

Fundamental Motives Influence Women's Attitudes About Romantic Partners Based on Interpersonal Dimensions

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The Background

Research into individual's evaluations of the outside world, or attitudes, is a well established concept within social psychology. However, advances within other areas such as evolutionary psychology have led to additional points of interest. Specifically, how and why people evaluate things the way they do.

The present studies look to integrate various theories and introduce new predictions about the process that creates people's attitudes.

Current Research

In the Construal model of attitudes, attitudes are not stable constructs. Instead, they are created on the spot as is necessary in response to the surrounding world. This results in different evaluations based on the context an individual finds themselves in.

Research has yet to inquire whether fundamental motivations serve as relevant internal contexts for evaluation. This would lead to predictable and even adaptive evaluative outcomes. We tested this hypothesis using the evaluation of potential mates as a framework. **We predicted that primed resource scarcity or viral outbreak would lead women to prefer a warm/incompetent man less and a cold/competent man more**

Study 1 Details

Participants: 149 single female college students at Texas Christian University completed a survey online testing if the assessment of potential mates is impacted by priming fundamental motivations.

Procedure

Priming: Participants initially read an article about either difficult academics (control) or a poor economy (experimental).

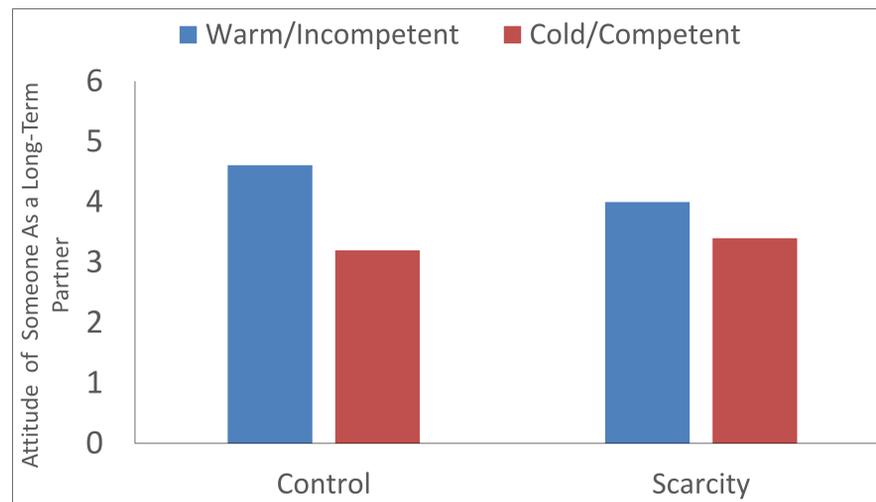
Evaluation: The women were then provided with profiles of two men described as either warm and incompetent or cold and very competent. Following the descriptions, the participants were asked to rate various qualities of the men.

Demographics: Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic questions in a random order.

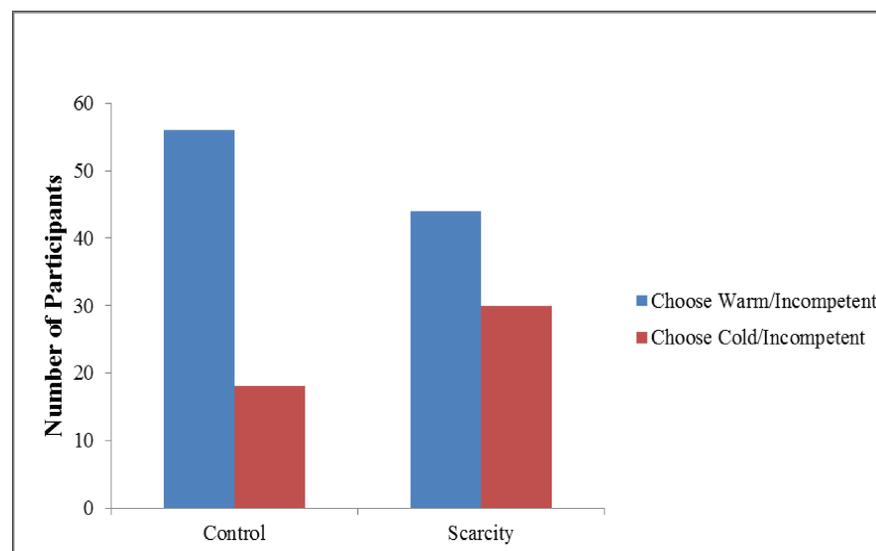
Results: Evaluation

The results of this study support our predictions. Based on a mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA), there was an interaction between priming and partner type (cold/competent vs warm/incompetent), $F(1, 147) = 3.93, p < .05, d = .33$.

Participants reported less positive attitudes toward the warm/incompetent man when primed with scarcity. This difference appears to be driving the observed interaction.



Results indicated that priming condition did not significantly predict short-term choice, Pearson's $r = .49, p = .97$, but did predict long-term choice, $r = 4.44, p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .18$. See Figure 2.



Study 2 Details

Participants: 109 single female college students at Texas Christian University completed a survey online testing if the assessment of potential mates is impacted by priming fundamental motivations.

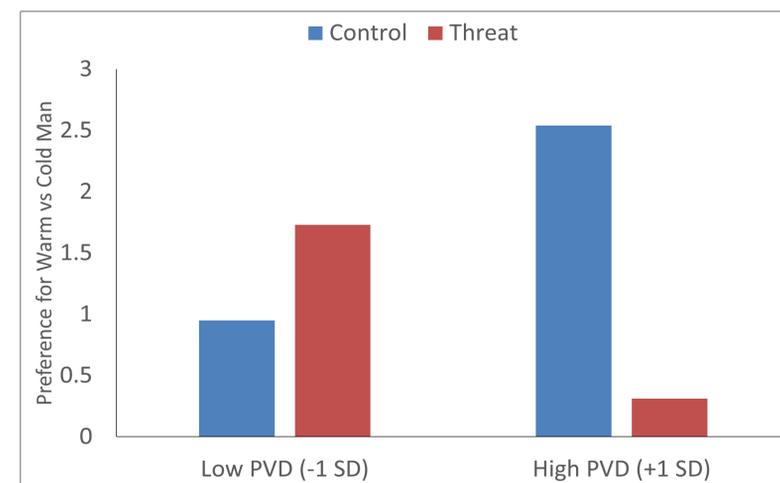
Procedure

Priming: Participants initially read an article about either traffic congestion (control) or the threat of a virus outbreak (experimental).

Evaluation: The women were then provided with profiles of two men described as either warm and incompetent or cold and very competent. Following the descriptions, the participants were asked to rate various qualities of the men.

Demographics: Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic questions in a random order.

Results: The results of this study support our predictions. Based on a mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA), there was an interaction between partner type (cold/competent vs warm/incompetent) and condition. However, we only found this for those high in perceived vulnerability to disease. See Figure 3 below.



Discussion

The current studies suggests that motives can impact attitudes. Additionally, woman primed with disease cues display a similar tendency. When compared to a group that has not been primed, there is a preference for a cold and dominant partner over a warm and submissive one.

A competent person would presumably be better at gathering resources, especially during times of struggle. A dominant person is perhaps more healthy would be an ideal mate when disease is rampant. Future research will examine additional motivations, such as self-protection. It will also delve into the mechanisms that mediate the effect of motivations on attitudes regarding potential mates.

