

Survival and seduction: Understanding the adaptive link between threat and sexual openness

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Background

- Ancestral women relied on men for direct benefits
- Harsh environments may particularly necessitate that women rely on men (e.g., Wilson & Mesnick, 1997)
- Women can offer sex in exchange for investment (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004)

Method

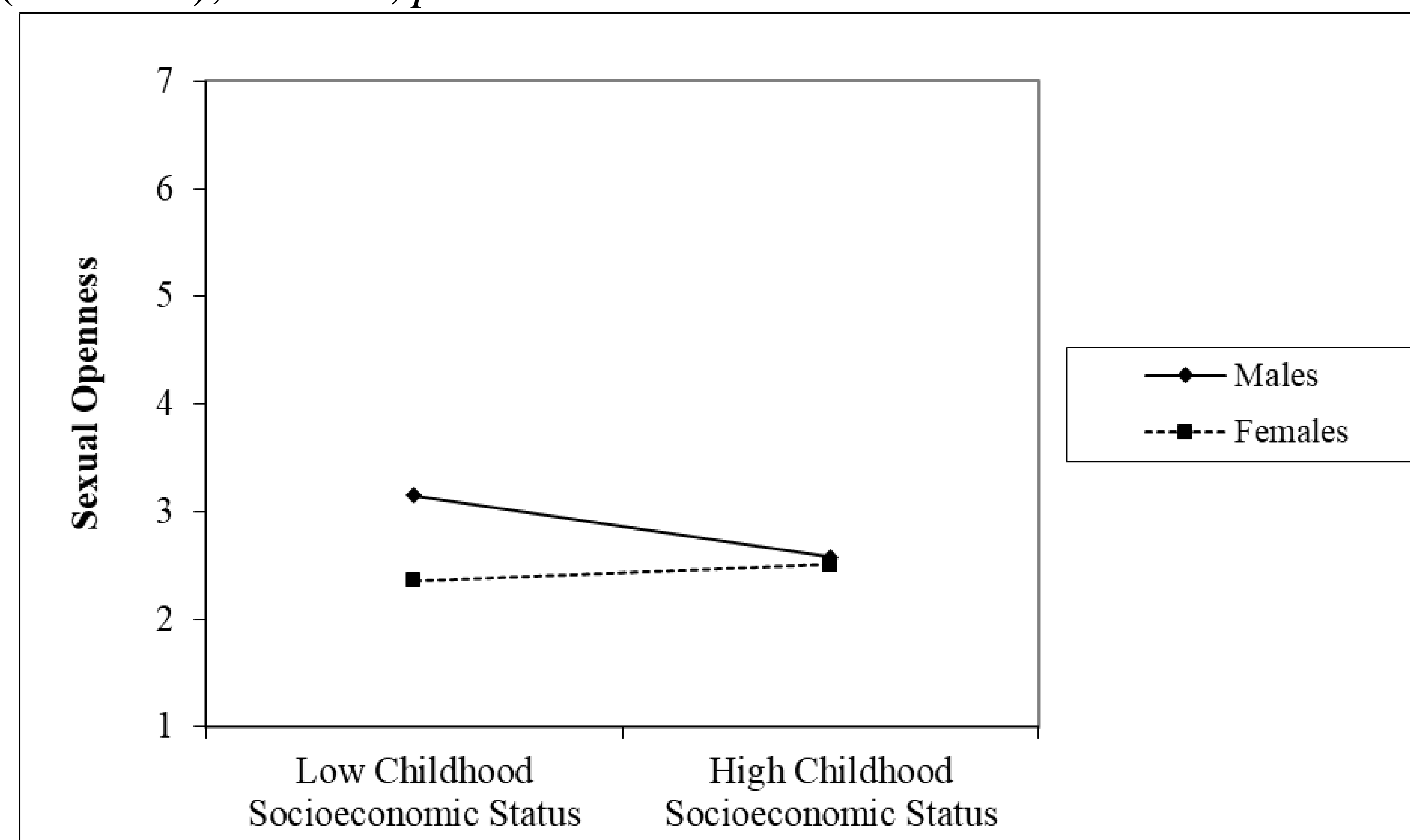
- 463 adults on Prolific provided information about their childhood socioeconomic status (SES) and current sexual openness
- Participants also completed measures asking about males and females' ability to use sex as a tool to gain financial support and resources

Hypotheses

- Females with lower levels of childhood SES will report higher levels of sexual openness compared to females with higher levels of childhood SES
- Males' levels of childhood SES will not be significantly related to their levels of sexual openness
- Participants will report that females are better able to use sex as a tool to gain financial support and resource investment than males

Results

- A dependent samples t-test revealed that participants rated females as being better able to use sex as a tool to gain financial support and resource investment than males, $p < .01$.
- A moderated regression explored the effects of sex (male vs. female; dummy coded, 0 = male) and childhood SES on sexual openness. The results revealed a significant interaction between sex and childhood SES, $b = .25$ ($SE = .12$), $t = 2.13$, $p = .03$.
- Simple slope tests revealed that males with lower levels of childhood SES displayed higher levels of sexual openness, $b = -.20$ ($SE = .09$), $t = -2.22$, $p = .03$. However, females' levels of childhood SES did not have a significant effect on their sexual openness, $b = .05$ ($SE = .08$), $t = .69$, $p = .49$.
- Regions of significance tests found that at low ($-1 SD$) levels of childhood SES, males report higher levels of sexual openness than females, $b = -.79$ ($SE = .34$), $t = -3.29$, $p < .01$. Similarly, at mean levels of childhood SES, males report higher levels of sexual openness than females, $b = -.43$ ($SE = .17$), $t = -2.53$, $p = .01$. However, at high ($+1 SD$) levels of childhood SES, there was no difference in levels of sexual openness between males and females, $b = -.07$ ($SE = .24$), $t = -.27$, $p = .79$.



Sexual openness as a function of sex and childhood SES

Conclusion

- People perceive females as being better able to use sex as a tool to gain financial support than males
- Females may not use sex as a tool to gain financial support
- Males' childhood socioeconomic status may influence their sexual openness

Limitations

- Data are cross-sectional
- Experimental manipulation needed to fully understand the results
- Data consisted of adults from ages 18 to 68 ($M = 37.35$) who likely have resources of their own and do not need to utilize sex as a tool to gain investment

Future Directions

- Conduct a follow-up study with young adults experimentally manipulating resource scarcity

References

- Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2004). Sexual economics: Sex as female resource for social exchange in heterosexual interactions. *Personality and social psychology review*, 8(4), 339-363.
- Wilson, M., & Mesnick, S. L. (1997). An empirical test of the bodyguard hypothesis. In *Feminism and evolutionary biology: Boundaries, intersections and frontiers* (pp. 505-511). Boston, MA: Springer US.