



# Sexual Opportunity or Threat? Affordance Mismatch Between Men and Women During Courtship

Krystina A. Boyd-Frenkel, Michael Barlev, & Steven L. Neuberg

## The Problem:

Women report unwanted sexual attention from men. Why? When situations are ambiguous, men may functionally over-estimate women's sexual interest in them (Haselton & Buss, 2000).

## Our Perspective:

Courtship offers different **affordances** to men and women: **short-term mating opportunities** for men versus **physical safety threats** for women. On a proximate level, self-reports and estimations of others' sexual interest may depend on the mindsets men and women are in during the early stages of dating.

## Study 1

### Methods:

N = 450 college students (72% F;  $M_{age} = 20$ ) were asked about their desires and beliefs regarding different possible outcomes of courtship (e.g., casual sex, a long-term relationship) and about behaviors they engage in before and during a date (e.g., flirtatious behaviors like trying to kiss their date; bringing physical protection like pepper spray).

### Results:

During courtship, men were more likely to desire casual sex and to report engaging in flirtatious behaviors. Women were more likely to engage in self-protective behaviors and to worry about their physical safety.

## Study 2

### Methods:

Men and women were primed with mindsets that mimicked **real-world** dynamics (men → mating motivation; women → physical threat concerns) or **reversed** them. (All conditions between-subjects.)

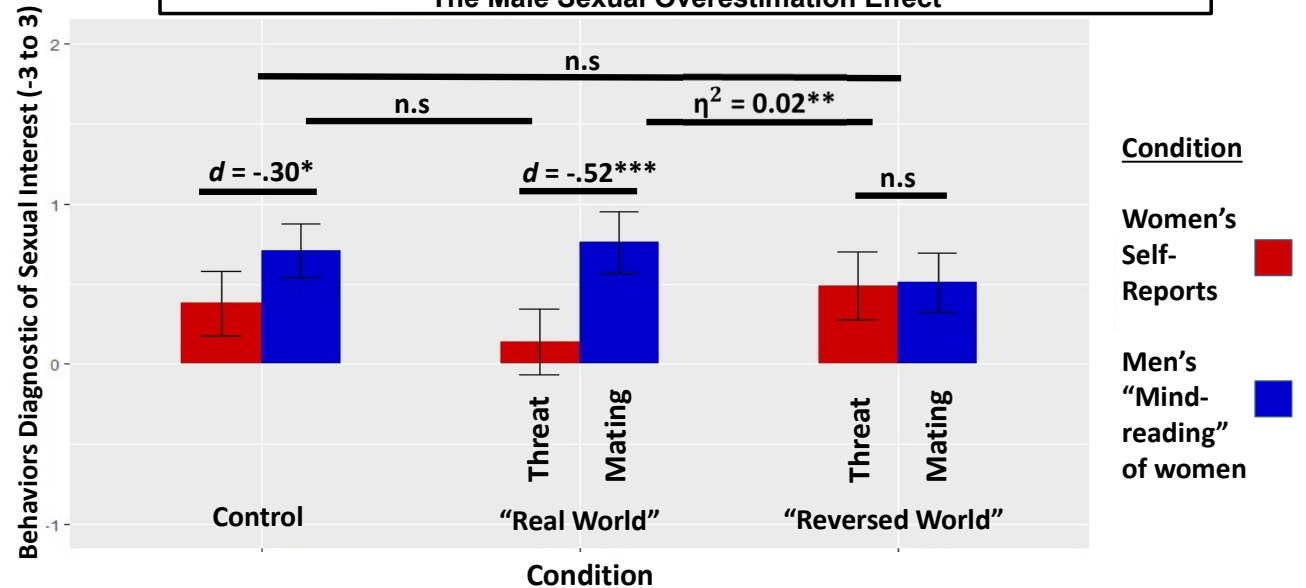
### Participants:

N = 793 MTurk Workers (55% F;  $M_{age} = 38$ )

Prime examples (Mating Motivation & Physical Threat)



## The Male Sexual Overestimation Effect



- **Do men overestimate women's sexual interest? Yes.** In the control condition, men's estimations of women's sexual interest were higher than women's self-reported sexual interest. (Replicates Haselton & Buss, 2000)
- **Do men overestimate women's sexual interest in a scenario that mimics real-world courtship? Yes.** In the "real world" condition (men primed with mating and women primed with threat), men overestimated women's sexual interest in them.
- **Do men overestimate women's sexual interest in a scenario that flips real-world courtship? No.** In the "reverse world" condition (men primed with threat and women primed with mating), no evidence of the male sexual overestimation effect

## Conclusion:

Mindsets (mating motivation versus physical threat concern) calibrate self-reports and estimations of others' sexual interest. Our findings shed light on the proximate mechanisms "upstream" of the male sexual overestimation bias & may have implications for real-world phenomena like unwanted sexual advances by men toward women, sexual coercion, and sexual violence.