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Research report

Self, friends, and lovers: structural relations among Beck Depression Inventory scores and perceived mate values

Beth R Kirsner ^a ... W.Jake Jacobs ^{a, b, 2}

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Abstract

Background: We used an economic model based on evolutionary theory to guide an examination of relations among self-reported depressive symptoms and ratings of mate values of self, social, and sexual partners. This model treats assortative mating as a form of social exchange between partners of socially and sexually desirable traits. *Methods:* Two studies used variants of the Mate Value Inventory (MVI), a multivariate assessment of attributes desired in social or sexual partners. For study 1, 115 male and 124 female undergraduates provided self reports on four forms of the MVI-11 and on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI); for study 2, 208 male and 277 female undergraduates provided self reports on seven forms of the MVI-7 and on the BDI-II. *Results:* Both multisample structural equations models indicated that the parameters were statistically

equivalent between female and male subsamples and provided an adequate fit to the data. The models revealed significant relations between the mate values ascribed to the self and those ascribed to short- and long-term partners as well as best friends. Furthermore, greater BDI scores significantly predicted lesser ratings of mate value for the self, and hence indirectly predicted lesser ratings of mate value for all types of partners evaluated. *Limitations:* Although the data obtained from the MVI demonstrated good psychometric validity, external validity has not yet been established. *Conclusions:* The results are consistent with models predicting: (1) assortative mating by mate value, (2) differential exchange rates of mate value for different types of partners, (3) a negative relation between depressive symptoms and assessment of one's own mate value, and (4) a possibly consequential mismatch of mate values when one partner exhibits or recovers from significant depressive symptoms. The results are inconsistent with models predicting (5) a generalized negativity bias due to depression.



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Keywords

Mate value; Beck Depression Inventory; Depression; Sexual partners; Friends

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