The psychology of risk and power: Power desires and sexual choices

Ithurburn, Andrew[1] & Moore, and Adam[1]

[1] The University of Edinburgh

Author Note

University of Edinburgh Department of Psychology

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ithurburn, Andrew, 7 George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9JZ. E-mail: a.ithurburn@sms.ed.ac.uk

12   **The psychology of risk and power: Power desires and sexual choices**

13   **Introduction**

14   Every day individuals make decisions be they mundane such as which cereal to eat
15   in the morning to the more complex of which job should they accept. The consequences for
16   making those decisions can be equally complex. Some decisions are more difficult to
17   quantify and understand while others can be relatively easy like choosing what cereal to
18   eat in the morning. However, some are increasingly more difficult to model. For example,
19   two adult males (or a man and a woman) who are intending to have sex must decide
20   whether or not to have sex with or without a condom. The consequences can have lasting
21   effects depending on what the couple chooses. *Issue*

22   *Spitefulness*

23   *DoPL*

24   *Dominance* The dominance motive is one of the more researched methods and well
25   depicted power motives. Individuals with a dominance orientation display the more primal
26   of human behavior. These individuals will seek power through direct methods such as
27   asserting dominance, control over resources, or physically assaulting someone (Johnson et
28   al., 2012; Winter, 1993). Early research in dominance motives has shown that acts of
29   dominance ranging from asserting physical dominance over another to physical displays of
30   violence has been shown in many mammalian species, including humans (citation
31   needed). Individuals high in dominance are often high in machiavellianism, narcissism,
32   and often are prone to risky behavior (discussion further in the next section). Continued
33   research has hinted at a possible tendency for males to display these dominant seeking
34   traits more than females (citation needed). When high dominance individuals assert
35   themselves they are doing so to increase their own individual sense of power (citation
36   needed). Asserting ones own sense of dominance over another can be a dangerous task. In

37 the animal kingdom it can often leader to injury. While, in humans asserting dominance

38 can take a multitude of actions such as leering behaviors, physical distance, or other

39 non-verbal methods to display dominance (citation needed). Power from a dominance

40 perspective is often never bestowed upon someone. Often, high dominance individuals will

41 take control and hold onto it.

42   *Prestige* Contrary to the dominance motivation of using intimidation and aggression

43 to gain more power, a prestige motivation or prestige in general is bestowed upon an

44 individual from others in the community (citation needed). Differently from the dominance

45 motivation, a prestige motivation is generally unique to the human species (citation

46 needed). Do in part to ancestral human groups being smaller hunter-gatherer societies,

47 individuals that displayed and used important behaviors beneficial to the larger group were

48 often valued and admired by the group. Therein, the social group bestows the authority

49 onto the individual. Generally, this type of behavior can be passively achieved by the

50 prestigious individual. However, this does not remove the intent of the actor in that they

51 too can see prestige from the group, but method of achieving that social status greatly

52 differs from that of dominance seeking individuals.

53   Apart from dominance motivated individuals that continually have to fight for their

54 right to have power over others, individuals that seek or were given power through a

55 prestige motivation are not generally challenged in the same sense as dominant individuals.

56 Displaying behaviors that the community would see as beneficial would indere them into

57 the community making the survival of the community as a whole better (citation needed).

58 Evolutionarily this would increase viability of the prestigious individual and their genes.

59 Similar to the dominance perspective, the prestige perspective overall increases the power

60 and future survivability of the individual. However, due to the natural difference between

61 prestige and dominance, dominance seeking individuals are challenged more often resulting

62 in more danger to their position (citation).

63   *Leadership* Apart from dominance and prestige, leadership raises some interesting

64 questions on deference and why individuals would defer to others in power.

65 Psychologically, leadership is the deference to authority and working together towards a

66 shared common goal (Van Vugt, 2006).

Methods

68   *Participants*: Participants were a convenience sample of 82 (Mage = 26.14, SD =

69 8.65) individuals from Prolific Academic crowdsourcing platform ("www.prolific.co").

70 Requirements for participation were: (1) be 18 years of age or older and (2) and as part of

71 Prolific Academics policy, have a prolific rating of 90 or above. Participants received £4 or

72 £8 an hour as compensation for completing the survey. The University of Edinburgh's

73 Research Ethics Committee approved all study procedures (approval reference number:

74 330-1920/1).

Materials*:*

76   *Demographic Questionnaire*: Prior to the psychometric scales, participants are asked

77 to share their demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, ethnic origin, and

78 educational attainment).

79   *Dominance, Prestige, and Leadership Orientation.* The 18-item Dominance,

80 Prestige, and Leadership scale [DoPL; Suessenbach et al. (2019)], is used to measure

81 dominance, prestige, and leadership orientation. Each question corresponds to one of the

82 three domains. Each domain is scored across six unique items related to those domains

83 (e.g., "I relish opportunities in which I can lead others" for leadership) rated on a scale

84 from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Internal consistency reliability for the

85 current sample is $

86   *Spitefulness Scale.* The Spitefulness scale (Marcus et al., 2014) is a measure with

87 seventeen one sentence vignettes to assess the spitefulness of participants. The original

spitefulness scale has 31-items. In the original Marcus and colleagues' paper, fifteen were removed. For the present study however, 4-items were removed because they did not meet the parameters for the study i.e., needed to be dyadic, more personal. Three reverse scored items from the original thirty-one were added after meeting the requirements. Example questions included, "It might be worth risking my reputation in order to spread gossip about someone I did not like." ,and "Part of me enjoys seeing the people I do not like fail even if their failure hurts me in some way." Items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"). Higher spitefulness scores represent higher acceptance of spiteful attitudes.

Sexuality Self-Esteem Subscale: The Sexuality Self-Esteem subscale (SSES; Snell and Papini (1989)) is a subset of the Sexuality scale that measures the overall self-esteem of participants. Due to the nature of the study, the sexuality subscale was chosen from the overall 30-item scale. The 10-items chosen reflected questions on the sexual esteem of participants on a 5-point scale of +2 (Agree) and -2 (Disagree). For ease of online use the scale was changed to 1 ("Disagree") and 5 ("Agree"), data analysis will follow the sexuality scale scoring procedure. Example questions are, "I am a good sexual partner," and "I sometimes have doubts about my sexual competence." Higher scores indicate a higher acceptance of high self-esteem statements.

Sexual Jealousy Subscale: The Sexual Jealousy subscale by Worley and Samp (2014) are 3-items from the 12-item Jealousy scale. The overall jealousy scale measures jealousy in friendships ranging from sexual to companionship. The 3-items are "I would worry about my partner being sexually unfaithful to me." "I would suspect there is something going on sexually between my partner and their friend." and "I would suspect sexual attraction between my partner and their friend." The items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"). Higher scores indicate a tendency to be more sexually jealous.

114   *Sexual Relationship Power Scale*: The Sexual Relationship Power Scale (SRPS;

115   Pulerwitz et al. (2000)) is a 23-item scale that measures the overall power distribution in a

116   sexually active relationship. The SRPS is split into the Relationship Control

117   Factor/Subscale (RCF) and the Decision-Making Dominance Factor/Subscale (DMDF).

118   The RCF measures the relationship between the partners on their agreement with

119   statements such as, "If I asked my partner to use a condom, he [they] would get violent."

120   and "I feel trapped or stuck in our relationship." Items from the RCF are scored on a

121   4-point scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly agree") to 4 ("Strongly disagree"). Lower scores

122   indicate an imbalance in the relationship where the participant indicates they believe they

123   have less control in the relationship.

124   The DMDF measures the dominance level of sexual and social decisions in the

125   relationship. Example questions include, "Who usually has more say about whether you

126   have sex?" and "Who usually has more say about when you talk about serious things?"

127   Items on the DMDF are scored on a 3-item scale of 1 ("Your Partner"), 2 ("Both of You

128   Equally"), and 3 ("You"). Higher scores indicate more dominance by the participant in the

129   relationship.

130   *Scenario Realism Question*: Following Worley and Samp in their 2014 paper on

131   using vignettes/scenarios in psychological studies, a question asking the participant how

132   realistic or how much they can visualize the scenario is. The 1-item question is "This type

133   of situation is realistic." The item is scored on a 5-point scale of the participants agreement

134   with the above statement, 1 ("Strongly agree") to 5 ("Strongly disagree"). Higher scores

135   indicate disagreement with the statement and reflects the belief that the scenario is not

136   realistic.

137   *Spiteful Vignettes*: After participants complete the above scales, they are presented

138   with 10-hypothetical vignettes. Each vignette was written to reflect a dyadic or triadic

139   relationship with androgynous names to control for gender. Five vignettes have a sexual

140   component while five are sexually neutral. An example vignette is,

141 "Casey and Cole have been dating for 6 years. A year ago, they both moved

142 into a new flat together just outside of the city. Casey had an affair with Cole's

143 best-friend. Casey had recently found out that they had an STI that they had

144 gotten from Cole's best-friend. Casey and Cole had sex and later Cole found

145 out they had an STI."

146 For each vignette, the participant is asked to rate each vignette on how justified

147 they believe the primary individual, Casey in the above, is with their spiteful reaction.

148 Scoring ranges from 1 ("Not justified at all") to 5 ("Being very justified"). Higher scores

149 overall indicate higher agreement with spiteful behaviors.

150 **Procedure***:*

151 Participants were recruited on Prolific Academic. Participants must be 18-years of

152 age or older, restriction by study design and Prolific Academic's user policy. The published

153 study is titled, "Moral Choice and Behavior." The study description follows the participant

154 information sheet including participant compensation. Participants were asked to accept

155 their participation in the study. Participants were then automatically sent to the main

156 survey (Qualtrics, Inc.).

157 Once participants accessed the main survey, they were presented with the consent

158 form for which to accept they responded with selecting "Yes." Participants were then asked

159 to provide demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and educational

160 attainment. Participants would then complete in order, the spitefulness scale, the sexual

161 relationship power scale, the sexual jealousy subscale, and sexuality self-esteem subscale.

162 Next, participants were presented ten vignettes where they were instructed to rate on the

163 level of justification for the action carried out in the vignette. After each vignette,

164 participants would rate the realism of the scenario. Upon completion of the survey (median

165 completion time 20 minutes $SD = 10$ Minutes 30 seconds), participants were shown a

166 debriefing message and shown the contact information of the Primary Investigator

167 (Andrew Ithurburn). Participants were then compensated at £8/hr. via Prolific Academic.

168 **Data Analysis***:*

169   Demographic characteristics were analyzed using a one-way analysis for continuous

170 variables (age) and Chi-squares tests for categorical variables (sex, ethnicity, ethnic origin,

171 and educational attainment). Means and standard deviations were calculated for the

172 surveys along with correlational analyses (e.g., spitefulness, SESS, SRPS, SJS). Bayesian

173 multilevel models were used to test differences between levels of justifications of vignettes

174 that are either sexually or non-sexually vindictive in behavior. Model 1

175   **Results**

176   **Discussion**

References

Johnson, S. L., Leedom, L. J., & Muhtadie, L. (2012). The Dominance Behavioral System and Psychopathology: Evidence from Self-Report, Observational, and Biological Studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, *138*(4), 692–743. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027503

Marcus, D. K., Zeigler-Hill, V., Mercer, S. H., & Norris, A. L. (2014). The psychology of spite and the measurement of spitefulness. *Psychological Assessment*, *26*(2), 563–574. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036039

Pulerwitz, J., Gortmaker, S., & DeJong, W. (2000). Measuring Sexual Relationships in HIV/STD research. *Sex Roles*, *42*(7), 637–660. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007051506972

Snell, W. E., & Papini, D. R. (1989). The Sexuality Scale: An Instrument to Measure Sexual-Esteem, Sexual-Depression, and Sexual-Preoccupation. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *26*(2), 256–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224498909551510

Suessenbach, F., Loughnan, S., Schönbrodt, F. D., & Moore, A. B. (2019). The dominance, prestige, and leadership account of social power motives. *European Journal of Personality*, *33*(1), 7–33. https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2184

Van Vugt, M. (2006). Evolutionary Origins of Leadership and Followership. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *10*(4), 354–371. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1004_5

Winter, D. G. (1993). Power, affiliation, and war: Three tests of a motivational model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *65*(3), 532–545. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.65.3.532

Worley, T., & Samp, J. (2014). Exploring the associations between relational uncertainty, jealousy about partner's friendships, and jealousy expression in dating relationships. *Communication Studies*, *65*(4), 370–388.

204   https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2013.833529