



Should I stay or should I go: Individual differences in response to romantic dealmakers and dealbreakers[☆]

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ABSTRACT

People glean key information about their potential mates during the early phases of courtship. Here ($N = 261$) we investigated how much learning “dealmaker” (i.e., positive) and “dealbreaker” (i.e., negative) information changed men and women's interest in potential romantic partners. We derived hypotheses from prospect theory and error management theory about loss aversion and how personality traits may enable people's sexual agendas. We found that dealbreakers and dealmakers both influenced participants' level of interest, but this effect was larger for dealbreakers (i.e., prospect theory). We found that the difference between dealmakers and dealbreakers was larger among women (i.e., error management theory) and that sex differences in responses to dealbreakers and dealmakers were fully mediated by individual differences in psychopathy, sociosexuality, and disgust. Our discussion focuses on the utility of an evolutionary framework in studying the early stages of relationship formation.

1. Introduction

Relationship formation is a dynamic process where people are evaluated and filtered as one learns more information about new potential partners. At the first stage of relationship formation, both sexes evaluate the physical attractiveness of others (Kenrick, Sadalla, Groth, & Trost, 1990). If one's minimum standards in physical attractiveness are met, people begin to assess other less obvious characteristics like personality, habits, and values (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002). Once such a threshold is met, people gather information to inform whether to continue investing and gathering more information or to cut their losses and move on to another partner. When confronted with favorable information or *dealmakers*, people are likely to gain interest. When confronted with unfavorable information or *dealbreakers*, people are likely to lose interest. In this study, we examine individual differences in changes in romantic interest when people are confronted with dealbreaker or dealmaker information about a person to whom they are initially attracted.

Most research on mate selection has focused on the positive side of this equation, explicitly or implicitly asking people what they want in their relationship partners (e.g., Buss, 1989). This is the most obvious

way of getting at people's mate preferences, but it focuses on people's tendency to seek what they want rather than avoid what they do not. Researchers have paid less attention to how the attributes that lead to rejection may also reveal mate preferences (Jonason, Garcia, Webster, Li, & Fisher, 2015; Stewart-Williams, Butler, & Thomas, 2017). From this view, people start their mate selection process by filtering out undesirable others, culling potential mates to avoid undesirable partners. If information were value-neutral, one would expect that more information of either kind would lead to similar changes in interest. However, this seems unlikely given the loss aversion bias noted in prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Prospect theory suggests that people have a bias to avoid losses more than seek gains, a tendency that might inform mate choice (Boysen & Isaacs, 2020; Jonason et al., 2015; Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004). If true, the magnitude of change in interest should be larger (regardless of direction) after learning dealbreakers than dealmakers (H1).

Unfortunately, prospect theory is sex-neutral. That is, it assumes men and women have essentially the same psychological systems. When it comes to mating psychology, this might not be a reasonable assumption (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). The costs of making mating mistakes are higher in the sex with the greater minimum obligatory

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parental investment – females (Trivers, 1972). Unlike men, who can invest much less in terms of time and metabolic expenditure, women pay a higher cost and shoulder the greater burden of pregnancy and rearing. Given this recurrent imbalance, selection pressures fashioned different mating psychologies in the sexes (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

One facet of these sex-differentiated mating psychologies is how men and women evaluate risk in romantic relationships as expressed in error management theory (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Perilloux, 2014). In this view, men might change their interest to a similar degree regardless of whether they encounter dealmakers or dealbreakers, whereas women will exhibit a stronger shift in response to dealbreakers rather than dealmakers because their sexual psychology has been more strongly shaped to avoid mistakes. Therefore, we (H2) expect that sex differences in responses to dealbreakers will be stronger than sex differences in response to dealmakers, (H3) men's change in interest will be similar in response to either kind of information, and (H4) women should respond more to dealbreakers than dealmakers.

Beyond sex differences, various personality traits may play a role in how learning new information leads to changes in romantic interest. We (tentatively) explore the role of individual differences in self-reported mating success (Landolt, Lalumière, & Quinsey, 1995), sociosexuality (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008), the Big Five traits (Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas, 2006), the Dark Triad traits (Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011), and moral, sexual, and pathogen disgust (Tybur, Lieberman, & Griskevicius, 2009) all of which may play a role in mating psychology. When learning dealmaker information, individuals received “good” information. Under such conditions, people with a hedonistic or approach bias (e.g., narcissistic, more self-report mating success, and extraverted) should change their mind more, as they may enable their mating success by strongly weighting positive information about their partners. That is, they may be looking for reasons to “say yes” to a partner. When learning dealbreaker information, those who are interested in casual sex (e.g., high in sociosexuality and psychopathic) should change their minds less because less change may enable their short-term mating agenda (Jonason et al., 2015); they are avoiding “saying no”. That is, fewer people rejected translates into more mating opportunities and those high in psychopathy tend to have low standards in their sex partners (Jonason et al., 2011) and those interested in casual sex may perceive a lower risk of sunk costs because they do not plan to stay in a relationship. Neurotic and conscientious people live a cautious life and tend to be concerned with order and cleanliness, respectively. This caution-bias may translate to a sensitivity to dealbreaker more than dealmaker information. And last, if sexual disgust guides mate choice to avoid mistakes (Al-Shawaf, Lewis, & Buss, 2015, 2018; Al-Shawaf, Lewis, Ghossainy, & Buss, 2019; Oaten, Stevenson, & Case, 2009), it should be more strongly correlated with changing one's mind in relation to learning dealbreakers than dealmakers.

Most research on mate preferences asks people what they *want* in their partners. By contrast, we focus on what people *do not want*. We focus on individual differences in changes in romantic interest when people learn new information about someone to whom they are initially attracted. People can learn two classes of information as they get to know someone; information that makes them “stay” (i.e., dealmakers) or “go” (i.e., dealbreakers). We examine sex differences in the way learning this kind of information changes one's interest and the role of an array of personality traits in accounting for variance in change in interest.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 261 undergraduates (64 men) aged 18 to 45 years ($M = 21.97$, $SD = 4.79$) from a mid-sized university in the Rocky Mountains region (USA) who received extra credit for completing an

online survey on “Dealbreakers, dealmakers, and individual differences”.¹ We sought a minimum sample size ($N \approx 250$) to detect the average effect size in social and personality psychology ($r \approx 0.20$; Richard, Bond Jr., & Stokes-Zoota, 2003) to maximize the stability of correlations in personality research (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Participants were mostly heterosexual (93%) and in a committed relationship (56%). Participants were informed of the nature of the study, provided tick-box consent, completed the scales described below, and were thanked and debriefed upon completion. The study was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (#19-109).

2.2. Measures

We used the 20-item short International Personality Item Pool (Donnellan et al., 2006) to measure the Big Five personality traits. Participants were asked how accurately (1 = *Very inaccurate*; 5 = *Very accurate*) the items characterized them. For example, participants reported the accuracy of statements starting with the stem “I...” and that were completed with phrases such as: “Have a vivid imagination” (i.e., openness), “Get chores done right away” (i.e., conscientiousness), “Talk to a lot of different people at parties” (i.e., extraversion), “Sympathize with others' feelings” (i.e., agreeableness), and “Have frequent mood swings” (i.e., neuroticism). Items were averaged to create composites of openness (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$), conscientiousness ($\alpha = 0.62$), extraversion ($\alpha = 0.81$), agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.74$), and neuroticism ($\alpha = 0.76$).

We used the 27-item Short Dark Triad questionnaire (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) to assess the Dark Triad traits. Participants indicated how much they agreed (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*) with items such as “It's not wise to tell your secrets” (i.e., Machiavellianism), “People see me as a natural leader” (i.e., narcissism), and “Payback needs to be quick and nasty” (i.e., psychopathy). Items were averaged to create composites for the corresponding measures of Machiavellianism ($\alpha = 0.79$), narcissism ($\alpha = 0.70$), and psychopathy ($\alpha = 0.72$).

We used the 21-item Three Domain Disgust Scale to assess three different kinds of disgust: pathogen, sexual, and moral disgust (Tybur et al., 2009). Participants were asked to rate how disgusting (0 = *not at all disgusting*; 6 = *extremely disgusting*) they found “seeing some mold on old leftovers in your refrigerator” (i.e., pathogen disgust), “a stranger of the opposite sex intentionally rubbing your thigh in an elevator” (i.e., sexual disgust), and “a student cheating to get good grades” (i.e., moral disgust). Items were averaged to create composites of pathogen disgust ($\alpha = 0.79$), sexual disgust ($\alpha = 0.77$), and moral disgust ($\alpha = 0.87$).

We used the 8-item Self-Perceived Mating Success Scale to measure participant's self-perceived mating success (Landolt et al., 1995). Participants were asked how much they agree (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*) with items like “members of the opposite sex that I like tend to like me back”. Items were averaged to create a composite variable for mating success ($\alpha = 0.90$).

We used the 9-item Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008) to measure participant's sociosexual orientation. While the scale captures (a) sociosexual behavior (e.g., “With how many different partners have you had sex within the past 12 months? [1 = 0; 9 = 20 or more]”), (b) sociosexual attitude (e.g., “Sex without love is OK [1 = *Strongly disagree*; 9 = *Strongly agree*]”) and (c) sociosexual desire (e.g., “In everyday life, how often do you have spontaneous fantasies about having sex with someone you have just met? [1 = *Never*; 9 = *At least once a day*]”) we used it as single index. Items were averaged to create a composite variable for sociosexuality

¹ Incomplete surveys ($n = 39$) and outliers (z -score ± 3.29) for the dealbreaker (described in the Measures section) scale ($n = 12$) were removed prior to analyses to reduce skew (-1.78) and kurtosis (4.05).

($\alpha = 0.88$).

To capture change in interest upon learning romantic dealmakers and dealbreakers we created 20 items capturing undesirable and desirable features in mates (see Appendix A). Desirable features (i.e., dealmakers) reflected major aspects of mate selection like kindness, social status, sense of humor, and intelligence (Kenrick et al., 1990; Li et al., 2002). Undesirable features (i.e., dealbreakers) reflected major features of mate rejection like differences in sexual strategies, health, arrogance, and anger (Jonason et al., 2015; Stewart-Williams et al., 2017). The order of the items was randomized within each set and the sets were presented in random order with the personality scales (within- and between-scale randomization) in between them to reduce carryover effects. Participants were asked to imagine they had met someone who they liked and found attractive and then asked how much learning different kinds of information would change their minds about dating this person (1 = *Not at all*; 5 = *Very much*). Items were averaged to create a composite variable for dealmakers ($\alpha = 0.79$) and dealbreakers ($\alpha = 0.85$) to offset the effects of any single dealbreaker or dealmaker.

3. Results

In Table 1 we report the descriptive statistics, sex differences, and correlations for our study variables. In response to learning dealbreakers ($t = 95.79, p < .01$) and dealmakers ($t = 88.24, p < .01$) there was a change in interest in targets; and the change associated with the former was stronger than the latter ($t = 2.12, p < .04$). Women reported greater change when presented with dealbreakers and dealmakers than men did; the change in men was 63% that in women. There was no difference within men when presented with dealbreakers and dealmakers ($t = 0.25$; Cohen's $d = 0.05$) but there was a within-sex difference for women ($t = 2.46, p < .02$; $d = 0.21$), suggesting that men's mating psychology was equally sensitive to new positive and negative information. By contrast, women were sensitive to both types of information, but more so to dealbreaker information; change to dealmakers was 24% the change to dealbreakers.

In addition, women reported more mating success, agreeableness, openness, neuroticism, pathogen disgust, and sexual disgust, whereas men reported more psychopathy and promiscuity. While change in interest to both kinds of information were correlated themselves, when people received both kinds of information, change in interest based on type of information were correlated with slightly different traits. Change in interest when confronted with dealmakers was associated with higher self-perceived mating success, extraversion, narcissism, pathogen disgust, and sexual disgust. Change in interest when confronted with dealbreakers was negatively correlated with sociosexuality and psychopathy (i.e., less change for promiscuous people) but positively correlated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and all three kinds of disgust.

While there were no differences between the correlations in men and women for dealmakers, there was one for dealbreakers (see Table 2). When learning dealbreakers, Machiavellianism was linked with a weaker change in interest in men than in women. Some additional patterns are worth noting. When learning dealbreaker information, a more restricted mating strategy and higher narcissism were associated with change in interest in women, whereas change in interest was associated with less neuroticism and more Machiavellianism in men. Among women only, when learning about dealmakers, higher mating success, extraversion, narcissism, and pathogen disgust were associated with greater change.

In addition, there were some differences in the correlations for dealbreakers and dealmakers (see Table 2). As predicted, mating success, narcissism, and extraversion were more strongly correlated with changes in response to dealmakers than dealbreakers. More permissive sociosexuality and psychopathy were associated with less change when learning dealbreaker than dealmaker information. And, individual

differences in sexual disgust were more strongly positively correlated with changes in response to dealbreaker than dealmaker information.

Last, we sought to determine whether personality traits mediated sex differences in responses to dealbreakers and dealmakers. We ran two hierarchical multiple regressions with participant's sex at Step 1 and the predictors that were correlated with the responses to information as seen in Table 1 and that had sex differences in Step 2 (Baron & Kenny, 1986) for efficiency, to reduce Type 1 error, and to exclude factors (i.e., extraversion and conscientiousness) that account for trivial variance. When accounting for the sex difference in response to dealbreakers ($\beta_{\text{Step 1}} = 0.21, p < .01$), mating success, narcissism, and pathogen and sexual disgust fully mediated ($\Delta R^2 = 0.11$; $F[4, 255] = 8.48, p < .01$) the sex difference ($\beta_{\text{Step 2}} = 0.10$); sexual ($\beta = 0.19$) and pathogen ($\beta = 0.21$) disgust had significant ($p < .01$) residuals. When accounting for the sex difference in response to dealmakers ($\beta_{\text{Step 1}} = 0.14, p < .03$), psychopathy, sociosexuality, agreeableness, and pathogen, moral, and sexual disgust fully mediated ($\Delta R^2 = 0.07$; $F[6, 253] = 3.16, p < .01$) the sex difference ($\beta_{\text{Step 2}} = 0.09$); sexual disgust ($\beta = 0.15$), agreeableness ($\beta = 0.14$), and psychopathy ($\beta = 0.20$) had significant ($p < .05$) residuals. However, despite the "full" nature of the mediations, personality and participant's sex account for a small amount of variance in processing dealbreakers and dealmakers.

4. Discussion

Most research in mate choice has focused on what people *want* (Li et al., 2002) as opposed to what they *do not want* (Jonason et al., 2015). Moreover, this research tends to treat mate choice as a static process as opposed to a dynamic process occurring over time with new revelations potentially changing one's interest. After discovering a person possesses unfavorable characteristics, people tend to lose interest in forming a relationship with that person; after discovering a person possesses favorable characteristics, people tend to gain interest. Naïvely, one might assume that these are equivalent processes, but prospect theory and error management theory suggest otherwise. In the context of mate choice, the former suggests that losses should loom larger than gains whereas the latter suggests that this effect should be stronger in women compared to men (Boysen & Isaacs, 2020; Jonason et al., 2015; Perilloux, 2014). In this study, we examined individual differences in response to learning favorable (i.e., dealmakers) and unfavorable (i.e., dealbreakers) information about potential romantic partners as a function of participant's sex and personality.

While learning new information—regardless of valence—led to change in interest, we found that interest changed more after learning about dealbreakers than dealmakers (Boysen & Isaacs, 2020; Jonason et al., 2015). Such findings are generally consistent with prospect theory until we looked deeper at sex differences. Inconsistent with prospect theory, men responded similarly to dealbreakers and dealmakers, but women conformed to predictions from prospect theory as modified by error management theory (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Perilloux, 2014).

Beyond sex differences, we considered the role of personality traits. First, change in interest after exposure to dealmakers was associated with higher mating success, extraversion, and narcissism. Change in interest after exposure to dealbreakers was associated with lower sociosexuality and psychopathy and agreeableness, as well as higher conscientiousness and disgust. For example, sexual disgust was positively correlated with changes in interest in response to dealbreakers more than dealmakers, lending credence to the view that sexual disgust is a psychological system that helps protect people from mating mistakes (Tybur et al., 2009). In contrast, more psychopathy was associated with less change in interest in response to dealbreakers, which may enable psychopaths' exploitative, short-term mating strategy (Jonason et al., 2011). Second, among women confronted with dealmakers, greater mating success, extraversion, narcissism, and pathogen

Table 1
Correlations between personality and amount of change when learning about dealmakers and dealbreakers in romantic relationships.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Dealmakers	-														
2. Dealbreakers	0.23**	-													
3. Mating success	0.22**	0.01	-												
4. Sociosexuality	-0.04	-0.23**	0.31**	-											
5. Extraversion	0.23**	0.10	0.40**	0.22**	-										
6. Agreeableness	0.11	0.14*	0.07	-0.10	0.09	-									
7. Conscientiousness	0.07	0.16*	0.10	-0.06	0.05	-0.05	-								
8. Neuroticism	-0.02	-0.07	-0.11	-0.08	0.14*	0.24**	-0.34**	-							
9. Openness	-0.03	0.05	0.07	0.03	0.14*	0.01	-0.01	-0.09	-						
10. Psychopathy	0.03	-0.24**	0.13	0.46**	0.10	-0.39**	-0.17**	0.16*	-0.07	-					
11. Machiavellianism	0.09	-0.08	0.11	0.23**	0.02	-0.26**	0.01	0.16*	-0.11	0.51**	-				
12. Narcissism	0.26**	0.08	0.41**	0.12	0.50**	-0.07	0.11	-0.19**	0.15*	0.24**	0.30**	-			
13. Moral disgust	0.12	0.18**	0.01	-0.09	0.08	0.10	0.10	-0.22**	0.10	-0.26**	-0.22**	-0.05	-		
14. Pathogen disgust	0.21**	0.33**	0.13*	-0.06	0.06	0.04	0.02	0.03	-0.08	-0.08	0.09	0.14*	0.21**	-	
15. Sexual disgust	0.13*	0.31**	-0.16**	-0.57**	-0.16**	0.07	0.09	0.04	-0.13*	-0.37**	-0.22**	-0.08	0.21**	0.41**	-
Overall: <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	4.00 (0.55)	4.08 (0.52)	4.65 (1.25)	3.52 (1.72)	2.92 (1.00)	3.99 (0.76)	3.50 (0.78)	2.91 (0.95)	3.83 (0.78)	2.77 (0.93)	2.81 (0.72)	4.25 (0.65)	4.75 (1.30)	4.72 (1.12)	3.82 (1.24)
Men: <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	3.86 (0.57)	3.89 (0.52)	4.29 (1.18)	4.13 (1.83)	2.96 (0.95)	3.68 (0.74)	3.48 (0.67)	2.27 (0.78)	3.97 (0.76)	3.19 (1.02)	2.90 (0.81)	4.31 (0.69)	4.90 (1.28)	4.15 (1.16)	3.06 (1.11)
Women: <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	4.04 (0.54)	4.15 (0.51)	4.76 (1.25)	3.32 (1.64)	2.91 (1.02)	4.09 (0.74)	3.51 (0.81)	3.12 (0.91)	3.79 (0.78)	2.64 (0.86)	2.78 (0.69)	4.23 (0.63)	4.70 (1.31)	4.91 (1.04)	4.07 (1.19)
<i>t</i> -test	-2.23*	-3.51**	-2.64**	3.33**	0.34	-3.94**	-0.28	-6.69**	1.65	4.24**	1.13	0.88	1.05	-4.89**	-5.97**
Hedge's <i>g</i>	-0.29	-0.46	-0.34	0.43	0.04	-0.51	-0.04	-0.87	0.21	0.55	0.15	0.11	0.14	-0.63	-0.77

Note. Hedge's *g* is for effect size to correct for unequal sample sizes in the sexes, the interpretation of which is the same as Cohen's *d*.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

Table 2

Testing the differences between correlations for change in interest and personality (Steiger's z) and the moderation (Fisher's z) of those correlations in men and women (r).

	Steiger's z	Dealbreakers			Dealmakers		
	DB to DM	Men	Women	z	Men	Women	z
Mating success	2.76**	-0.20	0.02	-1.52	0.16	0.22**	-0.42
Sociosexuality	2.51**	-0.08	-0.24**	1.12	0.01	-0.03	0.27
Extraversion	1.72*	0.10	0.11	-0.07	0.12	0.27**	-1.07
Agreeableness	-0.39	0.20	0.06	0.97	0.03	0.10	-0.32
Conscientiousness	1.18	0.17	0.16*	0.07	-0.02	0.09	-0.75
Neuroticism	0.65	-0.33**	-0.12	-1.51	0.03	-0.11	0.96
Openness	-1.04	0.18	0.04	0.97	-0.14	0.02	-1.10
Psychopathy	3.56**	-0.27*	-0.16*	-0.79	0.20	0.02	1.25
Machiavellianism	2.21**	-0.29*	0.02	-2.17**	0.01	0.14	-0.89
Narcissism	2.39**	-0.05	0.15*	-1.37	0.27*	0.28**	-0.07
Moral disgust	-0.79	0.29*	0.17*	0.86	0.11	0.14	-0.21
Pathogen disgust	-1.64	0.28*	0.29**	-0.15	0.11	0.20**	-0.63
Sexual disgust	-2.43**	0.30*	0.25**	0.37	0.17	0.06	0.76

Note. Steiger's z (<http://quantpsy.org/corrtest/corrtest2.htm>) to compare dependent correlations; Fisher's z (<http://quantpsy.org/corrtest/corrtest.htm>) to compare independent correlations; DB = dealbreakers; DM = dealmakers.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

disgust were linked with a greater change in interest, whereas in response to dealbreakers, lower sociosexuality, more conscientiousness, less psychopathy, and more narcissism and disgust were correlated with more change. Third, among men, in response to dealmakers, only narcissism was associated with upwards change in interest whereas in response to dealbreakers, less neuroticism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and disgust were associated with greater downwards change in interest. And fourth, mating success, narcissism, pathogen disgust, and sexual disgust fully mediated sex differences in response to dealbreakers, whereas psychopathy, sociosexuality, agreeableness, and all three types of disgust fully mediated sex differences in response to dealmakers, suggesting that these personality traits may be part of the pathways by which men and women to respond differently to dealbreakers and dealmakers.

5. Limitations and conclusions

The present study is one of the few that evaluated dealbreakers in romantic relationships with a standardized method for assessing change in interest. It is also the only study to do so while considering the predictive utility of a variety of personality and individual difference variables. Nonetheless, several limitations apply. The first issue relates to the W.E.I.R.D. (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) nature of the sample and the imbalance of men and women in the sample. As is common in this kind of research, there are more women who are interested and available to participate. While we found results consistent with hypotheses and replicated various other effects (e.g., sex differences, correlations among Dark Triad traits), we cannot be sure of the generalizability or robustness of our effects without replication in an independent sample. Second, we simulated change in interest *after* establishing physical attraction. This may mean we are only dealing with a subsequent part of the decision process. However, physical attractiveness acts as a threshold trait (Li et al., 2002) which means that lack of attraction may operate as the first dealbreaker. By holding attractiveness constant, we (1) isolated effects for nonphysical traits and (2) standardized our materials. Third, we assessed change in interest in

relation to 10 dealbreakers and 10 dealmakers. Each item is likely to have its own, idiosyncratic effects worthy of independent investigation. We opted for the composite approach to avoid Type 1 error inflation, item-analyses, exploratory tests, and to say something more general about decision-making in romantic relationships. Fourth, our method of assessing change in interest was hypothetical in nature. We cannot know the baseline interest people had in these targets, so getting at actual change relative to some initial point is not possible here. Instead, we assumed some level of interest given the vignettes we provided. Despite these shortcomings, we have provided one of only a handful of studies—an experimental one at that—about dealbreakers and dealmakers in romantic relationships.

Using prospect theory and error management theory, we tested how people change their minds in response to learning favorable or unfavorable information about a potential partner to whom they are initially attracted. While losses loomed larger than gains, as per prospect theory, this effect was stronger in women, as per error management theory. We also showed how personality traits may enable people to say “yes” or “no” to potential partners consistent with their mating strategies, and finally how sex differences in responses to dealbreaker and dealmaker information are fully mediated by personality traits. During the initial stages of courtship, people ask themselves the key question: should I stay or should I go? Studying the effect of dealmakers and dealbreakers provides a useful method for investigating change in romantic interest and represents an early step toward understanding the psychology surrounding the decision to stay or leave. We hope these findings spur additional research on the psychology of dealbreakers and dealmakers – and personality differences therein.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Peter K. Jonason: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Resources, Project administration, Formal analysis. **Kaitlyn P. White:** Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Data curation, Formal analysis. **Laith Al-Shawaf:** Writing - review & editing.

Appendix A. Items to measures change in interest in dealbreakers and dealmakers

Dealmakers			Dealbreakers		
Item	M	SD	Item	M	SD
1. is kind to strangers	4.46	0.65	1. gets angry easily	4.19	0.89
2. is well educated	4.34	0.81	2. is dating other people now	3.81	1.27
3. tells great jokes	4.24	0.84	3. is untrustworthy	4.62	0.66
4. is generous	4.44	0.70	4. has a child	2.97	1.33
5. owns a puppy	3.59	1.35	5. is married	4.42	1.06
6. exercises regularly	3.90	1.01	6. has a sexually transmitted infection	4.45	0.90
7. is successful at work	4.23	0.81	7. smells bad	4.33	0.89
8. can cook well	3.94	1.00	8. drinks quite a bit	3.69	1.11
9. dresses well	3.93	0.89	9. is inattentive	4.01	0.90
10. is popular with same sex others	2.88	1.11	10. is dismissive of your interests	4.35	0.80

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