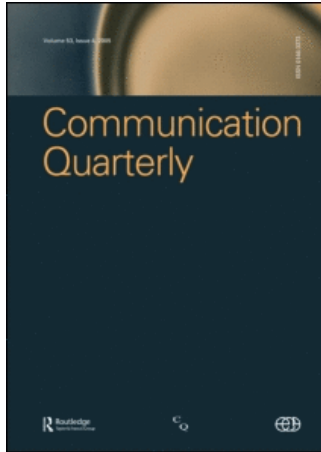


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Mate Value Discrepancy as Predictor of Forgiveness and Jealousy in Romantic Relationships

Robert J. Sidelinger & Melanie Booth–Butterfield

Mate value discrepancy (MVD), the perceived difference in resource value between self and partner in romantic relationships, may impact both forgiveness and jealousy. One hundred seventy-nine participants rated their own and their partner's mate value, and self-reported forgiveness and jealousy. MVD was associated with forgiveness in romantic relationships in that the higher the value of one's mate in relation to self, the more likely an individual would forgive that partner's transgression. Similarly, MVD played a role with jealousy in that the higher the value of the partner, the more likely an individual experienced jealousy. Additionally, individuals were more likely to forgive transgressions when their partners had higher mate values than theirs, even when jealousy is experienced.

Keywords: Forgiveness; Jealousy; Mate Value; Mate Value Discrepancy

As the old relationship adage goes, “there are plenty of fish in the sea,” but according to the idea of mate value not all “fish” are equal. For both sexes, not all romantic partners are equally preferred (Buss & Barnes, 1986). Moreover, there are gender differences in mate preferences. For example, females tend to place greater emphasis than men on a mate's degree of relationship commitment, social status and economic resources, and willingness to invest resources in her and her offspring (Buss & Barnes, 1986). Men, however, place greater value on youth and physical attractiveness when selecting a mate (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a). For the most part, research has looked

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at mate value in terms of mate selection, but such assessments can impact ongoing relationships as well (Buss, 1988).

Partners' perceptions of each others' mate value may influence their communicative behavior in a relationship. For example, Buss and Shackelford (1997b) analyzed mate value as a predictor of susceptibility to infidelity, finding that women who perceived their spouses to have higher mate value than themselves also believed their husbands would have affairs in the next year. The purpose of the current study was to analyze the differences in perceived mate value between relational partners, and how mate value discrepancy (MVD) influences other constructive or destructive factors in relationships, e.g., forgiveness and jealousy.

Resources and Mate Value Discrepancy

Exchange theories are concerned with comparisons of the resources people give and receive from one another. People often analyze their relationships in terms of their comparative rewards versus costs. Individuals who feel they are under-benefited compared to their partner experience more distress than individuals who feel that their benefits are proportional to their resource inputs (Buunk & VanYperen, 1991; Deutsch, 1975; Sprecher, 1998; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Although some sources indicate that receiving more resource than giving to one's partner (i.e., over-rewarded) is aversive, most studies find that being under-rewarded produces the most negative affect (VanYperen & Buunk, 1991).

Researchers Berg and McQuinn (1986) highlight Foa and Foa's (1974) categories of resources that people exchange, noting that all categories are not of equal importance. For example, some studies found that exchanges of love and services (e.g., doing favors, completing household chores) lead to closer friendships than did exchanges of goods, money, or information (Berg & McQuinn, 1986). Yet each person brings to a relationship his or her own individual resources including a variety of components such as physical attractiveness, social status, affection, and financial resources (Buss, 1988). Previous studies have indicated people have a tendency to pick mates who are similar. As Buss (1985) notes, homophily is important in establishing relationships. People who are alike are more likely to be attracted to each other.

When seeking a partner, some individuals (and their characteristics) are favored over others. Finding a mate can essentially become a competition in which individuals use a variety of tactics to attract mates. Buss (1988) found such active tactics included increasing exposure to potential mates, displaying athleticism, showing off, displaying humor, niceness, sophistication, touching, having sex, and dissembling in various ways.

Sprecher, Sullivan, and Hatfield (1994) surveyed over 13,000 single men and women ranging from ages 19 to 35 and found that good looks and youth are especially important to men in mate selection, while women prefer mates who have economic potential. According to the survey, men were more willing than women to

marry someone 5 years younger, who did not hold a steady job, earned less, and who had less education (Sprecher et al., 1994). Women were more willing than men to marry someone who was not physically attractive, someone who was 5 years older, earned more than they did, and had more education (Sprecher et al., 1994). Ultimately, the degree to which a person possesses qualities that are desired by others determines "mate value."

Evolutionary theory claims that sex differences in mate value are a result of biological differences (Grammer, Honda, Juette, & Schmitt, 1999). Only women can give birth, and only to a limited number of offspring. Therefore, they have a great investment in their offspring and look for men who are willing to commit, have the ability to protect, and are able to provide (Buss, 1988; Pines, 2001). Men, however, have wider opportunities to procreate. Therefore, men look for qualities in women that reflect their fertility and ability to reproduce – good looks, health, and youth (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Pines, 2001).

Most research attention has focused on overall mate value, but mate value attributes may be so idiosyncratic and extensive that a comprehensive measure of overall mate value has yet to be created (Buss & Barnes, 1986). Only limited attention has been on mate value discrepancy. Mate value discrepancy reflects an individual's own resources, desirability, or mate value, relative to that of the partner. Mate value discrepancy can influence mate retention. For example, partners with lower mate values might be at risk for losing their partners to potential alternatives (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a). Buss and Shackelford (1997b) found that husbands who perceived their wives to be especially attractive reported tendencies to display resources and enhance appearance; they also sent out more verbal signals of possession and made intrasexual threats. Mate value can impact ongoing relationships, as well as initial choices. For instance, women who were married to men of higher mate value believed their husbands would have affairs in the next year, and also that they, themselves, were more likely to kiss another man and to have affairs with other men (Buss & Shackelford, 1997b). As such, even expectations of difficulty can initiate negative communication behaviors. MVD has the potential to influence behaviors in romantic relationships over time. However, this may be mitigated by other interpersonal components operating in the relationship.

Forgiveness, Jealousy, and Relational Satisfaction

Forgiveness is a pro-social construct in relationships, though it has been studied primarily in religion and philosophy rather than communication research (McCullough, Fincham, Tsang, 2003; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). It can help restore a relationship after a transgression, and even benefit the forgiver in terms of mental and physical health (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004). The act of forgiveness may be dependent on several communication influences, such as transgressor apologies and concessions (Exline et al., 2004), as well as a variety of social-cognitive variables, e.g., affective empathy stemming from

relational satisfaction, closeness, and commitment (McCullough, Rachel, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998). Therefore, individuals are more likely to forgive their partners when the relationship is close, committed, and satisfactory, in part, because of their motivation to maintain such high-quality relationships (McCullough et al., 1998).

Forgiveness is the ability to overcome negative emotions and judgments of a transgressor, not by denying these emotions or judgments, but by viewing the transgressor with compassion, benevolence, and love (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989). McCullough et al. (1997) defined interpersonal forgiving as:

The set of motivational changes whereby one becomes (a) decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner; (b) decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement from the offender; and (c) increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the offender, despite the offender's hurtful actions. (pp. 321–322).

Exline et al. (2004) root forgiveness in social exchange theories, and view it as a cancellation of debt, allowing partners to reestablish positive feelings in a relationship after transgressions (Exline et al., 2004). Overall, researchers seem to agree that forgiveness is a positive method of coping with a transgression that basically benefits the forgiver through a reorientation of emotions, thoughts, or acts toward the transgressor (Wade & Worthington, 2005).

However, there may be some drawbacks to forgiving if the act of forgiveness seems unjustifiable or costly to the forgiver (Exline et al., 2004). Thus, whether forgiveness occurs or not may depend, in part, on the nature of the relationship. Partners' level of closeness and intimacy is positively related to forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998). McCullough et al. (1998) linked relational quality to forgiveness in several ways. People in close relationships may be more willing to forgive because they want to preserve the relationship, prefer to look to the future, or they recognize that in high-quality relationships partners' interests become intertwined and they have an investment to maintain. Relational partners tend to know each others' limitations and shortcomings, and may be more empathetic towards each other, or even interpret some transgressions as being for their own good. Further, relational quality may promote a "collectivistic orientation that promotes a willingness to act in ways that are beneficial for the relationship partner, even if there is some cost to the self" (McCullough et al., 1998, p. 1588). Finally, transgressors in high-quality relationships are more likely to apologize for the offense. In summation, the relationship itself may be a determinant of forgiving. Since mate value may be perceived as a reward within the relationship, individuals may be more forgiving of partners who possess higher mate value than they do. Therefore, hypothesis one predicts:

H1: A person romantically involved with someone of higher perceived mate value is more likely to forgive transgressions.

Previous forgiveness research has found inconsistent male-female differences in forgiveness. Neither McCullough et al. (1998) nor Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Conner, and Wade (2001) found sex differences in predispositions toward, or

the prediction of, forgiveness. However, Macaskill (forgiving.org) claimed that women are more forgiving than men. And, while Kalbfleisch (1997) found no sex-related differences overall in a study of conflict resolution between mentors and protégés, she did find that when protégés cried, female mentors were more forgiving than were male mentors. Since there are limited and inconsistent findings concerning male-female differences and forgiveness, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: Are there male-female differences in forgiveness in romantic relationships?

Jealousy

Whereas forgiveness is a positive component, jealousy is generally considered a negative aspect in interpersonal relationships (Carson & Cupach, 2000). Distressing events associated with jealousy include abuse, depression, suicide attempts, and marital dissatisfaction (Carson & Cupach, 2000; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). However, communicating jealousy may also express how partners value one another, and can lead to the renegotiation of the relational rules, and subsequently to more satisfying relationships (Guerrero, Anderson, Jorgensen, Spitzberg, & Eloy, 1995). Moreover, Rusbult and Buunk (1993) suggest that effective jealousy management is one way to maintain satisfactory relationships.

Jealousy is experienced across cultures (Guerrero et al., 1995) and represents not a single emotion, but rather a combination of many emotions (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). Jealousy can be defined as “a complex of thoughts, feelings, and actions which follows threats to self-esteem and/or threats to the existence or quality of the relationship” (White, 1981, p. 130). White suggested that jealousy is made up of three components – thoughts, feelings, and coping behaviors. Jealousy produces a reaction to a real or perceived threat to a relationship (DeSteno, Bartlett, Salovey, & Braverman, 2002), and also sets boundaries for what behaviors are acceptable in romantic relationships (Pines & Friedman, 1998).

Envy is different from jealousy; it is wanting what others have (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). Individuals can be envious of many different things, including someone's wealth, their physical attractiveness, or their innate intelligence. While envy is about potential gain, jealousy usually involves an outside threat, it can involve potential loss, e.g., individuals may be jealous when someone threatens to take away a significant other (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994).

Studies indicate sex differences in jealousy, both in emotional and behavioral patterns. In heterosexual relationships men report feeling more jealous of a partner's sexual infidelity, whereas women report feeling more jealousy when contending with a partner's emotional infidelity (DeSteno, Bartlett, Salovey, & Braverman, 2002). Behaviors such as searching the partner's belongings or inspecting clothes for signs of sexual activity correlated with intense male jealousy (Mullen & Martin, 1994). When experiencing jealousy, women often cried when alone, tried to make themselves more attractive for their partners, and acted as if they did not care (Nannini & Meyers, 2000).

For most romantic partners, jealous thoughts can indicate relational dissatisfaction (Carson & Cupach, 2000) and feelings of self-pity (Sharpsteen, 1995). More important, jealousy can contribute to violence and aggression in relationships (Guerrero et al., 1995). However, some degree of jealousy might help relational partners show care and concern for one another (Guerrero et al., 1995). If individuals become jealous of external competition to the relationship (e.g., time a partner spends away from the relationship or a third party threat), they are also conveying their level of interest in the relationship.

Individuals who are more dependent, insecure, and possessive of their partners are most likely to experience jealousy (Sharpsteen, 1995). For them, the threat of loss seems immense. Based on perceived mate value and jealousy literature, it is possible that mate value discrepancy and jealousy are interrelated. A partner's perception of the other's mate value may elicit feelings of jealousy. A discrepancy in mate value may predict the following hypothesis:

H2: A person romantically involved with a person of higher perceived mate value will report higher levels of relational jealousy.

In addition, might the relationship be both jealousy-inducing and forgiving dependent on MVD? Even though mate value discrepancy may lead to feelings of jealousy, partners may still be more forgiving due to their desire to maintain the relationship. When one partner in a relationship has higher mate value, the other partner, even though jealous, may give the other person more allowances in the relationship, and therefore be more forgiving of the other person. In a sense, the partner with lower mate value may offer another resource in the relationship by being more forgiving of the other person who has higher mate value. Hence, it may be that individuals who perceive their partners to have higher mate values than they do, will not only feel jealous, but will also be more forgiving of transgressions in the relationship. The following research question is posed:

RQ2: Will individuals who are romantically involved with higher mate value partners be more forgiving even when jealous?

Relational Satisfaction

Research suggests that relational satisfaction can be linked to both forgiveness and jealousy. Regarding jealousy, relational satisfaction can go down two paths. Experiencing jealousy can lead to discontent and relational dissatisfaction (Carson & Cupach, 2000). Yet as indicated earlier, expressing jealousy might benefit a relationship as well, allowing partners to communicate interest (Guerrero et al., 1995). If active, attentive communication is elicited as a jealous reaction, this can signal that the jealous partner values, is involved, and is committed to the other. By comparison, if partners are apathetic about potential relational threat, this can communicate low involvement or low satisfaction with the relationship. As Cayanus and Booth-Butterfield (2004) put it, jealousy is a double-edged sword that can enhance or harm a relationship.

Relationship satisfaction is usually measured as an outcome variable (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). Romantic partners actively seek out situations that contribute to high levels of satisfaction (Arriaga, 2001). Exchange theories suggest the more equitable the exchange of resources in a relationship, the more satisfying the relationship will be (Van de Rijt & Macy, 2006). Also, high levels of self-disclosure often indicate high levels of commitment and relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, et al., 1988). Securely attached individuals in romantic relationships tend to maintain higher levels of relationship satisfaction, commitment, and trust over time (Keelan, Dion, & Dion, 1998).

Satisfying relationships are also significant sources of social support and well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), often contributing to a better quality of life (Arriaga, 2001). Meta-analysis by Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton (2001) found that married people lived longer and were healthier, especially those in productive, high-quality relationships. Stress was reduced, resilience to a myriad of problems was enhanced, and they also tended to recover from ailments more quickly compared to people not in close relationships. For instance, satisfying marital relationships are beneficial sources of support for patients during breast cancer diagnosis and treatment (Manne, Ostroff, Sherman, Heyman, Ross, & Fox, 2004). Thus, the more satisfying a relationship is, the more valuable it becomes, and it may become resilient to relational problems. Combining backgrounds on forgiveness, jealousy, and relationship satisfaction, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H3: Individuals who are in satisfying romantic relationships will report being a) more forgiving, and b) less jealous.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 179 undergraduate students enrolled in large Communication Studies courses at a mid-size, mid-Atlantic university. Only students who were currently involved in romantic relationships were asked to complete the questionnaire. Limited demographic information was addressed in the packets, including sex, participant and partner's age, and length of relationship. There were slightly more males ($n = 93$) than females ($n = 86$), and the participants' average age was 20.28 ($SD = 2.6$). The average age of the participants' partners was 20.78 ($SD = 3.6$) and the average length of participants' relationships was 16.05 months ($SD = 15.0$). The remainder of the packet included a self- and other-report of mate value, self-report of jealousy, and self-report of forgiveness. Participants completed questionnaire packets in class and received minimal course credit.

Measures

In order to determine mate value discrepancy, participants were asked to respond to a series of items reflecting their perceptions of their own mate value, as well as their partner's mate value. The first scale focusing on mate value originated in

an unpublished dissertation (Kugeares, 2002) analyzing mate value discrepancy and dating anxiety. The original scale was altered to produce both a self-report and an other-report version. On a 9-point, Likert-type scale, participants evaluated themselves (e.g., how physically attractive do you perceive yourself to be) and also evaluated their romantic partners (e.g., how would you rate this person's financial prospects). Reliability was not previously reported for this measure. For this study, the mate value measure obtained a mean of 51.68 ($SD = 7.56$), alpha reliability of .78 for other-report, and a mean of 47.36 ($SD = 9.12$), reliability of .89 for the self-report version.

Since the previous study with this measure did not report validity testing or reliability, additional measures were added to gauge mate value discrepancy. Self- and other-report of commitment and relational alternatives were used as a second method of assessing MVD (Samp and Solomon, 2001). On a 6-point, Likert-type scale, participants reported how committed they were in their relationships, how committed they perceived their partners to be to the relationship, and perceptions of their own, as well as their partner's relational alternatives. Previous reliability for commitment was reported at .87 and for relational alternatives .70 (Samp and Solomon, 2001).

The difference between self- and other-report scores was used to determine mate value discrepancy on all three measures. For this study, Samp and Solomon's (2001) measure had a mean of 19.56 ($SD = 4.87$), alpha of .84 for self-report of commitment; and for other-report of commitment the mean was 20.24 ($SD = 4.11$), alpha .86. For self-report of alternatives, Samp and Solomon's (2001) measure had a mean of 16.43 ($SD = 5.10$), alpha .79; and for other-report of alternatives the mean was 17.04 ($SD = 4.62$), alpha was .74.

The Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (containing dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral jealousy) was used to assess participants' relational jealousy. On a 7-point, Likert-type scale participants addressed their own jealousy in their current romantic relationship. Pfeiffer and Wong (1989) report reliability for the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral subscales at .92, .85, and .89 respectively. For the current study the mean was 20.42 ($SD = 10.4$), alpha = .91 for cognitive jealousy, 39.29 ($SD = 11.6$), alpha = .93 for emotional jealousy, and 19.1 ($SD = 10.7$), alpha = .92 for behavioral jealousy.

Forgiveness was also assessed in two ways: dimensions of Forgiveness (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004) and Wade's Forgiveness Scale. The dimensions of Forgiveness were assessed by referencing a relational event in which the participant felt wronged or hurt. On a 9-point, Likert-type scale, participants reported the degree to which they felt hurt, ranging from 1 (very little hurt) to 9 (most hurt ever felt). Participants were then asked to respond to six statements based on the previously reported transgression; three were benevolent statements (e.g., I accepted my partner's humanness, flaws, and failures; I soon forgave my partner), while the other three were vengeful statements (e.g., I thought about how to get even, and I thought of ways to make my partner regret what he or she did). The vengeful items were recoded and all six items were summed. Fincham, Beach, and Davila (2004) studied husbands and

wives, finding the 6-item forgiveness measure mean was 29.7 for husbands and 32.1 for wives. Alphas were reported for the two subscales: retaliation subscale alphas were .78 for husbands and .87 for wives; the benevolence subscale alphas were .72 for husbands and .78 for wives (2004). For the current study the mean of overall hurt was 5.67 ($SD = 2.21$), and the forgiveness mean was 27.47 ($SD = 6.31$), reliability .81.

Wade's Forgiveness Scale was also used to determine participants' tendency to forgive (as cited in McCullough et al., 1997). On a 6-point, Likert-type scale students responded to 20 items reflecting both forgiveness and vengefulness. Participants were asked to recall a time in their current romantic relationship when they experienced being hurt or treated unfairly by their partner. To assure that all students were able to recall a transgression, they were instructed that this hurt or unfair treatment could range from their partner canceling plans to cheating on them. Reliability for the Forgiveness Scale has been reported at .94 (McCullough et al., 1997). For this study the measure had a mean of 91.85 ($SD = 19.25$), and an alpha of .92.

The Quality Marriage Index operationalized relationship satisfaction (Norton, 1983). Since participants are reporting on romantic relationships and not necessarily marriages, the first item of the measure was changed from "we have a good marriage" to "we have a good relationship." The reliability for the QMI measure was previously reported at 0.76 (Norton, 1983) and for the current study the mean was 34.63 ($SD = 9.3$), alpha was .95.

Results

The first hypothesis explored the relationship between mate value and forgiveness. To address this hypothesis a score for mate value discrepancy was obtained by subtracting Kugeares' (2002) other-report of mate value from self-report of mate value. Hence, a negative MVD indicates individuals perceive their partner as having higher mate value; a positive MVD indicates people perceive themselves as having higher mate value than the partner. MVD had a mean of -4.33 ($SD = 10.71$) with a range = -47 to $+20$.

There was a moderate relationship between MVD and the abbreviated forgiveness scale, $r = -.313$, $p < .01$, and for the 20-item forgiveness measure as well, $r = -.314$, $p < .01$. The direction of the correlations indicates a significant relationship between MVD and forgiveness, suggesting a negative MVD will be associated with more forgiveness in a relationship. Hypothesis one was supported.

Research question one asked whether there are male-female differences in forgiveness in romantic relationships. A t test revealed no male-female differences in the abbreviated measure of forgiveness dimensions, $t [178] = .09$; $p = .76$. For the 20-item forgiveness measure, the t test indicated similar non-significant results for sex and forgiveness; $t [178] = .46$; $p = .50$. Men and women were equally likely to forgive partners in romantic relationships.

The second hypothesis predicted a person romantically involved with another of higher mate value would report higher levels of jealousy in the relationship, and this hypothesis was supported. Correlations revealed small to moderate relationships between dimensions of jealousy and MVD: cognitive jealousy, $r = -.249$, $p < .001$,

Table 1 Regression Analysis Predicting Forgiveness

	B	SE B	β
MVD	-.849	.133	-.473*
Cognitive Jealousy	-.376	.150	-.203**
Behavioral Jealousy	-.228	.160	-.127
Emotional Jealousy	-.294	.123	-.178**

* $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$. $r^2 = .21$.

emotional jealousy, $r = -.272$, $p < .000$, and behavioral jealousy, $r = -.383$, $p < .001$. Thus, having a partner with higher mate value (i.e., larger discrepancy) may pose more of a threat of loss, thus increasing jealousy.

The second research question asked if individuals involved with partners of higher mate value would be more forgiving, even when they felt jealous. Multiple regression analysis indicated MVD, cognitive jealousy, and emotional jealousy helped to predict forgiveness, $F(4, 173) = 13.08$, $p < .001$, with MVD having the strongest relationship with forgiveness, and behavioral jealousy showing no relationship with forgiveness, (see Table 1). A stepwise multiple regression was conducted to account for unique variance in forgiveness; MVD accounted for approximately 10% of the unique variance, cognitive jealousy accounted for approximately 9% of the unique variance, and emotional jealousy accounted for approximately 4% of the unique variance.¹

Finally, the third hypothesis predicted that individuals in satisfying romantic relationships will report being a) more forgiving, and b) less jealous. A series of simple correlations partially supported this hypothesis. Overall, forgiveness and relational satisfaction were not related; $r = .095$; $p = .204$ (abbreviated measure), and $r = .092$; $p = .221$ (20-item measure). There was also no correlation between emotional jealousy and relationship satisfaction, $r = -.060$, $p < .424$. However, a moderate inverse relationship was found between cognitive jealousy and relationship satisfaction, $r = -.480$, $p < .001$, and between behavioral jealousy and relationship satisfaction, $r = -.326$, $p < .001$. Thus, satisfaction was associated with less cognitive and behavioral jealousy, but was not linked to forgiveness.

Post hoc Analyses

The previously-unproven mate value measure yielded appropriate reliability, thus the commitment and relationship alternatives measures were utilized as secondary variables for this study. Other-report of commitment and perceived alternatives was subtracted from self-report of commitment and perceived alternatives to create another way of examining mate discrepancy. There was a significant inverse correlation between MVD and perceived commitment discrepancy ($r = -.58$, $p < .001$) as well as a positive correlation between MVD and perceived alternative discrepancies,

Table 2 Correlations between Mate Value and Jealousy

	MVD	Self-Report	Report about other
Cognitive Jealousy	$r = -.277^*$	$r = -.417^*$	$r = -.110$
Behavioral Jealousy	$r = -.415^*$	$r = -.441^*$	$r = .056$
Emotional Jealousy	$r = -.283^*$	$r = -.234^*$	$r = .119$

* $p < .001$.

($r = .69$, $p < .001$). This outcome would suggest that if partners perceive themselves having a high mate value, they are less likely to be committed to the current relationship and more likely to perceive many relational alternatives for themselves. Alternatively, if a partner perceives a negative MVD, he or she may be more committed to that relationship and recognize fewer alternatives.

A different perspective may be gained if we examine the individual perceived mate value rather than in conjunction with one's partner. Thus, a second group of post hoc analyses examined self-report and other-report of mate value separately. Self-report of mate value had no relationship with forgiveness, but other-report of mate value revealed a significant relationship ($r = .400$, $p < .001$). These data indicated that when individuals perceive their partners as having high mate value, they will be more forgiving when the partner commits transgressions regardless of assessments of their own resource value. These results suggest that when it comes to forgiveness, what matters more is how much value people place on their mate rather than themselves. A converse relationship was found with jealousy.

Even though other-report of mate value was linked to forgiveness, assessment of partner mate value alone was not linked with jealousy. Correlational analyses indicated that self-assessments and MVD had small to moderate relationships with the three jealousy subscales, (see Table 2). Based on the results highlighted in Table 2, both MVD and self-report of mate value had definite relationships with the jealousy subscales, and other-report of mate value showed no relationship with the jealousy subscales. This suggests that when individuals perceive themselves as having low mate value, they are more likely to experience jealousy in romantic relationships.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of mate value discrepancy (MVD) on forgiveness and jealousy in romantic relationships. From a resource exchange or equity perspective, as one's partner is perceived to have more valuable attributes, it puts the other at a disadvantage and in a "one-down" situation. To restore equity and maintain a valuable relationship, the lower valued mate may tend to feel more jealous, but put up with more difficulty from the valued partner. This finding is consistent with Buss and Shackelford's research on attempts to retain relational partners who are viewed as high-value (1997a). It was clear that MVD, when one perceives

another to have higher mate value, was associated with being more forgiving of potential partner transgressions.

We also examined the issue of male-female differences. As stated before, previous research found inconsistent relationships between gender and forgiveness in relationships, but our study found no indication of such sex differences. For the abbreviated forgiveness scale, the mean score for men was 26.9 and for women it was 28.1. For the 20-item forgiveness scale, the mean score for men was 91.0 and for women it was 92.7. Future research might consider forgiveness-related differences in terms of masculinity and femininity rather than just looking at female and male designations. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) provides assessments of both masculinity and femininity in terms of the respondent's self-reported possession of traditional masculine and feminine personality characteristics (Bem, 1981). Such an avenue might be particularly productive in predicting mate value assessments and their impact.

Additional post hoc analyses examined the relationship between sex and jealousy. For the three jealousy subscales independent samples, *t*-tests yielded significant differences only for the behavioral jealousy subscale, $t(177) = 6.44$, $p = .012$; men had a mean of 18.12, while women had a mean of 20.15. Women were more likely than men to display overt signs of jealousy in romantic relationships. There were no differences between men and women on cognitive, $t(177) = .75$, $p = .388$, or emotional, $t(177) = .026$, $p = .87$, jealousy.

Our second research question addressed the interrelationship among MVD, jealousy, and forgiveness in romantic relationships. We anticipated that even if one feels jealous, perceiving one's mate as having a higher mate value would result in more forgiveness. The results did suggest MVD played a role with forgiveness in romantic relationship under conditions of cognitive and emotional jealousy, although not behavioral jealousy. It might be inferred that if an individual reaches the point of overtly acting out (behavioral) jealousy in a relationship, MVD may no longer influence forgiveness in the relationship.

Relational satisfaction showed no relationship to forgiveness, but it did to jealousy. People in more satisfying relationships tended to experience less jealousy. However, this only held true for cognitive and behavioral jealousy. Emotional jealousy, in comparison, does not seem to depend on how satisfied one is in a relationship and may represent a more individual, predispositional variable with less linkage to external circumstances. For example, someone may feel the emotion of jealousy and respond affectively, regardless of any real justification for that feeling. Similarly, forgiveness and relationship satisfaction were unrelated in this study. This suggests that forgiveness is also an individual characteristic, centered within each person and consistent with the trait conceptualization of McCullough et al. (1998). Forgiveness does not depend on how satisfied one is in the relationship, unless there is a mate value discrepancy. Thus, it appears that relational discrepancy is the better predictor of forgiveness.²

Finally, we must recognize that there are limitations in this research. The current study did not determine whether traditional values and assessments of mate value

still hold true, or if men and women have altered their perceptions; i.e., the mate value measure included items on mate physical attraction and financial resources that might be outdated for college educated adults today. A second issue is that this study only looked at how one partner in a relationship perceives the MVD. It may be appropriate to gain insights of both romantic partners in terms of mate value and its impact on forgiveness and jealousy in relationships. Because individuals in relationships can be influenced by their partners' communication, each response may be more a function of the interaction than a truly independent assessment. Future research could benefit from analyzing couples' perceptions to develop a more complete picture.

Implications and Extensions

The construct of mate value discrepancy, MVD, appears to be a useful way to examine responses in relationships. It may not be simply one's own self-image that guides relational communication, but the combination of how each partner is perceived. Thus, it would be useful in future research to explore other relational outcomes potentially related to MVD; e.g., conflict patterns, affinity-seeking, and additional commitment components. For example, demand-withdraw patterns occur when one partner requests change (demand) and the other withdraws by avoiding or ignoring the request (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999). These negative cycles tend to perpetuate and likely diminish relationship satisfaction. It seems reasonable that perceptions of mate value discrepancy may play a role in either demanding or withdrawing in such interactions.

Partners' loving style could also influence the impact of MVD on a relationship. For example, men tend to be more romantic, believing in one true love while women tend to be more practical and realistic (Peplau & Gordon, 1985). Thus, partners may evaluate mate value and the role of MVD in a relationship differently based on their loving styles or preferred affinity seeking patterns.

Commitment may also play a role with MVD; generally commitment is very low early on in a relationship and then increases dramatically if the relationship becomes a long-term one (Sternberg, 1986). MVD may be more important early on in a relationship when commitment is low, but may become less prevalent over time as commitment increases. Similarly, it would be useful to examine components of MVD in older adults and marital relationships, as well as with university students, as the respective relationships may be based on differential weighing of resources.

In addition, a reasonable question to ask is, "What can be done with this information?" Given knowledge about mate value discrepancies, and their potential impact on relationships, it is possible that couples can work to improve their communication. To illustrate, relational maintenance could be enhanced via reassuring communication, openness, and positivity if MVD were an issue (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2001).

Wade and Worthington (2005) examined numerous interventions to enhance forgiving in relationships. Several communication elements, such as re-framing, verbal

commitment, and perspective-taking, can be emphasized to help individuals lessen resentment and likely improve other interpersonal and relational concerns. Further, a major meta-analysis of the self-disclosure literature strongly concludes that disclosing improves liking and satisfaction in relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994). Thus if partners understand how each perceives their own "mate value," the discussion and clarification may help bring them closer and reduce jealousy, as well as other negative relational issues.

Conclusions

This study has explored the concept of relative mate value in romantic relationships. Results indicate that MVD does affect both forgiving and jealous responses in romantic relationships. Self-report of mate value alone and other-report alone played differing roles with forgiveness and jealousy. Self-report showed a stronger association with jealousy, and perceptions of the other were more related to forgiveness. However, overall mate value discrepancy played a more constant role, having more consistent relationships with those two variables. It can be assumed that it is the discrepancy between mates that indicates a more constant prediction rather than just looking at one partner's versus another partner's mate value separately. Mate value may bring people together to form relationships, but mate value discrepancy influences what may happen in those relationships in the long run.

Notes

- [1] When we altered the model, making jealousy the dependent variable and MVD and forgiveness the independent variables, the predictors were still significant, but less strong. The following outcomes were obtained: cognitive jealousy, $F(2, 175) = 17.31$, $p < .001$, emotional jealousy, $F(2, 175) = 15.12$, $p < .001$, behavioral jealousy, $F(2, 175) = 27.99$, $p < .001$. Results revealed a stronger predictive model when forgiveness is a dependent variable and cognitive, emotional, and behavioral jealousy, as well as MVD, are the independent variables.
- [2] The simple correlation of forgiveness and emotional jealousy was $r = .027$, *ns*, while forgiveness and cognitive and behavioral jealousy were related; $r = -.24$ and $-.22$, respectively, $p < .01$. These findings, coupled with other analyses from this study, suggest that emotional jealousy is consistently associated with variables in a different manner than cognitive and behavioral jealousy.

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