

Romantic Attraction towards Men and Women Consistent with Gender  
Stereotypes: The Role of System and Personal Control Threat

by  
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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

During times of economic and political uncertainty, people often feel a lack of control and security. Three studies demonstrate that the motive for a sense of control can increase the desire for a romantic partner who is likely to provide a sense of control. When the sociopolitical system is threatened, men are more interested in warm, caring, submissive women consistent with ‘benevolent’ sexist ideals of femininity (Study 1). Women, on the other hand, are less interested in men consistent with the masculine stereotype as assertive, independent, and achievement-oriented to the extent that a relationship with these men can diminish their sense of control (Study 2). Threatening beliefs in personal control produced the same effect on women’s romantic interest in stereotypically masculine men, which supports the observed effects of system threat as due to motive for a sense of control. But when women perceive these men as benevolent, external sources of control, they remain interested in these men when threatened (Study 3). Together, the studies suggest that romantic relationships can be a means of establishing a sense of control following economic and political uncertainty.

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## Introduction

In 2007, the worst economic recession since the Great Depression began on a global scale. People lost their homes, their jobs, and their livelihood. Many blamed the global economic meltdown, in part, on the American government for failing to regulate the financial sector and for letting corporate greed wipe away their life savings and investments.

To the extent that people see the government as inadequate, they may now rely on themselves rather than the government for a sense of order and control. Kay and his colleagues (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Kristin, 2008) have shown that when social systems such as the government fail to bring order and justice, people increase their perceptions of personal control over the environment. Increasing personal control can likely minimize the sense of randomness and chaos that arises when sociopolitical systems fail. If the government is not in control, people can at least believe they are in control and maintain the overall perception that things in the world are relatively under control and not random or chaotic.

In the present research I examine how romantic relationships allow people to gain a sense of control when systems fail. Given that romantic relationships are a potent source of felt security (e.g., Fraley & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Zeifman, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) when people's faith in the system is threatened they may especially prefer a romantic partner who can provide a sense of felt security—someone who is warm, caring, and responsive to his or her partner's needs (for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The motive for a sense of control therefore can intensify the desire for certain romantic partners.

In particular, I examine whether the motive for a sense of control can affect the desirability of romantic partners who are consistent with gender stereotypes. For instance, it can intensify the desirability of women consistent with the feminine stereotype as warm, caring, and nurturing as a relationship with these women can offer a sense of felt security. I focus on gender stereotypes because much research has linked stereotypes to perceptions of the system as fair and just (e.g., Jost, Kivetz, Rubini, Guermandi, & Mosso, 2005; Kay, Czaplinski, & Jost, 2009; Kay & Jost, 2003; see Kay, Jost, Mandisodza, Sherman, Petrocelli, & Johnson, 2007). For instance, the stereotype of women as communal (e.g., Langford & MacKinnon, 2000; Williams & Best, 1982), as well as the ‘benevolent’ sexist view of women as pure, vulnerable, and as ideal romantic partners (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001), can lead to increased perceptions of the sociopolitical system as fair and balanced among women (Jost & Kay, 2005). These flattering perceptions of women apparently compensate for the disadvantages women face and support the illusion of gender equality (see Jackman, 1994). Given that stereotypes can contribute to perceptions of a fair and balanced system, it seems fitting to examine how perceptions of the system can affect the desirability of men and women consistent with gender stereotypes.

To my knowledge, the present research is the first to investigate whether perceptions of the system can influence romantic attraction. Although perceptions of the system and romantic attraction seem unrelated, they are connected in that both processes can function to maintain a sense of order, structure, and stability in the world (Kay et al., 2008). When the system seems unreliable, people can maintain perceptions of the world as ordered and structured if they have a greater sense of control, which they can



experience if they were in a romantic relationship with certain individuals. In sum, the present research examines the prediction that romantic attraction is dependent on whether people perceive order and structure in the world.

## System Justification and Personal Control

Kay and his colleagues (e.g., Kay, Gaucher et al., 2009; Kay & Jost, 2003; Kay, Jimenez, Jost, 2002) have established that to various degrees, people defend societal institutions such as the government as legitimate, fair and justify inequalities and the status quo in various ways (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). They have argued that people defend social systems, in part, because it serves as a palliative function against the threat of uncertainty, randomness, and chaos (see Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Kay & Zanna, 2009; Napier & Jost, 2008; Rankin, Jost, & Wakslak, 2009). People are less likely to perceive randomness and chaos, and more likely to perceive order and structure, when they can trust social systems as capable of providing such order and structure. Thus, the motive to perceive the system as good, desirable, and fair can be considered as a subgoal of the overarching motive for order and structure.

Systems, of course, are fallible as seen in the recent economic meltdown. When systems fail, people may perceive the world as more random and chaotic. To preserve a sense of control, they may increase their beliefs in personal control. Kay et al. (2008) have demonstrated that when the system has failed to correct an injustice, because it was unable to alleviate the suffering of a person who contracted HIV due to misfortune, people perceive themselves as having greater control over the environment. To the extent that increased perception of personal control reflects a greater desire for personal control, this study shows that a system threat can activate the motive for personal control, as greater personal control can reduce threatening perceptions of randomness and chaos brought on by the system threat.

## Personal Control, Felt Security, and Romantic Attraction

How the motive for personal control may translate to attempts to increase personal control, however, is unclear. Although there are likely many ways to establish personal control, I examine romantic relationships as they are likely to be an especially important means of establishing control. Extensive research has made it clear that when adults experience psychological threats, they often respond by seeking proximity to romantic partners (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2005; Fraley & Shaver, 1998; see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007 for a review). Recent work by Florian, Mikulincer, and their colleagues has shown that for instance when people are reminded of death, they respond to this psychological threat by increasing their commitment to their romantic partner (Florian, Mikulincer, & Hirschberger, 2002) or in some cases by increasing their desire for an emotionally intimate relationship with a romantic partner (Mikulincer & Florian, 2000). Even subliminal exposure to threat-related words (e.g., *failure*, *death*) was enough to activate thoughts related to proximity (e.g., *hug*, *love*; Mikulincer, Birnbaum, Woddis, & Nachmias, 2000). Given that romantic relationships can often buffer against psychological threats, they may also buffer against threats of randomness and chaos triggered when sociopolitical systems seem unreliable.

How would romantic relationships buffer against psychological threats of randomness and chaos? Attachment theory suggests that romantic relationships can provide a sense of felt security (see Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988) if the partner is warm, caring, loving, available and responsive to his or her partner's needs (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). While I agree, I believe that felt security may only be one means through which romantic relationships

can buffer against psychological threats of randomness and chaos. Another means is through personal control. Romantic partners can provide personal control if they offer their partner direct control in the relationship. They may let their partner choose how often they see each other, how they spend their time together, the degree to which the relationship progresses, and so forth. They may readily yield to their partner when disagreements arise and submit to their partner's orders. A romantic partner who is warm, caring, loving, and at the same time submissive, complying, and obedient may be especially ideal when one is motivated to establish an overarching sense of order and structure because having such a partner can offer a sense of felt security and personal control.

## Romantic Attraction and Gender Stereotypes

From this perspective, women consistent with the feminine stereotype as warm, caring, unassertive, and submissive may be particularly ideal as romantic partners for people who want a greater sense of control. Extending this idea, women may be particularly ideal as romantic partners when they are consistent with benevolent sexist ideals. Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001) have demonstrated that while sexism towards women is often characterized by hostile antipathy, it is also characterized by a set of subjectively positive or benevolent sexist beliefs (see Glick et al., 2000). Benevolent sexism depicts women as delicate, fragile creatures who ought to be adored and protected by men because of their purity and vulnerability. Women who conform to benevolent sexist ideals are likely submissive, compliant and therefore desirable as romantic partners to men who are motivated to establish a sense of control.

Many researchers agree that flattering perceptions of women as communal (or as warm, caring, and relationship-oriented; e.g., Langford & MacKinnon, 2000), as well as vulnerable yet pure and ideal for romantic affection, contribute to the illusion of the status quo as fair and legitimate (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Jackman, 1994; Jost & Kay, 2005). Because such flattering perceptions apply only to women and not men, they presumably compensate for the positive, agentic traits that men but not women are stereotyped as having such as being assertive, independent, competent, and achievement-oriented (e.g., Eagly & Steffen, 1984). In addition, flattering perceptions of women justify their occupation in lower status positions (e.g., housewives) whereas the agentic qualities that men supposedly have justify their occupation in higher status positions (e.g., CEOs; Jost & Hamilton, 2005; Kay et al., 2007; Kay, Gaucher et al., 2009; see Fiske,

Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). In sum, stereotypes of men and women can justify gender inequality and ultimately support the perception that existing social arrangements are fair and balanced.

Given that gender stereotypes can justify inequality, it is clear why men may desire women who conform to flattering but sexist ideals when they perceive the system as inadequate. Warm, caring, submissive and vulnerable women can restore perceptions of a fair and legitimate system because they have system justifying qualities, and as romantic partners they can be a potent means of establishing a sense of felt security and personal control. Whether men consistent with the masculine stereotype as agentic but not communal would be particularly desirable under system threat is less clear. Their assertiveness, independence, competence and achievement-orientation can supposedly justify their privileged status and the system as a whole, but they would unlikely provide a sense of personal control as romantic partners to the extent that they are unlikely to be warm, caring, and submissive to their partner. Thus, when the system has failed, it is unclear whether men who exemplify stereotypically masculine qualities would be more or less desirable.

I aim to examine these ideas in the present research. Using a system threat manipulation (Kay et al., 2005; Kay, Gaucher et al., 2009), I examine whether a system threat would enhance the desirability of warm, caring women who embody benevolent sexist ideals as romantic partners. I also examine whether it would enhance (or diminish) the desirability of stereotypically masculine men who display agentic but not communal qualities. Demonstrating that system threat can influence interpersonal attraction, a

domain often considered unrelated to system justification, would illustrate the pervasive influence of system justification in everyday psychological functioning.

## Overview of Studies

The present studies seek to demonstrate the effect of system threat on romantic attraction. Study 1 will test the prediction that a system threat would heighten romantic interest in warm, caring women exemplifying benevolent sexist ideals to the extent that one can establish greater sense of felt security or personal control through a romantic relationship with these women. Study 2 will examine whether a system threat would heighten romantic interest in men with stereotypically masculine qualities that can justify the system or lower romantic interest because being with these men may threaten one's sense of felt security or personal control. As a prelude, in Study 2 I observe system threat as lowering romantic interest in these men, which suggests that romantic attraction is a function of the motive for felt security or personal control more so than the motive to justify the system. If so, then threatening perceptions of personal control should also lower romantic interest. Study 3 will examine this possibility. In addition, it will examine whether under certain conditions stereotypically masculine men would be seen as non-threatening to one's sense of control.



### Study 1: Who Do Men Want Under System Threat?

Study 1 tests the prediction that a system threat would increase men's romantic interest in warm, caring women consistent with benevolent sexist ideals. Male participants will read a (fictitious) article suggesting that the social, economic, and political conditions in their country are worsening. This system threat has been shown to successfully lower people's evaluation of the sociopolitical system (Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005). A control group will read an article that conditions in their country are fairly stable and good. Participants will then see online dating profiles of women half of whom portrayed as warm, caring and consistent with benevolent sexist ideals (as vulnerable, morally refined, and ideal for romantic affection), and the others as inconsistent with those ideals. System threat is predicted to heighten men's interest only in warm, caring women consistent with benevolent sexist ideals but not in women who are inconsistent.

## *Method*

*Participants.* Thirty-six heterosexual male undergraduates 18 to 23 years old ( $M = 20.3$ ) at a Canadian university participated in an online study in exchange for \$10.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-two participants identified themselves as European Canadian, eight as Asian Canadian, three as Indo Canadian, and three did not indicate their ethnicity. Ethnicity did not moderate any effects and is not further discussed.

*Procedure.* Under the guise of a memory study, participants read an excerpt ostensibly from a British newspaper as a manipulation of system threat. The excerpt from Kay et al. (2005) was modified so that it pertained to the Canadian sociopolitical system. In the system threat condition participants read that the social, economic, and political conditions were worsening:

These days, many people in Canada feel disappointed with the nation's condition. Many citizens feel that the country has reached a low point in terms of social, economic, and political factors. They feel that Canada is becoming less significant in the world, and is often ignored when global issues are at hand. . . . It seems that many countries in the world are enjoying better social, economic, and political conditions than Canada. More and more Canadians express a willingness to leave Canada and emigrate to other nations.

In the no system threat condition participants read that conditions in Canada were relatively stable and good:

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<sup>1</sup> Seven participants in Study 1, and four participants in Study 2, indicated that they were in a romantic relationship for three or more months. Such participants may show little interest in all dating profiles regardless of system threat. I ran separate analyses excluding these participants, and the pattern of results stayed the same. These participants, therefore, were included in the analyses.

These days, despite the difficulties the nation is facing, many people in Canada feel that the nation is in better shape relative to the past. Many citizens feel that the country is relatively stable in terms of social, economic, and political factors. They feel that Canada is becoming more significant in the world, and often plays a role when global issues are at hand. . . . It seems that compared with many countries in the world the social, economic, and political conditions in Canada are relatively good. Very few Canadians express a willingness to leave Canada and emigrate to other nations.

Participants were then informed that before they could answer questions on the article, they would see eight online dating profiles of women ostensibly as part of a separate study. To ensure that the system threat manipulation was salient, under the guise of testing their memory participants saw the article with minor changes after every two dating profiles and were asked to note the changes.

In the dating profiles, half of female targets were portrayed as warm, caring and consistent—whereas the other targets were portrayed as inconsistent—with benevolent sexism.<sup>2</sup> Each dating profile included a picture of a woman and a description she supposedly wrote about herself. The pictures were randomly paired with the written descriptions and were pretested as not differing in attractiveness,  $F(7, 10) < 1$ . I portrayed half of female targets as warm and caring by including communal traits in their self-descriptions (e.g., warm, caring, honest, kind, friendly). I also portrayed them as consistent with the three aspects of benevolent sexism—as vulnerable, pure, and ideal for romantic affection—by modeling their self-descriptions on items from the Benevolent Sexism Scale (Glick & Fiske, 1996; see Kilianski & Rudman, 1998). One woman, for

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for the dating profiles.

example, was depicted as vulnerable and wanting a man “who can make [her] feel cherished and protected.” She wrote:

I’ve just graduated from high school, and I’m about to start university. I’m a little scared because it’s my first time being away from Mom and Dad, so it would be nice to find a sweet and funny kinda guy who can take care of me and knows how to treat me right.

One woman was portrayed as pure and morally refined. She wrote that she was a “one guy kinda girl” who enjoyed classical music and writing novels. She also volunteered “at the local hospital to visit the elderly” because she “[believed] in helping others.” Her friends would describe her as “cute”, “sweet”, and sometimes “a bit naïve.”

Another woman was described as a “hopeless romantic” who believed in the importance of love and romance (e.g., “you can never be truly happy in life unless you find your soulmate”). She wanted a man who “wants a girl by his side to care for him.” Another woman was described as capturing benevolent sexism in general (e.g., she was “sensitive,” she loved “spending time with children,” and she “[believed] in love and romance”).

The other female targets were portrayed as different from one another in order to capture the various ways in which women might be inconsistent with benevolent sexism. One was portrayed as a “driven person” who was “very focused on [her] career goal,” one as someone who loved “hanging out at bars and clubs with friends” and was “always the life of the party”, one as a social activist who believed “in helping out in causes” by volunteering for “women and environmental organizations”, and one as a sports enthusiast who was “outgoing and active” and enjoyed “mountain biking, snow-boarding,

[and] cross-country skiing.” The dating profiles were presented in a randomized order with the exception that no participants would see consecutively three or four female targets consistent or inconsistent with benevolent sexism.

For each female target, participants responded to questions that measured their romantic interest on 7-point scales. They were asked “How attractive do you find this person?” and responded on a scale ranging from 0 (*not attractive at all*) to 6 (*extremely attractive*). They were also asked “How interested would you be in talking to this person on the Internet?”, “How interested would you be in getting to know this person?”, “How interested would you be in meeting this person?”, “If you were throwing a party, how likely would you invite this person?”, “If your friend set you up with this person, how pleased would you be?”, and “How interested would you be in starting a relationship with this person?” and responded on scales ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very*). Lastly, they responded to the question “How ideal is this person as a romantic partner?” on a scale ranging from 0 (*not ideal at all*) to 6 (*perfectly ideal*). An overall index of participants’ romantic interest in the warm, caring, and benevolent sexism targets ( $\alpha = .97$ ) and the non-benevolent sexism targets ( $\alpha = .97$ ) were calculated by averaging their responses to the eight questions.

After rating the eight female targets, participants were probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked for their participation. Six participants suspected that the dating profiles were fictitious but were included in the analyses as the results remained similar even when they were excluded.

## Results

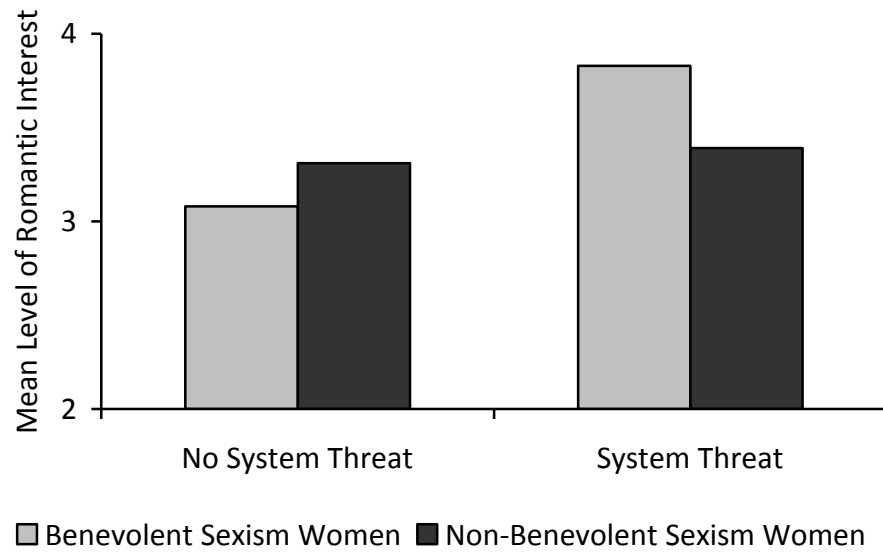
*Pretest.* As stated earlier, I predicted that a system threat would increase men's romantic interest in warm, caring women consistent with benevolent sexist ideals partly because as romantic partners they would be a potent source of control for men. The prediction rests on the assumption that these women would be perceived as more submissive (or less dominating) than women inconsistent with benevolent sexism. I pretested the eight dating profiles on a separate sample of participants ( $N = 39$ ) to test this assumption. Participants read the descriptions of the eight female targets in a random order and responded to items measuring the female target's submissiveness ("This person might like to have control over others", "This person may want to take charge in a romantic relationship", "This person may prefer to 'call the shots' in a romantic relationship", "This person appears to be submissive" [reverse coded], "This person probably wants to be the one in control of a romantic relationship", and "This person appears to be dominating") on 7-point scales ranging from 0 (*disagree strongly*) to 6 (*agree strongly*), with higher scores indicating greater dominance or lower submissiveness. An overall index of submissiveness of the female targets consistent ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and inconsistent ( $\alpha = .75$ ) with benevolent sexism was calculated by averaging participants' responses to the six items.<sup>3</sup> As predicted, female targets were viewed as less dominating, or more submissive, when they were consistent ( $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) compared to inconsistent ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) with benevolent sexism,  $F(1, 38) = 334$ ,  $p < .001$ . The present study, therefore, allowed me to test whether a system threat would heighten men's desire for a romantic partner high compared to low in submissiveness.

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<sup>3</sup> One item ("This person probably wants a partner who would take charge in a romantic relationship" [reverse coded]) was omitted because it had a low correlation with the other items.

*Primary results.* A 2 (system threat or no system threat) by 2 (women consistent or inconsistent with benevolent sexism) Analysis of Variance conducted on overall index of romantic interest, with the last factor as a repeated measure, revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 34) = 5.89, p = .02$ . As shown in Figure 1, system threat increased romantic interest towards warm, caring women consistent with benevolent sexism,  $F(1, 34) = 4.53, p = .04$ , but not towards women who were inconsistent,  $F(1, 34) < 1$ . Also, under system threat romantic interest was greater towards women consistent compared to inconsistent with benevolent sexism,  $F(1, 34) = 5.25, p = .03$ . In contrast romantic interest towards women consistent versus inconsistent with benevolent sexism did not significantly differ under no system threat,  $F(1, 34) = 1.38, p = .25$ . In sum, system threat increased participants' romantic interest in women consistent with benevolent sexist ideals compared to women who were inconsistent and compared to no system threat.

*Figure 1.* Mean level of romantic interest as a function of system threat and women as consistent versus inconsistent with benevolent sexism.





## *Discussion*

Study 1 demonstrated the influence of system threat on romantic attraction. To the extent that threatening participants' faith in the system activated the motive for control, it activated participants' desire for a romantic partner who could provide a sense of control. Having a warm, caring, and loving partner can be a potent source of felt security (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Also, being with women who exemplify benevolent sexist ideals—that is, who are pure, vulnerable, and ideal for romantic affection—can increase one's personal control to the extent that these women are submissive and likely to accommodate to their partner's needs. In contrast, women inconsistent with benevolent sexist ideals and who are low in submissiveness are less likely to provide a sense of control and are therefore less desirable.

There is another explanation for the results that has nothing to do with personal control. Instead, system threat has increased the desirability of warm, caring women who exemplify benevolent sexism because it has activated the motive to defend the system (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Kay et al. (2005) have shown that a system threat can increase the degree to which people endorse positive (or complementary) stereotypes about disadvantaged groups. In particular, the complementary stereotype of women as warm and caring, as well as benevolent sexist beliefs about women, have been shown to directly increase perceptions of fairness in the system (Jost & Kay, 2005). A system threat, therefore, can increase the desirability of warm, caring women who exemplify benevolent sexism because they display qualities that can serve as system justification. Thus, it is unclear whether the impact of system threat was due to the motive for personal

control or the motive for system justification (or both). Study 2 seeks to examine this issue.

## Study 2: Who do women want under system threat?

Study 2 again investigates the impact of system threat on romantic attraction but this time, it investigates its impact on women's romantic attraction towards men. In particular, it investigates its impact on romantic attraction towards men consistent with the masculine stereotype as assertive, competent, independent, achievement-oriented but not warm, caring, or relationship-oriented. The purpose of this is twofold. First, I want to examine whether the impact of system threat is driven by the motive to justify the system or by the motive for personal control and felt security. If driven by the motive for system justification, then system threat should increase the romantic desirability of stereotypically masculine men as their agentic traits can supposedly justify their privileged status in society (e.g., Eagly & Steffen, 1984). In contrast, if the impact of system threat is driven by the motive for felt security and personal control, then system threat should reduce the romantic desirability of stereotypically masculine men. To the extent that these men are seen as dominating, controlling, and not warm or relationship-oriented, a relationship with these men can only reduce one's personal control and felt security. In sum, Study 2 seeks to demonstrate whether stereotypically masculine men would be more or less desirable under system threat. Another purpose of Study 2 is to demonstrate that system threat can affect not only who men want but also who women want as a romantic partner.

## *Method*

*Participants.* Forty-eight heterosexual female undergraduates 17 to 20 years old ( $M = 18.6$ ) at a Canadian university participated in an online study in exchange for course credit or \$10. Only European Canadian participants were recruited lest participants would not be interested in the male targets if they were of a different ethnicity (all male targets were Caucasian).

*Procedure.* The same procedure as Study 1 was used. Under the guise of a memory study, participants read a system threat article suggesting that conditions in the country were deteriorating or a no system threat article suggesting that conditions in the country were relatively stable. They were then shown six dating profiles of men portrayed as consistent (i.e., as assertive, independent, and achievement-oriented) or inconsistent (i.e., as warm, caring, and relationship-oriented) with the masculine stereotype ostensibly as part of a separate study. The profiles were presented in a blocked randomized order to ensure that participants did not see three stereotypically masculine or non-stereotypically masculine targets consecutively. The system threat manipulation was presented again after every two male targets to ensure that the system threat manipulation remained salient.

The dating profiles contained a picture of a man and a description he supposedly wrote on himself.<sup>4</sup> Pretesting showed that the pictures did not differ in attractiveness,  $F(5, 52) = 1.37, p = .25$ . The pictures were randomly paired with the self-descriptions for each participant.

The stereotypically masculine targets were portrayed as assertive, confident, athletic, and achievement-oriented. One male target was described as a sports enthusiast

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B for the dating profiles.

who was “assertive and not afraid to speak [his] mind” and who considered himself a “gentleman when it comes to the ladies.” Another target was described as having high career ambitions; he wanted to an MBA and run his own company. He also described himself as “determined, sophisticated, independent, and achievement-oriented.”, as wanting to get an MBA and run his own company, and as having “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” as his favorite book. Another target was described as a “leader and a natural role model for others,” as someone who “likes to take charge” and who wants to go to medical school and be a doctor because he wants the same respect doctors receive.

The other targets were portrayed as inconsistent with the masculine stereotype (i.e., as warm, caring, relationship-oriented, gentle, and less ambitious). One wrote that he wants to be an elementary school teacher because his younger brother “means the world” to him and he loves spending time with children. He also “values his friends and family more than making a lot of money” and enjoys writing poetry. One target was described as a part-time writer and photographer who likes “walking through trails and enjoying the beauty of nature” and who “always puts others before [himself].” Another target wrote that he is “someone [friends and family] can turn to” because he is “a good listener”, that he appreciates art and history and likes to go to museums, and that he wants to be a counselor or a social worker.

To measure romantic interest in the male targets, participants responded to the same items in Study 1 on 7-point scales including “How attractive do you find this person?”, “How interested would you be in talking to this person on the Internet?”, “How interested would you be in getting to know this person?”, “How interested would you be in meeting this person?”, “If you were throwing a party, how likely would you invite this

person?”, “If your friend set you up with this person, how pleased would you be?”, “How interested would you be in starting a relationship with this person?”, and “How ideal is this person as a romantic partner?” with higher scores indicating greater romantic interest. An overall index of romantic interest in the targets consistent ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and inconsistent ( $\alpha = .96$ ) with the masculine stereotype was calculated by averaging participants’ responses to the eight items.

Participants were then probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked for their participation. Seven participants expressed suspicion towards the article or the dating profiles but were included in the analyses as the results were similar even when they were excluded.

## Results

*Pretest.* As stated earlier, I predicted that a system threat could reduce the desirability of stereotypically masculine targets because a relationship with these men could presumably threaten one's personal control. The prediction rests on the assumption that these men would be regarded as dominating and controlling especially in the context of romantic relationships. I pretested the six dating profiles on a separate sample of participants ( $N = 39$ ) to test this assumption.<sup>5</sup> Participants read the descriptions of the six male targets in a random order and rated the level of dominance of each target using items from the pretest in Study 1 (e.g., "This person might like to have control over others", "This person may want to take charge in a romantic relationship"). An overall index of dominance was calculated for the stereotypically masculine targets ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and the non-stereotypically masculine targets ( $\alpha = .81$ ) by averaging participants' responses to the items. As expected, the stereotypically masculine targets were seen as more dominating and controlling ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) than the non-stereotypically masculine targets ( $M = 2.26$ ,  $SD = .50$ ),  $F(1, 38) = 220$ ,  $p < .001$ . The present study, therefore, allowed me to examine whether a system threat would lower the desirability of men high versus low in dominance.

*Primary results.* A 2 (system threat or no system threat) by 2 (men consistent or inconsistent with the masculine stereotype) Analysis of Variance conducted on overall index of romantic interest, with the last factor as a repeated measure, revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 46) = 6.33$ ,  $p = .02$ . As shown in Figure 2, system threat lowered romantic interest only in stereotypically masculine men,  $F(1, 46) = 9.86$ ,  $p < .01$ , but not in non-stereotypically masculine men  $F(1, 46) < 1$ . Also, under system threat

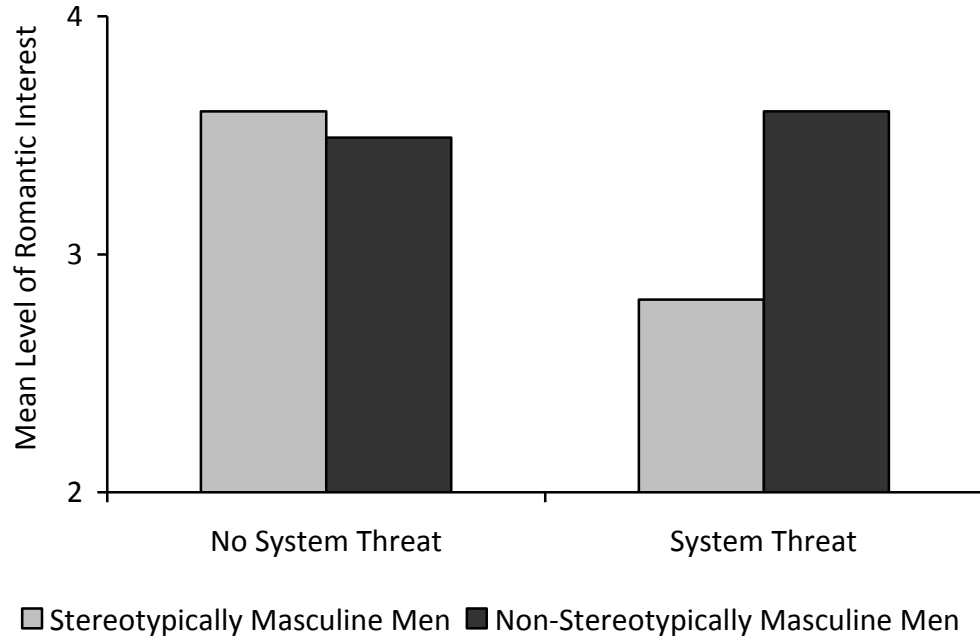
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<sup>5</sup> This is the same sample of participants pretested on the dating profiles of women in Study 1.

romantic interest was lower in stereotypically masculine men compared to non-stereotypically masculine men,  $F(1, 46) = 10.1, p < .01$ . In contrast, under no system threat romantic interest did not differ between stereotypically masculine men and non-stereotypically masculine men,  $F(1, 46) < 1$ . In sum, system threat diminished romantic interest towards dominating, stereotypically masculine men compared to non-stereotypically masculine men, and compared to no system threat.



Figure 2. Mean level of romantic interest as a function of system threat and men as consistent versus inconsistent with masculine stereotype.



## *Discussion*

As in Study 1, Study 2 demonstrated the impact of system threat on romantic attraction. To the extent that it activated participants' motive for felt security or personal control, it reduced the desirability of people who as romantic partners could reduce their felt security or personal control. In particular, it reduced the desirability of stereotypically masculine targets that were seen as dominating, controlling and therefore threatening to personal control and felt security. In contrast, it had no impact on the desirability of warm, caring, nurturing targets that were seen as relatively low in dominance and therefore as non-threatening to their sense of control. Together, Studies 1 and 2 presented the impact of system threat on romantic interest towards both men and women.

Did system threat also activate participants' motive for system justification? The answer is likely a no. If system threat had activated the motive for system justification, then it should have increased the desirability of the male targets when they displayed system justifying traits. That is, it should have increased the desirability of assertive, independent, competent, and achievement-oriented male targets as these qualities can justify their privileged status in society. But instead, it diminished the desirability of these men. Because system threat has been shown to increase system justification in other studies (Kay et al., 2005; Kay, Gaucher et al., 2009), why did it not increase the desirability of people with system justifying traits?

I speculate two reasons for this. First, system threat may have activated participants' motive to justify the system, but this motive did not translate into a greater desire for a romantic partner with system justifying traits. Second, system threat does not necessarily lead to system justification. According to Kay et al.'s (2007) model of

compensatory control, system justification is one means of satisfying the overarching motive to perceive order and structure in the world, but it is not the only means. Another means is by increasing personal control. If in Study 2 the opportunity for increasing personal control was more available than an opportunity for system justification, then following system threat participants would pursue the goal of personal control more so than the goal of system justification (see Kruglanski, 1996). Pursuing this goal, in turn, diminished participants' romantic interest in dominating, controlling male targets who could threaten participants' sense of control.

Study 2 raises a perplexing question. If system threat activated the motive for personal control, why did it not increase romantic interest in warm, caring non-stereotypically masculine targets? Given that a relationship with these men could potentially increase participants' sense of felt security and personal control, system threat should have increased the desirability of these men. I can only speculate an explanation for this. Perhaps participants were more focused on maintaining their sense of personal control than on attaining a greater sense of personal control. Brodscholl, Kober, & Higgins (2007) have demonstrated that goal maintenance calls for vigilant avoidance strategies whereas goal attainment calls for eager approach strategies (for a review, see Higgins, 1998). Thus, if participants were more focused on maintaining their sense of control, they would avoid stereotypically masculine targets who could threaten their sense of control, but they would not necessarily 'approach' or be more interested in warm, caring targets that could enhance their sense of control. Why participants would focus on maintaining their sense of control and not in attaining a greater sense of control is unclear. Regardless, Study 2 demonstrated the effect of system threat on romantic

attraction, even though the effect was observed only in control-threatening targets and not in control-enhancing targets.

Together, Studies 1 and 2 displayed the impact of system threat on romantic attraction towards both men and women. It increased the desire for a warm, caring, submissive romantic partner who could enhance a sense of personal control in Study 1 but decreased the desire for a dominating romantic partner who could threaten a sense of personal control in Study 2. As stated earlier, these effects were presumably driven by the motive for increasing (or maintaining) a sense of personal control. If so, then threatening perceptions of personal control should replicate these effects. In Study 3, I test this prediction by manipulating participants' perceived personal control then examining their romantic interest towards stereotypically masculine, dominating targets.

### Study 3: Who Do Women Want Under Personal Control Threat?

Study 3 aims to demonstrate the impact of personal control threat on romantic attraction. The purpose is twofold. First, I want to demonstrate that personal control threat would have the same effect on romantic attraction as system threat. This would support the observed effects in Studies 1 and 2 as due to the motive for personal control. Second, I want to examine whether under certain circumstances, personal control threat would enhance instead of diminish romantic attraction towards stereotypically masculine targets. In Study 2, these men were viewed as relatively dominating, controlling and thus threatening to personal control. But I wonder, could these men at times restore rather than threaten one's sense of control? These men could potentially, because of their assertiveness and competence, impose order and structure in their partner's life and thus reduce feelings of randomness and chaos. If so, a person who perceives little personal control may turn to such individuals to maintain an overall sense of control.

When would such individuals be viewed as a source instead of a threat to a sense of control? The answer, I believe, is when they are viewed as having one's best interests at heart. They may be dominating and controlling towards strangers whose interests are irrelevant to them, but offer a sense of control, order, and safety to those who are close to them and whose interests are relevant to them.

This line of thought stems from Kay et al.'s (2008) model of compensatory control. As I have alluded, perceiving personal control is one means of maintaining an overarching sense of order and structure, but it is not the only means. Another means is to rely on external sources of control such as the sociopolitical system. This is only the case, however, when the sociopolitical system is deemed benevolent—that is, as

representing people's interests. Kay et al. have demonstrated that threatening perceptions of personal control can increase people's endorsement of their sociopolitical system (in the form of resisting societal changes), but only when people regard the system as benevolent (not corrupt). In addition, Kay et al. have observed that across 67 countries in the World Values Survey (World Values Survey Association, n.d.), people who perceive little personal control tend to show higher levels of government support when they regard the government as benevolent. Taken together, these studies show people as often relying on benevolent, external systems of control when they perceive little personal control (see Laurin, Kay, & Moscovitch (2008).

From this perspective, people may rely on stereotypically masculine men as an external source of control, but only when they regard these men as benevolent. To test this prediction, female participants in Study 3 will be shown dating profiles of the stereotypically masculine targets. To manipulate perceived benevolence of these male targets, half of participants will imagine that they are in a romantic relationship with these male targets. To the extent that participants see these male targets as benevolent to only people close to them, imagining that they are in a romantic relationship would increase the male targets' perceived benevolence. Other participants will not imagine a romantic relationship with these targets. I predict that a personal control threat would reduce romantic attraction towards stereotypically masculine targets, but only when participants have not imagined a romantic relationship with these targets. Otherwise, personal control threat would enhance romantic attraction towards these men. To test these predictions, Study 3 has a 2 (personal control threat vs. no threat) by 2 (imagine or did not imagine romantic relationship) between-participants design.

## *Method*

*Participants.* Sixty-five heterosexual female undergraduates 18 to 20 years old were recruited in the study for course credit or \$10. All participants indicated that they were not in a romantic relationship or were in a romantic relationship for less than three months. Only European Canadians were recruited lest they were uninterested in men of other ethnicities across experimental conditions.

*Procedure.* A female experimenter conducted the experimental session individually or in groups of two to four. The cover story was to investigate the effects of imagination on people's emotions and cognitions. Participants' task therefore was to imagine various scenarios as instructed.

Following Laurin et al. (2008), participants were instructed to imagine a scenario that has been shown to manipulate their perceptions of personal control. Specifically, they imagined that they were in danger but were later rescued because of sheer luck or because of their own actions. Participants were reassured that they were free to withdraw from the study without penalty if they find imagining the scenario too stressful. The instructions for imagining the scenario were delivered by a pre-recorded audio.

*Personal control manipulation.* In the audio, participants were told to imagine that they encountered a person who tried to harm them. They were told to close their eyes and imagine:

You have just gotten off work and begin to head home. It is a 15 minute walk and you pass by a man, begging for money on the street. He asks you for some spare change, so you reach into your pockets to look for some. Your pockets are empty so you tell the man that you don't have any. He doesn't believe you and begins to

come towards you in a threatening manner. Again, you tell him that you have no change. He calls you a liar and pulls out a knife from beneath his jacket. You frantically look around for help, but there is no one. The street is deserted. Following your instincts, you turn and run. He begins to chase you, screaming at you for money. All you can hear is the pounding of your heart and feet on the cement. You do not know where you are going, but if you stop he will catch you. You keep running; your life depends on it.

At this point, the personal control manipulation was inserted. In the personal control threat condition, participants were told to imagine that they were rescued by police who luckily were nearby:

You are being chased. You scan your surroundings as you run. You turn around to see how close he is. He is right behind you; you can almost feel his breath on your neck. Suddenly, the police come out of nowhere and intercept him. They have saved you.

Although participants imagined they were rescued, they experienced a threat to their perceptions of personal control as they were rescued out of sheer luck. In contrast, participants in the no threat condition were rescued because of their own actions:

You remember that you have your cell phone with you, so you dial 9-1-1. You tell the operator that you are being chased. You tell her where you are and she tells you that the police are on the way. You turn around to see how close he is. He is right behind you; you can almost feel his breath on your neck. Suddenly, the police come out of nowhere and intercept him. They have responded to your phone call. You have saved yourself.



Although participants imagined that they were in danger, their perception of personal control was not threatened because they were able to pull themselves out of danger.<sup>6</sup>

After the pre-recorded audio participants were asked to write on a sheet of paper how they felt when they were imagining the scenario. This was done so that the purpose of imagining the scenario appeared to be to gauge participants' emotional response and unrelated to the next part of the study. The content of what they wrote therefore was not analyzed.<sup>7</sup>

Participants were then shown two dating profiles of the stereotypically masculine men in Study 2.<sup>8</sup> Two pictures of men from Study 2 were presented in the dating profiles. The same picture was paired with the same dating profile. The order in which participants saw the dating profiles were counterbalanced.

*Imagining romantic relationship.* Half of participants saw the dating profiles and rated their level of romantic interest in the male targets. Other participants, however, were given an additional task. Under the guise of another imagination study, they were instructed to imagine that they had recently entered into a romantic relationship with each male target. They read:

Imagine you are currently in a romantic relationship with this person. You met each other in a class you were taking. He chatted with you a few times. He asked you out, and you agreed. You have now been going out for 3 months. You spend a lot of time together. You see each other several times a week. You share similar

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<sup>6</sup> Laurin et al. (2008) demonstrated that although the personal control manipulation successfully lowered participants' perception of personal control, it did not manipulate participants' level of anxiety. Instead, participants found imagining both scenarios equally stressful.

<sup>7</sup> As expected, participants generally wrote that they felt scared or stressed while imagining the scenario.

<sup>8</sup> One of the stereotypically masculine targets (the sports enthusiast) from Study 2 was not presented because in hindsight, he did not quite capture the masculine stereotype as well as the other targets. He did not appear competent or ambitious in his career.

taste in food and music. You laugh at the same jokes. You enjoy hanging out with him, and he enjoys hanging out with you.

To increase the realism of this relationship, participants were encouraged to imagine in detail what being with the man is like. They read:

Focus your attention on this person. Imagine what it's like to go out with him.

What would you be talking about? What would his voice sound like? What would he be wearing? You may find that you can see the color of his eyes or hair up close. Really try to imagine what it's like to be with him.

After imagining a relationship with the stereotypically masculine targets, participants responded to questions that measured their romantic interest on 7-point scales. They were asked “How attractive do you find this person?” and responded on a scale ranging from 0 (*not attractive at all*) to 6 (*extremely attractive*). They were also asked “How interested would you be in getting to know this person better?” and “How interested would you be in developing a long-term relationship with this person?” on a scale ranging from 0 (*not interested at all*) to 6 (*very interested*). Lastly, they were asked “How ideal do you think this person would be as a long-term, romantic partner?” and responded on a scale ranging from 0 (*not ideal at all*) to 6 (*perfectly ideal*).<sup>9</sup> An overall index of participants' romantic interest in the male targets ( $\alpha = .88$ ) was calculated by averaging their responses to the four questions.

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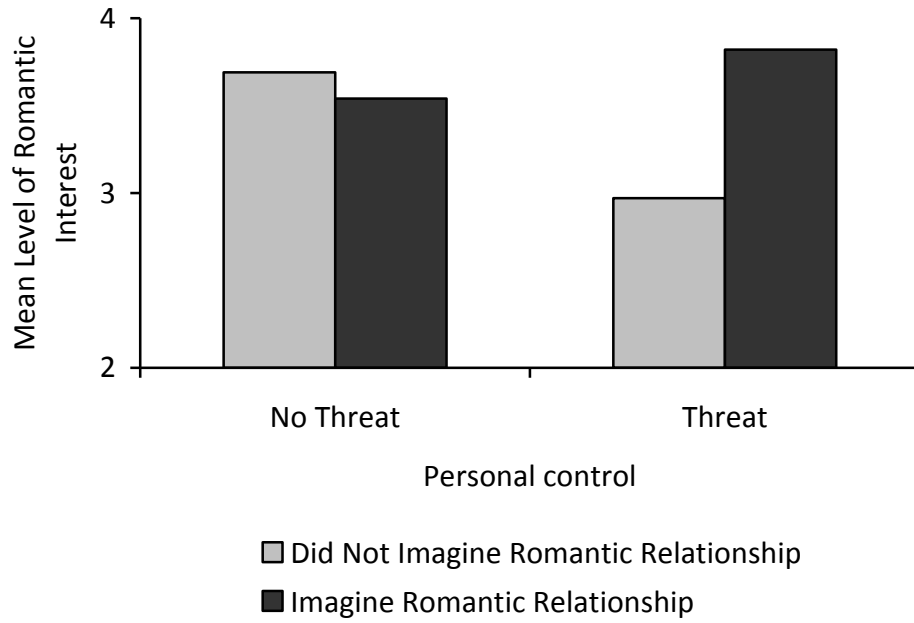
<sup>9</sup> The questions slightly differed from Studies 1 and 2 as some would be inappropriate for participants who had imagined a romantic relationship with the male targets (e.g., “How interested would you be in meeting this person?”). Despite the modifications I believe the questions nonetheless measured participants' level of romantic interest.

Participants were then probed for suspicion about the purpose of the study, debriefed, and thanked for their participation. One participant knew the hypothesis of the study and was therefore excluded from the analyses.

## *Results*

Order of the dating profiles had no effect on romantic interest and is not further discussed. A 2 (personal control threat vs. no threat) by 2 (imagine or did not imagine romantic relationship) Analysis of Variance conducted on overall index of romantic interest in the stereotypically masculine targets revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 61) = 4.41, p = .04$ . As predicted, personal control threat reduced romantic interest in the male targets only when participants did not imagine a romantic relationship with these men,  $F(1, 61) = 4.35, p = .04$  (see Figure 3). In contrast, when participants imagined a romantic relationship with these men, personal control threat somewhat increased romantic interest, albeit the effect was not significant,  $F(1, 61) < 1$ . Given a personal control threat, romantic interest was greater when participants imagined a romantic relationship than when they did not,  $F(1, 61) = 6.81, p = .01$ . Given no personal control threat, however, romantic interest was not greater (or lower) when participants imagined a romantic relationship than when they did not,  $F(1, 61) < 1$ . Interestingly, this suggests that merely imagining a romantic relationship with the men did not increase romantic interest. To summarize, I found personal control threat reducing romantic interest only when no relationship was imagined.

Figure 3. Mean level of romantic interest as a function of personal control threat and imagining versus not imagining romantic relationship.



## Discussion

In Study 3 I demonstrated the effect of personal control threat on romantic attraction. As predicted, personal control threat had the same effect as system threat; they both reduced romantic attraction towards stereotypically masculine men. This supports the observed effects in Studies 1 and 2 as due to the motive for a sense of personal control. System threat enhanced romantic attraction towards people who as romantic partners could provide a sense of personal control (i.e., warm, caring women consistent with benevolent sexism) but decreased romantic attraction towards people who as romantic partners could threaten a sense of personal control (i.e., stereotypically masculine men). The motive for a sense of personal control therefore can have a strong influence on romantic attraction.

Study 3 however produced only weak evidence for the other prediction on the effect of personal control threat. I predicted that personal control threat would enhance romantic attraction when participants imagined a romantic relationship with the stereotypically masculine targets. Contrary to my prediction, it had no significant impact on romantic attraction. Nonetheless, post-hoc analyses revealed some support. Analyzing the targets separately, I found support for my predictions in one target,  $F_s > 4.09$ ,  $p_s < .04$ , but not the other,  $p_s > .16$ . Importantly, personal control threat enhanced romantic attraction when participants imagined a romantic relationship with one target,  $F(1, 61) = 4.09$ ,  $p = .04$ , but not the other,  $F(1, 61) < 1$ .<sup>10</sup> Why did personal control threat increase romantic attraction in only one and not the other target? Perhaps imagining a romantic

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<sup>10</sup> Personal control threat enhanced romantic attraction when participants imagined a romantic relationship with the target described as a leader and a natural role model for others who likes to take charge and who wants to go to medical school because he wants the same respect doctors get. In contrast, no significant effects were observed across experimental conditions for the target described as determined, sophisticated, independent, and achievement-oriented and who wants to get an MBA and run his own company.

relationship increased the perceived benevolence of only one and not the other target; that is, participants may have perceived one target as likely representing a romantic partner's best interests, but perceived the other as unlikely to have anybody's best interests at heart but his own.

This possibility is supported by two findings. First, romantic interest was higher in the former target ( $M = 4.12$ ) than in the latter ( $M = 2.87$ ) across experimental conditions,  $F(1, 61) = 62.6, p < .001$ . Participants may have relatively little interest in the latter target because they regard him as low in benevolence towards everyone, including a romantic partner. Second, this particular target was rated as highly dominating and controlling in Study 2. His perceived level of dominance ( $M = 4.61$ ) was higher than the midpoint of the scale,  $F(1, 38) = 124, p < .001$ , and somewhat higher than the other target ( $M = 4.25$ ),  $F(1, 38) = 2.84, p = .10$ . Because participants perceive him as highly dominating, they may perceive him as interested in only his welfare and not that of others. Thus, imagining a romantic relationship with him would do little to increase perceived benevolence. If so, then a personal control threat would unlikely increase participants' romantic interest.

Like most post-hoc analyses, however, further studies are needed to support the above interpretation. Nonetheless, my interpretation is consistent with the extensive research on mate preferences. In general, people report that they prefer romantic partners low in dominance, even for women who theoretically might prefer dominating men (e.g., Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987; Snyder, Kirkpatrick, & Barrett, 2008). Lukaszewski and Roney (2009), however, have recently found women preferring men high versus low in dominance so long as the dominance is targeted towards other men and not to

themselves. This suggests that women may in fact desire assertive, dominating men so long as they see the men as offering a sense of safety and protection rather than as threatening their personal control.

In summary, Study 3 presented the impact of personal control threat on romantic attraction. Personal control threat reduced romantic interest in stereotypically masculine targets to the extent that the targets were perceived as threatening to participants' sense of personal control. In contrast, it did not reduce romantic interest when participants imagined a romantic relationship. Presumably, imagining a romantic relationship increased the perceived benevolence of the targets, and to the extent that these targets are perceived as a benevolent, external source of control, personal control threat no longer reduced romantic interest.



## General Discussion

Overall, I demonstrated that who people want as romantic partners can depend on their motives. When people are motivated to restore their overarching sense of order and structure, they want a partner who can provide that sense of order and structure. They may want a warm, caring, submissive woman who provides a sense of felt security (because of her warmth) and who provides direct personal control (because of her submissiveness). They may avoid an assertive, dominating man who can threaten their sense of felt security (because of his lack of warmth) and who can threaten their personal control (because of his high dominance). However, they may not avoid assertive, dominating men if they no longer perceive them as threatening to their sense of felt security or personal control.

When are people motivated to increase their sense of control? One answer is when they perceive low levels of personal control. A manipulation designed to threaten their perceptions of personal control led to a decrease in romantic interest towards assertive, dominating men, but only when people perceive these men as not caring about their interests (Study 3). Another answer is when they perceive the system as failing to impose order and control. A manipulation designed to threaten their confidence in the system led to an increase in romantic interest towards warm, caring, submissive women consistent with benevolent sexist ideals of purity and vulnerability (Study 1). It also led to a decrease in romantic interest in assertive, dominating men (Study 2).

Overall, these studies suggest that there are multiple ways in which people can maintain perceptions of order and structure. One way is to perceive the system as fair, legitimate, and having things under control (Kay et al., 2008). Another way is to increase

personal control or the extent to which one has the ability to bring desirable outcomes through one's behavior, such as by having a submissive partner who readily yields to one's desires. Another possible way is to increase one's sense of felt security, such as by having a warm, caring, and loving partner. It's important to point out, however, that in the context of the present studies, whether the effects were due to the motive for personal control or to the motive for felt security is unclear. In Study 1, women became more desirable under threat when they were both warm and submissive and who could therefore provide both a sense of felt security and personal control. Likewise, men became less desirable under threat in both Studies 2 and 3 when they were dominating and not warm or caring, meaning that these men could threaten a sense of felt security and personal control. Simply put, warmth and submissiveness of the male and female targets were confounded throughout the studies. It would be useful to conduct a study where these two traits were manipulated separately, as this would allow me to draw conclusively whether the demonstrated effects of the current studies are due to the motive for personal control or to motive for felt security.

Another important point to address is the idea of personal control. Throughout the studies, I have talked about personal control as being about to preserve a sense of order and structure without elaborating on the type of personal control one can have. In the context of a romantic relationship, having personal control could mean different things. For instance, people can have personal control over mundane decisions such as how the laundry should be done, how regularly the apartment should be cleaned, and so forth. Having control over mundane decisions will likely offer a sense of personal control but not a sense of power. On the other hand, people can have both personal control and

power if they are the ones who make the more important decisions such as which house to buy, whether the couple should relocate because one partner has a lucrative job offer, and so forth. When people feel threatened, it is unclear whether they would want to simply have control in a romantic relationship, or whether they would need a sense of power in order to ward off threats of randomness and chaos. It would be useful to conduct a study to examine whether a system threat or personal control threat would increase people's desire to simply have control (but not power) in a relationship or whether it would increase both the desire for control and power.

Although Study 3 results were promising, conducting further studies may be useful. In particular, the effect of personal control threat on romantic attraction in assertive, dominating men perceived as benevolent warrants further investigation. I found support that personal control threat may reduce romantic attraction to the extent they are deemed benevolent, but only in the form of post-hoc analyses. One possibility is that the perceived benevolence manipulation was only effective for one male target but not the other. Hence, personal control threat increased romantic interest in only one former and not the latter target. Further research is needed to support this interpretation. Finding support would have theoretical implications for Kay et al.'s model of compensatory control. According to their model, people rely on external systems of control (e.g., the sociopolitical system, a religious entity) when they perceive little personal control. Finding that personal control threat increases people's reliance on romantic partners as an external source of control would increase the applicability of compensatory control model to interpersonal domains.

It is unclear whether people motivated to gain personal control are looking for a partner who will submit to orders (e.g., do their laundry), or a partner who is not necessarily submissive but who is still responsive to their emotional needs (which attachment theorists say would increase sense of felt security), or a partner who is both submissive and responsive to emotional needs. Future studies are needed to flush out the exact motive of these effects. Results would have implications for whether people are desired because they are seen as warm, caring and thus provide felt security, or because they are submissive and thus can be dominated.

It is also unclear whether system threat has different impact on men and women's motives when it comes to choosing a romantic partner. It may activate system justification motive for men (and thus heighten their desire for partner with system justifying traits) but activate personal control motive for women (and thus lower desire for dominating, controlling partner). Although I see no theoretical reasons why system threat would have different effects for men than for women, it is still a possibility. Thus, further research may be needed.

As another suggestion, future studies may examine the relationship between romantic attraction and perceived control that potential romantic partners can provide. Romantic attraction should be higher towards romantic partners who are seen as potentially providing sense of control, whether because they are submissive (and therefore offer direct personal control), warm and caring (and therefore offer sense of felt security), or dominating but benevolent (and therefore imposing order and structure). This should be particularly the case when the motive for an overall sense of order and structure is heightened. A study that shows romantic attraction as positively related to

people's perceptions of a target as offering sense of control when their beliefs in the system or personal control is threatened would provide further support for the present conclusions.

Another suggestion for future research would be to examine possible individual differences as moderators. Perhaps system threat enhanced romantic interest in women consistent with benevolent sexism only for men who are high but not low in their endorsement of benevolent sexism. However, levels of benevolent sexism (as well as hostile sexism) of the participants did not moderate the effect or any other effects across the three studies. Nonetheless, other individual differences may be worth examining as moderators, such as need for personal control.

It is also worth examining the effects of system and personal control threat on romantic attraction towards people neither consistent nor inconsistent with gender stereotypes but rather have a mixture of both stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities. For instance, people who are warm, caring, nurturing as well as assertive, competent, and independent may be particularly desirable as romantic partners. They can provide a sense of felt security and control than people who only have one set of qualities but not the other. Obtaining evidence for this would suggest that the motive for personal control, whether triggered by system threat or personal control threat, affect romantic interest in people, in the real world, are generally more complex than the stereotypically masculine or feminine targets depicted across the studies.

In terms of theoretical implication, my studies suggest a link between motive for order and structure and theories of romantic attachment. If system threat, like other psychological threats, can increase proximity seeking to warm, caring individuals as

romantic partners, this would suggest that romantic partners can buffer against the psychological impact of system threat. Study 1 provided some support for this; it demonstrated system threat as increasing romantic interest in the warm, caring women. But because these women were also depicted as submissive, it is unknown whether the effect is driven by perceived submissiveness or perceived warmth of the romantic target. Future research can shed light on whether system threat would have an effect on romantic interest when only perceived warmth (and not submissiveness) of the targets is manipulated.

In terms of practical implications, my findings could explain why in an economic recession, people are spending more money looking for a romantic partner even though people tend to cut back on all expenses. Finding a romantic partner who is warm, kind, nurturing can provide a sense of felt security. Also, a partner who is submissive towards them would offer direct personal control to the extent that he or she is more likely to yield to them. Yet if the partner is dominating towards others, they can also be seen as providing a sense of safety and protection and therefore imposing order and structure in their partner's life. Together, a warm, caring, submissive to a romantic partner but dominating towards others may be the most ideal person to have as a romantic partner.

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## Appendix A: Dating Profiles of Women in Study 1



Gender: Female  
Age: 18  
Zodiac sign: Virgo  
Hobbies: cooking, trying out new recipes,  
camping, fishing  
Favourite movie: 13 going on 30  
Favourite book: Sense & Sensibility

### In my own words:

Thanks for reading my profile! I've just graduated from high school, and I'm about to start university. I'm a little scared because it's my first time being away from Mom and Dad, so it would be nice to find a sweet and funny kinda guy who can take care of me and knows how to treat me right.

### How I would describe myself:

I'm fun, easy-going and down-to-earth... very warm and caring. I love hanging out with my friends and go camping and fishing with my family. I also love cooking and learning new recipes from my Mom (I'm really good at making lasagna :).

### How my friends would describe me:

My friends would say I'm bright and funny, a little quiet at first but once you get to know me I can really open up. They would also say that I'm a very kind and caring person who's sensitive to other people's feelings and who would do anything for the people I care about.

### What I'm looking for in a guy:

I'm looking for someone who's sweet, funny and caring, someone who's a good listener and who will treat me like a princess :). I would like a guy who can make me feel cherished and protected, warm and safe, like I'm someone delicate and precious to him.



Gender: Female  
Age: 18  
Zodiac sign: Cancer  
Hobbies: volunteering at the local hospital,  
playing the piano, listening to  
classical music, creative writing  
Favourite movie: Shakespeare in Love  
Favourite book: Little Women

**In my own words:**

It's so tricky to describe myself, but here goes: I recently turned 18, and I'm just trying this online dating thing out of curiosity. I'm not sure what I'm looking for in a guy, since I haven't really dated before because I haven't had much time for it, but I'm usually attracted to guys who are mature and intelligent and funny.

**How I would describe myself:**

I'm young, pretty, friendly, warm and caring. Some people say I have a cute smile :) I am very honest and loyal, and would do anything for my friends and family. I also believe in helping others, which is why I like to volunteer at the local hospital to visit the elderly; it's a very rewarding experience. I also love playing the piano and listening to classical music, and would love to be a concert pianist one day, or a novelist since I love writing novels too.

**How my friends would describe me:**

My friends would describe me as a very sweet person who's very kind to others to a fault. They always say I'm cute, which is probably just their nice way of saying that I'm a little too naïve sometimes for my own good. (They like to tease me a lot).

**What I'm looking for in a guy:**

I'm definitely a one-guy kinda girl, and I would love to find that one guy I can turn to and depend on no matter what. I think compared to most people I can be a bit naïve, so I want a guy who won't take advantage of that and who will always be there for me. Oh, and I want a guy who can put up with the fact that I still sleep with my teddy bear every night! :)



|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Gender:          | Female   |
| Age:             | 18   |
| Zodiac sign:     | Sagittarius  |
| Hobbies:         | cooking, watching movies, reading,<br>chatting on the Internet |
| Favourite movie: | Jerry McGuire  |
| Favourite book:  | Pride & Prejudice  |

**In my own words:**

I'm just a girl looking for a great guy, simple as that. He doesn't need to be super good-looking or rich or have six-pack abs. I just want a sweet and gentle kinda guy who's strong and independent but who still wants a girl by his side to care for him and be there for him no matter what.

**How I would describe myself:**

I am a warm and loving person who's very supportive of my friends and family. I'm a bit of a hopeless romantic. I believe that you can never be truly happy in life unless you find your soulmate. Don't get me wrong! I'm not saying that we should all stop living our lives until we find that special someone. I just think that no matter how accomplished you may be, life wouldn't be complete without your soulmate by your side. Wouldn't you agree? :)

**How my friends would describe me:**

Probably the same way I'd describe myself: warm and loving and a hopeless romantic (they always tease me about that since I'm such a sucker for those romantic movies about boy meets girl... But what can I say? I'm a girl!).

**What I'm looking for in a guy:**

Like I said, I'm just looking for someone who's sweet and gentle, someone who doesn't mind doing little romantic things like holding hands or cuddling in front of the fireplace, someone who has his own life but who still wants a girl to support him and be by his side.



|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Gender:          | Female  |
| Age:             | 18  |
| Zodiac sign:     | Aquarius  |
| Hobbies:         | watching romantic movies, trying out new recipes, reading, listening to music |
| Favourite movie: | The Notebook  |
| Favourite book:  | Gone with the Wind  |

**In my own words:**

Hello! I'm 18 years old, and I'm a first year university student. I'd never thought I'd be on a dating website, since I'm pretty shy when it comes to meeting guys, but after some convincing from my friends, I thought I'd give this a try, so here I am!

**How I would describe myself:**

I'm very friendly and funny and I like to laugh a lot. I admit I'm a bit of a girly girl. . . . I like doing girls stuff like watching romantic movies and talking on the phone. I'm also a very kind and caring person. I love spending time with children and I love babysitting my two little cousins who are just absolutely adorable!

**How my friends would describe me:**

My friends would describe me as someone who's very honest and caring and somewhat sensitive. They always tease me about being a hopeless romantic because whenever I watch sappy romantic movies I always cry. I try so hard not to but I just can't help it! But there's nothing wrong with believing in love and romance, is there? :)

**What I'm looking for in a guy:**

I would love to find a guy who's charming and honest and who makes me laugh. I'm an old-fashioned kinda girl, so I'm definitely attracted to romantic kinda guys who do little things like opening the door for me or surprising me with flowers every now and then. Like most girls, I want a guy who will make me feel wanted and special.





Gender: Female  
Age: 18  
Zodiac sign: Cancer  
Hobbies: jogging, traveling, skiing, snow-boarding, reading, basketball, baseball, going to the gym, canoeing, camping  
Favourite movie: Million Dollar Baby  
Favourite book: Stone Angel

**In my own words:**

I'm a full-time university student. I grew up in Calgary and moved out here recently to start university and so far I've made a lot of friends. I also have a part-time job, so I'm a pretty busy person, but no matter what I always find the time to go out and have fun and I'm always up for trying something new.

**How I would describe myself:**

I'm smart, funny and outgoing and always on-the go. I'm a pretty driven person and very focused on my career goal, which is to go to med school and become a doctor. I also go to the gym regularly and right now I'm training for a 10km run (Wanna be my running partner? :) I also love traveling, and I've just come back from a month long trip across Europe.

**How my friends would describe me:**

They'd say I'm smart, mature, outgoing and very independent; I like to do things on my own and I hardly ask for help from others. They'd also say I'm a pretty competitive person. I like to succeed in whatever it is I'm doing, and I never back down from any challenges. But I still love to have fun and travel just like anyone else.

**What I'm looking for in a guy:**

I'm looking for someone who's confident, intelligent, funny, outgoing and can keep up with my busy lifestyle. Someone's who active and likes the outdoors and is definitely not a couch-potato. So, if you think you're what I'm looking for, then what are you waiting for? Send me an email :)



Gender: Female  
Age: 19  
Zodiac sign: Capricorn  
Hobbies: going to bars, clubbing, dancing,  
listening to music, going to the  
beach, swimming  
Favourite movie: Wedding Crashers  
Favourite book: Cosmo

**In my own words:**

Hey guys! A bit about myself... I'm a pretty outrageous person who will try just about anything once. Life is short so why not? I love hanging out at bars and clubs with my friends partying and dancing the night away. I'm looking for a guy who's confident and adventurous and who I can have fun with.

**How I would describe myself:**

Fun, spontaneous, confident, daring, energetic, and probably too flirtatious for my own good. There's never a dull moment with me. I'm always looking for new thrills and excitement. If we ever play truth or dare I always pick dare.

**How my friends would describe me:**

Never boring and always the life of the party. Whenever we go out my friends can always count on me being there. If you wanna know more about me, you'll just have to message me and ask ;)

**What I'm looking for in a guy:**

I'm looking for something fun and casual and just take it from there. I want a guy who's exciting and spontaneous and can handle a girl like me. He needs to have a sense of adventure and not be afraid of trying new things.



|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Gender:          | Female  |
| Age:             | 18  |
| Zodiac sign:     | Pisces  |
| Hobbies:         | volunteering, hiking, canoeing,<br>camping, watching movies |
| Favourite movie: | North Country   |
| Favourite book:  | A Handmaid's Tale   |

**In my own words:**

Let's see... I believe there's more to life than just school and work. You gotta take the time out to enjoy life and nature whether it's hiking or camping or horseback-riding. I'm looking for a guy to hang out with, someone who's honest and considerate and who appreciates all that life's gotta offer.

**How I would describe myself:**

I'm very easy-going and compassionate, assertive and not afraid to voice my opinions even if some people may not wanna hear them, but never pushy. I like doing things for others and I lead a very busy life balancing school and my volunteer work at an organization for women's rights. It's something I really believe in and I'm very proud to be a part of it.

**How my friends would describe me:**

Easy-going, passionate, friendly, always smiling, strong, assertive, outspoken, and never at a lost for words. Friends and family are very important to me and make me who I am. I believe in helping out in causes that are important to me, which is why I do a lot of volunteer work for women and environmental organizations.

**What I'm looking for in a guy:**

I want a guy who's honest and funny and who's got a good head on his shoulders. He should be fun and easygoing but knows when he should be serious. He should like outdoor activities and appreciate someone who's fun-loving and talkative and outspoken and independent like me.



Gender: Female  
Age: 19  
Zodiac sign: Leo  
Hobbies: mountain biking, swimming, snow-boarding, skiing, swimming, traveling, surfing, jogging, camping  
Favourite movie: Hotel Rwanda  
Favourite book: Da Vinci Code

**In my own words:**

Hey there! I'm an outgoing and active girl looking to see who's out there in the world of online dating. I love lots of outdoorsy stuff like mountain biking, snow-boarding, cross-country skiing, swimming, jet-skiing, and surfing, just to name a few. I also love to travel and so far I've been to Mexico, India, and Japan.

**How I would describe myself:**

Very adventurous and always in the mood for trying new things. I love mountain-biking and have been to some of the most beautiful trails across Canada... very fun and exhilarating. I also love swimming and used to compete in tournaments. I've recently taken up snow-boarding and I'm loving it.

**How my friends would describe me:**

My friends think I'm a down-to-earth, happy-go-lucky kinda girl who's funny and witty and athletic and a bit of a social butterfly. I'm just someone who enjoys being myself and wants to enjoy life the best way possible.

**What I'm looking for in a guy:**

I'm here looking for someone who's fun and exciting and who's got a big heart and who enjoys the simple things of life; just someone who doesn't take life or himself too seriously and knows how to have a good time. And definite brownie points if he's into mountain-biking or anything outdoors.

## Appendix B: Dating Profiles of Men in Study 2



Gender: Male  
Age: 20  
Zodiac sign: Virgo  
Hobbies: watching sports, playing football, cars  
Favourite movie: Invincible  
Favourite book: Tom Brady: Never-Quit Quarterback

### In my own words:

i like to be active and stay in shape and play sports. i like to hang out with my buddies. i'm looking for a girl who i can cuddle and laugh with, and who doesnt mind that i prefer watching sports to going shopping.

### How I would describe myself:

i'm very athletic and outgoing, i'm always up for a good time. i also love sports cars. my dream is to own a Porsche someday.

### How my friends would describe me:

a gentleman when it comes to the ladies :) funny and down-to-earth... pretty wild sometimes. assertive and not afraid to speak my mind.

This dating profile was also used in Study 3.



|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Gender:          | Male                                    |
| Age:             | 20                                      |
| Zodiac sign:     | Cancer                                  |
| Hobbies:         | jogging, tennis                         |
| Favourite movie: | Unforgiven                              |
| Favourite book:  | The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People |

In my own words:

I'm a university student and I plan to get an MBA. I go jogging and work out at the gym regularly and I am very fit.

How I would describe myself:

I would describe myself as someone who's determined, sophisticated, independent, and achievement-oriented. I plan to run my own company by the time I'm 35. During the week, I'm mostly busy at school, but on the weekends, I enjoy nightclubs, restaurants, etc.

How my friends would describe me:

My friends would say that I am intelligent, witty and sarcastic, but easily bored and distracted sometimes. They see me as someone who's very driven but still fun.

This dating profile was also used in Study 3.



|                  |                                   |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Gender:          | Male                              |
| Age:             | 19                                |
| Zodiac sign:     | Capricorn                         |
| Hobbies:         | reading, playing racquetball      |
| Favourite movie: | The Departed                      |
| Favourite book:  | Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures |

In my own words:

Here's some background info: I'm a Biology major, my grades have been good, and I plan on going to medical school. Ever since I was a little kid I've looked up to and respected doctors; I would like that kind of respect too.

How I would describe myself:

I'm educated, intelligent, loyal, down-to-earth, physically active and healthy. I'm also pretty ambitious; I know what I want and I'm not afraid to get it.

How my friends would describe me:

Someone who's dependable and reliable and who likes to take charge... a leader and a natural role model for others. Someone who's motivated and will work hard towards their goals.



|                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Gender:          | Male                     |
| Age:             | 21                       |
| Zodiac sign:     | Aquarius                 |
| Hobbies:         | watching movies, reading |
| Favourite movie: | North Country            |
| Favourite book:  | To Kill a Mocking Bird   |

**In my own words:**

Hello! Thanks for checking out my profile. I'm currently in my 4th year of university and I'm thinking of applying for Teacher's college soon to be an elementary school teacher. It's hard for me to find the time to meet new people, so I decided to give this online dating thing a try.

**How I would describe myself:**

An easygoing kinda guy. I like to write poetry in my spare time, although i'm not very good at it; i find it relaxing. I also like to travel and experience other cultures and keep an open mind to new experiences. My brother who's in 2nd grade means the world to me. I find that I love spending time with kids and that's why I want to be an elementary school teacher.

**How my friends would describe me:**

A happy-go-lucky person, and a good listener. They know that whenever they have a problem I am someone they can turn to. They also know that I value my friends and family more than making a lot of money.





|                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Gender:          | Male                     |
| Age:             | 20                       |
| Zodiac sign:     | Gemini                   |
| Hobbies:         | creative writing, biking |
| Favourite movie: | An Inconvenient Truth    |
| Favourite book:  | The Iliad                |

In my own words:

I'm a pretty creative person, except when it comes to writing these things! I'm an English major, and I work part-time as a writer and a photographer for a graphics design company.

How I would describe myself:

I'm an outdoors kind of person; I like walking through trails and enjoying the beauty of nature. I also like spending time with my friends. I'm a vegetarian, but don't worry, if we go out on a date eat all the meat you want. It won't offend me :)

How my friends would describe me:

My friends say that I'm the nicest and most easygoing guy ever, and that I am someone who always puts others before myself, and that whichever girl ends up being with me is the luckiest girl in the world :) Well alright they didn't exactly say that but I'm sure they would if I paid them to....



Gender: Male  
Age: 20  
Zodiac sign: Leo  
Hobbies: camping, visiting museums  
Favourite movie: Hotel Rwanda  
Favourite book: The Stone Angel

**In my own words:**

I'm an active guy who hates sitting on the couch and likes doing lots of things. I love camping and hiking and my favourite place in the world is Banff. I'm a psychology major and I'm thinking of becoming a counselor or a social worker, depending on what program I can get into.

**How I would describe myself:**

I like being with my friends and family having a good time. They think I'm a good listener; they always come to me when they need somebody to talk to. I also appreciate art and history and I like going to museums every now and then to get away from the stress of everyday life.

**How my friends would describe me:**

My friends and family see me as being extremely compassionate, easy-going, open-minded, down-to-earth, and fun-loving. They know that I'm always there for them and that I'm someone they can turn to whenever they need me.