Fickle men, faithful women: Effects of mating cues on men’s and women’s variety-seeking behavior in consumption

Rui Chen, Yuhuang Zheng, Yan Zhang

Abstract

Attitudes about commitment can affect consumers’ variety-seeking behavior. In the mating domain, short-term mating cues tend to activate an uncommitment mind-set in men and lead them to seek greater variety in romantic relationships; whereas long-term mating cues tend to activate a commitment mind-set in women and lead them to seek less variety. In this research, we explore whether short-term and long-term mating cues can likewise affect variety-seeking behavior in the product consumption domain through their influence on commitment attitude. In three experiments, we demonstrate that men’s variety-seeking behavior increases in the presence of short-term but not long-term mating cues; conversely, women’s variety-seeking behavior decreases in the presence of long-term but not short-term mating cues. These effects are caused by attitude toward commitment induced by mating cues. Past research concerning this topic has focused on one gender and on short-term mating cues only, but in this paper we provide a more complete picture—and a more coherent theory—of how, via influencing commitment attitude, mating cues affect variety-seeking behavior differently in men than in women.

Keywords: Short-term mating cue; Long-term mating cue; Variety seeking; Sex differences; Commitment

Introduction

The mating motive, which is probably the most basic and powerful motive in humans and, indeed, in all living creatures, has fundamental effects on human behaviors. It motivates people to engage in a diverse range of activities that signal mating value (Miller, 1999; Roney, 2003; Trivers, 1972). Examples of such behavior include choosing conspicuous products, generating creative artworks, wearing sexy dresses and getting tanned, giving gifts to romantic partners, displaying heroism or dominance, saving less but borrowing more, and becoming more aggressive to perceived offenders (Durante, Griskevicius, Hill, Perilloux, & Li, 2011; Griskevicius, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006; Griskevicius, Tybur, Ackerman, Delton, & Robertson, 2012; Griskevicius et al., 2007; Griskevicius et al., 2009; Saad & Gill, 2003; Saad & Peng, 2006; Sundie et al., 2011).

The effects of mating motives are not restricted to sex-signaling behaviors. For instance, short-term mating cues have been found to activate the general reward circuitry, which induces craving and impatience for food or monetary reward (Festjens, Bruyneel, & Dewitte, 2014; Kim & Zauberman, 2013; Van den Bergh, Dewitte, & Warlop, 2008; Wilson & Daly, 2004). Mating motives have been also found to activate a general sensitivity to indicators of growth and decay associated with determining...
mating value in human courtship, which increases people’s preferences for ripe fruits and newly blossomed flowers (Huang & Bargh, 2008). Our paper examines whether the effects of mating cues on individuals’ commitment to romantic relationships can carry over to their commitment to product choices—in particular, whether the effects carry over to their variety-seeking behavior in product choices. We demonstrate that, compared with the baseline case where no mating motives are activated, men’s variety-seeking behavior is increased by short-term mating cues but not by long-term cues; in contrast, women’s variety-seeking behavior is decreased by long-term mating cues but not by short-term cues. We further demonstrate that these effects are caused by a (un)commitment mind-set induced by mating cues.

The mating preferences and decisions are hypothesized to be strategic products of selection pressures (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993; Trivers, 1972). Because women invest more in offspring than do men (Trivers, 1972), females have evolved preferences for stable, long-term relationships in order to gain economic resources and protection for offspring; yet men have evolved a powerful desire for short-term sexual access to a large number of women, presumably to maximize the chances of reproduction (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994; Saad, Eba, & Sejean, 2009; Symons, 1979). The finding that mammalian males have a strong urge toward seeking variety in their sexual partners has a term called “the Coolidge effect” (Bermant, 1976).

These gender differences in preference for short- versus long-term mates tend to drive the different responses of men and women to mating cues. For example, short-term mating motives have been found to increase men’s willingness to pay for conspicuous products because such products can enhance men’s desirability as a short-term mate, but neither short-term nor long-term mating motives induce females to consume conspicuously because doing so is not instrumental in signaling a woman’s quality as a mate (Sundie et al., 2011). Similarly, men showed greater sensitivity to women’s attractive face and women showed greater sensitivity to men’s earning potential and ambition, and this difference was more pronounced in evaluations of short-term mates than in evaluations of long-term mates (Saad & Gill, 2014).

More relevant to our research, many studies show that men and women behave differently in the extent to which they commit to romantic relationships. Men are more likely to be interested in uncommitted sex (Bailey et al., 1994; Buss & Schmitt, 1993), and short-term mating cues tend to make men feel more uncommitted (Hirsch & Paul, 1996). In contrast, women are more likely to be faithful (Cashdan, 1996) and are less willing to have sex without commitment and emotional closeness (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Short-term mating cues therefore tend not to activate the uncommitment mind-set in women (Jedlinska, 1975; Schmitt, 2005). On the other hand, because women generally seek long-term relationships, they tend to feel more committed when a long-term mating motive is activated than when no mating motive is activated (Landolt, Lalumière, & Quinsey, 1995). Yet men tend not to become particularly committed when encountering long-term mating cues (Jedlinska, 1975).

The effects of mating motives can carry over to sex-unrelated tasks. For instance, priming short-term mating cues typically triggers thoughts about the present and leads to a local, detail-oriented processing style when people work on sex-unrelated tasks, whereas priming long-term mating cues typically triggers thoughts about the distant future and leads to a global, holistic processing style (Forster, Epstude, & Özelsel, 2009). We therefore hypothesize that the effect of mating cues on individuals’ commitment to romantic relationships also carries over to their commitment to product choices, namely, the extent to which they seek variety in those choices.

Commitment tendency leads to consistent preferences and behaviors, and uncommitment tendency leads to unstable preferences (Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Robertson, 1976). Feeling uncommitted in a romantic relationship usually drives individuals to seek alternative mates, whereas feeling committed tends to help individuals to maintain romantic relationships by inhibiting their tendency to switch partners (Gonzaga, Haselton, Smurdak, Davies, & Poore, 2008; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989). Likewise, activating concepts that are related to loyalty and commitment has been shown to decrease variety-seeking behavior in consumption choices (Fishbach, Ratner, & Zhang, 2011). Because short-term mating cues tend to activate an uncommitment mind-set in men, we expect short-term cues to increase men’s variety-seeking behavior in sex-unrelated consumption. At the same time, because long-term mating cues tend to activate a commitment mind-set in women, we expect long-term cues to decrease women’s variety-seeking behavior in sex-unrelated consumption. We tested our predictions in three experiments.

Experiment 1: Potato chips

Experiment 1 examines whether short-term and long-term mating cues affect men and women’s variety-seeking behavior differently.

Method

We hired one man and one woman as our experimenters. Each of the two experimenters approached same-gender prospective participants in a university library. Participants (N = 185, 95 women, M_age = 21.8) were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions (mating cue: control vs. short-term vs. long-term). We used participant gender as a natural between-participants variable.

The mating cue manipulation was adapted from Griskevicius et al. (2006). Participants in the short-term cue condition read a passage about a romantic encounter with someone of the opposite gender on the last day of a trip to a coastal city. The passage described the pair chatting at a romantic coffee house and sharing a candlelit dinner, followed by a walk along the seashore during which the date hinted at being attracted to the participant. In contrast, those in the long-term cue condition read a passage describing the participant falling in love with someone of the opposite gender during summer internship at a coastal city, spending time with that person reading, shopping, and seeing each other’s friends and family members after returning home.
making it clear to all that the two were meant for each other. In the control condition, participants read a passage that described the participant watching a performance show with a same-gender friend.

To measure variety-seeking, we asked participants to imagine choosing three bags of potato chips from four flavors for an upcoming excursion. Finally, as a manipulation check, participants self-reported the extent to which the scenario motivated them to seek and attract romantic mates. To test for whether the short-versus long-term mating cue manipulation activated different mating motives, participants in each cue condition were asked to evaluate the dating partner using a scale developed by Griskevicius et al. (2006) in terms of: perceived trustworthiness (trustworthy, truthful, honest; \( \alpha = 0.86 \)); level of commitment (committed, faithful, likely to cheat [reverse scored]; \( \alpha = 0.63 \)); and desirability as a long-term partner (good relationship material, the right person for me, confidence that the partner was a good boyfriend or girlfriend; \( \alpha = 0.83 \)). To rule out the likelihood that variety-seeking is driven by the motivation of exhibiting one’s uniqueness (Kim & Drolet, 2003), we asked participants to rate the extent to which they were motivated to show, through their choices, that they were unique, interesting, and not following others. All ratings in this experiment were made on 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely) scales.

Results and discussion

Manipulation check

We first checked whether the manipulation effectively triggered a mating goal. A 3 (mating cue) \( \times \) 2 (gender) ANOVA on the averaged measure of the motivation to seek and attract mates (\( \alpha = 0.77 \)) returned a significant main effect of mating cue (\( F(2,179) = 23.83, p < .001 \)). Further analysis showed that, compared with the control manipulation (\( M_{control} = 2.97, SD = 1.43 \)), both the short-term and the long-term mating cue manipulations significantly increased participants’ motivation to seek and attract mates (\( M_{short-term} = 4.67, SD = 1.63, F(1,182) = 39.42, p < .001; M_{long-term} = 4.40, SD = 1.44, F(1,182) = 26.79, p < .001 \)).

Next we conducted three 2 (mating cue: short-term vs. long-term) \( \times \) 2 (gender) ANOVAs on the measures of trustworthiness, level of commitment, and desirability of the dating partner as a long-term partner. The analysis showed that both male and female participants in the long-term mating cue condition viewed the dating partner as being more trustworthy (\( M = 4.40, SD = 1.24 \)), more committed (\( M = 4.36, SD = 1.04 \)), and more desirable as a long-term partner (\( M = 4.58, SD = 1.20 \)) than did participants in the short-term mating cue condition (\( M_{trustworthy} = 3.84, SD = 1.32, F(1,118) = 5.13, p = .025; M_{committed} = 3.94, SD = 1.18, F(1,118) = 3.82, p = .053; \) and \( M_{desirable} = 3.93, SD = 1.33, F(1,118) = 7.74, p = .006 \)). These results suggest that our manipulations of short-term versus long-term mating motives were effective.

Variety-seeking

We predicted that, as compared with the control condition, male participants would be more likely to seek variety in the short-term mating cue condition but not in the long-term cue condition, and female participants would be less likely to seek variety in the long-term cue condition but not in the short-term cue condition. A 3 (mating cue) \( \times \) 2 (gender) ANOVA on potato chip choices returned a significant main effect of mating cues (\( F(2,179) = 3.57, p = .03, \eta^2_p = .04 \)), qualified by a significant interaction between mating cue and gender (\( F(2,179) = 3.16, p = .045, \eta^2_p = .03 \)). As compared with the control condition (\( M = 2.30, SD = 0.75 \)), among male participants the short-term cue significantly increased variety-seeking (\( M = 2.70, SD = 0.53, F(1,179) = 5.80, p = .017, \eta^2_p = .03 \)) but the long-term cue did not (\( M = 2.19, SD = 0.79, F(1,179) = 0.44, p = .51, \eta^2_p = .00 \)). Yet female participants behaved differently: compared with the control condition (\( M = 2.70, SD = 0.53 \)), the short-term cue did not increase variety-seeking (\( M = 2.53, SD = 0.62, F(1,179) = 1.04, p = .31, \eta^2_p = .01 \)) but the long-term cue did marginally decrease variety-seeking (\( M = 2.42, SD = 0.66, F(1,179) = 2.83, p = .094, \eta^2_p = .016 \) (Fig. 1). Including the uniqueness motivation (average of the three uniqueness measures, \( \alpha = 0.816 \)) in the analysis did not change the pattern of results, with the interaction between mating cue and gender still significant (\( F(2,178) = 3.09, p = .048, \eta^2_p = .03 \)).

In sum, these results are consistent with our hypothesis that short-term mating cues increase variety-seeking in men whereas long-term mating cues reduce variety-seeking in women. Experiment 2 replicates the findings of Experiment 1 while using decisions that involve real choices.

Experiment 2: Lollipops

Method

University students (N = 299, 152 women, \( M_{age} = 21.4 \)) were approached in a library by two experimenters of the same gender as the prospective participant. The mating cue manipulation was identical to that of Experiment 1. The variety-seeking measure in this experiment involved real choices: participants chose three
lollipops from four available flavors and received the lollipops based on their choice.

Results and discussion

We submitted the number of lollipop flavors chosen by participants to a 3 (mating cue) × 2 (gender) ANOVA. As in Experiment 1, the analysis returned a significant main effect of mating cues (F(2, 293) = 3.06, p = .05, $\eta^2_p = .02$), qualified by a significant interaction between mating cue and gender (F(2, 293) = 2.93, p = .055, $\eta^2_p = .02$). Among male participants, those in the short-term mating cue condition chose more flavors ($M = 2.65, SD = 0.60$) than did those in the control condition ($M = 2.35, SD = 0.83$, F(1,293) = 4.24, p = .04, $\eta^2_p = .01$). Male participants in the long-term mating cue condition ($M = 2.27, SD = 0.84$) did not differ significantly from those in the control condition ($M = 2.60, SD = 0.67$, the short-term mating cue did not increase variety-seeking ($M = 2.40, SD = 0.69$, F(1,293) = 1.80, p = .18, $\eta^2_p = .01$) yet the long-term mating cue significantly decreased variety-seeking ($M = 2.30, SD = 0.76$, F(1, 293) = 4.18, p = .04, $\eta^2_p = .01$) (Fig. 2).

Experiment 3: Commitment attitude

Experiment 3 was designed to test the role of commitment attitude in the effect of mating cues on variety-seeking behavior. To capture individual’s attitude to commitment, we used a response latency task which is designed to assess people’s implicit attitude toward a construct or an evaluative target. The task asks participants to judge as quickly as possible whether a word is positive or negative. In general, if people hold a positive attitude toward an evaluative target (e.g., a white face), then viewing the target will make the positive attitude more accessible in mind, and people will consequently take shorter time to categorize positive-attitude-related adjectives (e.g., friendly) as positive. And because the negative attitude is less accessible in this case, people will take longer time to categorize negative-attitude-related adjectives (e.g., unfriendly) as negative. Conversely, if people hold a negative attitude toward the evaluative target (e.g., a black face), they would take shorter time to categorize negative adjectives and longer time to categorize positive adjectives (see Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995).

In our experiment, participants were asked to identify—as quickly as possible—commitment words as positive and uncommitment words as negative. If short-term mating cues activate an uncommitment mind-set in men, then men in the short-term cue condition should have a weaker tendency to consider commitment positive and uncommitment negative and hence perform the word categorization task more slowly than men in the control condition. Likewise, if long-term mating cues activate a commitment mind-set in women, then women in the long-term cue condition should have a stronger tendency to consider commitment positive and uncommitment negative and hence perform the task more rapidly than women in the control condition. We further predict that commitment attitude mediates the effect of mating cues on variety-seeking.

Method

Heterosexual university students ($N = 95$, 51 women, $M_{age} = 21$) participated in exchange for $5$. They were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions (mating cues: control vs. short-term vs. long-term). Again we used gender as a natural between-subjects variable. In the short-term cue condition, participants were presented with the pictures of three opposite-gender candidates from an online dating platform, and then read a paragraph that described having a romantic date with the candidate whom the subject considered the most attractive. In the long-term cue condition, participants were shown the same three pictures but instead were asked to read a paragraph that described falling in love with the most desired candidate. The descriptions of the dating partners were similar to those used in Experiment 1 with small variations to fit the opening story. In the control condition, participants were presented with the pictures of three apartments from an online apartment-rental platform and then read a paragraph that described having a conversation with the owner of the most preferred apartment.

All participants then moved on to the task that measured variety-seeking. Participants were asked to imagine that they would work as a volunteer for five days and that they could select five beverages—out of six different options—for those five days.

Participants then worked on a response latency task. We chose three commitment words (loyal, committed, and faithful) and three uncommitment words (fickle, dissolve, and unfaithful). Participants were asked to categorize the words presented on the computer screen either as positive or negative by pressing two different keys on the keyboard—one for positive and another for negative—as quickly as possible while ensuring that the categorization was correct (see the methodological appendix for more details). We were interested in how much time participants spent categorizing the words. The extremely fast responses (below 300 ms) and extremely slow responses (above 3000 ms) were excluded from the analysis (a total of 23 responses; cf.

![Fig. 2. Number of different lollipop flavors participants chose as a function of mating cue and gender in Experiment 2. Note: The asterisk indicates the statistical significance level ($* p < .05$) for the comparison between the short-term or the long-term condition, as indicated, and the control condition for each gender. Error bars represent standard errors.](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2015.07.002)
Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Incorrect identifications of positive or negative words were also omitted from analysis (5.1% of all responses).

We used the average response time of categorizing these words to measure each individual’s commitment tendency. Note that a longer response time corresponds to weaker commitment tendency.

Results and discussion

Manipulation check

As a separate manipulation check, we applied our manipulation to a separate group of 110 participants. These participants then reported their mating motives and their evaluations of the target person as a long-term partner. We first checked whether or not the manipulation was effective in triggering a mating goal. A 3 (mating cue) × 2 (gender) ANOVA on the averaged motivation of seeking and attracting mates (α = 0.77) returned a significant main effect of mating cue, *F*(2, 104) = 20.96, p < .001. Further analysis showed that, compared with the control manipulation (Mcontrol = 3.95, SD = 1.24), both the short-term and the long-term mating cue manipulations significantly increased participants’ motivation to seek and attract mates (Mshort-term = 5.42, SD = 1.16, *F*(1,107) = 31.10, p < .001; Mlong-term = 5.31, SD = 0.99, *F*(1,107) = 26.23, p < .001). Next we conducted three 2 (mating cue: short-term vs. long-term) × 2 (gender) ANOVAs on the measures of trustworthiness, commitment, and desirability as a long-term partner. The analysis showed that both male and female participants in the long-term mating cue condition viewed the dating partner as being more trustworthy (M = 4.91, SD = 1.03), more committed (M = 4.57, SD = 1.13), and more desirable (M = 4.94, SD = 1.15) as a long-term partner than those in the short-term mating cue condition (Mtrustworthy = 4.27, SD = 0.97, *F*(1,67) = 6.64, p = .012; Mcommitted = 3.97, SD = 0.54, *F*(1,67) = 7.34, p = .009; Mdesirable = 4.42, SD = 1.01, *F*(1,67) = 4.26, p = .043).

Variety-seeking

A 3 (mating cue) × 2 (gender) ANOVA on the number of different beverages chosen returned a significant main effect of mating cues (*F*(2, 89) = 5.05, p = .008, η² = .10), qualified by a significant interaction between mating cue and gender (*F*(2, 89) = 3.94, p = .023, η² = .08). Among male participants, in comparison with the control condition (M = 2.83, SD = 1.47), the short-term mating cue significantly increased variety-seeking (M = 4.36, SD = 1.21, *F*(1,89) = 10.14, p = .002, η² = .10) whereas the long-term mating cue did not change the level of variety-seeking (M = 3.33, SD = 1.36, *F*(1, 89) = 1.29, p = .26, η² = .014). Once again, female participants behaved differently: as compared with the control condition (M = 3.44, SD = 1.03), the short-term cue did not affect variety-seeking (M = 3.42, SD = 1.35, *F*(1, 89) = 0.00, p = .97, η² = .00) yet the long-term cue significantly decreased variety-seeking (M = 2.44, SD = 1.03, *F*(1, 89) = 5.06, p = .027, η² = .05) (Fig. 3, upper panel).

Response time for categorizing (un)commitment-related words

We log-transformed the response time data to lessen the skewed distribution (Ratcliff, 1993). A 3 (mating cue) × 2 (gender) ANOVA on the response time for categorizing (un)commitment-related words returned a significant interaction between mating cue and gender (*F*(2, 89) = 3.27, p = .043, η² = .07). Specifically, compared with the control condition (M = 2.899, SD = 0.092), the short-term cue significantly lowered male participants’ commitment tendency (i.e., longer response time, M = 2.975, SD = 0.103, *F*(1, 89) = 5.71, p = .019, η² = .06) whereas the long-term cue did not significantly affect that tendency (M = 2.937, SD = 0.075, *F*(1, 89) = 1.71, p = .195, η² = .02). In contrast, compared with the control condition (M = 2.935, SD = 0.064), the short-term cue did not affect female participants’ commitment tendency (M = 2.924, SD = 0.088, *F*(1, 89) = 0.15, p = .695, η² = .00) yet the long-term cue significantly increased that tendency (i.e., shorter response time, M = 2.877, SD = 0.077, *F*(1, 89) = 3.81, p = .054, η² = .04) (Fig. 3, lower panel).

Mediation analysis

To examine whether the effect of mating cues on variety-seeking was mediated by commitment attitude, we submitted the data to a model in which mating cue and gender were the
independent variables, beverage choice was the dependent variable, and the response time for categorizing (un)commitment-related words was the mediator (Model 8, Hayes, 2013). We found a moderated mediation: commitment attitude mediated the interaction effect of mating cue and gender on variety-seeking (indirect effect = −0.32, 95% confidence interval (CI) not including zero [−0.65, −0.07]).

To better understand the above mediation results, we next conducted two separate bootstrapping analyses using the same model. First, we only included the short-term and the control conditions in the model. The analysis showed a moderated mediation: commitment attitude mediated the interaction effect of mating cue (control vs. short-term) and gender on variety-seeking (indirect effect = −0.56, 95% CI [−1.32, −0.06]). In particular, short-term cues reduced men’s commitment attitude which consequently increased their variety-seeking (indirect effect = 0.49, 95% CI [0.08, 1.16]) but this relationship was not observed among women (indirect effect = −0.07, 95% CI [−0.45, 0.23]) (Fig. 4, upper panel). Second, we only included the long-term and the control conditions in the model. Again, we found a moderated mediation: commitment attitude mediated the interaction effect of mating cue (control vs. long-term) and gender on variety-seeking (indirect effect = −0.66, 95% CI [−1.51, −0.15]). In particular, long-term cues increased commitment attitude among women and consequently reduced variety-seeking (indirect effect = −0.39, 95% CI [−0.94, −0.07]), but this effect was not observed among men (indirect effect = 0.26, 95% CI [−0.11, 0.78]) (Fig. 4, lower panel). Taken together, these results provide evidence that mating cues affect variety-seeking behavior by influencing attitudes toward commitment (see supplementary mediation analysis in the methodological appendix).

**General discussion**

Across three experiments, we demonstrated that men sought greater variety in sex-unrelated choices when encountering short-term mating cues but not when encountering long-term mating cues; however, women sought less variety when encountering long-term cues but not when encountering short-term cues.

This research gives a more complete picture of the effects of mating cues on variety-seeking behavior. Unlike past research, most of which has focused on a single gender and on short-term mating cues only (Durante & Arsenia, 2015; Faraji-Rad, Moeini-Jazani, &Warlop, 2013; Van den Bergh et al., 2008), we compared how men and women respond differently as well as how short-term and long-term mating cues influence variety-seeking.

![Diagram illustrating the mediating role of commitment attitude on variety seeking in Experiment 3.](image)

Fig. 4. The mediating role of commitment attitude on variety seeking in Experiment 3. Note: *indicates p < .05, **indicates p < .001, *indicates a significant conditional indirect effect on variety seeking. The upper panel shows the results of comparing the short-term cue condition with the control condition. The interaction between mating cue (control vs. short-term) and gender had a significant total effect on variety seeking (β = −1.55, t = 2.35, p = .02). The interaction between mating cue and gender significantly predicted commitment attitude (β = −.09, t = 1.97, p = .05), and commitment attitude significantly predicted variety seeking (i.e., higher response time led to greater variety seeking, β = 6.43, t = 3.68, p < .001). The mating cue × gender interaction had a significant indirect effect on variety seeking via commitment attitude (β = −.56, 95% CI [−1.32, −0.06]). After controlling for the mediating influence of commitment attitude, the direct effect of the interaction between mating cue and gender on variety seeking became non-significant (β = −.99, t = 1.59, p = .12). As predicted, the indirect effect of the mating cue × gender interaction on variety seeking was significant among men (β = .49, 95% CI [0.8, 1.16]), but not among women (β = −.07, 95% CI [−.45, .23]). The lower panel shows the results of comparing the long-term cue condition with the control condition. The interaction between mating cue (control vs. long-term) and gender had a significant total effect on variety seeking (β = −1.50, t = 2.43, p = .02). The interaction between mating cue and gender significantly predicted commitment attitude (β = −.10, t = 2.46, p = .02), and commitment attitude significantly predicted variety seeking (β = 6.86, t = 3.71, p < .001). The mating cue × gender interaction had a significant indirect effect on variety seeking via commitment attitude (β = −.66, 95% CI [−1.51, −.15]). After controlling for the mediating influence of commitment attitude, the direct effect of the interaction between mating cue and gender on variety seeking became non-significant (β = −.84, t = 1.44, p = .16). As predicted, the indirect effect of the mating cue × gender interaction on variety seeking was significant among women (β = −.39, 95% CI [−.94, −.07]), but not among men (β = .26, 95% CI [−.11, .78]).
seeking behavior differently. To the best of our knowledge, our studies are the first to demonstrate that a long-term mating cue can decrease variety-seeking in women.

Our findings require a theory that can simultaneously explain the gender difference as well as the difference between the effects of short-term versus long-term mating cues. We suggest a more coherent theory that the effect is driven by the (un)commitment attitude induced by mating cues. This argument is consistent with the finding that ovulation increases women’s desire for various mates and that the tendency of being uncommitted to a single mate affects their desire for various products (Durante & Arsenia, 2015).

An alternative explanation involves activation of reward circuitry. Based on this account, mating cues activate reward circuitry (Aharon et al., 2001; Aron et al., 2005), and activating reward circuitry induces variety-seeking behaviors in reward-related domains (Goukens, Dewitte, Pandelaere, & Warlop, 2007). Faraji-Rad et al. (2013) similarly argued that women’s greater tendency to seek variety during the fertile phase of a menstrual cycle could be explained by their increased sensitivity to rewards. It should be emphasized, however, that these findings exclusively concern the effect of short-term mating cues. Our findings in the long-term mating cue conditions go against the prediction that the reward circuitry activation account would make. Because reward circuitry can also be activated by long-term love (Acevedo, Aron, Fisher, & Brown, 2012), the reward circuitry activation account predicts that people also seek greater variety when encountering long-term mating cues. But our results showed the opposite among women. We found that women who encounter long-term cues seek less variety. Thus, our theory is more general than the reward circuitry activation theory in predicting both the effects of short-term cues and the effects of long-term mating cues on men’s and women’s variety-seeking behavior.

In this research we found no effect of short-term mating cues on women’s variety-seeking behavior. This is not to conclude, though, that women’s variety-seeking behavior cannot be influenced by short-term mating motives. In fact, because ovulation is generally considered to activate a short-term mating goal, the results of Durante & Arsenia (2015) may suggest that women also seek greater variety when they have a short-term mating goal. In our study, the null effect of short-term mating cues on women could be due to the particular type of mating cues that we employed. In line with this conjecture, research has found that touching men’s boxers can increase women’s craving for short-term rewards whereas simply watching the boxers cannot (Festjens et al., 2014). We suspect that the short-term mating cues used in our experiments, although effective enough in activating a short-term mating goal in women, are not the particular type that activates an uncommitment mind-set and so would not lead to greater variety-seeking in women.

Comparing men and women in the control conditions, we found that men sought significantly less variety than women in Experiment 1 ($F(1, 179) = 5.68, p = .02$). We observed similar directional results in Experiment 2 ($F(1, 293) = 2.93, p = .09$) and Experiment 3 ($F(1, 89) = 1.95, p = .17$). Thus, the effect of short-term mating cues on variety-seeking may appear to be driven by the male control condition. However, we think the results from the control condition may simply be a replication of the established findings that females seek greater variety than males, especially in food choices, when no mating motives are activated (Tang & Chin, 2007). This is consistent with existing findings that women find food items more desirable and are more interested in trying them out than do men (Wang et al., 2009; Weingatten & Elston, 1991).

Practically, our findings imply that, by exposing male shoppers to short-term mating cues, such as posters of sexy women images, marketers can increase the likelihood of those shoppers buying a greater variety of products. On the other hand, encouraging long-term romantic partners to accompany female shoppers may lead women to choose options that are relatively less varied. In short, making use of the mating cues that are readily available in the market may activate commitment or uncommitment mind-set and thereby change a customer’s choice.

**Appendix A. Supplementary data**

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2015.07.002.

**References**


Jedlutek, D. (1975). Sequential analysis of perceived commitment to partners in