

Introduction

Mate retention behaviors are actions used to maintain a romantic partner and prevent relationship dissolution.

- These behaviors can be categorized as benefit-provisioning (e.g., affection, support) or cost-inflicting (e.g., jealousy, control).

Prior research shows that:

- Benefit-provisioning behaviors are associated with higher relationship satisfaction.¹
- Cost-inflicting behaviors are linked to lower satisfaction and relationship harm.²

Certain mate retention tactics, such as jealousy, surveillance, and time monopolization, have also been associated with relationship aggression and intimate partner violence (IPV).³

Social media has transformed romantic relationships, creating new opportunities for:

- Monitoring a partner’s activity
- Signaling possession
- Publicly displaying affection

Despite this shift, most research has focused on offline behaviors, with limited attention to online or social media-based mate retention. This study examines how online mate retention behaviors relate to personality, relationship satisfaction, and IPV, addressing a growing gap in understanding modern relationships.

Aims and Objectives

- Examine relationships between relationship satisfaction and benefit provisioning versus cost inflicting behaviors (offline mate retention behaviors; see Table 1).
- Identify whether online mate retention tactics are associated with specific personality traits (see Table 2).
- Determine how specific personality traits impact relationship satisfaction (see Table 2).
- Examine how personality traits predict engagement in online mate retention behaviors (see Table 3).
- Examine how personality traits differentially predict benefit-provisioning and cost-inflicting (offline) mate retention behaviors (see Table 4).
- Evaluate whether cost-inflicting mate retention behaviors predict the frequency of relationship aggression (see Table 5).

Methods

Participants & Procedure

Adults (18.06 + SD +/- 0.2) currently in a romantic relationship for ≥3 months were recruited through Oakland University’s Psychology Subject Pool. Participants (N=451) completed an anonymous online survey via Qualtrics, where questionnaires were presented in random order to reduce response bias.

Demographics

Variable	Category	N (%)
Age (Years)	Mean (SD)	18.06 (0.20)
	18	425 (95.1%)
	19–21	22 (4.9%)
Sex / Gender	Missing	4
	Female	349 (77.4%)
	Male	102 (22.6%)
Relationship Status	Casual	113 (25.1%)
	Committed	338 (74.9%)
	White	264 (58.5%)
Ethnicity	Middle Eastern	72 (16.0%)
	Black	51 (11.3%)
	Asian	29 (6.4%)
Sexual Orientation	Hispanic	26 (5.8%)
	Other	9 (2.0%)
	Heterosexual	449 (100%)
	Missing	2

Measures

- Personality: HEXACO-60 measuring six personality traits using a 1–5 Likert scale ($\alpha = .73$ –.80).⁴

- Relationship Satisfaction: Relationship Assessment Scale (7 items; 1–5 Likert scale; $\alpha = .86$).⁵

- Online Mate Retention: Modified Facebook Mate Retention Tactic Inventory assessing social-media behaviors (40 items; 0–3 scale).⁶

- Offline Mate Retention: Mate Retention Inventory–Short Form (38 items; 0–3 scale) measuring benefit-provisioning and cost-inflicting tactics.⁷

- Relationship Aggression: Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (20 items; 0–6 frequency scale).⁸

- Intimate Partner Violence: Composite Abuse Scale–Revised Short Form (15 items assessing abuse experiences).⁹

Analysis

Multiple regression analyses examined associations between personality, online/offline mate retention behaviors, relationship satisfaction, and IPV.

Results

Outcome	Predictor	Direction	B	SE	t	p-value
Relationship Satisfaction	Benefit Provisioning	Positive	0.254	0.023	11.07	< .0001
	Cost-Inflicting Behavior	Negative	−0.243	0.017	−14.1	< .0001

Table 1. Relationship satisfaction was positively associated with benefit provisioning and negatively associated with cost-inflicting behavior.

Criterion Variable	Predictor	Direction	ρ (rho)	p-value
Online Mate Retention	Honesty–Humility	Negative	−.240	< .0001
	Conscientiousness	Negative	−.209	< .0001
	Cost-Inflicting Behavior	Positive	.619	< .0001
Relationship Satisfaction	Benefit Provisioning	Positive	.355	< .0001
	Jealousy	Negative	−.436	< .0001
	Possessiveness	Negative	−.183	.0001

Table 2. Spearman’s correlations revealed higher online mate retention was associated with greater cost-inflicting and benefit-provisioning behaviors, and lower Honesty–Humility and Conscientiousness. Relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with jealousy and possessiveness using the HEXACO-60 model.

Predictor	Direction	B	SE	t	p-value
Honesty–Humility	Negative	−5.84	1.77	−3.30	.001
Emotionality	Positive	2.90	1.43	2.03	.043
Conscientiousness	Negative	−4.31	1.69	−2.55	.011
Extraversion	—	—	—	—	≥ .25
Agreeableness	—	—	—	—	≥ .25
Openness to Experience	—	—	—	—	≥ .25

Table 3. Multiple regression models predicting likelihood of online mate retention behaviors from personality traits. Lower Honesty–Humility and Conscientiousness, and higher Emotionality, predicted greater online mate retention.

Outcome	Predictor	Direction	B	SE	t	p-value
Benefit Provisioning	Honesty–Humility	Negative	−2.75	0.91	−3.02	.003
	Emotionality	Positive	4.63	0.73	6.30	< .0001
Cost-Inflicting Behavior	Agreeableness	Positive	1.92	0.91	2.12	.035
	Honesty–Humility	Negative	−6.30	1.12	−5.62	< .0001
	Conscientiousness	Negative	−6.10	1.07	−5.70	< .0001
	Openness	Negative	−2.07	0.96	−2.15	.032

Table 4. Benefit provisioning was predicted by higher Emotionality and Agreeableness and lower Honesty–Humility. Cost-inflicting behavior was predicted by lower Honesty–Humility, Conscientiousness, and Openness.

Outcome	Predictor	Direction	B	SE	Statistic	p-value
Abuse Frequency	Cost-Inflicting Behavior	Positive	0.082	0.019	Wald χ^2 = 18.56	< .0001

Table 5. Cost-inflicting behavior was positively associated with abuse frequency.

Conclusions

Cost-inflicting behavior consistently predicted adverse relationship outcomes, including lower relationship satisfaction and higher abuse frequency.

Benefit provisioning was positively associated with relationship satisfaction, but did not predict abuse outcomes.

Personality traits played a key role in relationship behaviors:

- Lower Honesty–Humility and Conscientiousness were associated with greater cost-inflicting and mate retention behaviors.
- Higher Emotionality and Agreeableness were associated with greater benefit provisioning.

No reliable sex differences or moderation effects were observed.

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