

Domestic violence turns women off masculine men

November 23 2017



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Women who are afraid of violence within partnerships prefer more feminine men, according to new research carried out by scientists at the University of St Andrews.

The study, carried out by academics from the School of Psychology and Neuroscience Perception Lab at the University, is the first to find that violence within partnerships influences [women's partner](#) preferences.

Worldwide, 30% of women report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or [sexual violence](#) from their partner during their lifetime. Statistics show that 38% of murders of women are committed by a male partner and violence coming from partners is a very real threat. This new study provides evidence that this threat shapes whom women find attractive.

The research, published this week in the *Journal of Behavioural Ecology and Sociobiology*, asked 83 women participants to complete a questionnaire about their health, education, access to media and feelings of danger from public violence and the likelihood of violence within [partnership](#). Participants then selected which male faces they considered more attractive from pairs manipulated to differ in masculinity level.

The research was carried in Colombia by scientists Martha Lucia Borrás-Guevara, Dr Carlota Batres and Professor David Perrett.

Martha Lucia Borrás-Guevara, who led the research, commented: "We found that even after controlling for participant age, education, access to media (TV and internet) and health, violence within partnership had a large influence on masculinity preferences."

Dr Carlota Batres added: "Preferring more feminine men may reflect a strategy of women to avoid partners who are more likely to behave aggressively and dangerously towards them, that is, more masculine partners".

Martha Lucia Borrás-Guevara, who is from Colombia, continued: "Our study shows the value of field work. Working face to face in rural and

urban settings one can get a true reflection of the influences on what women want. Prior work has indicated the importance of health, but fear of violence appears more important in Colombia, where this study was conducted.

"While violence against partners is against the law in Colombia it is often considered a 'private' matter. It is very interesting that we found the effect of violence within partnership to be specific to Colombian male faces. This makes sense as our participants are Colombian women and therefore more likely to form partnerships with Colombian men".

Previous studies have suggested that masculine men may be effective protectors for women against public violence. However, such studies have ignored the fact that when women prefer a more masculine man, they may also be putting themselves at risk from violence coming from the same partners.

Professor David Perrett, who runs the Perception Lab at the University's School of Psychology and Neuroscience, concluded: "Our prior work indicated that those fearing violence did not like masculinity but our early studies did not clearly differentiate what mattered most – fear of violence in the home or in fear of violence in public places. The current study clearly shows that it is worries about domestic [violence](#) that shapes partner preferences".

More information: Martha Lucia Borrás-Guevara et al. Domestic violence shapes Colombian women's partner choices, *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s00265-017-2405-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00265-017-2405-2)

Provided by University of St Andrews

Citation: Domestic violence turns women off masculine men (2017, November 23) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-11-domestic-violence-women-masculine-men.html>

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