

The Jaywalking Peacock

Men use risk-taking as a sort of mating display, even when trying to catch a bus, says a study in this month's

Evolutionary Psychology.

During three chilly winter months, a team led by Oxford University psychologist Robin Dunbar watched 524 men and 475 women wait for a 9:40 a.m. bus. Men were more likely to cut it close even though they risked being stranded in the cold by a full bus.



The researchers also observed 1000 street-crossings at a Liverpool crosswalk.

The men made more dangerous crossings if women were looking, says Dunbar, which adds to evidence that mating is never far from the male mind. And although men who were alone or with other men left no time to spare at bus stops, men traveling with women conformed to early feminine arrival times. "It shows how a good woman civilizes the boys," concludes Dunbar. Male bystanders had no discernible effect on females' traffic or bus-stop behavior.

Daniel Fessler, an anthropologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, says he likes how the authors, "by studying everyday behaviors in a natural context," show that male risk-taking permeates even pedestrian activities.