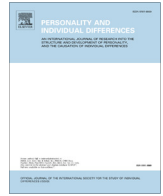




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Comparisons of the effectiveness of mate-attraction tactics across mate poaching and general attraction and across types of romantic relationships



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ABSTRACT

Mate poaching occurs when individuals knowingly steal someone else's mate for sex. Attempts to poach present challenges additional to those associated with non-poaching or general attraction. However, of Schmitt and Buss' (2001) 24 comparisons of the effectiveness of mate-attraction tactics, only one indicated tactics to be less effective in poaching than in general attraction. In the current research, 215 participants (125 men and 90 women) were instructed to imagine they were in different relationship contexts. For the poaching context, participants imagined they were dating, living with a mate, or married. For the general attraction context, participants imagined they were not in a monogamous relationship. They reported how wealthy or attractive an individual would need to be to attract them as a short-mate sexual partner, long-term sexual partner, and monogamous relationship. As hypothesized, for all contexts, participants reported that the wealth and attractiveness required was greater if they were dating, living with a mate, and married than if they were not in a monogamous relationship. Comparisons across dating, living with a mate, and married indicated that the greater the level of commitment, the greater the wealth and attractiveness required to attract participants from it.

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In romantic attraction, an individual may attempt to secure as a mate, someone who is unattached or who is already mated to someone else. When individuals are aware that the person with whom they are attempting to mate is already in a nominally exclusive relationship with someone else, they are said to be 'mate poaching' (Davies, Shackelford, & Hass, 2007). Research indicates that, across the world, poaching is a prevalent means by which men and women secure mates (Schmitt et al., 2004).

In both poaching and non-poaching contexts of attraction or general attraction, tactics used to attract mates involve presenting targeted individuals with benefits desired from a mate. Although many of these benefits, such as economic resources and physical attractiveness, are the same in both contexts (Schmitt & Buss, 2001), there may be differences in the effectiveness of presenting these benefits in poaching versus in general attraction. To date, the only study to have investigated this is Schmitt and Buss (2001). They considered the following tactics: enhance physical attractiveness; display (economic) resources; act helpful; suggest

easy sexual access; develop an emotional connection; and display social dominance over rivals. These were compared across poaching and general attraction within sex and temporal context (short-term or long-term matings). Of these 24 comparisons, Schmitt and Buss found only four differences and, for three of these, tactics were judged *more* effective in poaching.

Given the additional challenges of attracting already-mated individuals compared with attracting unattached individuals, it might be expected that Schmitt and Buss (2001) would find tactics to be judged less effective in poaching in an overwhelming number of comparisons. One of the additional challenges of poaching is that, whereas in general attraction an individual attempting to secure a mate may not have rivals whom the targeted individual views as a viable mate, a poacher is always in competition with the targeted individual's current partner. Also, poachers are likely to have to overcome any emotional attachment the potential poached may have for their current mate. Moreover, if the potential poached are married to or living with their current partner, they may be reluctant to succumb to a poacher due to financial costs incurred from violating or abandoning their current relationship.

Further indication of the effectiveness of mate-attraction tactics in poaching might be gained from individuals' perceptions of

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benefits and costs of engaging in sex with a poacher. However, no research has addressed this. Nevertheless, an insight into it may be gained from Davies et al.'s (2010) investigation into individuals' perceptions of benefits and costs of poaching someone. This is because several of these benefits and costs may also be experienced by individuals who are poached from their partner. For instance, Davies et al. found the costs "stress of concealment and deception", "guilt and ethical concerns", "suffer shame and gain a bad reputation", "being physically harmed by the partner of the poached", and "more bother" would deter men and women from poaching. As these costs are likely to be also incurred by individuals who are poached, Davies et al.'s findings indicate that there are several factors which militate against individuals deciding to have sex with poachers and which, therefore, are likely to impair the effectiveness of mate-attraction tactics in poaching.

Regarding benefits that individuals may gain from poaching that may also be gained by individuals who are poached, Davies et al. found "excitement of an illicit affair" would not motivate men or women to poach. Another benefit that attached individuals may secure from having sex with poachers is gaining revenge on their current partner for a perceived wrong inflicted on them. Davies et al. found, however, that the benefit "gaining revenge" by poaching the partner of someone who had wronged them would not motivate men and women to poach. These findings suggest the aforementioned benefits are unlikely to motivate individuals to succumb to the mate-attraction tactics of poachers.

The current study follows Schmitt and Buss (2001) in comparing mate-attraction tactics across poaching and general attraction but differs methodologically. First, Schmitt and Buss compared ratings of the effectiveness of tactics in poaching given by their participants with ratings of the effectiveness of tactics in general attraction given by participants in Schmitt and Buss (1996). As each sample considered the tactics in only one type of attraction, they were not able to contrast the dynamics intrinsic to each type. In the current research, therefore, each question presents a tactic in the context of general attraction juxtaposed with the tactic in the context of poaching and asks participants to provide a rating for each.

Second, Schmitt and Buss (2001) asked participants to rate "how effective" tactics are likely to be. There is, however, ambiguity associated with the term "effective". For instance, it is unclear whether a tactic judged as more effective means that, to be successful, individuals have to provide more or less of the benefit associated with it. For instance, Schmitt and Buss's finding that the tactic "demonstrate resources" was rated more effective in poaching than in general attraction might suggest that, for a given amount of resources, individuals would have a greater likelihood of success in poaching. Schmitt and Buss, however, stated that the finding indicates that the poacher has to provide "enough of an inducement to overcome the associated costs of leaving a current relationship" (p. 909). This suggests that resources are more needed by individuals who are the targets of poachers than they are by unattached individuals. However, it is unclear whether this means that, to attract an already-mated compared with an unattached individual, a poacher would have to provide more resources because the already-mated individual needs a greater amount of it or less resources because each particular amount of resources would be more appreciated by the already-mated individual. To avoid such ambiguity, the current research does not use the term "effective". Instead, participants are asked to report the minimum degree to which an individual must embody the benefit associated with a particular tactic if they are to be successfully attracted.

Third, Schmitt and Buss (1996, 2001) asked participants of each sex to rate the effectiveness of each tactic when used by a man and

a woman. Although both studies found agreement between men's and women's ratings for each sex, the current study asks participants to report the degree to which a potential mate must embody a benefit if *they themselves* are to be successfully attracted. By placing participants psychologically in the question scenarios, the current research aims to secure reports more representative of actual mating attempts.

Fourth, Schmitt and Buss (2001) investigated the effectiveness of poaching tactics across the following relationship contexts: marital; dating; living together; long-distance; highly-committed; not committed; just beginning; and about to end. Inherent in some of these labels, however, are the different strengths of the relationships. They, therefore, suggest to participants the likely effectiveness of tactics in each relationship context. For instance, it would be expected that all tactics would be judged less effective in poaching individuals in highly-committed relationships than individuals in not-committed relationships, and more effective in poaching individuals in relationships about to end than individuals in the other relationship contexts. The current survey, therefore, avoids relationship labels that explicitly indicate the strength of the relationships. As such, it considers the following relationship contexts: dating; living with a mate; and married.

The current participants were asked to imagine they were in one of the aforementioned relationship contexts versus not in a monogamous romantic relationship, and to report how wealthy or physically attractive an individual would need to be to successfully attract them for each of the following temporal contexts: short-term sexual partner; long-term sexual partner; and monogamous romantic relationship. Given the additional challenges associated with poaching compared to general attraction and the findings of Davies et al. (2010), the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1. Participants will report that, for all temporal contexts (short-term sexual partner, long-term sexual partner, and monogamous romantic relationship), the amount of wealth and physical attractiveness required to attract them will be greater if they are dating than if they are not in a monogamous relationship.

Hypothesis 2. Participants will report that, for all temporal contexts, the amount of wealth and physical attractiveness required to attract them will be greater if they are living with a mate than if they are not in a monogamous relationship.

Hypothesis 3. Participants will report that, for all temporal contexts, the amount of wealth and physical attractiveness required to attract them will be greater if they are married than if they are not in a monogamous relationship.

Further hypotheses were formulated comparing the amount of wealth and physical attractiveness required to attract participants in each of the relationship contexts. The degree of commitment in a relationship is considered to be a key factor in determining whether the relationship will persist (e.g., Rusbult, 1980). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the more committed a relationship is, the less successful will be attempts to poach an individual from it. As dating typically precedes couples living together, dating appears to be a step on the way to the greater commitment of living together. The following hypothesis was, therefore, formulated:

Hypothesis 4. Participants will report that, for all temporal contexts, the amount of wealth and physical attractiveness required to attract them will be greater if they are living with a mate than if they are dating.

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