



## Personality and mate poaching experiences



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### ABSTRACT

Although previous research suggests Big Five (BF) and Dark Triad (DT) traits (Narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) are related to mate poaching, no studies have simultaneously examined the effects of both groups of traits on poaching. This study examined BF and DT personality traits, as well as their higher order factors as predictors of mate poaching behaviors in short-term relationships among a sample of 819 university students. Results showed DT better predicted mate poaching experiences than BF traits, though they better predicted poaching success in men. Regarding specific traits, psychopathy from DT, and extraversion from BF, were the most consistent predictors of mate poaching experiences. Considering sex differences, DT better predicted being the target of poaching in women, and being successfully poached in men. There were no consistent sex differences in the effects of BF traits on mate poaching. Generally, personality traits better predicted poaching attempts, poaching success, and being the target of poaching than other poaching experiences. Possible different roles of BF and DT traits for mate poaching experiences in men and women were discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Mate poaching, defined as a behavior intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship is a frequent and potent form of romantic attraction in humans throughout the world (Arnocky, Sunderani, & Vaillancourt, 2013; Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2004). Schmitt and Buss (2001) found about 50% of men and women admit to attempting a mate poach at some point in their lives, and over 85% of people report that while in a relationship someone has tried to poach them. Some types of mate poaching are intended to entice only temporary, short-term sexual incursions on the current relationship in the form of one-night stands or brief affairs, whereas other types are intended to eventually progress to form new long-term relationships (Schmitt & Buss, 2001).

Identifying personal characteristics related to mate poaching is an important step in understanding its causes and consequences. Previous research suggests mate poaching experiences are linked to several personality dispositions. For example, poaching attempts (trying to attract someone who was already in a romantic relationship) are more likely to come from those who are extraverted, disagreeable, unconscientious, erotophilic (love for sex and sexuality

characterized by obscenity, indecency and lust) and low in relationship exclusivity, while poaching success (being successful in poaching) is linked with openness, erotophilia, sexual attractiveness and low relationship exclusivity (Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2004). Furthermore, being the target of poaching (one who is poached) is associated with extraversion, openness, sexual attractiveness, erotophilia, emotional investment and low relationship exclusivity, while being successfully poached (poached by somebody) is linked with disagreeableness, unconscientiousness, neuroticism, masculinity and erotophilia, low relationship exclusivity and emotional investment (e.g., Schmitt & Buss, 2001). These personality trait profiles of mate poachers and poaching targets seem to be consistent across most world regions (Schmitt et al., 2004).

DT is a constellation of three subclinical antisocial personality traits: Psychopathy, Narcissism, and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Psychopathy is characterized by callous affect, remorseless manipulation, and exploitativeness (Hare, 1985), Narcissism by dominance, exhibitionism, exploitation and feelings of superiority and entitlement (Raskin & Terry, 1988), while Machiavellianism refers to manipulateness, insincerity, and callousness (Christie & Geis, 1970). These traits are moderately interrelated and usually found as partially overlapping, but distinct constructs (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

There is evidence that DT is related to short-term mating strategies including mate poaching experiences. Jonason, Li, and

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Buss (2010) found that being high on DT was related to more frequent poaching attempts, higher poaching success, having been poached, and having had mates poached in short-term relationships. Also, DT composite was positively correlated with preferences for short-term, but negatively for long-term relationships (Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012), and DT traits were linked with short-term mating above and beyond effects of participant's age, sex and extraversion (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009). In both sexes DT was positively related with the extra-partner variables such as sexual desire and recreational sex (Carter, Campbell, & Muncer, 2014). Results also suggest that people high on DT create favorable environments for short-term mating by having generally lower set of standards in their mates. Because they are not choosy, those high on DT insure themselves a supply of potential short-term mates (Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011).

Although some previous studies evaluated the effects of DT on mate poaching after controlling for specific personality traits such as extraversion (e.g., Jonason et al., 2009), the overlap between DT and broad personality traits such as BF leaves open the question of whether mate poaching is primarily generated by DT or by more basic personality dispositions. For example, all three DT traits correlate negatively with agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Narcissism and psychopathy correlate positively with extraversion and openness, Machiavellianism and psychopathy negatively with conscientiousness and psychopathy negatively with neuroticism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Although there are some inconsistencies in results across various studies, most findings indicate that these two groups of variables are moderately interrelated. Furthermore, behavioral genetic studies found considerable overlap in the genes influencing co-occurrence of DT and BF, while phenotypic correlations based on self-report were moderate (from  $-0.59$  to  $0.36$ ), which may indicate that the two groups of variables represent overlapping but distinct clusters of personality (Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008).

The aim of this study is to examine whether and to what degree BF and DT traits predict the frequency and success of various mate poaching behaviors concerning short-term relationships on a sample of university students. As far as we know, there are no studies that simultaneously examined the effects of all BF and DT traits on mate poaching. Because of significant relationships of BF and DT traits with various mate poaching experiences, and overlap between these two groups of traits, it is important to examine their unique contribution to various mate poaching behaviors in order to avoid the "jangle fallacy" (Block, 2000). To get more parsimonious conclusions, we also examined the effects of higher-order personality traits, alpha and beta factors, as well as DT composite on mate poaching.

Additional reason for examining the effects of BF and DT traits is the assumption that both groups of variables might have different effects on various mate poaching experiences. For example, previous research equivocally indicates that certain factors of both BF and DT traits are positively related with poaching attempts (Jonason et al., 2010; Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2004). On the other hand, the evidence exists that BF are more consistently related to poaching success than DT traits (e.g., Schmitt & Buss, 2001). Examining possible differential associations between BF and DT traits with various mate poaching experiences may lead to better understanding of mate poaching behaviors and the delineation of the potential causal associations of personality variables with poaching dynamics and outcomes (Sunderani, Arnocky, & Vaillancourt, 2013).

Based on the previous results we can assume that extraversion from BF traits, and psychopathy from DT traits will be the best predictors of mate poaching experiences. Also, we can expect that both BF and DT traits would be related to poaching attempts, and that BF traits would be linked more with poaching success than DT traits. Considering the lack of compelling theoretical rationale

and empirical results, we do not have specific hypotheses related to other mate poaching experiences.

Furthermore, we will examine the relationship of BF and DT traits with mate poaching experiences in men and women separately. The results of the previous studies regarding sex differences in mate poaching (Davies, Shackelford, & Hass, 2010; Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2004), and the relationships of men's and women's personality characteristics with their mate poaching experiences are somewhat inconsistent. For example, Schmitt et al. (2004) found several meaningful sex differences, while Jonason et al. (2010) did not. Despite these conflicting results, some sex differences in the relations between personality and mate poaching could be expected. Namely, sexual selection and parental investment theory state that male sexuality is more indiscriminate and influenced by situational opportunities, while female sexuality is more discriminative and influenced by intrapsychic factors including personality traits (Geary, 1999). Therefore, we can hypothesize that personality traits in general will be more highly related to poaching experience in women.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

The study comprised 819 students from two large Croatian universities; 400 (48.96%) men and 419 (51.04%) women, with mean age of 20.96 years ( $SD = 1.74$ ). They were recruited using opportunity sampling. All participants reviewed a letter of information, provided informed consent and then completed the questionnaires.

### 2.2. Measures

For measuring BF traits we used the Big Five Inventory (BFI; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). Participants rated each of 44 items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach-alpha coefficients range from 0.73 to 0.83. Principal axes factor analysis performed on the correlations between five personality traits yielded two second order Varimax rotated factors, interpreted as alpha (agreeableness, conscientiousness and low neuroticism) (11.05% of common variance) and beta (extraversion and openness) (33.9% of common variance). Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allik, 2008), women scored higher on agreeableness ( $t_{817} = 3.21$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.23$ ), and neuroticism ( $t_{817} = 4.70$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.33$ ).

Narcissism was assessed with the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988). For each item participants chose one of two statements they felt applied to them more. The total number of narcissistic statements the participants endorsed was used as an index of narcissism (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83).

Machiavellianism was measured with the 20-item MACH-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970). Participants indicated how much they agreed ( $-3 =$  strongly disagree,  $+3 =$  completely agree) with each statement (Cronbach's alpha = 0.72).

The 31-item Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III (Paulhus, Hemphill, & Hare, 2012; Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007) was used to assess nonclinical psychopathy. Participants rated how much they agreed ( $1 =$  strongly disagree,  $5 =$  strongly agree) with each statement (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83).

As suggested by Jonason et al. (2009), a DT composite was computed by standardizing overall scores on each measure and then averaging all three together. All three measures loaded well ( $>0.70$ ) on a single factor that accounted for 58.55% of the variance (Eigen = 1.76). Men scored higher on psychopathy ( $t_{817} = 7.35$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.51$ ), Machiavellianism ( $t_{817} = 5.17$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.36$ ) and DT composite ( $t_{817} = 6.17$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.43$ ).

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