

## Human Mate Poaching: Tactics and Temptations for Infiltrating Existing Mateships

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The authors explored the psychology of romantically attracting someone who is already in a relationship—what can be called the process of human mate poaching. In Study 1 ( $N = 236$ ), they found that attempts at poaching were relatively common and were linked with distinctive personality dispositions. Study 2 ( $N = 220$ ) documented that the perceived costs and benefits of poaching differed somewhat for men and women and depended on whether short-term or long-term poaching outcomes were targeted. Study 3 ( $N = 453$ ) found support for 5 evolution-based hypotheses about the perceived effectiveness of poaching tactics. Study 4 ( $N = 333$ ) found that poaching effectiveness was influenced by the type of relationship being encroached on—marital, dating, long distance, highly committed, just beginning, or about to end. Discussion focuses on the importance of placing mate poaching within the broader context of human sexual strategies.

Over the course of human evolutionary history, those who failed to attract mates generally failed to reproduce. Modern humans are descended from those who effectively solved the adaptive problem of romantic attraction, who succeeded in obtaining a fertile partner at least long enough to conceive (Buss, 1994). A growing body of evidence suggests that one of the most potent ways that individuals attract one another is by deploying romantic tactics that embody the evolved desires of the opposite sex (Tooke & Camire, 1991; Walters & Crawford, 1994). Moreover, because our evolved desires may differ somewhat between short-term and long-term relationship contexts (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), the effectiveness of romantic attraction tactics can vary as a function of temporal context as well (Schmitt & Buss, 1996).

Much of the research on romantic attraction effectiveness is based on the implicit assumption that intrasexual competition centers around available mates in a mating pool. Those who successfully deploy the most effective romantic tactics best their same-sex rivals in attracting desirable and eligible mates. This assumption, however, bypasses a critical adaptive problem that must have been prevalent over human evolutionary history. Namely, many desirable mates are already mated and thus are not readily available or present in the eligible mating pool. Some

researchers have argued, on the basis of analyses of traditional cultures, that in human ancestral conditions, most women became married at or shortly after puberty (Symons, 1979). This mating context would have greatly exacerbated the adaptive problem of finding a mate for those who were not already mated, particularly for men. Any degree of polygyny, a possible recurring feature of our ancestral past (Foley, 1996), would have further intensified the problem of successful romantic attraction for men. We call this distinctive dynamic of romantic attraction the problem of *human mate poaching*.

### Human Mate Poaching Defined

We define human mate poaching as behavior intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship. Because of the importance of temporal context in general romantic attraction (Schmitt & Buss, 1996), it is expected that some mate poaching behaviors will be designed to entice only temporary sexual desertions by the already-mated partner, culminating in brief affairs or short-term liaisons. Other forms of poaching attraction, however, may be designed to elicit a more permanent relationship defection and the eventual formation of a new long-term mating alliance. Both forms of mate poaching are assumed to involve premeditated actions by a mate poacher, actions specifically intended to lure someone away from an established romantic relationship.

The assumption that mate poaching behavior is premeditated does not imply that all aspects of poaching attraction must be entirely conscious. For example, evolutionary perspectives are sometimes portrayed as assuming that romantic attraction behaviors are consciously targeted at reproduction, because people knowingly want to maximize current reproductive success. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of evolutionary approaches to

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human mating (see Buss, 1995a). Modern evolutionary psychologists do not assume that people's evolved romantic desires generate conscious awareness that mating with certain people will yield the most viable children. To the contrary, most psychological adaptations probably operate at an unconscious level (see Bock & Cardew, 1997), and some evolved mating desires, much like our evolved taste preferences for salt and fat, may generate behaviors that lead to lower rates of survival and reproduction in modern industrialized cultures (Nesse & Williams, 1994).

What most evolutionary psychologists assume is that certain psychological desires *historically* led to high rates of reproduction, particularly during the ancestral epoch known as the Pleistocene, when humans lived as small nomadic bands of foragers (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). It was within this ancient environment that some romantic desires probably led to higher rates of reproduction than did other desires and so may have been sculpted into the natural mating psychology of men and women (Symons, 1979). Evolved romantic desires, therefore, are considered by evolutionary psychologists to be the historical end products, not the current cause, of differential reproductive success (Buss, 1994). Nevertheless, the residual design features of our evolved desires seem to continue to exert an unbidden influence on the form and effectiveness of modern romantic attraction behavior (Schmitt & Buss, 1996).

The fundamental assumption underlying the present research on mate poaching behavior is that those in the past whose romantic desires led them to succeed at poaching attraction outreproduced those with alternative designs that either failed at mate poaching or lacked mate poaching mechanisms entirely. Modern humans, in short, have descended from romantically successful ancestors, some of whom were successful mate poachers. As their descendants, modern humans may carry with them a specially designed psychology of romantic desire, a psychology that we expect will cause evolutionarily predicted patterns to emerge within the realm of human mate poaching.

### Patterns of Human Mate Poaching

A large body of evidence suggests that certain patterns of human mate poaching have been and continue to be pervasive. Estimates of extramarital affairs, one form of mate poaching, range between 20% and 50%, depending on the study, method, and sample (Thompson, 1983; Wiederman, 1997). In most nonindustrial cultures, it is "not uncommon" for men and women to engage in extramarital affairs (Broude & Greene, 1980, p. 320). Many of these poaches may be temporary, short-term incursions on the current relationship, representing strategic one-night stands or brief affairs (Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). For instance, women seem to preferentially poach men who possess symmetrical features when seeking short-term mate-ships, possibly because of the genetic robustness of such men (Gangestad & Thornhill, 1997). Afterward, these women often rejoin their steady, long-term partners, leading to cuckoldry rates of up to 10% in some cultures (Baker & Bellis, 1995).

Other forms of poaching, however, eventually progress to long-term relationship takeovers, resulting in the dissolution of the initial mateship and the formation of a new mating union. The marital pattern of serial monogamy, which is common across cultures and may constitute part of our natural mating system (Fisher, 1987), sometimes results from a succession of long-term mate poaches. In some areas of the United States, this has recently

resulted in special poaching-related laws and civil litigation over "alienation of affection" (see Buss, 2000). However, mate poaching in all its forms has been a recurring feature in ancient mythology (e.g., Helen of Troy) and classic literature (e.g., DeLaclos, 1782/1995). One of the earliest recorded instances of romantic attraction is a Biblical account of long-term mate poaching involving King David, who noticed the beautiful Bathsheba through a window. Afterward, King David seduced Bathsheba, purposefully arranged for the death of her husband Uriah, and subsequently married her (2 Samuel 11:2–27, Revised Standard Version).

Although we do not explore the idea in this article, we expect that mate poaching, by creating a profound adaptive problem for the mates of those poached on, selects for mechanisms of mate guarding and mate retention to fend off such poachers (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a). Indeed, the prevalence of mate guarding tactics, particularly those designed to fend off interested rivals, is *prima facie* evidence of the potent influence of mate poaching. Given the pervasive presence of mate poaching, its varied and complex nature, and the documented importance of temporal context in general romantic attraction (Schmitt & Buss, 1996), it is reasonable to hypothesize that a distinct psychology may have evolved in response to the temporally contingent challenges of mate poaching attraction.

Remarkably, very little is known about the special psychology of mate poaching attraction. How often do people try to attract others who are already in relationships, and what type of person is most likely to be targeted by or engage in mate poaching attraction? Are there personality differences between those who poach and those who have been taken away from their partners? What kind of benefits might be reaped from undertaking a poaching attempt, and what special costs might be incurred when attracting an already-mated partner? What particular tactics do people use when attempting a mate poach? Do poaching tactics differ from general romantic attraction tactics? Why might some poaching attempts be more effective than others?

In the current research, we explore the psychology of mate poaching, both temporary, short-term incursions and permanent, long-term takeovers. First, we identify the frequency of poaching experiences across separate samples and isolate the distinctive personal characteristics of the mate *poachers* (i.e., the interlopers), those who are *poached* (i.e., the people taken away from their established relationships), and the *poachees* (i.e., those whose partners are taken away from them). In a second study, we investigate the particular costs and benefits of engaging in mate poaching attraction. In a third study, we examine the perceived effectiveness of poaching-specific attraction tactics. In a fourth study, we consider whether poaching attraction effectiveness depends on the type of relationship that is being encroached on. Across all studies, we place an emphasis on the ways that mate poaching differs from general romantic attraction, differs between short-term and long-term forms of mate poaching, and differs between men and women in evolutionarily predicted ways.

### Study 1: Personal Characteristics and Mate Poaching Attraction

#### Method

*Sample.* Participants in this study were from two samples. Sample 1 included 173 college undergraduates, 45 men and 128 women, enrolled in

a midsized private university in Illinois. Participation was for extra credit in a psychology course. Participants were primarily Caucasian and middle class and had an average age of 20 years, with a standard deviation of 2.5 years. Sample 2 included 30 men and 33 women who were our students and colleagues. These participants were a convenience sample of volunteers over the age of 30. Sample 2 was primarily Caucasian and middle-class and ranged in age from 30 to 65 years, with an average age of 41 and a standard deviation of 8.7 years.

**Procedure.** All participants were presented with one of two versions of a questionnaire entitled the Anonymous Romantic Attraction Survey (ARAS). The ARAS asked a series of questions about personal experiences with romantic attraction and mate poaching. One version of the ARAS asked about short-term mate attraction experiences (i.e., brief affairs, one-night stands); the other asked about long-term mating experiences (i.e., potential marital relationships). Thus, temporal context and sex were between-subjects factors. Each questionnaire asked participants to describe their experiences with certain attraction behaviors, using standard frequency rating scales ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). Intermediate values were labeled *rarely*, *seldom*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, and *almost always*. These particular frequency anchors tend to maximize the interval-level quality of rating scale data (Spector, 1992).

The first ARAS question asked about the frequency with which participants have generally attracted romantic partners, either as short-term sexual partners or for long-term mating relationships. The second question asked about their past mate poaching behavior—for example, “Have you ever tried to attract someone *who was already in a relationship with someone else* for a short-term sexual relationship with you?” The third question asked about the participants’ experiences with others trying to take them away from past mating partners: “While you were in a romantic relationship, have others tried to attract *you* as a short-term sexual partner?” Fourth, we asked about the frequency with which others have tried to take away their past romantic partners: “While you were in a romantic relationship, have others ever attempted to obtain *your partner* for a short-term relationship?” We also asked whether they or their past partners had ever been successfully taken away from a mating relationship: “If you have tried to attract someone who was already in a romantic relationship for a short-term sexual relationship, how *successful* have you been (if you have never tried, skip this question)?” The ARAS scales regarding success in poaching ranged from 1 (*not at all successful*) to 7 (*very successful*), with 4 as *moderately successful*. Finally, we asked participants three questions about their current relationships status. They were asked to respond either “yes” or “no” to whether they were currently in a romantic relationship, whether their current relationship was a direct result of their having attracted their current partner away from someone else, and whether their current relationship was a direct result of their having been attracted away from a past romantic partner.

Measures of the participants’ personality traits and sexuality attributes were administered to subsets of Sample 1. A subset of 151 participants (40 men and 111 women) completed a measure of the Big Five personality dimensions (Goldberg, 1992). The Big Five dimensions include the traits of Extraversion or Surgency (which is, in part, an index of whether one is sociable and dominant), Agreeableness (whether one is kind and humble), Conscientiousness (organized and reliable), Neuroticism (anxious and depressed), and Openness to Experience or Intellect (creative and cultured). A subset of 74 participants (21 men and 53 women) completed a measure of the “Sexy Seven” sexuality attributes (Schmitt & Buss, 2000). The Sexy Seven sexuality attributes are Sexual Attractiveness (including facets of beauty and seduction), Relationship Exclusivity (whether one is promiscuous and adulterous), Gender Orientation (masculinity and femininity), Sexual Restraint (abstinence and prudishness), Erotophilic Disposition (obscurity, indecency, and lust), Emotional Investment (love and romance), and Sexual Orientation (homosexuality and heterosexuality).

## Results and Discussion

**Frequency of poaching attraction.** We explored the frequency of poaching attraction in two ways. First, we wanted to know whether the undergraduate and mature participants had ever experienced the phenomenon of mate poaching. Responses greater than 1 (*never*) on the frequency scales of the ARAS were viewed as indicating at least some experience with poaching-related attraction. Second, we wanted to know the number of people who have had frequent poaching attraction experiences. If participants responded to the frequency scales with responses between 5 (*frequently*) and 7 (*always*), we considered them to have frequent experiences with mate poaching attraction. The same cut offs of 1 and 5 were used to identify some and frequent poaching success experiences. These particular anchors tend to maximize the psychometric quality of frequency scales (Spector, 1992).

As shown along the top of Table 1, over 70% of college-aged and mature participants reported that they had some experience with generally attracting another person as a mate, with essentially the same level of long-term and short-term romantic attraction experience. However, whereas nearly 30% of the participants frequently attracted long-term mates, only around 10% of the participants reported frequently attracting short-term mates. Experiences with poaching-specific romantic attraction were somewhat less frequent but were still rather substantial. Around 50% of the participants reported some experience with making long-term and short-term mate poaching attempts. Very few reported frequent poaching attraction attempts. Indeed, not a single college-aged or mature man reported that he frequently attempted to attract women who were already in relationships for short-term sex, perhaps a direct consequence of the intensity and violence associated with cuckoldry and male sexual jealousy—a point we revisit in later studies.

Participants reported that many more poaching attraction attempts had been made on themselves than were made by them. Around 85% of men and women reported that someone else had tried to attract them away from a past mating partner for a long-term relationship defection or for a short-term sexual desertion. These were all significantly higher than the poaching attempts made by participants on others. Around 30% of men reported that women often try to poach them for short-term sexual encounters, and 25% of women reported that men frequently try to poach them for new long-term mating alliances.

The reported successes of poaching attraction experiences appeared to match what has been found in previous studies on romantic infidelity. For example, over 40% of men and 30% of women in our undergraduate sample reported that they have been successfully attracted away from a partner at some point in their lives, for either a quick, short-term desertion or a more permanent, long-term defection. Feldman and Cauffman (1999) found that 40% of men aged 18–24 and 39% of women aged 18–24 have betrayed a past romantic partner in this way. Over 70% of our sample reported that someone had tried to attract a romantic partner away from them in the past. Notably, among both undergraduate,  $\chi^2(1, N = 173) = 5.24, p < .05$ , and mature samples,  $\chi^2(1, N = 63) = 24.24, p < .01$ , men were significantly more likely than women were to perceive that others frequently tried to attract away their past mates for short-term sex. Around 30% of participants reported that a past partner was successfully attracted

Table 1  
*Relative Frequency (%) of Romantic Attraction Experiences Among Undergraduate and Mature Participants*

Mate attraction experience	Have you ever?				Have you frequently?			
	Undergraduate		Mature		Undergraduate		Mature	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Attempted to attract someone								
As a long-term mate	87	86	93	76	35	29	40	29
As a short-term mate	91	74	87	75	9	14	0	6
Attempted to poach someone								
As a long-term mate	52	63	60	53	4	3	0	24
As a short-term mate	64	49	60	38	0	8	0	0
Experienced someone try to poach you								
As a long-term mate	83	81	93	82	13	29	13	22
As a short-term mate	95	91	87	94	32	22	27	19
Been successfully poached away from a past partner <sup>a</sup>								
As a long-term mate	43	49	67	41	13	5	20	6
As a short-term mate	50	35	40	31	9	9	0	6
Experienced someone try to poach your Partner as a long-term mate	70	79	87	88	13	14	27	12
Partner as a short-term mate	86	85	87	88	36	14	53	13
Had a past partner successfully poached from you <sup>a</sup>								
As a long-term mate	35	30	53	41	0	8	7	12
As a short-term mate	27	25	60	31	5	5	13	6

*Note.* Undergraduate responses are based on 22 men and 65 women who completed a questionnaire about their experiences in short-term mating and 23 men and 63 women who completed a questionnaire about their experiences in long-term mating. Mature responses are based on 15 men and 16 women who completed a questionnaire about their experiences in short-term mating and 15 men and 17 women who completed a questionnaire about their experiences in long-term mating. All mature participants were older than 30, with an average age of 41. "Have you ever?" was operationally defined as scoring greater than 1 on a 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*) scale for frequency of experiences. "Have you frequently?" was defined as scoring between 5 (*frequently*) and 7 (*always*).

<sup>a</sup> "Have you ever?" was operationally defined as scoring greater than 1 on a 1 (*not at all successful*) to 7 (*very successful*) scale for the success experiences. "Have you frequently?" was defined as scoring between 5 and 7 for the success experiences.

away from them at some point, but very few participants reported that they frequently had actual poachee experiences (i.e., that they frequently had partners attracted away from them).

When we asked undergraduates about their current relationship status, 56% of men and 58% of women reported being in a romantic relationship. This is typical of undergraduate samples (e.g., Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992). Of those participants, 12% of the men and 24% of the women reported that their current relationship resulted from their having attracted their current partner away from someone else. In addition, 20% of the men and 28% of the women reported that their current romantic relationship resulted from them having been attracted away from another partner. When we asked mature participants about their current relationship status, 73% of the men and 82% of the women reported being in a romantic relationship at present. Of those participants, 27% of the men and 26% of the women reported that their current relationship resulted from their having attracted their current partner away from someone else. In addition, 41% of the men and 30% of the women reported that their current romantic relationship resulted from them having been poached away from another partner. These percentages are slightly higher than those of the undergraduate sample, suggesting that, given additional time, many of the young participants from Sample 1 will eventually

experience successful mate poaching attraction in some way. Unlike the undergraduate sample, there was also a significant correlation among mature participants between whether their current relationship was formed by their attracting a current partner away from someone else and whether their relationship was formed by themselves having been attracted away from another partner,  $r(47) = .34, p < .05$ .

Two other sample differences are noteworthy. First, mature women were significantly more likely than were undergraduate women to make frequent long-term mate poaching attraction attempts (24% vs. 3%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 161) = 7.90, p < .01$ . Second, mature men were much more likely than mature women and somewhat more likely than undergraduate men to say that they have experienced frequent short-term attempts at having their partners attracted away from them. With our current methods, however, it is difficult to interpret these findings substantively. In sum, analyses from the mature sample have empirically replicated the finding that mate poaching is a prevalent and sometimes potent form of romantic attraction and relationship formation, and as a consequence the dynamics of the mate poaching merit further investigation.

*Personal characteristics and poaching attraction experiences.* We related participants' recollections of past poaching attraction experiences, as assessed by the ARAS, with self-reported personal

characteristics. It is surprising to note that few sex and context differences between short-term and long-term poaching correlations emerged. In addition, few significant relationships were found between one's own personal characteristics and the tendency to have one's partner be poached. Accordingly, we focused on attraction experiences as a poacher and as the poached, related to one's personality traits and sexuality attributes. As shown down the first column of Table 2, we found no significant relationships between the personal characteristics of our participants and their tendency to have made general romantic attraction attempts.

In contrast, human mate poaching attraction was meaningfully related to several facets of personality and sexuality. As shown down the second column of Table 2, we found that agreeable people,  $r(149) = -.28, p < .001$ , and conscientious individuals,  $r(149) = -.20, p < .01$ , were significantly less likely to be mate poachers. In other words, those who were especially kind and reliable were less likely to have engaged in making attraction attempts at others who were already in relationships. These findings were fairly robust across temporal context and sex. For example, agreeable people were less likely to poach for long-term relationship takeovers,  $r(73) = -.25, p < .05$ ; or for short-term relationship incursions,  $r(74) = -.30, p < .01$ , if they were women,  $r(109) = -.33, p < .001$ ; and, although the subsample of men was smaller, the correlation for them was also in the negative direction. Those who were low on the sexual attribute of Relationship Exclusivity tended to have made more poaching attraction attempts,  $r(72) = -.40, p < .001$ , and those who described themselves as having an erotophilic disposition were more likely to have tried to attract someone away from a mating relationship,  $r(72) = .29, p < .01$ . We found that those who reported having experienced some success at mate poaching attraction were high on Sexual Attractiveness and lacked Sexual Exclusivity. Apparently, being adulterous and erotophilic leads one to make mate poaching attempts, but being sexy may be required for a poaching attempt to succeed (see also Gangestad & Simpson, 2000).

As displayed down the fourth column of Table 2, extraverts and those open to experience were more likely to have received mate poaching attraction attempts. This may corroborate the finding that those high in sensation seeking, a trait corresponding to high levels of Extraversion and Openness to Experience, are more susceptible to risky sexual behavior involving multiple sexual partnerships (Zuckerman, 1994). Those who were sexually attractive, who were low on Relationship Exclusivity, and who described themselves as emotionally investing were more likely to have had someone try to attract them away from a past mating relationship. Sexy, adulterous, and loving individuals seem to either evoke or invite poaching attraction attempts. On the other hand, we found that those who were disagreeable, unconscientious, and neurotic tended to go along with the poaching attempts made on them in the past, as did those who were low on Relationship Exclusivity, had a masculine gender orientation,  $r(59) = -.31, p < .01$ , were low on Emotional Investment, and were high on Erotophilic Disposition.

*Summary of Study 1.* The evidence uncovered in Study 1 suggests that human mate poaching is a relatively frequent and sometimes potent form of romantic attraction. Over 50% of the participants reported making romantic attraction attempts on another person who was already in a relationship. More than 80% reported that while they were in romantic relationships, they received romantic attraction attempts from would-be mate poachers. Study 1 also revealed for the first time the personal characteristics of those who tend to poach and those who get poached. Mean, unreliable, adulterous, and erotophilic individuals tended to be mate poachers, whereas sexy and adulterous people reported the most success in mate poaching. Those who had more poaching attraction attempts targeted on themselves were sensation seekers who were also sexy, adulterous, and loving. However, those who actually went along with past poaching attraction attempts described themselves as mean, unreliable, neurotic, adulterous, masculine, erotophilic, and unloving. This heuristic profile of the psychology of mate poachers and those who are poached should be

Table 2  
Correlations Between Personal Characteristics and Mate Attraction Experiences

Characteristic	Mate attraction experiences				
	General attraction attempts made	Poaching attraction attempts made	Poaching attraction success experienced	Poaching attraction attempts received	Received poaching attraction successful
Personality trait ( $n = 151$ )					
Extraversion	.15	.10	.01	.27***	.00
Agreeableness	-.06	-.28***	-.01	.07	-.35***
Conscientiousness	-.09	-.20**	.07	-.08	-.25**
Neuroticism	.03	.15	.05	.01	.26**
Openness to Experience	.07	.00	.20	.22**	-.09
Sexuality attribute ( $n = 74$ )					
Sexual Attractiveness	.11	.21	.30*	.44***	.09
Relationship Exclusivity	-.19	-.40***	-.37*	-.32**	-.56***
Gender Orientation	-.15	-.08	.07	-.02	-.31*
Sexual Restraint	-.10	.01	-.28	-.11	-.03
Erotophilic Disposition	.17	.29**	.17	-.01	.41***
Emotional Investment	-.09	-.17	.09	.24*	-.36**
Sexual Orientation	.10	-.07	-.25	-.13	.00

*Note.* The personality and poaching success correlations were based on a subset of participants who reported that they had at some time attempted poaches ( $n = 84$ ) or had poaches attempted on them ( $n = 127$ ). The sexuality and poaching success correlations were based on a subset of those who attempted poaches ( $n = 42$ ) or had poaches attempted on them ( $n = 61$ ).

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

useful to future studies in which individual differences in mate poaching and their implications are more fully explored. When contrasted with our finding that general romantic attraction attempts were completely unrelated to personal dispositions, these results suggest that mate poaching is a psychologically distinct form of romantic attraction.

## Study 2: The Psychological Costs and Benefits of Mate Poaching Attraction

Most research on human infidelity has focused on the psychology of the poached, on the desires and motivations of adulterers, rather than on the psychology of the mate poacher (e.g., Treas & Giesen, 2000). The reasons given for why people engage in adultery typically range from basic needs for sexual variety, excitement, and personal growth to such situational factors as a partner's toleration for affairs and the desire for adulterous revenge (see Bringle & Buunk, 1991). Dissatisfaction with their current relationship appears to be among the most decisive reasons people engage in extradyadic mating, especially among women (Buss & Shackelford, 1997b; Wiggins & Lederer, 1984). Another critical feature is the commitment individuals have toward their current partners, with initially low levels of commitment strongly predicting physical and emotional infidelity in dating relationships (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999).

Even though the landscape of adulterer motivations has been well charted, the subtle contours and strategic influences of mate poaching motivations remain largely unexplored. For example, nearly all Americans disapprove of extramarital relationships (B. K. Singh, Walton, & Williams, 1976), but almost half of men and one third of women have participated in a mate poaching experience as the adulterer (Thompson, 1983; Wiederman, 1997). Why the striking discontinuity between attitudes and behavior? It seems likely that certain features of the mate poacher, features as yet uncharted, may play a motivational role. Buunk (1980) found that one of the most important predictors of extramarital sex was having an invitation to do so (i.e., an act of attraction by a mate poacher). Atwater (1979) found that an important feature of the extradyadic partner, especially for women, was that the person be an opposite-sex friend (see, also, Bleske & Buss, 2000). Thus, behavioral actions and psychological features of the mate poacher may be as consequential to the mate poaching experience as are the attributes of those who are poached. It is surprising to note that virtually no research exists on the topic of mate poacher motivations. What motivations lead a person to seek someone who is already in a romantic relationship? Do poacher motivations differ for men and women or between short-term and long-term poaching objectives?

Mate poaching clearly entails a complex web of potential costs and benefits for everyone involved. Previous research on the perceived costs and benefits of infidelity has shown that the motivations for adulterers engaging in extradyadic relationships are complex (e.g., loss vs. gain of children, friendship effects, impacts on status) and differ somewhat between men and women (Buss, 1994). Men tend to become poached (i.e., have affairs) as a result of perceiving high benefits to an adulterous relationship, whereas women tend to become poached as a result of perceiving low costs to adultery (Meyering & Epling-McWerther, 1986). Even so, many women report receiving significant benefits from

poaching experiences, including emotional satisfaction left unfulfilled by their current partner (Glass & Wright, 1985; Grosskopf, 1983).

It remains unknown, however, why a man or a woman would choose to romantically attract someone who is already in a relationship and what combinations of costs versus benefits might lead someone to actively attract another person for a short-term desertion compared with a permanent, long-term relationship defection. The goals of Study 2 are to uncover the major costs and benefits that people consider when attempting a mate poach and to assess the relative importance of each feature of poaching attraction for men and women and for short-term and long-term poaching experiences. We first wanted to identify the distinct costs and benefits of poaching attraction that men and women experience in short-term and long-term contexts. Toward this end, we conducted a preliminary study.

## Preliminary Method

**Participants.** In Sample 1, 76 undergraduates, 21 men and 55 women, enrolled in a psychology course at a midsized university in Illinois participated for extra credit. In Sample 2, 4 men and 4 women from Sample 2 of Study 1 who reported frequent experiences with mate poaching were asked to participate in focus groups to discuss the material nature of mate poaching attraction in greater depth.

**Feature nominations.** Twenty participants from Sample 1, 6 men and 14 women, received a sheet of paper asking for their age and sex and containing the following instructions:

Sometimes people try to romantically attract one another. On occasion, people try to attract someone who is *already in a romantic relationship*. For example, a woman may try to attract a man even though he is already dating or married to another woman. She might do this for a short-term sexual affair with him, or to try and obtain him for a new long-term relationship.

In this study, we are interested in the specific *costs* and *benefits* that people might consider when deciding whether to try to attract someone who is already "taken" (i.e., already romantically involved with someone else). Please write down 10 costs that a woman might consider when deciding whether to attract a man who is already in a romantic relationship for a *short-term* mating relationship with her. Then, please write down 10 costs that a woman might consider when deciding whether to attract a man who is already in a relationship for a new *long-term* mating relationship with her. PLEASE WRITE SPECIFIC COSTS.

Following these instructions were two sections, followed by 10 lines on which to write down costs of poaching attraction for each temporal context. One section was labeled "Short-Term Costs of Mate Poaching Attraction," and the second section was labeled "Long-Term Costs of Mate Poaching Attraction." Approximately equal numbers of participants received male cost, female benefit, and male benefit versions of the nomination forms.

From Sample 2, two focus groups, one composed of 4 women and the other of 4 men, were run in accordance with procedures outlined by Krueger (1988). The task was for the participants to freely discuss their perceptions of the costs and benefits associated with short-term and long-term mate poaching attraction. The moderator attempted to keep the discussion on task and later transcribed each cost and benefit that was mentioned. In each group, the moderator was the same sex as the participants.

### *Preliminary Results and Discussion*

The goal of this study was to identify a large number of costs and benefits that men and women might consider when engaging in mate poaching attraction. The nominations from Samples 1 and 2 were culled, removing exact duplications and phrases considered too vague to constitute an identifiable cost or benefit. The result was a list of 73 distinct motivational features of mate poaching attraction, all of which are available from us. These 73 features of mate poaching were categorized into 15 clusters of costs and 18 clusters of benefits on the basis of conceptual similarity and for the purpose of economy of presentation. A list of basic poaching motivations with example features is displayed in Appendix A.

### *Evolutionary Hypotheses About Costs and Benefits of Poaching Attraction*

Preliminary Study 2 yielded a wide variety of possible motivations for engaging in mate poaching attraction. Benefits ranged from Always Have Time Off to Take Pride in Conquest. Costs ranged from Dating Isolation to Unwanted Pregnancy. The primary purpose of Study 2 is to determine whether some motivations are perceived to differ between men and women and between short-term and long-term poaching attraction contexts. We advanced several hypotheses on the basis of an evolutionary analysis of the adaptive problems each sex would face when trying to attract someone for a short-term sexual incursion or long-term relationship takeover. A central premise of ours was that if a perceived feature of poaching attraction involved a solution to an adaptive problem of the mate poacher, it should serve as a motivational inducement to the mate poacher (Buss, 1994). Any feature of poaching that satisfies men's and women's mate preferences should be seen as a benefit of poaching. In contrast, if a feature would impede the solution of an adaptive problem, it should deter mate poaching. We propose four hypotheses, along with associated predictions.

*Hypothesis 1: Men's preference for physical beauty.* Finding a mate with high fertility appears to have been more of an adaptive problem for men than for women (Symons, 1979). Because physical attractiveness can be a reliable cue to a woman's fertility and reproductive value (Johnston & Franklin, 1993; D. Singh, 1993), men may have evolved preferences that place a premium on physical attractiveness in potential mating partners (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). In general romantic attraction, the desire for physical attractiveness appears to be more powerful in men than women (Schmitt & Buss, 1996). Within the context of mate poaching attraction, this adaptive desire may also provide an important inducement to male poachers. Consequently, we hypothesize that mating with physically attractive individuals is seen as more of a benefit to male mate poachers than to female mate poachers. We predicted a main effect of sex, therefore, for ratings of the Gain Partner With Physical Beauty feature of poaching motivation.

*Hypothesis 2: Women's preferences for the ability and willingness to invest resources.* Because women appear to have evolved a stronger preference than men have for potential mates who are able and willing to devote resources to themselves and their offspring (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Ellis, 1992), acquisition of

resources should be a greater benefit to female mate poachers than to male mate poachers. We predicted main effects of sex, therefore, for ratings of Receive Resources and Gain Partner With Resource Ability. In contrast, because men tend to need to possess high levels of resources to gain access to the most valuable mates (Buss, 1989), men should see resource devotion and heavy interpersonal investment as an associated cost of mate poaching attraction. We predicted a main effect of sex for ratings of the Suffer Resource Depletion feature of mate poaching motivation.

*Hypothesis 3: Men's short-term preferences for partner variety and easy sexual access.* Men seem to possess evolved psychological adaptations that lead to a desire for partner variety and quick sexual access in short-term mates (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt, Shackelford, Duntley, Tooke, & Buss, in press). Consequently, poaching features involving partner variety and sexual access should be perceived as particularly beneficial to men. This should be especially true for men seeking already-mated women for short-term matings, because a quick, short-term poach most directly satisfies men's evolved desires for partner variety and easy sexual access. We predicted a statistical interaction between sex and temporal context for ratings of the Enjoy Sexual Variety feature of mate poaching motivation.

*Hypothesis 4: Men's and women's preferences for future relationship commitment.* Most people prefer romantic devotion and commitment from their long-term mates more than from their short-term partners (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). From an evolutionary perspective, men may have evolved a preference for sexual fidelity in their partners because this helps to solve the critical male adaptive problem of paternity uncertainty. For women, romantic fidelity may have been an adaptive cue to long-term commitment and continued resource investment by men (Buss et al., 1992). Consequently, both men and women should perceive features that threaten future fidelity as more costly in the long-term context than in the short-term context of mate poaching. We predicted main effects of temporal context for ratings of Future Infidelity Concerns, Ready Competition, and Uncertain Future features of mate poaching.

### *Method*

*Participants.* Participants were 136 undergraduates, 45 men and 91 women, from a midsized Illinois university. Participants received extra credit in psychology courses; none were in previous studies.

*Design.* The design of this study was a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  factorial. The first independent variable was temporal context (short-term vs. long-term poaching), the second independent variable was sex of actor (male vs. female actor), and the third independent variable was sex of rater (male vs. female participant). The dependent variable was the rated cost versus the rated benefit of each mate poaching feature.

*Procedure.* The participants in this study received a three-page instrument titled "Costs and Benefits of Romantic Attraction of Someone Who is Already in a Relationship" that asked for the participant's sex and contained the following instructions:

*Instructions:* People often try to romantically attract one another. On occasion, people try to attract someone else even though that person is *already in a romantic relationship*. For example, sometimes a woman may try to attract a man who is already dating or married to another woman. She might act in a certain way or give off cues that indicate she is interested in having a *short-term* sexual affair with him.

Many people believe there are special *costs* and *benefits* associated with romantically attracting someone who is already in a relationship. Please rate each of the following "features of romantic attraction" in terms of the degree to which *you personally believe* it would be a "cost" or a "benefit" of attracting someone who is already in a relationship. In this study, we are asking you to please provide a specific type of rating: Would this feature of romantic attraction be a potential cost or benefit for a *woman* trying to attract a man who is already in a relationship for a *short-term* mating experience (e.g., for her to have a brief affair or a one-night stand with him)?

Although many of the following features of romantic attraction may seem similar, it is important that you rate each one accurately and honestly. Please use the following 7-point scale: A -3 indicates that the feature would be an extreme cost of attracting someone who is already in a relationship, a 0 indicates that it would be neither a cost nor a benefit, a +3 indicates the feature would be an extreme benefit of attracting someone who is already in a relationship.

A rating scale with all 7 points was presented after the instructional set. One disadvantage of this scale was that if a feature was thought of as both a cost and a benefit, we would be unable to capture both kinds of motivational features. However, given that we accumulated features designated as either costs or benefits, this limitation was acceptable to increase the efficiency of data collection. Participants were then presented with rating blanks for all 73 features of mate poaching. Thirty-two participants (10 men and 22 women) received the questionnaire as presented above. Approximately equal numbers of participants received either male short-term, female long-term, or male long-term versions of this form.

## Results and Discussion

**Reliability of cost versus benefit judgments.** Alpha reliability coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) were computed for each cluster of poaching attraction costs and benefits. The average alpha reliability reached appreciable levels for each cluster (see Appendix A). In subsequent analyses, the number of main effects due to the sex of the rater did not reach levels above what would be expected by chance alone, indicating sufficient agreement among male and female raters for reliable composite judgments to be obtained. The effects of temporal context (short-term vs. long-term) and sex of actor (male vs. female) were tested in a  $2 \times 2$  analysis of variance (ANOVA) design. The dependent variables were the judged cost versus the benefit of each nominated feature of poaching. Each cluster consisted of the mean average across all items subsumed by it. All item-level analyses within each sex and context are available from us.

**Tests of evolutionary hypotheses.** Hypothesis 1 suggests that obtaining a physically attractive partner who is already in a relationship is generally viewed as more beneficial to male mate poachers than to female poachers. As shown in Table 3, we found a main effect of sex for Gain Partner With Physical Beauty,  $F(1, 132) = 7.41, p < .01$ . This finding supports the view that men possess adaptive preferences for physically attractive mating partners and confirms the specific hypothesis that this preference plays a motivational role in why men may choose to attract women who are already in relationships.

It is important to note that alternative explanations of these findings exist, such as gender socialization and social-role stereotyping (e.g., Eagly, 1987; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Men may prefer physical attractiveness in our culture because this preference is learned by boys and is consistent with our culture's conception

of masculinity. This type of alternative explanation, however, leaves many questions unanswered, such as why men across virtually all cultures tend to prefer physical attractiveness in potential mates more than women do (Buss, 1989), why men tend to prefer precisely those physical features that are closely linked with female fertility (Johnston & Franklin, 1993; D. Singh, 1993), and why men are socialized to prefer physical attractiveness in the first place (cf. MacKinnon, 1987). The current evolutionary hypothesis, in contrast, can readily explain all of these human sex differences (see Buss & Schmitt, 1993). It is not that gender socialization does not take place, but as one of the earliest critics of sex difference research recently concluded, "the socialization account has not proved adequate to the task of explaining gender differentiation" (Maccoby, 1998, p. 9). This may be, in part, because most socialization accounts of sex differences are not integrated with what we know about comparative psychology, human ethology, and reproductive biology (Mealey, 2000). In short, they do not provide the much-needed ultimate level of psychological explanation and integration, a level of understanding that is provided by evolutionary perspectives on human sex differences (Buss, 1995b; Geary, 1998).

Hypothesis 2 suggests that resource-related benefits are seen as more beneficial to female mate poachers than to male mate poachers. We found main effects of sex for the Receive Resources and Gain Partner With Resource Ability features of mate poaching. In contrast, we predicted that men would find resource depletion more costly than would women when attracting a partner who was already in a relationship. We observed a main effect of sex for the Suffer Resource Depletion feature of mate poaching. A finding that we had not predicted in advance was that Receive Resources was seen as particularly beneficial to women in the short-term context of poaching,  $F(1, 132) = 9.58, p < .01$ . This may be due to the fact that women pursuing short-term mates generally find immediate resource acquisition to be more important than do women pursuing long-term mates (Schmitt & Buss, 1996). Thus, because the feature Receive Resources contained acts such as "She will like getting gifts from him," this feature may be especially potent for women deciding whether to engage in a short-term poach.

Although the evidence from Study 2 fully supports Hypothesis 2, there exist alternative explanations of this finding as well. For example, Eagly and Wood (1999) have argued that women's preference for men with resource-related attributes (including social dominance) stems from the social structures within societies, which result themselves from physical differences between the sexes tied to ancestral divisions of labor. Eagly and Wood's theory is still an evolutionary theory, in the sense that evolved physical differences between men and women and the subsequent sexual divisions of labor are hypothesized to lead to sex differences in the desire for resource-related attributes. However, their theory fails to account for several findings that are accounted for by Hypothesis 2, such as the wide span of research in animals supporting the strong influence of sexual selection in creating sex differences in resource-related mating psychology and the important role of hormones in mediating human sex differences in dominance and status seeking (see Kenrick & Li, 2000). Because the present hypothesis can account for a wider array of findings, we feel it is the more parsimonious of these alternative evolutionary hypotheses (see also Ellis, 1992; Geary, 1998).



Table 3  
*Perceived Benefits and Costs of Romantically Attracting Someone Who Is  
 Already in a Relationship*

Benefits and costs	Sex of poacher				<i>F</i> (1, 132)
	Men		Women		
	Short term	Long term	Short term	Long term	
Hypothesis 1: Acquiring beauty should be seen as more beneficial to male poachers					
Gain Partner With Physical Beauty					7.41**
<i>M</i>	1.78	1.70	1.33	1.23	
<i>SD</i>	1.02	0.97	1.11	0.77	
Hypothesis 2: Resource devotion should be seen as more beneficial to female poachers					
Receive Resources					4.40*
<i>M</i>	1.20	1.42	1.97	1.28	
<i>SD</i>	0.77	0.73	0.88	0.75	
Gain Partner With Resource Ability					9.15**
<i>M</i>	1.30	1.31	1.70	1.92	
<i>SD</i>	0.99	0.94	0.95	0.98	
Hypothesis 2: Losing resources should be seen as more costly to male poachers					
Suffer Resource Depletion					4.17*
<i>M</i>	-1.31	-1.75	-1.10	-1.31	
<i>SD</i>	1.03	1.01	0.73	0.83	
Hypothesis 3: Gaining sexual access should be seen as most beneficial to male short-term poachers					
Enjoy Sexual Variety					5.00*
<i>M</i>	2.16	1.24	1.45	1.45	
<i>SD</i>	1.26	1.18	1.21	1.09	
Hypothesis 4: Future commitment concerns should be seen as more costly to long-term poachers					
Future Infidelity Concerns					19.33***
<i>M</i>	-1.14	-1.95	-1.11	-1.95	
<i>SD</i>	1.13	1.10	0.91	1.21	
Ready Competition					13.58***
<i>M</i>	-1.04	-1.66	-1.08	-1.55	
<i>SD</i>	0.92	0.97	0.88	0.81	
Uncertain Future					32.05***
<i>M</i>	-0.96	-2.26	-1.11	-2.03	
<i>SD</i>	1.19	0.81	1.05	1.54	

*Note.* Cost and benefit judgments were based on the responses of 45 men (23 rating male poachers and 22 rating female poachers) and 91 women (51 rating male poachers and 40 rating female poachers). Means were rated on scales ranging from -3 (*an extreme cost*) to 3 (*an extreme benefit*), with 0 as a neutral point (*neither a cost nor benefit*). The *F* values provided represent hypothesis-related statistical tests.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

According to Hypothesis 3, men should find partner variety and easy sexual access as especially beneficial in short-term mate poaching attraction. We found a statistical interaction between sex and temporal context for the feature Enjoy Sexual Variety,  $F(1, 132) = 5.00$ ,  $p < .05$ . From Hypothesis 4, we predicted that features of mate poaching involving future relationship commitment would be more important to long-term mate poaching for both men and women. In support of Hypothesis 4, we found main effects of temporal context for the features Future Infidelity Concerns, Ready Competition, and Uncertain Future. It seems unlikely that these features would play a role in general romantic attraction. Instead, the special situation of mate poaching attraction makes these costs espe-

cially relevant in deciding whether to attract a partner for a new long-term relationship.

*Costs and benefits for which no hypotheses were generated.* Several interesting patterns emerged across sex and temporal context for which no a priori hypotheses had been generated. For example, Guilt Feelings,  $F(1, 132) = 8.55$ ,  $p < .01$ , Deception Issues,  $F(1, 132) = 9.35$ ,  $p < .01$ , Dating Isolation,  $F(1, 132) = 22.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , and Family Rejection,  $F(1, 132) = 79.38$ ,  $p < .001$ , were all seen as more costly in the context of long-term mate poaching than in the context of short-term mate poaching. These results confirm the distinctive nature of poaching attraction, because such issues would likely play no role in general long-term romantic attraction.

Men were seen as benefiting more than women from the Enjoy Lack of Responsibility,  $F(1, 132) = 6.41, p < .01$ , and Always Have Time Off features of mate poaching,  $F(1, 132) = 8.71, p < .01$ . Men appear to view poaching, in part, as an opportunity to engage in mating without the full interpersonal investment required by women in general romantic attraction. Men were seen as incurring a greater cost than women from the feature Fear Physical Danger,  $F(1, 132) = 7.80, p < .01$ . This may relate to the Study 1 finding that men were less likely than were women to engage in frequent poaching attempts. The risk of violent retribution from a cuckolded man may be an especially potent cost for men (Buss, 2000), a cost unique to the special attraction context of mate poaching.

One feature of mate poaching showed an interesting cross-over type of interaction between sex and temporal context. The benefit of Take Pride in Conquest was seen as more beneficial to men when they attracted short-term mates ( $M = 2.12$  in the short term,  $M = 1.31$  in the long term) but was seen as more beneficial to women when they attracted long-term mates ( $M = 1.47$  in the long term,  $M = 1.28$  in the short term),  $F(1, 132) = 7.16, p < .01$ . Perhaps men's self-esteem increases when they successfully attract short-term mates to whom they need not commit (see Kirkpatrick & Ellis, in press). In contrast, women's self-esteem may increase more when they successfully pursue long-term mates, because they have not only obtained the man from another woman but have been able to secure his commitment in a new, long-term relationship.

*Summary of Study 2.* These findings help to explain why people sometimes attempt to mate poach. When deciding whether to engage in long-term poaching attraction, men may be especially lured by physical attractiveness, whereas women may be enticed by the resource-related features of an already-mated partner. In contrast, worries about having to compete against a current partner and fidelity uncertainty seem to be special costs that deter people from long-term poaching. If would-be mate poachers do attempt to attract already-mated partners, in part because they foresee the key benefits and few of the associated costs that Study 2 uncovered, how might they do so? The next study explores the specific tactics people use to effectively attract someone who is already in a relationship.

### Study 3: The Acts and Tactics of Mate Poaching Attraction

According to a logical extension of sexual selection theory (Darwin, 1871), the mate preferences of one sex should directly impact on the effectiveness of attraction tactics used by the opposite sex. One of the most familiar illustrations of this principle is the peacock's plume. Because female peahens prefer to mate with males possessing elaborate trains, male peacocks have been shown to compete effectively for access to females when they vigorously display the most intricate eye-spotted plumage (Cronin, 1991). In the last 2 decades, evolutionary biologists have come to realize that much of animal mating psychology can be understood as resulting from sexual selection processes (Miller, 2000).

Research on romantic attraction among humans has identified many specific signals that men and women use to elicit romantic attraction (Moore, 1995; Perper, 1985) and has confirmed that many of the most effective tactics for men and women are linked

to the mating psychology of the opposite sex (Greer & Buss, 1994; Schmitt & Buss, 1996). For example, because men appear to have an evolved preference for physical beauty when choosing a mating partner (Johnston & Franklin, 1993; D. Singh, 1993), women tend to be more effective than men when using tactics that manipulate perceptions of beauty (Tooke & Camire, 1991; Walters & Crawford, 1994). In contrast, because women appear to have evolved preferences for men able and willing to invest resources (Ellis, 1992; Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987), men tend to be more effective than women when using tactics that manipulate perceptions of resource capability (Hill, Nocks, & Gardner, 1987; Townsend & Levy, 1990).

Romantic attraction in the context of poaching, however, may involve several design features that distinguish it from the context of attracting unmated individuals. For example, mated individuals are often sequestered, cloistered, concealed, protected, or guarded by their regular mates (Wilson & Daly, 1996). Indeed, this evidence suggests that the more desirable the mate, particularly if they are young and attractive in the case of women or high in status and income if they are men, the more intensely their partners devote effort to guarding them as well as exercising vigilance about potential relationship raiders (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a). This imposes a psychological problem for the would-be mate poacher of gaining an audience with the targeted mate while remaining unnoticed, without seeming to pose a threat to the regular partner and without incurring costs inflicted by the regular partner. Men, for example, have been documented to threaten, beat up, and in some cases kill those who attempt to poach their mates (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Wilson & Daly, 1996), a point that was reconfirmed in Study 2. Successful mate poaching therefore requires solving this adaptive subproblem, avoiding the costs that the regular partner of the targeted mate might inflict.

Those who are already mated also could suffer substantial psychological costs by permitting a mate poacher access. Divorce can inflict costs on children, rupture existing kin coalitions that were initially forged through marriage, break up common friendships, and cause reputational damage (Buss, 1994). Furthermore, women who are sexually unfaithful or who attempt to leave existing mateships run the risk of being assaulted and sometimes killed by their regular mate (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Wilson & Daly, 1996). Infidelity and attempts to defect are the two most powerful empirical predictors of spouse abuse, stalking, and spousal homicide (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Thus, the would-be mate poacher has the subproblem of offering benefits that not only exceed those already provided by the regular mate but that also exceed the costs to the tempted mate of rupturing an existing mateship.

There are two general strategies by which the problem of providing exceedingly valuable benefits to the potential mate can be solved by the would-be mate poacher (Schmitt & Buss, 1996). The first involves displaying attraction tactics designed to more fully embody the desires of the potential mate, when compared with the regular mate. Besting the regular mate on desirable qualities offers one way to offset the target's costs of defecting from the existing mateship. The second strategy involves denigrating the regular mate to make him or her seem less desirable to the targeted mate in comparison with the mate poacher. This could be accomplished, for example, by questioning the commitment of the regular mate, implying that the regular mate is cheating on him or her, or derogating the regular mate's appearance. These tactics

could be combined—for example, by dominating the regular mate in a fight or an athletic event, which simultaneously displays the poacher's physical assets and highlights the regular mate's relative physical weakness or lack of athletic ability.

Whereas these two general strategies—self-enhancement tactics and competitor derogation tactics—can be used to attract non-mated individuals on the eligible mating market (Schmitt & Buss, 1996), a third strategy specific to mate poaching may consist of presenting oneself to the couple in the innocuous guise of a friend and then insinuating oneself into the couple's lives while waiting for an opportune moment to poach. This third strategy also avoids many of the associated costs to the mate poacher of attracting an already-mated partner. There is evidence of such mate poaching in fish species, where males sometimes mimic being female to gain entry to a dominant male's harem and then proceed to fertilize the females of the dominant male (Gross, 1982). Such tactics have been written about with humans in literature and fiction—for example, Nabokov's (1938) *Invitation of a Beheading*, in which the character Axel Rex feigned homosexuality so as not to arouse the suspicion of mated Albinus and then proceeded to mate poach Albinus's mistress Margo with aplomb. No such tactics, however, have ever been documented in the scientific literature on human mating.

The major goals of Study 3 were to uncover the specific behaviors and general tactics used in the context of human mate poaching attraction and to test several evolutionary hypotheses about sex and temporal context differences in perceptions of attraction effectiveness. We first wanted to develop a diverse list of distinctive acts of attraction that men and women use for the goal of obtaining a mate who is already in a romantic relationship. Toward this end, we used an act nomination procedure.

### *Preliminary Method*

**Participants.** Participants were 86 undergraduates, 44 men and 42 women, enrolled in a psychology course at a large state university in Michigan. Participation partially fulfilled a course requirement.

**Act nominations.** Each participant received a sheet of paper asking for their age and sex and containing the following instructions:

In this study, we are interested in the specific acts or tactics that people use to attract or obtain a mate (romantic partner of the opposite sex) who is already "taken" (i.e., already romantically involved with someone else). Please think of males you know (this could include yourself, your friends, etc.) who have attempted to attract and obtain a mate who was already taken. Write down 5 (five) acts or behaviors they have performed (or might perform) to attract and obtain a mate of the opposite sex who was already taken. PLEASE WRITE DOWN SPECIFIC ACTS that someone could answer the following questions about: Have you ever performed this act? If so, how often have you performed it?

Following these instructions were two sections, followed by five lines on which to write down acts of mate poaching for each sex. One section was labeled "Male Acts Used to Attract and Obtain a Mate Who Is Already Taken," and the second section was labeled "Female Acts Used to Attract and Obtain a Mate Who Is Already Taken." The order of the nominations for each sex was counterbalanced, so that half of the participants first nominated acts of mate poaching performed by men, and the other half first nominated acts of mate poaching performed by women.

### *Preliminary Results and Discussion*

The goal of this study was to identify a large number of acts that men and women use for the specific goal of mate poaching. The nominations were culled, removing nominations of single adjectives (e.g., dominant), phrases considered too vague to constitute an identifiable act (e.g., hones in on her), and exact redundancies or duplications. The result was a list of 60 distinct acts of mate poaching attraction that are available from us. These 60 acts were categorized into 19 clusters of poaching attraction "tactics" on the basis of conceptual similarity for the purpose of economy of presentation. The 19 mate poaching attraction tactics, with example acts, are displayed in Appendix B.

### *Evolutionary Hypotheses About Mate Poaching Attraction*

We advanced five specific hypotheses, along with predictions, based on an evolutionary analysis of the adaptive problems each sex would face when trying to poach for either a short-term sexual incursion or a long-term relationship takeover. Central to all hypotheses was the premise that the mate preferences of one sex affects the tactics of attraction exhibited by the opposite sex (Darwin, 1871). In mate poaching attraction, when one sex prefers an attribute in a specific mating context, we predicted that the opposite sex will be seen as particularly effective at poaching a mate in that context if they display the desired attribute.

**Hypothesis 1: Men's preference for physical beauty.** Because men appear to have evolved mate preferences that place a premium on physical attractiveness (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), attraction tactics that enhance one's own physical appearance should be seen as more effective for women than for men in the context of human mate poaching attraction. In addition, derogating the existing rival mate by derogating his or her physical appearance should be judged more effective when used by women poachers than by men poachers. We predicted main effects of sex, therefore, for ratings of the tactics Enhance Physical Appearance and Derogate Rival's Physical Appearance.

**Hypothesis 2: Women's preferences for the ability and willingness to invest resources.** Because women appear to have evolved a stronger preference than men have for potential mates who devote resources to themselves and their offspring (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), displaying or devoting resources should be judged more effective when used by men than when used by women for the goal of obtaining a mate who is already in a relationship. There are two main types of resource cues that may be relevant to mate poaching attraction—cues to the ability and cues to the willingness to devote resources (Ellis, 1992). We predicted main effects of sex, therefore, for ratings of Demonstrate Resources and Be Generous.

**Hypothesis 3: Men's short-term preferences for partner variety and easy sexual access.** Because men seem to possess evolved psychological adaptations that lead to a desire for easy sexual access in short-term mates (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt, Shackelford, Duntley, et al., in press), an effective tactic for women trying to poach men for short-term mating should be to suggest easy, low-cost sexual access. Specifically, we predicted that the tactics Provide Easy Sexual Access, Suggest Easy Sexual Access,

and Arrange Easy Sexual Access should display a significant interaction between sex and temporal context.

**Hypothesis 4: Men's and women's preferences for future relationship commitment.** Men and women both prefer relationship devotion on the part of their long-term mates, but there is an important sex difference suggested by an evolutionary analysis. Men have evolved a preference for sexual fidelity by their partners, as this helps to solve the adaptive problem of paternity uncertainty; women, in contrast, place a greater premium on emotional fidelity as a signal of long-term commitment and investment (Buss et al., 1992). Consequently, questioning different aspects of the fidelity of the regular mate and suggesting different aspects of fidelity on one's own part should be differentially effective for male and female poachers. Specifically, we predicted main effects of sex for the tactics Manipulate Sexual Commitment of Rival, Manipulate Emotional Commitment of Rival, and Develop Emotional Connection.

**Hypothesis 5: Women's preference for dominance.** Women tend to prefer dominant men in both long-term and short-term mating relationships, but this quality seems to be more important for women in short-term mating (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). This adaptive preference may have resulted from women having pursued short-term sexual strategies in a way that disguised paternity and resulted in protection and social investment from multiple men (Smuts, 1991). As a result of this female short-term mate preference, men trying to poach women for short-term mating should be the most effective at displaying dominance, particularly over the rival regular mate. Specifically, we predicted an interaction between sex of actor and temporal context for the mate attraction tactic Display Dominance.

## Method

**Participants.** Participants were 367 undergraduates, 150 men and 217 women, drawn from two different universities. One university was a large public institution in Michigan, and the other was a medium-sized private university in Illinois. All participants in this study partially fulfilled a requirement for a psychology course. None of the participants in this study had participated in previous studies.

**Design.** The design of this study was a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  mixed factorial. The first independent variable was temporal context (short-term vs. long-term mate poaching), the second was sex of actor (male mate poacher vs. female mate poacher), and the third was sex of rater (male vs. female). Temporal context and sex of rater were between-subjects variables; sex of actor was a within-subject variable. The dependent variable was the judged effectiveness of each act of human mate poaching.

**Procedure.** The participants in this study received a four-page instrument titled "Tactics for Obtaining a Mate Who is Already in a Relationship" that asked the participant's age and sex and contained these instructions:

Instructions: Below is a list of acts that someone might perform in order to obtain a mate who is already in a relationship. Please rate the following acts on *how effective* each is likely to be in obtaining a mate who is already in a relationship. Please provide two ratings: 1) How effective will this act be *when performed by a male* in attempting to obtain a female who is already in a relationship; and 2) How effective will this act be *when performed by a female* in attempting to obtain a male who is already in a relationship. Please rate the following acts as though the mate is sought as a *short-term* partner (e.g., a brief affair, a one-night stand, etc.).

Please use the following 7-point scale: A 7 indicates that you think the act will be very effective at obtaining the mate, a 4 indicates the act is moderately effective, a 1 indicates the act is not at all effective.

A rating scale with all 7 points was presented after the instructional set. Then the participants were presented with rating blanks for all 60 acts of mate poaching. All participants rated their perceptions of both men's and women's effectiveness when performing each act. One hundred seventy-nine participants (76 men and 103 women) received the questionnaire as presented above. One hundred eighty-eight participants (74 men and 114 women) received a similar instrument, but instead of giving judgments about the effectiveness of attraction acts for short-term poaching, the participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of each act for men and women in the context of poaching for a long-term partner (e.g., a marriage partner).

## Results and Discussion

**Reliability of tactic effectiveness judgments.** Alpha reliability coefficients were computed for each composite tactic of poaching. For each tactic, the average alpha reliability for each condition reached appreciable levels (see Appendix B). In subsequent analyses, sufficient agreement among male and female raters led to reliable composite judgments. All act-level analyses are available from us.

**Tests of evolutionary hypotheses.** The effects of temporal context and sex of actor were tested in a mixed analysis of variance design; sex of actor was a within-subject variable, and temporal context was a between-subjects variable. The dependent variables were the judged effectiveness of specific mate poaching acts and tactics. For some hypotheses, we predicted interaction effects; for others, we predicted main effects of sex. All tests of the hypotheses and their corresponding *F* values are presented in Table 4.

We predicted from Hypothesis 1 that manipulating cues to physical attractiveness would be more effective for women than for men across both poaching attraction contexts. We tested two predictions derived from this hypothesis, one for self-enhancement tactics, and one for derogation of rivals (top rows of Table 4). The results fully support Hypothesis 1. Enhance Physical Appearance showed a main effect for sex of actor,  $F(1, 360) = 444.38, p < .001$ , as did Derogate Rival's Physical Appearance,  $F(1, 360) = 23.01, p < .001$ . Derogating the rival's physical appearance, however, was judged notably less effective than enhancing one's own appearance. It is interesting to note that both mate poaching tactics were judged more effective for both sexes in short-term compared with long-term mate poaching and were seen as most effective for women in the short-term mating context—corresponding with the finding that both sexes place a greater premium on physical attractiveness in short-term mating than in long-term mating (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Thornhill, 1997).

Hypothesis 2 predicts that resource display and devotion are more effective for men than for women across poaching attraction contexts. As shown in Table 4, the main effect of sex on the Demonstrate Resources tactic was significant. Men were judged to be far more effective than women at attracting someone already in a relationship when they display resources. In addition, the main effect of Be Generous was significant,  $F(1, 358) = 26.02, p < .001$ . Men were judged to be more effective than women were at attracting someone already in a relationship when they are gener-

Table 4  
*Judged Effectiveness of Mate Poaching Attraction Tactics Across Gender and Temporal Context*

Attraction tactic	Sex of poacher				<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
	Male		Female			
	Short term	Long term	Short term	Long term		
Hypothesis 1: Tactics should be judged more effective for women						
Enhance Physical Appearance					444.38***	1, 360
<i>M</i>	3.99	3.48	5.25	4.39		
<i>SD</i>	1.25	1.13	1.26	1.32		
Derogate Rival's Physical Appearance					23.01***	1, 360
<i>M</i>	2.39	2.20	2.81	2.31		
<i>SD</i>	1.45	1.19	1.69	1.26		
Hypothesis 2: Tactics should be judged more effective for men						
Demonstrate Resources					339.44***	1, 359
<i>M</i>	4.67	4.49	3.54	3.59		
<i>SD</i>	1.24	1.28	1.22	1.10		
Be Generous					26.02***	1, 361
<i>M</i>	4.77	4.94	4.61	4.74		
<i>SD</i>	1.20	1.18	1.24	1.12		
Hypothesis 3: Tactics should be judged most effective for women in short-term context						
Provide Easy Sexual Access					26.22***	1, 361
<i>M</i>	3.61	2.84	4.90	3.52		
<i>SD</i>	1.14	1.00	1.33	1.43		
Suggest Easy Sexual Access					21.68***	1, 361
<i>M</i>	3.71	3.31	5.04	4.23		
<i>SD</i>	1.04	0.89	1.10	1.15		
Arrange Easy Sexual Access					25.44***	1, 360
<i>M</i>	3.39	2.75	4.65	3.43		
<i>SD</i>	1.18	0.97	1.38	1.35		
Hypothesis 4: Tactic should be judged more effective for women						
Manipulate Sexual Commitment of Rival					2.09	1, 360
<i>M</i>	3.61	3.40	3.73	3.37		
<i>SD</i>	1.39	1.30	1.34	1.25		
Hypothesis 4: Tactics should be judged more effective for men						
Manipulate Emotional Commitment of Rival					64.19***	1, 361
<i>M</i>	4.71	4.86	4.37	4.61		
<i>SD</i>	1.08	1.02	1.02	0.93		
Develop Emotional Connection					10.66***	1, 359
<i>M</i>	5.00	5.16	4.86	5.07		
<i>SD</i>	1.17	1.08	1.21	1.06		
Hypothesis 5: Tactic should be judged most effective for men in short-term context						
Display Dominance					7.61**	1, 357
<i>M</i>	2.64	2.25	2.01	1.87		
<i>SD</i>	1.36	1.13	1.07	0.95		

*Note.* Effectiveness judgments are based on the responses of 150 men (76 rating short-term effectiveness, 74 rating long-term effectiveness) and 217 women (103 rating short-term effectiveness, 114 rating long-term effectiveness). Means were rated on scales ranging from *not at all effective* (1) to *very effective* (7) for poaching tactics. The presented *F* values are for hypothesis-related statistical tests.

\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

ous, an indicator of willingness to devote resources to women and their children.

Hypothesis 3 suggests that offering low-cost sexual access is most effective for women in the context of short-term mate poach-

ing. This hypothesis is strongly supported from the analyses of all three relevant mate poaching tactics. First, the multivariate interaction effect was significant,  $F(3, 358) = 16.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . In addition, the predicted interaction effect occurred for all three

individual tactics—Providing Easy Sexual Access, Suggesting Easy Sexual Access, and Arranging Easy Sexual Access. The judged effectiveness for women using these tactics for short-term mate poaching exceeded the judged effectiveness for women in the long-term mate poaching condition as well as the judged effectiveness for men's mate poaching in both temporal contexts. Beyond this, the results from our analyses show main effects for sex of actor and temporal context. Providing or indicating low-cost sexual access was judged a more effective mate poaching tactic for women than for men across contexts and was judged more effective in the short-term context than in the long-term context for both sexes.

The first prediction derived from Hypothesis 4 is that manipulating perceptions of the sexual commitment of a rival would be judged more effective for women. Results were somewhat supportive. Although the overall main effect of sex on the Manipulate Sexual Commitment of Rival tactic just missed conventional significance,  $F(1, 360) = 2.09, p < .15$ , this tactic was judged significantly more effective for women than for men in the context of short-term mate poaching,  $t(173) = 2.25, p < .05$ . The second prediction from Hypothesis 4, that manipulating perceptions of the emotional commitment of a rival is more effective for men, received full support. Men were judged more effective at Manipulate Emotional Commitment of Rival and at Develop Emotional Connection.

Hypothesis 5 suggests that displays of dominance are most effective for men in the short-term context. Displays of physical dominance were judged most effective for men seeking short-term sexual incursions. However, absolute magnitudes of the judged effectiveness of physical dominance were quite low. Even for men in short-term mate poaching, physical dominance display was judged to be only 2.64 in average effectiveness, suggesting that this is not among the more effective tactics of human mate poaching.

*Tactics for which no hypotheses were generated.* Several interesting findings relevant to poaching-specific attraction emerged for which no hypotheses had been generated. Overt attempts to rupture the existing mateship showed main effects for sex of actor and temporal context. They were judged more effective for women than for men across contexts,  $F(1, 361) = 63.31, p < .001$ . In addition, the Break Up Their Relationship tactic was slightly more effective in the short term than in the long term,  $F(1, 361) = 8.30, p < .01$ , perhaps because women are able to poach more actively in the short term by using sexual offerings as an effective incentive to already-mated men. Plying a potential mate with alcohol is a time-honored mate poaching tactic in college lore, but the current findings suggest that this tactic may be specific to sex and temporal context. Getting a potential mate drunk is extremely ineffective for either sex for the goal of long-term poaching but approaches moderate judgments of effectiveness in the short-term context, particularly when women use it,  $F(1, 358) = 61.99, p < .001$ . The effectiveness of this tactic may reside with the lowering of a man's inhibitions for succumbing to the implicit offering of low-cost sexual access.

The use of humor showed a main effect for sex of actor,  $F(1, 358) = 38.13, p < .001$ , indicating more effectiveness for men than for women in both temporal contexts. This finding appears to support Miller's (2000) hypothesis that humor and other cultural displays are sex-linked tactics that men use to impress women with

their protean intelligence. For women, two tactics of mate poaching were judged more effective than when used by men. These included Enhance Potential Mate,  $F(1, 361) = 15.08, p < .001$ , and Develop Social Ties,  $F(1, 361) = 28.28, p < .001$ . Enhancing the potential mate with behaviors such as "boosting his ego" suggests that at some level, poaching is related to the relative value of each person in the current relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Thus, by inflating the target individual's sense of self-worth, a poacher may be able to induce a defection and guide the dissatisfied mate into forming a new and seemingly more equitable mating partnership with the poacher.

Two tactics of mate poaching failed to reveal a sex of actor effect, a temporal context effect, or an interaction effect—Temporal Invasion and Wait Around. These tactics generally showed moderate to high levels of judged mate poaching effectiveness. It is interesting to note that these tactics are among the tactics most specific to the context of mate poaching, as they involve methods of driving a wedge into the existing relationship or insinuating the self into the existing social context, presumably while waiting for an opportune moment to deploy more direct mate poaching efforts. Furthermore, some already-mated individuals may require a realistic mate replacement before leaving their current long-term relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), and tactics such as Temporal Invasion and Wait Around may provide the necessary catalyst for defection.

Finally, we computed "average act effectiveness" ratings within each sex and temporal context. We did this by taking the mean perceived effectiveness of all 60 acts of attraction within each sex by temporal context quadrant. The average act effectiveness ratings differed somewhat across sex and temporal context. Overall, women were seen as more significantly effective than men,  $F(1, 354) = 164.69, p < .001$ . Attraction was viewed as more effective in the short-term context than in the long-term context,  $F(1, 354) = 10.01, p < .01$ . There was also a significant interaction of sex of actor and temporal context,  $F(1, 354) = 16.16, p < .001$ . The interaction of sex and context appeared to be driven by the fact that women in the short-term context ( $M = 4.30, SD = 0.81$ ) were judged as moderately more effective than women in the long-term context were ( $M = 3.97, SD = 0.77$ ),  $t(355) = 3.85, p < .001, d = -0.41$ , whereas men in the short-term context ( $M = 4.02, SD = 0.81$ ) were seen as only somewhat more effective than men in the long-term context were ( $M = 3.82, SD = 0.76$ ),  $t(356) = 2.35, p < .05, d = -0.25$ . In addition, women were seen as more effective than men for both short-term mate poaching incursions,  $t(171) = 10.79, p < .001$ , and long-term relationship takeovers,  $t(183) = 6.95, p < .001$ . The most and least effective acts within each sex by temporal context quadrant are available from us. Overall, act-level results revealed that sex and temporal context play critical roles in the romantic attraction of someone who is already in a relationship.

*Mate poaching attraction compared with general romantic attraction.* In an attempt to relate the effectiveness of mate poaching tactics to the effectiveness of nonpoaching romantic attraction tactics, we compared the results from Study 3 with results previously reported in the literature (Schmitt & Buss, 1996). As shown in Table 5, all evolutionary hypotheses were supported in both mate poaching and general romantic attraction contexts. From Hypothesis 1, tactics that corresponded to enhancing physical appearance were judged equally effective in mate poaching and

Table 5  
*Comparing General Romantic Attraction With Mate Poaching Attraction*

Attraction type	Sex of attractor				<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
	Male		Female			
	Short term	Long term	Short term	Long term		
Hypothesis 1: Attraction tactics should be judged more effective for women						
General						
Enhance Physical Attractiveness					21.56***	1, 106
<i>M</i>	4.38	3.85	5.13	4.61		
<i>SD</i>	0.94	0.98	0.87	0.94		
Poaching						
Enhance Physical Appearance					444.38***	1, 360
<i>M</i>	3.99	3.48	5.25	4.39		
<i>SD</i>	1.25	1.13	1.26	1.32		
Hypothesis 2: Attraction tactics should be judged more effective for men						
General						
Display Resources					4.96*	1, 106
<i>M</i>	4.17	2.94	3.51	2.53		
<i>SD</i>	1.59	1.31	1.48	1.13		
Poaching						
Demonstrate Resources					339.44***	1, 359
<i>M</i>	4.67	4.49	3.54	3.59		
<i>SD</i>	1.24	1.28	1.22	1.10		
General						
Act Helpful					10.03**	1, 106
<i>M</i>	5.22	6.03	4.65	5.55		
<i>SD</i>	1.34	0.95	1.35	1.07		
Poaching						
Be Generous					26.02***	1, 361
<i>M</i>	4.77	4.94	4.61	4.74		
<i>SD</i>	1.20	1.18	1.24	1.12		
Hypothesis 3: Attraction tactics should be judged most effective for women in short-term context						
General						
Make Proposition					14.57***	1, 106
<i>M</i>	3.89	2.70	5.52	3.40		
<i>SD</i>	1.39	1.10	1.16	1.31		
Poaching						
Suggest Easy Sexual Access					21.68***	1, 361
<i>M</i>	3.71	3.31	5.04	4.23		
<i>SD</i>	1.04	0.89	1.10	1.15		
Hypothesis 4: Attraction tactics should be judged more effective in long-term context						
General						
Act Sensitive					119.11***	1, 106
<i>M</i>	5.06	5.61	4.64	5.78		
<i>SD</i>	1.21	0.83	1.06	0.78		
Poaching						
Develop Emotional Connection					10.66***	1, 359
<i>M</i>	5.00	5.16	4.86	5.07		
<i>SD</i>	1.17	1.08	1.21	1.06		
Hypothesis 5: Attraction tactics should be judged most effective for men in short-term context						
General						
Act Macho					24.55***	1, 106
<i>M</i>	3.52	2.93	2.19	2.16		
<i>SD</i>	0.89	0.78	0.73	0.54		
Poaching						
Display Dominance					7.61**	1, 357
<i>M</i>	2.64	2.25	2.01	1.87		
<i>SD</i>	1.36	1.13	1.07	0.95		

*Note.* Judgments of general romantic attraction effectiveness were based on the responses of 58 men and 50 women who rated the short-term and long-term effectiveness of tactics, as reported in Schmitt and Buss (1996). Mate poaching effectiveness judgments were based on the responses of 150 men (76 rating short-term effectiveness, 74 rating long-term effectiveness) and 217 women (103 rating short-term effectiveness, 114 rating long-term effectiveness). All means were rated on scales ranging from *not at all effective* (1) to *very effective* (7).

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

general attraction contexts, and the tendency for enhancing physical appearance to be more effective in the short-term context than in the long-term context was expressed in both studies as well.

As shown next in Table 5, one difference between mate poaching and general romantic attraction was that demonstration of resources was judged more effective for men in the context of long-term mate poaching ( $M = 4.49$ ) than in general long-term romantic attraction ( $M = 2.94$ ),  $t(228) = 7.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . This finding suggests that successful long-term mate poaching involves providing enough of an inducement to overcome the associated costs of leaving a current relationship. Perhaps one of the more important factors in getting a person to go along with a long-term poach is that the new mating alliance must be an economically viable one. Also in support of Hypothesis 2, the tactics Act Helpful in general attraction and Be Generous in poaching attraction were both judged more effective for men than for women to use.

From Hypothesis 3, tactics that suggested easy sexual access were judged most effective for women to use in the context of short-term mating in both studies. An interesting difference between general attraction and poaching attraction was that providing easy sexual access was viewed as more effective for men and women in the context of long-term poaching attraction,  $t(470) = 5.61$ ,  $p < .001$ . Tactics that provide an index of emotional connection and fidelity were judged significantly more effective in long-term than in short-term contexts across both studies, supporting Hypothesis 4. Finally, tactics involving dominance were considered most effective for men to use when attracting short-term mates, as predicted by Hypothesis 5. However, we found a difference between general attraction and poaching attraction—displaying dominance over rivals was rated more effective in general ( $M = 3.52$ ) than when men targeted a woman's current relationship partner ( $M = 2.64$ ),  $t(228) = 5.89$ ,  $p < .001$ . Dominating a woman's current partner, as in the case of poaching-related attraction, may be seen as more desperate and offensive than dominating other men in general.

**Summary of Study 3.** We contrasted the perceived effectiveness of poaching tactics when used by men compared with women and when used to obtain a temporary, short-term poaching intrusion compared with a permanent, long-term relationship takeover. We tested five evolutionary psychological hypotheses about the moderating effects of sex and temporal context on perceptions of mate poaching effectiveness. We predicted that women would be judged most effective in short-term poaching when using easy sexual access tactics, because these tactics would theoretically fulfill men's evolved preference for easy sexual access in short-term mates (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). In contrast, we predicted that men would be viewed as most effective when using dominance tactics in the short-term context, because women's short-term psychology may be based, in part, on desires for protection and obtaining dominance-related genes (Smuts, 1991).

Although mate poaching attraction followed these evolutionarily predicted patterns, there were several differences between mate poaching and general romantic attraction, particularly for men. For example, demonstrating resources was judged more effective for men in long-term poaching than in general long-term attraction. Men were also seen as less effective when using dominance tactics in the context of poaching. For both sexes, providing easy sexual access was more effective in long-term poaching than in general long-term attraction. As a whole in Study 3, hypothesis-related

poaching tactics were seen as effective in the ways predicted by evolutionary theories of human mating, in ways differentially linked to the sex of the poacher and to the temporal context of the desired poaching relationship.

#### Study 4: Mate Poaching Attraction Targeted at Different Relationship Contexts

The primary goal of Study 3 was to reveal the substantive effects of sex and temporal context on mate poaching attraction. To achieve this goal, we assessed perceptions of male and female poachers when attracting already-mated partners for either short-term sexual incursions or permanent long-term relationship takeovers. Many tactics of mate poaching attraction were moderated by sex and temporal context. However, a potential limitation of Study 3 was that we failed to specify the precise nature of the relationship context from which the already-mated target was to be poached.

Certain qualities of targeted relationships could influence poaching attraction effectiveness. Some poaching attraction tactics could be more successful when targeted at dating relationships, as compared with marital relationships. Poaching attraction might yield better results when aimed at someone involved in a long-distance relationship, as compared with someone who is currently living with a mating rival. The extent to which the targeted person is committed to his or her relationship seems likely to play a role in poaching effectiveness. Whether the targeted relationship is just beginning or about to end could influence the effectiveness of some tactics more than others. It remains unclear, therefore, whether the sex and temporal context effects discovered in the previous study persist across differing relationship contexts. The aim of Study 4 is to document the effects of different targeted relationship contexts on perceptions of poaching tactic effectiveness. We tested the five evolutionary hypotheses from Study 3 across varying relationship contexts, providing an index of their power in accounting for patterns of poaching attraction effectiveness across multiple relationship forms.

#### Method

**Participants.** Participants were 333 undergraduates, 115 men and 218 women, from a midsized university in Illinois. Participants received extra credit; none were in previous studies.

**Design.** The design of this study was a  $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 8$  factorial. The first independent variable was temporal context, the second independent variable was sex of actor, the third independent variable was sex of rater, and the fourth independent variable was relationship context (marital, dating, living together, long distance, highly committed, not committed, just beginning, and about to end). All independent variables were between-subjects, with male and female actors equally distributed among male and female raters and further distributed among the remaining independent variables, as described below. The dependent variable was the judged effectiveness of each act of mate poaching as rated on a form similar to the one used in Study 3.

**Procedure.** Participants received a three-page instrument entitled "Tactics for Obtaining a Mate Who is Already in a Relationship" that asked for the participant's sex and contained the following instructions:

*Instructions:* People often try to romantically attract one another. Sometimes people try to attract others who are *already in romantic relationships*. For example, sometimes *men* try to attract a woman



who is already *married* to another man, in order to have a *short-term* affair with her. Below is a list of acts that someone might perform in order to obtain a mate who is already in a relationship. Although many of the following acts may seem similar, it is important that you rate the effectiveness of each act accurately and honestly. Please use the following 7-point scale: a 7 indicates that the act will be very effective at obtaining the mate, a 4 indicates the act will be moderately effective, a 1 indicates the act is not at all effective.

A rating scale with 7 points was presented after the set of instructions. Participants were presented with rating blanks for 50 acts of mate poaching. We took the acts from Study 3 by using up to 3 acts from each tactic in Appendix B. Two acts were added for this study that were not in Study 3. The act "display high levels of ambition" was added to Demonstrate Resources to help capture the context of future resource ability, a tactical feature that may be particularly salient to undergraduate samples. The act "call the rival fat and ugly" was added to the Derogate Rival's Appearance tactic, increasing to 2 the number of acts in this tactic. Both additional acts have been used in previous romantic attraction research (e.g., Schmitt & Buss, 1996). Alternative versions of the form containing different relationship contexts, sex of actors, and temporal contexts were equally dispersed among male and female participants.

## Results and Discussion

**Reliability of tactic effectiveness judgments.** Alpha reliability coefficients were computed for each composite tactic of mate poaching. For each tactic, the average alpha reliability for each condition reached appreciable levels across relationship contexts (see Appendix B). Sufficient agreement among male and female raters led to composite judgments. All act-level analyses are available from us.

**Tests of evolutionary hypotheses.** The effects of all independent variables were tested in a between-subjects factorial analysis of variance. Temporal context, sex of actor, and relationship context were between-subjects factors. The dependent variables were the judged effectiveness of poaching attraction acts and tactics. Each tactic consisted of the mean average across all acts subsumed by it. For some hypotheses, we predicted interaction effects; for others, we predicted main effects of sex. All hypothesis-related statistical tests are described in the text.

For efficiency of reporting, Table 6 shows the effectiveness judgments within specific combinations of sex and temporal context. For example, the top of Table 6 shows perceptions of women's effectiveness when using tactics related to physical appearance, because it is the effect of relationship context on women's means that represents the most critical test of Hypothesis 1. Using this presentation strategy for each hypothesis, we highlighted the effects of relationship context across the most crucial combinations of sex and temporal context. Full factorial analyses are available from us.

Hypothesis 1 from Study 3 led to the prediction that physical-appearance-related tactics would be more effective for women than for men at attracting someone who is already in a relationship. We found significant main effects of sex such that women were judged more effective than men at using the Enhance Physical Appearance tactic,  $F(1, 301) = 68.59, p < .001$ , and the Derogate Rival's Physical Appearance tactic,  $F(1, 301) = 26.20, p < .001$ , fully replicating the results from Study 3 and providing broader support for Hypothesis 1. The primary purpose of Study 4, however, was to evaluate the potential moderating role of relationship context on attraction effectiveness. Although relationship context did not interact with sex or

temporal context, it had a significant main effect on women's use of the Enhance Physical Appearance tactic,  $F(7, 160) = 4.78, p < .001$ . Using Tukey's honestly significant different (HSD) test to evaluate the specific effects of relationship context, we found that women were seen as significantly less effective when they targeted men who were married ( $M = 2.93$ ), compared with when women attracted men who were in dating relationships ( $M = 4.41$ ), living together ( $M = 4.33$ ), in long-distance relationships ( $M = 4.50$ ), in relationships that were not committed ( $M = 5.23$ ), or in relationships that were about to end ( $M = 4.45$ ).

Hypothesis 2 led to the prediction that resource-related tactics would be seen as more effective for men when trying to attract someone who is already in a relationship. We found across all relationship contexts that men were judged more effective at using the Demonstrate Resources tactic,  $F(1, 301) = 17.60, p < .001$ , replicating the results of Study 3 and providing further support for Hypothesis 2. Again, relationship context did not interact with sex or temporal context. However, among men, relationship context displayed a significant main effect on this tactic. Using Tukey's HSD, we found that men were judged significantly less effective when they targeted women who were highly committed to their current partner ( $M = 2.71$ ), compared with when women were just beginning their relationship ( $M = 4.35$ ). A second test of Hypothesis 2 came from the tactic Be Generous. We found across all relationship contexts that men were judged more effective at using Be Generous,  $F(1, 301) = 6.82, p < .01$ , providing broader support for Hypothesis 2. Among men, relationship context displayed a significant main effect on this tactic. Using Tukey's HSD, we found that men were seen as significantly less effective when they targeted women who were highly committed to their current partner ( $M = 2.97$ ), compared with when women were about to end their relationship ( $M = 4.67$ ).

Hypothesis 3 suggests that offering low-cost sexual access is most effective for women in the context of short-term mate poaching, because men's short-term mating psychology seems to contain a preference for easy sexual access and partner variety (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt, Shackelford, Duntley, et al., in press). We found across all relationship contexts that women attempting a short-term poach were judged most effective at using easy sexual access tactics. For example, for the tactic Provide Easy Sexual Access, the overall interaction between sex of actor and temporal context was significant,  $F(1, 301) = 21.47, p < .001$ , supporting Hypothesis 3. Women's perceived short-term effectiveness ( $M = 4.85$ ) was notably higher than were women's long-term effectiveness ( $M = 2.75$ ), men's long-term effectiveness ( $M = 2.16$ ), and men's short-term effectiveness ( $M = 3.06$ ) when using the poaching tactic Provide Easy Sexual Access. This pattern of results was also observed for the Suggest Easy Sexual Access,  $F(1, 301) = 6.35, p < .01$ , and the Arrange Easy Sexual Access,  $F(1, 301) = 8.88, p < .01$ , tactics of mate poaching attraction. The findings from Study 4 fully replicate the hypothesis-supportive results of Study 3, providing robust empirical support for the notion that the evolved preferences of one sex are linked to the attraction tactic effectiveness of the opposite sex.

Study 4 examines the potential moderating role of relationship context on attraction effectiveness judgments. Relationship context did not interact with sex or temporal context. However, all three tactics related to Hypothesis 3 displayed a significant main effect of relationship context. Among women in the short-term context,

Table 6

*Does Relationship Context Affect Poaching Attraction Effectiveness Judgments?*

Attraction tactics	Perceived effectiveness of poaching attraction across relationship contexts								<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
	Marital	Dating	Living together	Long distance	Highly committed	Not committed	Just beginning	About to end		
Hypothesis 1: Women's effectiveness using physical appearance-related attraction tactics										
Enhance Physical Appearance									4.78***	7, 160
<i>M</i>	2.93	4.41	4.33	4.50	3.70	5.23	4.07	4.45		
<i>SD</i>	1.43	1.62	1.33	1.34	1.22	0.95	1.73	1.33		
Derogate Rival's Appearance									<i>ns</i>	7, 160
<i>M</i>	1.71	2.82	2.05	1.85	1.95	2.13	2.05	2.30		
<i>SD</i>	1.42	1.59	1.61	1.16	1.48	1.50	1.51	1.71		
Hypothesis 2: Men's effectiveness using a resource-related attraction tactic										
Demonstrate Resources									2.27*	7, 157
<i>M</i>	3.45	3.63	3.06	3.80	2.71	3.65	4.35	3.67		
<i>SD</i>	1.37	1.27	1.47	1.18	1.26	2.09	1.57	1.28		
Be Generous									2.62**	7, 157
<i>M</i>	3.39	4.41	4.32	4.62	2.97	4.38	4.00	4.67		
<i>SD</i>	1.93	1.35	1.72	1.77	1.40	1.85	2.02	1.53		
Hypothesis 3: Women's effectiveness using sexual accessibility attraction tactics in the short-term temporal context										
Provide Easy Sexual Access									8.13***	7, 76
<i>M</i>	3.63	5.30	5.15	5.50	3.43	6.37	4.00	5.33		
<i>SD</i>	1.43	0.75	1.67	0.88	1.21	0.60	1.46	0.69		
Suggest Easy Sexual Access									2.89**	7, 76
<i>M</i>	3.20	4.73	3.94	4.97	3.50	5.23	3.39	4.73		
<i>SD</i>	1.34	1.67	0.77	0.88	1.50	1.68	1.90	1.92		
Arrange Easy Sexual Access									6.46***	7, 76
<i>M</i>	4.47	5.91	4.67	5.87	3.23	6.20	4.88	5.18		
<i>SD</i>	1.54	0.84	1.59	0.80	1.27	0.65	1.41	1.19		
Hypothesis 4: Women's effectiveness using a sexual fidelity-related attraction tactic										
Manipulate Sexual Commitment of Rival									4.34***	7, 160
<i>M</i>	3.13	4.11	4.65	4.92	3.50	4.82	4.08	4.05		
<i>SD</i>	1.49	1.82	1.13	0.88	1.51	1.13	1.28	1.42		
Hypothesis 4: Men's effectiveness using emotional fidelity-related attraction tactics										
Manipulate Emotional Commitment of Rival									3.89***	7, 157
<i>M</i>	4.27	4.89	5.17	5.48	4.60	6.02	4.93	5.25		
<i>SD</i>	1.56	0.97	1.04	1.00	0.93	0.87	1.66	1.46		
Develop Emotional Closeness									2.50*	7, 157
<i>M</i>	4.06	4.89	4.42	4.78	3.62	4.70	5.05	5.06		
<i>SD</i>	1.59	1.21	1.18	1.19	1.60	1.53	1.52	1.73		
Hypothesis 5: Men's effectiveness using a dominance attraction tactic in the short-term temporal context										
Display dominance									<i>ns</i>	7, 74
<i>M</i>	1.95	2.45	1.75	2.75	2.00	2.25	1.65	1.67		
<i>SD</i>	0.60	0.93	0.75	1.39	1.05	1.25	0.85	0.91		

Note. Effectiveness ratings were based on the responses of 115 men and 218 women. All means were rated on scales ranging from *not at all effective* (1) to *very effective* (7).

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

relationship context also had a significant main effect on effectiveness judgments of the Provide Easy Sexual Access tactic. Using Tukey's HSD, we found that it appeared women were perceived as less effective at using Provide Easy Sexual Access when targeting men who were married ( $M = 3.63$ ), compared with when targeting men who were dating ( $M = 5.30$ ). In addition, women were viewed as less effective when poaching men who

were in highly committed relationships ( $M = 3.43$ ), compared with men who were not committed to their relationship ( $M = 6.37$ ). This pattern of relationship context effects was evident across all tactics related to Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 led to the prediction that sexual fidelity tactics would be more effective for women than for men. Across all relationship contexts, women were judged more effective at using

the tactic Manipulate Sexual Commitment of rival,  $F(1, 301) = 12.99, p < .001$ , supporting Hypothesis 4. Among women, relationship context had a significant main effect on Manipulate Sexual Commitment of Rival. Using Tukey's HSD, we found that women were seen as less effective when the targeted men were highly committed ( $M = 3.50$ ) or married ( $M = 3.13$ ), compared with when men were in long-distance relationships ( $M = 4.92$ ).

Hypothesis 4 also led to the prediction that emotional fidelity tactics would be perceived as more effective for men than for women. We found across relationship contexts that men were viewed as more effective at using the tactic Manipulate Emotional Commitment of Rival,  $F(1, 301) = 28.76, p < .001$ , supporting Hypothesis 4. Among men, relationship context had a significant main effect on Manipulate Emotional Commitment of Rival. Using Tukey's HSD, we found that men were perceived as less effective when the targeted women were married ( $M = 4.27$ ), compared with when women were in long-distance relationships ( $M = 5.48$ ) or not committed to their current partners ( $M = 6.02$ ). Men were also seen as more effective than women when using the tactic Develop Emotional Connection,  $F(1, 301) = 6.55, p < .05$ , with a significant effect of relationship context among men. However, according to the Tukey's HSDs, men were seen as especially ineffective when women were highly committed ( $M = 3.62$ ), compared with when women were just beginning ( $M = 5.05$ ) or about to end ( $M = 5.06$ ) their relationship.

Hypothesis 5 led to the prediction that dominance tactics would be most effective for men in the context of short-term mate poaching. Although across all relationship contexts, men were seen as more effective at using the Display Dominance tactic,  $F(1, 301) = 5.01, p < .05$ , there was not a significant interaction of sex and temporal context, nor was there an effect of relationship context on Display Dominance. There was a significant interaction between sex and relationship context,  $F(7, 301) = 2.43, p < .05$ , such that the sex differences in Display Dominance were especially pronounced in long-distance relationships, with men ( $M = 2.03$ ) seen as more effective than women ( $M = 1.43$ ).

**Summary of Study 4.** Certain qualities of targeted relationships have an impact on the effectiveness of poaching attraction tactics. In general, when the targeted mate is in a relationship that is long-distance, not committed, about to end, or that is a dating relationship, poaching attraction is more likely to be effective. When the relationship to be poached is marital, living together, highly committed, or just beginning, poaching attraction is less likely to be effective. The specific role played by relationship context, however, depends on the particular poaching tactic that is used. The findings from Study 4 also provide additional, cross-relationship support for evolutionary hypotheses. Women were viewed as more effective when using physical-appearance-related tactics; men were judged more effective when using resource-related tactics. In the short-term context, women were seen as more effective when using attraction tactics involving easy sexual access. Manipulations of fidelity supported the hypothesis that men and women most effectively obtain poaching opportunities by using tactics that harmonize with the mating desires of the opposite sex (Schmitt & Buss, 1996).

## General Discussion

Across four studies of human mate poaching, we found that attracting someone who is already in a relationship is both a

common and a distinct form of romantic attraction. In Study 1, we found it common for people to have tried to romantically attract someone who is already in a relationship. The psychological characteristics of mate poachers, however, were distinctly different from the characteristics of those who engaged in general romantic attraction. In Study 2, we found that people pursue already-mated others for many of the same reasons they pursue mates in general but that human mate poaching seems to have several special costs associated that are not present in general romantic attraction. In Study 3, we found that sex and temporal context moderate mate poaching effectiveness judgments in ways that are supportive of evolutionary theories but that the overall effectiveness of mate poaching is weaker than general romantic attraction. In Study 4, we found that the context of the relationship that is being poached—marital, dating, long distance, about to end, and so forth—can have a strong effect on the perceived effectiveness of specific mate poaching tactics, an effect that has been largely neglected because of its irrelevance to general romantic attraction.

Before discussing the results in further detail, however, several limitations of the current set of studies should be noted. First, the samples we used were primarily undergraduate students. A number of studies suggest that many undergraduates do form long-term mating relationships, with roughly 50% of college undergraduates in enduring relationships at any one point in time (Buss et al., 1992; see also results from Study 1). Indeed, a case can be made that issues of mate poaching are more prevalent among undergraduates than among other samples. Even so, future research could profitably explore differences in poaching attraction among older and more diverse samples. Some studies suggest that men are most jealous and vigilant about potential poachers when married to young and attractive women (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a), indicating that young married couples would be an ideal sample to study issues of mate poaching. On the other hand, actual rates of infidelity appear to rise among women in their mid-30s (Baker & Bellis, 1995), suggesting that sexual desertions (which may reflect successful short-term mate poaching attraction) are more common in later stages of adulthood. Samples of different age ranges could help to explore these important developmental dimensions of poaching attraction.

A second limitation of the current study is that it merely assessed the perceived effectiveness of various mate poaching tactics. This is based on the assumption that the reported perceptions of mate poaching attraction effectiveness for men and women in the short-term and long-term contexts are reasonably veridical in representing actual tactic effectiveness. Establishing veridicality would be an extraordinarily difficult task, given that mate poaching is often conducted clandestinely, rendering observational studies all but impossible to conduct. Nonetheless, reports by successful mate poachers as well as those who have been lured by mate poaching may be one step toward providing convergent evidence of the current judgments of perceived effectiveness. We found that using a focus group strategy in Study 2 yielded more diverse features of mate poaching motivations than we would have otherwise accumulated. Assessing actual affective reactions to tactical attraction attempts in laboratory experiments (e.g., Schmitt, Couden, & Baker, in press) or capitalizing on social-psychological principles such as contrast effects (e.g., Kenrick, Neuberg, Zierk,

& Krones, 1994) would also help establish the veridicality of sex and context effects in poaching attraction.

A third limitation is that the current studies undoubtedly underestimate the real-life subtlety and complexity of mate poaching attraction. We anticipate that some strategies of mate poaching involve insidious manipulations of the targeted mate's opinions of his or her current mate, planting subtle seeds of dissatisfaction in the targeted mate, skillfully befriending the regular mate so as to gain access to his or her partner, influencing others in the social network and kin group of the targeted mate, and other tactics difficult to capture with any existing methods in the behavioral sciences. Because the current assessment of tactics involved single acts of mate poaching, we may have underestimated the effectiveness of the temporally extended, sequential deployment of poaching strategies. Furthermore, we did not fully address the relationship status of the mate poacher. Poaching attraction may vary depending on whether the mate poacher is single or already in a relationship. Although we examined poaching attraction from multiple psychological perspectives, the interpersonal complexity of human mate poaching attraction leaves much work to be done.

### *Mate Poaching Frequency and Personal Characteristics*

With these limitations in mind, several tentative conclusions can be drawn from the current set of studies. First, poaching-related romantic attraction is a relatively frequent event. Over 50% of participants reported making romantic attempts at poaching another person, and around 80% reported receiving attraction attempts on themselves or their partners while in a romantic relationship. The current studies also suggest that poaching attempts succeed in a nontrivial percentage of cases. Over 35% of men and women reported that others have experienced at least some success at attracting them away from a current partner. Around 10% of participants said others were more than moderately successful at poaching them away from a past partner, and over 25% of the participants reported that they have endured having a past partner taken away from them. These two findings are in accord with results from larger studies of infidelity (Wiederman, 1997). In sum, initial analyses of poaching attraction frequency suggest that it has been and continues to be a prevalent aspect of romantic dynamics, an aspect largely ignored in the attraction literature.

Second, there are distinct profiles of personal characteristics associated with different roles in the process of mate poaching. Those who poach tend to describe themselves as relatively mean, unreliable, adulterous, and erotophilic, whereas sexy and adulterous people apparently have the most success in mate poaching. Those who had poaching attempts made on themselves are relatively high on Extraversion and Openness (i.e., sensation seeking) and are self-described as sexy, adulterous, and loving. The finding that sexy people receive more poaching attempts evokes the question of what social processes people use in selecting their targets for poaching. Some people may simply find sexy people alluring, whereas others may wait for sexually proceptive behaviors (e.g., prolonged eye contact) before attempting a mate poach. It seems likely that the desires and behaviors of the person being poached play as important a role as the desires and behaviors of the poacher do (Schmitt, 2001).

Indeed, those who acquiesced to past poaching attempts have a very different psychological profile than do those who received more poaching attempts. Those who were successfully poached rated themselves as relatively mean, unreliable, neurotic, adulterous, masculine, erotophilic, and unloving. Although loving people received more poaching attempts, those who are relatively unloving went along with the poach. It is interesting that all five factors of the Big Five are involved in receiving poaching attempts but play different roles in the process of poaching. Those high on Extraversion and Openness receive more poaching attempts, possibly because others think these traits are desirable or lead to more effective poaching forays. Those low on Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and high on Neuroticism reported being more successfully poached.

The finding that people with relatively high levels of neuroticism are more successfully poached highlights the need to further explore how personality traits might play a moderating role in poaching. Is it the case that people high in neuroticism are more likely to go along with poaching because they are in some ways antisocial (Harpur, Hart, & Hare, 1994)? Is it that people high in neuroticism reside in and possibly create particularly unstable romantic relationships (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1997), in which case their current mates may be less vigilant than others about retaining their partner (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a)? Future research needs to place personality and sexuality traits within causal models of relationship satisfaction, mate retention, mate poaching, and relationship duration. These initial psychological profiles of mate poachers and the poached may provide important footholds for mounting future studies on individual differences and processes of human mate poaching.

### *Tactics and Strategies of Human Mate Poaching*

We uncovered a rich motivational taxonomy of perceived benefits and costs to romantic attraction that were embedded in the special context of mate poaching. For example, sexual variety, beauty acquisition, and enjoying a lack of responsibility are seen as unique benefits that men receive from attracting someone who is already in a relationship. Such benefits would be less likely to accrue when men romantically attract unmated women. In contrast, resource depletion, concerns over women's future infidelity, and increased risk for disease are all key costs for men seeking a poaching relationship. Key benefits for women are resource acquisition, gaining an already proven mate, and gaining revenge on a rival. Key costs for women are concerns of infidelity by the man, self-degradation, and worries of unwanted pregnancy. Many of these features represent unique problems and opportunities encountered only within the special context of human mate poaching.

Most evolution-based hypotheses about poaching effectiveness were strongly supported. Men were judged to more effectively lure women away from their current partners when demonstrating the ability and willingness to devote resources, when they manipulated the perceived emotional commitment of their rival, and when they dominated their male rival. In contrast, women were seen as effectively attracting men away from partners when they enhanced their appearance and when they enhanced the man's ego, and when they desired short-term poaches women were effective at providing easy sexual access to men. Overall, the evolutionary perspective provided heuristic and predictive value, and the results support the hypothesis that men and women confront different adaptive

problems in short-term as contrasted with long-term mating contexts (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

Schmitt (2001) has documented that the special ways people entice others into making poach attempts or signal openness to would-be poachers also follow an evolutionarily predicted pattern across sex and temporal context. For example, offering sexual access and physical beauty are viewed as especially effective for women who desire to be attracted away from their partners, whereas demonstrating resources and being generous are thought effective for men who seek to be poached. Unique to mate poaching enticement, several tactics were considered especially effective if they involved the current relationship partner. Inviting meddling in the current relationship and mentioning that one's current partner derogates oneself were seen as particularly effective for women to entice men into attracting them away from a romantic relationship. These key enticement tactics corroborate other research on promoting sexual encounters (Greer & Buss, 1994).

It might be expected that the partners of individuals who seek to be poached take action to guard against mate poaching attraction and enticement tactics. Buss and Shackelford (1997a) found that men were more likely to guard their current mates by displaying resources and physically threatening intrasexual rivals, whereas women were more likely to enhance their own appearance and verbally show signs of partner possession to thwart mate poaching attempts. Schmitt (2001) followed up on these findings and sought to identify the special ways that people disguise the fact that they are enticing others into making mate poach attempts, thereby overcoming acts of mate guarding. Increasing sexual frequency and discounting physical appearance tactics were especially effective for women who desire to hide their poaching desires, whereas increasing resources and emotional commitment toward a partner were effective for men who sought to hide mate poaching enticement. Unique to poaching enticement disguise, several of the tactics considered effective for women involved lying about oneself and one's relationships. These features may be designed to overcome some of the potent costs to women of poaching enticement, such as incurring the violence associated with male jealousy (Buss, 2000).

## Conclusions

One index of the importance of the phenomenon of mate poaching is the amount of effort people devote to guarding their mates (Buss & Shackelford, 1997a). It is exceedingly unlikely that energetically expensive efforts at mate guarding would emerge in the absence of real or possible encroachment threats from rivals. Those who seek desirable mates often must resort to attempts to lure them away from existing relationships, either for a transient sexual liaison or for a more enduring, long-term relationship. The psychology of mate poaching and the psychology of mate retention thus coevolved, each placing constraints on the other, each influencing which tactics are effective at achieving their respective goals. The current studies provide a first attempt to locate mate poaching within the broader matrix of human mating strategies.

This research makes several novel contributions to the study of human mating and romantic attraction. First, it provides a systematic exploration of a perspective of romantic attraction that has thus far received little attention in the mating literature—the perspective of human mate poachers. This may seem especially astonishing, given that our studies show that mate poaching occurs

relatively frequently and that a majority of men and women in our sample have experienced it in some form. Nevertheless, this research is the first to our knowledge to look at the confluence of infidelity and romantic attraction from the perspective of the poacher. Second, this research theoretically distinguishes several unique “design features” or “subproblems” associated with mate poaching that differentiate it from other aspects of romantic attraction. The problems of avoiding costs inflicted by the regular mate and providing benefits that exceed the costs of breaking up, for example, are unique to the context of mate poaching. Third, we provide an initial empirical sketch of the individual-differences psychology of mate poaching, the distinctive personality and sexuality trends associated with being a successful mate poacher and with succumbing to being poached. Fourth, we uncover key costs and benefits that men and women consider in the context of short-term and long-term mate poaching. Finally, the current studies provide empirical support for several evolution-based hypotheses about the perceived effectiveness of poaching attraction tactics when used by men and women.

In human societies, at any given point in time, many of the most desirable potential partners are already mated. That fact does not deter some people from attempting to lure desirable mates away from their existing partners, either for casual sex or for a new long-term union. Nor does it always deter the already-mated from sending signals suggesting their openness to encroachment. The current studies locate mate poaching among the pantheon of human mating strategies. In so doing, they take us one step closer to understanding the hidden agendas and temporally contingent complexities that lie beneath the surface of human social interaction.

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## Appendix A

### Reliability of 18 Potential Benefits and 15 Potential Costs of Human Mate Poaching

Scale, no. of items, and example item	$\alpha$
18 potential benefits of mate poaching	
Always Have Time Off (2 items): He will only have to "look good" some of the time.	.77
Enjoy Lack of Responsibility (2 items): She will be free from having to be totally responsible for him.	.89
Enjoy Quality Love (3 items): It may be the only way he can be with the woman he loves.	.71
Enjoy Sexual Variety (2 items): She will love the sexual variety it adds to her life.	.91
Experience Romantic Learning (3 items): He will learn how to have a really good romantic relationship with a woman.	.84
Experience Wanted Pregnancy (3 items): She will be able to get pregnant.	.80
Develop a Special Friendship (2 items): He will form a special bond with her.	.92
Gain Esteem From Others (1 item): Others will think more of her for having attracted him.	
Gain Partner With Physical Beauty (3 items): He will be able to obtain a beautiful relationship partner this way.	.88
Gain Partner With Resource Ability (2 items): It is a good way for her to obtain a rich relationship partner.	.81
Have Passionate Sex (3 items): It is a good way for him to have passionate sex.	.86
Have Ready Mate (1 item): She will have a man "ready to go" if she decides to get married.	
Nice Trips (2 items): He will enjoy going on nice trips with her.	.80
Personal Growth (3 items): She may become a more mature and independent person as a result of the relationship.	.79
Preapproved Mate (2 items): He will enjoy her because she has already proven the capability of attracting someone.	.53
Receive Resources (3 items): She will like receiving gifts from him.	.81
Revenge Against a Rival (1 item): He can get back at another man by mating with his woman.	
Take Pride in Conquest (2 items): She will feel good about herself because of her mating success.	.87
15 potential costs of mate poaching	
Dating Isolation (2 items): He won't like having to hide when on dates with her.	.70
Deception Issues (2 items): She will not like having to lie all of the time.	.55
Ethical Concerns (3 items): He will dishonor himself by violating the "code" of not stealing other men's partners.	.74
Family Rejection (2 items): If they ever became a real couple, her family would hate him.	.76
Fear of Physical Danger (3 items): The current mate may kill him for trying to attract her.	.61
Friendship Problems (2 items): His friends will get less time with him than she does.	.74
Future Infidelity Concerns (2 items): If he fools around with her, he may be unfaithful to his future relationships.	.63
Guilt Feelings (3 items): She will feel incredibly guilty about hurting his current partner.	.72
Increased Disease Risk (1 item): He will be at a heightened risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases.	
Ready Competition (2 items): With two partners in the picture, there will be ready competition against her.	.52
Resource Depletion (3 items): He will worry about the financial cost of having the relationship.	.73
Self-Degradation (2 items): She will feel like she is committing prostitution.	.53
Status and Reputation Concerns (3 items): He will worry about losing his job.	.64
Uncertain Future (2 items): She may never obtain him for real, and she will have wasted the best years of her life.	.80
Unwanted Pregnancy (1 item): He may get her pregnant and be forced to help raise an unwanted child.	

*Note.* Cost and benefit judgments were based on the responses of 45 men (23 rating male poachers and 22 rating female poachers) and 91 women (51 rating male poachers and 40 rating female poachers). Means were rated on scales ranging from -3 (*an extreme cost*) to 3 (*an extreme benefit*), with 0 as a neutral point (*neither a cost nor benefit*). Empty cells indicate that the reliability is not applicable to a one-item tactic. The pronouns in the appendix alternate between male and female attraction actors. In the actual measures, the independent variable of gender varied between subjects.

## Appendix B

## Reliability of Human Mate Poaching Attraction Tactics Across Two Studies

Tactic, no. of items, and example act	Average Cronbach's $\alpha$	
	Study 3	Study 4
<u>Arrange Easy Sexual Access (4 items)</u> He appears naked in potential mate's room or car.	.69	.83
<u>Be Generous (5 items)</u> She shows that she is a caring person.	.85	.88
<u>Break Up Their Relationship (3 items in Study 3, 4 items in Study 4)</u> He encourages the involved parties to break up.	.56	.80
<u>Demonstrate Resources (4 items)</u> She spends money on potential mate.	.68	.83
<u>Derogate Rival (3 items)</u> He points out the present mate's bad points.	.68	.86
<u>Derogate Rival's Physical Appearance (1 item in Study 3, 2 items in Study 4)</u> She puts down the appearance of her rival.		.89
<u>Develop Emotional Connection (3 items)</u> He confides in potential mate to get her closer to him.	.71	.86
<u>Develop Social Ties (4 items)</u> She attempts to get his peer group to like her.	.53	.80
<u>Display Dominance (2 items)</u> He dominates his rival in athletic events.	.42	.49
<u>Enhance Physical Appearance (2 items)</u> She improves her looks and appearance.	.48	.81
<u>Enhance Potential Mate (3 items)</u> He boosts her ego.	.53	.81
<u>Get Mate Drunk (1 item)</u> She gets the potential mate drunk and then takes advantage of him.		
<u>Manipulate Emotional Commitment of Rival (4 items)</u> He shows an emotional side that her current mate does not express.	.64	.82
<u>Manipulate Sexual Commitment of Rival (4 items)</u> She tries to prove that her rival is cheating on him.	.75	.78
<u>Provide Easy Sexual Access (4 items)</u> He offers her sex.	.69	.85
<u>Suggest Easy Sexual Access (6 items)</u> She acts sexy around potential mate.	.75	.90
<u>Temporal Invasion (5 items)</u> He changes his schedule so that he sees her more than present mate.	.79	.94
<u>Use Humor (2 items)</u> She is funny.	.82	.94
<u>Wait Around (1 item)</u> He waits around and is there when they break up.		

*Note.* Reliability analyses in Study 3 were based on the responses of 150 men and 217 women. Reliability analyses in Study 4 were based on the responses of 115 men and 218 women. All acts were rated on scales ranging from *not at all effective* (1) to *very effective* (7). Empty cells indicate that the reliability is not applicable to a one-item tactic. The pronouns in the appendix alternate between male and female attraction actors. In actual measures, the independent variable of gender varied between subjects.

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