

SELF-PERCEIVED SUCCESS IN MATE POACHING: HOW A COUPLE'S ATTRACTIVENESS AND RELATIONSHIP DURATION IMPACT MEN'S SHORT-TERM POACHING INTENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated how the effects of a discrepancy in the attractiveness of the members of a couple and how long the couple has been in the relationship effect poaching decisions. Heterosexual men (N = 222) saw a photo where the man was more attractive than the woman, both were equally attractive, or the woman was more attractive than the man. Accompanying the photos were three different descriptions regarding the couple's relationship duration (2 months, 4 years, or 8 years). Items were then presented regarding the attractiveness of the couple and poaching attempts. The 2-month couple, where the woman is more attractive than the man, was expected to be more likely to be selected for poaching of the woman. Also, attractiveness discrepancy and relationship duration main effects were expected where, in general, the couple where the woman is more attractive than the man would be more likely to be a mate poaching target, and long-duration couples, were expected to be less likely to be mate poaching targets. Results revealed that, contrary to prior survey research on mate poaching, when a couple is equal in attractiveness and when the woman is more attractive than the man, participants indicate they would have more success poaching the woman in the couple.

Keywords: *mate poaching, couple's attractiveness, assortative mating, relationship duration, couple's discrepancy.*

INTRODUCTION

Mate poaching involves a suite of behaviors intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship, away from their current partner (Schmitt & Buss, 2001). It is a cross-cultural phenomenon (Schmitt, 2004). Research suggests that 30-50% of individuals report having tried to poach an individual from their current romantic partner (Davies, Shackelford, & Hass, 2007). Thus, there are evolved tactics which makes mate poaching a successful mating strategy.

Mate Poaching Tactics

Mate poaching tactics tend to involve strategic planning for infiltrating a relationship. One strategy is to form opposite-sex friendships to get close to the desired mate. Research suggests that men are more likely to start an opposite-sex friendship to gain sexual access (Bleske & Buss, 2000), and forming opposite-sex friendships are perceived as being a successful way for mate poachers to also gain sexual access (Mogilski & Wade, 2013). Research using an act nomination approach supports this claim. Specifically, acts such as being attentive, complimenting her, and spending time together, are perceived as the most effective acts for a short-term mate poach (Moran & Wade, 2017). However, there are also crucial factors regarding the couple's relationship that influence the poacher's decision to mate poach.

Duration of the Couple's Relationship

One crucial factor involved in mate poaching is how long the couple has been in a committed relationship. Schmitt and Buss (2001) report that newly formed couples are more likely to be targeted of a poach compared to married or long-duration couples. Their conclusion was reached by asking participants to rate how difficult it would be for someone to poach members of various types of couples. Participants indicated that the easiest couple to poach was the couple whose relationship was described as newly formed, and recent research suggests that married couples are more difficult to poach (Davies & Shackelford, 2015; 2017). Therefore, the duration of a couple's relationship should play a role in a poacher's decision of whether to try to infiltrate the couple.

The attractiveness of the members of a couple is a characteristic that may also play a role in a poacher's decision of whether to infiltrate the couple. Buss (2006) suggested that the evolutionary drive to mate with someone attractive could be why mate poaching evolved as a strategy - to gain access to desirable mates who may already be taken. Therefore, attractiveness also needs to be considered in mate poaching research.

Attractiveness Between Partners

Individuals tend to choose long-term mates who have a similar level of physical attractiveness. This selection process is called "the matching hypothesis" (Berscheid et al., 1971) or "assortative mating" (Watson et al., 2004). In attempts to tease apart the influence of attractiveness on the formation of relationships, Feingold (1988) compared the correlation of attractiveness between romantic partners with the correlation of attractiveness between friends and found that the correlation was higher between romantic partners than between friends. This indicates that attractiveness is a trait that is

more common in the formation of a romantic partnership than in the formation of a friendship.

However, individuals do not always mate with someone equal in attractiveness to themselves. Bar-Tal and Saxe (1976) report that when participants rated couples who had discrepancies in attractiveness, specifically, when the woman was more attractive than her male partner, both men and women participants attributed the possession of admirable, successful qualities and better-paying jobs to the woman's hypothetical partner. The authors suggest these ratings were assigned in order for individuals to be able to explain the discrepancy in attractiveness among the members of a couple. This research suggests that when a couple is composed of members who are not equal in attractiveness levels, other men and women in the environment notice this discrepancy. Therefore, since other men and women have the ability to notice this discrepancy in attractiveness, issues in the relationship may arise.

Discrepancy within a Couple

When couples are not similar in attractiveness, various behaviors are implemented to compensate for the discrepancies in their attractiveness. When a woman is more attractive than her mate, she is more likely to resist mate-guarding tactics, and reports being less committed to her mate. Moreover, when women rate themselves as more attractive than their mates, they tend to also be more open to dating other men, and to flirting with other men when they are in a relationship (Fugère, Cousins, & MacLaren, 2015).

This discrepancy affects the mate retention efforts of her partner, such as, individuals who have a discrepancy in mate value with their partner performs more frequent mate retentive behaviors (Sela et al., 2017). Furthermore, women who rate themselves as more attractive than their mate report a higher number of mate retention tactics (Haselton & Gangestad, 2006). This suggests that men enact their mate retention behaviors based on the attractiveness of their female partner. This coincides with research where independent judges rate the attractiveness of a couple, as opposed to the individuals in the couple doing the rating, suggesting a similar pattern with respect to mate retention (Oltmanns, Markey, & French, 2016).

The dissimilarity in a couple's attractiveness has received attention in relation to men's perceived intentions to mate poach (Moran, Kuhle, Wade, & Seid, 2017). Specifically, when men are presented with a photo of a woman, paired with an attractive, an unattractive, and moderately attractive man, they tend to state they would infiltrate the relationship when the man is less attractive than the woman (Moran et al., 2017). The current project aims to build upon the experimental evidence obtained by Moran et al.

PRESENT STUDY

This research aims to understand further how the interaction between similarities and dissimilarities in the attractiveness of members a couple, and the duration of a couple's relationship affect a man's perceived success in infiltrating that couple.

First aim

The first aim of this project is to replicate the findings from Moran and colleagues (2017) systematically. Moran and colleagues (2017) utilized a within-subjects design, and the participants were presented with a forced-choice task. Although forced-choice is beneficial in psychological research (see., Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2000), the current study utilizes a between-subjects design to assess causality.

Instead of viewing two separate photos of a man and a woman, this research attempted to create more ecological validity, presenting the man and the woman sitting next to each other with the man's arm around the woman, and the woman's hand on the man's lap. This change in the methodology should introduce greater ecological validity since participants are more likely to encounter a couple sitting on a bench than they are to have three heads presented to them (Aronson, Wilson, & Brewer, 1998). By positioning the man and woman in this manner, the researchers are conveying that this is a real couple.

In Moran et al., (2017) the researchers asked heterosexual men to rate which couple they would be most likely to infiltrate, and which couple another man would most likely infiltrate. In the current project, men are asked if they would infiltrate the couple they are presented with, and how successful they would be at infiltrating this couple. This was done to determine how the degree of congruency in attractiveness between members of the couple affects the participants' perceived success in infiltrating the couple.

Second aim

As mentioned previously, one factor that has been studied extensively in mate poaching is the duration of the relationship that the poacher may choose to infiltrate. The second aim of this study is to experimentally investigate how the duration of a couple's relationship affects a man's likelihood of trying to poach the woman in the relationship. The current study will experimentally investigate how the duration of the couple's relationship and the degree of attractiveness congruency between members of the couple affect the poacher's decision to infiltrate the couple.

Hypotheses

There are four hypotheses for the current project. First, we hypothesized that the greater the extent to which the man is less attractive than the woman, the more likely are participants to attempt to infiltrate the relationship. Second, we hypothesized that the shorter the duration of the relationship, the more likely are participants to attempt to infiltrate the relationship. Third, the greater the extent to which the man is less attractive than the woman, the more likely are participants to perceive themselves as successfully infiltrating the relationship.

Finally, the shorter the duration of the relationship, the more likely are participants to perceive themselves as successfully infiltrating the relationship.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were undergraduate men from a university in the northeastern United States, or from *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Craigslist*. They consisted of 222 heterosexual men, aged 18-62, $M = 23.82$, $SD = 9.51$. Participants were 81.5% White, 5% Black, 6.3% Asian, 3.6% Latinx, .5% Native American, and 3.2% Other. When asked about their prior sexual history, 85.1% of the sample reported having been in a sexual relationship. Over half of the sample (55.9%) reported being single. A third of the sample (33.8%) stated that they had tried to sleep with a woman whom they knew was already in a committed relationship with another man, which is consistent with research from Davies, Shackelford, and Hass (2007), who found that 30% of individuals stated they had tried to poach before.

Materials and procedures

The participants received an email with a link to the survey, or they found the link on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, or *Craigslist*. When the participants accessed the link, they were first presented with an informed consent statement. They then were directed to a demographic questionnaire. Participants were then asked if they had ever tried to hookup (had sexual intercourse) with a girl, whom they knew was in a long-duration committed relationship. This question utilized a forced choice, yes or no option. Next, they were directed to the randomized stimuli which consisted of only one of three photos.

Participants were randomly presented with a photo of a man and a woman sitting on a bench. The man in the photo had his arm around the woman (see Figure 1.1-1.3). The individuals in the photo previously had their attractiveness rated by a separate sample of 30 heterosexual men. However, all three photos included the same woman ($M_{\text{Female}} = 4.46$). One photo consisted of the woman with a less attractive man ($M_{\text{Unattractive Male}} = 3.31$). Another photo portrayed the woman with a man of equal attractiveness ($M_{\text{Moderate Male}} = 4.46/10$), and the last photo consisted of the woman with a man who was more attractive than her ($M_{\text{Attractive Male}} = 6.08$). As mentioned previously, the photos had been rated on a scale from 0 (not at all attractive) – 10 (extremely attractive), and were rated significantly different from one another. The discrepancy between the unattractive man, and the moderate man was significant, $t(58) = 2.78$, $p = .007$, the unattractive man, and the attractive man was significant, $t(58) = 5.8$, $p = .0001$, and the moderate man and attractive man was statistically significant, $t(58) = 3.48$, $p = .0001$. The photos were taken using a Canon Vixia HFS -200 HD camcorder 79 inches away from the stimulus couple and were all taken on the same day. Participants saw only one of the three photos.



Figure 1.1: Man is less attractive than the woman in the photo.



Figure 1.2: Man is equal in attractiveness to the woman in the photo.



Figure 1.3: Man is more attractive than the woman in the photo.

The woman in each photo was of average attractiveness. Having a female of average attractiveness, allowed for an easy manipulation of the attractiveness discrepancy within the couple. Since individuals are able to point out a discrepancy in couples, it was important to be able to capture different combinations (Bar-Tal & Saxe, 1976). Having a woman of average attractiveness as a stimulus provides the benefit of allowing men to be able to realistically think they could infiltrate the relationship. If the woman was extremely attractive, men may feel deterred from infiltrating the relationship because they may perceive this extremely attractive woman as out of their league. This “out of my league” mentality has been experimentally tested in prior research and the results suggest that most men are of average attractiveness, and thus will not seek out a woman who is “out of their league” in attractiveness (Taylor, Fiore, Mendelsohn, & Cheshire, 2011).

Accompanying the photos were three randomized descriptions describing the couple’s relationship duration. Two months was chosen as the duration for the “short-term” couple since prior research shows that men tend to have sex after 9-11 dates, which could be done in a 2-month period (Cohen & Shotland, 1996). Additionally, the couple was described as: “they have been together for 2 months,” rather than as dating. Thus; participants should assume they are just starting out as a new couple, not dating. Four years was chosen as the median duration since research suggests that relationships tend to end and be most unhappy after four years because that may represent our early human

ancestor's mating strategy (Fisher, 2016). Eight years was chosen as the "long-term" duration condition because 7-8 years is the average number of years of marriage before divorce occurs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009) and when the seven-year itch occurs (Fisher, 2016). Thus the, three descriptions of the couple's relationship duration stated "This is Sally and Joe. They have been together for 2 months, 4 years, or 8 years."

Next, participants were asked to rate how attractive the man and the woman in the photo were using a scale from 1 (Very Unattractive) to 10 (Very Attractive). Participants were also asked whether they would like to have sex with the woman in the photo for a one-time, commitment-free sexual hookup. The participants then answered a forced-choice yes or no question. A forced-choice item was implemented due to the real-world representation, it holds during human mating. Shackelford, Buss, and Bennett (2000) argue that a forced-choice measure allows researchers to study differences in a realistic manner that may otherwise not be possible.

The participants were then asked, "How successful would you be at infiltrating this relationship, i.e., taking the woman away from the man in the photo, for a one-time commitment-free sexual hookup." This measure utilized a scale of 0 (Not at all Successful) to 10 (Very Successful). Participants were then debriefed.

RESULTS

A 3 (Duration of the relationship) x 3 (Discrepancy in attractiveness) Mixed Model repeated measures MANOVA was performed to examine the difference between groups for the male in the photo's attractiveness, the female in the photo's attractiveness, and how successful the participant would be at poaching from the couple. The MANOVA revealed a significant effect for the photo of the couple, $F(6, 414) = 10.70, p = .0001, \eta^2 = .134$. However, there was no significant effect for the duration of the relationship $F(6, 414) = .691, p = .657, \eta^2 = .010$., Additionally, the interaction between the discrepancy in attractiveness of the members of couple and duration of the relationship was not significant, $F(12, 547) = .750, p = .703, \eta^2 = .014$.

Univariates that accompanied the significant multivariate effect for the photo of the couple, revealed no significant effect for the female's attractiveness $F(2, 218) = .438, p = .648, \eta^2 = .004$. The average ratings for the female with her various partners were: when the male is less attractive ($M = 4.93, SD = 1.68$), when the couple is equal ($M = 4.68, SD = 1.61$), and when the female is less attractive than the male ($M = 4.94, SD = 1.84$).

However, univariate tests accompanying the significant multivariate effect for the photo of the couple revealed that there was a significant difference for the attractiveness of the male in the photo, $F(2, 218) = 21.84, p = .0001, \eta^2 = .173$, see Table 1.

Table 1: Male Attractiveness Ratings.

Stimuli	Total M(SD)
Male < Female	4.17 (1.56)
Male = Female	5.34 (1.61)
Male >Female	5.88 (1.58)

Note. Higher numbers mean more attractive, standard deviations are in parentheses.

A post-hoc Tukey test, revealed that perceptions of the man who is more attractive than the woman in the photo and the man who was equal to the woman in the photo, were not statistically different ($p = .102$). However, the man who less attractive than the woman in the photo was perceived as different from the other two men. Means were as follows: when the male was less attractive ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.56$), when the couple is equal ($M = 5.34, SD = 1.61$), and when the female is less attractive than the male ($M = 5.88, SD = 1.58$). Table 1 shows that the man in each condition was rated consistent with the attractiveness condition they were presented in. That is, the unattractive man was rated as less attractive than the woman, the equal in attractiveness man was rated the same as the woman, and the more attractive man was rated as more attractive than the woman.

Univariate tests associated with the significant multivariate effect for the photo also revealed that participants self-perceived success in poaching was also rated differently based on the photo condition, $F(2, 218) = 4.10, p = .018, \eta^2 = .038$, see Table 2, for descriptive statistics.

Table 2: Mean ratings of “How successful would you be in infiltrating this couple?”

Stimuli	Total M(SD)
Male < Female	3.14 (2.89)
Male = Female	3.96 (3.08)
Male >Female	2.59 (2.95)

Note. Higher numbers mean more success in infiltrating the couple, standard deviations are in parentheses.

A post-hoc Tukey test indicated that the man who was equal to the female in attractiveness was perceived as significantly different from the man who was more attractive than the woman ($p = .017$); however, the man who was equal in attractiveness to the female and the male who was less attractive than the female were not perceived as significantly different ($p = .22$). Furthermore, the man who was more attractive than the woman was not perceived significantly different from the man who less attractive than

the woman ($p = .515$). Overall, Table 2 shows that participants rated the couple that was equal in attractiveness as the couple they would be most successful at infiltrating.

A χ^2 was calculated comparing the frequencies of the participants' ratings for the question asking if they would like to have sex with the woman across the three discrepancies in attractiveness conditions, and across the 3 relationship duration conditions. There was no significant effect for attractiveness discrepancies, $\chi^2 (221) = 1.47$, $p = .479$, and no significant effect for relationship durations, $\chi^2 (221) = 1.23$, $p = .543$.

DISCUSSION

This research investigated whether heterosexual men's decisions to infiltrate a relationship are affected by the discrepancy in attractiveness among the members of the couple and the duration of the relationship of the targeted couple. An interaction between the discrepancy in attractiveness and relationship duration was predicted such that when the woman in the couple was more attractive than the man and their relationship duration was 2 months, they would be more likely to be selected as a poaching target. This hypothesis was not supported.

Regarding the duration of the couple's relationship, it was hypothesized that the long-duration couple (8 years) would be less likely to be chosen as a mate poaching target. However, the duration of the relationship had no significant effect on poaching decisions. These findings are not consistent with prior research which found that participants rate couples who are in long-duration committed relationships or married as being more difficult to infiltrate (Schmitt & Buss, 2001), and as more resistant to poachers (Davies & Shackelford, 2015, 2017).

Although prior research specifies that poachers tend to go for relationships that are newly formed (Schmitt & Buss, 2001), other research specifies that infidelity can occur at any stage of a relationship (Shackelford, Besser, & Goetz, 2008). Therefore, mate poachers may target both a long-term or a short-term relationship. In the present research, the poacher's neglect of the couple's current relationship duration could be due to the wording utilized. Since the participants were told it would be a one-time sexual hookup, men may not care how long the couple has been together since the sexual encounter is a one-time deal. Therefore, it seems that the duration of the couple's relationship does not affect the decision to poach, or how the couple is perceived by the poacher for a one-time sexual hookup.

It was also predicted that when the woman was more attractive than her partner the participants would indicate higher frequencies of mate poaching from this couple. This hypothesis was not supported. Results revealed that our pilot ratings for the individuals in the couples were consistent. Since the woman was the same in each photo, there should be no difference between her ratings, and which was found. However, there was a difference in the man's attractiveness, because the man was different in each photo. These results indicate that the participants were not relying on the female's absolute attractiveness; rather, the participants were focusing on the relative rating of the man and woman. Prior research suggests that even when a woman is rated as unattractive, men

would still choose to poach her if her romantic partner was more unattractive than she is (Moran et al., 2017).

Although the results revealed that the manipulation of the man's attractiveness was effective the participants did indicate that they would be successful in poaching the woman in the couple where the man was less attractive than the woman; however, they did not choose the couple where the man was more attractive than the woman either. Instead, they chose the couple that was equal in attractiveness as the most likely target. These findings are consistent with earlier research conducted by Moran et al., (2017), which found that men say they would poach a woman who was more attractive than her partner. However, these findings add new evidence that men may also be willing to poach a woman from a couple who is equal to one another in attractiveness. There are several reasons why the results of the present research do not comport with the results of the earlier research.

The first could be the difference in the methodology employed in the studies. The current research utilized more ecologically valid and realistic couples, depicting an actual couple sitting with one another rather than quasi-couples where the man and the woman are photographed separately as Moran et al., (2017) utilized. Additionally, the description of the relationship in the present research did not indicate the couple was married as was done in prior research. The concept of "Married couple" may convey a greater bond than "They have been together for 8 years." However, as mentioned previously, 8 years was chosen because it is the national average of years of marriage before divorce occurs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

The second reason that men were more likely to choose to poach from the couple that was equal in attractiveness compared to the couple where the woman was more attractive than the man could be due to the participant's mating intelligence (Geher & Kaufman, 2013) and understanding that there is a discrepancy in the attractiveness between the members of the couple. As previously mentioned, when participants rated couples where the woman was more attractive than the man, the participants rated the man as having extremely beneficial qualities (Bar-Tal & Saxe, 1976). This suggests that the participants were compensating for the discrepancy in attractiveness among the members of the couple by attributing better qualities to the man in this couple than to the man in the couples who were equal in attractiveness.

Consistent with the concept of mating intelligence these individuals may be very aware of how to accurately perceive potential mates. This finding could be a form of mate copying (Place, Todd, Penke, & Asendorpf, 2010), which operates on the premise that there is a social transmission of preference from the pairing of two individuals, and that an outside individual views this pairing as one that he or she should desire (Little, Caldwell, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011). Ultimately, if this attractive woman is paired with this unattractive man he must have some great characteristics; otherwise, the pairing is not logical. Being paired with a mate who is lower in attractiveness may reflect that there is something wrong with the woman too, and that she may possess qualities that are not preferred, which has led her to mate with someone who is not on her level of attractiveness. Therefore, the participants may not bother trying to infiltrate that relationship.

Additionally, research that indicates that a discrepancy in a couple's mate value leads to more mate retention tactics (Oltmanns, Markey, & French, 2016). Those research

findings can also explain the findings in the current research. In the present research, the participants' mating intelligence could have led them to see the couple where the man was less attractive than the woman as a bad option to poach from due to negative mate retention tactics that the man in that couple might employ. Buss and Shackelford (1997) report that when married men perceive their wives as more attractive, more intrasexual threats and violence against competitors can occur. Therefore, it may not be beneficial for men to choose the couple where the man is less attractive than the female because it could lead to a violent interaction.

A third explanation is that men rate gaining an "ego-boost" as a benefit of a short-term mate poach (Davies, Shackelford, & Hass, 2010). Thus, men may feel more "successful" at poaching a woman from a man who is attractive because it would function to boost their ego.

Researchers have also hypothesized that individuals employ conditional mating strategies (Waynforth & Dunbar, 1995). The hierarchy of conditional mating strategies hypothesis suggests that individuals will try to attract an unattached potential partner who is attractive. However, if this is not possible, mate poaching would be a useful mating strategy (Davies et al., 2006). Extending this hypothesis, individuals may survey different types of couples to poach from. The hierarchy of conditional mating strategy suggests that there is a system of checks and balances that individuals use when poaching. Thus, in the current study, when the participant is deciding should he poach, he is assessing poaching success based not only on the desirability of the mate, and could be looking at the relative difference in attractiveness between the two individuals in the couple.

Limitations and Future Research

The stimuli in the present research were white men and women. It would benefit researchers to incorporate men and women of other races into future experiments examining how mate value discrepancies affect mate poaching decisions in interracial couples and same-race non-white couples. Prior research indicates that mate poaching occurs across an array of cultures (Schmitt, 2004) and therefore mate poaching responses may be similar to those in the present research.

One theoretical limitation that this current project was unable to address is the difference between mate poaching and infidelity. In this current project, we asked heterosexual men to report how successful they would be at infiltrating a quasi-couple. Although mate poaching deals with a poacher's perception of a couple, future research should further investigate how the participant's perception and the attitudes of the target of that poach match. It would behoove researchers to investigate if a poacher's perception of the attractiveness of the male in the couple is similar to the woman in the couple's perception of her mate.

Another limiting factor in the present research was the use of only heterosexual men as participants. It would be beneficial to see how heterosexual women would respond in similar experiments since women also engage in mate poaching. Besides the participant's sex, another limitation may be the use of 2 months, 4-years, and 8-years as the relationship durations. The decision to choose these time periods was congruent with Schmitt and Buss (2001) who found that married couples would be less likely to be poached from compared to newly formed relationships. Although, the stimuli utilized

consisted of young twenty-something-year olds, this was deemed appropriate in order to be consistent with Schmitt and Buss (2001). While it may be unlikely that twenty-somethings had been together for eight-years, research does suggest that couples are perceived to be compassionate and loving (Fehr, Harasymchuk, Sprecher, 2014) which could be present in our participants' view of the younger couple when that couple is in an 8-year relationship.

Another issue that needs to be considered is the type of poach. In the current project and other's similar to it (e.g., Moran et al., 2017; Schmitt, & Buss, 2001), the participants were asked to report their success for a one-time, sexual hookup. This current study only investigated men's perception of a short-term mate poach because of the interest in understanding how mate poaching and cuckoldry intentions relate to one another. Cuckoldry occurs when a woman becomes impregnated by a man who is not her current long-term partner, but she tells her current long-term partner that the offspring is genetically his. This results in the male investing in an offspring that is not genetically related to him (Platek & Shackelford, 2006). Thus, we were interested in investigating a cuckolders point of view, via mate poaching. For this reason, we investigated short-term mate poaching since the adaptive function of cuckoldry is to not have to provide resources to the offspring. Therefore, short-term mate poaching would allow a sufficient amount of time for cuckoldry to occur. Although, men engage in extra-pair copulations

In this current study, we only analyzed how the men in the photo differed in terms of attractiveness. However, a limitation may be that the men were perceived as different along other dimensions. For example, the less attractive man may also have been rated more feminine than the other men in the photos. This has yet to be studied in the mate poaching literature. Future research could also incorporate other aspects of individuals' mate value. Research suggests that the effects of mate value discrepancies in couples affect relationship satisfaction (Conroy-Beam et al., 2016; Sela et al., 2017). Research shows that women prefer men who are financially well off, high status/powerful, and emotionally supportive (Buss, 1989). Thus, future research using vignettes about a couple specifying that the man has a high paying job, has power, and is emotionally supportive, or he has a low paying job, low social status, and is not emotionally supportive could be implemented to see how mate value interacts with mate poaching decisions. Although the current research project did not investigate mate value, it did examine attractiveness, which is considered a form of mate value (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999). Thus, using attractiveness in the current research allowed the participants the opportunity to assess the man's mate value without having to know anything else about him.

Conclusion

The present research shows that whether or not a couple has been together for two months, four years, or eight years, does not affect a male poacher's decision to infiltrate a relationship. Also, couples that are matched with respect to attractiveness are more likely to be poached from. Lastly, a different pattern of findings emerges for men's likelihood of mate poaching when one uses a between-subjects design rather than a within-subjects design. Thus, this research shows that mate poaching is a more complex mating strategy than previously indicated.

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