The Other Woman: Examining Women's Tendency to Mate Poach Across the Menstrual Cycle

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Introduction

Mate poaching:
- romantically pursuing an individual already in a committed romantic relationship
- a commonly used mating tactic (Schmitt & Buss, 2001).

Ovulatory Shift Hypothesis:
- women's mating-related behaviors, preferences, and perceptions shift near ovulation to facilitate acquisition of the best genes for potentially conceived offspring (Thornhill & Gangestad, 2008).
- Women put more effort into their appearance, are more interested in socializing with men, and are more flirtatious near ovulation (Haselton, Mortezaie, Pillsworth, & Bleske-Rechek, 2007; Haselton & Gangestad, 2005; Cantu, Simpson, Griskevicius, Weisberg, Durante & Beal, 2014).

Unconscious Detection of Ovulation Cues:
- Men find the scent and appearance of ovulating women more attractive (Miller & Maner, 2010; Roberts et al., 2004).
- Women report more jealousy and mate-guarding behaviors towards ovulating women (Krems, Neel, Neuberg, Puts & Kenrick, 2016; Hurst, Alquiat & Puts, 2017).

The Current Experiments

Experiment 1
Normally ovulating women will mate poach when:
- The target possesses indicators of genetic strength.
- The women are near peak fertility.

Experiment 2
Women will perceive rivals as more threatening when:
- The women themselves are near peak fertility.
- The rival is at high fertility.

Experiment 1

Method
Within-Subjects Manipulation: Participants (N = 88, M_{age} = 19.80, SD_{age} = 0.90) were shown a photo and description (modified from Durante, Griskevicius, Simpson, Cantu & Li, 2012) of two different men in a randomized order, a physically attractive man and a physically average man.

Mate Poaching: Participants evaluated the extent to which they would engage in 18 different mate-poaching behaviors in an effort to lure the target away from his current mate.

Conception Risk: Participant cycles were standardized and conception risk was assigned based on Wilcox et al. 2001 actuarial data.

Results
Among women who do not take birth control, there was conception risk x target interaction, $F(1, 84) = 5.29$, $p = .0121$. See Figure 1.
- At high conception risk mate poaching was higher for the attractive man than the average man, $F(1, 84) = 21.35$, $p < .0001$
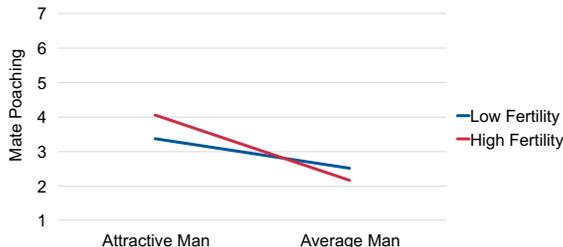- No difference in mate poaching at low fertility.

Figure 1. Among normally ovulating women, there is a positive association between conception risk and mate-poaching for the attractive man.

Experiment 2

Method
Participants (N = 92, M_{age} = 19.20, SD_{age} = 1.18).

Experiment 2 (…)

Method (…)
Between Subjects Manipulation: Participants were shown a photo of women either at high or low fertility called "Sara" and read a description of her interacting with the participants significant other at a party.

Perception of Mate Poaching: Participants evaluated the extent to which they perceived "Sara" to be poaching their partner on 19 different items.

Results
Among women who did not take birth control, high fertility rivals were viewed as marginally more threatening, $F(1, 88) = 21.35$, $p = .0793$. See Figure 2.
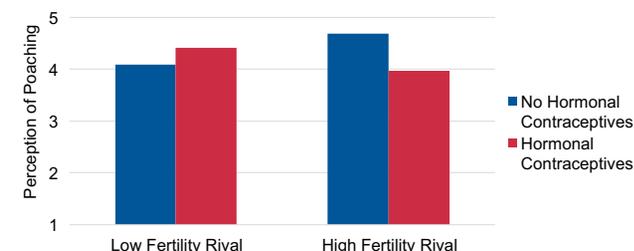

Figure 2. Among normally ovulating women, high fertility rivals are viewed as greater mate poaching threats.

Discussion

These findings both corroborate previous findings that high fertility rivals are seen as more dangerous (Krems, et al., 2016), as well as suggest that the suspicion partnered women have of ovulating women is in fact based on an increased likelihood of ovulating women attempting to mate poach such men.

Future research should examine additional contexts that may impact women's likelihood of mate poaching, such as mate scarcity v. abundance or fast v. slow sexual strategy. As well as poaching ques that may increase a partnered women's perception of a woman as a potential threat.