MORAL JUSTIFICATION OF MATE POACHING IN LATE ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

A Thesis

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Lay Vang

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MORAL JUSTIFICATION OF MATE POACHING IN LATE ADOLESCENT
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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by

Lay Vang

Approved by:

__________________________________, Committee Chair
Sheri E. Hembree, Ph.D.

__________________________________, Second Reader
Diane Lee, Ph.D.

__________________________________
Date
Student: Lay Vang

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

__________________________, Chair ___________________

Susan Heredia, Ph.D. Date

Department of Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
In this study, the researcher examined the incidence of, and moral judgments about, mate poaching among late adolescents. The sample included 61 participants ages 18 to 21 years who completed an online survey with items rating relationship experiences, frequency of mate poaching, and judgments and justifications about mate poaching behavior, and open-ended questions inquiring respondents to provide written justifications for poaching judgments.

Of the 61 participants, most (52) reported attempting to poach a partner, and 88.1% of participants rated that they were “successful” in the attempt. Results indicated that young adults generally disagree with statements endorsing the acceptability of stealing someone else’s partner away or having someone steal one’s own partner away. Statements listing justifications for stealing (e.g., if partner is better) were similarly not endorsed by this sample. Males were significantly more likely to endorse acceptability of having their partner stolen than females. In addition, males were more likely to agree
with the statement “people who get cheated on have usually done things to deserve it” and were more likely to report attempts to steal. There was a significant association between poaching attempts and agreement with the statement: “It is acceptable to steal someone else’s partner away if you have better qualities as a partner”. In addition, those who were a poached themselves were more likely to endorse the “acceptable if better partner” versus those who were not poached.

Qualitative analyses of open-ended justification responses revealed that young adults in the sample typically justified poaching as acceptable when someone is in an “Unhealthy Relationship”. Justifications for unacceptability for mate poaching included references to respect, moral wrongness, references to self, and shared responsibility. The most common responses involved reference to moral wrongdoing or compassion for others. Results suggest that there is evidence of a moral dimension to judgments of mate poaching. Future researchers may want to further explore this area more by using hypothetical situations in examining young adults’ endorsements on acceptability to mate poach. Interviews might also be useful in fleshing out justifications for this behavior.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Sheri E. Hembree, Ph.D.

_______________________
Date
DEDICATION

To Dr. Juliana Raskauskas, my family, and my friends for all of the support you have given me through this adventure.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

The formation of romantic relationships is thought to be one of the most important developmental tasks of adolescence. These relationships have significant implications for mental health and adjustment (Bouchey & Furman, 2003), and are associated with social competence and well-being (Furman, Brown, & Feiring, 2011). Romantic partners provide many benefits for youth and young adults including support (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003), positive feelings (Connolly & Goldberg, 2011), and increased self-esteem (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Healthy romantic relationships may increase resilience and enable some to overcome troubled relationships or rejection (Downey et al., 2011). Guzman, Ikramullah, Manlove, Peterson, and Scarupa (2009) state qualities of healthy romantic relationships include: commitment, a sense of satisfaction, lack of domestic violence, constructive conflict resolution, intimacy and emotional support, communication, fidelity, interaction and time together, respect, and trust.

While romantic relationships can have benefits, they can cause stress when the relationship is threatened. Many men and women who are involved in romantic relationships have been enticed to cheat at one point or have been the instigators or victims of mate poaching. Schmitt and Buss (2011) have defined human mate poaching as “behaviors intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship” (p. 894). “The mate poacher is the interloper. Those who are poached are individuals taken away from their established relationships. The poachees are those whose partners are
taken away from them” (Schmitt & Buss, 2001, p. 895). Romantic relationships can negatively affect the sense of self and self-esteem (Bouchey & Furman, 2003) and can have long-term consequences to relationship quality and security (Moore, Kamilowiez, & Lung, 2012). Mate poaching in romantic relationships may potentially reinforce mistrust and infidelity. Very little is known about the origins of mate poaching in early adulthood. The purpose of the current study is to examine the frequency and incidence of mate poaching in romantic relationships in late adolescence and early (emerging) adulthood, as well as moral judgments and justifications for this behavior.

**Romantic Relationships**

A romantic relationship is one in which two individuals acknowledge and express affection and or current anticipated sexual behavior (Furman & Collins, 2007). Previous researchers such as Carver, Joyner, and Udry (2003); Furman and Collin (2007); Furman and Collins (2009) Guzman et al., (2009); and Meir & Allen (2009) have found that more than half of all adolescents have experienced a romantic relationship. In one study, researchers found 78% of young adult participants indicated that at some point they had been in a romantic relationship (Moore et al., 2012). In another study, researchers found more than four-fifths of adolescents aged 18 years have had relationship experiences (Carver, 2003). By age 21, researchers found 65% of older adolescents reported having a romantic partner (Seiff-Krenke, 2003). Adolescents who are involved in such relationships may experience both benefits and difficulties in relation to their emotional,
mental, and moral well-being, depending on the quality of their romantic relationships, and breakups and potential mate poaching may also increase with age.

Unmarried young adults or older adolescents may cheat on their romantic partners for various reasons such as lack of reinforcement for feeling desirable or attractive; emotional conflicts in the relationship; a lack of emotional or sexual expressiveness; or a perceived loss of status. Research indicates that reasons for cheating include: permissive attitudes towards cheating, dissatisfaction with relationship, low levels of perceived commitment, and opportunities to cheat. In one study, youth aged 16-18 years old admitted to cheating at some point in a relationship. Often cited are temptation and an unwillingness to commit to an exclusive relationship. When a romantic partner cheated, the emotional and social responses included denial and painful emotion (Williams & Hickle, 2011). According to Williams and Hickle (2011), girls tolerate cheating because of a greater desire for intimacy. There is an understanding that exclusivity is an expectation for romantic relationships, but also that this principle is frequently violated. Youth aged 16 to 18 years old state that cheating is very common in romantic relationships and see such behavior as inevitable. As a result, many individuals choose to break up with his or her partner to end the relationship (Williams & Hickle, 2011).

**Mate Poaching**

Mate poaching refers to behavior designed to attract someone else’s partner away (Schmitt & Buss, 2001). While some choose to mate poach, others may choose not to,
while others will not accept mate poaching attempts. Previous researchers have found
gender differences in mate poaching. Schmitt and Buss (2001) found it to be more
beneficial to male mate poachers when obtaining a physically attractive partner who is
already in a relationship. Using rating scales, Davies and Schackelford (2010) found that
men gave a higher rating than women on the item “challenge of trying to attract someone
away from their partner” when poaching for a short-term sexual partner. Men also gave a
higher rating than women for the benefit gaining an ego boost from successfully
poaching someone as a short-term sexual partner. These findings support Schmitt and
Buss’s (2001) finding of “take pride in conquest” being rated as a greater benefit to men
than women when poaching for short-term mates.

For women, there are many perceived costs associated with mate poaching.
Schmitt and Buss (2001) found that the key costs reported by women are concerns of
infidelity by the man, self-degradation, and worries of unwanted pregnancy. In addition,
using the 31-Item Self Report Psychopathy Scale and the 40-Item Narcissistic Personal
Inventory. Davis and Shackelford (2010) found women provided a higher rating than men
for the cost “suffer shame and gain a bad reputation” related to mate poaching. Women
rated “danger of being physically harmed by the partner of the poached” a greater
disincentive to poach than did men when poaching for a new exclusive relationship. The
current study examined potential gender differences in mate poaching behavior and
attitudes.
Moral Reasoning about Mate Poaching

Moral reasoning helps guide individuals in their decision-making when confronted with complicated situations such as mate poaching in romantic relationships (Ozwalt & Dombeck, 2010). One way moral decisions are learned is through interactions with friends in romantic relationships.

Previous researchers have not looked at whether or not adolescents and young adults consider mate poaching to be right or wrong. Individuals engaging in mate poaching behaviors violate social norms about exclusivity and may fail to have feelings for someone who is already attached (Simon, Eder, & Evans, 1992). Simon et al., (2009) that violators of these social norms were gossiped about and confronted by their peers who reinforced these norms. In addition, those individuals violating these norms risked becoming victims of socially aggressive behaviors by their peers.

The poacher and those who are poached may have reasons to justify their behaviors through the usage of moral disengagement strategies. According to Bandura (2002), people who hurt others without feelings of guilt can disengage from societal norms and personal moral standards. Moral disengagement includes eight mechanisms by which disengagement of moral may occur: moral justification, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregarding or distorting the consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame. The two mechanisms believed to be the most closely related to mate poaching are moral justification and attribution of blame. Moral justification includes justifying a wrongful act as being personally and
socially acceptable. For example, the poachers may not feel guilty for mate poaching because those poached were not fully committed to his or her partner (Bandura, Barburnelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bandura, 2002). Attribution of blame includes putting the blame on the victim who brought it upon themselves or the compelling circumstances. For example, poachers may feel that those poached are at fault for ending their own relationships. The current study adds to the field by examining moral disengagement justifications related to involvement in mate poaching.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to fill a gap in the literature regarding mate poaching among late adolescents and young adults. Mate poaching refers to actions intended to attract an individual from a romantic relationship (Schmitt & Buss, 2001). Exploring the frequency of occurrence and nature of mate poaching in late adolescent and early adult romantic relationships can help us understand the development of this behavior.

First, this study assessed information about older adolescents’ romantic relationships and mate poaching, specifically the frequency of romantic relationships; the frequency of occurrence for mate poaching in these romantic relationships; and the success rate for mate poaching attempts in romantic relationships. The study also examined whether or not older adolescents and young adults think it is right or wrong to mate poach. The research questions were as follows.
(a) What is the frequency of occurrence of mate poaching among older adolescents and young adults?

(b) What are these emergent adults’ perspectives on whether or not it is right or wrong to mate poach and/or accept mate poaching attempts?

(c) Are gender, age, and previous relationship experience associated with mate poaching?

(d) What is the relationship between mate poaching behavior and moral judgments about mate poaching?

(e) What are the moral justifications given for judgments about mate poaching?

Methods

The current mixed design study centered around a quantitative survey that focused on describing the incidence of romantic relationships and mate poaching among late adolescent and emergent adults aged 18 to 21 years. The survey also assessed perspectives on moral decisions regarding romantic relationships and the practice of mate poaching. In addition, to better understand young adults’ moral reasoning around mate poaching judgments, the researcher examined participants’ written responses to open-ended questions asking for justifications for their judgments.
Participants

The study sample included 62 young adults aged 18 to 21 years from one university in Northern California. The participants were recruited from General Education classes at a university in Northern California. The researcher received permission from instructors to do a 5-minute presentation in child development classes about the research study, including information for accessing the online survey on Qualtrics.

Measures

The measure for this study was an anonymous online survey. The survey consisted of 31 fixed-choice questions – questions that asked and gave a selection of answers to choose from (See Appendix B). The fixed-choice questions consisted of three sections. The first section consisted of questions relevant to participants’ romantic relationship experiences and romantic relationship breakup experiences. The second section consisted of questions relating to mate poaching experiences. The last section consisted of mate poaching questions related to moral reasoning and moral disengagement. The fixed-choice questions were generated from three different surveys: the Anonymous Romantic Survey (ARAS) was created by Schmitt and Buss (2001); a questionnaire created by Moore et al., (2009) examining the occurrence of romantic relationships and breakups; and a moral disengagement survey modified by Detert, Trevino, and Sweitzer, (2008), all used in previous studies examining mate poaching and
moral disengagement. Relevant questions were selected from all three surveys and modified for use in the current study.

Several items on the survey were developed by the researcher. These included items concerning how respondents learned about mate poaching behaviors, feelings about mate poaching, admiration for people who successfully mate poach, and relationship formation and breakup behaviors. Two questions asked participants to rate the acceptability of attracting someone else’s partner away from his/her current partner or if someone stole his/her partner away from him/her. The survey also included demographic questions regarding age, gender, current romantic relationship status. Following the acceptability ratings, the researcher asked open-ended questions to find out participants’ reasoning about mate poaching judgments. These open-ended questions allowed participants to describe their personal thoughts on whether it is right or wrong to mate poach and or have someone else poach their partner away from them. The researcher analyzed these written justification responses to identify common themes around the responses.

**Definition of Terms**

The study sample includes late adolescents and young adults who are considered emergent adults. Late adolescence often includes years beyond 18 and *emergent adults* are individuals who are between the ages of 18 to 25 years (Arnett, 2000). A *romantic relationship* is defined as “mutually acknowledged on-going voluntary interactions; in
comparison to most other peer relationships, romantic ones typically have a distinctive intensity, which is usually marked by expressions of affection and current or anticipated sexual behavior” (Furman & Collins, 2007, p. 3). Human mate poaching is defined as behaviors intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship away from their established relationships (Schmitt & Buss, 2001, p. 895).

**Limitations**

Generalizing the results in this study for the given population is made difficult by the 36% return rate on the survey. In addition, there are other limitations to this study such as the small number of participants, the use of undergraduate students, and modification of ARAS survey. Further, the format of the survey may have influenced participants, making them less likely to report their honest answers. For example, in the survey the researcher put the following headings: “Tell me about your mate poaching experience; Tell me about your moral justification behavior; and Tell me about your attribution of blame behavior.” These headings may or may not have made participants want to answer honestly to the questions. Moreover, the researcher was the only person to code the themes.
Organization of the Study

This chapter has provided an introduction to the topic and serves as the overview of the thesis. The next chapter, Chapter 2, presents a review of the literature that describes romantic relationships, examines factors influencing romantic relationships, risk factors for romantic relationships, breakups and cheating/poaching. Chapter 3 describes the research methods including the purpose of the study, the design, the participants, and data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 provides information about the statistical and qualitative analyses, with tables that illustrate those findings. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of major findings and conclusions reached, the limitations of the study, as well suggestions for future research.
Adolescence has long been characterized as a time when individuals begin to explore psychological characteristics of the self and how they fit in the social world in which they live (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). One of the ways in which individuals engage in self-discovery is through romantic relationships. According to researchers, the formation of romantic relationships is often thought to be one of the most important developmental tasks of adolescence, and these relationships have significant implications for health and adjustment (Bouchey & Furman, 2003).

Many men and women who are involved in romantic relationships have been enticed to cheat at one point or have been the instigators or victims of mate poaching. Schmitt and Buss (2011) have defined human *mate poaching* as behaviors intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship. Among adults, mate poaching occurs frequently. In the United States, 85% of men and women have reported that while in a romantic relationship, someone else had tried to entice them for the purpose of starting a short term sexual liaison or for the purpose of starting a long-term relationship (Smith, 2001). Even more so, across all world regions, 70% of people reported that someone has tried to poach to them away from their partners. Although mate poaching is frequent in romantic relationships, little is known about the phenomenon in late adolescence. Moreover, moral reasoning around mate poaching has not previously been
examined. In order to help older adolescents form and maintain healthy relationships as they reach adulthood, additional understanding of mate poaching is needed.

The following chapter provides a review of literature relevant to this study of mate poaching among young adults. Topics include adolescent romantic relationships, factors influencing romantic relationships, risk factors in romantic relationships, mate poaching, and moral development related to mate poaching.

**Romantic Relationships**

A romantic relationship is defined as “mutually acknowledged on-going voluntary interaction.” Compared to other peer relationships, romantic relationships typically have “a distinctive intensity, which is usually marked by expressions of affection and current or anticipated sexual behavior” (Furman & Collins, 2007, p. 3). Romantic relations involve three main characteristics. The first characteristic is romance, that is, the relationship involves two individuals acknowledging some connection with each other. Second, romantic relationships are voluntary and the romance is a matter of personal choice. Third, there is some form of attraction. This attraction typically includes a sexual component, and is often manifested in some form of sexual behavior. At times, this may not be the primary focus or result in the attraction. Feelings of love toward a romantic partner may supersede the sexual nature of romantic relationships between partners (Furman, Brown, & Feiring, 2011).
There are five distinct features of romantic experiences. The first feature of romantic experience includes whether or not a person dates, at what age s/he begins to date, duration of relationships, and the frequency of dating and relationships. These factors lead to the second feature, partner selection. In this process, personal characteristics are observed as desirable or undesirable factors in selecting a partner. The third feature is the content of the relationship. Content in a relationship includes time spent together, and how they utilize this time. The fourth feature is based on the quality of the romantic relationship. This feature is dependent upon the degree of support and frequency of conflict in the relationship. The final features are the cognitive and emotional processes associated with relationship such as: perceptions, attributions, and representations of oneself, the partner, and the relationship. The emotional processes include the emotions and moods elicited by and in romantic encounters or relationship, as well as the use of romantic relationships to process or avoid emotions elicited by other aspects of one’s life (Furman & Collins, 2007). All five of these features make romantic relationships unique and different from other relationships.

**Adolescent Romantic Relationships**

More than half of all adolescents have experienced a romantic relationship (Carver et. al., 2003; Furman & Collin, 2007; Furman & Collins, 2009; Guzman et al., 2009; Meier & Allen, 2009). In one study, researchers found 78% of participants aged 18 to 26 years old indicate that at some point they had been in a romantic relationship.
In another study, researchers found the majority of adolescents in high school reported having been involved in a romantic relationship (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; Furman & Collins, 2009). The percentage of adolescents reporting romantic relationships increases with age. For example, 36% of 13-year olds, 53% of 15-year olds, and 70% of 17-year-olds reported having a special romantic relationship in the previous 18 months (Carver et al, 2009). In a longitudinal study, Seiffge-Krenke (2003) found 40% of adolescents at age 13 reported having a romantic partner. At age 15, 43% reported having a romantic partner. At age 17, 47% of adolescents reported having a romantic partner. In the current study, the frequency of occurrence for adolescents between the ages of 18 to 21 years was explored.

Development of Romantic Relationships

The origins of heterosexual romantic experiences are seen prior to adolescence. Prior to adolescence, interactions are typically with peers of the same gender (Furman & Collins, 2007). At younger ages, children’s peer groups tend to be gender segregated, but during the transition from childhood to adolescence, gender-based barriers weaken, and cross-gender relationships become increasingly important (Miller & Benson, 2011). By early adolescence, individuals begin to differentiate between romantic relationships with other-sex friendships and heterosexual romantic partners (Bouchey & Furman, 2003).

Over the course of development, adolescents move from same-gender friendships to mixed-gender affiliations and then to dating (Connolly, Craig, & Pepler, 2004). The development of romantic sexual relationships is usually a gradual, experimental process.
Adolescent romantic relationship experiences often occur in group dating contexts (Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Meir & Allen, 2009). Adolescents hang out with dating partners who engage in common activities (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006), then moving away from close friends as well as the peer network. This distancing from the influence of peer relationships leads to increased independence from the peer group and to enhanced autonomy in relation to peers (Connolly & Goldberg, 2011). Emotional and romantic involvement is often accompanied and intensified by expanding levels of sexual involvement (Miller & Benson, 2011). Thus, in late adolescence, one typically progresses to a single, committed intimate relationship of longer duration (Connolly et al., 2004; Meir & Allen, 2009).

**Benefits and Risks of Romantic Relationships**

Healthy romantic relationships provide many benefits for adolescents, including opportunities for developing social competence, positive self-esteem, support, positive feelings, and positive relational maintenance behaviors. Healthy romantic relationships are characterized by commitment, satisfaction, lack of domestic violence, conflict resolution, intimacy and emotional support, communication, fidelity, interaction and time together, respect, and trust (Guzman et al., 2009). Romantic involvement is associated with social competence and positive self-esteem (Furman, Brown, Feiring, 2011). Romantic partners provide support for many adolescents (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003), and having a romantic partner of the opposite sex can also provide a source of strong positive feelings (Connolly & Goldberg, 2011) and self-esteem (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Positive
relational maintenance behaviors used to sustain desired relational definitions are associated with relationship satisfaction, commitment, linking, and control mutuality (Goodboy & Myers, 2010). Healthy romantic relationships may enable some adolescents to break cycles of troubled relationships by reducing their sensitivity to rejection (Downey et al., 2011).

There are also risks associated with adolescent romantic relationships. Negative interactions and controlling behavior by one’s partner are associated with greater negative symptomatology and lower self-esteem (Bouchey & Furman, 2003). Adolescents who date partners many experience poorer relationship processes and increased negative affect (Madsen & Collins, 2011). Some adolescents have a greater number of partners who are older sexual partners (Cui et al., 2007; Miller & Benson, 2011; Royer, Keller, & Heidrich, 2009), and individuals in these relationships are less likely to have used any contraceptive method (Kusonaki & Upchurch, 2011). Other negative consequences include pregnancy, STIs, unwanted sex, and social stigma (Royer et al., 2009). Poor health and depression in romantic relationships are found to be related to loneliness, intimate partner violence, romantic relationship violence, and loss (Adam et al., 2011). Adolescents who experience negative interactions in romantic relationships are more likely to experience depression, suicide attempts, and suicide completions (Furman & Collins, 2007).

Moreover, adolescent breakups are also a risk factor. Moore, Kamilowicz, and Lung (2012) found 78% of participants indicated that at some point they had been in a romantic relationship. Of the 46.2% who reported to be in a romantic relationship, 79.5%
of them had experienced a relationship breakup at least once. For 17.4%, this breakup was recent. Forty three point one percent of the relationship breakups were initiated by the participants versus 32.8% of the relationship breakups were initiated by their partner. Twenty four point one percent of the romantic breakups were by mutual agreement. As a result of the breakup, 42% felt very hurt, 42.8% felt moderately hurt, and 15.2% did not feel hurt. Adolescent romantic breakups are the strongest predictors of depression, multiple-victim killings, and suicide attempts and suicide completions (Bouchey & Furman, 2003). In the current study, the researcher explored the frequency of occurrence for breakups in romantic relationships and how adolescents learned this behavior.

**Infidelity**

Infidelity is sometimes cited as a reason for a break-up. Adolescents might “cheat” on their romantic partner or end the relationship for various reasons. Miller and Benson (2011) found that adolescents reported cheating because they did not get the reinforcement they needed to feel desirable or attractive, because of emotional conflicts in the relationship, because of a lack of emotional or sexual expressiveness, or when there was a perceived loss of status.

Many romantic relationships are threatened when there is a mate poacher and poachee who is ready to accept mate poaching attempts. Mate poaching may reinforce mistrust and infidelity. Therefore, it is important to understand correlates of mate poaching and how these behaviors develop. In the current study, the frequency and success of mate poaching in late adolescence and early adulthood was examined. In
addition, the researcher examined mate poaching experiences and their judgments and justifications of poaching behavior.

**Mate Poaching**

Schmitt and Buss (2011) have defined human mate poaching as “behaviors intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship” (p. 894). The mate poacher attracts individuals away from established relationships, and the poachees are those whose partners are enticed away. Previous researchers have looked at the frequency of occurrence of mate poaching and the success rate of mate poaching. For example, in one study, Schmitt and Buss (2011) measured 173 college undergraduates using two versions of the Anonymous Romantic Attraction Survey. On a 7-point scale (1 = “Never” to 7 = “Always”), participants rated short-term mate attraction experiences, long-term mating experiences, frequency with which participants have attracted romantic partners either short-term or long-term, participants’ experiences with others trying to take them away from past mating experiences, and whether they or their past partners had ever been successfully taken away from a mating relationship. The key finding was that mate poaching is a relatively frequent occurrence in dating relationships in this population. Seventy percent of college-age and mature participants reported they have had some experience with generally attracting another attached person as a mate. Thirty percent of the participants frequently attracted long-term mates. Fifty percent of the participants reported making romantic attraction attempts on another person who was
already in a relationship. Eighty-five percent of men and women reported that while in a romantic relationship, someone else had tried to attract them away from a previous partner.

To further investigate the frequency of occurrence for adult mate poaching, Schmitt (2004) conducted surveys across 53 countries using the International Sexuality Description Project. Participants consisted of 16,954 people. Return rates for college student samples were 95% and return rates for community samples were 50%. Frequency of occurrence was measured by a 7-point scale (1 = "Never" to 7 = "Always"). Frequency for successful relationships was also measured by a 7-point scale (1 = “not at all successful” to 7 = “very successful”). Participants were also asked 3 questions about their current relationship status.

The key findings were that mate poachers and their targets possessed the same basic personality traits across all world regions such as extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and erotophilia. In addition, researchers found 60% of men and 40% of woman admitted that they have tried to poach someone else’s partner. The occurrence of successful poaching was over 80%. Ten percent of romantic relationships were the result of mate poaching and 3% were the result of two people poaching one another out of their old relationships and into a new relationship. More men than women reported pursuing short-term mate poaching. Women reported having receiving more short-term poaching attempts than men and reported more success than men.

Mate poaching occurs frequently among adults. In the United States, 85% of men and women have reported that while in a romantic relationship, someone else had tried to
poach them away from their current partner (Smith, 2001). Even more so, across all world regions, almost 70% of people reported that someone has tried to poach them away from their partners (Smith, 2004). Therefore, this common theme in romantic relationships needs to be studied. In the current study, the researcher explored the frequency of occurrence of mate poaching and the frequency of occurrence for the success rate of mate poaching among young adults, aged 18 to 21 years. Moreover, the researcher explored whether or not young adults think it is right or wrong to mate poach. To better understand older adolescents’ moral justifications, the researcher coded participants’ written responses into themes. Furthermore, the researcher examined the relationship between mate poaching judgments and mate poaching behaviors.

Moral Reasoning and Mate Poaching

Moral reasoning helps guide individuals in their decision-making when confronted with complicated situations in romantic relationships (Ozwalt & Zupanick, 2014). One of these complicated situation may be mate poaching. Previous research has not looked at whether or not adolescents and young adults consider mate poaching to be right or wrong. Individuals engaging in mate poaching behaviors violate social norms about exclusivity and may fail to have feelings for someone who is already attached (Simon, Eder, & Evans, 1992). Simon et al., (2009) found that violators of these social norms were gossiped about and confronted by their peers who reinforced these norms. In
addition, those individuals violating these norms risked becoming victims of socially aggressive behaviors by their peers.

The poacher and those who are poached may have reasons to justify their behaviors through the use of moral disengagement strategies. According to Bandura (2002), people who hurt others without feelings of guilt can disengage from societal norms and personal moral standards. Moral disengagement includes eight mechanisms by which disengagement of moral may occur: moral justification, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregarding or distorting the consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame. The two mechanisms believed to be the most closely related to mate poaching are moral justification and attribution of blame.

Moral justification includes justifying a wrongful act as being personally and socially acceptable. For example, the poachers may not feel guilty for mate poaching because those poached were not fully committed to his or her partner. Those who are highly prone to moral disengagement are not much troubled by guilt (Bandura, Barburnelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bandura, 2002). In addition, moral disengagers do not feel the need to make amends for harmful conduct (Bandura et al., 1996).

Attribution of blame includes putting the blame on the victim who brought it upon themselves or the compelling circumstances. For example, poachers may feel that those poached are at fault for ending their own relationships. If there are any consequences, then those poached brought it upon themselves. In sum, poachees who have had their romantic partners (those poached) taken away from them may feel that their romantic
partner and/or the poacher has wrong them, regardless of how poachers and those poached may justify their actions using moral disengagement strategies. In the current study, judgments and reasoning around mate poaching among older adolescents was investigated.

**Conclusion**

Past researchers have found mate poaching to be prevalent among adults. In the United States, 85% of men and women have reported that while in a romantic relationship, someone else had tried to entice them for the purpose of starting a short-term sexual liaison or for the purpose of starting a long-term relationship (Smith, 2001). Even more so, across all world regions, 70% of people reported that someone has tried to poach them away from their partners (Smith, 2004). Less is known about poaching in late adolescence.

The purpose of the current study was to examine moral judgments and justifications, and the connections between moral judgments and mate-poaching behavior in late adolescence. To understand this mate poaching behavior, the researcher explored the frequency of occurrence and nature of mate poaching in older adolescent romantic relationships. Further, the study addressed the success rate for mate poaching attempts, as well as moral judgements and justifications about the acceptability of mate poaching behavior. There are currently no existing studies looking at moral judgments and
justifications, and the connections between moral judgments and mate-poaching behavior.
Chapter 3

METHODS

This study examined the frequency of occurrence and nature of mate poaching in romantic relationships among older adolescents. The study surveyed a sample of 18 to 21-year-olds about their romantic relationships and mate poaching behavior, specifically the frequency of romantic relationships; the frequency of occurrence for mate poaching in these relationships, and the success rate for mate poaching attempts. Second, the study examined whether or not these youth think it is right or wrong to poach a mate. This chapter describes the methods that were used in the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were considered in the current study.

(a) What is the frequency of occurrence of mate poaching among older adolescents and young adults?

(b) What are these emergent adults’ perspectives on whether or not it is right or wrong to mate poach and/or accept mate poaching attempts?

(c) Are gender, age, and previous relationship experience associated with mate poaching?

(d) What is the relationship between mate poaching behavior and moral judgments about mate poaching?
(e) What are the moral justifications given for judgments about mate poaching?

Research Design

The current study was a quantitative survey assessing relationship and mate poaching experiences, as well as moral judgments of mate poaching. In addition, this study examined perspectives on moral decisions regarding romantic relationships and the practice of mate poaching through open-ended questions, which were analyzed qualitatively for common themes among the responses.

Participants

The initial sample contacted for the study included 167 older adolescents and emergent adults, aged 18 to 21 years, from one university in Northern California. The researcher recruited participants from General Education classes at a university in Northern California. The researcher received permission from instructors to conduct a 5-minute presentation in child development classes about the research study, including information for accessing the online survey on Qualtrics to complete the survey on their own time. Participants included all youths who read and checked the “I Agree” button on the consent forms before proceeding to the online survey via Qualtrics.

Out of the 167 participants initially contacted, 62 completed the survey. The research study consisted of 18 males and 44 females. For the ages of participants, there
were 8 who were 18 years old, 7 who were 19 years old, 13 20-year-olds, and 33 21-year-olds.

**Measures**

The measure for this study was an anonymous survey. The survey (See Appendix B) consisted of 31 fixed-choice questions. The fixed-choice questions were presented in three sections. The first section consisted of questions relevant to participants’ romantic relationship experiences and romantic relationship breakup experiences. The second section consisted of questions relating to mate poaching experiences. The last section consisted of mate poaching questions related to moral reasoning and moral disengagement. The fixed-choice questions were adapted from three different existing surveys: the Anonymous Romantic Survey (ARAS) was created by Schmitt and Buss (2001); a romantic experiences questionnaire created by Moore et al., (2009); and a moral disengagement survey modified by Detert, Trevino, & Sweitzer, (2008).

The ARAS has been used in previous studies to examine the occurrence and prevalence of mate poaching experiences, including whether and to what extent one has attempted a mate poach, whether and to what extent one has been successful at mate poaching, whether and to what extent one has received a mate poach, and whether and to what extent one has succumbed. Schmitt and Buss (2001) used a Likert rating scale values ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always) for the frequency of attempting behaviors. Another Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (not at all successful) to 7 (very successful)
was used for the degree of success in mate poaching. The results were analyzed by using a categorization strategy. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher asked only the occurrence of mate poaching experiences by asking Yes/No questions and modifying the ARAS questions about the success rate of mate poaching on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not successful) to 3 (very successful).

The Moore et al., (2009) questionnaire consists of items concerning whether or not participants were currently in a romantic relationship; participants who had experiences in relationship breakups were asked who initiated it on a response category such as 1 (self); 2 (partner); and 3 (mutual). The researcher modified this scale to a 4-point Likert scale and added 4 (someone else) to the initiation of breakups.

Detert et al.’s (2008) questionnaire consisted of 24 items measuring moral disengagement. This moral disengagement scale is a modification of the moral disengagement scale developed by Bandura et al., (1996), consisting of 32 items. Deter et al., (2008) used a Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). For the purpose of this study, the researcher used 6 questions from the survey that dealt with moral justification and attribution of blame.

The only survey drew from all three of these questionnaires, however, questions were modified and additional questions added to assess constructs not included in the three questionnaires. The resulting survey is next described with the entire questionnaire provided in Appendix B.
**Romantic Relationship and Breakup Experiences**

The first part of the survey consisted of questions concerning current romantic relationship status, duration, which method best described how the respondents knew they were a boyfriend/girlfriend, and how participants learned about romantic relationship behaviors. The researcher asked participants about the duration of their current romantic relationships based on a 3 point Likert-type scale ranging 1 (less than 3 months); 2 (3 to 6 months); and 3 (more than 6 months). Those participants who had experiences in a romantic relationship were asked how they knew they were someone’s boyfriend/girlfriend on a categorization response ranging from 1 (You got introduced as his/her girlfriend/boyfriend to his/her family and or friends); 2 (Social media update statuses such as Face (In a relationship with)); and 3 (other).

The researcher asked participants who have experience in romantic relationship about who did they learn relationship behaviors from on a categorization response ranging from 1 (self); 2 (friends); 3 (family members); 4 (media); 5 (others); and 6 (all the above).

In addition, this first section included questions regarding romantic relationship breakup experiences such whether or not adolescents have ever experienced a breakup, the method for breaking up with someone, and how hurt they were. There were also items concerning experience in romantic relationship breakup behaviors. The participants were asked how did you learn about breaking up with someone on a categorization response ranging from 1 (self); 2 (friends); 3 (family members); 4 (media); 5 (others); and 6 (all the above).
Mate Poaching Experiences

Next, participants responded to questions about mate poaching, including their mate poaching attempts, mate poaching success, if they had ever seen anyone do this, whether it was alright to poach someone else’s partner away, and whether they feel that someone has wronged them if someone attracted his/her partner away. This section included items concerning how respondents learned these mates’ poaching behaviors; participants who had experience in mate poaching were asked how they learned about this mate poaching behavior (stealing someone else’s partner) on a categorization response ranging from 1 (self); 2 (friends); 3 (family members); 3 (media); 4 (others); and 5 (all the above). Participants who had experienced in mate poaching were asked how such mate poaching behavior (stealing someone else’s partner) “make you feel about yourself” on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not good at all) to 3 (I feel very great about myself). Moreover, the researcher asked participants who had experience in mate poaching whether he/she admired people who successfully poach and on a scale from 1 (I do not admire people who do this) to 3 (I admire people very much for doing this). Furthermore, the researcher asked participants if they had seen others mate poach before using categories such as: “I have seen family members doing this”; “I have seen my friends do this at school” and “I have seen other people at my school do this”. The researcher asked participants whether it was alright to attract someone else’s partner away from his/her current partner on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). In addition, the researcher asked participants if they would feel that
someone has wronged them if someone stole his/her partner away from him/her on a 5-point Likert Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

**Moral Judgments about Mate Poaching**

The third section consisted of items concerning how respondents learned mate poaching behaviors, how mate poaching makes them feel about themselves, and whether or not they admired people who have successfully poached. Furthermore, this section included views on whether it was right to steal someone else’s partner; feelings when someone else mate poached their partner; and how many participants would not feel wrong about mate poaching or being poached.

**Justifications for Mate Poaching**

Finally, the survey included open-ended questions to find out participants’ justifications for mate poaching decisions. Participants were asked to explain their responses to: it is acceptable to steal someone else’s partner away and it is acceptable for someone else to steal my partner away. These open-ended questions allowed participants to describe their personal thoughts on whether or not it was right to mate poach and/or have someone else poach their partner away from them. The researcher coded participants’ written responses into common themes. Lastly, this study examined older adolescents’ perspectives on moral decisions regarding romantic relationships and the practice of mate poaching.
Procedure

The researcher utilized General Education classes at California State University Sacramento to recruit participants in this study. The researcher received permission from instructors to do a 5-minute presentation in the child development classes about the research study. The 5-minute presentation included information on the study such as: the topic of the study (mate poaching and moral development in romantic relationships), how many questions were on the survey (32), how long it would take to complete the survey (10-15 minutes), the targeted age range (18-21 years), and the incentives (possibly winning 1 of two $50 Visa gift cards). Potential participants then received a handout that included the information described in the study presentation, as well as how to access the Qualtrics link to complete the survey. Participants who completed the survey were able to access an additional link for a chance to win the incentive. At the end of the two-month period, the researcher picked one of the participants through via email to give them their $50 Visa gift card.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to examine the frequency of occurrence and nature of mate poaching in late adolescent and young adult romantic relationships. The study surveyed a sample of older adolescents about romantic relationships and mate poaching, specifically the frequency and duration of romantic relationship experiences; the frequency of occurrence and success rate for mate poaching in these relationships. Second, the study examined moral judgments, and attributions of blame, and justifications about mate poaching. The research questions were as follows.

(a) What is the frequency of occurrence of mate poaching among older adolescents and young adults?

(b) What are these emergent adults’ perspectives on whether or not it is right or wrong to mate poach and/or accept mate poaching attempts?

(c) Are gender, age, and previous relationship experience associated with mate poaching?

(d) What is the relationship between mate poaching behavior and moral judgments about mate poaching?

(e) What are the moral justifications given for judgments about mate poaching?
To examine the incidence of relationship experiences and mate poaching, several descriptive analyses were conducted. First, relationship experiences were examined. Fifty-two percent of participants reported being in a relationship at the time of the survey; 85.2% of participants reported having had a boyfriend or girlfriend and 91.7% reported having experienced a romantic relationship breakup. Of the 61 participants, 52 participants reported having had someone else try to attract their partners away (Table 1).

**TABLE 1**

*Frequencies for Relationship Experiences (n=61)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage (Frequency)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently in a relationship</td>
<td>52.50% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend</td>
<td>85.2% (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever experienced a romantic relationship breakup</td>
<td>91.70% (55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone else tried to attract partner away</td>
<td>59% (36)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, frequency of mate poaching was examined. As shown in Table 2, 16.9% of participants reported that their current mate was someone whom he/she attracted away from someone else, 22.4% reported that their current partner attracted him/her away from
someone else, and 14.8% had attempted to mate poach. In rating their own success at mate poaching, 88.1% of participants responded that they were “successful” in stealing someone else’s partner away. Fifty-nine percent of participants reported that they had experienced attempts to poach a partner. Respondents reporting attempts were asked to rate the success of those attempts, and 36.1% responded that a partner was poached successfully.

TABLE 2

*Frequency of Mate Poaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current mate is poached</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>83.1% (49)</td>
<td>16.9% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am poached</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>77.6% (45)</td>
<td>22.4% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have tried to poach</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>85.2% (52)</td>
<td>14.8% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful steal?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.1% (1)</td>
<td>88.1% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others have tried to poach my partner</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>42% (25)</td>
<td>59% (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful steal of my partner?</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>68.9% (23)</td>
<td>36.1% (13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moral Judgments about Mate Poaching

A second aim of the study was to examine moral judgments of mate poaching. Several items in the survey had respondents rate the degree to which they found mate poaching acceptable on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 5 “Strongly Agree.” As shown in Table 3, 79.5% of participants strongly disagreed with the statement “it is acceptable to steal someone else’s partner away.” Likewise, 9.8% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement “it is acceptable for someone to steal my partner away.” Almost half (45%) of participants gave written responses as to whether or not it was acceptable to steal someone else’s partner away. Several participants opted not to rate these 2 items when they provided a justification response, lowering the number of responses for these items.

Shown in Table 3 are frequencies and means for items assessing justifications and blame for mate poaching. A full 87.1% (n=54) of participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that with the statements that it is acceptable to “cheat when your partner does not make you happy,” or “to meet your own needs.” Further, 69% of participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that “it is alright to steal someone else’s partner if you have better qualities as a partner.” For the item concerning stealing when the partner mistreats, 40.3% strongly disagree, 12.9% disagree, 16.1% neither agree nor disagree, and 3.2% agree with this justification for mate poaching.

Two items assessed blame for poaching: acceptable when meet needs and usually deserves it Table 3 also shows the mean scores for acceptability and blame ratings.
Means for acceptability ranged from 1.38 to 1.61 and means for blame rating ranged from 2.16 to 2.60, on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating higher endorsement of the item.

**Demographic Factors and Poaching**

As part of the descriptive analyses, gender and age differences in mate poaching items were examined using independent samples t-tests, Pearson correlations, and chi-square analyses. Results indicated that males were significantly more likely to endorse acceptability of having their partner stolen than females (M males = 1.75; Mean females = 1.22, \( t(39)=2.702, p<.05 \)). Males were also more likely to claim agreement with the statement: “people who get cheated on have usually done things to deserve it” (M males =2.67; Mean females = 1.95), \( t(60)=2.26, p<.05 \). Males were significantly more likely to attempt to steal: \( \chi^2 (1) = 7.01, p<.01 \). There were no significant associations between respondent age and study variables.

**Relations between Poaching Judgments and Poaching Behavior**

Next, associations between poaching judgments and poaching behavior were examined. Table 4 shows the mean judgment ratings for poaching behavior groups (Yes/No). Results indicate significant differences in means for agreement ratings of “acceptable if better partner.” The mean ratings for those who had never attempted to
TABLE 3

Acceptability Ratings and Blame Attributions for Mate Poaching Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable to steal someone else's partner away</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>79.5% (31)</td>
<td>7.7% (3)</td>
<td>10.3% (4)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>2.6% (1)</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable for someone to steal my partner away</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>78.0% (34)</td>
<td>9.8% (4)</td>
<td>7.3% (3)</td>
<td>4.9% (2)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable when happy</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64.5% (40)</td>
<td>22.6% (14)</td>
<td>12.9% (8)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable when meets own needs</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>74.2% (46)</td>
<td>12.9% (8)</td>
<td>16.1% (6)</td>
<td>3.2% (2)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable if better partner</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>66.1% (41)</td>
<td>12.9% (8)</td>
<td>16.1% (10)</td>
<td>3.2% (2)</td>
<td>1.6% (1)</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No fault if partner mistreats</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>40.3% (25)</td>
<td>17.7% (11)</td>
<td>24.2% (15)</td>
<td>11.3% (7)</td>
<td>6.5% (4)</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s fault</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>35.5% (22)</td>
<td>8.1% (5)</td>
<td>33.9% (21)</td>
<td>6.5% (4)</td>
<td>16.1% (10)</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 4

Mean Judgment Ratings and Poaching Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poaching Judgments</th>
<th>Ever attempted to steal?</th>
<th>Are poached?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>1.46 (.70)</td>
<td>1.58 (.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>1.67 (.87)</td>
<td>1.53 (.87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: bolded means are significantly different, \( p < .05 \)

steal a partner were \( M=1.48 \) were significantly less likely to agree with the statement than those who had a mean rating of attempting to steal (\( M=2.44 \)), \( t(59) = 2.87, p < .05 \).

Similarly, those who were a “poached” partner (\( M=1.76 \)) were significantly more likely to endorse the “acceptable if better partner” statement than those who were not poached (\( M=1.15 \)), \( t = 2.74, p<.01 \).
Participants rated whether or not they agreed with the following statements: (a) It is acceptable for someone to steal my partner away and, (b) It is acceptable to steal someone else’s partner away. In addition, almost half of the participants wrote justification responses for their ratings. The researcher analyzed these justification responses by identifying themes. The following section describes the identified themes.

Four of 25 participants wrote justification responses endorsing “stealing someone else’s partner away.” All 4 participant responses were coded as Unhealthy Relationship, that is, they reflected an underlying idea that if someone was in a bad relationship, stealing the partner is acceptable (see Table 5).

Eighteen out of 25 participants provided written responses related to it being unacceptable to “steal someone else’s partner away” because of an Unhealthy Relationship. Three out of 18 participants’ written responses were coded as Disrespectful. For example, participants made justifications such as “It is disrespectful” and “It is rude.” Nine of 18 participants’ written responses were coded as Karma/Reference to Other, indicating an underlying “golden rule” or consideration for others, for example, “Karma comes around” and “If the same thing happened to you too you will be hurt like they are too.” Five of 18 participants’ responses were coded as Morally Wrong, stating for example, “It is morally wrong” or “It is not right.” Two of 18 participants’ responses were coded as Shared Responsibility (e.g., “They were not married”), and two responses were coded as Other (e.g., “human nature”).
Table 6 shows a summary of justification responses for acceptability/unacceptability of the poaching of one’s own partner. Nine participants wrote justifications for acceptability for “someone to steal my partner away.” Three out of the 9 participants’ written responses were coded as *Unhealthy Relationships*, for example, “If I were a bad person” and “Was not that good of a relationship to start then.” Three were deemed *Shared Responsibility* (e.g., “It’s up to both partners”) and the remaining responses were coded as *Other* (e.g., “My relationship is none of their business”).

Table 6 also shows the 15 out of 24 participants’ written justification responses for non-endorsement of it “is acceptable for someone to steal my partner away.” Five out of the 15 participants’ written responses were coded as *Morally Wrong*, with reference to justice morality, for example, “That’s just not right.” Two out of the 15 participants’ written responses were coded as *Karma/Reference to Other*, for example, “You wouldn’t want the same thing to happen to you.” Six out of 15 participants’ written responses were coded as *Self*, for example, “I only want my partner to be mine” and “I worked hard to build a relationship with my partner.” Lastly, 2 out of 15 participants’ written responses were coded as *Other*, for example, “They have to find someone else.”
TABLE 5

Justifications for Judgments About Poaching Someone Else’s Partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Justification Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Acceptable to Steal Someone Else’s Partner Away” (n=4)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy Relationship (4)</td>
<td>If the person is in an unhealthy relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If someone is in a bad relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saving someone in an unhealthy relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If they’re not getting the respect from their spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Not Acceptable To Steal Someone Else’s Partner Away” (n=22)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect (4)</td>
<td>It is disrespectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is rude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships should be respected by all parties involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma/reference to others (9)</td>
<td>Karma comes around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Put yourself in someone else’s position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the same thing happened to you too you will be hurt like they are too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If they’re in a happy relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is the person that they love</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You can’t steal someone else’s happiness away just because you don’t have yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stealing someone else’s partner will be like taking away their happiness just for your sake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No one wants their heart broken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If they’re the one for you, they will come to you willingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morally Wrong (5)</td>
<td>It is morally wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s better to be wronged, than to do wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is not because it is not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is not right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have no right to break that apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Responsibility (2)</td>
<td>It is impossible to steal someone; it goes both ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They were not married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (2)</td>
<td>It is human nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No one else's business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 6

*Justifications for Judgments Poaching of Own Partner*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Acceptable to Steal My Partner Away” (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy Relationship (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Responsibility (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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Chapter 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature regarding mate poaching among older adolescents and young adults aged 18-21 years. This study assessed the frequency of romantic relationships and experiences, as well as the frequency and success rates for mate poaching. The study also examined whether or not older adolescents think it is right or wrong to mate poach, whether there were associations between mate poaching judgments and behavior, and types of justifications for mate-poaching judgments.

Mate Poaching Frequency

In previous studies with adult samples, researchers have found mate poaching to occur frequently. In the United States, around 85% of men and women have reported that while in a romantic relationship, someone else had tried to entice them for the purpose of starting a relationship. Even more so, across all world regions, almost 70% of people reported that someone had tried to poach them away from their partners (Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Schmitt, 2004). In the current study, fewer than 15% of participants reported attempting to poach someone else’s partner away. This discrepancy is a new finding in the research of mate poaching. The difference found between this study and that of other studies with adults may be due to the age of participants. The participants in this study
were 18 to 21 years. In other studies, the age of participants varied from 30 to 65 years (Schmitt & Buss, 2001) and the mean age for another related study was 22.23 (Miguel & Buss, 2011).

Few participants in the current study reported success with attempts to steal their partners (36.1%); however, they reported success with their own attempts (88.1%). One reason for this discrepancy may be a matter of perception. Perhaps, individuals did not see others’ attempts as poaching as they perceived that their relationship with the poached (current partner) ended prior to the mate poaching attempt. For example, the poachee (those whose partners are taken away) may have ended a romantic relationship with his/her current partner, the poached (partner who is taken away from his/her relationship), because of a mate poacher attempting to steal his/her boyfriend/girlfriend away and the return engagement from the poached. Therefore, when individuals were being asked if someone was successful at mate poaching his/her partner, the success might be low because he/she perceived the relationship had ended.

**Judgments and Justifications for Mate Poaching**

The current study also examined moral judgments about mate poaching. In previous studies, researchers have looked at the frequency of occurrence for mate poaching (Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Schmitt, 2004), the costs and benefits of mate poaching (Schmitt & Shackelford, 2003), tactics and temptations of mate poaching (Schmitt & Buss, 2001), personality characteristics of mate poachers, the poaches, and those poached
(Schmitt, 2004), and mate retention tactics (De Miguel & Buss, 2011; Jonason et al., 2010). However, previous researchers did not examine whether or not young adults thought it is right or wrong to mate poach. In the current study, results indicated that young adults generally disagreed with statements endorsing the acceptability of stealing someone else’s partner away or having someone steal one’s own partner away. Statements listing justifications for stealing (e.g., if partner is better) were similarly not endorsed by this sample. The older adolescents and young adults in the current sample overwhelmingly did not think it was acceptable to poach someone else’s partner and/or to have someone else poach his own partner away. The researcher is unaware of any research that has examined justification endorsements for mate poaching in young adults’ romantic relationships. This is a new contribution to romantic relationships. Future researchers may want to further examine and investigate young adults’ endorsement justifications for mate poaching in romantic relationships. For example, future researchers may want to investigate why young adults who have had prior infidelity experiences in romantic relationships are less likely to endorse mate poaching.

According to Bandura (2002), people who hurt others without feelings of guilt can disengage from societal norms and personal moral standards. Moral disengagement includes eight mechanisms by which disengagement of moral may occur: moral justification, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregarding or distorting the consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame. The two mechanisms believed to be the most closely related to mate poaching are moral justification and attribution of blame. Moral justification includes
justifying a wrongful act as being personally and socially acceptable. For example, the poachers may not feel guilty for mate poaching because those poached were not fully committed to his or her partner (Bandura, Barburnelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bandura, 2002). Attribution of blame includes putting the blame on the victim who brought it upon themselves or the compelling circumstances. For example, poachers may feel that those poached are at fault for ending their own relationships.

In the current study, the researcher found there was little endorsement for mate poaching justifications that shifted blame for poaching behavior away from the poachee. Three out of the 9 participants’ written responses were coded as “Unhealthy Relationships.” For example, participants’ written responses included “If I were a bad person” and “If they’re partner cannot treat them like they should.” This means there was little focus on the mate poachers’ behaviors towards the poached. As a result, the poachee accepted the behaviors of the mate poacher and the outcome of his/her relationship with the poached. The justifications that participants indicated in this study to reflect an approval for the poached to be lured by the mate poacher included “Was not that good of a relationship to start then” and “If someone is not happy in a relationship.” Previous researchers have found that in the development of the self, individuals have standards of what is right and what is wrong. In this process, individuals evaluate their own moral standards, perceive the circumstances, and regulate their actions by the consequences they apply to themselves (Bandura, 2002, p. 102). What this means is that if young adults think that mate poaching is wrong, then they are less likely to violate their own moral standards. Moral disengagement has been found to be related to unethical decision
making (Bandura, 2002). Individuals who are more likely to empathize with others are less likely to morally disengage (Detert et al., 2008).

The results between the association of poaching judgments and behaviors for the statement: “It is acceptable to steal someone else’s partner away if you have better qualities as a partner” was less favorable for those who have never attempted to steal a partner before versus those who have attempted to steal before. In addition, those who were poached partners were more likely to endorse the “acceptable if better partner” versus those who were not poached. The findings indicate individuals’ experience or lack of experience with mate poaching influenced their decision in whether or not mate poaching was appropriate. Previous researchers have indicated that relational skills learned with romantic partners may be drawn upon previous experiences to manage present situations with romantic partners (Bouchey & Furman, 2003). Nonetheless, data also reflected the likelihood to engage with the mate poacher if there were some personal gains from the poached partner’s perspective.

Moreover, results indicated gender differences in poaching items. Males were more likely to endorse acceptability of having their partners stolen. In addition, males were more likely to agree with the statement “people who get cheated on have usually done things to deserve it” and were more likely to report attempts to steal. In a related study, previous researchers found adult men reported a higher percentage rate (men: 41% vs. women 30%) when being poached away from another partner (Buss & Schmitt, 2001). Previous researchers suggest that men may fail to resist women’s attempts (Buss & Schmitt, 2001). Gender differences should be further explored. Future researchers may
want to examine if gender effects young adults’ attitudes towards mate poaching. In addition, future researchers may want to consider examining the short-term and long-term mate poaching attempts that result from the formation of new romantic relationships. Perhaps more males are likely to steal or have their partners stolen is because of a short term romantic relationship versus a long term romantic relationship. One reason for this may be romantic partners’ commitment towards one another. For example, if an individual does not see a future with his/her current partner, then he/she may be more willing to mate poach or accept a mate poaching attempting. Future researchers may want to examine romantic partners’ commitment level in romantic relationships and young adults’ mate poaching attitudes.

Qualitative analyses of justification responses revealed that young adults considered mate poaching to have a moral dimension to it. Young adults in the sample justified that it was acceptable to poach if someone was in an “Unhealthy Relationship.” Some in this sample of young adults thought that if someone was in a bad relationship and he/she was getting disrespected by his/her partner, then it was acceptable to poach that individual. Perhaps, mate poachers felt that they could be a better partner and provide more for the poached. In addition, mate poachers may have perceived that the poachee's romantic relationship was coming to an end and he/she could start a new romantic relationship with this individual. In doing so, the mate poacher could be a savior of some sort. Justifications for acceptability of having one’s own partner stolen away included “Unhealthy Relationship” and “Shared Responsibility.” The poachee might have felt that he/she was not suitable for his/her partner and so if his/her partner was taken away, then
he/she could have a better opportunity with someone else. Future researchers may want to examine young adults’ self-esteem and self-confidence of being a romantic partner and explore associations with mate poaching attempts.

The analyses of justification responses indicated that older adolescents/young adults believed mate poaching had a moral dimension to it. Justifications for unacceptability for mate poaching included references to respect, moral wrongness, references to self, and shared responsibility. The most common responses involved reference to moral wrongdoing or compassion for others. Future researchers may want to further explore this area more by using hypothetical situations in examining young adults’ endorsements on acceptability to mate poach. Interviews might also be useful in fleshing out justifications for this behavior. In doing so, future researchers can have a deeper understanding of young adults’ perspectives and attitudes regarding mate poaching behaviors.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. First, the sample contained a small number of undergraduate participants. The number of participants who completed the survey was smaller than anticipated (n=62). The sample may also be unrepresentative in that all the participants in this study were college students from one university. The results found in this study and the conclusions would have probably been different if
there were a larger number of participants and if participants were from other universities
and the community as a whole.

Other limitations lie in the survey itself. The researcher converted items from the
ARAS from a 7-point Likert scale to a 3-point Likert scale. This may be problematic
because participants were forced to select only one of three options: agree, disagree, and
neither agree nor disagree. This type of scale does not give more detailed answers to
understand young adults’ beliefs and perceptions.

The format of the survey may have created bias among participants. For example,
in the survey the researcher put the following headings: “Tell me about your mate
poaching experience”; “Tell me about your moral justification behavior”; and “Tell me
about your attribution of blame behavior.” These headings may have made young adults
give desirable answers only.

In addition, the survey represented self-reports and did not assess actual mate
poaching behavior. Although one purpose of the research study was to find out whether
or not young adults thought it was right or wrong to mate poach; the endorsements for
acceptability to mate poach others’ partner away and to have someone else attempt to
mate poach individuals’ partner away was a design error. The current researcher asked
the two questions “It is acceptable to steal someone else’s partner away” and “It is
acceptable for someone else to steal my partner away.” The intent of the researcher was
to have participants rate their responses on a 5-point Likert scale, then give an
explanation for their ratings. However, many participants only gave written responses,
rather than answer the Likert 5-point scale.
Moreover, the researcher was the only person to code the themes for the open-ended justifications. This may be problematic because the researcher already knew what data will be meaningful and there may be some unintentional bias. In addition, the researcher may or may not have coded the themes correctly. Future researchers interested in using participants’ written responses may want to consider having more than one person to code themes to prevent any discrepancies.

Conclusions and Future Research

The current study sheds new light into the study of romantic relationships, specifically whether or not young adults think it is acceptable or unacceptable to mate poach. Mate poaching was not found to be a frequently occurring event in young adults’ romantic relationships. In addition, many young adults found it to be unacceptable not only to poach someone else’s partner away from his/her partner, but also for someone else to poach his/her current partner away from him/her. Justifications provided evidence for a moral dimension to judgments of mate poaching.

While the findings in the current study are a contribution to the study of early romantic relationships, future researchers may want to further explore this area of endorsement and non-endorsement justifications to mate poach. For example, future researchers may want to conduct qualitative research using interviews or hypothetical situations in which young adults can better explain their justifications to mate poach. In
this way, future researchers can have a more in-depth understanding of older adolescent and young adult reasoning and perspective.

The discrepancy between the low frequency of poaching in the current sample and other studies also warrants further study. Across all world regions, almost 70% of adults reported that someone has tried to poach them away from their partners (Schmitt & Buss, 2001; Schmitt, 2004). This raises the question of how mate poaching develops, and how adolescents learn to deal and cope with these mate poaching targets. This can be an area to explore for future researchers using developmental designs.

Future researchers may want to further explore mate poaching and reasoning about what mate poaching may mean for later marital relationships. For example, studies could explore whether or not adolescents who find it acceptable to mate poach might have greater likelihood of infidelity in later marital relationships. In addition, future researchers may want to further explore if the frequency of occurrence for mate poaching and moral justification endorsements change as adolescents transition into adulthood.
Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT
MATE POACHING IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study in regards to mate poaching in romantic relationships. My name is Lay Vang, and I am a Master of Child Development student at California State University Sacramento. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are between the ages of 18 years through 21 years old.

The purpose of this proposed study is to fill a gap in the literature regarding mate poaching. Mate poaching is defined as behaviors intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship. The mate poacher is the interloper. Those who are poached are individuals taken away from their established relationships. The poachees are those whose partners are taken away from them. To understand this mate poaching behavior, the researcher will be exploring the frequency of occurrence and nature of mate poaching in youths’ romantic relationships. This study will address the frequency of occurrence in youth’s romantic relationships; the duration of youth’s romantic relationships; the frequency of occurrence for mate poaching in romantic relationships; the success rate for mate poaching attempts in romantic relationships; the frequency of occurrence in romantic relationship breakup experiences; the methods used for romantic relationship breakups; and the different perspective of whether or not youth’s think it is right or wrong to mate poach. There are currently no existing studies looking at mate poaching and moral development with this important age group.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey consisting of 10 categories: the first part will ask you demographic questions; the second part will measure your current relationship experiences; the third part will measure your past relationship experiences; the fourth part will measure your past break up experiences; the fifth part will measure your mate poaching experiences; the sixth part will measure your experience with a mate poacher who attracted your partner away from you; the seventh part will measure your admiration for a mate poacher; the eighth part will ask you if have ever seen someone else try to mate poach; the ninth part will measure your moral development; the tenth part will measure your moral justification behavior; and the last part will measure your attribution of blame behavior. This survey consists to 32 questions and will take roughly 10-15 minutes to complete.

This survey will be self-administered online via Qualtrics. This survey has a possible minimal psychological risk. This survey will be asking you about relationship difficulties that may make you feel embarrassed or bad about answering. You may skip questions at any time. If you experience any psychological discomfort during the study and want help at that time or any time after completing the research, you may call Psychological Services at the Sacramento State Student health center at (916) 278-6416.

In addition, this survey has a minimal confidentiality risk as the researcher will be asking you demographic questions such as your age and gender. However, the information you
provide will remain anonymous and the researcher will not be collecting your signature on the consent forms, ensuring your anonymity.

The information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. All data will be kept in a secure location under the purview to this researcher. Your responses will be kept confidential to the degree permitted by the technology used. However, no absolute guarantees can be given for the confidentiality of electronic data. If you complete the survey and submit it, the researcher will be unable to remove anonymous data from the database should you wish to withdraw it.

While there may be no direct benefits to you, the child development profession can potentially benefit from the general data obtained through your participation as it may provide this researcher with a greater understanding of mate poaching experiences in youths’ romantic relationships. However, you will be given the opportunity to participate in a raffle for a chance to win 1 of two, $50 Visa gift cards. You must complete the survey in order to participate in the raffle. You will need to provide your e-mail address if you choose to enter the gift card raffle.

If you have any questions about this research project please contact me, Lay Vang, at lv45@csus.edu or you can call me at (559) 321-3208. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irb@csus.edu.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to complete the survey and may withdraw from the survey at any time. By clicking on the “I Agree” button, you indicate you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.
Appendix B

Mate Poaching and Moral Development in Romantic Relationships Survey

Thank you for agreeing to complete our survey. Please chose the best response to each question below. The items on this survey will ask about your current romantic relationship, your past romantic relationship experiences, your past romantic relationship breakup experiences, your mate poaching (attracting someone else’s boyfriend/girlfriend) experiences, and whether or not you think it is right or wrong to mate poach.

Before we start please tell us a little more about you:

1. What is your gender?
   1) Male
   2) Female

2. How old are you?
   1) 18
   2) 19
   3) 20
   4) 21

3. What ethnicity are you?
   1) Caucasian
   2) Hispanic or Latino
   3) African American
   4) Native American or American Indian
   5) Asian/Pacific Islander
   6) Other

**Tell Me About Your Current Romantic Relationship Status**

Written below are two questions asking you about your current romantic relationship status. For each question, you need to pick the answer you most identify with. To do this you must click on the answer under each question. Remember, you may skip questions at any time and or withdraw from this survey any time.

4. Are you currently in a relationship?
   1) Yes
   2) No

5. What is your current romantic relationship status?
   1) dating one person exclusively
   2) currently involved with one person and also talking or seeing someone else
   3) currently not involved with any one person and not talking or seeing anyone else
Written below are statements about your current romantic relationship and mate poaching experiences. Mate poaching means attracting someone else’s partner away from him/her. The mate poacher is the person who attracts someone else’s partner away from his/her boyfriend/girlfriend. Those poached are the ones who are taken away from his/her boyfriend/girlfriend. The poachees are those whose partner got taken away. For each statement you need to decide how much you agree with the statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). To do this click on the answer underneath each statement.

6. My current romantic relationship partner is someone I attracted away from someone else.
   1) Strongly Disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither Agree nor Disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly Agree

7. My current romantic relationship partner attracted me away from someone else.
   1) Strongly Disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither Agree nor Disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly Agree

Written below is a question about your current romantic relationship duration. For this question you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath the question.

If you are currently not dating anyone, skip to question 9.

8. If you currently have a boyfriend or girlfriend, how long have you been dating your partner?
   1) Less than 3 months
   2) 3-6 months
   3) 7-12 months
   4) More than 1 year

Tell Me About Your Past Romantic Relationship Experience

Written below is a question asking you about your past romantic relationship experience. For this question you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath the question.
9. Have you ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend?
   1) Yes
   2) No

Written below are questions asking you about your past romantic relationship experience. For these questions you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath the questions.

*If you have never had a boyfriend or girlfriend, skip to question 17.*

10. If you have ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend, which method best describes how you first knew you were his/her boyfriend/girlfriend?
    1) You got introduced as his/her boyfriend/girlfriend to his/her family and or friends
    2) Social media update statuses such as FaceBook (In a relationship with)
    3) Other

11. If you have any romantic relationship experience, how did you learn about boyfriend/girlfriend behaviors?
    1) Yourself
    2) Friends
    3) Family members
    4) Media
    5) Others not listed
    6) Yourself, friends, family member, and media.

**Tell Me About Your Past Romantic Relationship Breakup Experience**

Written below is a question asking you about your past romantic relationship breakup experience. To answer this question you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath each question.

12. Have you ever experienced a romantic relationship breakup before?
    1) Yes
    2) No
    3)

Written below is a list of questions asking you about your past relationship breakup experience. To answer these questions you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath each question.

*If you have never experienced a romantic relationship breakup, skip to question 16.*

13. If you have experienced a romantic relationship breakup, who initiated the breakup?
    1) Yourself
    2) Your Partner
    3) Someone Else
    4) Mutual Agreement
14. If you have experience in breaking up with someone, how did you learn to do this?
   1) Yourself
   2) Friends
   3) Family members
   4) Media
   5) Others
   6) All the above

15. Which method best describes how you and your previous partner broke up?
   1) Text Message
   2) Phone Call
   3) Social Media
   4) Someone else told you or told him/her
   5) Other
   6) This does not apply to me.

16. How hurt were you at the time of the romantic relationship breakup?
   1) Very hurt
   2) Moderately hurt
   3) Not hurt at all

Tell Me About Your Mate Poaching Experience

Written below is a question asking you about your mate poaching experience. To answer this question you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath the question.

17. Have you ever tried to steal someone else’s partner away from his/her partner?
   1) Yes
   2) No

Written below is a list of questions asking you about your mate poaching experience, how successful you were at attracting someone else’s partner, how you learned this behavior, and how it makes you feel. To answer these questions you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath each question. If you have never tried to steal someone else’s partner away from his/her partner, skip to question 20.

18. If you have ever tried to steal someone else’s partner away from his/her partner, how successful were you?
   1) Very successful
   2) Moderately Successful
   3) Not successful at all
19. If you have ever tried to steal someone’s partner away from his/her partner, how did you learn to do this?
   1) Yourself
   2) Friends
   3) Family Members
   4) Media
   5) Other People
   6) All the above

20. How does stealing someone else’s boyfriend/girlfriend make you feel?
   1) Not good at all.
   2) I feel a little good about myself.
   3) I feel very great about myself.

Tell Me About Your Experience With A Mate Poacher Who Attracted Your Partner Away From You.

Written below is a question asking you about a mate poacher attracting your partner away from you. To answer this question you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath the question.

21. Has anyone ever tried to attract your partner away from you before?
   1) Yes
   2) No

Written below is a question asking you about the success of a mate poacher attracting your partner away from you. To answer this question you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath the question. *If no one has ever tried to steal your partner away from you before skip to question number 22.*

22. If someone has tried to steal your partner away from you, how successful were they?
   1) Very successful
   2) Moderately successful
   3) Not successful at all

Tell Me About Your Admiration For A Mate Poacher

Written below is a question asking you about your admiration for someone attracting someone else’s boyfriend/girlfriend. To answer this question you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath the question.
23. Do you admire people for stealing someone else’s boyfriend/girlfriend?
   1) I do not admire people who do this.
   2) I admire people who do this a little bit.
   3) I admire people very much for doing this.

Tell Me If You Have Ever Seen Someone Else Try To Mate Poach

Written below is a question asking you if you have ever seen anyone tried to attract someone else’s boyfriend/girlfriend before. To answer this question you must decide which answer you identify most with. To do this click on the answer underneath the question.

24. Have you ever seen anyone tried to steal someone else’s boyfriend/girlfriend before?
   1) I have seen family members doing this.
   2) I have seen my friends do this at school.
   3) I have seen people at my school do this.
   4) I have seen this on the media.
   5) I have seen other people do this before.
   6) I have not seen anyone ever do this before.
   7) I have seen family members, friends, people at my school, the media, and other people do this before.

Tell Me About Your Moral Development

Written below are statements about moral development. Moral development involves individuals learning how to tell the difference between right and wrong and to act in accordance to the right decision. For each statement you need to decide how much you agree with the statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). To do this click on the answer underneath each statement. Also, please explain your answer. To do this type in your answer in the text box.

25. It is acceptable to steal someone else’s partner away. Explain why.
   1) Strongly Disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither Agree nor Disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly Agree
   6) Explain your answer.

26. It is acceptable for someone to steal my partner away. Explain why.
   1) Strongly Disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither Agree nor Disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly Agree
6) Explain your answer

**Tell Me About Your Moral Justification Behavior**
Written below are statements about the moral disengagement behavior called moral justification. Moral disengagement means people who hurt others without feelings of guilt can disengage from personal moral standards. *Moral justification* includes justifying a wrongful act as being personally and socially acceptable. For each statement you need to decide how much you agree with the statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). To do this click on the answer underneath each statement.

27. It is alright to cheat when your partner is not making you happy.
   1) Strongly disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither agree nor disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly agree

28. It is ok to steal someone else’s partner to meet your own needs.
   1) Strongly disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither agree nor disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly agree

29. It is alright to steal someone else’s partner if you have better qualities as a partner.
   1) Strongly disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither agree nor disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly agree

**Tell Me About Your Attribution Of Blame Behavior**
Written below are statements about the moral disengagement behavior called attribution of blame. Moral disengagement means people who hurt others without feelings of guilt can disengage from personal moral standards. *Attribution of blame* includes putting the blame on the victim who brought it upon themselves or the compelling circumstances. For each statement you need to decide how much you agree with the statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). To do this click on the answer underneath each statement.

30. If a partner cheats in a relationship, it is his/her partner’s fault.
   1) Strongly disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither agree nor disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly agree
31. People who get cheated on have usually done things to deserve it.
   1) Strongly disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither agree nor disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly agree

32. On a scale of 1 to 5 how much do you agree with the following statements.
   People are not at fault for cheating in a relationship if their partner mistreats them.
   1) Strongly disagree
   2) Disagree
   3) Neither agree nor disagree
   4) Agree
   5) Strongly agree
REFERENCES


