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Mate Provisioning



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Synonyms

[Mate protection](#); [Nuptial gift](#); [Resource provisioning](#); [Sexual cannibalism](#)

Definition

Providing one's sexual partner, or a prospective sexual partner, with material resources (such as food) or protection from predators or intrasexual competitors.

In many sexually reproducing species, one sex often will provision a member of the other sex with protection, food, or other resources to gain or maintain sexual access. Females are typically the sex with a larger obligate parental investment for offspring production, and as a result, males exert greater mating effort to gain sexual access to females. Males of many species exert mating effort by provisioning females with protection or material resources, sometimes in the form of a “nuptial gift.”

Nuptial Gifts

Nuptial gifts often are provisioned as a nutritional resource. For example, males in several avian species engage in courtship feeding, wherein they feed prey to their female partner (Jawor and Breitwisch 2006; Mougeot et al. 2006), and male scorpion flies gift females with dead insects or secretions from their salivary glands (Liu and Hua 2010; Thornhill 1981). In several species of spider, including the fishing spider, males offer themselves as a nuptial gift, being devoured by the female while and after they deposit their sperm in the female's reproductive tract (Arnqvist and Henriksson 1997).

Evidence from tribal and postindustrial societies suggests that humans also provision resources to prospective mating partners, though the type of resource provisioned varies across cultures. Several articles reviewing evidence from tribal societies suggest that men may provision food, and in particular meat, to attract mating partners (Bird 1999; Hawkes and Bird 2002; Jaeggi and Gurven 2013). Evidence from a Western, industrialized population suggests a similar pattern, with participants judging displays of resource potential to be the most effective strategy for men pursuing a long-term, romantic relationship (Schmitt and Buss 1996). However, participants from the same study judged immediately giving resources to be the most effective strategy for men pursuing a short-term sexual partner, indicating that the type of relationship pursued is important when

considering the effectiveness of different provisioning strategies.

Protection

Males may also provision their current or prospective mating partners with protection, either from predators or from sexually coercive males. Protection against rival males (also referred to as mate guarding) has the dual adaptive benefit of protecting against cuckoldry for males and protecting against copulation attempts from undesirable mates for females. Research involving mate protection behaviors in several avian species provides evidence for the adaptive benefits to females of protection by a male partner (Hogstad 2015; Lemmon et al. 1997). Specifically, partnered female willow tits received less aggression and experienced a higher foraging rate relative to unpartnered female willow tits (Hogstad 2015). A study of black-capped chickadees found similar results, observing that females paired to alpha males experienced less frequent aggression and a higher feeding rate (Lemmon et al. 1997).

Mate protection behaviors have also been observed in humans; however, these protection strategies have mostly been researched in the context of mate guarding against rival men, rather than protecting one's partner from nonsexual harms. Several studies have identified a range of strategies that men report using in their long-term romantic relationships to guard against mate poaching by rivals (Buss 1988; Buss and Shackelford 1997). There has also been research investigating the potential benefits that women may receive as a result of mate guarding. Hughes et al. (2004) found that, among college students, women are more likely to initiate sleeping with their sexual partner after intercourse. Hughes and colleagues suggested that, similar to other forms of mate guarding, sleeping with one's sexual partner may serve the adaptive function of guarding against cuckoldry for men and protecting against forced copulation from other men for women.

Males of many sexually reproducing species, including humans, exert mating effort in order to gain sexual access to females. This mating effort

often takes the form of provisioning gifts or protection to the female. Mate provisioning is one method by which males compete with one another for access to mating opportunities, and therefore, a male's ability to provision protection or resources can have considerable consequences for his reproductive success.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Mate Guarding](#)
- ▶ [Mating Effort](#)
- ▶ [Nuptial Gift](#)
- ▶ [Provisioning](#)

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