

# Evolutionary Mating: The Science of Choosing Your Partner

Authored by  
**mohammad looti**

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Given that sexual reproduction is the means by which genes are propagated into future generations, sexual selection plays a large role in the direction of human evolution. Human mating, then, is of interest to evolutionary psychologists who aim to investigate evolved mechanisms to attract and secure mates. Several lines of research have stemmed from this interest, such as studies of mate selection, mate poaching, and mate retention.

Much of the research on human mating is based on parental investment theory, which makes important predictions about the different strategies men and women will use in the mating domain (see above under "Middle-level evolutionary theories"). In essence, it predicts that women will be more selective when choosing mates, whereas men will not, especially under short-term mating conditions. This has led some researchers to predict sex differences in such domains as sexual jealousy, (however, see also,) wherein females will react more aversively to emotional infidelity and males will react more aversively to sexual infidelity. This particular pattern is predicted because the costs involved in mating for each sex are distinct. Women, on average, should prefer a mate who can offer some kind of resources (e.g., financial, commitment), which means that a woman would also be more at risk for losing those valued traits in a mate who commits an emotional infidelity. Men, on the other hand, are limited by the fact that they can never be certain of the paternity of their children because they do not bear the offspring themselves. This obstacle entails that sexual infidelity would be more aversive than emotional infidelity for a man because investing resources in another man's offspring does not lead to propagation of the man's own genes.

Another interesting line of research is that which examines women's mate preferences across the ovulatory cycle. The theoretical underpinning of this research is that ancestral women would have evolved mechanisms to select mates with certain traits depending on their hormonal status. For example, the theory hypothesizes that, during the ovulatory phase of a woman's cycle (approximately days 10-15 of a woman's cycle), a woman who mated with a male with high genetic quality would have been more likely, on average, to produce and rear a healthy offspring than a woman who mated with a male with low genetic quality. These putative preferences are predicted to be especially apparent for short-term mating domains because a potential male mate would only be offering genes to a potential offspring. This hypothesis allows researchers to examine whether women select mates who have characteristics that indicate high genetic quality during the high fertility phase of their ovulatory cycles. Indeed, studies have shown that women's preferences vary across the ovulatory cycle. In particular, Haselton and Miller (2006) showed that highly fertile women prefer creative but poor men as short-term mates. Creativity may be a proxy for good genes. Research by Gangestad et al. (2004) indicates that highly fertile women prefer men who display social presence and intrasexual competition; these traits may act as cues that would help women predict which men may have, or would be able to acquire, resources.