

# Darwinian Love

## Dr. Monkeylove uses the evolutionary theory to answer your questions about the nature of love

by Shannon Doyle

Dear Dr. Monkeylove,

**Can you give me a quick refresher on what evolutionary theory is all about?**

Darwinism is often reduced to the simple phrase “survival of the fittest.” The animals that are best adapted to their environment will be most likely to survive and reproduce, ensuring that their genes will be passed on to their progeny. If we assume that the most fundamental drive of animals is to propagate their genes, it would make sense that general preferences and desires somehow relate to that goal. Thus, when answering your questions about love and relationships, I take a purely evolutionary standpoint: what distant past situations and environments could have existed that would cause these behaviors to become hard-wired into our brains?

Dear Dr. Monkeylove,

**Why do puppies and babies work like chick magnets?**

Humans come into the world helpless. Like most mammals, we depend heavily on our parents to feed, protect and teach us. Your so-called “chick magnets” share an important survival characteristic with most young animals: they’re cute. “Cuteness” is actually a form of protective coloration for the young. A puppy’s big eyes and feet, slightly uncoordinated movements, disproportionately large head and overall chubbiness attracts attention by awakening the maternal instincts. Cute animals find themselves surrounded by cooing adults who, by their presence, enhance the babies’ chances for survival.

Dear Dr. Monkeylove,

**Why don’t women ever break up with someone because they want to go out and have their “wild oats” fertilized? Are men biologically predisposed to philander more than women?**

This boils down to a question of pa-

rental investment. A man invests very little time in the conception of a child, sometimes no more than a few minutes. A woman is responsible for the child’s well-being throughout gestation at the very least, and every conception is taxing on her body. With that in mind, a woman would need to be more selective about her sexual partners because in the case of pregnancy, she’ll be dealing with her choice for much longer than the man. To give her children the best chances of survival, she must choose her mate(s) very carefully. She’ll be looking for a man who will stick around after the birth to help care for and protect the babies and someone with some degree of social power or

**SM, 38, looking for curvy, youthful SF 18-25, physically fit, attractive, wants kids, loyalty a must, looking for casual fun**

**SF, 27, seeking mature, respectable, financially secure SM, 30+ who is not afraid of commitment for possible LTR**

prestige to ensure that he’ll provide for her throughout her pregnancy. The men aren’t as choosy- the male strategy is to mate with as many women as possible. The more children a man produces, the more likely it is that his genes will be passed on to another generation in the future. By mating with a variety of women, a man also produces children with a variety of genetic combinations, some of which may be more suitable for survival and procreation. Women, when asked how many sexual partners they’d like to have in their lifetimes, usually wanted four or five. Men responded that they’d

prefer to have 18 or more. During an experiment that has been replicated at least twice, researchers had a “moderately attractive” person approach a stranger and request sex. None of the women approached accepted the offer, but three out of four men did. The evidence looks a little incriminating.

Hey Dr. Monkeylove-

**So this whole Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas thing- how do relationships like that happen??**

I presume you’re referring to the age difference, which is called hypergamy. Men are looking for women who can give them children, so in essence, the most attractive women are the ones who show the most signs of fertility. Because a young, healthy woman has the best chance of bearing children, fertility (and therefore attractiveness) is strongly associated with youth, clear skin, thick hair, and a strong, curvaceous body. When a woman tries to make herself more attractive, it usually involves makeup to combat signs of aging and clothes that accentuate her curves. She improves her appearance to attract men. Age may diminish a woman’s attractiveness, but it enhances a man’s because women aren’t searching for fertility. Women are attracted to social power, resources and a willingness to commit, as I mentioned above. When a man wants to attract women, he’ll most likely brag of his accomplishments or earning power, flaunt his wealth or display social dominance over other males. When a substantial age differences exists in a couple, the combination most likely to occur is a young, fertile female and an older, financially secure male, as shown by Mr. Douglas’s extraordinary luck.

Dear Dr. Monkeylove,

**All of my boyfriends have been really jealous of other guys I hang out**

**with. What's the deal?**

Jealousy may serve as an evolutionary warning flag to a threat or possible loss. The emotionally charged behaviors that come about due to jealousy might actually protect someone's genetic investment. Males feel threatened by the potential loss of sexual access to a female or competition from other males. When a woman has a child, she knows unequivocally that it's hers, but males can never know with absolute certainty that the child is his. Males also find strict loyalty attractive in females because if a man is going to invest his resources and energy protecting a child, he wants to be positive it's his. Otherwise, he could be exhausting his resources while propagating another man's genes. For this reason, men are most jealous of sexual infidelity in their mates. Women report being more troubled by the formation of a strong emotional bond between their mates and another woman. This female jealousy might be because a man's emotional infidelity could lead to abandonment and the loss of the man's protection, resources and help in raising the children.

**To the knuckle-dragging Dr. Monkeylove:**

**I think you and your stupid theory are full of it. You make women seem like gold-digging, simpering baby factories in need of a man's protection, and men come out looking like shallow, oversexed pedophiles who drag their women around by the hair.**

I have a feeling I've offended you, and for that I apologize. It would be foolish of me to assume that the only factor in human behavior is evolution. It is, as the name suggests, only a theory; it's merely an instrument for inquiry, a possible explanation for that which may never be nailed down. Evolutionary theory does not account for the possibility of social learning, which is clearly a strong influence. Perhaps men find curvaceous women attractive because they are taught early in life that those women are the most desirable. This theory reduces men and women to nothing more than a collection of drives and desires and doesn't do justice to the wide spectrum of emotions and motivations that we feel every day. It also does not address determinism. Are we to believe that we have no control over our desires and destinies, that everything we do and think and want is simply the result of millions of years of natural selection?

Just as it would be foolish to ignore the departures from the theory, it would also be naive to ignore the theory all together. It offers a strong link to genetic and biological research into human behavior. Cross-cultural studies show that around the world, men are most attracted to women with a 3:2 hip-to-waist measurement ratio. This ratio transcends the cultures that find larger women beautiful and those that covet the tiniest women; the ratio remains constant. Women consistently rate ambition and high earning potential as very attractive in potential mates, and this includes women who clearly are in no need of financial support. What drives our most instinctual attractions to our significant others? The theory is also applicable to a host of sub-topics such as familial altruism, pro-social behaviors, incest avoidance and person perception.

My answers here are simply possibilities. I am not so ignorant to believe that all the glorious complexities of human love and attraction can be explained by a single theory, nor would I want them to be. Sometimes it is the mysterious nature of love that makes it so powerful. Happy Valentine's Day.