

Transcript for David Buss | The Evolution of Desire (Episode 627)

Full show notes found here: <https://theartofcharm.com/627/>

DAVID: Journaling, in general, is a good thing, both in marriage and throughout your life. Just the act of writing about these things helps people, both in terms of their physical health and their psychological health.

JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm, I'm Jordan Harbinger. On this episode we're talking with my friend David Buss. He's a professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. We're talking about one of my favorite topics anywhere, evolutionary psychology. David Buss has more than 300 scientific publications. Not bad, obviously does a lot of writing and a lot of researching, mostly on human mating strategies. He's been cited as one of the 30 most influential living psychologists. That is a big deal. Such a typical guy, thinks about sex and mating all day long. This stuff is crucial.

Everyone should know what modern science tells us about human mating. Mating matters because the decisions we make about it effect nearly all aspects of our lives. These include the status and esteem in which we are held, the health outcomes we attain, how long we live, the quality of our lives day to day -- we're going to discuss the mating crisis among educated women. This also greatly affects men because of how this works. We'll explore all that and we'll also explore how to select a good, long term, mate and what leads to good long term mate selection, as well as what leads to disasters. Now, let's hear from David Buss.

There's so many good places to start here because mating, dating, being with a significant other for a long period of time is something that people struggle with before they get there and struggle with during the relationship struggle, throughout pretty much every phase. And I say struggle because I think maybe that -- that might be too dramatic of a spin on it, but I feel like people who are doing it right and people who are doing it wrong are always putting in energy into their relationships,

and that's just kind of how it works. There's really no getting around it.

DAVID: Yes, that's right. And I would add that the same people get it right sometimes and get it wrong sometimes, where it's right for five years and then turns bad. You know, I think one of the myths is that somehow we're supposed to meet the one and only when we're at a very young age and live perfectly happily ever after for the next 50 years with no bumps in the road. And I think that's just naive. I think that a person who's an ideal mate for you when you're in, let's say, high school or college, might be different from the ideal mate for you when you're 30 or 40. So, I think we have to keep those complexities in mind when dealing with your point about the travails and troubles and good things about mating as we go through the process.

JORDAN: Every single person that I know -- I think everyone alive -- alive or dead for that matter, has faced problems of mate selection, attraction, retention, there's always conflict between the sexes in relationships, both good and bad. And I'm sure there's a lot of good tension as well as bad. And of course people write songs, poems -- there's art about great and terrible relationships, both of which seem to be, equally popular, depending on where the consumer of that art is in their life and in their relationships. So, there's a lot of stuff here and of course this is a lot of what we focus on at The Art of Charm, in our workshops, our boot camps, the early episodes of the show, so this should be really, really interesting.

I'd like to start with something maybe counter intuitive for a show that traditionally has been geared towards guys. I think the mating crisis among educated women is a great place to start because this also greatly affects men because of simply how this works. Men and women, sort of the default stereotypical relationship -- the mating crisis among educated women affects both men and women in different ways.

DAVID: Yes, absolutely. So the first thing maybe just to describe what that crisis is. What's happened is that there's been a sex ratio

imbalance, meaning that, there's a much larger percentage of women compared to men, who are getting higher education, who are going to college, and also getting higher degrees. But, it's especially pronounced at the college level at the moment. I mean, estimates vary.

It depends on what college you go to but I teach at the University of Texas at Austin. We have about 54 percent women, about 46 percent men, we go up the road to Texas Christian University, it's about 60 percent women, 40 percent men. But this is occurring through the sex ratio imbalance is occurring throughout the United States and Western Europe with some exceptions and the exceptions tend to be the engineering schools like MIT or Caltech. But in the vast majority of colleges and universities, there's this sex ratio imbalance. So -- no, so that's point A. Point B is the reason that this creates a crisis is because women have very strong mate preferences, such that they don't want to mate with guys who are less intelligent, less educated, and less professionally successful than they are.

Women have stronger mate preferences on those variables and so what that means is that there aren't enough highly educated, intelligent, successful men in these settings that women would like. So that's one effect that it has. But the other effect that it has is -- the sex ratio imbalance -- is that it creates a context for a dramatic increase in casual sex or hooking up. I talked recently to a guy who's actually very professionally successful, who got his undergraduate degree at Texas Christian University and as he's recalling the times, there's this kind of glaze that comes over his eyes as he remembers that he had such high mate value there because there was just a surplus of women.

And when there's a surplus of women, basically the rarer sex -- in this case men -- have an advantage because they're higher in mate value and so the way the TCU people describe it to me is a who's a normally a 5 in any other context, could be an 8 at Texas Christian University during that period of time. When you add that into the mix, what happens is that males have a

greater desire for sexual variety as part of our evolved sexual psychology and when men are in that position, they can tip the balance in their favor and so you get more hooking up, less stable relationships, more dissatisfaction, because one of the things that we know in scientific studies of hookup culture is that women typically feel less good about it emotionally afterward.

So I'll give you one example. One study asks people who were engaged in hooking up, "Well, what is your ideal outcome of a hookup?" And women say, "Well my ideal outcome is that this will lead to a relationship," and men are more likely to say, "Well I hope this hookup leads to more hookups. Perhaps this woman will continue hooking up with me or perhaps she'll introduce me to her friends." And so these conflicts come up in part because men and women have overlapping mating psychologies but in some domains dramatically different mating psychologies. It's become fashionable to try to argue that men and women are really identical in their mating psychologies and their sexual psychologies but they're not. I think it's one of these kind of ideologically driven agendas and we know scientifically that -- the areas in which they differ.

JORDAN:

Right, that makes a lot of sense. Of course we can try to create sociological constructs around what we'd like society to look like but we really can't say, "All right biology, you've got to follow suit because you're being pretty inconvenient right now." We have to follow our biology in many ways or at least our bodies want to do that regardless of what society wants to do in any given decade or set of decades. Color me a little bit surprised that if you want to hook up, as a guy, that you go to a private Christian university where there's a lot of women because that will increase your odds. That part is a little surprising. So, if we're in a culture or a society -- a microcosm of society, such as that university where there's a bunch of women. I'm a guy there and I'm more rare so the women are then beginning to act more promiscuously which is what you've implied, right? Am I correct so far?

DAVID: Yeah, in order to attract a guy, they have to offer up sex and with less investment on his part than they really like.

JORDAN: Okay, and so once I get out of that environment as a guy -- let's say I'm in a relationship with somebody that I met there, I'm probably going to be able to punch a little bit above my weight, right? I might be able to select somebody who normally might not want to date me given a 50 50 ratio or given a larger pool of people and so I'm punching above my weight at this university and then I leave that university and enter the quote unquote real world. How will that affect my relationship?

DAVID: Well, there are a couple possibilities. Once they're in a relationship, people tend to invest in the relationship and there's this, what I call this mutual ratcheting up process of investment. And so, it might be that the relationship is just fine outside of that context, but it also might be the case that the woman perceives she has perhaps more options and the guy finds that his mate value has dropped. This gets to a really core issue of what I call a mate value discrepancy.

When there's a mate value discrepancy -- so like if an 8 is mated to a 6 -- then this creates problems for both the 8 and the 6 because the 8 feels that they can do better on the mating market and the 6 is worried that the 8 will defect from the relationship or be sexually unfaithful and so people don't like mate value discrepancies. One of the things people do is they try to influence their partner's perceptions of their mate value in various manipulative ways to try to smooth out that discrepancy or eliminate that perception of a discrepancy.

JORDAN: What are some of those ways? I'd love to hear about that.

DAVID: Well some of them are pretty uncomfortable, I must say. So one of them is that the lower mate value person sometimes tries to undermine the self esteem of the higher mate value person and this can be done in a variety of different ways. There's pretty good evidence that our self esteem, how good we feel about ourselves, is in part a reflection of our mate value -- our self

perceived mate value. And self perception of mate value and other perception of mate value, that's what the all important thing is.

Jordan I'm sure have encountered this perhaps is some women who are really fantastic in a -- they're stunning, they're smart, they have a dazzling personality, but they feel that they have low self esteem. And so they underestimate their mate value or see all the flaws in themselves rather than reveling in their mate value. And I think similar is true with guys. So in general, people are roughly accurate in tracking their mate value but sometimes people are off. I mean you also get the other end of the spectrum. So, some people who are high in narcissism -- the personality trait of narcissism -- tend to overestimate their mate value. If they're a 7, they think they're a 9 and so that can create problems in and of itself.

JORDAN: Jason thinks he's a 12.

DAVID: Only goes up to 10 --

JORDAN: Oh, well, then I -- then that goes double for Jason then on this one. I think he knew that and he still thinks he's a 12. I like this idea here because this is super creepy and cringeworthy. There's a lot of people listening right now, especially women who have been in relationships and they're probably thinking, "Wait a second. That's why this guy treated me like garbage, because he was afraid I might leave, right? So if I'm an average guy or below average guy and I managed to someone who date someone who's much more, in order to

DAVID: Yes, that's right. Now, of course, the two basic classes of influence strategies that I've studied, this is the first one that we just talked about cost infliction. So a guy might insult the woman's appearance or point out flaws or asymmetries or, you know, asking if she's having a bad hair day or whatever. But there are also another class which is a little warmer and fuzzier and nicer which is benefit bestowing strategies and so another set of strategies -- so, let's say a guy's a 6 and he's with a woman who's an 8, he might up his game. So, in other words

more fully embody the qualities that women typically desire. So, invest more heavily in her, increase his status, you know, work harder to increase his income, etcetera. So there are benefit bestowing strategies and cost inflicting strategies and we're a mixed species and we use both sets.

JORDAN:

Yeah, that seems to be the case for a lot of folks. I mean, every guy kind of instinctively -- before they're listening to anything along these lines -- knows that if you want to get somebody who is very desirable then doing that does not just depend on having 6 pack abs or especially if we're in our 30s and 40s, we're working and focusing much more on career and a lot of guys lament that but I think a lot of guys also realize that that's a great way to increase our value, our status as men.

And it doesn't always have to be that way, I mean you could also be well known or have high status in a certain environment, right, as well. I remember when I worked at a movie theater when I was younger and I was probably 17. I became a team leader which is like a, you know, roughly equates to supervisor. And again, I'm 17 years old at this point. And suddenly, a lot of the women that I was working with were kind competing for attention and things like that and I thought, "Wow, this is pretty cool. You know, I got this team leader position, I'm making an extra 75 cents an hour, and I'm a hotter commodity." And it's kind of a joke because in the scheme of things, a 17 year old sub supervisor at a movie theater who no longer has to clean the sticky gummy bears but can delegate that to somebody else, not exactly the same thing as becoming a pro basketball player or winning the lottery, right? But it's all relative to the context in which this happens, I would imagine.

DAVID:

Yes, that's exactly right. A woman friend and colleague of mine said that she went to a conference and she found herself very attracted to the organizer of the conference. And the reason of course, is he had high status. And then she met him six months later and he was just a participant at the conference and she didn't find him attractive and she wondered like, what was she thinking? Status, the esteem in which a guy is held by other

people, is extremely important in women's mating psychology. And part of that is determined by the attention structure. As you point out, it is absolutely context that matters. But the attention structures, basically, the high status person tends to be the person to whom the most people pay the most attention. And that's going to vary across context. This is one of the weird things about our modern mating environment is that, just thought I'll give you one personal anecdote. So, I'm an evolutionary psychologist and I'm very well known in my scientific communities.

So if you go to a conference, especially an evolutionary psychology conference, I have extremely high status. But, I also ride motorcycles. In my motorcycle group, I don't have the hottest motorcycle, I'm not the most experienced motorcyclist, and if my motorcycle breaks down, I don't have a clue about what to do. So in that context, my status is very low. And so males -- especially males -- experience dramatic fluctuations in their mate value in their status and hence mate value as they move from one context to another. Women much less so.

JORDAN: Why is that? I mean the answer seems somewhat obvious but let's spell it out.

DAVID: Well the obvious answer is that a woman's physical appearance -- how physically attractive she is -- it's important for both sexes but it's a more important component of women's mate value than it is of men's mate value. And so, like if you see, just as an example, a hot woman with a guy who's kind of dumpy looking, people automatically assume, and they're correct, that he must have high status and high resources and almost invariably does. The attractive women, the 8s the 9s and the 10s, they are not going out with guys who are flipping burgers at McDonalds.

JORDAN: Right, typically. That could probably be different though, right? Because what if she got out of a relationship or was raised in such a way where her sense of self worth was pegged as lower regardless of her physical appearance, right? Then she may

actually choose to go after somebody like that thinking that's what she deserves.

DAVID: Yes. I think you're right. There is some critical period in adolescence where our self perceptions and mate value do become somewhat crystallized but it's also sensitive to change. Like there are lots of cases where, let's say a woman is a kind of a gawky, and tall and gangly pre-adolescent and maybe made fun of, but then blossoms into a beautiful woman, or similarly, a guy who's, let's say I don't know, might be nerdy, not terribly athletic, not popular with women in high school, but then becomes very professionally successful. So mate values change over time. It would be astonishing if we didn't have any ball psychology that was sensitive to those changes. You know if we were totally pegged to what our self perceptions were when were in 10th grade.

JORDAN: Yeah. Of course those things would -- would and should evolve. And, I'd love to discuss some potential or possible solutions to this because there's a lot of people sitting at home right now, listening to this, thinking, "Okay this is really kind of a bummer. What can I do about any of this?" Especially if you're an educated female and you're thinking, "Oh, shoot, that's my problem? I thought it was just this particular context. What are my options now?"

DAVID: Well, there are a couple different possible options for a woman in that position and it's being a professor and, you know, a lot of female friends are also professors and highly educated and so I talk to them quite extensively. So I know from personal experience what they go through. But one thing has to do with changing the context. So, getting out of a mating pool that's disadvantageous and there are different mating pools. And so, I mentioned earlier -- think places like MIT or Caltech, there are places where there's a surplus of men. And there are other places that are just disasters for a lot of women.

So, for example -- and so it's not just in universities. So like, Manhattan -- there's a huge sex ratio imbalance where there

are a ton of attractive, single, often successful -- professionally successful -- women and a surplus of them compared to the men in Manhattan. And so -- so that's another context, so the moving into a different context -- but the other is that women -- I think another strategy would be to widen the pool of potential mates she considers.

I know this one colleague, female friend of mine. She's a professor. She has these really exacting criteria, like she wants a mate who speaks at least three languages, knows Russian literature in depth so she can have these interesting conversations about Russian literature with this guy. It's an absurdly specific set of criteria. Weirdly, most academics are -- so majority tend to lean left politically. What's interesting is that she finds herself most attracted to guys like republican bankers and so there's this really interesting mismatch between what she thinks she wants and who she is really attracted to.

And so I think that one thing women can do is take stock of their mate preferences. I actually just yesterday had a drink with a woman who's a professional matchmaker and she said that her clients -- the female clients -- they come in with this long list of like 53 things that they must have in a potential mate and I think it's important for women to take stock that -- well, what are the necessities and what are the luxuries? What are things ideally you would like to have but what are you willing to compromise on? What are you willing to trade off on because no one is going to get the perfect thing -- mate who embodies all 53 qualities that they ideally want.

JORDAN:

Yeah this is something that we do at boot camp as well. Go through deal breakers, go through lists of what you want and what you think you want, and we can get into that in a little bit because humans are typically pretty bad at preferences. We're really, really bad at thinking about things that we want and differentiating between things that we think we want and things that we actually want and that we actually need. We're

really bad as humans -- preferences and long term thinking. Is that correct?

DAVID: I wouldn't say we're disastrously bad. I think that there are problems with it though, both in mating and outside of mating. So yeah, sometimes people think, "Boy, if only I could get that hot girl then I would really be happy." They find sometimes they get the hot girl and no, she's either not that bright or they have to be constantly vigilant because there are mate poachers around, guys who are always hitting up on her, so they constantly have to be doing mate guarding. Our predictions of what is going to make us happy are known to be off base. Yeah some self reflections, which it sounds that you do in your boot camps -- what are necessities, what are deal breakers, and then what things can you live without?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: If you're a female or a male for that matter and you find yourself in a particular context or situation in which you would be at a dating disadvantage -- so for example, if you're a guy, you're going to an engineering school, there's three women in your class of 60 or whatever the ratio ends up being, the timing is probably pretty poor for you to be selecting or to present yourself to be selected, if we're going to use the evolutionary psychology terminology here -- the time is bad for you to lock something down. You should maybe wait or consider waiting until you are in a more advantageous position. So if you graduate from that school, you take a job in New York City, that's a better time for you to put yourself out there and indulge in the dating pool because your odds are going to be much higher that you're going to get something that you're satisfied with long term. Is that correct?

DAVID: Yeah, that is absolutely correct. I mean it's one of the reasons that I think guys tend to delay committed, long term mating, for longer than women do. So the average age women is like two and a half to three years. Guys marry older and part of the reason for that is because the arc of their career and status

trajectory is different so that the most 20 year olds don't have the highest status. You know, if they were on an upward trajectory, you know, you want to wait because you are going to be able to attract a higher mate value person in the long run, closer to the peak of your arc.

JORDAN: Right, so it's better for guys short term, to wait until they're really in the peak of their career and then date somebody who's significantly younger -- sort of problems with personalities and age gap aside, that would be the biological win, if that's the only factor we're taking into consideration.

DAVID: Yeah, you want to be able to ideally -- this is how our mating psychology is built -- you want to be able to attract the highest mate value person you can, all else equal, but also someone that you can retain. So this is -- I'm talking about long term mate now. So it does you -- if you're a 6, it does you no good to attract an 8 in the hopes that you're going to be able to hold on to her because these mate value discrepancies, which we mentioned earlier, they are predictive of infidelity and breakups, and so you want to be able to attract the highest mate value person that you can successfully retain. So mate retention is just as important as initial mate attraction.

JORDAN: There's something that I think a lot of people don't think about. Whether or not they're looking for shorter term relationships -- here's looking at you, every guy ever -- or just not thinking about it because you can't see the forest through the trees or you're just trying for a quick win, I would love to discuss the mate retention stuff as well because I think that concept is of greater utility for people over a longer period of time. You know, most of us at some point get into a long term relationship or we get married and this stuff stays in play, whereas many of us have left or are leaving the dating stuff behind, maybe forever.

DAVID: Yes, that's right. Sometimes people pay a lot of attention to the mate attraction process and not enough attention to the mate retention process.

JORDAN: So let's talk about online dating. How has Internet dating -- which has risen dramatically over the past decade -- how has that sort of been messing with our evolved mating psychology, which has been growing over -- not just the past decade but the past 100,000 plus years and change, right?

DAVID: Yes. It's a great question and what we need to do is contrast the ancestral environments in which our mating psychology evolved with the modern context. So we evolved in the context of small group living -- so groups of perhaps 50 to 150, maybe as many as 200. So, in small group living, pretty much everyone knows one another but here's the key thing. The number of potential mates that you would come across in your lifetime, maybe would have been a few dozen, okay? A relatively small number. In the modern environment, we have -- due to Internet dating and large, urban city living -- we have thousands, potentially millions of possible mates for us out there. And so what this does, I think, is it has some positive effects and some negative effects.

So one positive effect is that, well it probably increases the chances that -- it dramatically increases the pool of potential mates that you have access to. So in small group living in the past, you wouldn't have access to a group of potential mates that lives 50 miles away. They'd just be geographically too far away. They'd be isolated. You wouldn't even know about them. So, that's one good thing but the bad thing is it gives us this illusion that we can find that mate who fulfills all 53 things that we want in an ideal mate and so what that means is that especially the women -- so I know this one woman, she went on an Internet dating site, she's fairly attractive, and she got -- within, I don't know, a week or so -- 500 responses from guys. She was very, very picky and so she actually went out on a date with only one of those guys and within the first five minutes found something wrong with him. And so, it gives people the illusion that there is that perfect mate out there for us.

And then a second thing that it does, and this is especially true on some dating sites more than others. So Tinder more than

let's say, I don't know, OkCupid or eHarmony -- that physical appearance takes on overwhelmingly a disproportionate importance compared to what it should be. So physical appearance is important. It's important for men, it's important for women, physical attractiveness is a sign of good health, it's a sign of good genes and it's somewhat more important for women's mate value than men's mate value as I mentioned earlier, but it's important for both sexes. But it's just one thing.

You know, you also -- in long term mating -- you know, you want someone who has other qualities. You want someone, for example, who is kind, empathic, has good social skills, and also -- this is something I think is overlooked a lot -- is you want someone who is within your intelligence range. If there's too large a discrepancy in intelligence, basically the smarter person always feels like they have to dumb down what they're saying and the less smart person is always struggling to understand what the smarter person is saying. So you want to be with someone within your intelligence range.

Of course this isn't important for short term matings. If you're just interested in a one night stand, a casual hookup, it doesn't matter. But in the long run, you want some compatibility on those things as well as other things. So, things like values and political orientations, religious orientations, those things are extremely important. I think most people know that. You know, you do find the occasional democrat and republican who work successfully so like James Carville, Mary Matalin. She's a republican, he's a democrat. They seem to have a very successful marriage. But if you're too discrepant in general, it's a generalization on political views, on religious orientations, then it creates conflict in a relationship.

Anyway, that's kind of a long winded answer to your question. So just to sum that up I think the key points are giving us the illusion that we can find someone who fulfills everything that we want and then also increases the importance the online dating sites create physical appearance has had like an

overwhelming variable that tends to obscure all these other important variables.

JORDAN:

So what can we do about that because men and women everywhere are lamenting the fact that you get swiped or not swiped and now you're out of luck and that the disparity in effectiveness for online dating men and women -- many guys can't get enough matches, many women are getting so many that they just -- they're overwhelmed by it because most of them are not a fit. How do we start to fix this problem? Or is online dating just so broken it's not worth doing?

DAVID:

Well I don't know. I mean, I think there's a way in which the online dating is still kind of in its infancy. I mean there are new sites that crop up all the time and people are just trying to figure out what works and what doesn't work and of course it depends on your mating goals. Are you into it just for short term mating? So Tinder, for example, tends to be more of a short term mating app. In fact, I read a statistic recently that 30 percent of the guys who were on Tinder are actually married. They're just looking for something on the side. Where there -- other dating sites tend to be more oriented towards long term relationships, so I don't know. If you're a woman looking for short term mating, then Tinder is great. And people do sometimes find long term mates on Tinder but I would advise women who are looking for a term mate -- Tinder is probably not your best bet.

So the other thing is, and this gets to the issue and one of the cardinal aspects of our mating psychology is what's called in the business female choice. Women have evolved to be very, very choosy. And part of what that means is that, in an environment where they perceive that there are these millions of potential guys out there, they feel that they can be really, really picky. And so, I've heard many accounts where women -- they'll diss a guy after a first date. They'll have a coffee or a drink with a guy and maybe he's a little nervous or something and they'll totally discount him. You know, sometimes on the

second date he relaxes a little and his true personality comes out.

And, you know, on these first dates, people know they're being evaluated critically, it's like going on like a high stakes job interview. I guess I would encourage women to give guys a second chance. Guys also -- I guess I would encourage them not to focus solely on physical attractiveness. I think guys -- you know, probably including me -- I think guys tend to overvalue -- it's part of our evolved psychology, we're very attentive to physical attractiveness in women. Because they're cues to fertility, they're cues to health. But for a long term relationship to work, there's this old cliché, you know, "Don't marry a pretty face," or "Don't marry solely a pretty face". You need so many other qualities in a long term mate.

JORDAN: I want to challenge you on something. So if guys are supposed to not look at just another pretty face and women are supposed to give guys a second chance, aren't we kind of just telling people again, what we talked about in the beginning of the show which was, "Hey look, you can't fight biology. We can't have these sociological constructs that say everything is going to be the same. We've got to listen to our biology," and now we're saying, "Well actually, maybe don't just listen to your biology because the online world is skewing that perception so much?" Where's the balance? Because it seems like we just recommended people to not worry about that?

DAVID: No I don't see a contradiction there. And first of all, I would call it our evolved psychology. So it's really the evolved psychology and yeah, our bodies and minds and brains that we're dealing with. But here's the thing. We have many competing desires that are part of our evolved biology, our evolved psychology. You can say -- to take into a slightly different context -- you know, we have evolved food desires for things that are rich in sugar, fat, salt, and protein. But we can say, "Okay, I'm not going to eat that, you know, Bic Mac and have a tub of ice cream even though it tastes really good, because I have other goals. I want to be healthy, I want to be fit, I don't want to get fat.

So, many of our evolved goals are in conflict with each other and so we can choose to override some of them in the service of others. Biology is not destiny in the sense that social input has no effect. Of course social input has effect and we've been talking this whole time about social input like sex ratio imbalances, you know, number of competitors in the mating pool, changes in mate value over time as a function of status. So things change. Just as we can overcome our food preferences.

This is another perfect example. Our food preferences evolved in a context where things like fat and sugar were in scarce supply and so it made very good sense to hunger after these things and also to pack on weight when we came across abundant resources. And so, now we live in this weird modern world where they take these evolved food preferences and exploit them by, you know, making them widely available and concentrated packets on every street corner. And so as a consequence, we as a society, we're fatter, we're having problems with type 2 Diabetes, etcetera. But we can choose to override these things because we have other evolved goals.

And I think the same is true in mating. You can't tell a guy not to be attracted to a woman who's physically attractive. There's much more consensus about how attractive a woman is than there is about how attractive a man is. Men's attractiveness tends to be more contingent on context, as we mentioned earlier, context like his status in the local environment. So anyway, I don't think there's any contradiction between saying that yes we have these evolved desires but we have many of them and we can choose to plump up some and dampen down others.

And so what I'm suggesting is that you're not going to eliminate men's sexual attraction to attractive women just as you're not going to eliminate the sensation of sweetness if you put sugar on your tongue. But, you can say this is only one variable and in long term mating, that's especially important. It's fine -- in short term mating, all this is much less consequential. But

here's one other element in which it is consequential. A lot of the mate competition among men tends to be focused on physically attractive women. The 8s and the 9s, sometimes the 10s although sometimes, women who are a 10 -- there's a little bit of a dropoff because guys are too intimidated to approach the 10s sometimes. But let's say the 8s and the 9s. There's a huge competition for those and so a woman who looks like an 8 or a 9 on an Internet dating site, she gets a ton of interest from guys. But if you're a guy, sometimes much better off competing not where the competition is fiercest. You know, you have much better odds competing where there's a bit less competition. And so that's a piece of mating advice that I would just urge guys not to get too overwhelmed by physical appearance. So a woman, of course, has to be attractive enough -- as one friend of mine said, "Over threshold."

JORDAN:

I think it's important to realize this as a guy. For me, going back to your original question for me which was how did I meet and decide on Jenny as my wife was that there was the over threshold, to put it as -- in sort of a Beautiful Mind kind of way. The John Nash kind of way, I think he mentioned that in that movie, the over threshold. But, it's very easy, especially in a city like Los Angeles -- where we met -- to get caught up on the next best thing or the bigger, better deal, or something like that. And I have to be very clear, I just -- I actually did a lot of what we do at AoC and things like that where I identified deal breakers, I identified what I wanted, what I thought I wanted, and then tested those assumptions. "Okay, here's what I think I want," date a bunch of people who have those, "Hmm, maybe I don't really want that because I tested that and this doesn't really mesh well with me. It's just something I thought I needed."

So once you get those things out of your system, I whittled away at the things I thought I wanted. Instead ended up with a deeper list -- or a more accurate list of deeper qualities, I should say-- that I actually did want. And those ended up being what we would call deal breakers, where it's like, "Okay this person cares about others. That's important to me. I've tested that. It doesn't work when they only care about me or only care about

themselves. They have to be kind, they have to be nurturing," and all these other things that I'd put in there. And, I also got rid of other things I thought I needed such as types. Typically my girlfriends have been tall blonde women. It's not because I liked tall blonde women, it's just something that started when I was in high school and sort of went all the way through college and then afterwards and it's just something that -- those are the women that were attracted to me and those are the women I decided to date.

Jenny is Asian. I never dated anyone Asian or I should even say mostly my girlfriends have been white -- caucasian. And, I got rid of that thinking, "Well I can be more open about it. It's not a deal breaker for me. I don't really care, it's just a habitual thing that I've dated caucasian women." So once I got rid of that stereotype or the wish -- desire for that stereotype or the classic caucasian woman like I'd grown up dating in Michigan, that opened up a whole bunch of other areas that I'd never really thought about which cause me to be more open minded in general. Which actually I think long term, so far, has made me much happier. Because instead of marrying somebody that had everything I thought I wanted, I tested those assumptions, refined that list pretty greatly, and married somebody who fit an entirely different set of characteristics that I might have thought I wanted a few years ago and that I hadn't tested before.

DAVID: Yeah. Well so I'm curious -- so in addition to the physical appearance, what other qualities did you decide were critical and which did you decide you could dispense with or that were not true once you tested them?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: So I thought I wanted somebody who was really sophisticated in certain ways, really well travelled and knew a lot about all these different parts of the world. Not that Jenny is not sophisticated but she's definitely travelled a lot less than me and I decided that it's okay. I'm just as happy teaching somebody about things that they don't know as I am learning

from that person about international things or travel or etcetera. Jenny teaches me other areas that she's more experienced in. So that whole thing, I thought, "For sure, I need somebody who's grown up abroad, maybe even in Europe or spent lots of time there and spent a lot of time studying foreign languages or foreign relations or something like that." None of that turned out to be that important. None of it did.

Something that I didn't know that I needed that I ended up really wanting was somebody who was very positive. I can get caught in negative thought loops and things like that or, you know, get down on -- or beat myself up about something, especially about the business, and I needed somebody who was going to force me to look on the bright side and a lot of the women that I was dating would either indulge the negativity that I had at that point or they would just ignore it until it went away.

But I really like the fact that Jenny is bubbly and fun and positive and when I feel a little bit down she's like, "Oh, let's go for a walk. Let's go get some ice cream or something like that," or, "Let's go to the gym," or some measure of that. She's very good at pulling me out of that funk. I haven't had that before and when I found that I thought, "Wow, this is something that I never actually knew that I needed," and I'd seen hints of that from other women that I'd dated but she's definitely the best at it and it really, really sticks out.

DAVID:

That's very cool. I'm happy for you. That's a really important part of the learning process. In my case, two qualities that I have changed in how important they are -- okay, one is emotional stability. Earlier in my life I was involved with this woman, she was drop dead gorgeous, she was intelligent, had a fascinating personality, she was lively -- she was sort of everything, you know, that I thought I wanted but she had this one other quality that undermined everything and that's that she was high on neuroticism or emotional instability. And I didn't realize that at the time -- I didn't realize how important that was at the time.

After that breakup I really elevated the importance I attached to emotionally stable women. So that was one and then the other is narcissism. And this is some of my scientific research kind of supports my also -- my personal experiences. If you're mated long term with someone who's high on narcissism, it's problematic because they feel entitled to more than their fair share of things and that includes sexual infidelity. So living with a narcissist can be a real nightmare, at least depending on the narcissism. Some people do just fine with it.

A narcissist admires themselves and then they're mating with someone who admires them. But if that admiration, you know, shows any cracks, then the narcissist will get very angry. One of the things about narcissism is that at least many have this -- what's called oscillating self esteem. The oscillate between thinking they're the greatest person in the world and then thinking they're really shallow and a piece of ****. That fragile self esteem is really problematic as well. Those are two things I would actually advise most people, if you're looking at personality characteristics, to avoid or to select. Avoid emotional instability and avoid narcissism in potential mates.

JORDAN: I think most people know to do that. I think the problem is that they get caught up in that anyway for some other reason. Would you agree there? I don't think anyone's like, "Look man, I just need to date a narcissist because that's what I'm into." I mean maybe there's some but it seems rare.

DAVID: Well, yeah. A narcissist can be very charming initially. That's part of the catch and so as a general rule men tend to be a bit higher on narcissism than women and so a guy can be very charming and a woman thinks, "This is such a great guy, he's so charming, he's so sophisticated, he's showering me with attention and flowers and everything." But what's good in the short term, sometimes is not so good in the long term. You know and that's part of the reason people don't say, "Okay I'm going to marry after 10 days." A few do. It happens occasionally. It typically ends in disaster.

JORDAN: Yeah, that seems like it would be a disaster and I think a lot of men and women will look at things like, "Oh, well I really love somebody who acts this way," but like you said, it is a short term mating strategy. Obviously we now know a great deal about what leads to good, long term mate selection and what leads to disasters. So, narcissism, things like that, leads to disaster. Anything else that's kind of a direct link? Somebody who's very charming isn't always narcissistic, but it's a fairly good indicator. How do we know if somebody's just very charming versus narcissistic early enough to go -- because there's people listening right now who are going, "Yeah, I like that and I always seem to end up with narcissists. Does that mean I have to date somebody who is kind of a putz in order to not end up with a narcissist, yet again?" There have to be other factors, right?"

DAVID: So I do talk about this in my book, [*The Evolution of Desire*](#), and what some of the hallmarks are, and they're basically seven hallmarks that you can look for. One thing is to look at how people treat not just you but how they treat other people. So some of the hallmarks, just to mention a couple, and then people can explore further. I also have an article published that people can download free from my website, specifically on narcissism and its hallmarks. But one is, one I mentioned earlier, a sense of entitlement. And so, the sense of entitlement is kind of hard to conceal, so -- if you are with somebody for any length of time.

A second is a sense of grandiosity, so overinflation of their status, their abilities, or their looks. Let's see, what are some others? Self centeredness is another hallmark and this is also disastrous for relationships. You have to have a balance between -- we are all selfish to some degree, I mean we have to do things for ourselves. We have to eat, we have to go to the gym, we have to work on our own careers, but in a relationship you want someone who has what I call a good welfare tradeoff ratio.

That is someone who values your welfare, at least in proportion to their own, doesn't have what I call a selfishly skewed welfare tradeoff ratio, and that's what narcissists have is a selfishly skewed welfare tradeoff ratio. They think that they deserve the biggest piece of the pie, the privileged place, the best seat in the house -- you know, as opposed to the other person -- and they expect their mate to make all the sacrifices in the relationship. Those are a few of the hallmarks and I think a keen observer -- I think you can train yourself to pick up on these signs or tells of narcissism over time, if you're aware of what indicates it. And the same with emotional stability. So one of the hallmarks of emotional instability is like -- as we go through life, we all experience stresses and strains, bumps in the road, setbacks, problems, difficult people we have to deal with.

One of the hallmarks of emotionally unstable people -- they get thrown out of balance or out of whack more easily by these bumps in the road and it takes a longer period of time before they return to baseline. So that latency of return to baseline is another hallmark that people can attend to for the emotional stability, instability dimension.

JORDAN:

Okay, that's probably an entirely new show that we'll have to do at some point because there's a lot to chew on there. But I would love to talk more about something you mentioned earlier in the show, personality characteristics, for example people who are more likely to cheat, who's more likely to leave, and who is more like to be a good partner through thick and thin. You're hinting at this right now but what are some characteristics we can look at for that? We already talked about mate value discrepancy, for example, if you've got somebody because of context who might be -- again, you're punching above your weight. That person is more likely to cheat or leave you. Who's more likely to be a good partner through thick and thin? Are there other factors that might illustrate who's more likely to cheat and leave?

DAVID:

Yes. There are two. One is conscientiousness. So this is one of the factors -- I'm sure many people have heard of the big five.

So people talk about the big five personality characteristics and one of them is conscientiousness. So there's people who are dependable, reliable, tend to be punctual, tend to be hardworking, industrious, as opposed to impulsive or undependable, might show up might not show up, might forget to call you, might forget to text, whatever. And so that dimension is critical. So people who are more impulsive and lower on conscientiousness are more likely to cheat. And then also low agreeableness is another one. There's a new body of research that talks about the dark triad, and the dark triad is also more likely to cheat. Dark triad is high narcissism, high machiavellianism, and high psychopathy. People who are -- both men and women -- who are high on these dimensions, are much more likely to cheat. You want to avoid those in a long term mate for sure.

The other one is kind of tricky and this is where I was going to introduce a slightly -- another complexity to this and that is that there are individual differences in what's going to work for someone. And one of those has to do with the fifth factor on the big five, which is openness to experience. And this is an individual difference variable. Some people are open to new experiences, they like to try new food, new restaurants, new countries, new cultures -- they like to expose themselves to new stuff and then some people don't. And I think it's important to be in the ballpark of being well matched on those. So, in my case, I'm fairly high on that. I like to experience a wide variety of things and so I like to be with someone who also is that because then that person exposes me to, you know, new experiences themselves. It is also the case that if someone is too high on openness then that means they're sometimes high on openness to other sexual relationships.

JORDAN: Mm-hmm.

DAVID: But it's the combination of high openness and low conscientiousness that predicts, statistically, infidelity in relationships.

JORDAN: So what are some practical ways in which we can actually enhance our ability to select somebody who's going to be great for us long term?

DAVID: One thing, yeah, is to write an essay in which you describe in as much detail as you can, your best mating experiences -- that is, what has worked in the past -- and also, your worst. And then, analyze what qualities they were, like what is it that caused the relationship to work, what is it that caused relationships to fail? And so I think that kind of gaining self insight through your own experiences can be helpful.

Now, I do this professionally, that's why I have a professional curiosity about -- well, your marriage and what led to your mating experiences. But, I talk to people about mating all the time and I learn something practically every day from people. So, as I mentioned, I talked to this professional matchmaker yesterday and she related a number of experiences that she's had. So I think talking to other people is another useful strategy for increasing your -- we call it mating intelligence, for lack of a better phrase.

JORDAN: So when we write this essay, detailing our best and worst mating experiences, how do we know our perceptions here are accurate, or does that not matter?

DAVID: Yeah, I don't think it matters for the exercise. I mean, perceptions are extremely in and of itself -- in and of themselves, whether they're accurate or not. And our perceptions of how attractive -- to take something, you know, that you could maybe objectively measure -- how attractive a particular person is -- even physical attractiveness -- there are individual differences in them. And so, the man perceives his partner to be attractive, that is the best predictor of how happy he is in the relationship -- it's also a good predictor of his sex life, by the way.

That's another topic we might get into at some point. It doesn't matter if you had a panel of 100 judges and they say, "Well

actually, no she's only a 4." This guy thinks she's a 9. It's the fact that he perceives her to be a 9 that's what's driving it as opposed to, quote, objective reality on it. I think perceptions are important, in and of themselves, to be analyzed. And that also might lead to issues like, "Well was I miscalibrated? Are my perceptions accurate? Was I mistaken? Did I think this person was charming and it turned out they were a narcissist?" So I think perceptions are absolutely fine. Another thing I would add is, add emotion words to the essay. That is, how did you feel when these different things in the relationship unfolded. Both the good ones and the bad ones.

JORDAN: Right, because then we can decide whether or not we want to repeat those particular feelings or not, right?

DAVID: Yeah, I think there's something. There is what I call emotional wisdom. People don't pay enough attention to -- that is, you know, our gut feelings about things. I mean, people sometimes have a gut feeling that this is wrong but they then do it anyway because objectively, on some objective list, this person fulfills all the qualities but they have a gut feeling that it's not going to work. And those gut feelings, I think, should be listened to. Our emotions, of course, are evolved emotions. The way we feel about things is an important guide and so, that's why I would encourage in their essay to add emotion terms. How do they feel, not just what were their perceptions. How did they feel about these things that they unfolded.

JORDAN: I think that homework is pretty important. I strongly advise everyone to actually do this because creating this type of written record and putting it to paper, not just thinking about it, is actually really important. This made a huge difference for me, personally, when looking at things I thought were maybe important and what weren't important, and then testing these particular assumptions, inside and outside of my relationships and my dating life at that time, was extremely valuable. Is this something that we can do if we're already married? Is this useful inside the context of marriage?

DAVID: I think it is. Journaling, in general, is a good thing, both in marriage and throughout your life, about different things. I mean, among other things -- I mean, there's actually pretty good scientific research on things like bad experiences or traumas -- traumatic experiences. When people write about them, it really helps them to -- both kind of organize those experiences in a kind of coherent narrative, and also to get some closure on it. And so, there's evidence that just the act of writing about these things helps people, both in terms of their physical health and their psychological health. You know, and I think the same thing can be said -- writing about the positive stuff hasn't been looked as much in the psychological research but I think it's just as important.

JORDAN: David, thank you so much. Is there anything that I have not asked you that you want to make sure you deliver to the audience?

DAVID: Two last things. One would be personality is really important and there are individual differences, both in what we want and what we seek and who's going to be a good partner for us. But the other is, you have to be reasonably accurate about your mate value. If you're off in your self perceptions of mate value, you're going to be going after the wrong pool of partners, in both directions. If you think you're hotter than you really are, you're going to be going after people that, even if you succeed in attracting, you're not going to succeed in retaining. Or if you underestimate your mate value, you're going to be going after people who are lower in mate value than you really deserve.

JORDAN: And that has implications for us working on ourselves and our self esteem, as it grows, through working on ourselves. For example, if we're in our forties and we decide, "You know what? I'm going to learn a new language and I'm going to get in shape." And then you do that and then maybe you quit your job and you start a business or you get promoted. Your social status changes inside your relationship. That can be good and bad, I suppose.

DAVID: Yes, that's right. That can close a mate value discrepancy or it can open up a mate value discrepancy that wasn't there.

JORDAN: Well, yikes. I don't think any of us really want to eject from our relationships just because we got promoted and got in shape, right? So it might be worth focusing on what to do in those contexts and I have some inkling of how to do that but I'd rather open that can next time we talk.

DAVID: Sounds great.

JORDAN: Thank you so much for your time. This has been super enlightening and really, really interesting. Definitely an area that's near and dear to my heart and a lot of what we do at AoC is based on these concepts that you have researched over the past few years. So, I wanted to take the opportunity to thank you both for coming on the show and for helping found and expand this area of science, which I think is greatly important, not just to The Art of Charm as a business, but to humanity in general because the more we understand these, the happier we can be inside our relationships and I think that itself is priceless.

DAVID: Yes, well thank you. It's been really fun and delightful talking to you and it's really -- from my perspective, really enjoyable to talk with someone who's sophisticated about our underlying mating psychology. We can have a much more interesting conversation as a result.

JORDAN: Great big thank you to David Bus. The Book title is [*The Evolution of Desire*](#). Of course that'll be linked up in the show notes for this episode. I love this. I had a hard time capping this at even the hour that we talked here and there's definitely going to be more David Buss on the show. It took us a while to get this scheduled and happening. He's going to regular on the show, has to be. This is one of my favorite subjects -- definitely the authority on this subject. Now you can see really the difference Jason, especially between -- remember when we used to have all these, like, coaches and things like that on the show? And

they're just kind of speculating. The difference between that and actual science-backed, practical application is just -- the gap is huge.

JASON: Oh, yeah, don't remind me about those old shows.

JORDAN: I know.

JASON: Oh, yeah, this is -- this is heads and shoulders above what we used to do.

JORDAN: It's really incredible looking at selecting long term mates, the science behind long term mate selection, what leads to benefits and disasters, the crisis among educated women -- there's so many topics in this book. We didn't even get to all the notes that we took from the book that were supposed to be small enough to fit into a show. And now, we've got what? Three shows just from that. So, this is something I think we're going to be exploring for the next few years for sure. Again, you know, one of the roots of AoC and these subjects are broken down very, very individually and very practically in the AoC toolbox as well. So if you want to go to theartofcharm.com/toolbox that's where we're going to find a lot of this.

And if you enjoyed this, don't forget to thank David Buss on Twitter. We'll have that linked in the show notes as well. Tweet at me your number one takeaway from this episode. I'm @theartofcharm on Twitter. Remember you can tap our album art in most mobile podcast players, to see the show notes for this episode. We'll link to the show notes directly on your phone. Also we want to encourage you to join the AoC challenge at theartofcharm.com/challenge or text the word 'charmed,' C-H-A-R-M-E-D to 33444. The challenge is about improving your networking and your connection skills and inspiring those around you to develop a personal and professional relationship with you. It's free, a lot of people may not know that. This is the whole idea behind that. This is a fun way to get the ball rolling and get some forward momentum in that area.

We'll also send you our fundamentals Toolbox that I just mentioned, which includes great practical stuff, ready to apply, right out of the box, on similar subjects as this. Reading body language, charismatic nonverbal communication, science of attraction, which is what we focused on today. Negotiation techniques, networking and influence strategies, persuasion tactics, and everything else that we teach here at The Art of Charm. This will make you a better networker, a better connector, and a better thinker. That's the main idea behind all of this. Theartofcharm.com/challenge or, at a red light, text the word 'charmed,' C-H-A-R-M-E-D to 33444. For full show notes and all previous episodes, head on over to theartofcharm.com/podcast.

This episode of AoC was produced by Jason DeFillippo, Jason Sanderson is our audio engineer, show notes on the website are by Robert Fogarty, theme music by Little People, transcription by TranscriptionOutsourcing.net, and I'm your host Jordan Harbinger. Go ahead, tell your friends, because the greatest compliment you can give us is a referral to someone else, either in person or shared on the Web. Word of mouth is everything. So, share the show with friends and enemies. Stay charming and leave everything and everyone better than you found them.

