

The Reasons for Female vs. Male Infidelity Explained by Evolutionary Psychologist David Buss

The Joe Rogan experience And there have been you know maybe four or five leading hypotheses about why women do it And uh this is one area where I've changed my mind on uh pretty dramatically So uh early on a former student of mine Marty Hazelton who's now a professor at UCL A and other friends and colleagues like Steve Gang Aste and Randy Thornton put forward this idea that the reason that women do it is that they're pursuing a dual mating strategy that is they're trying to get investment from one guy like the good dads Uh but good genes from another guy And and so it's it's uh and is there any research done on what type of meat a woman is likely to cheat on Uh Well that's that's a good question So um there's been some and it's not conclusive but basically the only way this could work Uh And I have to back up just a second on that Uh We know that affairs are very costly for women So if discovered they result in um infidels result in violence sometimes they result in killing you know getting to the killing I don't know if we want to get into that maybe later in our conversation uh you wrote a whole book on murder I wrote a whole book on murder Yeah Uh you know uh the murderer next door But um uh but also women suffer more than men If an infidelity is discovered they suffer reputational damage they suffer suffer uh sometimes social ostracism Uh it's uh cataclysmic for their relationship So you know it's in fact it's one of the leading causes of divorce worldwide across cultures uh is if there's a female infidelity Um And so and so the issue is what benefit could be so great to a woman that she's willing to risk all the all these costs if it's discovered And so the good genes dual mating strategy argument could work in principle Um And it could work if there were no costs And this is you know one of the reasons why men and women um commit Infidelities in in secret you know it's been driven underground They people don't go on Twitter and say hey I just hey I just had an affair on my partner you know um uh it's driven underground People try to keep it under wraps So they don't experience the costs And of course there are costs to men as well by being discovered They're just not as uh cataclysmic as they are as they are for women So the only way it would work though is if the getting back to your original question uh is if there's a a large discrepancy between the woman's regular partner uh and her affair partner in terms of the quality of his genes And so with these um these good genes dual

mating strategy theorists propose is that there are certain markers of good genetic quality they hypothesized masculine features Um And there's a logic behind that uh they hypothesize symmetrical features So we are a bilaterally symmetrical species So normal development in every way you know our hands or arms or legs grow you know more or less symmetrically But there are things that cause deviations from symmetry So uh mutations so genetic mutations can cause deviations um diseases can cause asymmetries um and um environmental insults in a variety of ways And so what they the good genes theorists argue is that if someone is if a male is very symmetrical then that's a marker that he's um not experienced a history of disease or environmental insults um or a high mutation load uh or has a what they call a developmental system that's very kind of impervious to these insults So even though they've suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune they still maintain that symmetry Well I think they are there there are problem problems with that But anyway um back to uh to backtrack a second why I changed my mind So I used to advocate this Well this seems it's it's logically plausible Um uh but I started to doubt it and I started to doubt it for two reasons One is um some um replications some larger scale replications uh uh of the work started to fail to replicate uh the original finding So what they did is how did they how did they test this What they looked at is do women change their preferences when they're ovulating So because it's only in that narrow window of ovulation that she's gonna be getting the good genes So so what they looked at is women's normal mate preferences and then attract them over the ovulation cycle And do they change to prefer more masculine more symmetrical features when they're ovulating and then go back to their normal preferences And the initial studies suggested yes they do Um Initial studies suggested that when women have affairs it tends to coincide with when they're ovulating and some other things like that Um How do they gather this data Uh Well it's very difficult and time consuming data But um you know it started out with crude methods such as estimating the woman's time of ovulation through a back through a counting backward counting method But I mean how do they get people to even become a part of a study where they admit that they have cheated on their husbands Oh well So so that that that's a that's a different question What they these studies just looked at changes in mate preferences So you're talking about affairs It's not just changes in may preferences It's a decision to have intercourse with someone other than your husband How do you how do you run a study And they haven't run studies like that So they they haven't said no no So how do they

know they don't It's just do the mate preferences change at ovulation in the predicted in the ways predicted by the theory Ok So how would they find that out How would they find out if a woman's mate strategies changed And if her preference has changed based on ovulation so they basically get women and then they track them throughout the cycle Uh And so and they can do this now they they can do it through uh hormonal essays Uh So there are you know ovulation kits that they can um assess So what do they have like a like a survey they fill out like who are you attracted to today Harry Styles What about tomorrow Something like Jason Momoa I must be ovulating Right Right Or or basically they show photographic images and so the women just rate oh how attractive is this guy Uh And so what they and then they independently they can assess masculinity like like Jason how do you pronounce the name Momoa Aquaman Uh Yeah he's like super mask I remember him I don't think I saw Aquaman but I remember him from Game of Thrones Um And uh yeah when Tony and the barbarian too Yeah Uh so yeah he would be a perfect example highly masculine features you know the um square jaw heavy brow ridges you know uh you know a good um shoulder to hip ratio So uh you know typically masculine features Uh and so they would look at do women rate the photos of these masculine and symmetrical guys more attractive when they're ovulating than when they're not That's basically what they did and um uh the the bottom line So there there's some conceptual problems with that of you know what does symmetry and masculinity Why are these the sole features that mark good genes Because there are also a lot of things that have moderate heritability It's one of the things we know from the heritability studies um A zillion things show moderate heritability Um but he here's the here's what really convinced me So so one is the failures to replicate those studies So the larger scale studies failed to find those preference shifts at ovulation But when you when I started to look at the literature about women who are having affairs and the reasons that they're having affairs and the nature of the affairs there are things that cropped up like this Um 79% 1 study found 79% of women fell in love with or became emotionally involved with her affair partner And to me this is exactly the opposite of what you'd want if you're trying to pursue that dual mating strategy idea You want you you want to get the good genes and then forget about the guy And so it's not to jeopardize your investment from the regular partner Um And so and so it's really it's a design feature that's counter to that notion Can I stop you here doesn't it But it seems to me that you're pursuing this like as if it's a logical endeavor that's

based on trying to achieve an outcome And I think it's far more likely you're dealing with mental illness alcohol you know uh emotional balance uh extreme desire for attention narcissism which leads people to seek out exorbitant amounts of attention from other people Like you have to take that into account don't you Yeah OK So that's a fair point And those things aren't necessarily inconsistent if you ask like who has affairs and what are their personality characteristics Hey but affairs happen in all cultures or virtually all cultures unless the women are extremely cloistered as they are in some cultures where they're like they cannot leave the home without a male bodyguard Um But affairs happen in all cultures And so uh sure I'd love some Thank you So affairs happen in all cultures Yeah affairs happen in all cultures And so a competing hypothesis about why And this is the one I'm currently um putting my money on if there's a horse race is what I call the mate switching hypothesis Uh And and this is the notion that women who are in relationships who are and where the relationship is going south Perhaps the partner starts out looking promising but has failed to live up to his promise Perhaps he becomes an alcoholic or a drug addict or loses his job uh or um or starts um abusing her starts beating her up that that women use affairs as a mate switching device either to divest herself of her regular partner um uh or and or to trade up in the mating market to someone who's more desirable or to make it easier to transition back into the mating market on the notion on the assumption that she'll be able to find someone more desirable out there Uh And so and so there's um at least a fair amount of circumstantial evidence that supports the mate switching hypothesis like the one I just mentioned um women uh with 79% of women becoming emotionally involved or falling in love with their partner This suggests you know it's not just oh I'm seeking transient attention Uh As you mentioned that some women might do it for that of course Um But it suggests that they um uh forming a long term attachment to this other guy rather than the regular partner So here's here's another one and this may seem like super super obvious is that women who are unhappy with their regular relationship either sexually unhappy or generally unhappy with their overall relationship they're more likely to have affairs Now This seems like the most obvious thing in the world Right Yeah Sure Tell me something I don't your grandmother couldn't tell you you're unhappy in the relationship You were likely to have an affair but it turns out the same is not true for men That is there are at least some studies that show that if you compare men who have affairs with men who don't there's no difference in how happy they are with

the relationship Um And that's why you can have men and just to bring up I don't know movie star examples Um uh Like uh this is an older one but Hugh Grant was um involved with uh Elizabeth Hurley I don't know if you remember uh that that one and he's like having sex with a prostitute in L A Why Why is he uh uh cheating with Elizabeth Hurley Um Kind of crazy Now in his case in that case uh the male motivation for affairs differs on average substantially from the female motivation Uh And that is that men are uh have this tremendous desire for sexual variety meaning a variety of sex partners Uh Men tend to have a higher sex drive uh in general on average Uh And so they try to satisfy so even even men who are involved with or married to classically beautiful beautiful women sometimes have affairs of people are very puzzled by this but that desire for sexual variety is what drives most men in into affairs And so there's a dramatic sex difference in why men have affairs with um desire for sexual variety pushing most men into it You know it's like uh I think it was Chris Rock said you know men are only as faithful as their opportunity You get a low cost opportunity A lot of men act on it You know if you're uh like an academic you're away at a conference you're in a different town You know uh some fall into bed with someone else one night stand a brief affair and and that's that Um uh but women it it's really different Of course some women do it just for sexual variety too Uh but that's a minority If you if you ask the question why do most women have a have an affair I think that's the mate switching notion