

Why good girls like bad guys—Does evolution explain?

A woman's parents are generally choosier about her mates than she is—a fact that can be a source of great family conflict.

This phenomenon is so common—showing up in wide array of disparate cultures—that researchers Piet van den Berg and Tim W. Fawcett, believe it must be a product of human evolution. In a [New York Times](#) op-ed piece they describe a specific model of natural selection, which was published earlier this year in the journal [Evolution and Human Behavior](#), that would explain why parents may be more discerning than their daughters regarding her potential mates.

Drawing on classic Darwinian theory, it's believed that parents have the evolutionary incentive to distribute their resources among their children in a way that ensures the maximum number of grandchildren, begotten from any of their children, survive. In contrast, each individual child has the incentive to secure more than his or her fair share of parental resources to ensure the survival of their own offspring over those of their siblings.

Van den Berg and Fawcett created a simulation of male and female populations from which individuals pair up to produce kids. The virtual women have genetic traits that make them more or less selective in choosing a male that is a good provider. As parents, the simulated couples choose how to provide resources to their children and some have a genetic trait that makes them interfere in a pairing.

Over a series of simulated generations parents give more resources to daughters paired with poor providers and a familiar pattern emerges: Women evolve to be less choosy and more likely to select a poor provider. This is because Mom and Dad will help out with resources. At the same time, parents evolve to interfere more if they think the mate is a poor provider. This is so that their resources can be more evenly distributed among their children.

The research and conclusions of course remain controversial, as is the entire field of evolutionary psychology.

Read the full, original story here: [Evolution and Bad Boyfriends](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Parents just don't understand: parent-offspring conflict over mate choice](#), *Evolutionary Psychology*
- [Why Parents Think Your Partner Isn't Good Enough](#), *Science Daily*
- Evolution May Explain Why Parents Kids Clash Over Mate Choice, *Psych Central*