

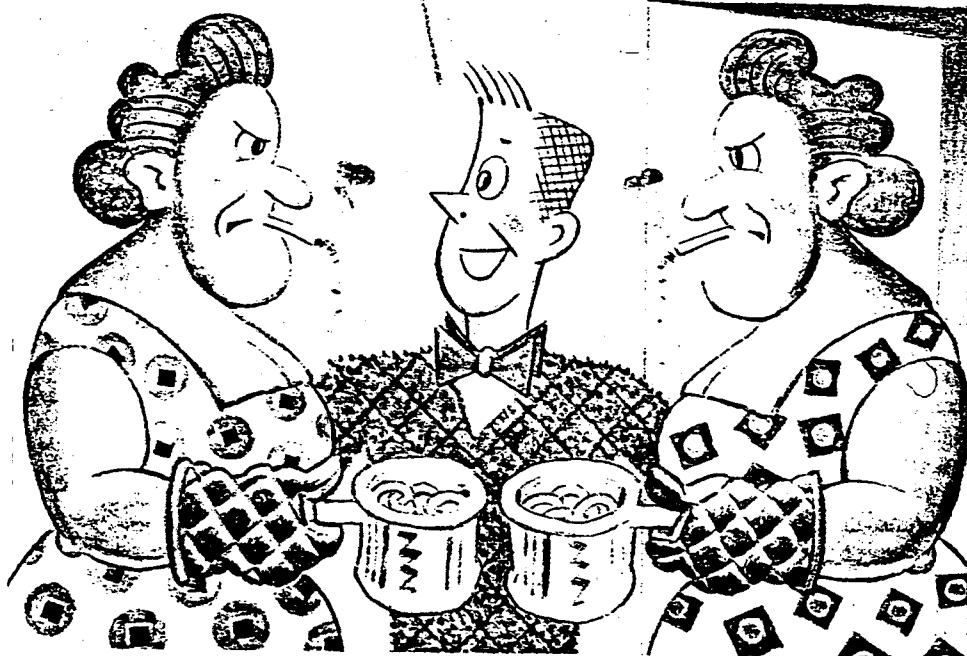
RECOMMENDED  
READING



BY JARED DIAMOND

# 'I WANT A GIRL JUST LIKE THE GIRL...

MOM, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET HELEN,  
MY FIANCÉE.



**W**herever lusty young bachelors gather—be it in a UCLA locker room or a New Guinea jungle camp—the discussion often gravitates to women and sex. One evening while I was camping with

some New Guinea men of the Foré tribe, the conversation took its usual turn, and they explained to me their taste in women: “The most beautiful women are Foré women. They have gorgeous black skin,

---

**...that married dear old Dad.' We resemble our mates because we look for someone who reminds us of a parent or sibling, who in turn resembles us**

---

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RON BARRETT

DISCOVER • NOVEMBER • 1986

hick, dark frizzy hair, full lips, broad noses, small eyes, a nice smell, and perfectly shaped breasts and nipples. Women of other New Guinea tribes are less attractive, and white women are unspeakably hideous. Just compare them with our women to see why: white skin like a sick albino's, straight hair like strings, sometimes even hair colored yellow like dead grass or red like a poisonous snail, thin lips and narrow noses like axe blades, big eyes like a cow's, a repulsive smell when they sweat, and breasts and nipples of the wrong shape. When you get ready to buy a wife, find a Foré if you want someone beautiful."

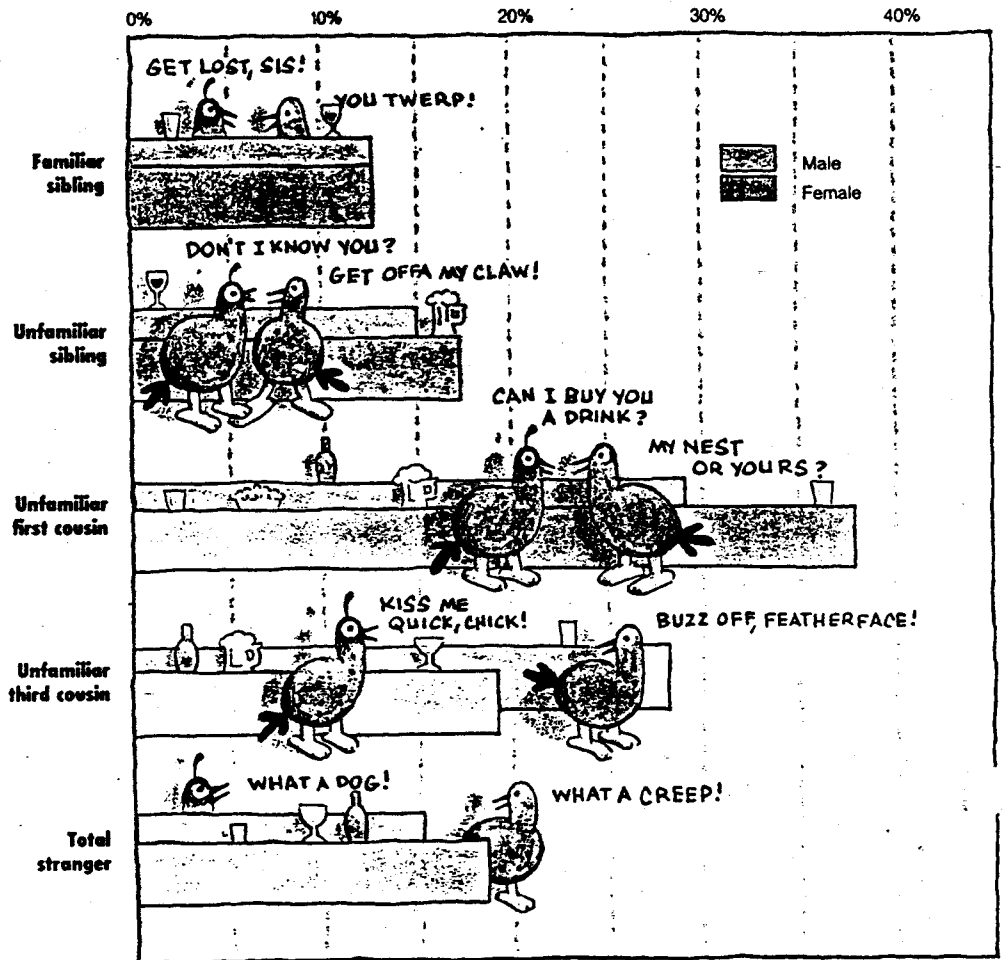
One of the reasons I didn't follow that advice was that I happen to find those "unspeakably hideous" women attractive. But then, I was conditioned by my own society's ideals, just as my Foré friends were by theirs. Darwin said that every people he knew about—Chinese, Hottentots, black Africans, Fijians, etc.—measure beauty by their own appearance. Are there really no universal rules of human beauty and sex appeal? If not, do we inherit our particular taste in spouses through our genes, or do we learn it by looking at other members of our society?

Those questions become more intriguing when one compares what turns different people on within the same culture. Think of the men or women you find sexually attractive. If you're a man, do you prefer women who are blonde or brunette, for instance, tall or short, flat-chested or buxom, and with big or small eyes? Probably you don't go for just anyone, but only certain types. Everyone can name friends who got divorced and then chose a second spouse who was the

*Jared Diamond teaches physiology at UCLA Medical School.*

## QUAIL SINGLES BAR CHART

Percent of time spent hanging out with each other



spitting image of the first one. A colleague of mine went through a long series of plain, slim, brown-haired, round-faced girl friends until he finally found one he got along with and married her.

The particular ideal that each of us pursues is an example of what is called a search image. (A search image is a mental picture against which we compare objects and people around us in order to be able to recognize something quickly, like a Perrier bottle among all the other bottled waters on the supermarket shelf, or one's child from other kids at a playground.) How do we develop our private search image for a mate? Psychologists

Quails were placed next to a row of windows through each of which they could see one quail of the opposite sex. That quail was either related or unrelated to the test bird and might or might not have been familiar to it while both were chicks. The test quail's preference was measured by how much time he or she spent near each window. Both male and female birds found first cousins most desirable, siblings least.

have tackled this question by examining many married couples, measuring everything conceivable about their physical appearance, and then trying to make sense out of who married whom. The answer isn't one that would leap out at you immediately if you just looked at a few married couples. That's because we don't select our own mates for their bodies as carefully as we select the mates of our show dogs, race horses, and beef cattle. But we select nevertheless.

If you measure enough things about enough couples, the answer that finally emerges is unexpectedly simple: on the average, spouses resemble other slightly but significantly