

## EN\_72556989 Research Introduction

In Beyoncé's song Daddy Lessons (2016), she sings of the memories of her father Matthew Knowles. In her song, she refers to her father telling her to stay away from men like him. This is for a reason: Matthew has shown infidelity towards Beyoncé's mother Tina, which eventually ended in a divorce. This event has caused Beyoncé to reflect on her own romantic relationships, making her fearful of falling in love with men similar to her father (Beyene, 2019).

The idea of unconsciously seeking a partner who resembles one's opposite-sex parent – regardless of the desire to avoid such a pattern – is not new. This phenomenon has been widely studied in psychological literature and is commonly referred to as sexual imprinting (Chen & Zheng, 2021). Sexual imprinting was first introduced by Konrad Lorenz, before it was investigated among humans. He observed that young birds separated from their mothers and exposed to a human caretaker would latch to the first moving object they saw, allowing the birds to attach themselves emotionally to them. Lorenz concluded that this attachment process is rapid, occurring within a very short time window. Once the imprinting occurs, the process is irreversible (Lorenz, 1937). In mating, young birds initially refused to mate with a female bird from their own species, because the female did not resemble the human caretaker enough.

In humans, sexual imprinting plays a similar role but is more complex. Just like the young birds in Lorenz's study, young children also subconsciously pay close attention to their caregiver's appearance (Bereczkei et al., 2002). This can be backed up with research on infants' preference for attractive faces, as judged by adults (Lorenz, 1937; Griffey & Little, 2014). With these observations, they form a mental template of typically their opposite-sex parent (Bereczkei et al., 2002). Once the individuals reach sexual maturity, they can use this template (Bereczkei et al., 2002). Compared to the birds from Lorenz's study, humans do not choose potential mates by solely comparing physical features, but rather with the use of physical and behavioural template of their opposite-sex parent, they seek a partner that fits this "blueprint" (Bereczkei et al., 2002).

While sexual imprinting explains how early experiences influence mate preferences, Bowlby's (1969) well-known theory on attachment styles provides a different – but deeper – insight into how relationships with caregivers during infancy shape emotional development and influence patterns in later – especially romantic – relationships. This was further investigated by Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) who concluded there were three branches of attachment: secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment (Van Rosmalen, 2015). Securely attached individuals are more trusting of others, making it easier for them to establish romantic relationships, as they feel like their parents are involved and affectionate (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). People with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style typically want to establish intimate relationships, but because they have experienced rejection or abandonment from their caregivers, this does not allow them to establish these intimate relationships comfortably (Jalilian et al., 2023).

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