When evaluating mates, women are more willing to trade off wealth and status for high sex appeal during fertile periods of the menstrual cycle relative to other cycle points. Near ovulation, women also feel sexier and more powerful and are more flirtatious with men who are not their long-term romantic partners. Women’s male partners appear to become more jealous and attentive during those times, especially if they are relatively low in sexual attractiveness. Our research suggests that male partners — and even complete strangers — can detect subtle cues at ovulation that alert them to a woman’s fertility, including cues identifiable in photographs, vocal recordings, and body scent. These findings provide evidence of the subtlety of women’s sexual strategies and reveal a hidden side of female desire evident primarily when women are fertile.

Haselton received her doctorate in psychology from the University of Texas at Austin in 2000. She holds a joint appointment in the Departments of Psychology and Communication at UCLA and serves as the associate director of an NSF-funded graduate training program in interdisciplinary relationship science. Haselton’s work integrates natural and social science research to discover how evolution has shaped the social mind and explores topics such as courtship, mate choice, sexuality, error management theory, and the link between ovulation and women’s social behavior. She is co-editor-in-chief of Evolution and Human Behavior, the flagship journal of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society.

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