

Some Notes on Evolutionary Psychology

Walter vom Saal

1. Introductory thought question: what one student learned at college.

(Men care more about sex, women care more about love. True or false?)

2. Basic approach. Emphasize importance of genetics, heredity. Explain human behaviors by evolution. Specifically: predict and explain male-female differences in behaviors by what traits are selected by evolution.

3. Evolutionary theory.

- we have traits that are influenced by genes. Examples: aggression, cooperation, nurturing, etc. Traits can be physical characteristics or behavior patterns.
- some traits increase the chances of survival of the organism.
- genes for these traits are more likely to be passed to the next generation.

Conclusion: certain traits are “selected” by evolution. “Look at the impact of a trait on the survival of the gene for that trait.” Concept of “best evolutionary strategy.”

[Other concepts from evolution: Charles Darwin; survival of the fittest; natural selection; traits selected in our evolutionary past may be damaging or counterproductive today (McDonalds example); traits selected are not necessarily conscious, rational, or related to personal happiness;.]

4. Basic observation. The number of potential offspring differs for males and females.

5. General prediction. This critical difference predicts and explains male-female differences in behavior in humans. Because males have unlimited offspring and females have only a limited number, the “best evolutionary strategy” for males and females will differ. Most broadly: females should be more selective than males, and should seek stability and resources. Males should father as many children as possible, being relatively non-selective.

6. Specific predictions and relevant data.

a. Males will want sex more than females.

DATA: Overall level of sexual activity in males and females; cultural expectations; extramarital sex; polygamy (polygyny vs polyandry); sexual behavior in homosexuals.

b. Females will be more interested in relationships than males.

DATA: anecdotal data; Buss data on marriage questionnaires.

c. Males will be less selective than females in seeking sexual partners.

DATA: research studies.

d. Females will select partners based on stability and resources (power). Males, if they are selective at all, will select based on youth and fertility (attractiveness?)

DATA: research studies on attractiveness of potential dates.

e. Males should seek youth, but that is less important for females.

DATA: anecdotal data on post-divorce activity; age at first marriage across cultures.

f. Males will have more of a tendency to think they see sexual interest and sexual intent in potential partners than vice versa. (From an evolutionary point of view, it won't hurt the male to act as if the female is interested even if the chances are low.)

DATA: videotape analysis by males and females.

(NOTE implications for sexual harassment and date rape.)

g. Achievement vs. Affiliation as basic motivations for men and women.

DATA: numerous studies.

h. POSSIBLE implications for communication styles in men and women.

E.g. John Gray: men, success and achievement; women: relationships.

i. Jealousy: Men should be more jealous than women of partner's sexual behavior.

DATA: Anecdotal; questionnaire studies (Buss 1994)

7. Counter-arguments.

- McDonalds revisited.

- Frank Beach: differences in sexual behavior across the phylogenetic scale. IN GENERAL: we humans have evolved to be incredibly adaptive and sensitive to learning, but have remarkably few complex built-in behaviors.

- implication: it may be best to talk about evolution producing *tendencies* and *predispositions* instead of determining behavior.

- **It is entirely possible to REJECT THIS ENTIRE APPROACH.**

8. FINAL DISCUSSION

- do you believe the psychobiology view of male female differences?

- any final conclusions?

- implications for your life?

- when *you* go home from college this semester, what will *you* say *you* learned?

9. References:

Buss, David M. (1994). The evolution of desire: strategies of human mating. New York: Basic Books.

Wright, R. (1994). The moral animal: the new science of evolutionary psychology. New York: Pantheon