

## Sexual behavior and jealousy: An evolutionary perspective

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### **Abstract**

*Evolutionary psychology introduces sexual behavior as a result of the evolutionary process, and is closely related to and dependent on environmental factors. Morphological, psychological and behavioral differences between sexes are explained as the consequences of the sexual selection process and of the conflict between the different reproductive ways of men as compared to women (Buss, 2008).*

*The human species exhibits a series of behavioral and psychological characteristics that differentiate the two sexes. These are called “sexual dysmorphism” and, from an evolutionary psychology perspective, there are three explanations for it: (1) Differences may be a result of natural selection, which occurred differently in women and men; (2) gender differentiation can be a result of competition for resources and (3) sexual dysmorphism is most likely the result of sexual selection (Andersson, 1994).*

**Keywords:** *Evolutionary psychology, sexual dysmorphism, parental investment and sexual selection, polygyny mating system*

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## I. THE THEORY OF PARENTAL INVESTMENT

Robert Trivers speaks of “sexual selection” and refers to sexual dimorphism in his study entitled “Parental Investment and Sexual Selection” (1972). The author talks about the different way of involvement of the two sexes in the production and growth of the descendants; from the very beginning, the egg provides the genetic and energetic material necessary for the development of the embryo – it mostly invests in the descendants, while the sperm contributes only with genetic material to the zygote formation – so it invests less in the descendants. The author concludes that this discrepancy represents the basis for possible conflicts of evolutionary interest in strategies of searching for a partner, finding one and ultimately, mating. The sex that invests the least in the descendants will not spend too much time choosing the partners; it will only count on finding as many partners as possible, regardless of their quality. The sex that invests most in descendants develops mechanisms for selecting partners, choosing according to the principle of best quality (Trivers, 1972).

According to the theory of Parental Investment developed by Trivers, which searches to explain the mating strategies in human species, when engaged in the process of finding a partner, the male sex will look for attributes that suggest fertility - youth, vigor, robustness (Trivers, 1972).

According to evolutionary logic, the fact that people have a universal preference for physical attractiveness by linking it to fertility stems from the fact that this preference must have played a positive role in maintaining or increasing reproductive success. Studies show that one possible reason why preferences for beautiful partners are universal is that these individuals are on average healthier and more fertile (Little, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011).

At the same time, women will look for partners capable of providing the necessary resources for their survival and their descendants (Trivers, 1972).

In the context of evolutionary adaptation, due to the fact that pregnant women or those who cared for young children were not able to gather necessary meals by themselves and because the infant mortality was very high, the women that chose men which were capable and willing to offer them the adequate material resources and protection they needed had considerable reproductive advantages over those who did not benefit from such “support” (Marlowe, 2000). On the other hand, the reproductive success of a man was directly related to the woman's reproductive capacity, and less to her resources, so that men who had access to fertile women had, on average, a higher number of offspring's (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Little, Jones, & DeBruine, 2011).

The idea that access to resources was an important factor that gave men sexual access to a larger number of women is noticeable even nowadays: men with a high status in contemporary

society seem to have a greater degree of sexual access to members of the opposite sex. At the same time, in the case of long-term relationships, the status of men and the amount of resources they have are correlated positively with the attractiveness of their spouses and negatively to their age. Women continue to reject, as in the past, men who do not have enough resources; they marry men who earn more than their previous partners, and divorces are more likely to occur in families where wives earn more than spouses. All of the aforementioned occurrences are a reflection of the psychological mechanisms that have been consolidated over millions of years and have ensured the reproductive success of our ancestors (Buss, 2005a).

## **II. INFIDELITY AND JEALOUSY**

Stemming from natural selection theory, evolutionary psychology emphasizes the following differences that occur between the sexes in terms of attitude towards infidelity or, rather towards jealousy (Darwin, 2004; Carpenter, 2012; Kristiansen, 2014):

- Given that men seek to pass on their genes to their offspring, they are concerned that their partner might engage in a sexual relationship with someone else;
- As investing in genetic material is fundamental to men, they will be more affected by the partner's sexual infidelity (they no longer have the certainty of paternity);
- Because women are more interested in raising their offspring (transmission of genes in their case is safe because they give birth to children, they invest both genetic material and energy), they aim to accumulate resources - to support parental efforts. Because of this, they will be more affected by man's emotional infidelity, because that would mean that they would be reorienting their resources to another person (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, Choe, Lim, Hasegawa, Hasegawa, and Bennett, 1999).

Evolutionary psychology argues that jealousy is innate; natural selection outlines sex jealousy as a mechanism to prevent male “betrayal” and emotional jealousy as a mechanism to prevent the loss of resources for women (Martínez-León, Peña, Salazar, García, & Sierra, 2017).

Evolutionary psychology argues that jealousy, be it manifested through behavior or thought and emotion, is an important determinant for male violence against women (Bendixen, Kennair, & Buss, 2015). The argument is that the environment of the evolutionist adaptation, where there is supposed to be a predominant polygyny mating system (which offered increased chances of infidelity), led to a heightened awareness of men involved in a relationship with a single woman towards sexual infidelity and towards making threats that could affect their relationship (Buss, & Schmitt, 1993). Possible threats would involve violence and were directed either on the partner or on the rival; in the case of young women with high fertility potential, there is a greater likelihood of abuse compared to the elderly (Buss, 2016).

Evolutionary psychology is considered to be the most integrative scientific framework in which different attitudes towards jealousy based on gender were studied (Buss, 2015). According to it, jealousy can be seen as an imperfect adaptive behavior, which has evolved in order to counteract and minimize the risk of a potential deceiving from the partner; it is instinctive because it occurs as a result of the unconscious interpretation of the behavior of the opposite sex. Jealousy reflects the adaptations to the various pressures that men and women have been subjected to in the evolutionary past in building and maintaining a relationship (Tooby, & Cosmides, 1990). Thus, gender differences which occur in relation to jealousy develop biologically as individuals adapt to environmental changes (Buss, & Greiling, 1999).

### III. CONCLUSIONS

Sexual behavior is a result of the evolutionary process that is closely related to environmental factors (Tooby, & Cosmides, 1989). Morphological, psychological and behavioral differences between sexes are explained as consequences of the sexual selection process and of the conflict between the different reproductive processes of men and women.

People show a universal preference for physical attractiveness by linking it to fertility, because it has played a positive role in maintaining or increasing reproductive success; preferences for beautiful partners are based on the fact that these individuals are healthier and more fertile on average (Buss, 1989; Tovée, Swami, Furnham, & Mangalparsad, 2006).

Women seek partners capable of providing the necessary resources for their survival and that of their descendants (Gangestad, & Simpson, 2000). On the other hand, the reproductive success of a man is directly related to the woman's reproductive capacity, and less to her resources (Buss, 2008).

These things are still noticeable today: high-ranking men seem to have a greater degree of sexual access to the members of the opposite sex. Women continue to reject, as in the past, men who do not have the necessary resources; they marry men who earn more than the men they have previously rejected, and divorces are more likely in families where wives earn more than their spouses. All these characteristics are a reflection of the psychological mechanisms which have been consolidated over millions of years and which ensured the reproductive success of our ancestors.

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