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Book Review

The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating by David Buss, 2nd Edition. NY: Basic Books, 2003.

Reviewed by James Brody

In *The Evolution of Desire* (hereafter *ED*) David Buss addresses topics that he and his army of collaborators defined in the first place: the preferences of each gender, differences in their strategies for casual mating and for long term partnerships, maintaining relationships between spouses, conflict in sexual agendas, breaking up of partnerships, marital careers, and harmony between the sexes. He closes several chapters with predictions of what research might tell us in the next edition of *ED*. (Buss also appended two chapters, "Women's Hidden Sexual Strategies" and "Mysteries of Human Mating," to the first edition and a separate list of references for them.)

Contrary, however, to one of the cover blurbs, *ED* is no longer a shocker: The differences between the behaviors of our two genders and the evolutionary explanations for them have been caught naked in *Time* and *Newsweek*. *Matrix* could as well substituted genes for computers. Thus, any shock in *ED* comes not from our conduct but from science's finding good sense in what we do instinctively. And that shock is felt largely by the minority of our population open to the delusion that human nature is infinitely malleable. (See Pinker, 2002; Sowell, 1987.) Such believers often work in universities and are politically left of center. Another set of people won't like *ED*. They endorse self reliance and attach consequences to behavior: many of them look to God to mend traits that Buss would probably call design features. (*New Scientist* had an essay several years ago about the novel union between right-wing Christians and academic liberals, one cemented by their shared opposition to evolutionary theory.)

The rest of us will like *ED* but it's old news. We watch the nature shows on television, our kids compete to know all about dinosaurs, and we buy *Scientific American's* special issues about human evolution. Further, human gender stereotypes have always appeared in C&W tunes but now with an extra layer of detail: Chris Kagel refrains "'Cuz the girls love it" to questions about why men do dumb things. Dierks Bentley sings of a young girl who screams "Faster!" when her date

races them in a truck through a cornfield at night with his lights off, eluding the cops.

Women Practice Eugenics: Hard Eggs and Molarity

The next Big Stories may come from outside of the neodarwinian, adaptationist framework that Buss uses.

1) It might be for the next generation to explain why males don't exist in harsh conditions and to consider that having two genders allows one species to realize benefits from both chaotic and orderly situations.

2) Males can also be seen as an extended phenotype of females, an imperfect companion that resulted from our not getting a second X.

3) Human females are firmly eugenic in their standards and get away with it, males catch hell. Even if men have good grades, women don't like acne, allergies, ectomorphs, loners, fatties, geeks, and the lopsided (Buss, 1999; Miller, 1998, 2000). Women also strive mightily to repair these things in their flawed sons.

4) Females compete directly with other females not just for males but for how their children will be treated. (The cosmetics industry is a reflection of female-female competition, not just of lies that allure males.) Whether in groups of wolves, rhesus, chimps, or fans of Nat Angier, offspring have different opportunities as a function of mother's social position.

5) Rape is probably not only a function of loser-males who trap females but could involve different populations of males and females. (Buss acknowledges this possibility.) For example, impulsive females get pregnant at earlier ages than average, impulsive males become fathers at later ages than average. Impulsive females are probably easier targets for non-impulsive, predatory males.

A second population of risk-taking females (NOT the same as "impulsive") may require high stimulus intensities to elicit either joy or fear, pleasure or pain, a trait escorted by perpetual boredom and one sometimes associated with psychopathy (Fechenhauer, 2001; Lermontov, in *A Hero for our Time,* 1992, gives us a character study; Buss has a short discussion of women who prefer rougher sex).

For example, the teenage girl in the front of Bentley's truck was the daughter of an ex-con who "peppered" the tailgate with a shotgun as Bentley drove her away. Becky goes happily with him to a honky-tonk where Bentley fights a "mountain of a man" for her. When home at 2:30 A.M., Becky's father heads for the truck and she gives Bentley a "come-and-get-me grin."

"And like a bullet we were gone again."

If we buy the idea of a psychopathic streak in Becky, then Bentley is not only a predatory male but also her match. (See Maes et al, 1998, on the genetic contributions to mate preferences on the basis of psychopathology!)

6) Mate selection is seldom a passive enterprise and we often care too much for whom we screw and more for those whom we can't. Beck (1988) com-

pares love to insanity. We may find that both sperm and vaginal fluids carry messengers that elicit bonding between the partners and, if the usual channels are not available, sustain oral recreation. (Yes, things that are not necessarily in good taste sometimes taste good.)

7) Finally, no one studies teeth. The Victorians hid their rotten teeth when sitting for portraits and photographs. Modern photographers and dentists whiten teeth and many parents spend fortunes not only for braces and rubber bands but also for portraits. My own generation invests similar amounts in caps and crowns rather than caps and gowns. There may be juicier data in these effects than in the relative size and angularity of our two ears.

Moderation, Skepticism, and the Judgment of the Birds

Buss' own fitness is at stake here, "fitness" as reflected in network terms, in the number of his collaborators, students, and sources, his ability to recruit new ones, and to find jobs for his old ones. Thus, his legacy requires *détente*. While there are topics with shock value, the David Buss of *ED II* is more Polonius than Laertes, perhaps in order to achieve a reputation for impartiality. (Has "fitness" become the new N-word?). For example:

"Ultimately the disturbing side of human mating must be confronted if its harsh consequences are ever to be ameliorated." (p. 5)

"Judgment of what should exists rests with people's value systems, not with science or what currently exists." (p. 17)

"...mating behavior is enormously flexible and sensitive to social context... no behavior is inevitable or genetically preordained... Knowledge of the conditions that favor each mating strategy gives us the possibility of choosing which to activate and which to leave dormant."

He seems to argue that behaviors may be in our genes but we choose whether to obey them. He may also be saying that we need to arrange environments in order to elicit more of the behaviors that we think that we want. I can subscribe to the latter but am aghast at the former. And I suspect his academic readers (Sowell, 1987), often blank-slaters (Pinker, 2002) and possibly for genetic reasons (Martin et al., 1986), will only consider the first interpretation. Sooner or later, however, culture comes back to the possibilities found in genes.

I prefer to see us as channeled, although emergent and I am grateful for the detailed guidance that we get from genes, network phenomena, and statistical physics. (The dynamics of emergent networks beautifully accommodate the phenomena of strategic variation described by Buss.) David, however, is a likeable adaptationist who subscribes to Bowlby's metaphor that the Pleistocene was our mother and to the idea that evolutionary psychology should be about the crafting that made us human during the ice ages. Buss also believes that if a behavior exists, it must be doing something that was useful in the past 1.2 million years. He depends heavily on whatever universals that he can find in our conduct and he infers mechanisms from them. (Preachers find gods, psychologists find mecha-

nisms, anthropologists sometimes imitate psychologists: neither gods nor mechanisms will ever be seen by the rest of us.) Skeptical about an adaptation? Buss describes the human phenomenon and then gives us a heavy toad or a peculiar insect that does something similar, and therefore, for the same reasons. Thus, he frames his hypotheses outside of evo-devo, internalism, and *Hox* genes and he has no need for network dynamics as a selective force. Some of you may not find these exclusions restrictive for our understanding of evolution and mate selection. I do.

First, there are beautiful lines in Eiseley (1946/1957, p. 167) that resonate within me and, I hope, within you. He leans out of a 20th story window at 4 A. M. in New York City and watches from above as pigeons leave their roosts: "I will never forget how those wings went round and round, and how, by the merest pressure of the fingers and a feeling for air, one might go away over the rooftops."

You can find parallels in the mating behaviors of primates and birds despite the lack of a direct evolutionary connection between them and us (Wilson 1975, 2000). Similarities between primates and avians could be more attributable to homology than to convergence (Raff, 1996; Gould, 2002). That is, similar ancestral genes biased our outcomes as long as 500 MYA and we only carried out of the Pleistocene fancier versions of the baggage that we carried into it.

Second, the externalist tale of environments' shaping creatures makes phenotypes a 3-D product suited to Locke's *tabula* and we must look to evo-devo and other fields to escape that trap. For example, Bouchard (1996) and his team offer us the concept of "experience producing drives," a step that might account for identical outcomes in separated identical twins. And certainly, the processes that guide outcomes for twins apply equally to non twins but, perhaps, more powerfully so because most of us did not have the early distress of sharing a womb. Lewontin (2000) argues that settings and occupants become a unity and occupants turn settings into environments. (Lewontin's model applies to Bouchard's findings although these guys are rarely on the same page of the genetics book!). Olding-Smee et al (2003) and Turner (2000) reinforce Lewontin's model. The arrow between genes and settings points both ways, whether that setting is a rock or another human (Brody, 1999; Turner, 2000; Brody, et al, 2001). This sort of model also promises a foundation for the intensely stubborn personal will with which each of us, including David Buss, exerts influence on one another and on our nests. Evolutionary psychology will perish from anemia if it does not address these preoccupations.

Bottom Lines

ED summarizes an important segment of what an important viewpoint tells us about mate selection. *Buy it for that reason*.

Buss apparently wrote this book in the same manner that he conducted his international studies on mate preferences: like a good infantry general and with an extraordinary network of collaborators. He thanks 125+ individuals in his opening and it's difficult to imagine anyone within EP who is both knowledgeable about

this topic and not his ally. Buss and his allies, however, perhaps know too much from one viewpoint to keep *ED* simple but too little about important alternative viewpoints to make it complete.

Unfortunately, like many a spouse, *ED* gained 90 pages in 9 years and got fat. I cheered for the svelte first edition and bought copies for my friends: familiarity, repetition, and homilies, however, bred somnolence rather than contempt. *ED* would benefit from King's Dictum but applied to second editions: "2nd Draft = 1st Draft - 10% (King, 2000, p. 222).

Evolutionary psychology itself would benefit from a Mencken. If only Silverman were younger...

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