Evolution of Dating/Mating Strategies

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I believe the personality of an individual can be evident through the relationships they form. Whether these are sibling, romantic, sexual, familial, or friend relationships, the emotional connections we form are oftentimes a window into who we are as individuals. The following paper looks at romantic relationships from an evolutionary perspective and proposes that the romantic partners we choose are not based on fate, or similar heritages, but instead are based on certain instincts which have evolved over time by natural selection. That it is these evolved instincts which create that gooey feeling inside.

**Dating**

According to Rebecca J. Glover we date in order to successfully discover who we are as a person and to develop intimacy. She believes that as one gradually becomes closer to another, they slowly discover more about themselves and as a result become more self-aware. They begin to notice the differences between themselves and others and realize which attributes make up themselves. Through this process one moves away from family ties and begins to develop stronger relationships with their peers. In other words, we date to develop our personalities and mature into adults.

**Evolutionary Psychology**

According to Evolutionary Psychology we date for a very different reason, one which is much less glamorous. Evolutionary Psychologists look at our current
psychological processes and study how they were influenced by various selective
pressures in our evolutionary history. The idea is that through these certain
pressures, those species which were able to survive passed on their genes, creating
the gene sequences we display today. These selective pressures are climatic (the
ever changing climate selected which species were able to evolve), ecological (it
was the ecology in our evolutionary history that was the biggest impact), and social
(the pressures of conforming to society, building connections, etc. that help in the
gathering of food and raising children that selected those genes which were
passed on) (Geary, 2005). A fourth proposal, one not frequently mentioned, is
sexual selection.

**Sexual Selection**

According to David Buss sexual selection takes two forms. First, two
members of the same sex compete, and the winner of that competition gains
greater sexual access to members of the opposite sex. In other words, by winning
a competition typically the 'loser' leaves the tribe/group and the 'winner' is allowed
to have sexual relationships with the opposite sex. In this form individuals
typically need various qualities in order to beat out their competition. According to
David Buss they require strength, attractiveness, and intelligence (Buss, 1994).

The other form of sexual selection is when members of one sex choose a
sexual partner based on displayed phenotypic characteristics. In this form
decisions are generally basing off of physical attributes that signal good health and strength such as body and face symmetry, or clear skin. In both situations, the traits from the winning mates get passed down to the next generation. The more offspring one has, the greater their chance their genes will be passed down. These phenotypic characteristics are also referred to as fitness indicators. In other words, they indicate how fit that particular individual is for the current environment, and how likely they are to survive the various climatic, ecological, social, and sexual pressures (Buss, 1994).

**Downside to being an Individual**

What is ironic about the entire process is that those characteristics which we typically choose a romantic partner off of, if our motivations truly are influenced by our desire to pass down our genes, are not always beneficial for our offspring’s survival. Miller (2000) explained the whole point of fitness indicators, these desired characteristics, is to display the differences between individuals to potential romantic partners (i.e. mates). Since organisms are competing for sexual partners, distinguishing oneself as more fit will increase that organism's chance for sexual partners, or for a higher number of sexual partners.

According to Pomiankowski & Moller (as cited by Miller, 2000), however, while these traits attract mates and pass down ones genes, they are not always beneficial for ones own physical survival. Traits which are necessary for survival
will be very similar between individual organisms and it is the traits which cause individual differences that can decrease an organism's chance for survival. A somewhat crude metaphor for this type of sexual selection is the stereotype “good guys finish last.” It seems we have devised a few sayings which fit the idea that those who you are attracted towards are not always the ones who are best for a long term relationship.

**Varied Mating Strategies**

It is still under debate whether men and women display varied or consistent mating strategies. Both are believed, however, to still always go for the 'best' member of the opposite sex they can get and by best I mean demonstrates the healthiest phenotypic characteristics. For men, it has been shown that within the sex there are varied mating strategies. Men seem to be on a continuum ranging from fully committal, desiring to invest in their offspring and not have outside romantic relationships other than with the mother of their child, to non-committal, 'spreading their seed' every chance they get. Men, again, are still looking for the 'best' possible romantic partners, but those who are looking to commit typically will invest in a female that is slightly higher in rank than if the man was non-committal (Buss, 1994).

Females, on the other hand, up until very recently were believed to all be fully committal individuals. Through a variety of different strategies the evolved
female mentality is to attain the highest ranking male they can that will commit and help them raise their offspring. Again, remember, the entire goal of finding a romantic partner is to find one with good-enough genes so that their offspring will have a higher chance of survival. Females who are unable to attain a high-ranking romantic partner typically will attain a long-term lower-ranking male, but try to have short affairs with a higher ranking male. The strategy here is to ‘get the good genes’ from the high-ranking male, but have a lower-ranking male help her raise the child. Deceptive, I know, this is why I said it is less glamorous than Glover’s proposal.

The new view is that females also have varied mating strategies. Females are not always looking for a long-term romantic partner to help invest in their offspring, but may also just be looking for a short-term ‘fling’ as well. The idea behind a short-term mating strategy is that by having many children, and not investing too much time in any of them, one might still have the same number of survival offspring than if one had only a few children and invested a lot of time into them.

Discussion

Even though I am a strong believer of Evolutionary Psychology I believe the argument I presented still has a few holes. Remember that although the explanation makes dating and finding a romantic partner much less appealing these
strategies are what *motivates* us today, but do not by any means determine who we will date. By having these evolved mental mechanisms we are more prone to find a romantic partner who has a symmetrical face and clear skin attractive, compared to one who does not have these characteristics. What I feel still needs to be explained are why we are attracted to those characteristics which will be later detrimental to our offspring’s health.
Bibliography

