

Choosy Women and Cheating Men

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Evolution and Human Behavior

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book was inspired by the wonderful enthusiasm my college students showed for learning in my Evolution and Behavior course. I developed that course because the only introductory behavior courses then (and still) available to most students; Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology, were woefully limited by the methods and perspectives of social science. I believed that a basic introductory course in the biology of behavior was badly needed to counterbalance the social science courses. So, my course described the basics of Ethology, Behavior Genetics, Sociobiology, and the other biobehavioral sciences. This provided opportunity to learn about the genes and hormones and neurotransmitters and instincts and other biological influences on behavior. And, more importantly perhaps, students could learn for the first time, the natural selection-based explanations, rarely mentioned in social science classes, of why behaviors evolved to be as they are.

Well, I was right to expect students would be interested in this subject matter, but I underestimated how eager they were for this information—the class quickly became one of the most popular courses on campus.

My colleagues in the Biology Department at that time

were not so enthused, to say the least. When I initially proposed the course they voted it down by a secret vote! A secret vote in a science department! Most of them were not teaching any evolution in their general biology courses and they did not think that it was important that students learn about the biology of animal behavior much less human behavior. They did think, however, that it was very important that all beginning biology students should learn all microscopic layers of leaves and stems and the latin names of local plants, and hours worth of details about mitosis and meiosis and the Krebs cycle which nearly all students said were unimportant to them and extremely boring.

The students, though, did think that learning about the biology of behavior was very important. Many, on class evaluations, said it was the most interesting, most valuable class they had ever had, and that comparable courses should be required for most college majors. Soon the enrollment swelled to 200 students each semester. Elementary Education majors, Pre-med and Pre-law majors, Criminal justice, Philosophy, Psychology, and Art majors as well as Biology majors and many others all took the class.

Thank you students for your encouragement. It helped inspire me to write this book.

And thank you my friends who read some of the chapters and made helpful comments: Anne Doran, John Hazard, Judy Nakdimen, Glenn Weisfeld, Esther Frank, Laura Thurlow, Steve Thurlow, Bill and Lyn Burns, Elaine Watson, Marel Thomas, and especially my wife MaryLou who, as always, offered the best advice of all.

Biology and Human Behavior

THE STATISTICS ABOUT marital infidelity are difficult to be sure of because many people are unwilling to be honest, even if they are assured their responses will be kept private. However, several research studies have indicated that 40 to 50 percent of married men (in the U.S) have extramarital sex at some during their lives, but only about one third as many women ever cheat. Why is this difference so great?

Why do so many men cheat on their wives? Even politicians who have so much to lose? John Ensign, David Vitter, John Edwards, Bill Clinton, Mark Sanford, Eliot Spitzer, James McGreevey, and Newt Gingrich, to name just a few in recent years. Even evangelical preachers like Jim Bakker and Ted Haggard whose careers are devastated when their hypocrisy is revealed.

We know from many studies that when men cheat its mostly (80%) for the sex. When women do it's mostly (80%) for reasons *other* than sex.

Why do men cheat far more often than women do, and why this big gender difference in *reasons* for extramarital affairs?

Gay men have, on average, at least 10 or 20 times as many sex partners in a lifetime as straight men do, but gay women, just like straight women, have far fewer partners.

Why is this so?

The answer to each of these questions requires an understanding of evolutionary psychology. Yes, evolution! It is not enough to know about genes and hormones and neural circuits and stimuli and other proximate causes in order to understand why we behave as we do. To answer most 'why' questions about common human behaviors, we need to refer to what natural selection favored during our evolutionary past.

Cheating fundamentalist preachers will, of course, not be pleased to hear that their sexual escapades have anything to do with evolution, but there is no scientific doubt about it—natural selection has inclined men's brains (and the brains of virtually all male animals) to be relatively promiscuous, and to want sex with *new* partners. Women's brains, in contrast, have been shaped by selection to want committed relationships, and women, unlike men, have little interest in having sex just because the partner is new. The evolutionary reasons for these male-female differences are explained in the chapter on *The Coolidge Effect and Human Affairs*.

Men, of course, are not forced by uncontrollable instincts to cheat. They *can* use better judgment. They don't have to try to seduce the attractive woman they meet at the conference. Nobody is making them flirt with the waitress at the hotel bar. They are not absolutely compelled by hormones to pay for a prostitute. Men *do* have some free will and they *can* make other choices. They could take a cold shower and ignore their biological inclinations. Instead of looking for sex outside their marriages, they *could* go to church and pray instead, (and resolve not to lustfully look at the women in the pew in front

of them). This should be an easy choice for evangelical ministers. Biology isn't certain destiny. Men aren't *forced* to scratch when they itch.

But men often *do* cheat even though it is socially disapproved, and even though it is often destructive to their marriages and careers because it is biologically *natural* for men to want sex with more partners than their wives. Some may say cancer is natural too. I am not justifying sexual cheating. The purpose of this book is to describe our natural evolved psychology, not to make moral judgments.

It may appear, so far, that this book is going to be about sexual behaviors, but sex is only one of many topics discussed. **This book is more generally about how evolution has shaped our biological predispositions and inclinations and instincts which evolved many thousands of generations ago, many of which we have shared with our animal relatives for millions of years.**

It's not just questions about sex; if you wish to understand why most people, men especially, like football and other team sports, or why we are patriotic, or why warfare has been so constant it is necessary to understand how **natural selection** has shaped human behavior!

If you want to understand why tall men are preferred as dates and mates, why they make more money, and why the taller candidates for public office usually win, it is necessary to understand **human evolution!**

To explain we think some people are good looking or sexy, or why children play so much, or why men usually pay for dates, or why people are religious; if you want good scientific answers to why most all common human behaviors are the way they are, the *only* way to get much insight is by referring to **evolution by natural selection.**

This book is *not* about our learned behaviors which differ from one individual and one society to another, but rather it is about our evolved genetically-influenced behaviors that are much the same in all societies—behaviors which are human universals—the same in African farmers, Swedish scientists, Chinese cab drivers and British royalty.

The Dark Ages of Behavior Study

Even though the behaviors described in this book are typical of people in all human societies, the evolutionary explanations of many of them will be unfamiliar and surprising to many readers. This is especially true of readers whose academic training in human behavior was limited to typical courses in psychology, sociology, and anthropology taught from the 1940's until at least the 1980's. Biological explanations of human behavior were largely ignored or denied during those dark ages; ever since James Watson and B.F. Skinner founded behavioral psychology, and ever since the environmentally-deterministic Standard Social Science model came to dominate the study of human behavior.

We were taught then that except for some behaviorally uninteresting reflexes, most human behavior is due to learning and acculturation. Boys and girls behave differently, we were told, because of the way they are raised. Boys are given trucks and footballs and girls are given dolls, and thus children are *taught* to behave in gender-appropriate ways. Some people still believe this; social constructionists, gender feminists, behavioral psychologist and many sociologists and Marxists among them.

Sometimes people hold these environmentally deterministic

views because they are not aware that boys in *all* cultures behave differently from girls in many instinctive ways regardless of how they are raised.

Another common reason why some people object to biological explanations of human behavior is because their beliefs are influenced less by scientific data than by social and political attitudes. Many Marxists, for example, cannot accept that humans are innately selfish because then a communistic good-of-the-species political system like they espouse would rub against the grain of human nature and therefore would not work unless people were denied the liberty to behave naturally. Likewise some feminists cannot accept that males and females have innate behavioral differences because that would seem to suggest (it doesn't though) that males and females should not have equal rights and opportunities.

We were told that boys in all cultures are more physically aggressive and fight more with one another because that's how society shapes them. But why did anyone ever think this makes sense? Why would all those hundreds of societies all teach boys to behave this way? And how to explain why it is that males of virtually *all* species fight more with one another than females do? Were we supposed to believe that beetles and lizards and mountain sheep all teach their males to physically fight with one another?

Basic male-female differences in humans are very much the same as they are in our animal relatives. Why did so few social scientist fail to realize the significance of this fact? Part of the reason they didn't is because animal behavior was rarely taught even in biology courses, and evolutionary perspectives were rarely applied to understanding human behavior. We didn't realize the significance of the fact that we *are* animals after all.

If a boy turned out to be gay there was rarely any thought that the reasons might be biological. No, it was assumed that the cause had to be environmental. Maybe his father was distant or his mother was overprotective, or he didn't resolve the Oedipal complex (Freudian nonsense, we know now) which said that little boys go through a stage where they are hostile, even hateful, to their fathers because they are jealous that their father possesses their mother sexually. If you told your psychology professor that you never felt that way about your father and you were certainly not sexually interested in your mother when you were a small child, he was likely to say that's because you *repressed* it (more Freudian nonsense).

Because the study of human behavior largely denied biological influences and was founded on the ridiculous assumption that human behavior is almost entirely the result of experience, a lot of unscientific nonsense (like most Freudian theory) was taught in those years. Margaret Mead, perhaps the most well known social scientist of the fifties and sixties—the Grand Dame of Anthropology—quoted frequently by the Reader's Digest, argued in her very popular books that there were some societies where males and females did not behave differently, and in some societies there was no significant aggression, nor rape or murder, for example. Poor Margaret was not a very good researcher and was duped by the subjects she interviewed. Later research showed that the societies she studied turned out to have the very same male-female differences as all, and the rates of rape and murder in the societies she said were so gentle were sometimes much higher than average. Margaret Mead was a student of Franz Boas, the founder of Anthropology. Had she also studied under a mentor who knew something about the biology of behavior,

she might have questioned the paradigm of cultural determinism which dominated those decades and saved her reputation from later disgrace.

If one wondered why some people are smarter than others, or more shy or depressed or better at math, there was little or no mention then of genes or hormones or other biological causes. Learning was everything. We were blank slates at birth and culture shaped all our behaviors, so they said. Steven Pinker has written a rich, fascinating, and comprehensive discussion of why these unscientific ideas persisted for so long and still do today in his excellent book *The Blank Slate* (2002). If one asked during those decades why some people are perceived to be more beautiful or sexy than others, one received the standard social science answer that standards of beauty and sexual appeal are strictly personal (beauty is in the eye of the beholder), or are shaped by culture. It was decades before scientific research proved that our perceptions of beauty and sexiness are not so much personal and culturally determined as we had thought, but instead are mostly universal and are largely determined by instincts shaped during our evolution.

If you asked then why we play team sports or why we are patriotic or why human warfare has been so constant, hardly anyone suggested that this must have something to do with our biology since almost all social animals are altruistic to their own groups and hostile to other groups of their species. At that time only a few ethologists like Lorenz and Tinbergen, most of them in Europe, were studying the biology of behavior, and there was little realization that to understand human behavior one must first understand the general principles of animal behavior and evolution.

If you studied human behavior in the U.S. from the 1940's until at least the 1980's you would have thought we dropped

out of the sky, unconnected with our biological past or that we had transcended our animal biology, no longer animals except structurally. There was not much reference to genes or hormones or evolved brain circuits or instincts. Many social scientists even insisted that there was no such thing as human instincts. Some still do! Many Americans still believe the earth was created less than 10,000 years ago!

Invisible Animals

Most of us today realize vaguely that we are animals structurally but few of us seem to realize that we are animals behaviorally as well. That's not just because the social sciences denied for so long that biology had much to do with human behavior but it is also because most biology courses failed to include animal behavior, and schools rarely provided courses in the biology of human behavior. And as Pinker's *The Blank Slate* points out, there are many other reasons why we have failed to realize our human animal behaviors. Again, read his book if you want to understand those dark ages and why biological explanations of our behavior are rejected even today.

In the general biology courses most of us took we learned all about we dissected frogs and/or pigs and learned about animal and human *anatomy* but, curiously, not about animal *behavior*, much less human behavior. There were a hundred courses where psychology and education and pre-law majors were required to learn about the structure of roots and stems and the detailed stages of meiosis for every one which included a unit on the biology of behavior. Those students learned whether the endodermis was to the inside or the outside of

the pericycle in the *Ranunculus* root, and they all were taught the boring chemical details of the Krebs cycle, but almost none of us then were learning why males and females have evolved to behave differently, or why humans and other social animals are antagonistic to other groups within their own species. Biology teachers, like most everyone else, believed that human behavior was all due to learning or was not a suitable topic for general biology courses. In any case, **my intent in this book is to describe many of these evolved human behaviors which we didn't learn about then; behaviors which are the same in all cultures, and which usually are very similar to those of our animal relatives because of shared genes.**

Our emotional responses, for example, are *all* instinctive. Anger, fear, love, joy, sadness, disgust, shame, and many others we rarely realize or talk about. We don't learn *any* of these! We are automatically prewired by our evolutionary past to feel these emotions in response to certain stimuli.

Our facial expressions in showing these emotions are also automatic and inborn and the same in every culture in the world. Even children born blind, smile when they are happy or amused, and frown to show displeasure, and they show the same facial expressions of fear and surprise and disgust and anger as sighted children do. Our emotions and the ways we express can sometimes be partly controlled but they are essentially instinctive.

This book will discuss some of these natural emotional responses, and also our instinctive attractions and aversions, our instinctive sexual behaviors, our biologically-based male and female behavior differences, our programmed learning, our natural aggressive and territorial inclinations, and much more. Everything from why men have "wandering eyes" (chapter 3) to why we are religious (chapter 15).

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Some of our biological behaviors, such as our instinctive program to learn language according to innate rules of grammar and syntax, and our pleasurable response to rhythm and music are unique to humans. But most of our biological behaviors are shared with our closest animal relatives. How could it be otherwise? We *are* animals after all. It's not just our anatomy and physiology which are much like that of our animal relatives. Our behaviors are highly similar too because of shared genetic descent.

Some of our basic male-female differences, for example, are almost universal; typical of nearly all animals. Female crickets and frogs, for example, like female humans, are much more picky than male crickets and frogs when it comes to whom they will have sex with, while males of virtually all species, like human males, are biologically inclined to be much more promiscuous.

It's easy to see we are vertebrates structurally, since we have backbones, hormones (like adrenalin and testosterone), a chambered heart, a brain with a cerebrum, cerebellum, and medulla, and a hollow dorsal nerve cord, just like our other vertebrate relatives (fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals). It's not so easy, though, for us to realize that we *behave* like vertebrates too. But how could it be otherwise? Yes, our brain is proportionately much bigger than that of any other vertebrate, and we are capable of far more learning, but, after all, our brain is a *vertebrate* brain not a blank slate. Since we *are* vertebrates shouldn't we expect that we would behave like vertebrates? Scientists from another planet would know we are vertebrates even if they couldn't see our structures. They would be able to tell by our behaviors. Our territorial and aggressive, and sexual behaviors, for example, are just as distinctly vertebrate in pattern as our structures are.

Among the vertebrates, our closest relatives are the other mammals. Like them, we have hair, mammary glands, a placenta, sweat glands, a diaphragm, an extra-large cerebrum, and a limbic system which produces emotions. It's no wonder since we are mammals that we show many typical mammal behaviors from play to maternal care, and the full range of mammal emotions from jealousy to bonding/love. Why didn't we realize, for example, that since human mothers, just like all other mammal mothers, nurse and love and care for their young that this just might have something to do with the fact that we are mammals?

Our closest mammal relatives, of course, are the other primates, especially, the apes. Like them, in addition to our shared vertebrate and mammal characteristics, we have binocular-color vision, flat nails, opposable thumbs and many other physical traits due to our close genetic relationship. Our very closest primate relatives are the chimpanzees and bonobos with whom we share more than 98% of our genes, so, of course, we share many of the same behaviors from kissing and hugging to political manipulation and deliberate deception. Franz De Wall's books, especially *Chimpanzee Politics*, *Bonobo*, and *Good Natured* are wonderful sources for reading about the many behaviors we share with these apes.

Proximate Causes of Behavior

Because this book is mostly about the biology of human behavior, there will be some references to genes, since genes play a major, albeit indirect, role in producing all behaviors. Genes also greatly influence our temperaments and abilities, **even our social and political attitudes** as many behavior-genet-

ics studies have shown. Genes influence whether we are shy or bold, inclined toward leadership or not, extroverted or introverted, gullible or skeptical, dominating or submissive, etc. Almost all personality traits and abilities; logic, orderliness, creativity, stubbornness, sociability, fearfulness, etc., are affected by which genes we have. Even the inclination to be religious or non-religious as an adult is significantly affected by genes.

Nobody thinks there is a single gene for being shy or extroverted or sociopathic or religious. Our biological inclinations and instincts result from a combination of many genes. And, it is true, of course, that genes cannot cause any trait all by themselves. All genetic expression depends upon the environment, so even identical twins differ in some ways because small environmental differences cause genes to be expressed or suppressed. Nonetheless, the extent to which genes usually influence human behavior has startled even many behavior geneticists. For more information about human behavior-genetics, one of the best sources is the extensive research which has been done for decades by Thomas Bouchard and his team at the University of Minnesota.

The biology of behavior also has a lot to do with hormones and neurotransmitters and brain circuits produced by the genes. Testosterone, for example, increases confidence and aggressiveness, and is necessary for libido in both sexes. Also, the level present in the fetus during the second month of pregnancy determines, by programming the hypothalamus, whether the child, regardless of anatomical sex, will have a masculine or feminine brain after birth. Girls whose brains receive high levels of testosterone during this critical period will usually show typical male-type (tomboy) behaviors and sexual interest in females. Boys whose fetal hypothalamuses receive too little testosterone grow up feeling like females and

usually show female-type behaviors and as adults they are sexually attracted to men.

Near these hypothalamic brain centers which produce gender behaviors and sexual preference there is another center for “falling in love”. When patients have had the circuits cut here during surgery they can still be friends, and can still have sex but they can no longer experience the biological addiction we call “falling in love”.

Genes and hormones, neurotransmitters, brain circuits, and instinctive responses are, all important in explaining human behaviors. They tell us all about the immediate preceding physical causes or influences which produce our behaviors. But they don't tell us anything about *why* we have the behaviors we do. But that's what this book is mostly about. **The main focus of this book is not on the proximate physical causes like genes and hormones, it is rather upon the evolutionary 'why' questions about our common biological behaviors** (explained in the next chapter). Among the questions explored in this book are the following:

- Why do men and virtually all male animals have such a “wandering eye” interest in the possibility of sex with new sexual partners? (Ch.3)
- Why do humans in all cultures show the same basic male-female differences as occur in other animals? (ch.4)
- Why do we have so much non-procreative sex, and what are the natural evolved purposes of sex? (Ch.6)
- Why do we play as do other mammals? Why don't most animals play? Why do youngsters play the most and why do we tend to get neophobic as we get older? (Ch.10)
- Why such interest in team sports especially by men,

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why are we patriotic, and why are we so easily inclined to go to war? (Ch.12)

- Why do we give tall men so many advantages, and why do we lower our heads and bodies when we feel deferential or when we are appeasing? (Ch.7)
- Why do we instinctively like sweets and salt and fat, but not bitter or rotting foods? Why do we think some people are beautiful. and why do we think certain body features are sexy? (Ch.5)
- Why are we usually more altruistic to our relatives and why can altruism often be better described as selfishness? (Chs. 8 & 9)

These questions have been explored by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists and other scientists who study the biology of human behavior and their answers (often surprising and unfamiliar to non-scientists) will be described in following chapters as will many other “why” questions about human behavior. I will also discuss some “why” questions to which the answers are more controversial and scientists are not all agreed such as:

- Why are most people religious? (Ch. 15)
- Why do we age and therefore die? (Ch.16)