

Symposium S-E2

Lust in our Ancestral Dust: Evolution, Attraction, and Relationships

Saturday, February 15, 2014, 9:45 AM - 11:00 AM, Ballroom D

Chair: Jeff Simpson, University of Minnesota

Co-Chair: Vladas Griskevicius, University of Minnesota

This symposium (1) reveals that ovulation leads women to unconsciously flirt more with men, (2) presents a meta-analysis identifying which traits ovulating women find more attractive in men, (3) shows how parents spend more money on girls in economic recessions, and (4) identifies how feelings of jealousy boost men's testosterone.

Fertile and Selectively Flirty: Women's Behavior Toward Men Changes Across the Ovulatory Cycle

Jeff Simpson, Stephanie Cantu, Vlad Griskevicius, Yanna Weisberg, Kristina Durante, Daniel Beal

University of Minnesota; Linfield College; University of Texas at San Antonio

Past research shows that men respond to women differently depending on where women are in their ovulatory cycle. But what leads men to treat ovulating women differently? We propose that the ovulatory cycle alters women's flirting behavior. We tested this hypothesis in a controlled experiment in which women interacted with different types of men at different points in their cycle. Women in the ovulatory phase reported more interest in men who had markers of genetic fitness as short-term mates, but not as long-term mates. Behavioral ratings of the interactions revealed that women displayed more flirting behaviors when they were at high versus low fertility. Importantly, fertile women flirted more only when they interacted with men who had genetic fitness markers, but not with other men. In sum, fertility not only alters women's behavior; it does so in a context-dependent way consistent with adaptive logic.

Evidence for Ovulatory Cycle Shifts in Women's Mate Preferences: A Meta-Analysis

Martie Haselton, Kelly Gildersleeve, Melissa Fales

UCLA

The ovulatory shift hypothesis posits that women experience elevated sexual attraction on high- relative to low-fertility days of the cycle to characteristics that reflected genetic quality in ancestral men. Dozens of published studies have provided evidence for these 'cycle shifts' and have been widely cited as demonstrating the utility of an evolutionary perspective in studying human behavior. However, recently published null findings have cast doubt on the robustness of these cycle shifts. We quantitatively evaluated support for the ovulatory shift hypothesis in a sample of 127 effects from 34 published and 13 unpublished studies. Consistent with the hypothesis, analyses revealed robust cycle shifts in women's preferences for cues of genetic quality in short-term but not long-term partners. Funnel plots, imputation procedures, and analyses limited to studies using a continuous fertility variable indicate that these findings do not reflect publication bias or 'researcher degrees of freedom' in defining cycle phases.

Spending on Girls versus Boys in Economic Recessions

Kristina Durante, Vlad Griskevicius, Joseph Redden, Andrew White

University of Texas at San Antonio; University of Minnesota; Arizona State University

Do people invest more resources into boys or girls? Theory in evolutionary biology suggests

that investment in male versus female offspring depends on environmental conditions of resource availability. We use both historical data and experiments to test if economic conditions alter spending on boys versus girls. Consistent with predictions, poor economic conditions led people to allocate more resources to girls relative to boys. Economic recessions, for example, led people to bequeath more assets to girls rather than boys in their will, and increased people's willingness to pay for girl versus boy toys. Additional studies revealed the psychological mechanism for this effect and showed an important boundary condition, finding that economic conditions have stronger effects on gender-biased spending as children near reproductive age. Bridging work on animal behavior, evolutionary biology, and consumer behavior, this research contributes by showing how, why, and when environmental factors influence spending on girls versus boys.

Confronting Intrasexual Rivals: 2D:4D Digit Ratio Predicts Behavioral and Endocrinological Responses to Infidelity

Jon Maner, Saul Miller, Jacqueline Coyle, Michael Kaschak

Florida State University; University of Kentucky; Stetson University

An evolutionary perspective provides critical insight into processes associated with the maintenance of long-term romantic relationships. One key challenge associated with relationship maintenance involves warding off intrasexual rivals -- individuals who might encroach on one's relationship and steal one's partner. The current research applies an evolutionary perspective to shed light on a physiological mechanism potentially underlying confrontational responses to infidelity. Findings suggest that responses to infidelity threats in adulthood are shaped by hormonally mediated masculinization of the brain in utero. In an experimental study, 2D:4D digit ratio (widely regarded as an index of prenatal testosterone exposure) moderated behavioral and endocrinological responses to infidelity threat. After an infidelity prime (but not a control prime), lower (more masculine) 2D:4D was associated with a greater tendency to approach attractive same-sex targets (intrasexual rivals) and also with heightened increases in circulating testosterone, a hormone related to a variety of aggressive and confrontational behaviors.