

including the history of scientific thought, feminist theory, cultural or gender studies, and evolutionary psychology. It is accessibly written, well referenced and should foster many interesting class discussions.

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Popularizing Evolutionary Psychology

A review of *Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters* by Alan S. Miller and Satoshi Kanazawa.

Penguin Group: New York, 2007. US\$23.95, 252 pp. ISBN 978-0-399-53365-5

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For many in search of explanations for the mysteries underlying human behavior, the epiphany and parsimony that evolutionary psychology provides is undeniably one of the keys to formulating a comprehensive grasp of what it is to be human. It is this fundamental attribute that Miller and Kanazawa illustrate in *Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters*, summing up how evolutionary thinking has led to fruitful advances in explaining human behavior. For those already familiar with evolutionary psychology, this book provides a useful and entertaining summary of its central tenets and major research findings. However, for the lay reader curious about evolutionary psychology, but unwilling or unable to dig deeper into the scientific literature, this book will have a more profound impact.

The clear and straightforward style of Miller and Kanazawa's writing effectively brings the world of evolutionary psychology to just about anyone's living room. They use a simple question and answer format, and choose effective examples, embellished with excellent wit, common sense logic, and relevance to today's reader. Their reliance on the core arguments runs smoothly throughout the book.

The authors have an uncanny knack for making sure that no ideas are lost in translation, keeping the prose concise and digestible even to those with little or no knowledge of the field. Their focus on the evolutionary psychology behind attraction, mating, violence, politics, and social issues speaks to the interest of those who might otherwise ignore this unique perspective on human behavior.

Despite the book's provocative title, the authors touch upon much more than just what determines the sex of a child. In fact, their exploration of this question only accounts for a few pages; a wealth of other topics, research findings, and explanations make up a large part of the book. The hypothesis that beautiful people have more daughters is based on previous findings from evolutionary psychology that female attractiveness is valued highly in both short and long-term mating, whereas male attractiveness is valued primarily in short-term mating. Therefore, more attractive parents would benefit more by having attractive daughters rather than sons. In accordance with their assumption, Kanazawa reports that adults rated as "very attractive" did indeed have more daughters than sons. Miller and Kanazawa use this finding to exemplify how evolutionary psychology can generate unique theories, allow for testable ideas, and provide a coherent and fundamental explanation for the ultimate causes of all sorts of human processes and behaviors.

In clarifying the ethos of evolutionary psychology, Miller and Kanazawa repeatedly show the stark contrast between Evolutionary and Standard Social Science Models for explaining human behavior. Armed with the latest and most prominent findings of evolutionary psychology, each chapter persuasively refutes the claims of the Standard Social Science Model that all of our behavior is a product of environmental input, socialization, and cultural transmission. Instead, Miller and

Kanazawa support the evolutionary contention that much of our behavior is shared across cultures, and can be explained through Darwinian natural selection. Miller and Kanazawa challenge the underlying principles of the "nature vs. nurture" argument as a false dichotomy. In spite of this stated position, they nonetheless focus their efforts on proving that the "nature" side is the prevailing force in shaping how we think and act. For the lay reader, their straightforward approach to this topic is easy to follow and understand, reinforcing the authors' goal of bringing evolutionary psychology into the public square. However, for more astute followers, this strength may prove to be its main drawback.

While most evolutionary psychologists agree on the big picture – that natural selection shapes human brain evolution and behavior – there are still many controversies not adequately brought to light in this book. These include the concrete nature of human mental adaptations, the existence and role of behavioral variation, and the extension, as well as limits, of evolutionary logic in deriving ultimate explanations. A perfect example is the author's usage of the "savannah principle", stating that, "the human brain has difficulty comprehending and dealing with entities and situations that did not exist in the ancestral environment" (p. 21). The authors use this train of thought to explain why watching television gives us a sense of social belonging, the attractiveness of legally under-age women to older men, the effectiveness of make-up and plastic surgery, and the popularity of pornography even though it has no direct reproductive value. This argument is a valid one, as modern culture has found ways to manipulate our evolved desires to the extent that we cannot just "shut them off" when they become maladaptive. On the other hand, it fails to put into perspective that while our evolved desires and motivations are being manipulated, we still fully understand the context and realities of television, law, plastic

surgery, and pornography. We know full well that the actors are not our friends, that the under-age women are off-limits, that breast implants are fake, and that we didn't just have sex by watching it on TV. In fact, our ability to understand such innovations even as they manipulate our evolved desires is a testament to adaptations overlooked in this book, such as the vast breadth of learning, memory, and other cognitive capabilities that allow us to function in the 21st century. Miller and Kanazawa present a sound argument for evolutionary theories of our human nature, but then end up leaving out many aspects of our human nature in the service of building an argument against the Standard Social Science Model.

Nevertheless, *Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters* is a tribute to the success of evolutionary psychology in ushering in a new and much needed perspective to the field of human psychology. Miller and Kanazawa's goal is not to explain every single nuance of our complex human nature, but rather to build a strong empirical and theoretical case that much of what we are, and how we think, is ultimately a product of the adaptations that helped our ancestors, and their ancestors before them, survive and reproduce. In this sense, *Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters* succeeds brilliantly, with a style and charm that can bring the epiphany of evolutionary logic into the mind of any reader.

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Human Nature in Rural Tuscany: An Early Modern History

By **Gregory Hanlon**

Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, xiii + 218pp.
ISBN: 1-4039-7764X [Hbk, US\$69.95].

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Piuttosto can vivo che leone morto
(Better to be a living dog than a dead lion)

{Tuscan proverb}

Despite the reference to "Human Nature" in the title, one may doubt that a history book would seriously consider "human nature" in an ethological manner, but this book does have a substantial component of historical ethology. The author reveals in the brief but informative preface that it is "a **nominative** study of social behavior" (i.e., focused "on the individual actions of ordinary people") using a conceptual framework of ethology and evolutionary psychology. In fact, he begins the book proper by drawing parallels between his historical technique applied to a small village and the detailed study of captive chimps by Frans de Waal and others. Over the course of the book it becomes clear that the author has been greatly inspired by the techniques, theories and findings of behavioral primatology. Adding to the interest for many readers, the book concerns village life in rural Tuscany, not far from the site of the 2008 ISHE Congress in Bologna, Italy.

Hanlon's focus is Montefollonico, a typical Tuscan *castello* (hilltop community) for which he has uncovered rich archives dealing with the "minutia of daily life" during the 1600's. This small village contained about 350 residents, with 450-500 more inhabitants among the