

Project Summary

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This is a short story about sex. It explores the ideas of pair-bonding, reproduction, and parenting in humans and animals. It's called "Strangelove: Animals Do It Better" and details an evening in the life of Mia, a young girl feeling strange about sex while she waits for her new boyfriend, James, to come over. Mia and James have things in common, but she's not sure she thinks they need to have sex to become closer. She thinks of the way animals do it, and concludes that they are better.

I thought the comparison between animal sex and human sex would be a good way to illustrate some common concerns that exist about sex. Mia concludes that animals do it better because they just do it to breed, and they don't make their whole lives about it. Then she realizes that some do make their whole lives about it. Then she realizes that bees have other goals other than strict reproduction. She likes the idea of having goals, rather than just looking for someone to be with. She admires bears and turtles for their lack of connectedness to mates; she gets sad when she realizes that turtle babies never know their mommies, though. She doesn't mind that some animals need each other as much as she minds polygynous systems of reproduction.

I wanted to include as many examples of mating systems as possible in this story because I think it shows the diversity in the world and, that no matter the way things work for animals, humans have their own way of doing them. And, probably, what works for animals won't work for us.

My major examples show a trajectory of pair-bonding and reproductive experiences. These are not my only examples. I include bees as an example of a mating system because their complex cooperation leaves some bees out of parenthood (Harbo and Rinderer, pgs. 49-57). I discuss turtles for a similar reason; while turtles only have finding a mate and being able to lay eggs as obstacles for reproduction, they, too, don't get to parent in the same sense that humans do. They never see their young (Seaturtle-World.com, 1). Mother bears parent, but they do it alone (MountainNature.com, 1). I mention both penguins because these animals do parent and they need somebody else to do it (Vleck and Vleck, 1). Environment dictates this; otherwise, their young could be killed. I talk about gorillas next, because their polygynous mating systems also show that environment necessitates more than one individual to raise the young (and here my young heroine starts to have a real change of heart because she realizes she doesn't want to share the man she loves), but it is a step away from the human ideal (not necessarily the human practice, but the human ideal) of one man and one woman pairing together (Jethá and Ryan, 61-79). I conclude with bonobo apes, because they mate with some other purpose beyond reproduction (Jethá and Ryan, pg. 61-79).

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Strangelove
Animals Do It Better

James met Mia buying yogurt. It was love at first sight. Not paying attention to anything but the John Mellancamp song playing on the speakers of the grocery store, they both reached for the strawberry banana and their hands brushed against one another. They bonded over certain digestive upsets that lead to their eating of lots of yogurt and a love of John Mellancamp, and their love blossomed so they were nearly inseparable. With love, came sex, which was the first moment of doubts Mia had. Not about James, any man who was that open with his stomach troubles was clearly worth keeping, but about this thing...sex.

It wasn't as if she hadn't done it before. But it had been lackluster, and she couldn't help but think that animals did it better. They didn't attach so much romance to it; they just did it and moved on.

Animals do do it better, she thought as she waited for him one night and contemplated the complexities that humans created for themselves with their weird, weird sex lives. *They have a goal in mind*. She sat on her couch and crossed her legs at the ankles and concluded that, basically, animals did it for breeding. They did it to make babies, new animals, carry on the species, and their genetic code. They were about two gametes meeting in the night, not two strangers buying yogurt at the grocery store and singing John Mellancamp songs at the top of their lungs. They didn't have sex for any other reason. Then they went on with their business.

Mia stood and started to pace. That would be sick, she concluded. A life all about sex. Never getting to experience anything else. But an animal had its purpose in

life, goals, outside of baby-making. It had to forage for food and find a place to be safe from predators. Sharks had to swim. Birds had to build nests. Mia stopped. For their young. She started walking again. Salmon had to get back upstream. She paused again. To mate. Even some insects spent their whole life cycles mating, just to carry on the species...

Bees, Mia realized. She snatched the example out of the air and clung to it with a ferocious intensity. *Bees have more of a purpose than just to reproduce.* Bees had to collect pollen, had to work with the hive. Not all bees managed to make baby bees, but they had what Mia would call fulfilling lives.

She sat down on the arm of the couch. But were they happy? she wondered. Did they silently, secretly, long to make babies of their own? Did they have little, empty bee nurseries set up for the day when their dreams finally came true?

She shook her head. No, bees had the right idea. Some of them didn't mate so that others could. The rest just helped out at the hive. It was better to have goals. Not like those girls who couldn't think about anything else. She'd gone to high school with a few of those girls.

Of course, those girls all wanted someone to stick around with them and help them raise those babies. Even if animals were all about having babies, they weren't desperate for that kind of attention. At least in *that way*, animals did it better.

Mother bears were *all about* their young cubs, but they didn't need a man bear hanging around and making things complicated and harder in their lives. Some animals didn't even bother with their young. Turtles laid their eggs and left.

I wonder if when the turtles return to the sea, they reunite with their mothers, Mia mused as she slid down from the arm of the couch to rest on her back. She giggled at the idea of whole turtle families being reunited under the sea: mom, dad, brothers, sisters. Aunts, uncles, cousins. Grandparents. Great Uncle Will. *No, they probably wouldn't do that. They probably can't find each other ever again.*

Of course, some animals were monogamous. Or at least they stayed in pairs. Penguins needed each other to care for the young, so did gibbons.

Needing someone isn't so bad, she realized. She sat up and smiled, thinking about James. Any minute now, he would be pulling into her driveway, blasting a John Mellancamp song, no doubt. She thought about running out on the porch to greet him dramatically, like in the movies. Then she decided against it; she didn't know how he would react. *Needing someone for your species to survive isn't so bad,* Mia corrected herself, drawing her knees to her chest.

It was probably better to just need one other creature than a whole bunch, like gorillas seemed to. Well, male gorillas and their harem of lady gorillas all there to reproduce with him, to make his children. Humans might have had weird reasons for having sex, might've thought yogurt and stomach aches and John Mellancamp were enough reasons to have sex, but at least no one expected her to do that.

Well, I suppose that if it's what you need for your children to survive... the ever-practical Mia mused. She pictured seven clones of herself sitting around one James and couldn't help but laugh. He would be terrified at having to have so many demands placed on him. He was too shy to be a dominant gorilla; she was glad.

He was too shy to even push too hard for sex. She knew that if she really didn't want to, she didn't have to, and the evening would go on without major disasters. James wasn't demanding like that. But James was a romantic, and he would expect that this night would mean something.

She didn't want to have James' baby; she was reasonably confident he didn't want her to have his baby either. They hadn't known each other that long! And all of science so far was telling her that there was little to no romance in it; it was just done with one goal in mind. Babies.

They knew what they were doing when they did it; she didn't. All animals did it for the babies. For the young animals. For genetics, for the carrying on the species. *Well, Mia thought as she leaned back against her couch cushions, maybe not dolphins. Certainly not bonobo apes. They have sex all the time. Sex bonded them. They could share food after. Sex gave them something, gave them a relationship.*

So some animals had purposes other than making babies. So what? That still didn't mean that they were expected to spend their lives with just that aim, to copulate, in mind. She and James were bonded just fine; they didn't need sex for that. She knew all about his stomach disorders; they didn't need to do anything else. She knew his top ten favorite John Mellancamp songs in order; she knew which brands of yogurt to get for him, to surprise him.

But if you're bonded that much, why not bond more? a voice in her head asked.

Just then, she heard a sound off in the distance. As it grew closer, she realized it was tires and John Mellancamp's "This Time." She jumped to her feet, but didn't race

out onto the porch to greet him like she wanted to earlier. Instead, she just bounced on the balls of her feet until there was a knock at the door.

Mia ran to answer it, and found James standing on the other side, holding a strawberry-banana yogurt. It had a big red bow on top of it.

“My favorite! Thank you!” She accepted the yogurt from James and led him inside, with a smile.

“No problem.” She turned to find James shoving his hands through his hair, a thing he always did when he got nervous.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing. Nothing. I was just thinking, on the way over here, about bees.”

“Bees, James?” Mia stopped walking away from him and played with the bow on top of her yogurt.

“And turtles. And bears. And gibbons.”

“I was thinking about all that, too.”

“You were?”

“Mhmm.” She twirled a finger in the ribbon so tightly it cut off her circulation.

“But we can talk about all that later. Why don’t we just go in the living room now.”

She held out her hand and he took it, and the two of them walked off with John Mellancamp’s “This Time” playing loudly in their heads.