



Strange Bedfellows: The Surprising Connection between Sex, Evolution and Monogamy.

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STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: THE SURPRISING CONNECTION BETWEEN SEX, EVOLUTION AND MONOGAMY.

By David P. Barash and Judith Eve Lipton. New York: Bellevue Literary Press. \$25.00. 158 p.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-1-934137-20-8. 2009.

The authors' 2002 book *The Myth of Monogamy: Fidelity and Infidelity in Animals and People* (New York: W. H. Freeman) created a stir by providing the general public with a window on a reality already well-illuminated by ethologists: most animals, including humans, do not practice long-term sexual fidelity. Their concise follow-up volume, *Strange Bedfellows*, represents Barash and Lipton's response to discomfort fostered by their earlier publication. If *The Myth of Monogamy* served to immolate the concept of monogamy, *Strange Bedfellows* represents an attempt to salvage the ideal from the flames.

Wide-ranging and engaging, this book thoroughly discusses the ecology and evolutionary biology that underlies mating behavior. We learn why monogamy is so rare in nature and explore the various ecological conditions that can favor fidelity to one's mate. We are also provided with a comparative analysis of the human species, one that does not engender much faith in the inevitability of monogamy, but still leaves room for the possibility of long-term fidelity. Exposed to a healthy dose of game theory, we also gain a theoretical perspective on the male-female conflicts that threaten monogamy. Despite the comprehensive treatment of mating systems, including that of humans, the obvious possibility that much of human sexual behavior serves nonreproductive functions is never seriously considered.

Although informative in its mix of disparate biological concepts, this book is clearly aimed at general readers. Containing a lot of literary and other cultural allusions, it can be almost folksy in its discussion of the issues surrounding monogamy. Readers looking for a comprehensive treatment of the scientific literature or novel hypotheses will be disappointed, but for anyone seeking an entry point to the science underlying our own pair-bonding behaviors, this volume offers an accessible introduction. If you are not familiar with the ecological, behavioral, and theoretical concepts illuminated here, you are likely to emerge with both a good initial understanding and a curiosity demanding greater depth.

So does this book offer a convincing argument that humans can be monogamous? Perhaps, but only with one hand tied behind its back. Although the penultimate chapter, Pro-Monogamy Hardware, suggests some attractive means by which our biology might be commandeered to support long-term fidelity, the authors almost complete failure

to consider the role of culture in fostering monogamy seems shortsighted. If biology is the stage on which the play of culture unfolds, this book is mostly about the potential of different set designs. A more whole consideration of human pair-bonding behavior probably requires a slightly more consilient analysis, one that harmonizes biological and cultural insights.

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LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD MALES: FEMALE CHOICE IN EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY. *Animals, History, Culture.*

By Erika Lorraine Milam. Baltimore (Maryland): Johns Hopkins University Press. \$60.00. ix + 236 p.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-0-8018-9419-0. 2010.

Female choice is currently a key component of behavioral ecology, and together with male-male competition comprises Darwin's ingenious concept of sexual selection. Milam (an historian) provides a fascinating account of the varied reception of female choice between Darwin's day until the beginning of the behavioral ecology revolution in the 1970s. Female choice faced two hurdles from the outset: many (both scientists and nonscientists) felt that females lacked the cognitive ability to make an informed choice and, as Alfred Russel Wallace pointed out, Darwin had not said what females gained by being choosy. With no clear resolution, female choice faded (almost) away. Between 1915 and 1930, however, it had a (theory-based) revival, motivated by R. A. Fisher's eugenic ideals. Just a few years later, female choice was engulfed by natural selection and speciation during the "modern synthesis" thanks largely to Julian Huxley's persuasive but muddled thinking. Following a fundamental change in evolutionary ideas in the 1970s, driven by a switch from group to individual selection, female choice became the flavor of the month, or more accurately, a research obsession that has so far lasted for four decades.

There is much to be said for someone outside the field writing about a subject's history, but there are some downsides too. My guess is that the behavioral ecologists that read this (and they should all do so) may be frustrated by an unfamiliar writing style and by the fact that Milam's account ends too soon and without really revealing the current status of female choice. Nonetheless, this long look at female choice is an important contribution not only to the history of science but to the science itself.

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