

and human mating strategy
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Sexual Selection and Human Mating Strategies

In their Review “Reproductive social behavior: cooperative games to replace sexual selection” (17 Feb., p. 965), J. Roughgarden *et al.* mischaracterize theory and research on human mating strategies. Although they provide one decontextualized quote from Buss (1), the characterization that men pursue a singular strategy of promiscuous mating while women pursue low-quantity monogamous mating is factually incorrect.

Evolutionary psychologists have long theorized and empirically verified that humans possess a menu of mating strategies: Both women and men pursue long-term committed mating, short-term mating, serial mating, polygynous mating, polyandrous mating, and mixed mating strategies (including extra-pair copulations) (1, 2). A particular individual’s mating strategy is predictably contingent on sex ratio, mate value, influence from kin, and cultural norms (1–3).

Contrary to Roughgarden’s statement that it is “axiomatic” in evolutionary psychology that only males pursue promiscuity, much theoretical and empirical research documents the adaptive benefits to females of short-term mating (1). These include access to resources, advantageous mate switching, and possibly beneficial genes. Men typically benefit from long-term committed mating (e.g., increased offspring survival) and incur costs when pursuing promiscuous mating (e.g., violence from other men and decrement in mate value) (2).

These findings do not negate the importance of the differential parental investment in driving the intrasexual and intersexual components of sexual selection (4). Nor do they contravene well-documented sex differences in these components, which follow logically from parental investment theory (2, 3). It is precisely because both sexes invest so heavily parentally when pursuing long-term mating that evolutionary psychologists stress that both sexes fully engage in mutual mate choice and intrasexual competition for desirable mates. Reducing the well-documented diversity of human mating strategies to outmoded clichés about male promiscuity and female monogamy does a gross disservice to the current scientific understanding of human mating.

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References

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2. D. M. Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology* (Allyn & Bacon, Boston, 2004).
3. S. W. Gangestad *et al.*, *Proc. R. Soc. London B* **272**, 2023-2027
4. R. Trivers, in *Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man: 1871–1971* (Aldine, Chicago, 1972), pp.136-179.