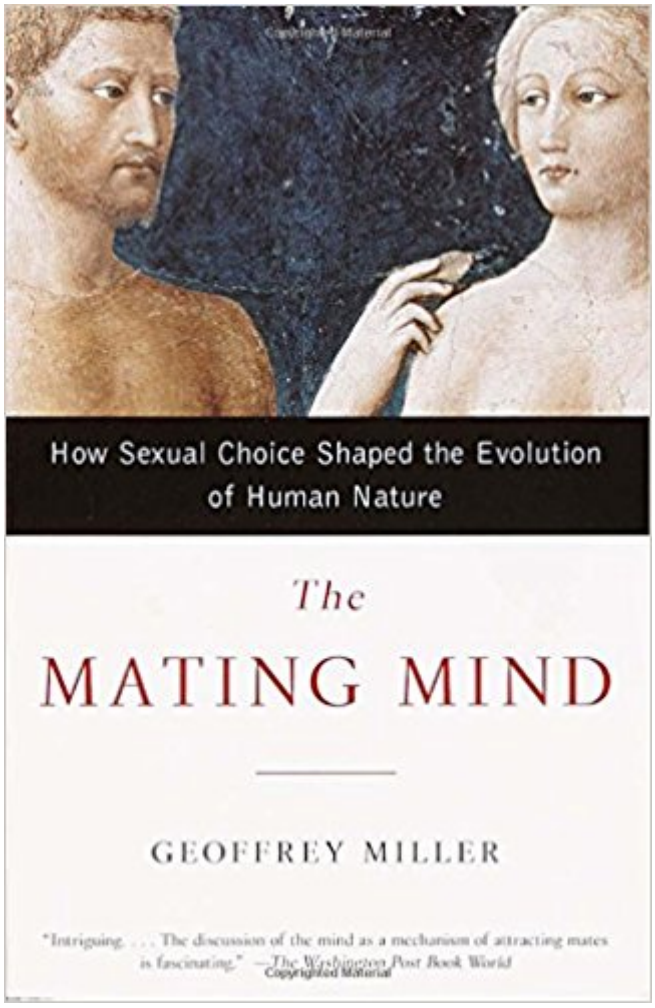
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The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped The Evolution Of Human Nature



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Synopsis

At once a pioneering study of evolution and an accessible and lively reading experience, The Mating Mind marks the arrival of a prescient and provocative new science writer. Psychologist Geoffrey Miller offers the most convincingÃ¢â ¬â œand radicalÃ¢â ¬â œexplanation for how and why the human mind evolved. Consciousness, morality, creativity, language, and art: these are the traits that make us human. Scientists have traditionally explained these qualities as merely a side effect of surplus brain size, but Miller argues that they were sexual attractors, not side effects. He bases his argument on DarwinÃ¢â ¬â„¢ s theory of sexual selection, which until now has played second fiddle to DarwinÃ¢â ¬â„¢ s theory of natural selection, and draws on ideas and research from a wide range of fields, including psychology, economics, history, and pop culture. Witty, powerfully argued, and continually thought-provoking, The Mating Mind is a landmark in our understanding of our own species.

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Customer Reviews

Evolutionary psychology has been called the "new black" of science fashion, though at its most controversial, it more resembles the emperor’s new clothes. Geoffrey Miller is one of the Young Turks trying to give the phenomenon a better spin. In The Mating Mind, he takes Darwin’s "other" evolutionary theory--of sexual rather than natural selection--and uses it to build a theory about how the human mind has developed the sophistication of a peacock’s tail to encourage sexual choice and the refining of art, morality, music, and literature. Where many evolutionary psychologists see the mind as a Swiss army knife, and cognitive science sees it as a computer, Miller compares it to

an entertainment system, evolved to stimulate other brains. Taking up the baton from studies such as Richard Dawkins' The Selfish Gene, it's a dizzyingly ambitious project, which would be impossibly vague without the ingenuity and irreverence that Miller brings to bear on it. Steeped in popular culture, the book mixes theories of runaway selection, fitness indicators, and sensory bias with explanations of why men tip more than women and how female choice shaped (quite literally) the penis. It also extols the sagacity of Mary Poppins. Indeed, Miller allows ideas to cascade at such a torrent that the steam given off can run the risk of being mistaken for hot air). That large personalities can be as sexually enticing as oversize breasts or biceps may indeed prove comforting, but denuding sexual chemistry can be a curiously unsexy business, akin to analyzing humor. As a courting display of Miller's intellectual plumage, though, The Mating Mind is formidable, its agent-provocateur chest swelled with ideas and articulate conjecture. While occasionally his magpie instinct may loot fool's gold, overall it provides an accessible and attractive insight into modern Darwinism and the survival of the sexiest. --David Vincent, .co.uk --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The booming but controversial field of evolutionary psychology attempts to explain human feelings and behaviors as consequences of natural selection, using plausible analogies from the animal kingdom to show (for example) why we have the capacity to enjoy music, or why men commit violent crimes. Miller, an evolutionary psychologist at University College-London, argues that much of human character and culture arose for the same reason peacocks have beautiful tails: mating purposes. A peacock that can find enough to eat and avoid being eaten despite such an enormous appendage must have very good genes; by displaying its tail, then, a peacock displays its potential to be a good mate. Miller looks at several kinds of sexual selection. "Romantic" behavior like the making of complex art wouldn't have helped our ancestors find more food or avoid predators. It might, however, have helped display the fitness of proto-men for the proto-women with whom they wanted to mate--and vice versa. If we like to show off our large vocabularies, it's at least in part because our ancestors sought smart partners. Miller's enjoyable book also surveys animal kingdom parallels and recent theoretical arguments about sexual selection. Like most popular evolutionary psychologists, however, Miller doesn't always distinguish between a plausible story and a scientifically testable hypothesis. And some of his arguments seem covertly circular, or self-serving: Do we really need Darwin to explain why men publish more books than women? Still, picturing "the human brain as an entertainment system that evolved to stimulate other brains," Miller provides an articulate and memorable case for the role of sexual selection in determining human behaviors.

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Although this book doesn't directly deal with marital problems per se, reading it helps to gain understanding of both what is, and what is NOT particularly "natural" in man-woman relations (mating behavior). As other reviewers have indicated, the main thrust of the book is to chronicle the thinking of evolutionary scientists as to the nature of non-directly survival oriented selection, i.e. selection outside the realm of the conventional "natural selection" of traits needed to survive to reproductive age. For this purpose, traits that may indicate overall offspring strength and health tend to be sexually selected for, based on the traits' difficulty to fake and conspicuous costliness. For example if a peacock can be so strong as to survive with such a heavy colorful predator attracting tail, well, he surely must be a strong peacock and, as such, quite sexy. The analog to the peacock tail for humans is, in general, extensive human intelligence. But beyond detailing the various theses of sexual selection and its related evolutionary processes, the book also covers mating behavior of pre-civilization (Pleistocene) humans. Furthermore it notes that the amount of time civilization has existed, measured in reproductive generations, is so small that hardly an iota of genetic difference exists between civilized humans and pre-Neolithic hunter gatherers. (Some of the latter are still in existence today.) As such there can be no doubt that our basic genetic human nature is that of the hunter gatherer. Moreover, there is a material consistency in sexual/mating behavior of hunter gatherers, behavior that could be described as "natural". It's not prostitution, at least to the extent that hunter gatherers don't have/use money. It's not polygamy, this appearing as a kind of corollary to skewed distributions of power and wealth that occur in civilization. And finally it's not ultra long-term monogamy (marriage), also an outcome of civilization invented to deal with legal and economic matters concerning property, inheritance, education in child rearing, etc. Nope. The "natural", hunter gatherer way is described in the book a something akin to "serial monogamy", which across diverse hunter gatherer societies yields quite consistent observation of fairly strong temporary monogamous bonds, at least through to pregnancy. Such bonds may even extend through child birth and early baby care, but little continues after that. Half siblings and multiple lifetime lovers are more the rules than the exceptions. With this sort of knowledge and understanding of both the evolutionary purpose and the more natural norms of human mating behavior, it seems possible that marriage counselors and their clients might be better prepared to come up with more apt solutions to marital difficulties. And I also suspect there's an important policy implication from this book for social and legal planners: invent renewable, one to five year term

marriages.

I found this book fascinating. Miller's theories behind the evolution of the human mind are novel and well argued. He delves into the lesser known side of Darwin's work to help explain how human's and other animals can develop complicated organs/appendages before they produce any real survival benefit. A great book, and an important read if one wants to better understand the intricacies of the human mind.

This book was recommended to me by a friend studying evolutionary psychology, a branch of study I never even knew existed. It is filled with intriguing ideas and lively observations. Anyone interested in what makes us human would enjoy this book.

The mating mind is a brilliant theory and it is very well explained. It's very insightful regarding the differences between men and women.

Quite an interesting reading

intriguing book

Easy and fun to read but not too simplified. I enjoy reading books on evolutionary biology and psychology and this is one of the best.

Intensely interesting. Thorough. Protracted.

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