PSYCHOLOGY & HUMAN NATURE

Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters

by Alan S. Miller and Satoshi Kanazawa

Evolution applied to daily life: why beauty favors daughters, and why stone-age brains struggle today.

BEST POINTS FROM THE BOOK

01 **Your brain is running Stone Age software in a world it was never built for.**

The Savanna Principle (Ch. 1): the brain struggles with anything that did not exist in the ancestral environment - hence cravings for once-scarce sugar and fat in a world of plenty, and screen faces that can feel like real friends.

02 **One asymmetry runs the whole book: a man can father hundreds of children, a woman can bear only a few - and she always knows they are hers.**

From that gap (Ch. 2) the authors derive most sex differences: male competition, risk, and sexual jealousy on one side; female choosiness and certainty-based family ties on the other. It is their master argument, not a settled consensus.

03 **Parents tend to end up with more children of whichever sex their traits help most.**

The generalized Trivers-Willard hypothesis (Ch. 5): any heritable advantage - beauty, size, status - should tilt a family's births toward the sex that gains more from it.

04 **Beautiful people have more daughters, the authors argue, because beauty pays a daughter more than a son.**

Looks raise a woman's mating prospects more than a man's. The book reports very attractive parents were 36% likelier to have a daughter as a first child (a study of 3,000 young Americans) - though later statisticians have disputed that finding.

05 **Wealth, status, and size tilt families the other way - toward sons.**

A high-status son can attract many partners while a low-status son may attract none, so the book reports rich, prominent, and big-and-tall parents having more boys (Ch. 5).

06 **Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder; to the authors, it is a health certificate.**

They argue beauty standards are universal because features like symmetry, clear skin, and lustrous hair advertised health and fertility in every culture - which is why media did not invent them (Ch. 3).

07 **Having a son, the authors report, makes a marriage less likely to end in divorce.**

Couples with at least one son divorce less than couples with only daughters (Ch. 4); the book argues a son raises a father's stake in staying. The same chapter warns that handsome men tend to stray more and make riskier husbands.

08 **The book's darkest family claim: stepchildren face far more danger than children living with both birth parents.**

Daly and Wilson's 'Cinderella effect' (Ch. 5) - in the data the authors cite, young children with a stepparent, especially a stepfather, suffer far higher rates of abuse and killing. A contested statistic about group risk, never a verdict on any individual stepfamily.

09 **Crime and genius peak on the same curve, because in this theory both are young men showing off.**

Male violence, risk-taking, and even creative productivity all crest in the twenties (Ch. 6): if status historically won mates, young men compete hardest - and marriage, which takes a man out of that contest, settles him down.

10 **Religion, in this telling, is a byproduct of a brain that would rather see a ghost than miss a predator.**

Over-detecting agency was the cheap error ancestrally (Ch. 8), so we see intentions behind storms and luck. The authors add that women are more religious in every culture because faith doubles as risk management for the more risk-averse sex.

11 **Read every claim in this book as a slight tilt in group averages - never as a fact about a person.**

The authors themselves insist observations are not prescriptions ('there is no place for ought in science'), the effects are small, and several headline findings have been challenged by other researchers. A provocative lens, not a law.

THE BOOK, IN SHORT

Two evolutionary psychologists take on everyday puzzles in question-and-answer form: why do men marry younger women, why are diamonds a girl's best friend, why are almost all violent criminals men, why are women more religious than men - and, of course, why do beautiful people have more daughters? Their answer to nearly all of it starts with two tools.

The first tool is the Savanna Principle: the brain evolved for life in small ancestral bands and still handles anything evolutionarily new - supermarkets, screens, strangers, birth control - clumsily. The second is reproductive asymmetry: men can potentially father hundreds of children and can never be fully certain which are theirs, while women bear few and always know. From those two premises the authors build explanations for the sex differences they say appear in every culture.

Applied to mating and family, the machinery produces the book's title. Beauty, they argue, is a universal health-and-fertility signal rather than a cultural taste. And under the generalized Trivers-Willard hypothesis, parents have more children of the sex their traits advantage: beauty helps daughters most, so attractive parents tilt toward girls; wealth, status, and size help sons most, so the well-off tilt toward boys. The same chapters report that couples with sons divorce less, that handsome men stray more, that girls whose fathers leave early reach puberty sooner, and that stepchildren face sharply elevated risks - the 'Cinderella effect.'

The final chapters push the theory onto crime, inequality, and conflict. Young men's violence and young men's genius, they claim, peak on the same age curve because both are status displays in a mating contest - and marriage calms men by ending the contest. The authors attribute much of the pay and career gap to differing male and female priorities rather than discrimination alone, read religion as a byproduct of a brain built to over-detect agency, link suicide bombing to the mating squeeze created by polygyny, and call ethnocentrism innate even while racial categories themselves are fluid.

To the authors' credit, the book ends by admitting what evolutionary psychology cannot yet explain, such as homosexuality and why rich societies choose to have so few children. Readers should extend that caution further: the effects described are small statistical tilts, some headline findings (including the beauty-and-daughters result) have been disputed by other statisticians, and critics accuse the authors of reasoning in circles. Taken as bold, testable hypotheses about human nature - not as verdicts on any individual - it remains one of the most entertaining tours of evolutionary psychology ever written for general readers.

DO THIS WEEK

This week, catch one Savanna mismatch at work in yourself - the pull of sweets in a world of abundance, 'friendship' with faces on a screen, a flash of status anxiety around richer peers - and do not fight the urge head-on. Change the setting instead: keep the trigger out of sight and out of reach for seven days, and notice whether the Stone Age brain calms down once the ancient cue is gone.

By Alan S. Miller and Satoshi Kanazawa, first published 2007 (Perigee). Kanazawa completed the book after Miller's death in 2003. Read it for provocative, testable explanations of human behavior - and read it with a skeptical eye.