

Anthropology 3533

Evolution of the female orgasm

Review

- Week 1
 - Evolutionary theory
 - Misconceptions of evolution
 - Biocultural perspectives
- Week 2
 - Mechanisms of evolutionary change
 - Darwinian versus modern theories of sexual selection
 - Sexy Son versus Good Genes, fitness tradeoffs and male, female strategies for reproduction
- Week 3
 - Life history and biodemography perspectives
 - Evolutionary and biocultural perspectives on sexual desire, feminist critiques of biological determinism and male-centered definition of desire
 - Evolution of the Female Orgasm
- Week 4
 - Hominin evolution and the pelvis (from Australopithecines to Homo)
 - Patterns in anatomically modern human birthing and Natural Selection

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

- Remember, males and females are not the same in terms of
 - Reproductive investment
 - Energetics
 - Fitness tradeoffs
 - Embryonic development
 - Hormonal cycles and response
 - Sexual desires

Female is not the default

Subject to their own unique sexual and reproduction pressures, energetics, costs, anatomy and physiology, which deserves attention and study

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

- When we discuss theories of the female orgasm, please remember

Traits = adaptations only IF

- They are heritable
- There is/was variation within populations
- Trait has evolutionary significance
 - Increases chance of survival
 - Increases chance of reproduction
 - Increases chance of offspring survival
- There is a clearly defined evolutionary mechanism

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

- Just like the discussions of sexual selection, reproductive strategies, energetics, embryonic development of sexuality, and sexual desires....
- Females are not males without a penis
 - i.e. female sexual desire is not linked to changes in testosterone levels that way that it is in males
- Beware of biological determinism
 - i.e. sexual desire is culturally constructed (Foucault) and not a biological reality

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

Evolutionary hypotheses for explaining the female orgasm

- Men do not experience the female orgasm'
- Neither do 10-15% of women
- That means we rely on communication to convey ideas about the female orgasm
- Communication is cultural-social
- Scientific studies of the female orgasm rely on communication as well

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

Evolutionary hypotheses for explaining the female orgasm

1. Increases chance of fertilization
 - Keeps female horizontal after ejaculation
2. It is a by-product of face to face posture
3. It is a pseudo-male response
4. To grip and massage the penis to ejaculation (female choice)
5. To suck up sperm

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

Evolutionary hypotheses for explaining the female orgasm

6. Spontaneous abortion (correlation = causation)
7. Communicating a possible abortion to males
8. Signals to males that female is satisfied (will not seek more copulations)
9. Intermittant rewards

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

11/19 involve the pair bond

“The male-female pair bond is adaptive and female orgasms serve the pair bond”

1. Panglossian paradigm - monogamy
2. Sex for meat, protection, infant survival
3. Efficient coitus without estrus
4. Male sexual selection
5. Keeping a man around
6. Female sexual selection

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

“The male-female pair bond is adaptive and female orgasms serve the pair bond”

7. Behavioral reward for copulation with partner (females passive, must be encouraged)
8. Makes it easier for a female to be satisfied by one male
9. Making the male more excited/attracted (sexy daughter)
10. Keeps male around for childrearing
11. Reduce tension and violence in communities

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

“The male-female pair bond is adaptive and female orgasms serve the pair bond”

Some non-human primate females orgasm, disassociated from copulation

- Stump tailed macaques heary and respiration rates, uterine contractions
- Females mount females, more orgasms occur this way
- Not related to phase of cycle
- Chimps, rhesus macaques

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

Female centered explanations

- Sherfey's health advantage
 - Relieves vasocongestion in the pelvis
 - Short term benefit leaves women unsatisfied
 - Potential benefit from multiple orgasms
 - Based on external genital orgasm
- Hrdy's pleasure account
 - Social role of orgasm in controlling males
 - Making females more promiscuous

Evolution of the Female Orgasm

Just because a trait is advantageous does not mean it is an adaptation