

## Letter

# Questioning Heteronormative Theories of Mate Choice

### Root Gorelick

Department of Biology and School of Mathematics and Statistics,  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, ON, Canada  
Root.Gorelick@carleton.ca

Faundes and Pardo (2010; henceforth F&P) have recently published an interesting model of human mate choice in *Biological Theory*. Unfortunately, their paper contained enough heteronormative presumptions to warrant a short critique.

F&P (2010: 106) wrote: “The brain also participates by determining the sexual orientation of [individual] Y, which is fundamental in order for the first interaction to be effective.” They are completely ambiguous about what the first interaction is, but I assume they mean signals that an individual transmits to indicate their availability for reproduction. In this modern age, with wide recognition and acceptance of homosexuality and transsexuality, as well as broad availability of reproductive technologies (IVF and even turkey basters), human reproduction can occur without mating. Furthermore, mating can occur without reproduction, even for heterosexual matings, thanks to contraceptive technologies. In fact, most of the time that heterosexual matings occur, the participants hope that reproduction does not occur. It is sobering to consider that the only effective matings in the eyes of F&P are those that result in reproduction, especially in light of all the good evolutionary work that has occurred on social bonds formed by matings (e.g., Parish 1994; Hrdy 1999; Roughgarden 2004).

F&P (2010) present complementary arguments in Figure 2 that are classically heteronormative: with a diagram hinting at women and men being like proverbial locks and keys. Such complementary arguments are commonplace, albeit specious, so much so that many scientists and social scientists still erroneously think that vaginas and penises are homologous organs. We too often forget about clitorises or tragically amputate them without the “owner’s” consent if they are too long (in someone’s eyes).

I have the greatest problems with F&P’s (2010: 108) final sentence: “Finally, we can say that [our] theory is evolutive, [sic] because if a successful sexual attraction is established between two heterosexual persons, according to factors and elements mentioned above, the couple’s descendants will be healthy and reproductively successful.” First, the notion of “couples” is misguided in light of extra-pair copulations, which are estimated to result in approximately 10% of human offspring. Second, the exclusion of homosexual matings is misguided, especially because their participants often are more cognizant of choosing fit egg or sperm donors than are participants of heterosexual matings. Third, is a mating homosexual or heterosexual if it involves three or more individuals, at least one of whom is female and another male? Fourth, existence of numerous transsexual and intersexual individuals (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Hird 2006) means that it is often impossible to discern whether a mating between two people is homosexual or heterosexual . . . as though we should really care which it is.

I do not begrudge F&P writing their theory of human mate choice, even if I consider it chauvinistic and anachronistic. Nor do I begrudge the editors for publishing it. However, I also hope that they do not begrudge my critique. This is how the risky business of science progresses.

### References

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