How People Choose a Partner: The Evolutionary Psychology of Mating Strategies, VKN-096:61

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Office hours and place:
Tuesdays, 1200-1330, Izu 205 (Mihály Berkics, 2019 Fall semester)

The schedule and place of the course:
The first class is on Friday, 13th September, 1315-1445 in room P1.
Further classes are on six Fridays, two classes each day in room 315 – see the detailed schedule.

The goal of the course
This course will introduce basic principles and terms and will cover most relevant topics of the evolutionary psychology of mating strategies and preferences. Students shall learn about the basic principles of evolutionary theory and its applications to mating-related psychological phenomena, and develop an understanding of what an evolutionary approach can bring to our knowledge of human behavior and mental processes in this domain. The semester will start with a short, basic overview of evolutionary psychology and the parental investment theory by Trivers (1972), on which many evolutionary accounts of mating strategies and sex differences in mating are built. Mating strategies and behavior of animals, especially primates will also be briefly reviewed to give a comparative perspective. Then the focus will be shifted to human mental and behavioral processes and within-sex differences, which, besides the often-studied between-sex differences, are an emerging and ever more important field in the study of human mating. Students will also get an introduction to the most relevant and up-to-date methods of this domain, including the possible gamification of research.

Conditions of the course completion
Seminar/practical grade based on participation at classes, doing homeworks, preparing for and doing presentations, doing group work in classes (e.g. discussions).

Bibliography, additional materials
Compulsory readings:
- Selected papers from journals like Evolution and Human Behavior and Evolutionary Psychology
- Further readings will be specified during the course: students will get it as an assignment to search up-to-date and relevant literature to their chosen topics.
Recommended readings:


Access to further material on Canvas.

Detailed syllabus

1. 13.09.2019 – 2x45 mins, MB + ZC – Introduction and foundations: the evolutionary approach

2-3. 04.10.2019 – 2x90 mins, MB – Signals and handicaps: how humans (and animals) let others know they are worth choosing; Competition and jealousy: between- and within-sex differences

4-5. 11.10.2019 – 2x90 mins, ZC – Parental investment theory and mating strategies in the animal world; Within-sex differences in mating strategies, and the variety in relationship types

6-7. 25.10.2019 – 2x90 mins, ZC – What do people consider when they choose a partner? Factors of mate preferences

8-9. 22.11.2019 – 2x90 mins, MB – The role of physical attractiveness and its components (e.g. WHR, facial masculinity); The role of status and other factors

10-11. 06.12.2019 – 2x90 mins, MB – How people avoid undesirable candidates: dealbreakers in mate preferences; The mismatch problem: are our evolved preferences still adaptive in the modern world?

12-13. 13.12.2019 – 2x90 mins, ZC – Additive vs threshold models of mating preferences and other mate choice models (e.g. Euclidean model, Manhattan-distance model, homogamy)