

# The evolutionary psychology of men's coercive sexuality

Note: This commentary is intended to be satirical.

Randy Thornhill<sup>a</sup> and Nancy Wilmsen Thornhill<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Biology and <sup>b</sup>Departments of Biology and Anthropology,  
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-1091  
Electronic mail: rthorn@unmvm.bitnet

**Abstract:** Psychological adaptation underlies all human behavior. Thus, sexual coercion by men could either arise from a rape-specific psychological adaptation or it could be a side-effect of a more general psychological adaptation not directly related to rape. Determining the specific environmental cues that men's brains have been designed by selection to process may help us decide which of these rival explanations is correct. We examine six testable predictions against existing data: (1) Both coercive and noncoercive sex will be associated with high levels of sexual arousal and performance in men. (2) Achieving physical control of a sexually unwilling woman will be sexually arousing to men. (3) Young men will be more sexually coercive than older men. (4) Men of low socioeconomic status will likewise be more sexually coercive. (5) A man's motivation to use sexual coercion will be influenced by its effects on his social image. (6) Even in long-term relationships men will be motivated to use coercion when their mates show a lack of interest in or resistance to sex because these are interpreted as signs of sexual infidelity. Current data support all six predictions and are hence consistent with the rape-specific hypothesis, but this does not eliminate the side-effect hypothesis, which is likewise compatible with the findings, as well as with the further evidence that forced matings increased the fitness of ancestral males during human evolution. We suggest some research that may help decide between the two hypotheses.

## Open Peer Commentary

### The evolutionary psychology of priesthood celibacy

Jennifer J. Freyd<sup>a</sup> and J. Q. Johnson<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Psychology, <sup>b</sup>Office of University Computing, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403

Electronic mail: <sup>a</sup>jff@dynamic.uoregon.edu; <sup>b</sup>jqj@oregon.uoregon.edu

Instead of getting tangled in the powerful relationship between socialization and adult aggression (for example, the enormous correlation between exposure to childhood sexual abuse and adult rape or the existence of essentially rape-free societies [Sanday 1979]), Thornhill & Thornhill (T & T) go right to the heart of the matter.

As a sample of the sorts of hypotheses this kind of approach inspires we explore the question: How can a society create and maintain ecclesiastical celibacy? Following T & T, we hypothesize that this phenomenon relates to the fact that psychological adaptation underlies all human behavior. By cultural definition, priests remain celibate. This means that males do not need to guard their females when left alone with a male priest. But of course studies have shown that priests really do not remain celibate at all. Furthermore, they are inclined toward adulterous affairs with the married female members of their flock (see, e.g., Brundage 1987). To the extent that these priests successfully impregnate their mistresses, they have the ideal opportunity for perpetuating their own genes. Not only do they have access to a large population of women, but better yet, they are guaranteed that the offspring will be provided for by other males (the husbands). The celibate clergy are therefore seen as a straightforward institutionalization of the cuckold or "sexy son" mating strategy (e.g., Buss 1988).

Many questions await further research, but we are confident that this novel approach to clerical celibacy, inspired by T & T's target article, will prove revealing concerning the human condition.