

Evolutionary Psychology

www.epjournal.net – 2008. 6(1): 85-89

Book Review

We are Family, All My Kin and Me

A Review of Catherine A. Salmon and Todd K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Family Relationships: An Evolutionary Perspective*. Oxford University Press: New York, 2007, \$43.90, 366 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-532051-0

Jack Demarest, Department of Psychology, Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ 07764; Email: demarest@monmouth.edu.

The jacket of this book has a recommendation from Douglas Kenrick that says it all. Ten years ago Catherine Salmon noted that studies of family relationships represented a conceptual hole in our knowledge, specifically our understanding of the evolutionary psychology of the family, and this edited volume does a magnificent job of filling that void. And it does more. This is a great collection, full of empirical and theoretical contributions that review the literature and often provide new data and clever predictions for research not yet done on almost every conceivable kin relationship. What's more, it is a fascinating "read." I was absorbed by the ideas, the predictions, the evidence, and the yet untested insights in almost every chapter.

The volume consists of 15 chapters, divided into four sections with a final summary chapter. The chapters in Section 1, the introduction and overview, discuss the important evolutionary factors that family and kinship networks bring to bear on the socio-ecology of family life. Relying heavily on parental investment theory, inclusive fitness, the implications of sex differences in parental certainty, and then sprinkled with many caveats unique to humans and our hominid ancestors (e.g., brain size, extended childhood, female social power, extensive paternal care) as well as subsistence patterns and tradeoffs, like that between breastfeeding and women's work, these three chapters provide the foundation for the rest of the book. Chapter 1, written by the editors (Salmon and Shackelford), is an overview of general theory and the topics covered by each of the authors.

Most engaging is Hrdy's (Ch 3) assessment of family relationships from the unique perspective of the cooperative breeding model (derived mainly from avian behavioral biology), i.e., that hominid females most likely raised their offspring with reliable and necessary help from alloparents. Hrdy briefly reviews the literature on cooperative breeding beginning with Emlen's (1997) ecological model of the family and transitions quickly into a gathering of convincing arguments why alloparenting *must* have been essential for early

humans. To this, add the chapter by Flinn and his colleagues (Ch 2) focusing attention on the implications of cooperative breeding and extended kin networks for negotiating social relationships (e.g., the value of language, empathy, self awareness, and theory of mind) and the scene is set for an ecologically and evolutionarily sophisticated tour de force through the various combinations and permutations of family relationships.

Section 2 consists of five chapters on parent-offspring relationships. Beginning with the transition from mated couple to parental responsibility, Johns and Belsky (Ch 4) briefly review the literature on the costs of having a child for the couple's relationship (e.g., violation of individual expectations, changes in attachment orientation, and relationship dissatisfaction). Noting that this period is often the most stressful and dissatisfying time in the couple's relationship, these authors then identify social factors that can influence this experience (e.g., age, kin support, available child care) and then explore various evolutionary accounts for the scheduling of children and investment in each child. Other chapters in this section include one on motherhood (Keller and Chasiotis – Ch 5), an excellent treatment by Geary on fatherhood (Ch 6), parent-offspring conflict (Salmon – Ch 7), and Sulloway's review of research on the evolutionary significance of birth order (Ch 8). I especially enjoyed the chapters on fatherhood and parent-offspring conflict. Geary begins his chapter by noting that fatherhood is a scientific puzzle because little or no male parenting exists in 95% of all mammals. Using the same benefit/cost analysis that most of the authors in this volume rely on, he maps many of the benefits accrued from paternal care, places this in the context of estimates of potential cuckoldry and paternal uncertainty in primate and human populations, as well as relationship satisfaction and the resulting psychosocial stress in the family, and concludes that the evolutionary history of paternal care may well have had its roots in a gorilla-like pattern as opposed to other primate family systems (e.g., Geary, 2006, Geary and Flinn, 2001). I would like to see someone examine if a synthesis is reasonable between the cooperative breeding model of female alloparental care (Hrdy) and this gorilla model of male parental care.

In the next chapter, Salmon examines factors that influence the nature of conflict between parent and child. Although each portion of her chapter is brief, this contribution highlights many sources of conflict from conception to adolescence, provides insight into the costs and benefits to parents, adds some discussion of evidence from anthropological studies of the Trivers-Willard effect, and ends with some thoughts on stepparenting and adoption. Again, I would like to see someone examine how Hrdy's cooperative breeding model dovetails with the findings on family systems influenced by stepparents and adoption since there seem to be opposing positions that these are either typical of ancestral populations (Hrdy) and that current non-kin step-family and adoptive family relationships activate the alloparenting mechanism as incidental byproducts (e.g., Buss, 2008) or that these non-kin relationships are atypical and maladaptive or at least less viable from an evolutionary point of view (Salmon).

Section 3 has the nondescript title of "other family relationships" but actually extends the sphere of influence on the family beyond parents to siblings, grandparents and other kin (which would have been a better title). Two of the three chapters are written by the same authors (Michalski and Euler), and as I shall argue later, two of the three chapters in the final section of the book belong here as well. This is one of the more stimulating sections of the book, primarily because it tests the limits of our predictions from inclusive

fitness, paternal uncertainty, and Trivers-Willard, and presents us with many unique and untested predictions as well.

The chapter on sibling relationships (Michalski and Euler - Ch 9) was evidently written or revised after many of the others since the authors cite half a dozen other chapters along the way, perhaps underscoring the future usefulness of this volume as a resource. What I enjoyed about this essay was the evolutionary treatment provided for all types of siblings, from full sibs to fictive sibs and siblings-in-law, and the use of original data from recent research by the authors to address areas of sibling relationships that have not yet received much attention. I also especially appreciated the theoretical predictions for research yet to be done. The inclusion of untested predictions similarly marks a highlight of the essay on grandparents and extended kin relationships, also written by Euler and Michalski (Ch 11). In this chapter, the authors go beyond the basic hypotheses about grandparenting derived from the paternity uncertainty principle to discuss socio-ecological variables (e.g., rural vs. urban ecology; patrilineal vs. matrilineal setting; number and age of children and grandparents). The third chapter in this section, on family sexual abuse (Tal and Lieberman – Ch 12), is another fascinating and stimulating read. I expected another summary of the research from people like Daly and Wilson but was presented with something far more inclusive and potentially far reaching. Tal and Lieberman turn other theories of sexual abuse upside down (i.e., family systems theory; Finkelhor, 1984) and examine how sexual aversion within the family (i.e., incest avoidance) is where we should begin in order to explain why the incidence of intrafamilial sexuality is so low, and that in the absence of kin recognition, normal mating strategies are activated (i.e., sexual abuse). This is a highly controversial argument but one that is likely to create new research frontiers.

At least two of the three chapters in the fourth section of this book, oddly titled “Applications to specific issues,” could have been more appropriately included elsewhere for added clarity. The chapter on family violence (Goetz – Ch 12) focused on predictions from the paternity uncertainty principle and should have preceded the more specific and in-depth treatment of family sexual abuse by Tal and Lieberman (Ch 10). Similarly the editors could have located the chapter on twin research (Segal et al – Ch 14) more effectively after the one on sibling relationships (Michalski and Euler – Ch 9). Segal et al provide a window on research strategies and findings with these rare sibling combinations which, the authors point out, have been unusual in the history of human evolution. Consequently, psychological mechanisms unique to twin relationships are unlikely to have evolved differently than for any sibling pairs, assuming that human sibs can identify their degree of relatedness. Thus, one area of research necessary for understanding sibling relationships is detection of relatedness, and the various types of twin studies, especially those with degrees of MZ twin discordance and DZ twin concordance, will help us understand this phenomenon.

The final chapter (Gardiner and Bjorklund – Ch 15) is an overview of some of the topics addressed in this volume. As such, it does not add much to what the rest of this wonderful collection already provides and would have been more useful if it incorporated references to each of the relevant chapters, as the editors did in Ch 1. These authors do briefly make the distinction between *direct adaptations*, *ontogenetic adaptations*, and *conditional adaptations*, concepts that need to be integrated into any model of family

relationships (i.e., notably, the terms are not found elsewhere in this volume) but the substance of this book is really in each of the contributions between chapters 2 and 14.

Finally, one chapter stands out as distinct from the rest: by Fisher and her colleagues on temperament and mate choice. First of all, this contribution is not concerned with family relationships so much as mate selection and there is little here to indicate that the “temperamental” sex differences alleged to be important for mate choice have any bearing on the family (i.e., they may, but there’s no mention in this chapter). Second, unlike the other chapters that set their topic within a benefit/cost socio-ecological perspective, using theoretical tools like parental investment theory, inclusive fitness, paternity uncertainty, the Trivers-Willard hypothesis and other evolutionary-based predictive models, this chapter lacks a similar theoretical and empirical foundation and does not really address the functional (adaptive) significance of the sex differences in personality the authors hope to explain. In addition, the concept of “temperament syndromes” provided in this chapter is extraordinarily broad, each “syndrome” referring to a wide variety of traits, only some of which hang together as related personality factors and many of which seem to be context-dependent rather than global traits, especially not global sex-differentiated traits as the authors appear to be arguing here. Finally, the notion that each “temperament syndrome” is uniquely related to a separate neuro-hormonal chemical system is an interesting idea that bears further examination but taken at face value it seems to trivialize the enormous integration and parallel processing that takes place when neural systems yield to complex psychological processes like personality. In sum, I’m not sure why this chapter was included in the current volume.

I teach an undergraduate course in evolutionary psychology and no textbook covers family relationships with the breadth and depth achieved in this volume. Obviously, this book could not substitute for a textbook in evolutionary psychology, although it would be an excellent text for a graduate seminar in family relationships and would add a missing dimension for undergraduate and graduate courses in which a non-evolutionary approach to the family is the main agenda. I supplement my undergraduate course with about 50 reprints of articles that provide more detail and a broader review of the literature than the textbook; this edited collection could substitute for about a quarter of those supplementary readings. In sum, I highly recommend this book for the classroom at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and I think it will be an enormously useful reference for scholars and researchers interested in family relationships. Moreover, unlike most other edited collections, *Family Relationships: An Evolutionary Perspective* will be the source of much new research, since many chapters are stocked with fresh ideas and novel predictions. I began this review with a paraphrase of the book jacket, and shall end with an equally fitting quotation: “The book... paves the way for a truly comprehensive understanding of family relationships. It should be required reading for any scholar working on human families ...” (David Buss).

References

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