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Human Creativity May Have Evolved as a Way for Parents to Bond with Their Children

Evidence from Disneyland suggests that human creativity may have evolved not in response to sexual selection as some scientists believe but as a way to help parents bond with their children and to pass on traditions and cultural knowledge, a new study published in the inaugural issue of the International Journal of Tourism Anthropology suggests.

Evolutionary psychologist Geoffrey Miller of the University of New Mexico has suggested that human creativity, storytelling, humor, wit, music, fantasy, and morality, all evolved as forms of courtship behavior. He used evidence drawn from the Southern California tourist industry to underpin his argument. The work offers an explanation as to why the human brain is so much bigger relative to body size than that of other apes -- sexual selection for greater intellect. Intriguingly, Miller has referred to the mind as "Amusement Park."

Now, anthropologists Craig Palmer of the University of Missouri, Columbia, and Kathryn Coe of the University of Arizona beg to differ. Although Miller talks of the mind in such terms, he fails to include in his analysis the most famous amusement park in the world, Disneyland. Palmer and Coe suggest that this is one of the most dense concentrations in the world of exactly those aspects of culture -- art, creativity, storytelling, humor, wit, music, fantasy, and morality -- that Miller claims evolved as courtship displays.

Writing in the IJTA, Palmer and Coe suggest that Miller's hypothesis cannot account for the fact that Disneyland is

fundamentally devoted to children. They reason that Disneyland and other similar amusement parks, support an alternative hypothesis that the creative aspects of the human brain may have evolved in the context of parents influencing their offspring, and offspring responding to their parents, not in the context of courtship.

The researchers do concede that some tourism is related to courtship, and not just "honeymoon" tourism and that it often involves art, creativity, storytelling, humor, wit, music, fantasy, and morality as part of the attractions. The team argues, however, that "The brain circuitry involved in both the generation of, and response to, these traits was selected for because it enabled parents to increase their fitness by increasing their ability to influence their offspring." The human brain increased in size through evolution as cultural traditions accumulated over numerous generations. "Traditions can last much longer than a generation or two and that the massive accumulation of traditional behavior is unique to our species as is the large brain," the team concludes.

Editor's Note: This article is not intended to provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.