

The Science of Romance: Secrets of the Sexual Brain

Nigel Barber

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For some, love may be full of hearts and stars, but for evolutionary psychologists like the author, it's mainly a stew of neurons, genes, and hormones. In this work on how evolution affects human behavior in the romantic and sexual realms, the author of *Why Parents Matter: Parental Investment and Child Outcomes*, kicks away Cupid in favor of Darwin and the result is fascinating.

Although he's passionate in his views about how two million years of hominid evolution have shaped current dating life, Barber acknowledges that not everyone will want to admit that sometimes biology is destiny. He writes, "While some people may be offended by the notion that our romantic lives can be reduced to chemistry, it is really no more offensive than the uncontroversial notion that our bodies are composed of atoms. Chemical reduction is a scientific method of explaining psychology and behavior." With that, he sallies forth into an impressive range of topics, taking on homosexuality, flirting, sexual jealousy, marriage, divorce, and even dancing.

His thoughts about how emotional conflict in childhood can influence later behavior in relationships is an area that's been well covered in psychology, but his addition of other sciences on the topic, such as cognitive development and linguistics, give his arguments weight and depth. Barber is seemingly inexhaustible when it comes to diversity of thought, discussing the effects of testosterone overabundance on young men in one chapter, and the usefulness of fat for fertility in another. His accessible and lively writing keeps the book from feeling too wide-ranging and scholarly.

Anyone who believes that love is a magical journey, rife with mysterious meetings, lovely coincidences, and moments of destiny, should avoid this compelling exploration. Those who don't mind considering, however, that romantic inclinations may be in one's genes and not in one's heart will find much to chew on in this weighty addition to the field of evolutionary psychology.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (July / August 2002)

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