

Re: Statistics, Selection, Society, Individuals, Gender, Gossip, Conflict, and Careers

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In article <d0maqf\$10la\$1@fiasco.xenopsyche.net>, tessel@tum.bot writes:

> > *the question of why humans take such pleasure in, and feel such
> > compulsion to indulge in gossip.*
> >
> > *I think it is clear from evolutionary biology that gossip was essential
> > for our survival back in the caveman days, thus it is still interesting
> > to many people today, even if it is not as strongly needed as back then.*
>
> *I think you are suggesting that this might have been adaptive 10,000 years
> ago, but is now selectively neutral, or even a waste of valuable energy.*

Right.

> *That could well be, but I don't think one can assume this is true without
> a lot more evidence.*

Evolutionary biology is similar to astrophysics and cosmology in that, in contrast to most sciences, one can't do experiments, but has to explain the observations in a plausible way. Probably as a result of this, books play a much larger role in the active scientific discourse of evolutionary biology than in, say, particle physics. The ONLY evidence, presumably, is plausibility in a case like this, and I think that Pinker makes a pretty good case that interest in gossip was an adaptive trait which has held on.

> > *AVERAGE is the key term. There can be a woman who is taller than the
> > average man, or even taller than all men, without changing the fact that
> > most men are taller than most women. Second, the standard deviation
> > tends to be larger in men. Thus, even if the average is the same, there
> > will be more male overachievers, but also more underachievers. Most
> > geniuses are male, but so are most idiots.*
>
> *Isn't that what I said?!*

Probably.