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| **Sexual Selection and Human Reproductive Behaviour: Sexual Selection AO1** | | | |
| **Anisogamy**  This is the difference between male and female sex cells (gametes). These are very obvious in humans. Male gametes (sperm) are extremely small, highly mobile, created continuously in vast numbers from puberty to old age, and do not require lots of energy to produce. Female gametes (eggs or ova) on the other hand are relatively large, static, and produced at intervals for a limited number of fertile years and require a huge investment of energy. As such, for mate selection, there is no shortage of fertile males but a fertile woman is a rare ‘resource’.  Anisogamy is also important in partner preference because it gives rise to two type of mating strategy… | | | |
| **Inter-sexual Selection**  This is the strategy preferred by the female – quality over quantity. Ova (eggs) are rarer than sperm and require more energy to produce. Trivers (1972) states that females make greater commitment of time, effort and other resources before, during and after birth of her offspring. Both sexes are choosy, because both stand to lose if they choose substandard partners. But the consequences for a woman are much more serious, making her more choosy. The optimum mating strategy is to pick a genetically fit partner who is able and willing to provide resources. This leaves males competing for the opportunity to mate with the fertile female.  This preference determines which features are passed on to offspring e.g. if height is considered an attractive trait, then over successive generations of females it would increase in the male population because females would mate with tall males and over time produce sons who are taller with each generation and create daughters with a greater preference for taller partners. This is known as the *runaway process*. As described by Fisher (1930) om his *sexy sons hypothesis*, a female mates with a male who has a desirable characteristic and this ‘sexy’ trait is inherited by her son. This increases the likelihood that successive generations of females will mate with her offspring. | | | |
| **Intra-sexual Selection**  This is the preferred strategy of the male – quantity over quality. This refers to the competition between (intra) males to be able to mate with a female. The winner of the competition reproduces and gets to pass on to his offspring characteristics that contributed to his victory. It is this strategy that has given rise to *dimorphism* in humans (obvious differences between males and females), e.g. in any physical contact between males, size matters. Larger males have an advantage and are therefore more likely to mate. On the other hand, females do not compete for reproductive rights so there is no evolutionary drive towards favouring larger females.  There are behavioural and psychological consequences of intra-sexual selection. For males to acquire fertile females and protect them from competing male, they may benefit from behaving aggressively and perhaps even thinking in a certain way.  Anisogamy dictates that male’s optimum reproductive strategy is to mate with as many fertile females as possible. This is because of the minimal energy required to produce enough sperm to theoretically fertilise every woman on the earth, and the relative lack of post-coital responsibility the male carries (it’s the woman that is left ‘holding the baby’). A behavioural consequence of this competition for fertile mates is a distinct preference for youth and a sensitivity to the indicators of youth (e.g. certain facial features) as well as fertility (e.g. a certain body shape). | | | |
| **Sexual Selection AO3** | | | |
| **Support for Anisogamy**  P: One strength of the theory of anisogamy in sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour is that there is supportive research.  E: For example, Buss (1989) carried out a survey on over 10,000 adults in 33 countries and found that female respondents placed greater value on resource-related characteristics (e.g. good financial prospects, ambition and industriousness) than males did. Males valued reproductive capacity on terms of good looks and chastity, and preferred younger mates than females did.  E: This is a strength because it shows that anisogamy plays a role in sex differences in mating strategies. Buss’ research supports predictions about partner derived from sexual selection theory. Furthermore, the findings can be applied across different cultures, reflecting fundamental human preferences which are primarily not dependent upon cultural influences.  L: As a result, the strength of anisogamy as a theory for sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour is increased. | **Support for Inter-Sexual Selection**  P: One strength of the theory of inter-sexual selection is that there is supportive research.  E: For example, Clark and Hatfield (1989) showed that female choosiness is a reality of heterosexual relationships. Male and female Psychology students went all around an American university campus and asked other students ‘I have been noticing you around campus. I find you to be very attractive. Would you go to bed with me tonight?’. They found that no females agreed to the request, but 75% of males did.  E: This is a strength of the theory of sexual selection as evolutionary theory because it suggests that females are choosier than males when selecting a sexual partner, and that males have evolved a different strategy to ensure reproductive success.  L: As a result, the strength of inter-sexual selection as a theory for sexual selection and reproductive behaviour is increased. | **Ignores Social and Cultural Influences**  P: However, the evolutionary theory of sexual selection is criticised for being too reductionist.  E: For example, it ignores the recent changes of social norms of sexual behaviour which develop much faster than evolutionary timescales imply and have instead been affected by cultural factors such as the availability of contraception.  E: This is an issue because Bereczkei et al (1997) argue that social change has consequences for women’s mate preference, which may no longer be resource-oriented. Women’s greater role in the work place means they are no longer dependent on men to provide for them (despite the ongoing inequality in earning power).  L: Therefore, mate preferences can be seen to be a combination of evolutionary and cultural influences. Any theory that fails to account for both is a limited explanation and is therefore reductionist in nature, weakening the evolutionary explanation for sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour. | **Support from Research**  P: One strength of the evolutionary theory of sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour is that there is further support from empirical research.  E: For example, Singh (1993, 2002) studied the waist-hip ratio. Males showed a preference for a female body shape that signals fertility. This is not body size as such, but the ratio of waist to hip sizes. Up to a point, males find any hip and waist sizes are attractive so long as the ratio of one to the other is about 0.7. This combination of wider hips and narrower waist is attractive because it is an ‘honest signal’ (hard to fake) that the woman is fertile but not currently pregnant.  E: This is a strength because it supports the notion of the males’ reproductive strategy of mating with as many fertile females as possible. The waist-hip ratio indicates that males will seek out potential mates based on this, and will therefore seek to fertilise as many women as possible in order to pass on their genes to their offspring.  L: As a result, the explanatory power of the evolutionary theory of sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour is increased. |