

## Darwinian 'Game'

By Geoffrey Miller

Published as:

Miller, G. F. (2013). Can Darwin really improve your sex life? *Wired UK*, May, pp. 64-65.

If you're a scientist engaged with the media, you quickly learn that you can't control who reads your research or how they use it. A few years ago, I was astonished to find that many members of the "seduction community" had read my book *The Mating Mind*, about how sexual choices shaped our evolution. In their acronym-heavy quest for sexual self-transformation from "average frustrated chumps" to "pick-up artists" (PUAs), these men had become avid consumers of my field, evolutionary psychology.

Neil Strauss's 2005 book *The Game* mentioned a few ways in which evolutionary psychology was influencing PUAs, by framing male-female dynamics in a Darwinian context. David DeAngelo, a leading dating specialist, told me:

"Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* and Matt Ridley's *The Red Queen* were the 'gateway drugs' to EP for me. It became clear that animals go through mating rituals, and that humans have one as well. This led to unlocking some of the reasons why men who were successful at attracting women were able to do it with such counterintuitive approaches."

The counterintuitive tactics include not worrying so much about one's status, wealth or handsomeness, but focusing on developing one's "inner game" (self-confidence, playfulness, risk-taking) and "outer game" (physical fitness, "peacocking" with eye-catching clothes).

The seduction community hybridized a Darwinian fatalism about sexual motives (men are hard-wired to seek casual sex, women are hard-wired to be choosy) with a self-help optimism about improving one's sexual charisma. Baba Brinkman, Darwinian rapper and playwright, explained:

"PUAs are only interesting if they begin as conspicuously low mate-value, and turn their status around using the tactics. The subtext seems to be about the value of Machiavellian Intelligence as a tool for subverting the usual mating-market pecking order."

Since *The Game* and *The Pick-Up Artist*, a US reality TV series, the seduction community has become a vanguard of applied Darwinism. PUAs refine new seduction tactics modeled on the latest evolutionary psychology principles and findings, and trade "field reports" on which tactics succeed or fail, through online "seduction lairs". The Darwinian enthusiasm has spread beyond PUAs into mainstream male culture. Tucker Max, author of four best-selling books about his sexual adventures, told me:

"EP greatly influenced me. I encountered it in college, after reading *Sperm Wars* by Robin Baker. From there I read as much as I could of Richard Dawkins, David Buss, Leda Cosmides, etc. EP gave me a way to see the world that made complete sense, and fit all the facts that I saw."

Women, meanwhile, are appropriating evolutionary psychology for their own mating goals. *Cosmopolitan* magazine and *Psychology Today* bloggers routinely report new evolutionary psychology findings and their implications for understanding men and relationships. Women are also growing savvier about PUA tactics and more skeptical about their scientific basis. Amanda Denes, communication researcher at the University of Connecticut, explained:

“PUAs seem to draw on an evolutionary framework as a way of validating their problematic approaches to seducing women. They tend to depict all women as being essentially the same, and women’s sexuality as a passive response to men’s actions.”

Some evolutionary psychology confirms sexual stereotypes and goes viral among PUAs, but other evolutionary psychology overturns stereotypes and is championed by Darwinian feminists.

The results are morally tricky. Today’s dating scene has become a global, uncontrolled experiment in competing mating strategies. Science-minded singles have new levels of self-consciousness – not just as people, but as fitness-displayers, mate-choosers, gene-replicators, and social primates. So, men and women are locked in a runaway arms race of male sexual-escalation tactics versus female commitment-escalation tactics.

Neither sex can afford for their “game” – their Darwinian seduction insights and skills – to stagnate. As David DeAngelo told me:

“PUAs run the very real risk of becoming overly dependent on the techniques and shortcuts that, on average, tend to increase dating success. Many of them are like a person who wants to learn how to speak a new language, so they learn 100 words in the language, then stop learning and use only those 100 words forever.”

To master this language of love, both men and women are super-charging their unconscious sexual instincts with the conscious lessons of evolutionary psychology. With such high stakes, we evolutionary psychologists had better get the science right.