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Life History Theory and the Sexual Double Standard

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LIFE HISTORY THEORY AND THE SEXUAL DOUBLE STANDARD

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Life History Theory

- A child's upbringing can have both physiological and behavioral implications (Belsky, et al., 1991).
- If relationships with parents are strained, or the father is absent, the child's future romantic relationships may be affected.
- More specifically, females who grow up without fathers mature earlier and have more sexual partners than other females (Quinlan, 2003).

The Sexual Double Standard

- The sexual double standard is the notion that the same sexual behavior is judged differently in men and women. In other words, men are rewarded for sexual behavior while women are derogated.
- Empirical research has found conflicting results about the actual existence of the double standard.
- If people make evaluations of sexually active targets while in a group setting, or if they are distracted while making evaluations, they are more likely to exhibit the double standard (Marks, 2008; Marks & Fraley, 2007).

Life History Theory & The Sexual Double Standard

- Because a female's upbringing relates to her subsequent sexual activity, it seems reasonable to assume that a female's upbringing also may impact her views of others' sexuality.
- The purpose of the present research is to investigate whether females who grow up in father-absent homes, or who have strained relationships with their fathers, are more or less likely to exhibit the double standard.



How I Met Your Mother

Method

- Participants (n = 236) completed the Attachment History Questionnaire (AHQ; Pottharst, 1990) and questions about their own sexual history.
- They then were presented with a fake Facebook profile of a target person.
- Four possible conditions: man with 12 sexual partners, man with 1 sexual partner, woman with 12 sexual partners and woman with 1 sexual partner.
- They evaluated the target person on four different domains: popularity, success, intelligence and values.

Results

- No exhibition of the double standard.
- Targets with 12 sexual partners were judged more negatively than targets with 1 sexual partner.
- Females with divorced parents rated male targets with 12 partners as less successful than male targets with 1.
- Female participants with poorer mother relationships rated men with 12 partners as less virtuous.
- Participants' sexual histories and relationships with their fathers did not relate to the double standard.

Discussion

- Perhaps females who grow up without a father have negative feelings towards their fathers (who are more likely to have multiple sexual partners compared to a father who is married). Thus, they are more likely to judge highly sexually active men harshly compared to less sexually active men.
- Females who have strained relationships with their mothers may view men as competition for their mother's attention. Therefore, a man who is less sexually active will pose less of a threat compared to a man who is more sexually active.