

Expository Writing 20.046 and 20.047 **Darwinian Dating: The Evolution of Human Attraction**

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Class time: M/W 10, M/W 11
Location: Barker Center 218
Office hours: Wed. 12:30-2
or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Among animals, individuals chose mates based on biologically informative features such as long colorful tail feathers, large canines, or a red, swollen posterior. We typically assume that human attraction (and love) is much more nuanced and complex... but is it? Many features that humans find beautiful or attractive, such as small waists, curvy hips, broad shoulders, and large eyes, can be tied to biological explanations. Even behavioral features, such as nurturing behaviors, may be attractive for adaptive reasons. In this course we will explore biological explanations for these and many other aspects of human attraction. Using an evolutionary perspective, we will examine global patterns of attraction and challenge stereotypes of beauty. Are the Barbie-like women of Hollywood really who men are most attracted to? Do nice guys really finish last? Do traditionally attractive features in western cultures—such as large breasts—actually provide an evolutionary benefit, or might some be false signals? In addition to exploring the biological roots of attraction, we will examine how principles of attraction are expressed in popular culture, as well as how they play out right here on a college campus.

Students will explore this provocative topic as they develop their analytical and writing skills. The writing assignments for this course are structured around three topical units:

Unit 1: Applying evolutionary theories of attraction to human behavior

In unit 1, we examine how to approach the study of human attraction from the same perspective as we approach mating behavior in non-human animals, and what challenges scientists face in applying theories of sexual selection and sociobiology to human behavior? In the first essay, we will explore the nature of the disagreement between proponents of human sociobiology (i.e., Harvard professor E.O. Wilson) and those who disagree with the approach. Draft due date: Thursday, 9/25 (5 pm)



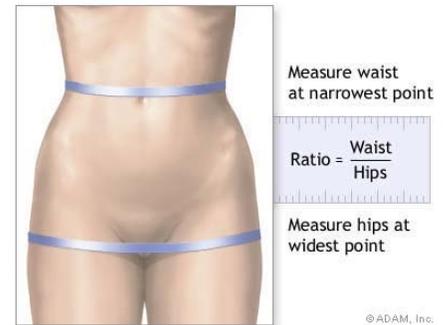
Unit 2: Principles of female attraction (i.e., what do women want?)

In unit 2, we consider male features that are typically attractive to women, including masculinity and aggressiveness, maturity, income, and nurturing behaviors. In essay 2, you will critically assess contradictory theories of female attraction, and will attempt to answer the question of what women really want – the nurturing “nice guy” or the alpha “bad boy.” Draft due date: Thursday, 10/23 (5 pm)



Unit 3: Principles of male attraction (i.e., what do men want?)

In unit 3, we explore female features that are typically attractive to men, including youth, curvaceous breasts, the waist-to-hip ratio, and blonde hair. In addition to our readings, we will examine evidence of female beauty in popular culture, art, and archaeology. For this essay, you will explore the complexities of male attraction using multiple sources and independent research to inform and support your argument. Draft due date: Wednesday, 11/26 (5 pm)



THE WRITING PROCESS

This course is organized around three essays of increasing length and complexity. In each essay, you will be asked to develop a thesis and to analyze evidence to support your argument. This style of analytical writing will be expected of you in future papers across disciplines at Harvard and in academia as a whole. During each unit, we will follow the same general format in developing ideas, gathering evidence, and drafting and revising essays.

- Pre-draft response papers and exercises: These take-home and in-class assignments will focus on specific aspects of writing and analysis (e.g., thesis, paragraph organization) and will aid in the writing of the essay draft.
- Essay draft: For each essay, you will submit a draft several weeks into the unit. This draft is an important part of the writing process, as it allows you to explore ideas and arguments. You should expect to make significant changes before your essay is done.
- Draft cover letter: With each draft and revision, you will submit a cover letter. In this letter, you should state your thesis and describe any questions or problems you have regarding your draft.
- Draft workshop: In the class following draft submission, we will have an in-class workshop in which we will work through two student papers. As a group, we will offer constructive criticism and suggestions for improvements to the essay. You should come to class having read the selected drafts and having completed pre-workshop assignments.
- Conference: In the week following your draft submission, we will meet in a 20 minute, one-on-one conference to discuss your essay. This conference should be an active conversation, not simply a time for me to tell you what I think. Please come to each conference having read my draft comments and re-read your essay, and prepared to discuss ideas, questions, problems, etc. You should plan on taking notes during our discussions. You will sign up for conferences in class. Since the schedule during conference days is so tight, I may not be able to reschedule missed conferences.
- Essay revision: You will extensively revise your draft before submitting your final essay for a grade. Revisions will be due one week (i.e., 7 days) after your conference by 5 pm.

COURSE MECHANICS

Readings

Course readings include articles and book chapters, which can be found as PDFs on the course website. Any readings not available on the course website will be handed out in class. Although you do not need to purchase any textbooks, you will need to do a lot of printing and should plan accordingly.

Grading

Grades will be determined as follows:

Essay 1 = 25%

Essay 2 = 30%

Essay 3 = 35%

These grades will be based on the quality of your final revised essay for each unit. The remaining 10% of your grade will be based on your active participation in class, including the completion of your preliminary assignments, drafts, and cover letters and your *active participation* in class discussions, workshops, and conferences.

Policy on late work

All drafts *must* be submitted by the deadline given in the syllabus. Late drafts will result in a grade deduction from the final essay grade of 1/3 of a letter grade per day or part of a day that the draft is late. Revisions are due one week (7 days) after the conference by 5 pm. Late papers will be accepted, but you will be penalized a **full letter grade** for each day or part of a day that the paper is late (e.g., a B+ paper that is turned in 1 hour late or 1 day late will receive a C+ as the final grade).

Writing Assistance

In addition to our conferences, you are free to come see me during office hours. If you cannot attend office hours, please contact me to arrange another time to meet. I can also be reached with questions via email. I will typically respond to emails within 24 hours, possibly excluding weekends. Please do not assume that emails sent after 7 pm will be received that evening.

If at any stage of the writing process – brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, or editing revisions – you want extra help with your essays, the **Writing Center** is an excellent resource. The Writing Center (located in the Barker Center, garden level) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations. Visit the Writing Center's web site at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr> for more information or to make an appointment.

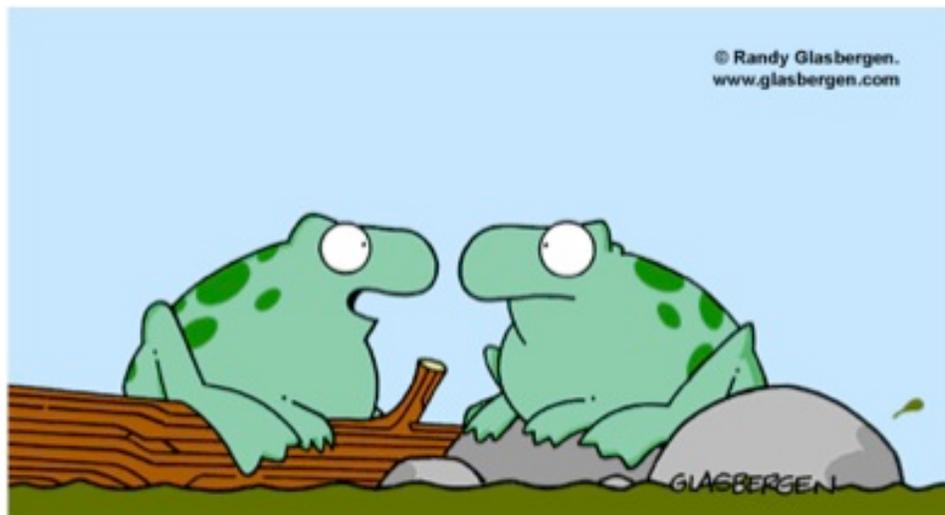
Academic Honesty

Writing assignments are **expected to reflect your independent intellectual effort**. Handing in someone else's work as your own constitutes plagiarism, as does using someone else's ideas without proper attribution. You must use citations when you cite an author's idea in a paper, even if you do not quote the text verbatim. Throughout the semester we will work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and will face disciplinary action through the university. If you are unsure of the proper way to cite references or quotes, please talk to me or visit the Writing Center.

Additionally, **writing essays and response papers with other students is expressly forbidden**. While we will sometimes do group work in class, all work submitted must be in your own words. The following kinds of collaboration **ARE** permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students, and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). As stated in the Student Handbook, "You do not need to acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading." If you feel that someone has contributed significantly to the intellectual development of your argument, it is standard to acknowledge them in an endnote, footnote, or in an acknowledgement section.

Electronic Submissions

You will submit most of your work electronically this semester. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document as a .doc or .docx file *or* in a form compatible with Microsoft Word. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you send is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.



"Looks aren't everything. It's what's inside you that really matters. A biology teacher told me that."

HARVARD COLLEGE WRITING PROGRAM POLICIES

Attendance and Participation

One of the benefits of Expos is its small class size. This benefit is best realized when every student participates fully in class, both by their attendance and by participating in discussions. Therefore you are responsible for being in class, prepared and on time, each time we meet. "Being prepared" means that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assignments and that you are ready to contribute ideas and questions to our discussion.

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

GRADING FRAMEWORK FOR ESSAY REVISIONS

An A grade is for work that is excellent in every way (this is not the same as perfect):

- This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples with interesting, complex ideas; responds discerningly to counter-arguments; and explores well-chosen, well-integrated evidence.
- The author has a clear and appropriate method for approaching the analysis of evidence, and uses theoretical concepts and keyterms appropriately and consistently.
- The discussion enhances, rather than underscores, the reader's and writer's knowledge (it doesn't simply rehash obvious points). There is a context for all the ideas; someone outside the class would be enriched, not confused, by reading the essay.
- Its introduction is clear, gives the reader a reason to read on, and clearly states what the argument of the essay is. Its end is something more than a summary and explores the next step this essay could take, or the next level of implications of the author's argument.
- The language is clean, precise, often elegant. As a reader I feel surprised, delighted, engaged.

A B grade is for a solid piece of writing that reaches high (although not as high as an A essay) and achieves many of its aims:

- The ideas are solid and progressively explored but some thin patches require more analysis and/or some stray thoughts don't fit in. The reasoning and argument may be rather routine.
- The method for analyzing evidence is appropriate, but may not be clearly spelled out or sources may not be critically evaluated. Theoretical concepts and keyterms are employed, but not accurately or consistently.
- The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not.
- The evidence is relevant, but there may be too little; the context for the evidence may not be fully explored, so that I have to make some of the connections that the writer should have made.

A C grade is for a piece of writing that has real problems in one of these areas:

- Conception (there's at least one main idea but it's fuzzy and hard to get to). The essay may not move forward but rather may repeat its main points, or it may touch upon many (and apparently unrelated) ideas without exploring any of them in sufficient depth.
- Structure (confusing)
- Use of evidence (weak or non-existent--the connections among the ideas and the evidence are not made and/or are presented without context, or add up to platitudes or generalizations). No clear rationale for choosing evidence. No reference to concepts from the secondary sources.
- Language (the sentences are often awkward, vague, abstract, and contradictory). Punctuation, spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and transitions may be a problem.

OR essay that merely summarizes what is evident in the primary or secondary sources, but is written without major problems.

OR an essay that is chiefly a personal reaction to something instead of a piece of reasoning. Well-written, but scant intellectual content--mostly opinion.

A D grade or lower goes to efforts that are wildly shorter than they ought to be to grapple seriously with ideas or those that are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aims, structure, use of evidence, language, etc., OR those that do not come close to addressing the expectations of the essay assignment.