

Preface

Research on human mate choice is now a flourishing industry in the two closely allied fields of evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology. It is recognized that our sexual preferences mostly evolved during the Pleistocene when we were hunter-gatherers. However, this research is often conducted without reference to the recent discoveries in paleoanthropology and paleoarchaeology. On the other hand, the importance of mate choice and marital networks in human evolution is often not fully appreciated by researchers in paleoanthropology and paleoarchaeology, who continue to focus on matters of subsistence and survival. For example, it is certainly worth entertaining the possibility that regional differences among ancestral hominid groups may have evolved partly by sexual selection, as suggested by Darwin to be the case for the modern “races.” Furthermore, migration rates and distances are crucial determinants of the amount of inbreeding, which in turn affect the need for incest avoidance behaviors.

With these points in mind, an international symposium on “Human Mate Choice and Prehistoric Marital Networks” was held at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) in Kyoto in November 2000. Our objectives were to (1) review mate choice as it is practiced in modern and historical populations, (2) evaluate estimates of marital distance in prehistoric populations and the possibility of admixture between anatomically modern humans and Neandertals, and (3) consider the evolution, both genetic and cultural, of human mating preferences and mating systems. Invited were eminent scholars from Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Estonia, France, Germany, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, whose names are listed at the end of this volume.

Given the broad range of disciplines covered, our major worry was mutual intelligibility. However, the papers were well presented—this is reflected in the written papers included in this volume—and the heated discussions that ensued had to be cut short. Hence, much exchange—scientific and otherwise—occurred between sessions and after hours, which regrettably went unrecorded. Also unfortunate is the fact that a number of participants were unable to submit their written papers.

Nevertheless, the nine papers and two discussions comprising parts 1 and 2 of this volume provide an up-to-date coverage—including unpublished hypotheses and data—of many current issues in human mate choice research. In addition, the three papers in part 3 give a flavor of the ongoing research in prehistoric anthropology and archaeology that we believe may have important consequences for an understanding of human mate choice.

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