



Evolutionary Psychology Student Worksheet

Saturday, October 10, 2009



1) You are on a boat that overturns. It contains your 5-year-old and 1-year-old children (of the same sex). The boat sinks and you can save only one. Whom do you choose to save? Circle one:

5-year-old

1-year-old

2) That same boat (you are slow to learn lessons) contains your 40-year-old and 20-year-old children (both of the same sex). Neither can swim. As the boat sinks, whom do you choose to save? Circle one:

40-year-old

20-year-old

3) Would you rather marry (or have you married) someone older or younger than yourself? Circle one:

older

younger

4) Of the following six, which three are most important in the selection of your mate? Circle your selections.

Good financial prospects

A caring and responsible personality

Physical attractiveness

Ambition and industriousness

An exciting personality

5) You and your spouse are the proud parents of a new child. The grandparents are ecstatic. Who do you think will be kinder to the child? Circle one:

The mother of the mother

The mother of the father

6) Who will mourn more at the death of a child? Circle the answer in each pair:

a. father

mother

b. parents of the father

parents of the mother

c. younger parents

older parents

7) Which will elicit more grief? Circle the answer in each pair:

a. death of a son

death of a daughter

b. death of an unhealthy child

death of a healthy child

Solutions to exercises

You can introduce a few of the basic principles of evolutionary psychology with this handout, designed by Bernard Weiner. According to evolutionary psychologists, all organisms, including humans, are "gene-producing machines" with the basic motivation of perpetuating their own genetic pool. In short, our genes predispose us to act in ways that enhance their chances of surviving and spreading. This fundamental motive underlies all our behavior.

In response to questions 1 and 2, respondents are more likely to choose the 5-year-old and 20-year-old, respectively. Why? As Weiner explains, because some children die between ages 1 and 5, and 5-year-olds are therefore more likely to reproduce, saving the older child would be more likely to perpetuate the genetic pool. Similarly, a 20-year-old is more likely to reproduce than is a 40-year-old.

Ultimately, it is mating that perpetuates the genetic pool. For the female, reproductive capacities are limited to approximately 25 children. For males, reproductive potential is almost limitless. Because of the female's greater investment in each child, she must be careful to select a mate who will help her in child-rearing. The male must simply choose females who can bear children. In response to question 3, it follows that females should prefer to mate with older males, because they have more resources to help in child care. Males should prefer younger females because they are more likely to give birth. In response to question 4, females should select items a, c, and e, which concern resources, caring, and responsibility, whereas males should select items b, d, and f, which relate to sexual preoccupations.

Females have the advantage of knowing that any child they bear is theirs. The male must determine that the female has really borne his child. Thus, in response to question 5, the maternal grandparents, assured of 25 percent genetic carryover, should be especially happy.

The greater the investment in a child and the more likely that child is to reproduce, the greater the experienced negative emotion at death. Thus, in response to question 6, greater grief should be experienced by the mother, parents of the mother, and older parents (who are less likely to reproduce again); in response to question 7, grief is greatest for the death of a healthy male child.