

Social Fabrics of the Mind

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Alternative Channels for Negotiating Asymmetry in Social Relationships

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THE YIELDING SUBROUTINE OF RITUAL AGONISTIC BEHAVIOUR

Darwin (1871) was the first to point out that socially mediated asymmetry between members of the same sex of the same species would, if associated with differential reproduction, be an important force in evolution. He described it as the intra-sexual component of sexual selection (the other component being mate choice), and he suggested that sexual selection might have an importance in evolution approaching that of natural selection. The theory of sexual selection has received support over the years (Campbell, 1973); recently, increased reproduction in men of high rank has been demonstrated in more than 100 pre- and non-industrial societies (Betzig, 1986), and reduced reproduction in low-ranking females of a variety of animal species (Kevles, 1986). Male animals are well known to show an association between reproduction and social rank, particularly those that have polygynous or lek forms of mating system; and although there are no data available for human females, social heredity (Schiff & Lewontin, 1986) ensures that high-ranking females will have excess grandchildren because of the increased reproduction of their sons.

Ritual Agonistic Behaviour

It follows from Darwin's theory that mechanisms for generating social asymmetry are likely to be selected for. In fact, only one such mechanism, ritual agonistic behaviour (RAB), appears to be common in vertebrate