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Why Who Shot J. R. Matters: *Dallas* as the Pinnacle of Human Evolutionary Television

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The TV series *Dallas* remains one of the most popular shows to ever have been broadcast on American TV. It was a serialized prime-time soap opera with weekly 45 minute episodes that ran from 1978 until 1991. This long-running show is one of the few to have been entirely released in DVD format; all 14 seasons are available as of 2011, and reruns are still aired internationally. Hundreds of thousands of visitors still tour the Southfork Ranch used for filming, outside Dallas, Texas. I will argue that the reason for this show's success is because it routinely depicted themes that align with our evolved psychology. Using arguments that have been created to discuss literary Darwinism and gossip, I propose that this show depicted topics that have adaptive value; *Dallas* both exploits our evolved interests but also may act as a learning device for solving adaptive problems. Over the course of human evolution, it may have increased individual fitness to know who is wealthy or owns plentiful resources, has power and status, cheats on or poaches mates, engages in sibling rivalry, enhances their attractiveness, and so on. *Dallas* depicts these topics, and others, and thus, it is sensible that it would have been so successful among international audiences, and across decades.

Keywords: mass media, evolution, TV, *Dallas*, prime time

Why is it that so many TV shows seem to have the same basic content? At the moment, one of my favorite shows is *Castle*. The premise is that a suspicious death needs to be investigated by a police homicide department in New York City. Ultimately, however, the potential murder is a vehicle for displays of problem solving, as well as the interpersonal relationships between some of the characters, including the potential romantic relationship between the leads who are at the forefront of every episode. Older American and Canadian readers might recall the shows *CHiPs*, *NYPD Blue*, *Starsky and Hutch, DragNet, T. J. Hooker,* or *Cagney and Lacey*, all of which had the same basic theme of police officers solving a mystery, with a focus on the problem solving and interpersonal relationships. Indeed, Wikipedia currently lists approximately 550 TV shows under "police TV drama" alone, excluding reality TV, or comedy-drama!

One show that departed from the success of police drama, or any other existing genre, was *Dallas.* As I will review, *Dallas* was an atypical show because it was not based on a context that created conflict (Jacobs, 2005). Instead, it was based on family dynamics. *Dallas* led to a new genre of TV, and none of its successors has had the same international appeal or longevity.

That many shows fall into specific genres could indicate that once one is successful, other producers realize that they can make a similar product and capitalize on that success, reselling another story that is different enough to be distinct from the one they are copying, but close enough to draw attention from the same audience. Although it is highly plausible that producers act in this manner, it begs the question of why that specific type of show is interesting in the first place. What is it that draws in viewers; what actually makes the show, its clones, and any spin-offs, successful?

Studying a Novel Type of Human Artifact

One perspective that has gained considerable momentum in recent years is that of Darwinian literary studies. This area of study can be best described as the use of evolutionary theory for understanding literary fiction, among other products of human culture (e.g., Boyd, Carroll, & Gottschall, 2010; Carroll, 1995; Wilson & Gottschall, 2005). It has been effectively demonstrated that one can examine texts to meaningfully comprehend human nature, particularly with respect to motivations and emotions. For example, one could study romance novel titles to understand women's evolved mating interests, given that women are the overwhelming international consumer of this genre. Thus, by qualitatively analyzing the major themes present in titles, one would learn that women are interested in long-term monogamous relationships, reproduction, and mates with considerable resources (Cox & Fisher, 2009). Alternatively, one might concentrate on character development in these novels, which would reveal that heroes often undergo a transformation from being quite "cad" like (i.e., gruff, independent, aggressive roguish men) in their personality and behavior, to being "dad" like (kind-hearted, faithful men who would be good fathers; Fisher & Cox, 2010; see also Fisher & Meredith, in press a).

Using the tenets of literary Darwinism, Kruger, Fisher, and Jobling (2003) explored reactions to proper and dark heroes, which respectfully align with these so-called "dad" and "cad" male mating strategies. They found that women reported that they would prefer a proper hero, who might best be described as the sort of man who is willing to become a parent and who is loyal and kind,

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for a long-term committed relationship. Additionally, they found women preferred a dark hero, who may typify a man who is very physically attractive, for a brief sexual interaction. In contrast, men trusted proper heroes and thought they would be good business partners (hypothetically speaking) and avoided dark heroes as business partners, son-in-laws, and companions for their girlfriends (Kruger & Fisher, 2005). More recently, Strout, Fisher, Kruger, and Steeleworthy (2010) investigated participants' views of female characters in the works of Jane Austen, and found that both men and women can readily differentiate between characters oriented toward short-term relationships versus long-term relationships, based on brief descriptions. The approach used to analyze romance novel titles is different from that used to study reactions to heroes or Austen's characters, in that the former is directly examining the text while the latter is more concerned with people's understanding of the text. However, both are valid as they rely upon the supposition that humans create and consume these texts, and thus, they reflect humans' evolved motives, cognitions and interests.

Using the same logic, Fisher and Meredith (in press b) explored the five most frequent topics of paintings, which revealed that paintings of people (especially young attractive women and people of nobility) and landscapes are popular, as well as paintings of major events (like hunts, war, coronations), daily life events, and still life. The crux of their proposal is that these topics reflect interests that have deep evolutionary roots. For example, they argued that the reason we do not see paintings of unattractive or elderly women (in comparison to naked young women) is because of the evolved mate preferences of male painters. Therefore, by studying the frequent topics of paintings, one can learn about human motivations and preferences, even without understanding the nuances of the painter's intended meaning or technique. Thus, it seems that Darwinian literary studies can be broadened to meaningfully investigate other human artistic endeavors, including nonliterary work.

Film and Human Nature

Another potentially valuable avenue for research is to see how film reflects human nature. In fact, perhaps no other medium actually has such a direct link to our evolved psychology. Film, whether it be TV or movies, fictional or nonfictional, often displays people who are speaking, performing, moving, interacting, experiencing, and so on. In other words, it is a close approximation of our shared experience of living. Indeed, one can even begin to feel that they have a relationship with a celebrity, although such a relationship is an entirely one-sided, parasocial relationship (see Giles, 2002). As Gitlin (2002) clarifies, media theorists often overlook the immense attention that is paid by devoted audiences to media, and the ways that shows "absorb our time and resources. The obvious but hard-to-grasp truth is that living with the media is today one of the main things Americans and many other human beings do" (p. 5). Although this statement is accurate at a face-value level, it fails to say why. I propose that the reason we devote so much of our attention to mass media products is because they exploit our evolved psychology.

Media, in general, has underscored much of humanity's recent social interaction by allowing a common point of reference. It is not surprising that media theorists have discussed at length the social role of media in our interpersonal interactions. For example, "whenever strangers wish to feel out common ground and establish that they are not altogether alien to one another, they compare notes on stars and shows . . ." (Gitlin, 2002, p. 4). What is disappointing, however, is that these theorists fail to take their argument a step further and discuss why these strangers would intuitively know what topics to discuss.

Here I argue, using the framework of Darwinian literary studies, that the elements of film, specifically TV shows, that most capture our attention, as evidenced by success in terms of audience size, are those that are most congruent with our evolved psychology. Similar to the research on gossip that indicates we attend to information that would have conferred evolutionarily relevant advantages to our ancestors (De Backer & Gurven, 2006), I posit that we are most attentive to relevant themes within TV shows. Furthermore, I propose that a show with immense international success should be one that accurately depicts cross-cultural issues of evolutionary relevance. That is, a show that is centered around adaptive problems, such as location and retention of a suitable mate, or family dynamics and conflict, and that clearly illustrates how these problems have been solved by other individuals, will have high audience appeal. One such show is *Dallas*.

The Exploitation of Evolved Psychology and Vicarious Learning

Before continuing, there are two key and related concepts that require clarification. The first is that I argue that we attend to particular themes because they are convergent with our evolutionary interests. Put another way, the reason that *Dallas* was so successful is because the producers managed to find themes that resonate with those that reflect relevance, such that the themes' meaning is based on the problems we faced during our human evolutionary history. So, for example, we are interested in someone's romantic relationship and how they found their partner because establishing such a relationship would have been a key element of our ancestors' experiences. The establishment of a romantic relationship confers many advantages that have been studied from an evolutionary perspective; it would increase mating access, possibly increase paternity certainty, and promote the exchange of resources to women and children. To recap, then, the first point is that *Dallas* exploits concepts that have evolutionary relevance to us. It also indicates that romance is a key element of what many people find entertaining.

The second key concept is that we might also *learn* from watching *Dallas*. It is entirely possible that the relationship is two-way; *Dallas* is successful because it taps into evolved interests, but also the viewer is vicariously learning potential solutions to adaptive problems. Although there are many different ways to view learning, the essence is that behavior is modified by one's own experience or knowledge of others' experiences. The latter do not have to be direct experiences, as we can learn from someone's indirect experience about another individual, for example. As De Backer and Gurven (2006) outline, obtaining direct experiences can take too much time, energy, and involve too much risk, and hence, it may be very beneficial to engage in social learning, which may occur via imitation of other's behavior (e.g., Henrich & Gil-White, 2001) or through information being communicated through language (e.g., Pinker, 1995). Film provides a way for

both forms of learning to occur. One can see people performing certain activities and imitate them in their own lives, or they can learn through attending to the verbal discourse of a show.

The key is that we do not simply just learn about any topic; the topics that we learn about have an evolutionary relevance, which maps onto the topics that *Dallas* exploits. As De Backer and Gurven (2006) argue, "we increase our vicarious experience with the successes and failures of others" (p. 251). In their study of gossip, they suggest that we attend to information about potentially damaging or threatening situations, and situations that provide opportunities for us to gain vicarious experiences to obtain skills and information. As Tooby and Cosmides (2001, p. 23; see also De Backer & Gurven, 2006) state, "vicarious, orchestrated, imagined or fictional experience" can be used to promote efficient learning at a low cost, as compared to learning from first-hand experience. De Backer (2005) goes further and proposes that information used in learning can be deconstructed into subcategories, such as mating-relevant information and survival-relevant information, leading to a taxonomy that could reflect human evolutionary problem solving.

Dallas

Dallas was an American prime-time serial drama (or soap opera) that pivoted around the extremely wealthy Ewing family. The pilot episodes, as well as the first few years of the show, centered around seven family members. There was the eldest brother, John Ross Ewing (called J. R.) and his brother Bobby Ewing. J. R. was married to Sue Ellen, and Bobby was married to Pamela. There was Lucy, the daughter of a third (but not present) brother, Gary. The patriarch of the family was Jock, and his wife was Miss Ellie. The two central characters are, though, J. R. and Bobby. In fact, Bobby is so important that after his character leaves for a season, the produces brought him back to the show under the guise of the former season simply being a dream.

They collectively lived on the highly opulent Southfork Ranch, near Dallas, Texas. They had house servants and many hired hands to care for the ranch's livestock. In addition to the ranch being a profitable business for cattle, the Ewing men worked at Ewing Oil in Dallas, Texas. The family was well known locally, and their friends were usually other wealthy oil barons or ranchers and their glamorous wives. At times these friends became business partners, while other times they were competitors for takeovers.

The Ewing women often had very little to do aside from shopping, although in later seasons, Pam worked as an employee at a clothing store, as an aerobics instructor, and then as a business woman. She inherited this business from her mother, and worked alongside with her brother, Cliff Barnes. (The Barnes family had a rivalry with the Ewing family and was the notorious underdog. The rivalry started when Jock evidently wronged former business partner Digger Barnes, Cliff's father and alleged father to Pam, and managed to win the heart of Digger's true love, Miss Ellie.) Sue Ellen, after she recovered and started to manage her alcoholism, ran a successful lingerie business, then worked as a film producer, and finally was CEO of Ewing Oil. Meanwhile, Lucy was a student, then a model, a waitress, a partner in a construction business, and finally a patron of the arts.

The first draft of the *Dallas* pilot script is dated December 10, 1977, and was reviewed by CBS' network president and by the entertainment chief. Evidently, since there was no "franchise—these were not cops or doctors in an environment that itself created conflict and jeopardy—it was difficult to know what kind of story [they'd] be selling week after week" (Jacobs, 2005, p. xi). Previous to *Dallas*, there had not been a successful prime-time serial on TV (Jacobs, 2005). The key was to produce a show that followed the formula of "resolve the problem, don't solve the problem" (Jacobs, 2005, p. xii). What is interesting is that much of daily existence follows the same trend; in our social interactions, we rarely solve a dilemma or problem to completion, and new interactions with the same individuals occur.

Dallas premiered on CBS at 10 p.m. on Sunday, April 2, 1978, and the pilot was in the form of five, 1-hr episodes that would air weekly at the same time. "*Dallas* was the first show to combine the scope of a miniseries with the big ideas of life—themes such as good versus evil and brother versus brother. Set in the big state of Texas—where life is lived in the fast lane, where everything is bigger and badder than anywhere else" (Ultimate *Dallas*, September 27, 2011). Over time the characters changed, and the stories became more intricate. For example, Jock died, and Miss Ellie married Clayton Farlow, who moved in and took over as patriarch. However, in my opinion, the character that best typifies the ongoing drama of the Ewings is Sue Ellen, who I recap here to provide an example of the type of storyline seen on the show.

After enduring J. R.'s infidelities for the first 7 years of their marriage, Sue Ellen had a brief affair with Ray Krebbs (who turns out to be a Ewing half brother), then dated Cliff Barnes and became pregnant. When J. R. found out that she was pregnant, he assumed the child was his, and was determined to protect the child and raise it properly, to be his heir. Sue Ellen gave birth and was then institutionalized for alcoholism, immediately after which she fell in love with a cowboy, Dusty Farlow (who was the wealthy son of Clayton Farlow). During this time, she was happy and content, but not for long; Dusty was thought to die in a plane crash, and so Sue Ellen lapsed back into alcoholism. She then reconciled with J. R., and quickly thereafter had an affair with her first love, Clint Ogden. Dusty was eventually discovered alive but impotent, and she left J. R. to be with Dusty. The relationship was not to be, and soon after she reunited with Cliff, and eventually ended up remarried to J. R. who had schemed to have Sue Ellen in his life in order to have ready access to his child. The monogamy did not last long; they moved into separate bedrooms and agreed to an open marriage. She had an affair with a younger man, then reconciled again with J. R., only to return shortly thereafter to separate bedrooms. She again left J. R. for Nicolas Pearce, who later died from a fall off a balcony. Then she met Don Lockwood and moved to England and married him. At the end of the series, she left Don and returned, one last time, to J. R. As this summary (and forthcoming descriptions) hopefully demonstrates, *Dallas* extensively relied on depicting the nuances of people's relationships, whether they be romantic, sexual, parental, business, or familial.

A Popular Pleasure

"For we must accept one thing: *Dallas* is popular because a lot of people somehow *enjoy* watching it" (Ang, 1985, p. 4).

The show ran continuously from 1978 until 1991. However, in 2010, TNT (affiliated with Warner Brothers TV, who currently

owns the series) announced that it is in the process of revamping the show. The new series will focus on J. R. Ewing's son, John Ross III, and Bobby Ewing's adopted son, Christopher. Therefore, the viewing public's fascination with *Dallas* has not necessarily ended, and TV audiences can look forward to forthcoming drama at Southfork.

According to some theorists, *Dallas* marked the beginning of the 1980s and changed world TV; it had "extraordinary but undeniable popularity" (Ang, 1985, p.1). Its success was unrivalled at the time. The famous "Who shot J. R." episode, aired on November 21, 1980, had 350 million viewers in 57 countries and was the highest rated program in the history of TV at that time (Curran, 2005). Indeed, that episode was chosen in the early 2000s as being one of the top 10 milestones in the history of TV, among the likes of U. S. President Kennedy's funeral and the 1969 Apollo moon landing (see Curran, 2005, for a review).

In terms of success, as Curran (2005) notes, the show ran for 357 episodes over 13 years, was nominated for 23 Emmy awards (of which it won four) and was one of the top two rated series on American TV for half of the 1980s. The domestic cable ratings were high enough to warrant reruns three times a day in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The popularity of *Dallas* was immense and included "over 90 countries, ranging from Turkey to Australia, from Hong Kong to Great Britain" (Ang, 1985, p. 1). Some theorists have written about the influence of *Dallas* within their own individual countries, for example, Dunkley (1985) examined it within the context of the U.K. and communications policy, while Ang (1985) investigated how it impacted on Dutch culture in the Netherlands. Ang proposed that in the Netherlands, over half the population watched *Dallas* weekly in the spring of 1982, which was when the show reached its peak in popularity, and that "no other fictional program, foreign or domestic, has ever achieved such high viewing figures" (p. 1). Dunkley (1985, p. 97), points out that in the U.K., stations would try to maximize their ratings by showing *Dallas*; "You could say that *Dallas* is the Ford Sierra of TV" (1985, p. 97).

An average episode cost approximately $700,000 to create, which many countries could not themselves afford (Ang, 1985). What is interesting, though, is the influence the cost of reruns had on the international market. Dunkley (1985) suggests that one of the reasons American programs were immensely popular with British broadcasters (despite hostile attitudes) in the 1980s is that they were inexpensive. American production houses habitually budgeted to cover their costs and make a profit in their home market alone so that all the revenue from foreign sales was a bonus and hence, they charged only a minimal fee.

The international appeal of *Dallas* cannot be overstated. According to Curran (2005), in Germany, the Bonn Municipal Theater created a ballet inspired by *Dallas*, and in Italy, restaurant patrons were scarce during airtime. In Turkey, parliamentary meetings were adjourned so as members could watch the show, while theaters in Johannesburg would close to avoid competition. Reruns continue to be shown in more than 100 countries (Curran, 2005), while according to a flyer from the Southfork Ranch in Texas, where exterior parts of the show was filmed, over 400,000 annual visitors come to the ranch.

Given the popularity of the show, it is not surprising that it has been the topic of scholarly discourse. However, all of the previous writings on *Dallas* discuss the show in terms of its cultural influence. The best example of this perspective is Ang (1985). She states that American popular culture has made significant inroads since the 1950s into the national cultural identities of Western European countries, and as a result, trying to understand *Dallas*' popularity "becomes a totally incomprehensible and elusive issue, a whim of the silent majority" (Ang, 1985, p. 3). This conjecture is precisely where she (and other media theorists) go wrong; by understanding human motivations and emotions via evolutionary mechanisms, one can begin to comprehend the popularity of this show.

Exploitation of Evolutionary Themes

Given the duration of *Dallas*, it would take hundreds of pages to completely capture all of the evolutionary-based themes in the show. Instead, I present a brief sampling to provide evidence that *Dallas* exploits our evolved interests. I will discuss only a few topics, including kin relationships, infidelity, intrasexual competition, and mate preferences. It is of note that some of these topics overlap, or intersect other behaviors that have been documented by evolutionary psychologists.

Kin Relations and Family Composition

I begin this review with kin relations for two reasons. First, *Dallas* pivots around the Ewing family, and often the focal point of an episode is the relationship between family members, or potential incoming members (e.g., a Ewing is dating someone new) or outgoing members (e.g., a Ewing, or their mate, is leaving the family). Second, kin selection has remained a cornerstone to much of the work in behavioral biology and social evolution (Agrawal, 2001). Kin selection theory began with Hamilton's (1964) need to explain altruism, and in the broadest sense refers to the strategies that favor the reproductive success of one's genetic relatives, even when there is a cost to oneself. Indeed, kin selection research shows that we preferentially treat kin altruistically once recognized (see Agrawal, 2001 for a review). What is noteworthy is that kin recognition works in an array of family structures. For example, in some systems, individuals predominately interact only with their kin due to spatial structures, while in other systems, individuals interact with far more nonkin, yet consistently demonstrate preference for kin (Agrawal, 2001). Moreover, as Salmon and Shackelford (2007) outline in the introduction to their book concerning evolutionary perspectives of family relationships, "Humans have evolved specialized mechanisms for processing information and motivating behavior that deal with the distinct demands of being a mate, father, mother, sibling, child, or grandparent" (p. 8).

During human ancestral development, the reliance on kin would have been extremely important considering the obvious advantages of shared food, childcare, protection, and resources. By staying close to kin, children would also have learnt, often indirectly, about behaviors critical for survival, if the data on living hunter-gatherer groups can reliably be used as a model. Among the Hazda, for example, Marlowe (2010) has shown that young children (3-4 years old) begin foraging for tubers, which emerges naturally from play behavior but also from imitating older individuals they have observed.

As for *Dallas*, some members of the family live together, sharing resources and each other's experiences. The composition of this family changes over time; some people leave due to romantic relationship dissolution (e.g., after Pam leaves, Bobby starts dating Jenna who then leaves him), death (e.g., Jock), or seeking new experiences (e.g., Lucy moves to Atlanta to rekindle the relationship with her ex-husband, Mitch). New members are added by birth (e.g., John Ross), creation of a romantic relationship (e.g., Pam is brought home in the first episode, or Miss Ellie marries Clayton Farlow who takes over as patriarch following Jock's death), or simply by visiting kin (e.g., the Ewing brother, Gary, visits). Hence, there is a constant change with respect to the type of intangible resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, experiences) to which family members are exposed because family membership is dynamic. These changes in composition likely map onto how human families over the course of evolution would have been structured; a core group would be static, while other kin might visit, marry out, or become additions.

Like most North American families, the young Ewing children (John Ross and Christopher) live at home with kin, who ensure that they are cared for and protected. These adults help to guide the child's behavior, which may take the form of role modeling, direct teaching, or social learning, for example. Just like J. R. was brought into Ewing Oil by his father Jock, John Ross is brought into Ewing Oil by J. R., as observed by his suit and spending the day at the office. At various points, J. R. comments directly about how John Ross will inherit the business and needs to know how to run the company, which indicates that J. R. is engaging in the transmission of knowledge via social learning of acquired behavior and strategies to the potential heir (e.g., Galef, 1976).

The family has a strong matriarch, Miss Ellie, who is loyal, faithful to her husband, emotionally supportive, nurturing, and entirely unselfish. In many ways, she is the epitome of an ideal mother and effectively serves as a role model. Her relationship with her children varies according to each individual, as one would expect based on various evolved mechanisms, including parent-offspring conflict. Although a mother is genetically related to her children to an approximately equal level, each child may seek out a way to get ahead, compared to siblings as a form of selfish gene propagation (e.g., Dawkins, 1976). Therefore, a mother and her children have evolved competing interests concerning the allocation of maternal effort and resources (see Salmon & Shackelford, 2007 for a review).

The emphasis on reproduction is very apparent within *Dallas*, which is aligned with the unconscious need for reproductive success, from an evolutionary perspective, as demonstrated by the number of viable children one parents. Within the show, Pam is believed to be unable to conceive, which causes her psychological anguish. This topic remains an ongoing theme for several episodes, and she is characterized as being distressed when Sue Ellen has a child. As a side note, not only might the presence of a child at the Southfork Ranch serve as a constant reminder at a conscious level of her inability to conceive, but also recently Worth and Fisher (in press) demonstrated that women may be unconsciously motivated to become synchronously pregnant with family and friends, due to the evolved benefits of shared parenting and resources. Pam ultimately does become pregnant, and her character is effectively eliminated from the show immediately afterward (i.e., she is calling Bobby to tell him the "good news" from her mobile phone while driving and has a collision with a truck. She undergoes extensive surgeries and in the end, vanishes to avoid being a burden to Bobby). When Sue Ellen gives birth to John Ross, several episodes focus on her mothering behavior, and the relationship she has with J. R.

The altruism that is freely granted to genetically unrelated kin is also noteworthy, since it does not necessarily map onto evolutionary theory, vis-à-vis increasing inclusive fitness. For example, just as the show is beginning, Lucy is spoilt, promiscuous (even to the point of sleeping with Ray Krebbs, who turns out to be an uncle), and often lies to the family. Pamela, who had just joined the Ewings, tries to make Lucy see the problems that may result from her behavior; these problems are in keeping with those that might suggest a fast life history strategy (for a review, see Nettle, 2010). Likewise, Lucy tries to help educate Cally, J. R.'s wife for a brief time. She teaches Cally about art, supports her painting abilities, and generally, helps her fit into the Ewing family despite her incredible young age and naivety.

Sibling Rivalry

At the heart of *Dallas* is the continual sibling rivalry between J. R. and Bobby Ewing. Although they are not the only brothers in the Ewing clan, the two of them are the focal point of the show. They fight over how to run the company, usually with J. R. behaving in an underhanded manner, as he is deceptive and at times uses bribery and blackmail, while Bobby typically behaves in a fair and upstanding way. They rarely fight over access to mates, presumably because the women who might find J. R. a lucrative mate will not similarly find Bobby acceptable, given that they represent two different aspects of the male mating spectrum. It might be interesting to also note that a second, more covert rivalry exists between Sue Ellen and Pam, who are genetically unrelated but brought together through their marriages to be sisters-in-law. Due to the rivalry between J. R. and Bobby, it is not surprising that their corresponding wives also have some rivalry out of loyalty.

Sibling rivalry is an interesting topic for evolutionary psychologists because siblings share approximately half of each parent's contribution to their genome and, therefore, according to the tenets of Hamilton's inclusive fitness (1963), they should support each other and be cooperative. However, Hamilton's model also predicts the point at which individuals should engage in selfish behavior by placing their own interests ahead of others, including kin (Mock & Parker, 1998). Mock and Parker (1998) outline that in situations where parents produce more offspring than they can support, possibly to buffer against uncertain environments, for example, competition will occur. Within the show, the parents (Miss Ellie and Jock) certainly have enough material resources to support their children, but there would still be competition for parenting effort. Moreover, though, competition would exist for social power and dominance, given that the brothers have divergent views on how to operate the company.

Infidelity

Infidelity is rampant throughout *Dallas*, and is almost always shown as a male behavior. J. R. engages in infidelity throughout the entire series. While married to Sue Ellen, he has an affair with

a housewife, a country western singer, his secretary, his wife's sister, a business partner, a bridesmaid at his niece's wedding, his public relations advisor, and employed the services of a prostitute. Sue Ellen sometimes knows about the other women, yet is tolerant of the affairs. Although there has been considerable research on sex differences in distress (e.g., Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992) and guilt (Fisher, Rekkas, Voracek & Cox, 2008) from infidelity, there has been less examination into why men have higher rates of infidelity. One proposal is that men seek more sexual variety, given that they engage in lower levels of parental investment, than women, and infidelity is an offshoot of this preference for variety (e.g., Schmitt, Shackelford, Duntley, Tooke, & Buss, 2001). In accordance with the research on sex differences in distress from infidelity that shows women tend to be more upset by emotional rather than sexual infidelity (Buss et al., 1992, but see also Harris, 2003), perhaps Sue Ellen is (at some points anyways) tolerant of J. R.'s sexual infidelity because she still receives the financial and emotional benefits of remaining married. When those benefits for her, and later on her son, are reduced, she leaves.

In contrast, female characters frequently flirt with and make sexual overtures toward Bobby, but he remains loyal to Pam (and later, to his girlfriends and fiancés). In many ways, J. R. and Bobby embody the variance in male mating strategies, with J. R. belonging to the "cad" and Bobbi the "dad," similar to the dark and proper heroes of Byronic literature (Kruger et al., 2003).

Intrasexual Competition

Given that the Ewing men are desirable for the resources they have accrued and the power and status they have, among other potentially sought after characteristics, the Ewing men are often the source of women's mating interest. Consequently, *Dallas* shows many instances of women competing with each other for the attention of the Ewing men. One of the most notorious rivalries is between Pam and Jenna, who is a former fiancée of Bobby. After Pam and Bobby divorce, Bobby becomes engaged to Jenna, but since Pam and Bobby have an adopted child together, Christopher, Pam remains in Bobby's life. Her involvement in Bobby's life, in any capacity, displeases Jenna, and a few episodes show them arguing over the former's presence. Jenna and Bobby end up not marrying, and instead, Bobby remarries Pam. Interestingly, most of the depictions of intrasexual competition are for Bobby, who is the "dad" character, relative to J. R.

Within intrasexual competition, one can find many specific strategies that have been documented in the literature (for a list, see Fisher & Cox, 2011). One behavior that individuals may perform for competitive purposes is the sequestering of a mate or mate guarding by the removal of the mate from a rival's location (Buss, 2002; Fisher & Cox, 2011). For a few episodes, J. R. is sexually involved with model Mandy Winger, while he is married to Sue Ellen. Mandy ends up working for Sue Ellen's lingerie company, but after a while, Sue Ellen forces Mandy to leave Dallas to pursue a career in Hollywood. Mandy returns under the guise of helping Sue Ellen with a marketing campaign, but really, it was to be closer to J. R. Sue Ellen realizes what has happened and ends Mandy's contract, which forces Mandy back to Hollywood.

Mate Preferences

The way that Sue Ellen and J. R. are supposed to have met is a shining example of the way evolved mate preferences are portrayed in the show. Sue Ellen was a contestant (and then winner) of the Miss Texas Pageant, and J. R., who was due to inherit Ewing Oil, was one of the judges. When reflecting upon their first meeting, she claims to have liked him for his eyes, voice, and physical attractiveness, but also knew of his status and wealth. Moreover, Sue Ellen's mother was disappointed with her daughter's choice, as she thought Sue Ellen should marry a very wealthy heir to an oil, coal, diamond, and uranium business (Ultimate *Dallas*, 2011). Evolutionary psychologists have extensively documented mate preferences, and these and mate choice are depicted is congruent with this literature. For example, women attend to men's voices and prefer those that are deeper (i.e., lower in frequency and with closer harmonics; Collins, 2000), which is in keeping with Sue Ellen's comment about J. R. Furthermore, although both sexes place kindness and honesty at a premium in choosing a mate, women tend to emphasize men's possession of resources (or abilities to accrue resources) more than men value women's resources, and men place more emphasis on women's physical attractiveness than women place on men's appearance (Buss, 1989).

Dallas exaggerates these sex differences in mate preferences by concentrating on male wealth and female beauty. The viewer is repeatedly led to believe that if a man was not rich, or the woman was not attractive, they would be of little mating interest. For example, Cliff Barnes is the underdog who repeatedly tries to get revenge on the Ewings, especially J. R., for their alleged mistreatment of his father, Digger Barnes, by J. R.'s father, Jock. He does not have the stable economic status of the Ewings (he sometimes becomes quite wealthy, however, but typically for short periods), and as a result, is shown to be rather unhappy much of the time. Most importantly, though, Cliff is unable to retain a mate and has infrequent mating opportunities, as compared to J. R. or Bobby.

The focus on female beauty is nicely captured by a particular interaction. Model Mandy Winger, while having an affair with J. R., asks Sue Ellen why she is still with J. R. Sue Ellen replies that other than J. R., she loves being at Southfork and it is a good place to raise her son. She says that J. R. will get tired of Mandy, and that soon enough she will have his attention again. Mandy replies that she is younger, prettier, and has a good body, and that it is her that J. R. wants for sex and for, eventually, a long-term relationship. Her personality characteristics, profession, or any other attribute are not mentioned, leaving the focus solely on her physical appearance.

Discussion

In this article, I have argued that the approach of Darwinian literary studies can be effectively used to explore the TV show, *Dallas*. I selected *Dallas* because of its incredible popularity both within the culture it was produced (the United States) but also internationally, and for the longevity of its popularity, which continues into the present day. The reason for its fame is because it reflects evolved motives, cognitions and emotions; it provides topics that have evolved relevance to viewers. Moreover, viewers are watching characters solve adaptive problems, such as how to

relate to one's kin, how to find a mate, what to do about infidelity, how to parent a child so that it survives, and so on. That is, viewers are engaged in learning from the experiences of the characters, as previously suggested in the gossip literature (e.g., De Backer & Gurven, 2006). Perhaps, then, one could argue that *Dallas* is a form of TV gossip, which is a possibility that deserves future investigation. Moreover, one could also examine clones that relied on the *Dallas* framework, such as *Dynasty*, or *Knots Landing.*

For support, I reviewed a small number of themes that have been examined by evolutionary psychologists and discussed how they were present within *Dallas.* There are many other topics that also warranted discussion, such as the family feuds between the Ewings and the Barnes, and how they are primarily sustained by men. There is also the emphasis on marriage, or the decision of marrying for love or money. Or, for example, the uncertain paternity of Sue Ellen's child, and how it ends up being raised by the wealthier man who is most likely not the biological father. The list of themes within the show and how they correlate with the literature on evolutionary psychology is extremely long, so for brevity, I only focus on a few of the topics that seem to arise most frequently on the show.

In the past, media theorists have examined *Dallas* and examined it only in the most shallow of ways. For example, Liebes (1988) asked viewers from different cultures (but residing within Israel and the United States), how they would retell the theme of an episode to others. She documents considerable variation in the structure of how the show is retold. However, she does not highlight the fact that the retellings, as presented in the article, focus on the interpersonal relationships between characters, or problems that the characters are attempting to solve, such as Pam's depression about her inability to conceive. Thus, the retellings themselves provide evidence that viewers, regardless of the culture, comprehend and find meaning in behaviors or problems that would reflect similar situations to those faced by our ancestors. Instead, she says, "We chose *Dallas* because it was the most popular program in the world at the time and because, contrary to common belief, its meaning is not self-evident from the action; quite the contrary, it is not understandable without its words, and in some ways (kinship structures and the several strands of interwoven subplots) it is quite complex" (p. 278). This statement is simply without support; the fact that the show was the most popular in the world clearly suggests that it is understandable and of immense interest to international audiences.

Darwinian literary studies is a powerful framework for understanding literary products, but also other products of the human imagination, such as movies, music, painting, sculpture, and TV shows. By examining those products that are extremely popular, we can continue to build our understanding of evolved human nature. *Dallas*, which some consider to be the most popular TV show ever to have been aired (e.g., Curran, 2005; Liebes, 1988), is an effective vehicle for this exploration, and ultimately, might very well represent the pinnacle of TV success because it is highly evolutionary-relevant TV. In the future, researchers could begin to assess whether adherence of a show to depict solutions to adaptive problems, predicts a show's success. If *Dallas* is any indication, this finding should be readily obtainable.

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