

## **DISCUSS SEX DIFFERENCES IN PARENTAL INVESTMENT** **(8 + 16 marks)**



Trivers devised his parental investment theory which argues that the differences in male and female reproductive behaviour has its origin in the amount of parental investment made by both sexes. The sex that has the larger investment (female) will be the most discriminating and choosy whilst the other sex will compete for access to them.

As for maternal investments, mothers invest more both pre and post natal. The ova is 100 times larger than the sperm, is in limited supply and is not available for the whole of the women's life. She also carries the growing foetus for 40 weeks, gives birth and then has to breastfeed and take care of the baby for a long period of time as human babies are born relatively premature. Females therefore will be more choosy of their mate and their only way to increase their reproductive success is to ensure the survival of her few offspring.

With paternal investment, the large amounts of sperm and the ability to remain fertile throughout their lives means that a male's parental investment is considerably less than females. The only limit on the number of mating's is the availability of female partners. Men can therefore increase their reproductive success by mating with as many women as possible.

The greater investment of females may also be explained in terms of parental certainty. As fertilisation is internal, Men will always have some degree of parental uncertainty and so are under pressure to protect themselves from investing in a child that is not theirs. Therefore they will be more concerned with sexual infidelity as they have to protect themselves from the risk of cuckoldry.

This theory can help to explain why men are more willing to engage in short-term relationships and to understand the differences regarding sexual and emotional infidelity.

**Geher** conducted a study using students. They completed a "parental investment perception scale" and then were exposed to scenarios where parenting might be seen as costly. Their ANS arousal was measured and results showed that men had higher arousal than women which suggests that they are biologically less prepared to confront parenting issues. This study can be commended for its use of biological measurements as these are relatively reliable and thus it can back up the theory well.

There is also evidence from comparative studies. Research has found that in chimpanzees and bonobos (two most closely related species to humans), males showed little or no parental investment which suggests that the development of male parental investment is either an evolutionary change or the contribution of evolutionary learning and so males are not biologically programmed for parental investment, further supporting the theory.

However, it does not account for individual differences with a gender as it exaggerates the differences between sexes and fails to appreciate the differences within sexes, for example, it portrays men as more likely to cheat but it is evident that many more women are having one night stands and it must be noted that with every man that has a one night stand, there must be another "willing" woman for him to sleep with and this idea is not fully explored by the theory as sleeping around would be seen by Triver to be extremely costly for the woman.

It also cannot fully explain why homosexual relationships occur or why homosexuals may not always want to engage in short-term uncommitted sex even through the risk of pregnancy is not a threat. It therefore cannot explain or be applied to all types of relationship. There is also the ethical issue here of highlighting homosexual relationships as not being "normal" and thus this socially sensitive area of psychology must be treated carefully by researchers.

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Trivers theory, like all evolutionary theories, suffers from the fact that it cannot be proven or disproven. It bases its ideas on what researchers believe about the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptiveness and so, without having proper and proven scientific ideals, it lacks scientific evidence and credibility.

The theory is also rather deterministic. Some people argue that we have the cognitive abilities to override our instincts and due to social change and technology advances many couples aren't having children and thus are emphasising their free will and thus the theory may not be so applicable to nowadays and so could lack external validity.

Furthermore, it is also reductionist as it reduces complex behaviour and tries to explain mate choice through genes and thus ignores other factors like upbringing even though it has been found that childhood experiences such as divorce tend to correlate with the degrees to which men invest in the care of their children.

Lastly, **Daly and Wilson** analysed murders in the US and found that children under 2 are 60 times more likely to be killed by a step-parent than a biological parent. This supports the idea that men are concerned with cuckoldry and are not willing to invest in offspring that are not their own. However, counter evidence for this comes from **Anderson** who found that fathers and step-fathers did not discriminate between biological or step-children.