fewer and less-violent crimes than men do.

But this fear of injury does not explain why women should actively seek egalitarianism, nor why they should form communal bonds with unrelated individuals that are more enduring and less exchange-orientated than the alliances formed by men. While most of the book is devoted to explaining how and why women compete, Campbell devotes a chapter to this more conciliatory side of female nature. She suggests that their communal tendencies are an evolved response to male philopatry, women's consequent lack of kin support, and the need for protection from men. Perhaps. It is a topic that deserves more attention from evolutionary psychology than it has received.

Many books discuss human sex differences from an evolutionary perspective, but this one differs from most as it is more a monograph than a text. Campbell has a point to make, and she integrates a vast array of material in doing so. That said, the book would nonetheless make a fine text for a graduate course on the evolutionary psychology of women. Among the book's strengths are its emphasis on conditional strategies, its integration of 'ultimate' (adaptive) and 'proximate' (neurological and biochemical) levels of explanation, and its authoritative treatment of female aggression — a field in which Campbell has done considerable ground-breaking research. Notwithstanding its specialized focus, it does cover the bases in the evolutionary psychology of human sex differences, and the treatment is thorough, thoughtful and up-to-date. The writing is also clear and engaging.

My pleasure in reading the book was repeatedly marred, however, by the publisher's treatment of the references. They are grouped by chapter at the end of the book (rather than being listed alphabetically), and it is a guessing game to find the chapter you need. If references must be grouped this way, please give readers a hint about where to look by indicating the chapter title at the top of each page of references. ■

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Science in culture

E. MATSUI

Natural style

Ideas taken from science are proving to be fashionable.

David Cyranoski

Like the criss-cross pattern of a sunflower head and the spiral of a nautilus shell, Eri Matsui's best-selling wedding dress (above, far right) can be described using the Fibonacci mathematical sequence. The Japanese fashion designer used increasingly short layers of fabric in the skirt to form sections in a 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 35, … pattern, culminating in 56 narrow tufts around the waist. "People recognize the beauty in the order, whether they are looking at the dress or wearing it," says Matsui, who has devoted herself to finding universal forms to make women look beautiful.

Having experimented with images from knot theory, fractal models and Klein bottles, Matsui has more recently been scouring the world of biology for universal forms to use. Her November 2000 collection, for example, with the theme "Brain, Mind, Computer, and Fashion", showcased dresses with colourful images of neurons and others whose thick folds approximate the brain's contours (above in lilac).

Best known in Japan for her somewhat unconventional wedding dresses, Matsui knows that these kinds of design are unlikely to become a common sight on the streets of Tokyo or in wedding halls. "But these designs help open up the imagination, and provide a basis for designing more practical clothing for everyday wear," she says. Practical clothing based on universal forms does not have to be conventional, she insists.

For her last collection, entitled "A Changing Erotic Lifeless Object", shown on 18 April, Matsui tailored several sets of clothes around cell division and differentiation. In one series, the first model emerged onto the catwalk totally enshrouded in an egg-shaped netting. The next, with netting billowing out above and below a tight waistline, was undergoing the first stage of cell division. The series continued with representations of multiple cell stages. Another series (above, left five images) began with straight horizontal lines representing a single cell that gradually curved, model by model, becoming increasingly individual and specialized. The series ended with a death stage, in which slits represented cell walls breaking apart.

Matsui hopes that her work will help us to realize what we are, and recognize the beauty within ourselves.

"When people think about the brain or neurons, they think of them as something external, something that scientists tell us about, something to be looked at objectively — not as part of us," she says. "On the other hand, clothes really are lifeless and external — but when we put them on we think of them as part of us." Clothes that depict or represent these biological processes can allow us to experience directly what we are, she adds.

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Eri Matsui's next show will be held in Tokyo in autumn.