

# Cultural products have evolutionary roots

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From Brad Pitt fighting zombies to Superman falling for Lois Lane, summer blockbuster season is upon us. But while Hollywood keeps trotting out new movies for the masses, plotlines barely change.

Epic battles, whirlwind romances, family feuds, heroic attempts to save the lives of strangers: these are stories guaranteed to grace the silver screen. According to new research from Concordia University, that's not lazy scriptwriting, that's evolutionary consumerism.

Marketing professor Gad Saad says evolution has hard-wired humans to be naturally drawn toward a specific set of universal narratives within cultural products. His new article in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* shows that little in [consumer behaviour](#) can be fully understood without the guiding light of evolution.

"The human drive to consume is rooted in a shared biological heritage based around four key Darwinian factors: survival, reproduction, kin selection and reciprocal altruism. These fundamental evolutionary forces shape the narratives that are created by film producers or song writers," explains Saad, who holds the Concordia University Research Chair in Evolutionary [Behavioural Sciences](#) and Darwinian Consumption, within the John Molson School of Business.

That's true for other pop culture products like song lyrics, which Saad says offer "one of the most direct windows to our evolved mating psychology." From Bieber to Beyoncé, it's all about signalling wealth and finding a mate.

Saad explains that the focus of 90% of songs is on universal sex-specific preferences in the attributes we desire in [prospective mates](#). Male singers show off their wealth and engage in [conspicuous consumption](#) via high status brand mentions. On the other hand, female singers refer to their own "bootylicious" physical beauty and call for "no scrubs" in order to denigrate men of low social status.

"[Romance novels](#), pop songs and movie plotlines always come back to the Darwinian themes of survival (injuries and deaths), reproduction (courtships, sexual assaults, reputational damage), kin selection (the treatment of one's progeny), and altruistic acts (heroic attempts to save a stranger's life). Movies, television shows, song lyrics, romance novels, collective wisdoms, and countless other cultural products are a direct window to our biologically based human nature," says Saad.

It's not just cultural products that demonstrate the evolutionary roots of what Saad terms "Homo consumericus." From the food we eat to the clothing we buy, we're always under the influence of evolution.

For Saad, the practical implications are clear: "In order to achieve commercial success, cultural products typically have to offer content that is congruent with our evolved human nature." That means that Clark Kent will fall for Lois Lane while Superman saves the planet for a long time to come.

Provided by Concordia University

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