

Dispelling misconceptions about evolutionary psychology

Research in evolutionary psychology attracts considerable attention, from both enthusiasts and critics. Evolutionary researchers devote substantial effort to correcting misperceptions of the field, for example that evolutionary researchers studying humans are genetic determinists.

Also, the field itself is not monolithic in belief, there are competing theoretical models and phenomena which are accepted to greater and lesser degrees. Several topics studied under an evolutionary umbrella are contentious or controversial, both within and outside the field.

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An [international collaboration](#) led by University of Michigan researcher Daniel J. Kruger, conducted [The 2020 Survey of Evolutionary Scholars on the State of Human Evolutionary Science](#) to counter misperceptions and document the extent of belief in contested areas.

Results from the largest survey ever of evolutionary researchers were just published online in *Evolution and Human Behavior*. "What do evolutionary researchers believe about [human psychology](#) and behavior?" documents that there are both core beliefs shared among evolutionary scholars, as well as phenomena accepted by varying proportions of scholars. There are also differences in the prevalence of beliefs between those trained in Anthropology and Psychology.

Nearly all participants believed that developmental environments substantially shape human adult psychology and behavior, refuting accusations of genetic determinism. Nearly all participants believed that there are differences in human psychology and behavior based on sex differences from [sexual selection](#), and that there are [individual differences](#) in human psychology and behavior resulting from different genotypes. These concepts are currently controversial in mainstream social science.

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About three-quarters of participants believed that there are within-person differences in psychology and behavior across the menstrual cycle, an area which generates considerable debate and sometimes contradictory findings. Three-fifths believed that the [human mind](#) consists of domain-specific, context-sensitive modules, another focus of criticisms from outside and even from within the field. Psychologists were more likely to believe in these notions than Anthropologists were.

Only about 40% of participants believed that group-level selection has substantially contributed to human evolution. Belief in group selection has waxed and waned over the decades, with the rise of increasingly complex models such as multi-level selection.

Overall, the paper clarifies the actual positions of evolutionary researchers, which should help clarify misunderstandings and shows that there are competing perspectives even among those who identify as evolutionists. Scientific progress is facilitated when critics have an accurate understanding and can direct arguments and research at the beliefs which are actually held.

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