

inspiring that mainstream psychologists are increasingly acknowledging some of the central tenets of evolutionary psychology. These include: (1) that evolution by selection is the fundamental creative force behind the origins of human psychological mechanisms (Buss 1995; Tooby & Cosmides 1992); (2) that theories of human psychology inconsistent with known principles of evolutionary biology stand little chance of being scientifically correct (Symons 1992); and (3) that because many adaptations, including evolved goals, are somewhat specialized for different functional behavioral output, their manifestations will sometimes be in conflict with each other and individuals will consequently be, or appear to be, inconsistent (Buss 2012; Kurzban 2012).

We propose that the utility of Selfish Goal Theory will be strengthened by even fuller conceptual integration with the principles of evolutionary psychology. Evolution by selection is an essential and logically necessary explanation of the origin of the psychological mechanisms that underlie human behavior. Evolutionary theory provides not merely a metaphor for explaining behavior, but rather an indispensable set of causal principles for explaining why humans have the goals toward which they strive. When properly applied, the genes-eye perspective can be useful in predicting not only specific human goals, but also the “design features” of the underlying mechanisms, including the many properties of goals that H&B describe.

A concrete example from evolutionary psychology illustrates this important point. H&B highlight *inconsistency* in behavior over time as one of the key principles of Selfish Goal Theory. Inconsistency serves as a useful test case for demonstrating the utility of an increased emphasis on evolutionary principles because identifying inconsistencies follows from identifying *specific* goals and their manifestations. A more complete grounding of Selfish Goal Theory in evolutionary psychological principles would facilitate the identification of inconsistency because an evolutionary perspective guides researchers to specific evolved goals, as well as the behavioral inconsistencies that may exist when these goals conflict.

Consider two plausible evolved goals within the mating domain for which there is abundant empirical evidence: (1) the desire for sexual variety (e.g., Schmitt et al. 2003; Symons 1979), and (2) the goal of keeping a long-term mate sexually faithful (e.g., Buss et al. 1992; Daly et al. 1982). Acting on a desire for sexual variety by having an extra-pair copulation seems inconsistent with endorsing moral and political condemnations of adultery and promiscuity in others, which is hypothesized to function in promoting long-term sexual fidelity in one’s partner (Kurzban et al. 2010). But these apparent *behavioral* inconsistencies are not *psychologically* inconsistent because they derive from two separate evolved psychological adaptations.

A qualitatively different form of inconsistency highlighted by evolutionary psychology occurs in human sibling relationships. Human siblings share, on average, 50% of their genes by descent, posing sibling relationships to be highly cooperative according to inclusive fitness theory (Hamilton 1964). However, given their 50% lack of genetic relatedness, their similar age, and their shared environments, siblings are also sometimes in competition for major resources such as parental investment, social status, and available mates. These facts combine to suggest that sibling relationships will simultaneously be among the most cooperative *and* conflictual human relationships (Buss 2012). One sibling might rush to the other’s aid in a battle with a common enemy at one time, while attempting to monopolize a larger share of parental resources at the expense of the other at another time. The often conflicting evolved goals of investing in close kin and securing resources from shared environments furnish precise predictions about the forms seemingly inconsistent behavior will take.

Conflicting mating goals and conflicting goals within kinship relationships are just two of the many domains in which evolved psychological mechanisms give rise to inconsistency or apparent inconsistency (Buss 2012; see also Kurzban 2012). The key point is that knowledge of evolved goals and their potentially

A deeper integration of Selfish Goal Theory and modern evolutionary psychology

doi:10.1017/S0140525X13001982

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Abstract: Conceptually integrating Selfish Goal Theory with modern evolutionary psychology amplifies theoretical power. Inconsistency, a key principle of Selfish Goal Theory, illustrates this insight. Conflicting goals of seeking sexual variety and successful mate retention furnish one example. Siblings have evolved goals to cooperate and compete, a second example. Integrating Selfish Goal Theory with evolutionary theory can explain much inconsistent goal-directed behavior.

Huang & Bargh (H&B) present a novel meta-theory of human behavior that draws from the success of the genes-eye perspective, the dominant paradigm within modern evolutionary theory. It is

contradictory manifestations is enhanced by analysis of the adaptive functions of goals. A closer conceptual integration of Selfish Goal Theory with evolutionary psychology furnishes the theoretical power required to generate very specific predictions about the domains in which different goals generate inconsistent, or seemingly inconsistent, behavior.

In sum, we believe that Selfish Goal Theory, which draws from modern evolutionary biology and psychology, is an important conceptual step in the right direction. We suggest that a deeper conceptual integration with evolutionary psychology will provide an even richer set of empirical predictions about the ways in which selection has forged the psychological mechanisms that make humans behave in ways that seem highly goal-driven, and the design features of goals that lead to apparent or real behavioral inconsistencies. We hope that other psychologists will follow the lead of H&B and build upon the important first steps their theory provides in creating psychological theories not just consistent with, but explicitly driven by, known principles of evolutionary theory.