



PsychTable

A Taxonomy of Evolved Psychological Adaptations

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Abstract

PsychTable.org, the Web-based taxonomy of human evolved psychological adaptations (EPAs), has in recent years raised questions about the evolutionary behavioral sciences' need for empirical rigor, open science for all, interdisciplinarity, peer evaluations of evidentiary breadth and depth, and international research collaborations. This paper examines opportunities, risks, and lessons learned in taxonomic activities, since the evolutionary behavioral sciences community is both increasingly defending the field and trying to make better sense of the literature to date. Newly-strengthened mechanisms for evaluating evidence for EPAs and special design are described for quality control purposes, in addition to new ways that scientists, educators, students, contributors, and the general public can interact with the growing global body of knowledge about evolved behavioral taxa. Guiding principles for increasing efficiency and access to PsychTable.org without sacrificing empirical quality are also discussed.

How it Works

PsychTable works by aggregating citations which support or challenge each purported EPA, using a mathematical algorithm to assign an evidentiary "strength" score to each, and generating a table which represents the current (but ever-changing) state of the empirical evidence. Citations are added and assigned evaluative ratings by both general users and an international community of expert contributors; as such, the content of the site will represent the consensus of the scientific community and new research opportunities.

Applications

Scientists, educators, students, contributors, and the general public will be able to use PsychTable.org to:

- Explore detailed descriptions of hundreds of proposed evolved psychological adaptations (EPAs)
- Connect directly with a worldwide community of scientists, educators, students, contributors, and the general public
- Propose empirical evidence and studies that support or challenge the existence of individual EPAs
- Easily evaluate the existing literature to determine how robustly any purported EPA is empirically supported
- Help compile individual dossiers that profile individual EPAs' neurolocalizations, neurochemical substrates, elicitors, outputs, and so on
- Nominate hypothesized EPAs that may be substantiated or appear in the future via emerging research
- Gain rapid insight into which areas of evolutionary social scientific research are open to further empirical inquiry
- Provide a helpful Web-based study tool for students

Challenges and Opportunities

- Curation and accessibility
- Measuring evaluative criteria like Special Design, Fitness Enhancement, Low Phenotypic Variance, etc.
- Potential for biased evaluations of EPAs
- Third-party applications
- Managing commenting system and users' debates
- A central location of all EPAs and their details for easy reference and comparison
- Revelation of new research opportunities, e.g., which areas are open to empirical inquiry
- Arbitration of debates about the existing evidence for any EPA
- A place for students to explore and study EPAs
- Critics can debate, find contrary evidence, and display it on the site if they disagree with the existence of EPAs

Background

PsychTable is based on Balachandran's (2011) article proposing a taxonomy of EPAs, and uses as its framework the Schmitt & Pilcher (2004) system for evaluating evidence for EPAs – support is drawn from eight diverse lines of evidence:

Theoretical Evidence
Psychological Evidence
Medical Evidence
Physiological Evidence
Genetic Evidence
Phylogenetic Evidence
Hunter-Gatherer Evidence
Cross-Cultural Evidence

References

- Balachandran, N., & Glass, D. J. (2012). PsychTable. org: The taxonomy of human evolved psychological adaptations. *Evolution: Education and Outreach*, 5(2), 312-320.
- Balachandran, N. (2011). A proposed taxonomy of human evolved psychological adaptations. *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology*, 5(3), 1-14.
- Schmitt, D.P., & Pilcher, J.J. (2004). Evaluating evidence of psychological adaptation: How do we know one when we see one? *Psychological Science*, 15, 643-649.

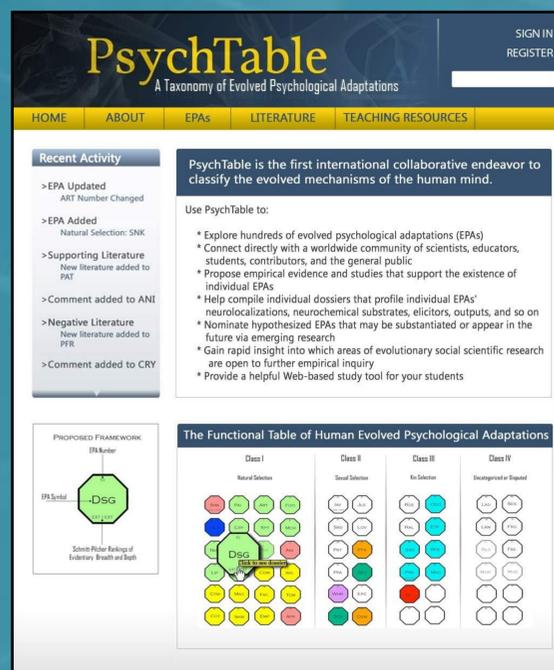


Figure 1. PsychTable.org homepage, featuring table of EPAs.

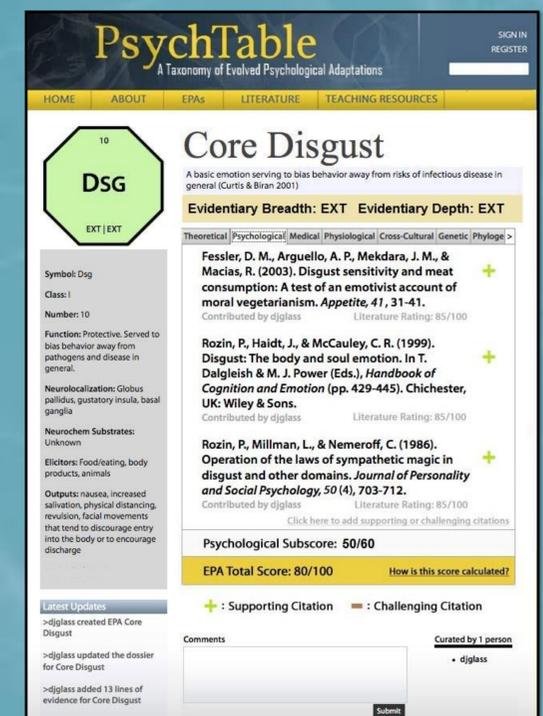


Figure 2. Dossier for an individual EPA (Core Disgust)

Endorsements

