

# Evolutionary Personality: Why We Are All So Different

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Evolutionary psychology is primarily interested in finding commonalities between people, or basic human psychological nature. From an evolutionary perspective, the fact that people have fundamental differences in personality traits initially presents something of a puzzle. (Note: The field of behavioral genetics is concerned with statistically partitioning differences between people into genetic and environmental sources of variance. However, understanding the concept of heritability can be tricky--heritability refers only to the differences between people, never the degree to which the traits of an individual are due to environmental or genetic factors, since traits are always a complex interweaving of both.)

Personality traits are conceptualized by evolutionary psychologists as due to normal variation around an optimum, or due to frequency-dependent selection, or facultative adaptations. Like variability in height, some personality traits may be simply reflect inter-individual variability around a general optimum. Or, personality traits may represent different genetically predisposed "behavioral morphs" -- alternate behavioral strategies that depend on the frequency of competing behavioral strategies in the population. For example, if most of the population is generally trusting and gullible, the behavioral morph of being a "cheater" (or, in the extreme case, a sociopath) may be advantageous. Finally, like many other psychological adaptations, personality traits may be facultative--sensitive to typical variations in the social environment, especially during early development. For example, later born children are more likely than first borns to be rebellious, less conscientious and more open to new experiences, which may be advantageous to them given their particular niche in family structure.