

This article (Rushton, J. P., & Templer, D. I. (2012). Do pigmentation and the melanocortin system modulate aggression and sexuality in humans as they do in other animals? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 53(1), 4–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.02.015>) has been retracted at the request of the Editor-in-Chief and the majority of Senior Associate Editors of *Personality and Individual Differences* and in consultation with the Executive Officers and Board of Directors of the International Society for the Study of Individual Differences (ISSID).

The journal, *Personality and Individual Differences* (PAID), was founded 40 years ago and is recognized as a major publication of psychological science research focusing on an examination of human behavior along the continuum of how we are all alike to what distinguishes us from one another. The aims and scope of PAID are clearly stated as published in the journal: “*Personality and Individual Differences* is primarily devoted to the publication of articles (experimental, correlational, theoretical, expository/review) which enhance our understanding of the structure of personality and other forms of individual differences, the processes which cause these individual differences to emerge, and their practical applications. Accessible methodological contributions are also welcome. The Editors invite papers that focus on the genetic, biological, and environmental foundations of individual differences, and possible interaction effects. Ultimately the editors of PAID view human beings as bio-social organisms and that work on individual differences can be most fruitfully pursued by attending to both these aspects of our nature.”

We rigorously follow the widely practiced standard procedure for evaluating all submissions to PAID: Overarching this review and publication of submitted papers is strict compliance with the principles/tenets of science and its methods that most clearly includes ethical standards (i.e., beneficence and nonmaleficence). PAID editors fully endorse and adhere to the guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) as well as Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Thus we are responsible for all papers published in PAID, both during or prior to the current editors' terms, such that the editors reserve the right to take further action on published papers should evidence of any irregularity come to the fore. Such investigations by the editors and content experts as required, may then lead to actions that could range from a corrigendum correcting minor errors, a notice of concern that might label a paper as potentially unsafe, to a retraction of the paper. Retractions are immediately initiated by the editor when there is clear evidence of purposeful malpractice or data fabrication, or an admission of malpractice by an author, all of which may mislead the reader. Plausible inference or inferred motives, in and of themselves, is not evidence of malpractice; rather papers are retracted if the evidence after careful analysis shows beyond reasonable doubt that malpractice in any sense as described above has occurred that in turn would violate the publication standards of the journal and COPE guidelines.

It has recently come to our attention that the following article published in PAID contains sufficient errors and misrepresentation to require our attention, review and action: Rushton, J. P., & Templer, D. I. (2012). Do pigmentation and the melanocortin system modulate aggression and sexuality in humans as they do in other animals? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 53(1), 4–8.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.02.015>.

As editors of PAID we have a responsibility to adhere to and respect the principles/tenets of science and its methods that most clearly include ethical considerations (i.e., beneficence and nonmaleficence). While this paper was published in 2012, the current Editor-in-Chief and Senior Associate Editors now have the responsibility to address all matters arising from it.

Rushton & Templer (2012) contend that animal studies show that dark skin pigmentation is reliably related to increased aggression and sexual activity. They speculate that the same may be true in humans, and claim that the psychological literature supports this contention that is grounded in evolutionary theory. Their thesis is that genetic differences, related to darkness of skin colour, explain supposed racial differences in sexual behaviour and violence.

Both authors are now deceased, and so we cannot speculate about their motivations and intents when publishing this work. Whilst we regard their views

expressed in this paper as deeply offensive to particular minorities, we also maintain that they did not provide a fair representation of the literature of that time which was available to them, and further did not draw valid inferences from it. Our final position on this article included analyses by PAID Senior Associate Editors and elected officers and directors of ISSID. As well, we considered the reviews by an a Ph.D. senior geneticist and a Ph.D. neuroscientist (neither have any connection to the authors of the paper or to either PAID or ISSID, and a medical researcher who initially drew our attention to the issue in a letter to the PAID Editor-in-Chief and which can be currently found at:

<https://medium.com/@evopsychgoogle/a-critique-of-rushton-and-templers-2012-paper-b334ed8db5ae>

Specifically:

- (1) Rushton & Templer drew on a review paper in an Ecology journal (Ducrest et al., 2008) which argues that genetic variants which influence skin colour may also influence aggression, sexual activity and resistance to stress – mainly based on birds and fish. The correspondent and geneticist each comment that the genes responsible for skin pigmentation in humans are completely different to the genes in these animals. It therefore makes no sense to extrapolate from these animal studies to humans. Ducrest et al. made this crystal clear: “human populations are therefore not expected to consistently exhibit the associations between melanin-based coloration and the physiological and behavioural traits reported in our study”. As the geneticist observes, “the point about genetic variants for skin pigmentation being different in humans makes all the other vertebrate work cited inconsequential”.
- (2) Rushton & Templer claimed that there are black/white (human) differences in levels of psychopathy. As required of a review paper, the authors should have been aware of a literature showing that black-white differences in the best-available measure of psychopathy are negligible (Skeem et al., 2004). They instead relied on an analysis by Lynn (2002) which has been extensively criticized (Skeem, Edens, Sanford, & Colwell, 2003; Zuckerman, 2003).

- (3) Rushton & Templer ignored obvious social and educational explanations for higher levels of violence, HIV infection etc. in African and Caribbean countries whilst favouring a genetic theory.
- (4) Rushton & Templer made several errors when interpreting the results summarised by Ducrest et al. Although relatively minor, these errors consistently favoured their genetic thesis.

It is on the basis of our analysis supported by input from experts that forms the grounds for issuing a retraction decision of the Rushton and Temper (2012) paper published in *Personality and Individual Differences*.

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