

Abstract:

The idea that men's reproductive strategies are driven in large part by a desire to maintain paternity certainty underlies major tenets in the evolutionary psychology of mating. When they fail, men are said to be the victims of "cuckoldry," unwittingly investing in children they did not father. In this talk I will use ethnographic and historical records, in combination with more than ten years of fieldwork with Himba pastoralists to present and challenge two assumptions that are built into standard models of cuckoldry: (1) men are being tricked into investing in non-biological offspring; and (2) investment in non-biological offspring is wasted. First, I will show that extra-pair paternity (EPP) is common among Himba (and variable across cultures) and briefly explain why normative concurrency is a viable strategy for Himba men and women. Next, I will show that the concepts of pater and genitor are complex and locally constructed ideas that often include explicit knowledge of extra-marital relationships and extra-pair paternity. When this context is considered, we see that paternity losses can be associated with important gains to offset them. Finally, I will propose that cuckoldry as a concept has limited use in understanding paternity in humans. Future studies should pay close attention to the cultural milieu surrounding fatherhood, rather than assuming men everywhere will be equally driven by the same concerns.