

Breeding apes & humans?

This month's question was driven by a recent news headline, albeit from a non-standard source that tends to promote sensationalistic stories. In addition, I had a pastor recently contact me inquiring about this news report.



Evolutionary psychologist and University of Albany professor Gordon Gallup is claiming his former university professor told him that a human-chimpanzee hybrid was born 100 years ago at a research facility where he (Gallup's professor) used to work. Gallup went on to state, "But in the matter of days, or a few weeks, they began to consider the moral and ethical considerations and the infant was euthanized."

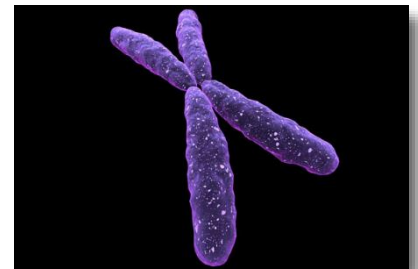
is my normal mode of operation to use these "Question of the Month" articles to explore various interesting topics in a fairly simple manner, while making an important "larger point". This month will only be a slight, temporary diversion from the norm, taking somewhat of a break and providing some comical relief.

I truly don't give any credence to this type of story and normally wouldn't even bother mentioning it, but it raises a larger question, which is what I like to do with the "Questions of the Month". Actually, there are two questions this time. (Also, I have enough background to make an instant judgment call on things like these, but most of the general public doesn't; so they are naturally curious when they hear anything similar to this particular news item.)

Is this type of hybridization even possible? And if so, would it be right or wrong to pursue something like this?

The answer to the first question is easy... "No". It's not so much a matter of lacking the technology to pull it off. It's more a matter of what is physically possible and what is not. It's not my intention to launch into a technical lecture on genetics but simply to mention a few basic principles.

The details of the way DNA is structured and how sexual reproduction works will not permit two fairly disparate creatures to produce viable offspring. (Really, not any kind of "offspring" at all.) Just one example is that we inherit half of our genes/DNA from our fathers and half from our mothers. The DNA segments come together to form what are known as "chromosomes" (see figure here). Since chimpanzees have 24 chromosomes and humans only have 23, it would not be possible to match them up. Beyond this, there are myriads of other reasons why it won't work.



We sometimes still hear that human and chimp DNA is 98% identical, which might lead you to think that perhaps the two could actually "mate". However, this percentage is grossly inaccurate and most

Question of the Month

scientists are probably aware of this. Unfortunately, it continues to be promoted by many others as well as the popular media and educational systems. We are more like 80-90% similar, which is much lower than would be expected by evolutionists, since they believe we share a common ancestor, from which we split about 6 million years ago. Given the actual differences, this relates to at least 300 million letter differences in our DNA code! That is huge! In fact, it's one of the major challenges to evolution. Specifically, how do you make that many changes to the DNA to convert an ape-like creature into a human being in 6 million years? The changes are in the form of "mutations" which are largely accidental copying errors (most of which are harmful) that occur when the DNA is reproduced (i.e. copied). This problem (getting random copying errors to create that much new information and become a permanent part of the population) is officially known as Haldane's Dilemma (named after famous evolutionary geneticist J.B.S. Haldane).

So don't be looking for human/chimp hybrids anytime soon (or ever).

That was all in response to the first question—"Is this even possible?" What about the second question—"If so, would it be right or wrong to pursue something like this?"

This gets into the "moral" realm. It's interesting to note that this alleged "creature" (which I don't think ever existed) was supposedly "gotten rid of" because of "moral and ethical considerations". Hmm... we might have done something wrong here, so let's kill it! (Do you see the moral irony?)

Consider for the moment that most scientists do not believe the Bible and make no attempt to pay attention to its standards. This is very sad, but it makes sense that since they don't believe the Bible, why should they care at all about its "shalls" and "shall nots"? Take away the biblical narrative, and it makes a lot of sense to experiment with human/chimp hybrids. After all, evolution posits we're closely related and share a common ancestor, so why not pursue this? I could not fault them on this basis. However, for a Christian, we should never "set aside" our source of authority (Scripture), independent of whether or not others accept it. We rightly have a biblical mandate for being against the breeding of humans with chimps or any other animal (Leviticus 18:23). This is not a "gray" area. But what about cloning? Now that's another question altogether and one that I may consider tackling in next month's "Question of the Month". It's a fascinating topic and one that truly isn't just "black & white".

In the meantime, if you have any questions about this or any other issue, please don't hesitate to [contact us!](#)