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HUMAN-SPECIFIC ADAPTATIONS IN LONGEVITY, REPRODUCTIVE FUNCTION, AND PATTERNS OF COGNITIVE AGING

J.G. Herndon

Yerkes National Primate Research Center, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Presenter's Email: james.herndon@emory.edu

Is the long lifespan of *Homo sapiens* explained by the societal and medical progress of the past century, or is it the result of an evolutionary selection process? One idea supporting the latter view is the "Grandmother Hypothesis." Originally proposed as an explanation of mid-life menopause, this construct has been revised to explain humans' extreme longevity. Data from our lab suggests that long post-menopausal life is a uniquely human trait. Cognitive traits such as language and social cognitive functions may have evolved as mechanisms to compensate for age-related decline in our species in particular. This has significant implications for research in which nonhuman primates are considered as models of human cognitive aging; it also means that some processes can be studied only in humans.

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