

in our heads that says “that claim is wrong.” Schwarz’s work reminds us that merely memorizing a list of misconceptions isn’t enough: It’s crucial to understand the *reasons* underlying each misconception. His work also suggests that it’s essential for us to understand not merely what’s false, but also what’s true. Linking up a misconception with the truth is the best means of debunking that misconception (Schwarz et al., 2007). That’s why we’ll spend a few pages explaining not only *why* each of these 50 myths is wrong, but also how each of these 50 myths imparts an underlying truth about psychology.

Fortunately, there’s at least some reason to be optimistic. Research shows that psychology students’ acceptance of psychological misconceptions, like “people use only 10% of their brain’s capacity,” declines with the total number of psychology classes they’ve taken (Standing & Huber, 2003). This same study also showed that acceptance of these misconceptions is lower among psychology majors than non-majors. Although such research is only correlational—we’ve already learned that correlation doesn’t always mean causation—it gives us at least a glimmer of hope that education can reduce people’s beliefs in psychomythology. What’s more, recent controlled research suggests that explicitly refuting psychological misconceptions in introductory psychology lectures or readings can lead to large—up to 53.7%—decreases in the levels of these misconceptions (Kowalski & Taylor, in press).

If we’ve succeeded in our mission, you should emerge from this book not only with a higher “Psychology IQ,” but also a better understanding of how to distinguish fact from fiction in popular psychology. Perhaps most important, you should emerge with the critical thinking tools needed to better evaluate psychological claims in everyday life.

As the paleontologist and science writer Stephen Jay Gould (1996) pointed out, “the most erroneous stories are those we think we know best—and therefore never scrutinize or question” (p. 57). In this book, we’ll encourage you to never accept psychological stories on faith alone, and to always scrutinize and question the psychological stories you think you know best.

So without further ado, let’s enter the surprising and often fascinating world of psychomythology.