Anthro Notes

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EXPLORING OUR BASIC HUMAN NATURE
ARE HUMANS INHERENTLY VIOLENT?

by Robert W. Sussman

Are human beings forever doomed to be violent? Is aggression fixed within our genetic code, an inborn action pattern that threatens to destroy us? Or, as asked by Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson in their recent book, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*, can we get beyond our genes, beyond our essential "human nature"?

Wrangham and Peterson's belief in the importance of violence in the evolution and nature of humans is based on new primate research that they assert demonstrates the continuity of aggression from our great ape ancestors. The authors argue that 20-25 years ago most scholars believed human aggression was unique. Research at that time had shown great apes to be basically non-aggressive gentle creatures. Furthermore, the separation of humans from our ape ancestors was thought to have occurred 15-20 million years ago (Mya). Although Raymond Dart, Sherwood Washburn, Robert Ardrey, E.O. Wilson

and others had argued through much of the 20th century that hunting, killing, and extreme aggressive behaviors were biological traits inherited from our earliest hominid hunting ancestors, many anthropologists still believed that patterns of aggression were environmentally determined and culturally learned behaviors, not inherited characteristics.

Demonic Males discusses new evidence that killer instincts are not unique to humans, but rather shared with our nearest relative, the common chimpanzee. The authors argue that it is this inherited propensity for killing that allows hominids and chimps to be such good hunters.

According to Wrangham and Peterson, the split between humans and the common chimpanzee was only 6-8 Mya. Furthermore, humans may have split from the chimpanzee-bonobo line after gorillas, with bonobos (**pygmy chimps**) separating from chimps only 2.5 Mya. Because chimpanzees may be the modern ancestor of all these forms, and because the earliest australopithecines were quite chimpanzee-like, Wrangham speculates (in a separate article) that "chimpanzees are a conservative species and an amazingly good model for the ancestor of hominids" (1995, reprinted in Sussman 1997:106). If modern chimpanzees and modern humans share certain behavioral traits, these traits have "long evolutionary roots" and are likely to be fixed, biologically inherited parts of our basic human nature and not culturally determined.

Wrangham argues that chimpanzees are almost on the brink of humanness:

> Nut-smashing, root-eating, savannah-using chimpanzees, resembling our ancestors, and capable by the way of extensive bipedalism. Using ant-wands, and sandals, and bowls, meat-sharing, hunting cooperatively. Strange paradox...a species trembling on the verge of hominization, but so conservative that it has stayed on that edge.... (1997:107).

Wrangham and Peterson (1996:24) claim that only two animal species, chimpanzees and humans, live in patrilineal, male-bonded communities "with intense, male initiated territorial aggression, including lethal raiding into neighboring communities in search of vulnerable enemies to attack and kill." Wrangham asks:

> Does this mean chimpanzees are naturally violent? Ten years ago it wasn't clear....In this cultural species, it may turn out that one of the least variable of all chimpanzee behaviors is the intense competition between males, the violent aggression they use against strangers, and their willingness to maim and kill those that frustrate their goals....As the picture of chimpanzee society settles into focus, it now includes infanticide, rape and regular battering of females by males (1997:108).

Since humans and chimpanzees share these violent urges, the implication is that human violence has long evolutionary roots. "We are apes of nature, cursed over six million years or more with a rare inheritance, a Dostoyevskyan demon...The coincidence of demonic aggression in ourselves and our closest kin bespeaks its antiquity" (1997:108-109).

Intellectual Antecedents

From the beginning of Western thought, the theme of human depravity runs deep, related to the idea of humankind's fall from grace and the emergence of original sin. This view continues to pervade modern "scientific" interpretations of the evolution of human behavior. Recognition of the close evolutionary relationship between humans and apes, from the time of Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1874) on, has encouraged theories that look to modern apes for evidence of parallel behaviors reflecting this relationship.

By the early 1950s, large numbers of australopithecine fossils and the discovery that the large-brained "fossil" ancestor from Piltdown, in England, was a fraud, led to the realization that our earliest ancestors were more like apes than like modern humans. Accordingly, our earliest ancestors must have behaved much like other non-human primates. This, in turn, led to a great interest in

using primate behavior to understand human evolution and the evolutionary basis of human nature. The subdiscipline of primatology was born.

Raymond Dart, discoverer of the first australopithecine fossil some thirty years earlier, was also developing a different view of our earliest ancestors. At first Dart believed that australopithecines were scavengers barely eking out an existence in the harsh savanna environment. But from the fragmented and damaged bones found with the australopithecines, together with dents and holes in these early hominid skulls, Dart eventually concluded that this species had used bone, tooth and antler tools to kill, butcher and eat their prey, as well as to kill one another. This hunting hypothesis (Cartmill 1997:511) "was linked from the beginning with a bleak, pessimistic view of human beings and their ancestors as instinctively bloodthirsty and savage." To Dart, the australopithecines were:

> confirmed killers: carnivorous creatures that seized living quarries by violence, battered them to death, tore apart their broken bodies, dismembered them limb from limb, slaking their ravenous thirst with the hot blood of victims and greedily devouring livid writhing flesh (1953:209).

Cartmill, in a recent book (1993), shows that this interpretation of early human morality is reminiscent of earlier Greek and Christian views. Dart's (1953) own treatise begins with a 17th century quote from the Calvinist R. Baxter: "of all the beasts, the man-beast is the worst/ to others and himself the cruellest foe."

Between 1961-1976, Dart's view was picked up and extensively popularized by the playwright Robert Ardrey (*The Territorial Imperative, African Genesis*). Ardrey believed it was the human competitive and killer instinct, acted out in warfare, that made humans what they are today. "It is war and the instinct for territory that has led to the great accomplishments of Western Man. Dreams may have inspired our love of freedom, but only war and weapons have made it ours" (1961: 324).

Man the Hunter

In the 1968 volume *Man the Hunter*, Sherwood Washburn and Chet Lancaster presented a theory of "The evolution of hunting," emphasizing that it is this behavior that shaped human nature and separated early humans from their primate relatives.

> To assert the biological unity of mankind is to affirm the importance of the hunting way of life....However much conditions and customs may have varied locally, the main selection pressures that forged the species were the same. The biology, psychology and customs that separate us from the apes .. we owe to the hunters of time past .. for those who would understand the origins and nature of human behavior there is no choice but to try to understand "Man the Hunter" (1968:303).

Rather than amassing evidence from modern hunters and gatherers to prove their theory, Washburn and Lancaster (1968:299) use the 19th-century concept of cultural "survivals": behaviors that persist as evidence of an earlier time but are no longer useful in society.

> Men enjoy hunting and killing, and these activities are continued in sports even when they are no longer economically necessary. If a behavior is important to the survival of a species...then it must be both easily learned and pleasurable (Washburn & Lancaster, p. 299).

Man the Dancer

Using a similar logic for the survival of ancient "learned and pleasurable" behaviors, perhaps it could easily have been our propensity for dancing rather than our desire to hunt that can explain much of human behavior. After all, men and women love to dance; it is a behavior found in all cultures but has even less obvious function today than hunting. Our love of movement and dance might explain, for example, our propensity for face-to-face sex, and even the evolution of bipedalism and the movement of humans out of trees and onto the ground.

Could the first tool have been a stick to beat a dance drum, and the ancient Laetoli footprints evidence of two individuals going out to dance the "Afarensis shuffle"? Although it takes only two to tango, a variety of social interactions and systems might have been encouraged by the complex social dances known in human societies around the globe.

Sociobiology and E.O. Wilson

In the mid-1970s, E.O. Wilson and others described a number of traits as genetically based and therefore human universals, including territoriality, male-female bonds, male dominance over females, and extended maternal care leading to matrilineality. Wilson argued that the genetic basis of these traits was indicated by their relative constancy among our primate relatives and by their persistence throughout human evolution and in human societies. Elsewhere, I have shown that these characteristics are neither general primate traits nor human universals (Sussman 1995). Wilson, however, argued that these were a product of our evolutionary hunting past.

For at least a million years--probably more--Man engaged in a hunting way of life, giving up the practice a mere 10,000 years ago....Our innate social responses have been fashioned through this life style. With caution, we can compare the most widespread hunter-gatherer qualities with similar behavior displayed by some of the non-human primates that are closely related to Man. Where the same pattern of traits occurs in...most or all of those primates--we can conclude that it has been subject to little evolution. (Wilson 1976, in Sussman 1997: 65-66).

Wilson's theory of sociobiology, the evolution of social behavior, argued that:

(1) the goal of living organisms is to pass on one's genes at the expense of all others;
(2) an organism should only cooperate with others if :
(a) they carry some of his/her own genes (kin selection) or
(b) if at some later date the others might aid you (reciprocal altruism).

To sociobiologists, evolutionary morality is based on an unconscious need to multiply our own genes, to build group cohesion in order to win wars. We should not look down on our warlike, cruel nature but rather understand its success when coupled with "making nice" with some other individuals or groups. The genetically driven "making nice" is the basis of human ethics and morality.

> Throughout recorded history the conduct of war has been common.. some of the noblest traits of mankind, including team play, altruism, patriotism, bravery...and so forth are the genetic product of warfare (Wilson 1975:572-3).

The evidence for any of these universals or for the tenets of sociobiology is as weak as was the evidence for Dart's, Ardrey's and Washburn and Lancaster's theories of innate aggression. Not only are modern gatherer-hunters and most apes remarkably non-aggressive, but in the 1970s and 1980s studies of fossil bones and artifacts have shown that early humans were not hunters, and that weapons were a later addition to the human repertoire. In fact, C.K. Brain (1981) showed that

the holes and dents in Dart's australopithecine skulls matched perfectly with fangs of leopards or with impressions of rocks pressing against the buried fossils. Australopithecines apparently were the hunted, not the hunters (Cartmill, 1993, 1997).

Beyond Our Genes

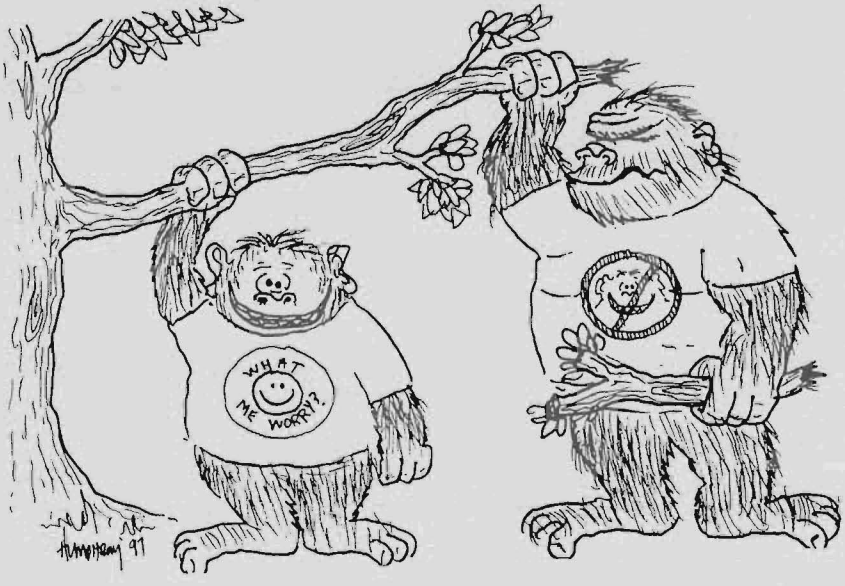
Wrangham and Peterson's book goes beyond the assertion of human inborn aggression and propensity towards violence. The authors ask the critical question: Are we doomed to be violent forever because this pattern is fixed within our genetic code or can we go beyond our past? -- get out of our genes, so to speak.

The authors believe that we can look to the bonobo or pygmy chimpanzee as one potential savior, metaphorically speaking.

Bonobos, although even more closely related to the common chimpanzee than humans, have become a peace-loving, love-making alternative to chimpanzee-human violence. How did this happen? In chimpanzees and humans, females of the species select partners that are violent. ..."while men have evolved to be demonic males, it seems likely that women have evolved to prefer demonic males....as long as demonic males are the most successful reproducers, any female who mates with them is provided with sons who themselves will likely be good reproducers" (Wrangham and Peterson 1996:239). However, among pygmy chimpanzees females form alliances and have chosen to mate with less aggressive males. So, after all, it is not violent males that have caused humans and chimpanzees to be their inborn, immoral, dehumanized selves, it is rather, poor choices by human and chimpanzee females.

Like Dart, Washburn, and Wilson before them, Wrangham and Peterson believe that killing and violence is inherited from our ancient relatives of the past. However, unlike these earlier theorists, Wrangham and Peterson argue this is not a trait unique to hominids, nor is it a by-product of hunting. In fact, it is just this violent nature and a natural "blood lust" that makes both humans and chimpanzees such good hunters. It is the bonobos that help the authors come to this conclusion. Because bonobos have lost the desire to kill, they also have lost the desire to hunt.

> ...do bonobos tell us that the suppression of personal violence carried with it the suppression of predatory aggression? The strongest hypothesis at the moment is that bonobos came from a chimpanzee-like ancestor that hunted monkeys and hunted one another. As they evolved into bonobos, males lost their demonism, becoming less aggressive to each other. In so doing they lost their lust for hunting monkeys, too....Murder and hunting may be more closely tied together than we are used to thinking (Wrangham and Peterson 1996:219).



The Selfish Gene Theory

Like Ardrey, Wrangham and Peterson believe that blood lust ties killing and hunting tightly together but it is the killing that drives hunting in the latter's argument. This lust to kill is based upon the

sociobiological tenet of the selfish gene. "The general principle that behavior evolves to serve selfish ends has been widely accepted; and the idea that humans might have been favored by natural selection to hate and to kill their enemies has become entirely, if tragically, reasonable" (Wrangham and Peterson 1996:23).

As with many of the new sociobiological or evolutionary anthropology theories, I find problems with both the theory itself and with the evidence used to support it. Two arguments that humans and chimpanzees share biologically fixed behaviors are: (1) they are more closely related to each other than chimpanzees are to gorillas; (2) chimpanzees are a good model for our earliest ancestor and retain conservative traits that should be shared by both.

The first of these statements is still hotly debated and, using various genetic evidence, the chimp-gorilla-human triage is so close that it is difficult to tell exact divergence time or pattern among the three. The second statement is just not true. Chimpanzees have been evolving for as long as humans and gorillas, and there is no reason to believe ancestral chimps were similar to present-day chimps. The fossil evidence for the last 5-8 million years is extremely sparse, and it is likely that many forms of apes have become extinct just as have many hominids.

Furthermore, even if the chimpanzee were a good model for the ancestral hominid, and was a conservative representative of this phylogenetic group, this would not mean that humans would necessarily share specific behavioral traits. As even Wrangham and Peterson emphasize, chimps, gorillas, and bonobos all behave very differently from one another in their social behavior and in their willingness to kill conspecifics.

Evidence Against "Demonic Males"

The proof of the "Demonic Male" theory does not rest on any theoretical grounds but must rest solely on the evidence that violence and killing in chimpanzees and in humans are behaviors that are similar in pattern; have ancient, shared evolutionary roots; and are inherited. Besides killing of conspecifics, Wrangham "includes infanticide, rape, and regular battering of females by males" as a part of this inherited legacy of violent behaviors shared by humans and chimpanzees (1997:108).

Wrangham and Peterson state: "That chimpanzees and humans kill members of neighboring groups of their own species is...a startling exception to the normal rule for animals" (1996:63). "Fighting adults of almost all species normally stop at winning: They don't go on to kill" (1996:155). However, as Wrangham points out there are exceptions, such as lions, wolves, spotted hyenas, and I would add a number of other predators. In fact, most species do not have the weapons to kill one another as adults.

Just how common is conspecific killing in chimpanzees? This is where the real controversy may lie. Jane Goodall described the chimpanzee as a peaceful, non-aggressive species during the first 24 years of study at Gombe (1950-1974). During one year of concentrated study, Goodall observed 284 agonistic encounters: of these 66% were due to competition for introduced bananas, and only 34% "could be regarded as attacks occurring in 'normal' aggressive contexts" (1968:278). Only 10 percent of the 284 attacks were classified as 'violent', and "even attacks that appeared punishing to me often resulted in no discernable injury...Other attacks consisted merely of brief pounding, hitting or rolling of the individual, after which the aggressor often touched or embraced the other immediately (1968:277).

Chimpanzee aggression before 1974 was considered no different from patterns of aggression seen in many other primate species. In fact, Goodall explains in her 1986 monograph, *The Chimpanzees of Gombe,* that she uses data mainly from after 1975 because the earlier years present a "very different picture of the Gombe chimpanzees" as being "far more peaceable than humans" (1986:3). Other early naturalists' descriptions of chimpanzee behavior were consistent with those of Goodall and confirmed her observations. Even different communities were observed to come together with peaceful, ritualized displays of greeting (Reynolds

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"KENNEWICK MAN" A TEACHER FOR ALL AGES

Why would a group of physical anthropologists and archaeologists have to go to court for the right to study a 9,200-year-old skeleton they consider one of the most important discoveries ever made in this country?

This past July, a U.S. District Court judge issued a ruling that may make such study possible and clarified many of the controversial issues surrounding the bones of "Kennewick Man."

Who is "Kennewick Man?"

On July 28, 1996, two college students watching a boat race spotted a skull in the banks of the Columbia River near Kennewick, Washington. Thinking it a murder victim, they called the sheriff's office. The skull was taken to the local coroner who called upon the assistance of a local forensic archaeologist, who, after recovering the rest of the skeleton, requested a CAT scan. The skeleton at first appeared to be that of an early European settler until a stone spear point was found embedded in the hip bone. Radiocarbon dating placed the skeleton's age at 9,200 years ago.

From preliminary observations, it appeared that "Kennewick Man" died around the age of 50. He possessed some bodily and facial features that differ from the Native Americans of that region. His long and narrow skull, large jaw with a pronounced chin, and arms long in proportion to the rest of his body raise the question of Kennewick's ancestry and his relationship to modern Native Americans.

Conflicting Claims

The skeleton was found on land belonging to the Army Corps of Engineers. A coalition of five Northwest tribes, led by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, filed a claim with the Corps asking for the return of the skeleton, which they said should be buried immediately in a secret location without scientific study.

After the Umatilla filed a claim for the skeleton, the Corps of Engineers decided to hand over the Kennewick remains to the tribal coalition. The Corps, meanwhile, had denied requests from several prominent scientists to carry out scientific studies of this rare and ancient find, which might shed light on life at the end of the Pleistocene. The Corps also denied the completion of a DNA analysis that had been started by the University of California-Davis, offered at no cost to the Corps. To safeguard the remains, Kennewick Man was taken by the Corps to a vault at the Batelle Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Washington, where it remains today.

The Corps' actions were based on their interpretation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which defines "Native American" as "of, or relating to, a tribe, people or culture that is indigenous to the United States." According to Alan L. Schneider, counsel for the scientists objecting to the Corps' actions,

> Congress's use of the present tense would seem to imply that it did not intend for human remains and other 'cultural items' to be subject to the act unless there is a demonstrated relationship to present-day Native Americans. What kind of relationship this requires and how it is to be established are issues that have yet to be resolved...In the Kennewick Man case, there is no evidence at this point to support the Army Corps' decision. (*Anthropology Newsletter*, February 1997:18).

In recent years, Native Americans actively have sought to halt archaeological excavations on their lands. Some believe that Native Peoples originated in this land and that their ancestors did not cross the Bering Strait; therefore, any skeletons found must be directly related to indigenous Native Peoples and must be returned. Many consider human remains sacred and should not be the object of study.

On the other side of the controversy stand the scientists, whose new scientific techniques such as DNA analysis and CAT scans, along with meticulous methods of recording data, have made it possible to obtain information on skeletal remains

not available before. Such studies do not cause significant harm to the remains. Scientists are interested in comparing the remains of Kennewick Man with those of similar age found in Nevada, Texas, Colorado, and Minnesota.

Scientists have long been involved in studies of skeletal materials to obtain information about nutrition, disease, lifestyles, health, and cause of death of early populations in North America. The human skeleton provides a detailed record of the life of an individual and thus remains an extremely important source of information about past lifeways.

The Court Case

Once the Corps decided to turn the remains over to the tribal coalition, eight prominent anthropologists, including two Smithsonian scientists acting in their capacity as private citizens, sought a legal restraining order from the U.S. Courts to halt the Corps' transfer of the Kennewick remains to the Umatilla. The scientists stated that the skeleton, one of the oldest and most complete ever found, should be made available for scientific study. Only a few well-preserved skeletons more than 8,000 years old have ever been discovered, and hence Kennewick is of interest to scientists worldwide.

The court's decision came this past July, one year after the skeleton was discovered. The Judge sent the case back to the Corps of Engineers, telling the Corps to reconsider its earlier decision to turn the skeleton over to the Umatilla without further study. The Court criticized the Corps' handling of the case, calling it "arbitrary" and "capricious." Among other things, the Court stated that the Corps:

> acted before it had all of the evidence or fully appreciated the scope of the problem. The agency did not fully consider or resolve certain difficult legal questions. The agency assumed facts that proved to be erroneous. The agency failed to articulate a satisfactory explanation for its action. By the agency's own admission, any decision in this matter was premature and ought to be set aside and the matter remanded to the agency for further consideration (Civil No. 96-1481-JE Court's Opinion p. 31).

The Judge went on to explain that the Corps must take a fresh look at all the legal issues and fully reopen the matter. Meanwhile, the government was to retain custody of the Kennewick remains, and not dispose of them before full resolution of the issues had been made. The Corps must reconsider the plaintiffs' request for permission to study the remains, protect them for their value for scientific study, and consider, among others, the following issues:

a) Whether the remains are subject to NAGPRA;
b) What is meant by terms such as "Native American" and "indigenous" in the context of NAGPRA and the facts of this case;
c) Whether NAGPRA applies to remains from a population that is not directly related to modern Native Americans;
d) The level of certainty required to establish biological or cultural affiliation;
e) Whether there is evidence of a link, biologically or culturally, between the remains and a modern Native American tribe; and
f) Whether scientific study and repatriation of the remains are mutually exclusive or if both objectives can be accommodated.

Scientific Studies

Scientists believe that science should have a role in the determination of what happens to the Kennewick remains. Within the context of repatriation, scientists examine bones in museum collections to establish correct cultural affiliation and ensure that Native Americans receive the bones of their ancestors through repatriation transfers of museum collections. Sophisticated techniques such as craniofacial analysis involving a system of complex measurements and angles help identify the specific ethnic and tribal group to which the materials belong. For example, distinct differences among Native American populations enable scientists to distinguish a Paiute from a Cheyenne. Other physical anthropology studies have revealed

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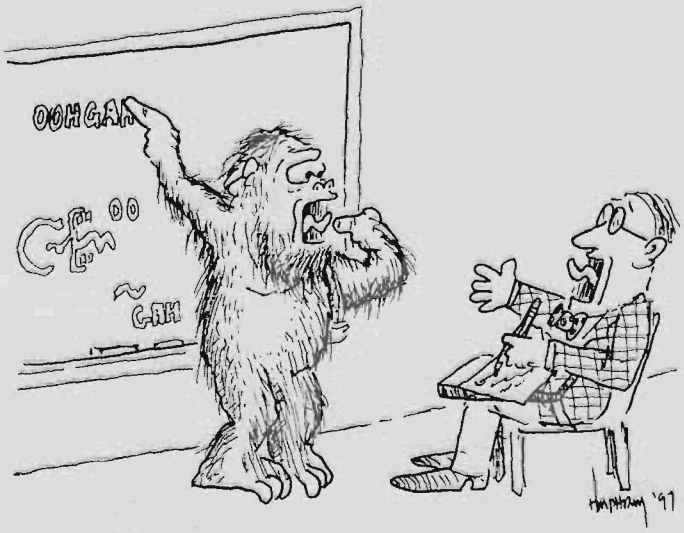
THINK TANK

by Benjamin B. Beck

[Editor's Note: Although most *AnthroNotes* readers will never go into the field like Robert Sussman to study primates in the wild, a new exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park invites visitors to better understand primates through cognitive research, including research on captive animals. In the following comments, Benjamin Beck, Associate Director for Biological Programs and one of Think Tank's chief developers, shares with our readers the concepts and goals of this extraordinary new exhibition.]

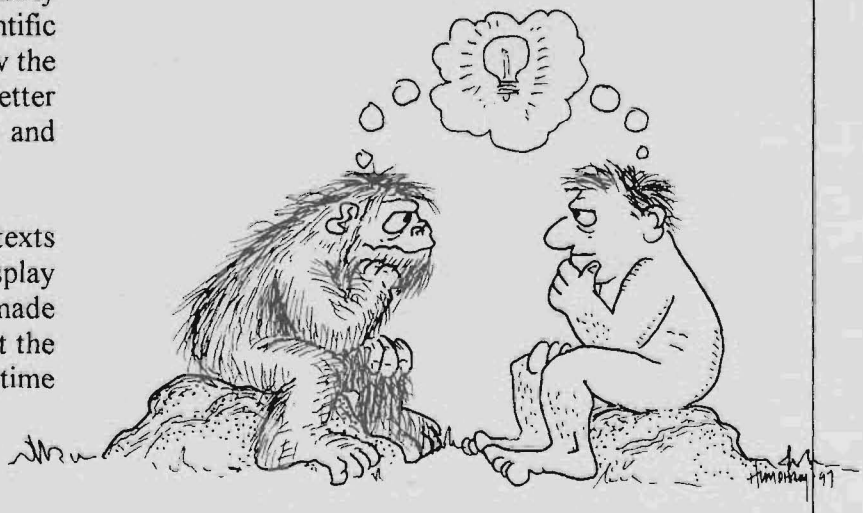
Think Tank is the first-ever zoo or museum exhibit about animal thinking, or animal cognition, a vital scientific subject of great interest both to scientists and the general public. In Think Tank we actually try to do sound, interesting, original scientific research--right in front of the public. We draw the public into a dialogue that helps them better understand a scientific approach to the topic, and lets them think critically about it.

If you visit Think Tank, you will see written texts with supporting photographs and animals on display that demonstrate the various points being made about animal, including human, cognition. But the linch-pin of the Think Tank Program is real-time research-on-exhibit.



The big challenge is the subject matter, since thinking is invisible. We can't measure it, weigh it, or time it directly, depriving us of some of our best scientific tools. So, we turn to the study of behavior by using experimentally controlled situations, and then make inferences about the animals' thinking. And, most importantly, we have real scientists, supported on Think Tank research fellowships, conducting research on the animals in the exhibition. We make clear to our visiting scientists that they not only have to conduct research, but conduct it on exhibit and interpret it for the public. And our visitors, particularly teachers and students from area high schools and colleges, have responded enthusiastically.

One of Think Tank's popular exhibits is the "O-Line" for the orang utans, who pass outside along



the "high wire" from one building to the other, morning and evening. This pioneering feature of the exhibit engages the visitor in a very empathetic way, as the visitors watch the graceful orang utans move across the O-Line from one part of the exhibition to the other.

The biggest problem we had to confront is that cognition, being invisible, complicates the exhibit. To understand cognition we must rely on inferences from behavior: hence our research on display, on self-recognition, spatial learning, object constancy, the discovery and spread of social traditions, and tool use among monkeys and orang utans. At any one time we and our visitors might watch those

primates cooperate to get a pan of choice food or observe an orang utan learning abstract symbols ("words") that represent objects and then try to make inferences about thinking from the observed behaviors.

The exhibition combines traditional panel displays and text, animal observation, and real-time scientific research with scientists interacting with the public. "Think Tank" puts "thinking" on the front burner, seen in the animals' behavior, the scientists' research, or the visitors' engagement in understanding the complex and fascinating realm created by the Think Tank environment.

Benjamin Beck is Associate Director for Biological Programs at the National Zoological Park

ANTHROPOLOGY CAN PROMOTE BETTER RACE RELATIONS

by Robert Sussman

President Bill Clinton should consider expanding the new advisory board on race relations to include an anthropologist.

Given the history of poor race relations in the United States, anthropologists, trained to bridge the gap between cultures and understand social processes, are especially well suited to play a major role in Clinton's plan to address current racial divisiveness.

Although some may view anthropologists as an esoteric group of social scientists digging up old bones or recording the behavior of chimpanzees, anthropologists with their international perspective on human behavior and society, from prehistory to the present, can provide rich information about human diversity and help combat problems related to misunderstandings over this diversity. Issues of interest to anthropologists are issues of the modern world from AIDS to homelessness to international economic interdependence.

As cross-cultural experts in human behavior and evolution, anthropologists can be non-judgmental when examining the issues at the root of the problem and provide a broader, cultural, human context for such questions as "What exactly is race?" "What are the causes of racism?" and "What are its consequences?"

Through ethnographic studies, anthropologists have found American notions of race are often derived from misunderstood and misused physical criteria (such as skin color, hair type, facial structure and body build), leading to conclusions that race is based on biological rather than social categories that carry with them presumed characteristics as well as social status.

For example, anthropologists have noted that Americans may accept that people brought up in Samoa have a different history, culture and world view than people in Australia, but they generally are much less aware of the equally dramatic cultural differences and history of isolation among racial groups in the United States.

As a case in point, black people brought up in the South may have a different subculture than white people from the same region. While Americans tend to assume that the differences between these groups are based on biological racial differences, in reality, the genetic differences between blacks and whites are quite small; about 85 percent of human genetic variation is explained by differences between individuals and only 15 percent by differences among "races."

Racism arises when those within differing ethnic groups develop hostilities toward and prejudices

about those outside their own group or subculture, often due to a lack of both understanding and tolerance. In the United States, racism is due, in part, to Americans marginalizing groups, condemning those groups for not buying into mainstream society, and, finally, stereotyping others of like ethnic groups as part of those marginalized groups.

Since biological anthropologists and geneticists can demonstrate conclusively that the problems of crime, drug abuse and poverty are not based on racial biology, we must turn to other explanations. In the case of the black urban poor, for example, behaviors considered "maladaptive" to mainstream society actually may be "adaptive" survival strategies, anthropologically speaking, given the hopeless situations some people face.

Anthropologists historically have been at the forefront of debunking theories about the biological basis of racial differences. As early as 1911, Franz Boas challenged the "eugenics" movement and the view that differences in race, ethnic group and social class were due to innate capacities. Boas' radical view at the time was that behavioral differences among ethnic groups were not genetically based, but caused by environmental factors and "culture" - derived from people's varying histories and experiences. Other leading anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and Ashley Montagu have been key figures in the debate over the essence of race.

Anthropology is itself at a crossroads and must again become central to the public debate on racism. As experts in comparing different societies and identifying the core cultural reasons behind certain behaviors, anthropologists can help us understand the need for education, for policies reversing socio-economic conditions and for a culture of tolerance in which we appreciate the richness of different subcultures.

Above all, anthropologists must lead the charge in recognizing that we are one species, and that no evolutionary evidence exists to demonstrate that one culture or ethnic group is supreme.

Robert Sussman has been named editor-in-chief of American Anthropologist, the journal of the American Anthropological Association. The first issue under Sussman's editorship, which will be published in September 1998 marking the journal's 100th anniversary, will focus on race and racism.

AAA WORKSHOPS FOR TEACHERS

In recent years the American Anthropological Association (AAA) has made efforts to reach out to the precollegiate educational community. This year *The Teaching of Anthropology: Problems, Issues, and Decisions* was published by Mayfield Publishing Company in association with the AAA. The AAA has also organized Saturday workshops for precollege teachers at their annual meetings.

At this year's annual meeting in Washington DC, November 19-23, the AAA collaborated with local teachers, curriculum specialists, and anthropologists to present the following workshops:

"Understanding Cultures in the Schools."
"Human Biodiversity."
"Intrigue of the Past: Scientific Methods Through Archaeology."
"Cultural Perspectives on Students with Special Needs."
"Tapping into Household Funds of Knowledge."
"Dialect Awareness."
"Educating African Americans: What Works?"

Next year's annual meeting will take place in Philadelphia, and local teachers will be invited to participate. To keep informed of AAA educational programs and publications, contact their web page at http://www.ameranthassn.org/ or Patsy Evans, education coordinator, whose email address is pevans@ ameranthassn.org.

LAO REFUGEE WOMEN TAKE CONTROL

by Ruth Krulfeld

How do refugee communities mobilize, organize, and negotiate power within their new dominant societies?

The answer is especially important in this time of widespread xenophobia; funding cuts; and legislation against legal and undocumented refugees, immigrants, migrant workers, and their children. Refugees lose power through forcible uprooting, interim resettlement, and eventual resettling in new societies. Under these circumstances, refugees come with limited abilities to cope and often end up in the lowest social and economic strata of society. When self-empowerment occurs, it has far-reaching consequences for self-esteem, self-determination, and access to status and resources.

This article focuses on refugee women and their self-empowerment through the formation of a new organization for women, The Lao-American Women's Association (LAWA). My research with the Lao community began in 1981. Understanding the construction of organizations for self-empowerment has implications not only for academic research but also for public policy, provision of service, and human rights.

LAWA

LAWA began as an idea around 1993; in 1995 the association was granted non-profit status. LAWA is crucial to self-protection as well as self-actualization. Lao women, although influential within the home, are disadvantaged in the public sphere, where any power they may have is usually covert. One of the officers of the women's organization explained that women had to raise men's self-esteem by publicly showing deference to them, and even performing public rituals of self-deprecation relative to men. Another officer listed numerous cases of deferential treatment of men here and in Laos, such as the monthly offerings of flowers and incense women traditionally made in Laos in supplication--or, as she put it, "worship,"--to their husbands. In Laos, the husband attended PTA meetings, always representing the family outside the home. According to gender cosmology in Lao Buddhism, women must be reborn as men in order to become monks, thus maximizing their chances to attain both great social status and enlightenment.

In mobilizing women to form LAWA after resettlement, the women challenged these gender restrictions--and confronted opposition. Since the planners and workers in this new organization all hold at least one--and sometimes two or more--full-time jobs, have families and great social demands on their time, their involvement in this new organization represents both daring and commitment. Such involvement is even more significant because challenging traditional status is very uncomfortable in a society in which non-confrontation is so highly valued--more so for women.

Focus of Research

My research focused on several questions: 1) Why did these Lao women decide to organize and continue in the face of strong opposition; 2) What was the opposition and why did it occur; 3) Which influences promoted this organization; 4) Were there any precedents for it; 5) Why did it occur when it did; 6) What problems arose both internally and externally; and 7) What was the impact of the organization on both women who joined and the Lao community?

New organizations such as LAWA are likely to begin only after refugees have acquired such necessities as learning a new language, job skills, housing, and financial security, permitting them to concentrate on less immediately demanding matters. LAWA was started 16 to 20 years after initial resettlement by most Lao refugees.

Addressing Community Problems

Who begins such an organization and why? The organizers of LAWA were interested in attaining public prestige and self-empowerment and alleviating certain community problems. Prior to LAWA, the organizations in this enclave refugee

society were male-run--most of them highly politicized and in conflict. There had been twelve opposed political parties in this relatively small population, all with the agenda of reclaiming the Lao government and each with a different idea of what to do with it when they got it back. Mobilization for these men's political organizations began early on. They were recently formed into one large association, with a board and membership comprised of men, under which all Lao organizations were to be subsumed. Even the PTA was male-run. The political conflicts between such organizations and the battles for personal power between men limited most other activity for community causes, except that already in-place, such as traditional cooperation to organize celebrations and rituals.

The women felt that the community was now established enough that major problems should be addressed. The existing male-run Lao organizations were doing no more than talking about problems. The women felt motivated to take action on such issues as isolation and alienation among the Lao elderly, the threat of loss of Lao culture, the generation gap between children who spoke only English and numerous Lao parents and grandparents who either spoke no English or barely understood it and who did not understand the culture in which their children were growing up. Health issues were also a concern, as was domestic abuse, alcoholism, gangs, and children in prison. As social services and outside funding have become increasingly restricted, the women felt the community had to break the pattern of dependency that had become established for many Lao. So, community concerns and lack of action by male-run organizations provided the initial impetus for Lao women to mobilize.

Women Take Action

The LAWA board members turned their attention to the following:

1) Running the Lao language and culture school for the purposes of preserving Lao culture, reducing inter-generational conflict, giving Lao children a sense of ethnic identity and self-esteem, and reducing involvement of youth in gangs and other dysfunctional behavior.

2) Publishing and circulating a newsletter, with information on immigration, citizenship, health, resources for the elderly, schools, SAT exams, advanced placement courses, and women's conferences. Also included was recognition of students who make honors, stay in school and graduate; women who obtain degrees; and Lao who achieve honors in the wider society.

3) As far as time and resources permit, visiting and cooking for the elderly, the ill, and providing transportation to doctors.

4) At their general meeting in November 1996, the women planned to enlarge their mandate to include organizing monthly meals and meetings for Lao elderly and arranging transportation for them. Because of increasing problems for aliens obtaining welfare and health benefits, the women decided to provide classes to prepare people for the citizenship exam. They will also coordinate transportation to class and to the Immigrant and Naturalization Services (INS) for those who need it. They voted to set up a telephone hotline to remind women in the community to do monthly breast examinations and have annual pap smears. They also decided to teach Lao cooking, taking turns in holding classes in members' homes.

Running the Lao language and culture school constitutes a major drain on time and resources, especially since the five most highly committed women, who now constitute the LAWA board, do

all the coordinating and most of the work, with only sporadic help from the other 32 women in the association.

Precedents

Since the women maintain contact with family and friends in Laos, influences from that country and the Laotian diaspora also help explain why these women mobilized for power. The tradition of women in social action, although restricted in the public sphere, was not altogether lacking in Laos before refugee resettlement. Although a few women had the combination of boldness, education, and elite status to have their ideas heard and accepted, such gender power was highly restricted. A women's organization in Laos, begun as an auxiliary in the 1930s, cooked for Lao soldiers during the war for Lao independence from France. This organization only gained independent status and government recognition as the Women's Union after the communist revolution. Its members now work in what Lao women here termed "the quiet way that Lao women have" to campaign against polygyny in Laos. They also have submitted a grant proposal to the International Voluntary Service for training volunteers to educate the public in Laos about AIDS. One of the leaders of the women's organization here, who is a board member of IVS, translated their proposal.

American and world concern over women's status and access to public power probably has had an even greater affect on these refugee women. One recently received her B.A. with a certificate in women's studies from an American university. Although initially she was reluctant to become involved with LAWA, because of time pressures of study and family, she eventually decided she wanted to contribute to her community and took a position of leadership in the organization. She produces LAWA's newsletter, which she sends not only to the Lao community but to Lao all over the world.

Two older elite women have exercised some degree of overt power and continue to work individually for community action. However, LAWA was established and is led by women without such elite connections. Their lack of high social status in the enclave community slowed the progress of the community in accepting the new organization, and did little to protect them from their opposition's criticisms and accusations. However, the board members believe that the older elite feminists have too little contact with the current situation here to act as leaders of this new refugee organization.

Obstacles

Obstacles have come from within the community. On numerous occasions hate mail was sent to the whole Lao community accusing the board members of the women's association of being communists and working for the embassy. This attack was carefully constructed to turn a refugee community that had suffered greatly at the hands of communists against the organization and its organizers, despite the lack of basis for these accusations. These letters, which named names and sometimes included crude caricatures, were always sent out to the Lao community at the time the women's organization publicized major initiatives. For example, the women mailed flyers to the community on the

registration dates for the Lao school, or on a fund-raising party they hosted, or when they sent invitations to the women of the community to attend the first general meeting since their initial mobilization. In one hate mailing, the LAWA insignia with its drawing of a traditionally clad Lao woman encircled by the name of the organization was replaced with the communist symbol. Another mailing calling them "communist bitches" was circulated before the second registration period at the school.

In my interviews with Lao men, I was told that these women were working against the established organizations, and that they ought to work within organizations that were already in place instead of duplicating effort. Some men said that they had heard awful things about these women and their organization. Two men told me that LAWA was really a pawn of the embassy and that the board members were communist, explaining how awful that is for people who suffered so much at the hands of the communists. The women told me that the men "want us to work for them silently in the background and they'll take credit for everything we do, just as they usually do. We refused to be part of that, although we did it by saying we would be glad to help them in any way possible." Two leaders of the women's organization felt that the officials of the male-run Lao organization were continually trying to co-opt them, since both women--one of whom is likely to be voted the next president of the woman's organization--were offered an official position in the male-run organization. Both refused, feeling that it was done to sabotage LAWA. Many of the men forbade their wives to go to LAWA meetings or join LAWA. Given the Lao value on avoidance of confrontation, the tactics employed by these men have been somewhat effective in keeping some Lao away from the women's organization and its projects.

The Lao school initially became divided with LAWA in charge of one day of classes and a male-run organization taking over the second day. Conflicts between them caused one leader to resign and declare that he was voting to give the whole school over to the women to run, so that the other man would have to work under female jurisdiction. Basically, the women already controlled the school. The power play his action involved was obvious to the women who continue to sponsor the school. It is interesting to note that when the male leader resigned, he took with him the many children of his friends and relatives who had previously been enrolled. His resignation coincided with a community-wide rumor that the entire school had closed. This precipitated a crisis of declining enrollment, which the women creatively handled through a new way of attracting children to the school. Enrollment rose from a low of 5 students in 1996 to 26 by the end of the last academic year.

Perserverence and Results

Despite problems such as some interpersonal conflict among members, discouragement at lack of more immediate community-wide acceptance and appreciation for their efforts, the scarcity of funding and other resources, attempts to co-opt them, and the debasing criticism they have suffered, the women's commitment has continued. They keep trying to widen their mandate to alleviate other serious problems that plague the Lao community. The women gave several reasons for persevering in the face of great opposition. One important factor was that Lao women are accustomed to working together cooperatively with little public or individual recognition for their efforts. Typically, this is done in traditional areas such as cooking for the monks, ceremonies, and social events for which women go about getting things done and men take public and official credit.

Much of the women's dedication results from their success in accomplishing results no other organization or group in the community has achieved. This was helped by their ability to work together despite conflicts that have arisen. Their empowerment is evident in the strength of their commitment, and their roles are now public. Their newsletter circulates throughout the Laotian diaspora with its news of the activities of these women. The Lao school continues despite its ups and downs and plans are being made to address additional community problems. Some of the women have represented their community and organization at women 's conferences and meetings

in the wider society and even internationally. They are proud of their achievements and speak with pride of their own empowerment.

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(*"Human Nature" continued from page 6*)

and Reynolds 1965; Suguyama 1972. Goodall 1968).

Then, between 1974 and 1977, five adult males from one subgroup were attacked and disappeared from the area, presumably dead. Why after 24 years did the patterns of aggression change? Was it because the stronger group saw the weakness of the other and decided to improve their genetic fitness. But surely there were stronger and weaker animals and subgroups before this time. Perhaps we can look to Goodall's own perturbations for an answer. In 1965, Goodall began to provide "restrictive human-controlled feeding." A few years later she realized that

> the constant feeding was having a marked effect on the behavior of the chimps. They were beginning to move about in large groups more often than they had ever done in the old days. Worst of all, the adult males were becoming increasingly aggressive. When we first offered the chimps bananas the males seldom fought over their food;....now...there was a great deal more fighting than ever before....(Goodall 1971:143).

The possibility that human interference was a main cause of the unusual behavior of the Gombe chimps was the subject of an excellent, but generally ignored book by Margaret Power (1991). Wrangham and Peterson (1996:19) footnote this book, but as with many other controversies, they essentially ignore its findings, stating that yes, chimpanzee violence might have been unnatural behavior if it weren't for the evidence of similar behavior occurring since 1977 and "elsewhere in Africa" (1996:19).

Further Evidence

What is this evidence from elsewhere in Africa? Wrangham and Peterson provide only four brief examples, none of which is very convincing:

(1) Between 1979-1982, the Gombe group extended its range to the south and conflict with a southern group, Kalande, was suspected. In 1982, a "raiding" party of males reached Goodall's camp. The authors state: "Some of these raids may have been lethal" (1996:19). However, Goodall describes this "raid" as follows: One female "was chased by a Kalande male and mildly attacked....Her four-year-old son...encountered a second male--but was only sniffed" (1986:516). Although Wrangham and Peterson imply that these encounters were similar to those between 1974-77, no violence was actually witnessed. The authors also refer to the discovery of the dead body of Humphrey; what they do not mention is Humphrey's age of 35 and that wild chimps rarely live past 33 years!

(2) From 1970 to 1982, six adult males from one community in the Japanese study site of Mahale disappeared, one by one over this 12 year period. None of the animals were observed being attacked or killed, and one was sighted later roaming as a solitary male (Nishida et al., 1985:287-289).

(3) In another site in West Africa, Wrangham and Peterson report that Boesch and Boesch believe "that violent aggression among the chimpanzees is as important as it is in Gombe" (1986:20). However, in the paper referred to, the Boesch's simply state that encounters by neighboring chimpanzee communities are more common in their site than in Gombe (one per month vs. 1 every 4 months). There is no mention of violence during these encounters.

(4) At a site that Wrangham began studying in 1984, an adult male was found dead in 1991. Wrangham states: "In the second week of August, Ruizoni was killed. No human saw the big fight" (Wrangham & Peterson 1996:20). Wrangham gives us no indication of what has occurred at this site over the last 6 years.

In fact, this is the total amount of evidence of warfare and male-male killing among chimpanzees after 37 years of research!! The data for infanticide and rape among chimpanzees is even less impressive. In fact, data are so sparse for these behaviors among chimps that Wrangham and

Peterson are forced to use examples from the other great apes, gorillas and orangutans. However, just as for killing among chimpanzees, both the evidence and the interpretations are suspect and controversial.

Can We escape Our Genes?

What if Wrangham and Peterson are correct and we and our chimp cousins are inherently sinners? Are we doomed to be violent forever because this pattern is fixed within our genetic code?

After 5 million years of human evolution and 120,000 or so years of *Homo sapiens* existence, is there a way to rid ourselves of our inborn evils?

> What does it do for us, then, to know the behavior of our closest relatives? Chimpanzees and bonobos are an extraordinary pair. One, I suggest shows us some of the worst aspects of our past and our present; the other shows an escape from it....Denial of our demons won't make them go away. But even if we're driven to accepting the evidence of a grisly past, we're not forced into thinking it condemns us to an unchanged future (Wrangham 1997:110).

In other words, we can learn how to behave by watching bonobos. But, if we can change our inherited behavior so simply, why haven't we been able to do this before *Demonic Males* enlightened us? Surely, there are variations in the amounts of violence in different human cultures and individuals. If we have the capacity and plasticity to change by learning from example, then our behavior is determined by socialization practices and by our cultural histories and not by our nature! This is true whether the examples come from benevolent bonobos or conscientious objectors.

Conclusion

The theory presented by Wrangham and Peterson, although it also includes chimpanzees as our murdering cousins, is very similar to "man the hunter" theories proposed in the past. It also does not differ greatly from early European and Christian beliefs about human ethics and morality. We are forced to ask:

Are these theories generated by good scientific fact, or are they just "good to think" because they reflect, reinforce, and reiterate our traditional cultural beliefs, our morality and our ethics? Is the theory generated by the data, or are the data manipulated to fit preconceived notions of human morality and ethics?

Since the data in support of these theories have been weak, and yet the stories created have been extremely similar, I am forced to believe that "Man the Hunter" is a myth, that humans are not necessarily prone to violence and aggression, but that this belief will continue to reappear in future writings on human nature. Meanwhile, primatologists must continue their field research, marshaling the actual evidence needed to answer many of the questions raised in Wrangham and Peterson's volume.

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("Kennewick" continued from page 8)

that some groups have displaced others in distinct geographic regions, rather than one culture evolving directly into the other.

Establishing clear cultural affiliation of such an early individual to any present-day Native American group is likely impossible. Scientific study of Kennewick Man and other early remains, however, can help answer questions not only about the life and health of early inhabitants of North America, but also the range of physical types or human variation of these early people. Investigating these areas may help solve other mysteries, such as the puzzle of the origin of the Ainu people of Hokkaido, Japan, who are considered perhaps the oldest population of that region with features resembling those of caucasoids--more body hair, less facial flatness.

For many, "Kennewick Man," along with other very ancient remains, holds national and international significance, and therefore represents an inheritance for the entire human family.

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