

The Evolutionary Psychology of Violence

I. Lines of Evidence that Humans Have “Evolved Mechanisms for Discretionary Violence” (i.e., that Violence is an Evolved Predisposition or Capacity)

A. Primatological evidence

1. chimp warfare
2. “chimpicide” and cannibalism

B. Morphological evidence: *Homo sapiens* sexual dimorphism and the legacy of our polygynous past

- Factoid: 84% of human cultures accommodate polygyny—this is consistent with models suggesting that the original human mating system was polygynous.
- Polygyny implies strong male intra-sexual competition.

C. Ethnographic data (foraging and tribal people)

1. male deaths from warfare 25% (4-6 times the modern rate)
2. male deaths from murder can reach 30% (4 times the USA rate)

D. Archaeological evidence

1. Cannibalism at Atapuerca (800,000 years ago)
2. European Cave Art
3. Settlements: walls, fortifications
4. Skeletal studies (confirm 25% male death in warfare?)

E. Modern Cross-Cultural evidence

1. Murder: all cultures have it (Buss)
 - a. 87% of killers are men; 75% of victims are men—mostly unmarried.
 - b. 91% of men and 84% of women fantasize at least once about committing murder ($n=5$ cultures).
2. frequency of child murder by an American stepparent is 60 times higher than murder by a biological parent; abuse is 8 times higher (Daly and Wilson)
3. widespread “cultures of honor” that trade in violence (e.g., Mafia).
4. frequency of soccer (“the world’s game”) hooliganism and violence??

F. Life-Historical evidence: Most male killers are unmarried 15-30 year olds; Men die an average of 7 years earlier than women.

G. Linguistic evidence

1. many Western encounters and games described aggressively (e.g., American football)
2. Tribal “noun classifiers” (e.g., Wari): outsiders viewed as “edible”

H. Experimental evidence, e.g., Zimbardo at Stanford: the “**Moral Circle**” can contract very easily.

I. Anecdotal evidence: *anyone* can become violent; e.g., E.O. Wilson protesters who physically assaulted him for claiming that violence is natural!

II. Questions for a Violent World?

- A. What was the adaptive value of group and interpersonal violence in the EEA?
- B. What can be done to work around our evolved predispositions for violence?