

ASEM 2420
THE CULTURED APE
Spring 2016

Evolutionary Psychology of Politics, Violence, and Political Violence

I. Questions for an Election Year

A. What does Avi Tuschman find “astonishing”, “amazing”, and “stunning” about research into the biology of political orientation?

B. Is there anything in Tuschman’s account that helps us better *understand* the political polarization or “gridlock” that, by almost universal consensus, is currently paralyzing the United States government? Or, better understand the *mob behavior* that we’ve seen erupting at both Republican and Democratic primary events? Is anything suggested in Tuschman and Pinker’s accounts that can help us *deal* with these situations?

C. Were the American Founding Fathers *Tragic* or *Utopian* Visionaries, and how important is it that we know?

D. *Other Questions?*

II. Lines of Evidence that Humans Have “Evolved Mechanisms for *Discretionary* Violence” (i.e., that Violence is an Evolved Predisposition and can be *Adaptive* in the right circumstances)

A. **Primatological** evidence

1. chimp gang warfare
2. “chimpicide” and cannibalism

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

C. **Ethnographic** evidence from “Noble Savage” societies (foraging and tribal people)

1. male deaths from warfare around 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) and multiple more recent examples.
2. ancient cemetery studies (often confirm ethnographic findings of a high percentage of male deaths 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. Widespread “Cultures of Honor” that trade in violence.
3. Cultures of sport: Violence around the “World’s Game” (Soccer)

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 described aggressively: “fight crime”; “war on drugs”, election “campaigns” and “campaign war chests”, too many sports catchphrases to mention...

2. Tribal “noun classifiers” (e.g., Wari)

H. **Experimental** evidence, e.g., Philip Zimbardo and “The Stanford Prison Experiment”: The **Moral Circle** can contract very easily.

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

III. Questions for a Violent World

A. What’s the “**Central Dogma**” of violence studies, for Pinker?

B. What do Buss, Barash, and Pinker conclude about the causes of human violence, and how we should analyze it? Are they on the same page?

C. Who gives us good ideas for dealing with violence, and what are they?

D. How can we understand *political violence*; i.e. terrorism and suicide terrorism? Is the concept of “**Culture of Honor**” usefully applied to this phenomenon?

E. **Other Questions?**