

Mizzou Weekly

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MU study suggests evolutionary roots of violence among Amazon tribes



URGE TO FIGHT Robert Walker, assistant professor of anthropology, holds two arrow points made by the Aches, an Amazon tribe. Walker says that the social structure of modern societies is based on evolutionary drives. Photo by Rob Hill

EVOLUTION AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Professor examines anthropological reports of warfare in 44 tribes

Twenty-first century societies in developed countries seem pretty rational and sophisticated. But the cog deep in the societal machine appears to have primordial roots.

Robert S. Walker, an anthropology assistant professor, has studied Amazonian tribal societies for 13 years. Among his discoveries is an in-group/out-group mentality that seems to harken back to social structures among higher primates.

But modern societies are equally tethered to their evolutionary past. "It pops up in all facets of life," Walker said, offering examples of cliques, sports, politics, gangs and racism.

The Other

In August, Walker co-published a paper in the journal *Evolution and Human Behavior* on causes of death among people in South America's Amazon tribes, such as the Yanomamo, Ayoreo, Ache, Hiwi and Kayapo. He examined anthropological studies undertaken between 1900 and 1970 on causes of death within tribes before contact with modern civilizations. The sample involved 44 lowland South American societies.

He discovered that on average 30 percent of deaths were due not to health issues and accidents but violence. Seventy percent of violent deaths were male. Overall, 238 violent events (duels, homicides, raids, battles, revenge killings) accounted for 1,145 deaths.

In-group warfare is between two villages with a shared culture, including language. Out-group warfare is between different cultures, which can mean different language, religion and dress.

Walker found that in-group raids were more frequent but had fewer casualties than out-group raids. Out-group conflict appeared to ratchet up the violence, he said, in that revenge raids involved higher body counts than the original attack. This implies that societies with different cultural signposts are more likely to engage in high-stakes warfare.

"It's really going to war against 'The Other,'" Walker said.

But The Other can also be within the tribe, such as between two Yanomamo villages. The distance between villages is enough to break down cooperation.

Scientists have found in-group/out-group behavior among chimpanzees, who share a recent common ancestor with *Homo sapiens*. Neighboring chimpanzee groups often compete with each other for territory, female access and food.

In the 1960s, Jane Goodall observed in Tanzania's Gombe Stream National Park a chimpanzee group that split for seemingly arbitrary reasons, followed by violence between them. It appeared that the split was enough to unleash bloody conflict.

"The applicability of the chimpanzee model appears to fit Amazonian warfare up to a point in that violence is often ongoing between groups, mostly low cost for attackers during any particular event, and includes some benefits in terms of access to captured females [for reproductive purposes] and goods and potentially to more territory," wrote Walker and Drew Bailey, a psychology postdoc at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Motivation for tribal conflict, however, can differ from the motivation for chimp conflict in that the former can also involve revenge, Walker said. What's more, tribes engage in guile to slay enemies by befriending another tribe, then, with guard lowered, striking violently, he said.

Why were Amazonian tribes so warlike prior to outside contact? Walker said that the tribes generally didn't trade with one another because most of their goods were perishables, so cooperation was limited. Another factor is lack of overarching government.

When the Portuguese first made contact with Amazonian tribes in the 1500s, they pillaged and spread European diseases. But they also introduced a rudimentary government and the Catholic faith that offered alternatives to violence, Walker said.

"After European contact, the dynamics of Amazonian tribal life changed dramatically," he said. "Although the spread of Christianity and imposition of national legal structures resulted in great loss of cultural identity, they also reduced deadly raids." In recently contacted tribes, a tribal government ideally resolves differences without violence.

Evolutionary drives toward conflict are not limited to hunter-gatherer tribes such as those in the Amazon, Walker said. Primal drives are the platform on which modern, sophisticated societies are built.

In American politics, and most recently in the general election, Democrats and Republicans seem reflexively to take polar views — perhaps a highbrow channeling of evolutionary aggression toward the out-group. "It's almost comical if you take a third-person perspective," Walker said of political jousting. "You can see the inconsistencies."

Racism is probably the most obvious example of the predilection for division due to geographical distance, appearance or culture, Walker said.

Modern-day sports appear to be a positive way to vent the primal urge to battle and take sides, he said.

David Livingstone Smith, keynote speaker at the Mizzou Diversity Summit Oct. 29–30, wrote in his book *The Most Dangerous Animal* (St. Martin's Press, 2007) that human societies have such a propensity for war that they will create reasons to engage in it.

Beyond Conflict

Government rule, trade and culture can decrease violence and lay the groundwork for tolerance.

The first step is to admit that the in-group/out-group mentality is an evolutionary dead-end, Walker said. The Civil Rights movement of the early 1960s is an example of overcoming the tendency to demonize those who look different from the majority

ethnicity.

“We are all one country now, deal with it,” Walker said. “Move past the long evolutionary history of conflict.”

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Award established for MU faculty involved in Campus Writing Program

WIN HORNER AWARD

Professor emeritus pioneered creation of Writing Intensive courses

Officials announced on Nov. 1 the establishment of the Win Horner Award for Innovative Writing Intensive Teaching, which recognizes MU faculty who teach a Writing Intensive (WI) course.

“Win was such a pioneer for writing on this campus,” Amy Lannin, director of the Campus Writing Program, said at the Conley House, where task force members who created the program at MU were honored.

“This award is recognition of faculty who demonstrate the same spirit of pioneering in their teaching of Writing Intensive courses,” she said.

Horner, an MU professor emeritus of English who led the Writing Program task force in the early 1980s, does not write much anymore. But her passion for the craft remains.

“I have always loved to write,” she said, before clarifying. “Actually, I like to have written,” she said. “Writing is work.”

In the early 1980s, Horner headed the task force assigned to develop a writing intensive program at MU. She was inspired to do this after learning about student writing programs at other universities.

Starting the writing program wasn’t easy. Horner and the task force had to convince faculty that writing was an important part of their teaching and their students’ learning.

“We had to do some educating and brain changing,” Horner said.

A WI undergraduate course requires at least 5,000 words of writing by each enrolled student. The writing helps students better understand the course topics and hone their writing skills. More than 170 WI courses are offered each semester at MU. Undergraduates are required to take two WI courses.

Since 1987, every undergraduate degree granted by MU has included the WI requirement.

“I am just overcome,” Horner said of the eponymous award. “Seeing where the Campus Writing Program is today is an honor in and of itself.”

The first recipient of the Win Horner Award will be announced at the Creative Writing Program Awards Ceremony next April and receive \$1,000.

Award nominations will be accepted starting in January. To qualify, nominees must have a

WI course approved during the 2012–13 academic year, or have a new approach for an existing WI course.

To nominate a faculty member, email Lannin at lannina@missouri.edu, or visit cwp.missouri.edu (<http://cwp.missouri.edu>).

— *Josh Murray*

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Lecturer at diversity summit discusses why we dehumanize people

MIZZOU DIVERSITY SUMMIT

Speaker draws parallels between war and racism

David Livingstone Smith is a philosopher with a difference.

He's not afraid to cross into other disciplines. His books are a synthesis of Western philosophy, psychology, sociology, Darwinian biology and history. His ambition is to lessen hate and racism in the world through knowledge.

On Oct. 29, Smith gave the keynote lecture for the Mizzou Diversity Summit in Memorial Union's Stotler Lounge. The bi-annual summit opens a dialogue among students, staff and faculty about racism and sexual diversity. Groups form to plan strategies to create a more inclusive campus environment.

Because Smith is one of the few scholars exploring dehumanization, and because his presentation is visually and aurally graphic, he was a bold choice by the summit committee to be keynote lecturer.

His presentation, titled "Less Than Human: Civility in an Age of Discontent," delved into the whats, hows and whys of dehumanization.

Projected on three screens to an ethnically diverse audience of about 250 were disturbing illustrations, photographs and text.

A grainy photo of a hog-tied African-American. An illustration of Native American body parts being sold for dog food. A newspaper cartoon from recent years depicting Iran as a country of parasites.

Texts included The Valladolid Debate (1550), where the humanity of Native Americans was questioned; writings from Nazi Germany claiming Jews are subhuman; and political propaganda that compares soldiers of enemy countries to cockroaches and lice.

Smith, a philosophy professor at the University of New England and author most recently of *Less Than Human* (St. Martin's Press, 2011), said "dehumanization disables the inhibition" to kill or harm another human being. It can bring about the worst human rights atrocities, such as the Nanjing Massacre, Rwandan genocide and American slavery.

Smith's books delve into the evolutionary reasons for dehumanization. But in his lecture, he spoke only of humankind's tendency to make distinctions between the surface self and the true self, which sets the stage for dehumanization, he said. On the surface, an ethnic group may look human and deserve respect. But underneath they are less than human.

"Dehumanizing populations is not just thinking of them as donkeys or dogs," Smith said. "They are monsters."

Once the line is crossed, atrocities result. War typically requires the heuristic fiction that the enemy is subhuman to embolden soldiers to kill with impunity.

Ancient civilizations were aware of this, Smith said, and typically conducted elaborate purifying ceremonies for soldiers returning from war. It was a way for soldiers to throw down their psychological sword and shield and re-enter society.

But comparable postwar ceremonies have not been available for modern-day military veterans, said Smith, his voice rising. "All [America] offers returning veterans is cheap hype about heroism," he said.

During the Q&A, a student asked about the tendency to dehumanize the Stalins, Gaddafis and Mansons of history. Smith said that was a mistake. The Nazis, after all, weren't crazy, Smith said, citing psychological studies. "They were people you'd meet at a PTA meeting."

By labeling them monsters, we attempt to separate them from us, he said. But this blocks us from self-reflection.

"We dehumanize the dehumanizers," Smith said. "We cannot see our own reflection in the mirror."

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Nobel laureate's medical school lecture points to new areas for molecular research



Murad

INSTITUTE FOR CLINICAL AND TRANSLATIONAL SCIENCE

Mysteries of the “miracle molecule” revealed at talk

In 1867 Alfred Nobel, who instituted the Nobel Prizes, invented dynamite, which has nitroglycerin in it. At the time, it was known that nitroglycerin was not only good at blowing things up. It helped people's heart, though no one knew why.

This seemed counterintuitive: How could the organic nitrate compound that splinters mountainsides help the human cardiovascular system? Nobel, who had a weak heart, was so skeptical he refused nitroglycerin treatment from doctors.

Nobel laureate Ferid Murad told this story with irony at his Nov. 15 lecture in the School of Medicine's Bryant Auditorium. In 1998, Murad shared in winning the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine. He and his two colleagues — scientists Robert F. Furchgott and Louis J. Ignarro — had been honored with the highest award in science for discovering why nitroglycerin eased cardiovascular pain.

His lecture was part of the Chancellor's Distinguished Visitors Program, now in its second year. About 300 medical students and researchers in MU's Institute for Clinical and Translational Science attended.

In the 1980s, Murad was a tenured professor at Stanford University. Later he joined the University of Texas to create a department that integrated biology and pharmacology disciplines. He is currently director of the Institute of Molecular and Cellular Signaling at George Washington University.

Despite being a Nobel laureate, the 76-year-old scientist still teaches an undergraduate course, advises students and leads a laboratory at George Washington.

Murad and colleagues won the Nobel for discovering that nitroglycerin contains the molecule nitric oxide, which softens the lining of veins and arteries to facilitate blood flow. Better blood flow lessens the chance of cardiac arrest and other heart ailments. "Nitric oxide is the mechanism of relaxation," Murad said at the lecture.

The implication of the discovery was enormous. It resulted in better nitric oxide-based medicines for patients suffering from high blood pressure, hypertension and heart ailments, caused in part by patients having low nitric oxide levels in the body.

But Murad also expressed frustration over development of nitric oxide products by pharmaceutical companies. "They are more interested in selling product than getting answers in clinical trials," he said.

Nitric oxide, often called "the miracle molecule," has other health benefits, as well. The molecule heightens brain function, especially memory, and "regulates genes," Murad said.

"It is going to be an exciting next 10 to 20 years to see where the research goes," he said.

Rob Duncan, MU vice chancellor for research, said the nitric oxide research areas mentioned by Murad are of interest to MU's translational researchers. "There are many opportunities here," Duncan said.

Jamal Ibdah, director of the Institute for Clinical and Translational Science, was largely responsible for bringing the Nobel Laureate to Mizzou. "[Murad's] work has served as the catalyst for thousands of research papers and continues to influence how scientists worldwide study and develop drugs for a number of diseases," Ibdah said.

A scientist for 54 years, Murad gave no hint he's ready to quit.

"I hope I can keep going," he said at lecture's end. "It's been a fun field to see it all happen."

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Press freedom contributes to quality of life, study by doctoral student suggests

QUALITY OF LIFE

Happiness stems in part from informational freedom, according to student researcher

Freedom of the press is viewed by many as a cornerstone of democracy. But can it help improve people's lives and make them happy?

Researchers at the University of Missouri may have found that citizens of countries with press freedom tend to be much happier than citizens of countries without free presses. Edson Tandoc Jr., a doctoral student in the School of Journalism, says that press freedom directly predicts life satisfaction across the world.

"We already know that having reliable, objective news sources can benefit democracy," Tandoc said. "But in this study, we found that press freedom also benefits communities by helping improve the overall quality of life of citizens and, in the process, by also making them happier.

"Citizens of countries without a free press are forced to rely on the government for information," he continued, "when what people really want is diversity in content where they are free to get the information they want from the source of their choosing."

Tandoc and his co-author, Bruno Takahashi from Michigan State University, analyzed data from 161 countries using a 2010 Gallup Poll evaluating happiness levels around the world. They compared those happiness levels with Freedom House's press freedom index, which rates the level of each country's press freedom.

The researchers found that countries with higher levels of press freedom enjoyed better environmental quality and higher levels of human development, both of which also contribute to life satisfaction.

Tandoc credits this to the watchdog function of the press, which helps expose corruption in all levels of society.

"A country with a free press is expected to be more open about what is wrong in their societies and with their environments," Tandoc said. "A free press is likely to report about poor human conditions and environmental degradation, bringing problems to the attention of decision-makers. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that press freedom is positively related to both environmental quality and human development."

The study was published last summer in the *Social Indicators Research* journal.

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MU smoking ban coming next summer

Smoking will be prohibited on the University of Missouri campus starting July 1, 2013, officials announced

Nov. 15 in the Student Center. Smoking is already banned in campus buildings.

“MU officials are committed to making campus a healthy place to work, live and learn,” said Kevin Everett, associate professor in the School of Medicine. “Smoke-free policies reduce exposure to secondhand smoke, improve student and employee health, and reduce litter on campus.”

The Tobacco Policy Implementation Committee — made up of faculty, staff and students — is working on ways to enforce the ban. The website smokefree.missouri.edu (<http://smokefree.missouri.edu>) will be updated to reflect the new smoke-free campus policies.

MU will join about 500 other American colleges and universities that have either tobacco-free or smoke-free policies in place for the entire campus.

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You're invited to the Holiday Open House

Faculty, staff and students are invited to attend the Holiday Open House 3:30–5:30 p.m. Dec. 3 at the Residence on Francis Quadrangle, 501 S. Ninth St.

Attendees can meet Chancellor Brady J. Deaton and his wife, Anne, and Provost Brian Foster and his wife, Lerke.

Musicians from the MU School of Music will perform during the event.

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Hospital honored for stroke program

This month, University Hospital was named to the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's Honor Roll. The hospital was honored for its ability to help stroke patients recover.

To treat them, University Hospital uses a multidisciplinary team from several different departments, including neurology, neurosurgery, physical therapy, cardiology and emergency services.

"We are very proud of being named to this prestigious list for a second time," said Niranjana Singh, a neurologist and director of University Hospital's stroke program.

"It recognizes our commitment and achievement in providing a higher standard of care for our ischemic stroke patients," he said.

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