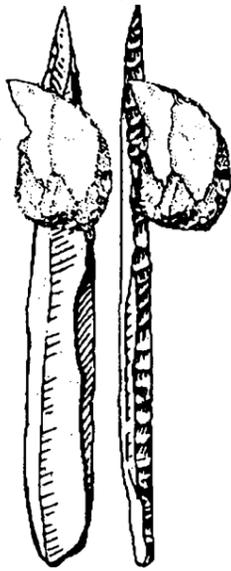


The Cutting Edge

The Cutting Edge features news relevant to anthropologists and anthropological practice. In addition to material provided by Special AN Correspondents, submissions from the



membership at large are welcomed for consideration. Please send short articles (500-700 words) to the Anthropology Newsletter Editor, 4350 N Fairfax Dr, Suite 640, Arlington, VA 22203; 703/528-1902 ext 3005; fax 703/528-3546 (double-spaced copy only); susi@aaa.mhs.compuServe.com.

The Next Frontier: Anthropology and Evolutionary Psychology

By Daniel M T Fessler (Hofstra)

Unlike many other disciplines, anthropology has traditionally encompassed both sides of the nature-nurture debate: Our field is premised on an understanding of the importance of culture in thought and action, yet we also recognize the contribution our primate heritage makes to who and what we are. Some anthropologists have been content to confine their questions to one side or the other of this divide. Such approaches, however, fail to take advantage of the unique potential our discipline holds for producing a sophisticated synthesis of views. Psychological anthropology stands out as one area where there is considerable promise for the integration of these two perspectives. Portraits of mind increasingly describe innate predispositions and capacities, potentials that, though hardwired, are only realized through the learning and manipulation of a specific culture. Similarly, recent accounts of culture emphasize the fit between this informational system and the strengths and weaknesses of human minds, while the differences between cultures are described as in part the result of differential emphasis on and elaboration of particular nascent proclivities.

A variety of approaches in psychology have contributed much toward our understanding of mind. Until recently, it has been difficult to combine psychological perspectives with anthropological findings concerning hominid evolution. If we are to take seriously the proposition—common in psychological anthropology—that culture and the human mind coevolved, our investigations of mind must adopt an evolutionary perspective. It is therefore exciting to note the emergence of a new type of psychology, one explicitly premised on an evolutionary foundation.

Beyond Sociobiology

Evolutionary psychology grew out of sociobiology and, like its predecessor, is based on the assumption that human behavior has been importantly shaped by natural and sexual selection. Evolutionary psychology differs from sociobiology in a number of fundamental ways. Whereas sociobiology is content to treat the mind as a black box, evolutionary psychology asserts that because behavior is a product of mind, to shape behavior selective forces must have also shaped the mind. Moreover, because selective forces are highly specific, the mind ought to consist of multiple independent systems, each a response to a particular selective force. Lastly, because foraging in small groups probably constituted the principal adaptation throughout most of hominid evolution, selection will have operated to maximize fitness within this social and physical context.

Human minds are thus seen as a package of proclivities and capacities, each of which served a specific function in our foraging past. In stark contrast to sociobiology, evolutionary psychology does not assume that present-day behavior is uniformly aimed at increasing inclusive fitness. Some sociobiologists, for example, compare the number of children fathered by high-ranking and low-ranking men, arguing that men seek high rank to increase reproductive success. In contrast, evolutionary psychologists argue that because high rank correlated positively with reproductive success in the ancestral environment, selection favored a strong sensitivity to and desire for prestige. It is this feature of the mind, rather than concern with reproductive success, that is largely responsible for the struggle for rank we see today. Furthermore, because many extant societies (and cultures) differ markedly from ancestral ones, high rank may be entirely decoupled from reproduction today, as in the case of power couples who forgo having children for the sake of their careers.

Collaborative Potential

Evolutionary psychology presents the anthropologist with new opportunities for productive collaboration. On the one hand, anthropologists can work to keep evolutionary psychologists honest. First, we can test evolutionary psychologists' claims of universality: is it true, for instance, that men in all societies exhibit a desire for prestige? Second, we can use anthropological portraits of hominid development to examine the plausibility of evolutionary psychologists' evolutionary scenarios: do findings from biological anthropology and paleoanthropology support or contest these reconstructions?

On the other hand, evolutionary psychology can supply anthropology with new avenues for exploring the relationship between culture and mind. We can ask, for example, how different cultures suppress, manage or enhance the desire for prestige.

Gender relations represent another area where collaboration may also be productive. Anthropological accounts of power relations between men and women can both test and be enriched by a consideration of evolutionary psychological theories concerning the causes of men's proprietary attitudes toward women, and the role that women's own actions play in perpetuating patriarchy.

Common Paradigmatic Thread

Although anthropology and evolutionary psychology can benefit one another, it is important to note that evolutionary psychology is not a discipline, but merely a paradigm. Current contributors to evolutionary psychology can be found in departments of history, biology, law, economics, psychology, literature, sociology, and even anthropology. As this diversity demonstrates, there are few topics of interest to anthropologists that cannot be addressed from an evolutionary psychological perspective. If there is one thing this paradigm generally lacks, however, it is a rich understanding of the importance of culture. Hence, whereas anthropology can benefit from

many insights developed in evolutionary psychology, the latter can also be enormously enhanced by anthropological contributions. The result may be a fuller understanding of the dynamic interplay of nature and nurture and, ultimately, what it means to be human.

[Readers interested in a general sampling of evolutionary psychology should consult *The Adapted Mind* (J Barkow, L Cosmides and J Tooby, eds, 1992) and David Buss's "Evolutionary Psychology: A New Paradigm for Psychological Science" (*Psychological Inquiry*, 1995, 6(1):1-30). Those interested in prestige and rank-striving should see *Homicide*, by Martin Daly and Margo Wilson (1988). Readers interested in gender relations may wish to consult Barbara Smuts's "The Evolutionary Origins of Patriarchy," (*Human Nature*, 1995, 6(1):1-32), as well as Daly and Wilson's chapter "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Chattel" in *The Adapted Mind*. For current anthropological comments on and use of evolutionary psychology, see the forthcoming theme issue of *Ethos* devoted to the topic of bioculture.

Dan Fessler has recently been appointed assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Hofstra. His research focuses on the phylogenetic development of shame and pride, as well as the various uses of these emotions as mechanisms of social control in different cultures.]

Direct Evidence for Prehistoric Sex Differences

By Kristin D Sobolik (U Maine)

Recent technological advances now allow us to determine differences in dietary intake and gender specific activities in prehistory through hormonal and DNA content of human paleofeces. Paleofecal material contains the most direct evidence available for prehistoric diet and nutrition in the form of undigested food remains consumed by specific individuals. These samples tend to preserve small, fragile remains, which usually cannot be replicated from animal or plant debris excavated from archaeological sites due to preservation and recovery problems. Determining the sex of the paleofecal depositor allows us to analyze differences in diet between males and females of a prehistoric population. Paleofeces are also found in a variety of contexts and may, by their very presence, indicate gender-specific activities and travel.

Paleo Men's Room

An analysis of hormonal content of 12 paleofeces recovered from Mammoth and Salts Caves indicated that the samples were deposited by males. These results did not allow us to determine differences in dietary intake between males and females but did provide evidence that only males may have explored and conducted mining activities in the largest cave system in the world. To date archaeologists have used human skeletal material to determine population demographics and economy, but such samples tend to be found in burials and do not reveal the travels and explorations of the person. Paleofeces—although usually found in



The ritual installation of a Mayan ruler during the Late Classic Period, AD 692. Debate continues as to the factors leading to the human desire for high rank. (Sculptural panel 1 from Bonam Pac, Chiapas. © Linda Schele. Reprinted by permission)