

## A Primate's Memoir

Robert Sapolsky

Within this book Robert Sapolsky recounts his various endeavors in Kenya and the African continent. He starts off by articulating his reasoning for wanting to become an individual who studies Primates. This also included his reasoning for becoming a vegetarian due to the affect it has on animals and due to teenage angst. Sapolsky then talks about the various power structures and dominance and hierarchies within the primate communities. Now due to the fact that these primates are tournament species these hierarchies are primarily based upon sexual selection. Although they are tournaments, on the aggregate there seems to be some variation wherein individuals choose to pairbond as a cost:benefit analysis from the perspective of passing on genes. The virtue of exponential gains and delayed gratification is also expressed through individuals such as Saul. Where due to his initial patience he was able to have a very long reign within the troop. An extension of this is longevity, which is the two pronged approach of becoming an individual at the top of the dominance hierarchy. This includes first exhibiting traits related to dominance and high testosterone expression, but then if you want to have a longer term position, you must showcase expression of prosocial behaviours in order to minimize the probability of conflicts.

Another aspect of these hierarchies which was explored is the catecholaminergic influences made by dominance hierarchies. This is that the position of your ranking on the dominance has bidirectional predictive powering on your levels of certain hormones. Individuals higher on the dominance hierarchy are likely to have higher testosterone. The caveat is that such hormonal levels are strongly context dependent, that is in times of instability the leader actually has higher cortisol levels than that of the lowest individuals. But in times of stability the lowest members have higher cortisol levels. These dominance hierarchies are seen in humans as well, with the caveat that they are much more complex.

They are more complex due to the contextual proficiency of human brains, whilst humans do have dominance hierarchies they are multifactorial in nature. An example of this is that an individual may be at the bottom of his social hierarchy for work, but at the top of the social hierarchy for his monthly softball team.

Sapolsky also details his many escapades with Masai tribesmen and the various scams he was riddled with as a naive white student travelling through Africa. This includes a kidnapping, going through desolate areas with suboptimal conditions, eating cow blood with the Masai. Also recounts his trouble surviving within Africa when his advisor had forgotten to send him money. He also extensively talks about the interesting aspects of Masai culture, which for the most part have been left wildly unchanged by the modern world. Although there is starting to be some aspect of change within the culture reflecting the modern world.

Overall I am very grateful for this book and Sapolsky as it taught me the great importance of contextual framing, pro social behaviour and the power of the exponential. As well as the massive utility of the prefrontal cortex in regards to contextual thinking.