Caveman politics: Has our violent history led to an evolved preference for physically strong political leaders? -- ScienceDaily

New research into evolutionary psychology suggests that physical stature affects our preferences in political leadership. The paper, published in *Social Science Quarterly*, reveals that a preference for physically formidable leaders, or caveman politics, may have evolved to ensure survival in ancient human history. The paper, published by Gregg R. Murray and J. David Schmitz, from Texas Tech University, focuses on evolutionary psychology, the study of universal human behavior which is related to psychological mechanisms which evolved to solve problems faced by humans in ancient history.

"Some traits and instincts that may have been acquired through evolution continue to manifest themselves in modern life, seemingly irrationally," said Murray. "A near universal fear of snakes and a preference for unhealthy fatty foods likely evolved from when snakes were a common threat and caloric intake was uncertain. We believe similar traits exist in politics."

The author's interest in the physical strength of political leaders stems from the popular observation that taller candidates have won 58 percent of US presidential elections between 1789 and 2008; a trend known as the "presidential height index" by political pundits.

In order to test this theory Murray and Schmitz first reviewed the literature to establish concepts of the 'big man' in tribal leadership of ancient societies, as well as the impact of physical strength on rank and status in the Animal kingdoms.

The authors then carried out two studies, analyzing 467 students from both public and private universities in the United States. The first study aimed to capture attitudes towards the preferred physical stature of leaders by using a figure-drawing task.

Students were asked to describe and draw a figure which represented their concept of a 'typical citizen' and an 'ideal national leader', before being asked to draw both figures together. The results showed that 64 percent of students drew the leader as taller than the citizen. In the second test subjects were asked to answer a questionnaire about their own leadership attributes to consider how height influences personal perceptions of political leadership and attitudes toward running for office.

The expectation was that subjects with greater physical stature would be more likely to think of themselves as capable leaders. The results revealed a statistically significant association between height and perceived leadership capability and interest in running for a political office.

"We believe this research extends beyond merely establishing an association between physical stature and leadership by offering a theoretical basis for this phenomenon," said Schmitz. "Culture and environment alone cannot explain how a preference for taller leaders is a universal trait we see in different cultures today, as well as in societies ranging from ancient Mayans, to pre-classical Greeks, and even animals."

"Our research and the literature demonstrate that there is a preference for physically formidable leaders that likely reflects an evolved psychological trait, independent of any cultural conditioning," concluded Murray. "So while at 6'1" Barack Obama towered over the 5'8" John McCain in 2008, perhaps he'll meet his physical equal in one of the 'big man' governors in the 6'1" Rick Perry or the 6'2" Mitt Romney in November 2012."

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/10/111018084634.htm>

# How Does Evolutionary Psychology Explain Aggression?

*Evolutionary psychologists attempt to understand human behavior by studying the role of evolutionary pressures on modern humans. One of the most interesting areas of study for evolutionary psychologists is human aggression. According to Live Science, humans are one of the most aggressive species on the planet. Paradoxically, humans are also one of the most compassionate species. This contradiction may arise from our evolutionary past.*

**Securing Resources**

Historically, resource scarcity has been an ongoing problem for human societies. Given limited amounts of food and shelter, humans have been forced to compete for survival. Aggressive behavior, according to psychologists David Buss and Todd Shackelford, helps humans protect their resources and take new resources from others. A good example is a forest full of game such as deer and elk. The more humans hunt in the forest, the fewer deer and elk each person can eat. As a result, stronger groups may attack weaker groups to chase them off the land and ensure more food for themselves.

**Establishing Status**

Aggression can also help strong members of a society establish power and status over weaker members. Being seen as powerful is a major advantage in all societies because it deters attack and increases sexual reproduction options, according to anthropologists at the University of Utah. Aggressive behaviors such as fighting allow people to display strength and secure a higher spot in the pecking order. Buss and Shackelford note that studies of tribes in Peru have found that males who have won many fights tend to enjoy respect and deference from the the rest of the tribe. Even in modern societies that condemn actual violence, displays of strength still matter. For example, American society tends to glorify professional football players for their strength and power.

**Deterring Attack**

Another evolutionary explanation for aggression is that it deters aggression from other people. Parents who teach children that the best way to stop a bully is to stand up to him will intuitively understand this point. A child, by behaving aggressively, may discourage the bully from behaving aggressively in the future. According to Live Science, deterrence may be a major factor in most aggressive behavior. Even modern societies rely on aggression to deter attack. A good example is the United States' use of military power against hostile nations.

**Sexual Competition**

Finally, aggression may have helped human ancestors secure reproductive opportunities. According to Shackelford and Buss, early humans may have used aggression to prevent sexual infidelity in their mates. Studies of battered women, they note, indicate that extreme jealousy is a major cause of domestic violence even today. Sexual competition may also explain violence against children. Shackelford and Buss note that male lions often kill unrelated cubs, giving themselves more reproductive opportunities. They say similar behavior may occur in some human societies.

#### **TK, B. (2015). Human aggression in evolutionary psychological perspective. - PubMed - NCBI . Ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. Retrieved 9 December 2015, from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9336**

<http://education.seattlepi.com/evolutionary-psychology-explain-aggression-5442.html>