

---

## Evolutionary Emotional Intelligence for Social Workers: Status and the Psychology of Group Violence

By: Boyd Patterson Jr.<sup>1</sup>

*January 7, 2015: Islamic terrorists kill 12 magazine employees in Paris, France. Motive: retaliation for the magazine publishing cartoons perceived as insulting to the Prophet Muhammed's revered status.<sup>2</sup>*

*December 25, 2011: Nine American youths are shot on Christmas Eve in Chattanooga, Tennessee during a single, random encounter. Motive: retaliation between warring gangs competing for perceived street status.<sup>3</sup>*

*May 28, 1993: Four neo-Nazi skinheads in Solingen, Germany set fire to the house of a large Turkish family, killing five women and injuring several others. Motive: retaliation against the increasing flow of immigrants into Germany, coupled with the common Nazi/skinhead beliefs in their superior racial status.<sup>4</sup>*

### The significance of status

Between nations and across cultures, threats to the social status of an individual or group motivate retaliatory violence. History provides countless examples of such violence, committed at all levels of society. Whether orchestrated by individuals or governments, the perpetrators almost invariably justify the violence as a necessary response to an existential threat. "Cultures of honor" such as the Southeastern United States condone the use of

---

<sup>1</sup> M.A., J.D.; Youth Violence Prosecutor Hamilton County District Attorney's Office and former Gang Task Force Coordinator Hamilton County District Attorney's Office/City of Chattanooga; United States of America

<sup>2</sup> Vinograd, C., Jamieson, A., Viala, F. & Smith, A. (2015, January 7). Charlie Hebdo Shooting: 12 Killed at Muhammed Cartoons Magazine in Paris. *NBC News Online*; <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-magazine-attack/Charlie-hebdo-attack-fails-kill-satire-stop-muhammad-cartoons-n309496>

<sup>3</sup> Hardy, K. & Jagoda, N. (2011, December 26). Chattanooga: 9 shot on Christmas Eve outside Club Fathom. *Chattanooga Times Free Press*

<sup>4</sup> Ghosh, P. (2013, June 3). After Neo-Nazis Killed Five Turkish Girls, Integration in Germany Remains Elusive. *International Business Times*.

---

violence to protect one's reputation<sup>5</sup> and, unsurprisingly, this region of America has consistently produced the highest levels of per capita violence in the entire country.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, religious texts warn of the destructive power of "pride," placing it with envy, greed, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth as one of the Seven Deadly Sins.<sup>7</sup> Our personal experiences with road rage, school bullies and office politics all provide a regular stream of anecdotal evidence of the inexplicably powerful emotions driving those whose status has been threatened.

As a former mental health counselor, criminal prosecutor and gang task force coordinator in the Southeastern United States, this author has personally observed numerous examples of pride's destructive influence. Deadly bar fights, domestic violence and street gang conflicts frequently ensue from seemingly trivial offenses to one's status. In American cities, simply spray painting over a rival gang's graffiti can lead to retaliation murder.<sup>8</sup> In fact, gang retaliation plays out so consistently that when a gang entrenched neighborhood gets shot up, the police can usually predict which neighborhood they will respond to for the next shooting.

Teens who commit mass school shootings<sup>9</sup> (as well as those who commit suicide<sup>10</sup>) often have histories of being bullied. Jihadi suicide bombers who leave testaments behind commonly frame their homicidal acts as, not just attempts to obtain religious honor, but also as responses to political grievances.<sup>11</sup> Generating popular support for large-scale wars

---

<sup>5</sup> Shackelford, T. (2005). An Evolutionary Psychological Perspective on Cultures of Honor. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 3:381-391

<sup>6</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation (2011) Crime in the United States. *FBI Uniform Crime Report*

<sup>7</sup> Meyers, R. (2004). *The Virtue in the Vice*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications Inc.

<sup>8</sup> Welborn, L. (2010, September 10) Teens get Life in Prison in Retaliation Murder. *Orange County Register*

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015). *Effects of Bullying*. <http://www.stopbullying.gov>

<sup>10</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2014) *The Relationship between Bullying and Suicide*. <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-suicide-translation-final-a.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Sela-Shayovitz, R. (2007). Suicide Bombers in Israel. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* Vol 1(2), p 160-168

---

typically involves painting opponent nations as either victimizing innocent populations or having the strong likelihood to do so.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the urge to violently retaliate arises as a common reaction to the perception of being victimized and/or humiliated.

Yet, violence does not operate solely as an adaptive response to perceived threats. Violence and the capacity to inflict violence can also bring increases to status. Contrary to the myth of the socially awkward bully, teen bullies enjoy relatively high social status.<sup>13</sup> The most violent gang members naturally rise to positions of influence in the gang.<sup>14</sup> Jihadis who die fighting believe that they will inherit the greatest places of honor in the afterlife.<sup>15</sup> Citizens of countries with powerful armed forces connect their national pride with their nation's military might.<sup>16</sup> The overall takeaway: *violence is a currency* capable of obtaining valuable social status. Accordingly, those of us working to reduce violence in our communities must overcome a general aspect of human nature, namely, the acquiring and defending of "status."

Of course, status constitutes one of many factors that motivate extremists. Desire for political change, religious rewards and financial gain also inspire extremist behavior.<sup>17</sup> The ranks of gang members, Jihadis and Nazis alike all include some members who sacrificed high status in mainstream society for some reward provided by the extremist narrative. The status drive tends to motivate younger recruits who have not yet made a name for

---

<sup>12</sup> See: Kimble, J. (2006). *Mobilizing the Home Front*, College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press; MacDonald, D. (2002) *Balkan Holocausts?*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press (2002); Polyakova, A. (2014, April 28). Russia Can't Decide if Ukrainian Jews are Victims or Villians. *New Republic*; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2015) *Nazi Propaganda*, Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; <http://www.ushmm.org/wic/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005202>

<sup>13</sup> Juvonen, J., Graham, S. & Schuster, M. (2003). Bullying Among Young Adolescents. *Pediatrics*, Vol 112, p 1231-1237

<sup>14</sup> Hess, K., Orthmann, C. & Vright, J. (2013). *Juvenile Justice, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition*; Independence, KY: Cengage Learning

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, Sela-Shayovitz (2007)

<sup>16</sup> Smith, T. & Jarkko, L. (1998). *National Pride: A cross-national analysis*. National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>17</sup> Davis, P. & Cragin, K. (2009). *Social Science for Counterterrorism*. RAND National Defense Research Institute.

---

themselves, accumulated material resources or started a family.<sup>18</sup> Older extremists who sacrificed a relatively high social status for joining their extremist organizations presumably place greater value upon one of the many non-status related benefits. Accordingly, the modern model for combating violent groups utilizes a wide variety of social services, including counseling, education, job training and community building.<sup>19</sup> However, that model has consistently excluded one key component: *biology*.

Understanding the biology of status and violence will not replace any of the existing prevention, intervention, suppression and reentry strategies (including faith-based programs) that have proven themselves effective in your practice. Ultimately, we simply do whatever works for the client sitting on the other side of the desk. Yet science provides a relatively solid, evidence-based perspective through which to view the causative factors of violence. Understanding any aspect of the “why” behind destructive behavior will help explain “why” some strategies work better than others. While this basic science will not replace anyone’s existing practice model, it can certainly add a helpful dimension. Just as you do not need a degree in mechanical engineering to drive your car, you do not need a degree in molecular genetics to recognize how the evolved drive for status commonly operates in young members of extremist groups, from gangsters in Chicago to Jihadis in Madrid. We begin with the most fundamental aspect of the biology of violence: the biology of emotion.

---

<sup>18</sup> *Id*, Sela-Shayovitz (2007)

<sup>19</sup> Arciaga, M. (2001). Multidisciplinary Gang Intervention Teams. *National Youth Gang Center Bulletin*, No. 3. <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/NYGCBulletin3.pdf>

---

## Emotion and evolution

Our inner drives that result in outward behaviors make emotion a key issue of inquiry in both criminal law and psychology. By definition, *emotion* moves us to act.<sup>20</sup> *Motive* constitutes the legal concept of what inspires criminal behavior,<sup>21</sup> including crimes of violence. Understanding the biological mechanisms driving violent behavior requires us to take an evolutionary perspective when examining emotion. Scientists often look through the lens of a microscope or telescope to view phenomena outside the ordinary range of vision. Observing human behavior through the following LENS will help bring the biological mechanisms driving violence more clearly into your focus.

Life

Evolved through

Natural

Selection.

This biological fact has been established time and time again, through multiple scientific examinations, in multiple scientific fields. Just as this LENS has long provided a stable view of the dynamics operating in biochemistry, molecular biology, epidemiology, genetics, comparative anatomy, paleontology, biogeography and other scientific fields, this LENS will likewise provide you with an additional framework to understand the biological source of emotion, thus expanding the professional range of your emotional intelligence.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Emotion (2015). The Latin root *mot-* means “action.” The prefix *e-* means “outward.” Retrieved March 9, 2015 at [https://myvocabulary.com/dir-root-root\\_master#M](https://myvocabulary.com/dir-root-root_master#M)

<sup>21</sup> Motive (2015). Defined as the inducement, reason or willful desire and purpose behind the commission of an offense. Retrieved March 9, 2015 at <http://thelawdictionary.org/motive/>

<sup>22</sup> Cherniss, C., Extein, M., Goleman, D. & Weissberg, R. (2006) All emotional intelligence (EI) models involve awareness and management of one’s own emotions, as well as awareness and management of others’ emotions. Emotional Intelligence: What does the Research Really Indicate? *Educational Psychologist*, Vol 41(4), 239-245.

---

Applying our LENS to emotional intelligence gives us *evolutionary emotional intelligence*,<sup>23</sup> which views emotion as evolved instinct. Connecting this scientific terminology with the day-in-day-out practice of deradicalization may seem daunting in the beginning. For our purposes, the terminology will remain basic, for even a basic understanding will allow you to more easily recognize the bio-emotional dynamics as they influence your clients. In practical applications, this awareness will help you recognize and redirect the biological drives that inspire violence, hopefully preventing it from occurring in the first place.

### Basic concepts

From the functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies that occurred in the 1990s,<sup>24</sup> we now have visible proof of the changes that sweep through the human brain during adolescence.<sup>25</sup> The last brain area to mature, the prefrontal cortex, sits just behind our foreheads and governs executive functioning.<sup>26</sup> As a result of this late development, the neural mechanisms that allow us to weigh the consequences of risky behavior remain immature until our early to mid-20s.<sup>27</sup> Of course the cascade of testosterone and estrogen floods the body between the ages of 9 and 14.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the anecdotal observation that

---

<sup>23</sup> *Note:* Evolutionary Emotional Intelligence (EEI) represents the author's integration of evolutionary psychology and emotional intelligence. EEI involves the same four dimensions of emotion as EI: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management. Integrating those four dimensions into evolutionary psychology creates a working model for applied settings. EEI also adds a depth analysis of three interconnected strata of motivation that direct and shape human behavior, extending from (1) one's learned/cultural framework of motivation, which rests upon and flows from (2) the instinctual level of motivation (shared by all members of our species or of the same sex within our species), which rests upon and flows from (3) the fundamental drive for genetic survival (shared across multiple species).

<sup>24</sup> Clay, R. (2007). Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging: A New Research Tool. *American Psychological Association*

<sup>25</sup> Yurgerun-Todd, D. & Killgore, W. (2006). Fear-related Activity in the Prefrontal Cortex Increases with Age During Adolescence: A Preliminary fMRI Study. *Neuroscience Letters* Vol. 406, p 194-199

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*, Yurgerun-Todd (2006)

<sup>27</sup> National Institute of Mental Health (2011). The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction. *NIH Publication No. 11-4929*

<sup>28</sup> Rogol, A., Roemmich, J. & Clark, P. (2002). Growth at Puberty. *Journal of Adolescent Health* Vol. 31, p 192-200

---

adolescents act more on emotion than reason enjoys scientific support and, thus, illuminates an aspect of our common biological narrative.

Another phenomenon that commonly occurs between nations, across cultures and throughout time: criminal activity typically increases rapidly at the beginning of puberty, peaks in the mid-to-late teen years and then gradually tapers off.<sup>29</sup> This global observation corresponds perfectly with what the fMRI brain images have confirmed, specifically that all adolescents generally make poor decisions during the initial phase of puberty, while experiencing a growing ability to understand and appreciate the consequences of risky/criminal behavior as the prefrontal cortex matures.

A third biological observation regards the correlation between gender and crime.<sup>30</sup> Across the world, far more crime (and an even higher percentage of violent crime)<sup>31</sup> consistently gets committed by males. Related studies show that the young males who commit crimes and engage in risky behavior acquire increased status among their peers and, no surprise, increased mating opportunities.<sup>32</sup> Beyond human behavior, high-status correlates to increased mating opportunities across other primate species as well.<sup>33</sup> Although your adolescent male clients do not consciously join extremist groups for “increased mating opportunities” (probably not, anyway!), they will sign up in a heartbeat for increased status opportunities.

---

<sup>29</sup> L. Ellis & A. Walsh (2000). *Criminology: A Global Perspective*, Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon

<sup>30</sup> Duntley, J. & Shackelford, T. (2009). *Evolutionary Forensic Psychology*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press (2009)

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*, Duntly (2009)

<sup>32</sup> See: Ellis, B., Dishion, T., Gray, P., Hawley, P., Volk, A., Del Giudice, M., Figueredo, A., Griskevicius, V., Jacobs, J., James, J. & Wilson, D. (2012). The Evolutionary Basis of Risky Adolescent Behavior. *Developmental Psychology* Vol. 48, No. 3, 598-623. Jafee, S. (2003). Life with (or without) Father. *Child Development* Vol. 74, p 109-126

<sup>33</sup> Surbeck, M., Mundry, R. & Hohmann, G. (2010). Mothers matter! Maternal support, dominance status and mating success in male bonobos. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*; doi:10.1098/rspb.2010.1572

---

Unsurprisingly, American street gangs, Middle Eastern Jihadis and European Nazis have all discovered that adolescent boys make willing recruits.<sup>34</sup> The gang narrative of fast money, accessible women and street respect sells well both in and out of the inner city. The Jihadi narrative brings the highest eternal honors and rewards, including houris (virgin companions), to every faithful servant. The Nazi narrative promises national prosperity through maintaining racial solidarity and purity. Regardless of your young client's belief in any of the above promises, all such narratives definitely deliver 1) immediate belonging to a group and 2) opportunities to acquire status within that group. Unfortunately for the rest of us, all of the above narratives confer high status for acts of violence. However, beneath all of these narratives operates the same biologically-based narrative. This single narrative holds none of the allure promised by the above recruiters. Even so, it draws strength from a source that trumps even the most compelling extremist narrative: scientific evidence. As a social service provider, you do not have to convince your clients of the common biological narrative. You just have to utilize it. Let us now examine the biological equivalent of emotion: *instinct*.

### Basic instinct

*Instinct* is defined as an **inherited tendency** of an organism to behave in a certain way, usually in **reaction to its environment** and for the **purpose** of fulfilling a specific need. Instinctive behavior develops in the same way for **all individuals of a species or of the same sex of a species**.<sup>35</sup> Five aspects of this definition hold particular significance for social workers.

---

<sup>34</sup> See: Lefevre, C. (2014, February 26). Youth Unemployment and the rise of Neo-Nazism in Europe. *Fair Observer*; Howell, J. (2010). Gang Prevention: An Overview of Research and Programs. *OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin*; Sosis, R. & Alcorta, C. (2008). *Adaptive Militants and Martyrs? What evolutionary theories of religion tell us about terrorism*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press

<sup>35</sup> Instinct (2002). *American Heritage Science Dictionary*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin

---

(1) Instinct is **inherited**, meaning it has a genetic basis. Wolves naturally hunt in packs. Birds naturally build nests and fly south for the winter. Spiders do not need training to build intricate webs. Like the instincts of all other species, the emotional tendencies that motivate human behaviors come naturally prepackaged in our brains. If your clients grew up in different circumstances, they would seek status in different ways. However, the inherited, instinctive drive for status would motivate them in some way.

(2) Instinct is a **tendency**. As powerful as your clients' emotional impulses may seem at times, they are just tendencies that one can resist and redirect. In the case of status-seeking emotions, even your neediest clients can temporarily resist expressions of violence. At some point though, your younger clients will pursue whatever opportunities appear before them, violent or non-violent, to acquire status within a group.

(3) Instinct is a **reaction to the environment**. Cues in the environment trigger all instinctual urges. Extremist narratives create compelling visions designed to activate status-seeking urges. Lavish glorification of members who commit acts of violence on behalf of the group motivates young members to commit similar acts.<sup>36</sup> As you well know, adolescents who have suffered some form of status blow<sup>37</sup> (acute or long-term) or who otherwise perceive themselves as victims make particularly eager recruits.

(4) Instinct is **purposeful**. A feeling represents a strategy, designed over deep evolutionary time, to move us toward something important or away from something dangerous. In modern times, the emotions may push your clients in directions obviously detrimental to their long-term interests. Recognizing that emotions evolved for a specific purpose in the

---

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*, Sela-Shayovitz (2007)

<sup>37</sup> Kruglanski, A., Belanger, J., Gelfand, M., Gunaratna, R., Hettiarachchi, M., Reinares, F., Orehek, E., Sasota, J. & Sharvit, K. (2013). Terrorism-A (Self) Love Story. *American Psychologist* Art: 2011-2621

---

ancestral environment<sup>38</sup> can help you find pro-social directions for their expression, including the emotions related to status seeking.

(5) The same instincts exist in **all individuals of a species or the same sex of a species**. There is no room for racism here. Black, White, Hispanic, Asian; we all have the same destructive instincts and the violent extremist groups within our race to prove it. The only clear instinctual differences exist between males and females of a species. Across most species, males typically employ mating strategies that involve impressing females by competing, often violently, with other males for status and resources.<sup>39</sup> As your clients most likely to commit violent acts will tend to be young, unmarried, unemployed males,<sup>40</sup> keep in mind the incredible power of that status drive operating within them.

### **The shared biological narrative**

This next section delves perhaps deeper into biology than you may believe necessary to serve your clients. Some social service providers may struggle to see how the biological definition of “fitness” and the process of how genetic material passes from generation to generation will help them convince an 18-year old neo-Nazi to stop attacking foreigners. However, reducing violence holds enough importance for us to gather every scrap of information about its root causes. The last two decades have produced an amazing amount of information about the biological aspects of behavior.<sup>41</sup> We must now arm those on the front lines of violence reduction with that information. As stated earlier, this knowledge will at the very least add to your professional understanding of violence’s causal factors and may lead to new programs that more effectively address them. Also, extremism divides people

---

<sup>38</sup> Roberts, S. (2012). *Applying Evolutionary Psychology*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press

<sup>39</sup> Gottschalk, M. & Ellis, L. (2010). Evolutionary and Genetic Explanations of Violent Crime. *Violent Crime* (Chapter 4). New York, NY: Sage Publications

<sup>40</sup> *Id*, Sela-Shayovitz (2007)

<sup>41</sup> National Juvenile Justice Network (2010). Using Adolescent Brain Research to Inform Policy. *NJJN Fact Sheet*, September 2010

---

into “in groups” and “out groups.” For that reason alone, social service providers need to recognize that the fervent emotions motivating “in group” members constitute the very same biological mechanisms motivating “out group” members. While the young extremists you assist would not embrace this shared biological narrative, the scientific evidence can still facilitate your professional objective to help them. Consider the following basic, scientifically indisputable facts, which will provide enough foundational information for anyone, regardless of scientific background, to better recognize the biological causes of violence.

- 1) We are biological entities.
- 2) The fittest genes survive.
- 3) Instinct is genetic.
- 4) Status seeking is an evolved instinct.

### **Fact 1: We are biological entities**

Other than meeting clients’ basic needs of food and shelter, the fact that we are all biological creatures rarely gets discussed in the context of social service provision. Yet at our most fundamental levels, we literally exist in various forms of biological material. Blood, bone, muscle and every other aspect of our physical structures and mechanisms consists of biological tissue. These tissues cooperate at every level to sustain the greater entity. Cells cooperate to form organs. Organs cooperate as organ systems. Organ systems cooperate to form entire individuals. In their purest expressions, the components of these wonderful cooperative mechanisms each have a **genotype**, which is the specific genetic code from which every such component will grow.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Weatherall, D. (2001). Genotype-Phenotype Relationships. *Encyclopedia of Life Sciences*

---

Our most fundamental biological level also generates our innate drive to survive. We naturally experience intense fear, designed to keep us alive, when faced with life-or-death situations. In such moments, our sympathetic nervous systems release adrenaline and cortisol,<sup>43</sup> allowing us to withstand pain and giving us the energy to survive by fighting or fleeing. These automatic biochemical processes occur regardless of our conscious wishes. More accurately, our drive to survive actually functions for the survival of our genetic material which, along with ourselves, includes our children and family members.<sup>44</sup> This most basic biological drive, along with our other physiological systems, operates naturally and automatically, outside of our conscious awareness. Accordingly, from our core-level motivation for genetic survival to our individual biochemical components, *we are biological entities*.

### **Fact 2: The fittest genes survive**

Today, we possess the genotypes that emerged as the most fit for surviving the brutal conditions of the ancestral environment. These genotypes currently exist in the same biochemical formation as they did back when they existed in our distant ancestors.<sup>45</sup> While you inherited genotypes for various characteristics from both of your parents, no mixing of the inherited individual genes occurred. A good explanation for this process likens individual genetic characteristics to colors of paint.<sup>46</sup> Consider your mother's gene for a particular physiological characteristic (lung capacity, heart valve structure, etc.) as blue paint. Consider your father's gene for the same inheritable characteristic to be red paint. The genotype you inherit does not get expressed as "purple," i.e., a mixture of the two

---

<sup>43</sup> Klein, S. (2013, April 19). Adrenaline, Cortisol, Norepinephrine: The Three Major Stress Hormones, Explained. *The Huffington Post*

<sup>44</sup> Dawkins, R. (2006). *The Selfish Gene, 30 Year Anniversary Edition*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*, Dawkins (2010)

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*, Dawkins (2010)

---

genes. For that genetic characteristic, you will express either blue or red. Your genes are exact copies of either your mother's corresponding gene or your father's corresponding gene for a particular characteristic. Likewise, your parents obtained exact copies of their genes from their parents. So, apart from the rare mutation, every single one of the genes in your body today successfully passed through the filters of multiple generations, perhaps tens of thousands of generations.<sup>47</sup> Your individual genes developed as the "fittest" for a very different environment, one with extreme hazards that we no longer face on a regular basis. The vast majority of these genes still exist in us all, in the exact same form as they did eons ago.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, *the fittest genes have survived*.

### **Fact 3: Instinct is genetic**

Hands function to grasp. Lungs function to breathe. Spleens function to fight off infection. As social service providers, the biological organ that most impacts your clients is the one that functions to manage their behavior. Like every other biological tissue, the biological tissue comprising the brain has individual genes associated with particular aspects of its design.<sup>49</sup> Those aspects produce individual neural mechanisms that receive information about the environment, analyze it and motivate responsive behaviors.<sup>50</sup> Looking at the brain through the LENS of natural selection, the behaviors that best facilitated the success of our genetic material became inherited instinctive tendencies. By definition, instinct is shared by every member of a species or of the same sex of a species.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, every young male on your caseload shares the same biologically evolved instincts, which inspire the same, often

---

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*, Dawkins (2010)

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*, Dawkins (2010)

<sup>49</sup> Pinker, S. (1997). *How the Mind Works*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*, Pinker (1997)

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*, American Heritage Science Dictionary (2002)

---

violent, behaviours that made our genes successful in the harsh environment of our distant ancestors. Thus, *instinct is genetic*.

#### **Fact 4: Status seeking is an evolved instinct**

Our society has not always provided a legal system. Or police officers. Or hospitals. Or grocery stores. Think of the instincts that would arise from an ancestral environment that was violent, lawless, had scarce resources, in which humans had much shorter life spans and lived in small insular groups. The instincts necessary to survive this harsh world drove us as a species to acquire safety, acquire resources, acquire sex, nurture our children, live cooperatively within a group and to *seek power/status within that group*.<sup>52</sup> The instincts to immediately respond to threats to these capacities (via fight-flight-freeze)<sup>53</sup> would also naturally develop.

So, you can see how the destructive and self-destructive emotions people feel today, described earlier as “Seven Deadly Sins,” flow directly from our evolved instincts. “Lust” flows from our reproductive instinct. “Envy” and “greed” focus our attention upon resources that we lack. “Wrath” gives us the ability to violently take what we need and defend the resources we have. “Pride” flows from the instinct to acquire and defend one’s status within a group. Even “gluttony” and “sloth” make sense when looking through the LENS and recognizing the life-or-death consequences of acquiring and preserving calories in the harsh ancestral environment. These instincts emerged and developed for our survival over the course of hundreds of thousands of generations<sup>54</sup> and continue motivating your clients today. As in our modern environment and in other species,<sup>55</sup> high status in the ancestral environment provided greater access to resources, more mating opportunities and

---

<sup>52</sup> Wright, R. (1994). *The Moral Animal*. New York, NY: Vintage Books

<sup>53</sup> Bloom, S.L. & Farragher, B. (2010) *The Human Stress Response*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press

<sup>54</sup> *Id*, Dawkins (2006)

<sup>55</sup> *Id*, Dawkins (2006)

---

more protection from exploitation. All of which made one's genetic material more successful in following generations. Accordingly, whether one calls it ego, hubris, pride, dignity, honor or its usual name, *status is an evolved instinct*.

### **Clinical applications of Evolutionary Emotional Intelligence**

When assessing your extremist clients, keep in mind that the drive for genetic survival motivates them at their most fundamental levels. Flowing from this core-level fitness drive, evolved instincts push them to seek safety, sex, resources, cooperative belonging to a group and status within that group. Learning and culture shape the outer expression of all instincts, including status seeking. So, while your young male clients will always value status, the narrative they learn from their particular environment will direct how they seek to obtain that status. The street gang narrative bestows status upon the gangsters who commit violent crimes. The Jihadi narrative bestows status upon the adherents (and the families of the adherents) who fight and die for religious purposes. The Nazi narrative bestows status upon its members who elevate their own race's status and denigrate the status of other ethnicities. As difficult as changing these learned expressions can be, take heart in the fact that your clients were taught their extremist narratives, which proves their ability to adopt a new worldview.

So, when sitting across from a client entrenched in a destructive or self-destructive narrative, look for ways to detach his natural status drive from his learned violent expressions of that drive. One specific strategy could involve reducing the status your client attributes to those who commit violence for their group's objectives.<sup>56</sup> Show him vivid evidence of the innocent victims of extremist groups and remind him that greater society rightly abhors murderers. A second specific method could involve educating him that violence usually fails

---

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*, Kruglanski (2013)

---

to achieve an extremist group's objectives.<sup>57</sup> Thus, you can potentially persuade your status-seeking client that he will likely be seen as an ineffective failure if he employs violence. All approaches should include the tactic of channeling him toward pro-social methods of obtaining the status that he seeks.<sup>58</sup> Connecting the satisfaction of multiple instinctual drives (acquiring safety, belonging, resources, etc.) to a pro-social course of conduct will allow your efforts to better compete with his extremist narrative. As a social service provider, you have undoubtedly already employed this tactic many times in your practice. Hopefully, understanding the biological drives operating within your client will allow you to gather information about his current interests and social background that reveals what type of "status" most appeals to him. Thus, you can better harness and potentially redirect the natural motivations currently driving him down a destructive and, ultimately, self-destructive path.

### **Next level programs**

With this understanding, you can also identify existing programs that directly provide belonging and status. Rather than start with a list of programs that address these issues in a general way (mentoring agencies, athletics, job training, education, etc.), start with the client's existing values. If he already specifically values success in business, education or athletics, or if he admires someone who has enjoyed success in a particular field, identify a program that will connect your client with a successful person in that field. This personal connection will tap into the social nature of the instincts and, by itself, could reorient your younger clients toward a new, pro-social direction of gaining belonging and status.

If your overall client population has common values, you can even create programs that address their needs for belonging and status in ways tailored to fit their specific background.

---

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*, Kruglanski (2013)

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*, Kruglanski (2013)

---

One of the anti-gang programs developed by the author provides inner city youth with a specific non-violent method of obtaining status. The first step involved identifying existing non-violent activities that the target population already deemed “high status.” In this case, youth at risk of joining gangs placed a high value upon artistic expression, especially music. The second step involved providing participants with opportunities to obtain status in the chosen non-violent activity. So, the Stars of Chattanooga program was created, which allowed at-risk youth to create original songs using high-quality recording equipment at two city recreation centers. Recreation center staff members mentored program participants (“Stars”) with lyric composition, track recording and stage presentation. A local radio station agreed to play songs recorded by the Stars during regular city-wide broadcasts that featured new musical artists. The Stars reported receiving slews of congratulatory phone calls from friends and family members who heard the songs played on the radio. The recreation center mentors compiled a musical CD of the Stars’ songs and sponsored a professional-quality CD release event, complete with media, photographers and the artists’ combined fans. The mentors burned 5000 copies of the Stars of Chattanooga CD for distribution across the city and uploaded individual songs to promotional websites. The mentors regularly scheduled Stars of Chattanooga performances at other city-sponsored events. In a major show of support, the largest annual music festival in Chattanooga, which often drew audiences close to 100,000, gave the Stars of Chattanooga a full hour of stage time.

As intended, Stars participants received heavy doses of belonging and status.<sup>59</sup> This powerful effect boosted credibility to the mentors’ promises to help the kids improve their lives through the other social programs. Expelling participants for drugs or gang activities

---

<sup>59</sup> See: Wilson, J. (2013, June 6). Stars of Chattanooga To Perform At Riverbend For Outreach Initiative. *Chattanoogan.com*. <http://www.chattanoogan.com/2013/6/6/252776/Stars-Of-Chattanooga-To-Perform-At.aspx>; Phillips, C. (2013, June 10). Critics Choice: Stars of Chattanooga. *Chattanooga Times Free Press*

---

gave the Stars reasons (and explanations to their peers) for avoiding gang-related behavior. These general policies and underlying strategies could be adapted to draw adolescents away from other extremist groups as well. Identifying a non-violent activity/group to which your clients ascribe “high status” and connecting them with mentors in that area can help steer them away from radical Jihadi and neo-Nazi organizations. Do not waste your breath attempting to sell any client on activities he has never considered. The critical component lies in identifying activities an individual client *already* deems “high status,” which could include non-violent expressions of his existing political/religious perspective. Moderate groups often share goals with extremist groups, but employ socially acceptable methods of pursuing them. In fact, the world community reveres non-violent leaders such as Ghandi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King and usually rallies behind those who struggle for social change using peaceful methods. At the very least, you can easily show your clients that murdering unarmed civilians over money, cartoons or immigration status tends to have the opposite effect.

### **Conclusion**

Beyond assisting you with individual clients, increasing your understanding of the common biological narrative can help you identify existing programs and design new strategies that address the instinctual motivations driving young extremists. The wide acceptance of these basic foundational facts allows us as colleagues working in different agencies to create mutually beneficial programs within a unified framework. Clearly, belonging to a group and achieving status within that group drives adolescents across cultures. Recognizing those natural drives and responding with measures that channel them away from violence will increase your chances of saving lives, including those of your clients. Thus can evolutionary

emotional intelligence help guide your practice toward our common goal of reducing the violence overwhelmingly committed by the young males in our communities.