

**Review of Todd K. Shackelford and Viviana A. Weekes-Shackelford (Editors), *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Perspectives on Violence, Homicide, and War* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)**

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This title, which is part of the “Oxford Library of Psychology,” initially struck me as surprisingly focused for a handbook. But handbooks aren’t what they used to be, and Oxford University Press has apparently decided that contemporary psychology has sufficient substance to warrant scads of them: recent offerings include *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Counseling Psychology*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Psychology*. So why not this topic too? Its titular domain is near and dear to *my* heart, and I was eager to get my hands on it. But what an uneven compendium of 27 chapters it turned out to be.

Let me start with some positive remarks about some of the better contributions. Patricia Lambert’s review of archaeological evidence of prehistoric warfare in western North America stands out as a well-written account of what has been unearthed and a careful discussion of what can and cannot be inferred therefrom. I don’t know if other experts will quarrel with her preferred interpretations, but I learned a lot from her chapter. Another solid chapter is by Michael & Stephanie Brown, who present a well-argued case for taking seriously the idea that there may have been selection during human evolution for self-destructive motives that are evoked when one’s expected contribution to inclusive fitness drops below zero. And Kingsley Browne provides a balanced, persuasive review of how psychological sex differences have confounded efforts to integrate the armed forces, although I confess to being a little put off by his blithe Americocentrism. (This is typically more of an annoyance in mainstream social psychology than in evolutionary psychology, but it detracts from several chapters here.)

Another good chapter, by Kenneth Letendre, Corey Fincher and Randy Thornhill, is laid out like a journal article with original empirical content and hypothesis testing. Its thesis is that parasite stress is a major distal cause of warfare and hence a major

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determinant of war's variable prevalence and severity across human societies. You don't have to be convinced by the argument to appreciate its clarity and the mustering of data in its support. Grant Harris and Marnie Rice clearly review risk factors for filicide and child maltreatment and discuss how an adaptationist model of parental motives helps make sense of the epidemiological facts. And in a very different vein, literary scholar Joseph Carroll is eloquent in advocating the utility of a Darwinian worldview for explaining how and when violence rings the bells of readers.

But several other chapters are less successful. One, by John Hartung, starts out as a commentary on the xenophobia and sexism that pervade the "Holy Bible," then morphs into an anti-Zionist rant; whether you agree or disagree with Hartung's opinions, they have no place in this book. Neither does the lengthiest chapter, a 36-page attack on "theism" by Gregory Paul, which contains lots of good tidbits but is marred by weird tangents, grammatical collapses, and its author's naïveté about basic biology. Another potentially interesting chapter on "animal abuse and cruelty" is likewise undermined by its authors' incomprehension of adaptation and natural selection. In fact, half a dozen chapters are by authors who are neophytes, at best, about Darwinism.

A chapter on bullying begins with the claim that the "first necessary, but not sufficient, criterion" for establishing that a trait is an "evolved adaptation" is that it must have demonstrable heritability. Two other chapters say something similar, but this notion is simply wrong. Important adaptations are often universal; with selection eliminating suboptimal genetic variants, and with remaining phenotypic variation likely to be a reflection of either facultative response or mishap, the heritability of fitness-affecting traits often approaches zero. Having two eyes, for example, is a human adaptation with negligible heritability (those with only one are victims of mishap); eye color, by contrast, maintains high heritability in certain populations precisely *because* it has little or no effect on visual function. In general, substantial heritability constitutes a priori (albeit inconclusive) evidence that a trait is *not* an adaptation. People contributing to a handbook on "evolutionary perspectives" should know this—it has been pointed out in textbooks of quantitative genetics for decades—and if they don't, editors should straighten them out.

And there's the rub: a successful multi-authored handbook requires a firm editorial hand, but none is in evidence here. Nobody corrected a mischaracterization of the Yanomamö as "hunter-gatherers" (p 304), to take one little example among many. Nobody insisted that impossible homicide-suicide rates in a table on p 118 be checked and fixed. And nobody orchestrated the book as a whole. The Bateman-Trivers-Williams theory of sexual selection and parental investment is explained in 9 of the 27 chapters; group-level conflict and raiding among common chimpanzees are described in 13! (This is far more coverage than small-scale warfare in *human* societies receives.) It is not surprising that authors try to write chapters that can stand alone, in ignorance of what others are writing. Only substantial editorial efforts can prevent such massive redundancy. Todd Shackelford was a co-editor of three Oxford handbooks published in 2012 alone. How much time can he have for editing?

The publisher certainly won't pick up the ball. Once upon a time, university presses employed literate copy-editors who fixed grammatical errors; not so for this volume. Indexing was evidently left to the authors, making the index haphazard and virtually useless. It seems that Oxford University Press's agenda is now simply to maximize quantity, and as long as university libraries keep buying, their business

model will remain viable. Search “Handbook” plus “Psychology” on the OUP website and you will find more than 200 entries; by the time you get to *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Minimalism*, you may be forgiven for wondering if John Cleese has joined the acquisitions department. The title page of the book that I am reviewing here indicates it is part of their “Organizational Psychology” series. Is anybody home at OUP?

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