

Role Of Showoff Hypothesis In Social Decisions Investigated

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A new study of the Hadza population in Tanzania, forthcoming in the April 2006 issue of *Current Anthropology*, explores the role of hunting in human evolution. Among chimpanzees and most human populations that subsist on wild resources, hunting is a predominantly male activity, and researchers have long tried to locate the advantage that hunting, a dangerous and tiring activity, brings to men.

Though some have argued that good hunters have longer-lasting ties to mates and better-fed offspring, other research suggests that hunting provides an opportunity to garner social attention and increase one's mating prospects, also known as the "showoff hypothesis."

"When asked where they would like to reside, [Hadza] women preferred the camp of good hunters, where more food would be shared with their families," explains Brian M. Wood (a graduate student in biological anthropology at Harvard University). "The choice was not so clear for [Hadza] men: living with bad hunters would showcase their own hunting prowess. Living with good hunters, however, would bring more food to their family, at the cost of lowered relative hunting status."

In a similar study of the Ache hunter-gatherers in eastern Paraguay, also published in *Current Anthropology*, Wood revealed that a man without dependent offspring is more concerned about his individual prestige as a hunter, and would therefore rather reside among poorer hunters, while one with children, more concerned about access to food, prefers to be with better hunters. However, most participants in the Hadza study opted

for a living situation that provided a better flow of nutrients to the household.

"A few joined the camp of bad hunters, where they could, as one [Hadza] man put it, "teach them how to hunt", " Wood says. "Most men, however, joined the camp of good hunters. We may still wonder whether it is better to play second string on a winning team, or to be the star of a losing team. For the Hadza at least, the spoils of the winning team seem to matter the most."

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