

A special symposium on

# *The Evolutionary and Cultural Psychology of Honor*

March 26, 2004

Many of the most dramatic and tragic human actions are motivated not by the pursuit of any reward, but by preoccupation with honor. Whether in a university seminar, a street gang, or global politics, an affront to honor is likely to be met with massive retaliation. Explanations of suicide terrorism, revenge attacks and wars often depend on understanding how evolved human emotions shape cultures of honor in which a reputation for retaliation is an essential social resource. This Symposium brings together four leaders in studies of honor to address the question of how social emotions and cultural contexts create each other, and how this knowledge might help us with some of the most urgent questions of our time. Scott Atran is an expert on the psychology of terrorism and suicide bombings in addition being a leader in evolutionary approaches to cognition. Bill Miller is an Icelandic historian and Professor of Law whose volume *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* provides deep historical context of the topic. Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen published *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*, in which they outline a theory of honor using data from their experiments on the topic. The symposium will begin with brief presentations by each speaker, followed by extensive time for discussion to explore the differences and similarities in their positions, and how they understand current events in the light of these ancient human predilections as manifested in differing cultural contexts.

## Scott Atran

Adjunct Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan  
Adjunct Research Scientist at the Research Center for Group Dynamics  
Directeur de Recherche, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

*What makes people die to kill?*

## Dov Cohen

Associate Professor of Psychology, University of Illinois  
*Honor, Dignity, Reciprocity and Violence*

## William Miller

Thomas G. Long Professor of Law, University of Michigan Law School  
*Smart honor, stupid honor: staying alive in the honor game*

## Richard Nisbett

Professor of Psychology and Research Professor ISR, University of Michigan  
*Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Friday, March 26 9:00 am – 12:00 am, 4448 East Hall**

Breakfast is available at 8:45 am

\*\*\*\*\*

[http://www.lsa.umich.edu/psych/cultcog/seminar\\_2004.html](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/psych/cultcog/seminar_2004.html)

For more information: Crystal Fortwangler (crystalf@umich.edu).

This symposium is part of the *Evolution, Culture and the Social Emotions* series sponsored by a collaboration between the Culture and Cognition and the Evolution and Human Adaptation Programs at the University of Michigan.