**How can evolutionary psychology explain aggression?**

**Aggression** is overt, often harmful, social interaction with the intention of inflicting damage or other unpleasantness upon another individual. It is a virtually universal behaviour among animals. It may occur either in retaliation or without provocation. In humans, frustration due to blocked goals can cause aggression. [Submissiveness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Submission) may be viewed as the opposite of aggressiveness.

In definitions commonly employed in the [social sciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_sciences) and [behavioural sciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavioral_science), aggression is a response by an individual that delivers something unpleasant to another person. Some definitions include that the individual must intend to harm another person. [Predatory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predatory) or defensive behaviour between members of different species may not be considered aggression in the same sense.

Aggression can take a variety of forms which may be expressed physically or communicated [verbally](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verbal_aggressiveness) or non-verbally: including anti-predator aggression, defensive aggression (fear-induced), predatory aggression, dominance aggression, inter-male aggression, resident-intruder aggression, maternal aggression, species-specific aggression, sex-related aggression, territorial aggression, isolation-induced aggression, irritable aggression, and brain-stimulation-induced aggression (hypothalamus).

There are two subtypes of human aggression: (1) controlled-instrumental subtype (purposeful or goal-oriented); and (2) reactive-impulsive subtype (often elicits uncontrollable actions that are inappropriate or undesirable). Aggression differs from what is commonly called [assertiveness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assertiveness), although the terms are often used interchangeably among laypeople (as in phrases such as "an aggressive salesperson"

*Like many behaviours, aggression can be examined in terms of its ability to help an animal survive and reproduce, or alternatively to risk survival and reproduction. This* [*cost-benefit analysis*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cost-benefit_analysis) *can be looked at in terms of the following evolutionary advantages….*

**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 behaviour, 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 behaviours, 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 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 behaviour. 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 behaviour may occur in some human societies.