The evolutionary explanation for aggression suggests that we can display aggression in the form of jealousy. For males, this is sexual jealousy, as they can experience parental uncertainty and so have a fear of cuckoldry. To reduce the chances of infidelity in their partner, they can be aggressive and jealous by using adaptive mate retention strategies. These include direct guarding where a partner may come home early to check on their significant other, or there could be negative inducements which is when threats are given with dire consequences, for example ‘I’ll kill myself if you leave me’. Females also experience jealousy, but in the form of emotional jealousy, as they are more fearful that if their partner loves another, then they will devote their resources to them and not themselves.

Shackleford studied intimate partner violence which is the use of mate retention strategies, specifically from the male. He got the partners to complete questionnaires about their behaviours, and things that their other partner does, as well as the physical violence there was in the relationship. He found that the more the men used mate retention strategies, the more the women reported that their partner used violence. This supports the explanation, as retention behaviours could reliably be used as a method of predicting violence within a relationship.

A strength of this explanation is that it has real world applications. As Shackleford’s study shows, the mate retention strategies can be used as a clear predictor for domestic violence. If the identification of these retention strategies were more widely known and taught, then family members and friends could identify these, and help to stop domestic violence before it happens. This would consequently help the wife who could have been abused. Therefore, this approach and research has value and helped bring around changes to the legal system such as Clare's Law.

However, a weakness of this explanation is that Shackleford’s study has some methodological issues. He used a self-report method which may have social desirability bias, as the participants are unlikely to admit that they are violent or that their partners are violent as it is not acceptable in society. Males may be less likely to open up about their retention strategies for fear of sounding strange, and so this method has flaws. Furthermore, a small sample size of 100 heterosexual couples were used and so it is harder to make assumptions about all couples from this group. It therefore lacks external validity, and so this limits the conclusions that we can make. This overall works to limit the explanation which is based on Shackleford’s findings.

Despite this, an asset of this explanation is that it can be used to explain gender differences. It is widely seen that males are more aggressive towards females, and there are more stories of domestic abuse from males than females. Campbell suggests that women are less likely to be aggressive as they would end up putting them and their child’s life at risk. Instead they use verbal aggression or non - aggressive methods to end disputes, this further supported in the 'tend and befriend' response seen in females in stressful situation (stress response). The support from the biological explanation and differences in aggressive rates between males and females, gives this explanation face validity.

A weakness of the explanation is that it lacks a scientific approach. The theory is unfalsifiable, as it is based on a hypothesis on human behaviour from thousands of years ago, hence ‘evolutionary’. There is no way to test whether men experience sexual jealousy and so have adapted techniques to reduce cuckoldry, and so it is difficult to use this theory. A theory is not scientific unless it can be disproven. Leading on from this, it is based on correlation, and so it is difficult to assume causation that mate retention strategies come from anti-cuckoldry behaviours. Therefore, this explanation is weakened and is less useful for the scientific community.

Can this explanation be applied to modern society? Step families? Adoption? Do all males respond violently to cuckoldry? By saying it is evolutionary, therefore out of control, are we providing an alibi?