

Why men 'exhibit warrior tendencies'

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Human ancestral history of inter-tribal war has programmed men to exhibit warrior behaviour. Image courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum.

A new study has looked into how our psychology concerning war and conflict may have been shaped by our evolutionary past.

Following a review of current academic literature by [psychologists](#), [biologists](#) and anthropologists, the study concludes that men are biologically programmed to be warriors because of our deep ancestral history of inter-tribal war and [conflict](#). Meanwhile, females have evolved a response to threats from male outsiders where they 'tend and befriend' as a way of protecting their [offspring](#), suggests the study.

In a paper published in the journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, researchers from Oxford, VU Amsterdam, and Michigan universities argue that although these responses may have evolved as a way of coping with threats posed by outsiders, they 'might not be functional in modern times and are often counter-productive'.

The researchers suggest that the study may help us to understand the evolutionary and biological roots of the aggressive behavior between 'tribal' factions in today's world. The study points out that in modern cultures, this 'evolved' behavior can be observed in large-scale conflicts between countries and nations as well as in relatively small-scale skirmishes, such as between supporters of rival football teams or street gangs.

Professor Mark van Vugt, Research Fellow at the Institute for Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology (ICEA) at the University of Oxford, said: "A solution to conflict, which is an all too common problem in societies today, remains elusive. One reason for this might be the difficulty we have in changing our mindset, which has evolved over thousands of years. Our review of the academic literature suggests that the human mind is shaped in a way that tends to perpetuate conflict with "outsiders".

"Our research finds that conflict between rival groups of men has presented opportunities to gain access to mates, territory and increased status. We believe this has resulted through natural selection in an evolved [psychology](#) amongst men to initiate and display acts of intergroup aggression."

The study examines current literature by evolutionary [anthropologists](#) that supports what is known as the 'male warrior hypothesis'. It finds that self-report surveys consistently show that men are, on average, more likely than women to demonstrate prejudice and discrimination against

men who are viewed as outsiders – and this is true across different cultures and times.

The study cites research showing that men prefer group-based social hierarchies and are more likely to strongly identify with their own group than women. Studies that show how men are more motivated to work closely together within their group if they are competing against another group are also cited.

Current academic literature demonstrates how [men](#) across all cultures have been more likely than women to initiate violence in order to win the fight, the study concludes. It also says the benefits for the males of this strategy, amongst humans and among other species, are that they gain more [females](#) in the group at their disposal, which results in them being more likely to successfully reproduce.

Professor Van Vugt said: "We see similar behavior in chimpanzees. For example, the males continuously monitor the borders of their territory. If a female from another group comes along, she may be persuaded to emigrate to his group. When a male strays too far, however, he is likely to be brutally beaten and possibly killed."

Provided by Oxford University

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