

Human Aggression (Part 1)

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1.0 Introduction

Like most behaviors, aggression can be examined in terms of its ability to help a species to reproduce and survive. Animals may use aggression to gain and secure territories, as well as other resources including food, water, and mating opportunities. Researchers have theorized that aggression and the capacity for murder are products of our evolutionary past.

Although humans share some aspects of aggression with animals, they differ from most of them in the complexity of their aggression because of factors such as culture, morals, and social situations. In addition, aggression may take a variety of forms among humans and can be physical, mental, or verbal. A wide variety of studies have been done on these situations.

To explore deeper, I will begin by offering some basic definitions. Next, I will describe several domain-specific theories of aggression before proceeding on the causes and preventive measures. Finally, I will describe the general aggression model that will bring more order and structure to the field of aggression.

1.1 Definition of Aggression

In psychology, as well as other social and behavioral sciences, aggression refers to behavior between members of the same species that is intended to cause pain or harm. Predatory or defensive behavior between members of different species however is not normally considered "aggression". To narrow down the scope, I will only focus on human aggression. Human aggression can be defined as any behavior directed toward another individual that is carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

Aggression is a complex behavior with several subtypes. *Childhood-onset* violent behavior for example appears more persistent than *adolescent-onset* aggression and may be associated with more neuropsychiatry problems. *Overt* aggression (eg, bullying and fighting)

may come to clinical attention more often than *covert* antisocial behavior (eg, stealing and vandalism) (Bastiaens & Bastiaens, 2006).

The most common form of destructive aggression takes place in the home in the form of physical abuse or domestic violence. The impact of these various forms of violence on children and adolescents is complex, but one result appears clear: the number of aggressive and violent youth is increasing dramatically (Perry, 2007).

In its most extreme forms, aggression is human tragedy unsurpassed. Hopes that the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust would produce a worldwide revulsion against killing have been dashed. Since World War II, homicide rates have actually increased rather than decreased in a number of industrialized countries, most notably the United States. Thus, in recent years there has been renewed interest in learning why humans sometimes behave aggressively (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

Accidental harm is not aggressive because it is not intended. Harm that is an incidental by-product of helpful actions is also not aggressive, because the harm-doer believes that the target is not motivated to avoid the action such as pain experienced during a dental procedure (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). Although this definition excludes accidental acts that lead to harm, such as losing control of an auto and accidentally killing a pedestrian, but includes behaviors intended to harm even if the attempt fails, such as when a bullet fired from a gun misses its human target (Bushman & Anderson, 2001).

Violence on the other hand is aggression that has extreme harm as its goal such as physical assault and murder. All violence is aggression, but not all aggression is violent (Bushman & Anderson, 2001). For example, one child pushing another off a tricycle is an act of aggression but is not an act of violence.

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