

Human Aggression (Part 6)

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3.0 Causes of Aggression

There are many factors contribute to violence, and these causes need to be better understood if we are to design effective treatment and prevention programs. Most aggression researches focuses on discovering what biological, environmental, psychological, and social factors influence aggressive behavior, and on how to use these discoveries to reduce and at the same time prevent the present of aggression. These factors can be categorized as features of the situation or as features of the person in the situation (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). The key causal factors can be divided into two major categories that are personal and situational. However, in order to create a simpler and more comprehensive understanding of human aggression, we will only discuss on the personal factor.

3.1 Personal factor

Personal factors include all the characteristics a person brings to the situation, such as personality traits, attitudes, and genetic predispositions (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). Stable person factors are those that display consistency across time, across situations, or across both (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). It is also said that this consistency is largely the result of the person's consistent use of schemata, scripts, and other knowledge structure. In a very real sense, personality is the sum of a person's knowledge structures. In addition, knowledge structures also influence what situations a person will selectively seek out and what situations will be avoided, further contributing to trait-like consistency. Together, personal factors comprise an individual's preparedness to aggress (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

3.1.1 Personality Traits

Certain traits predispose individuals to high levels of aggression. One recent breakthrough, for example, was the discovery that certain types of people who frequently

aggress against others do so in large part because of susceptibility towards hostile attribution, perception, and expectation biases. Another recent breakthrough contradicts longstanding beliefs of many theoreticians and the lay public alike: A type of high self-esteem (and not low self-esteem) produces high aggression (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). Specifically, individuals with inflated or unstable self-esteem (narcissists) are prone to anger and are highly aggressive when their high self-image is threatened.

3.1.2 Sex

Males and females differ in aggressive tendencies, especially in the most violent behaviors of homicide and aggravated assault. The ratio of male to female murderers in the United States is about 10:1 (FBI 1951–1999) (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). Laboratory studies often show the same type of sex effect, but provocation dramatically reduces sex differences in physical aggression, and specific types of provocation differentially affect male and female aggression (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996).

The greater aggressiveness of males is mainly found between strangers and casual acquaintances (Baumeister & Bushman, 2008). The preferred types of aggression also differ for males and females. Males prefer direct aggression, whereas females prefer indirect aggression. According to Bjorkqvist, girls are taught to be less direct in expressing aggression. As a result, they often resort to more indirect forms of aggression (Baumeister & Bushman, 2008). Developmental research suggests that many of these differences result from different socialization experiences (White, 2001). However, evolutionary explanations of some key gender differences also have received empirical support (Baumeister & Bushman, 2008). For example, males are more upset by sexual infidelity of their mates than by emotional infidelity, whereas the opposite pattern occurs for females. In all of these examples, our understanding of sex differences in aggression is greatly enhanced by the discovery of differential affective reactions

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