

Human Aggression (Part 8)

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3.2 Other Causes of Aggression

In the discussion of criminal behavior the broadly debatable topic of nature versus nurture ultimately rules the conversation. Not only have both sides battled issues ranging from homosexuality to alcoholism, but neither side can make a convincing argument that either one is exactly correct. We believe that nature plays a role in the characteristics of a human being; however, the role of nurturing affects the individual substantially greater (Bailey & Brownlow, 2000). Essentially, we believe that both roles work together in defining what makes a person who they are.

A lot of the evidence seems to point the cause of criminal behavior towards a bad upbringing. It is whether aggressive or neglecting parents or just a bad upbringing in general, in terms of environment and so on. This could ultimately lead to a life of criminal and aggressive behavior, but the question remains if upbringing and environment are the only causes.

Criminals tend to be especially high on impulsivity, hyperactivity, sensation seeking, and risk taking. There is also a substantial body of evidence which indicates that impulsivity, hyperactivity, and a propensity for sensation-seeking and risk-taking are often biologically determined (Bailey & Brownlow, 2000). Persons prone toward criminality, are said to bore quickly and easily, and need to seek out new and more intense stimulations than that provided by normal daily experiences. Their stimulus seeking behaviors are likely to include deviant and criminal acts, particularly if they lack legitimate opportunities to satiate their stimulus needs. Most criminals have a history of poor performance at instrumental tasks. This typically results in a very limited education, and, as an adult, a poor work history and a limited income. Not unexpectedly, such persons have a low investment in conventional society and often have an antagonistic orientation towards conventional society.

For such persons the potential loss of the rewards associated with normal society do not pose a substantial cost, and they often turn elsewhere for symbolic situations that provide meaning to their lives. Such abuse: a) is often criminogenic in itself, b) impairs one's performance in conventional roles, c) is a motive for crime, and d) can trigger violent criminal behavior (Bailey & Brownlow, 2000). Furthermore, as persons differ in their reactions to and desire for alcohol and other drugs, it seems probable that criminals are particularly likely to find the effects of drugs and alcohol rewarding (Bailey & Brownlow, 2000).

Ethnographic studies are rich in detail and much of what we know about the motivations for crime comes from them. Most ethnographic studies, however, are primarily concerned with describing the way persons act, and typically do not focus on motivation (Bailey & Brownlow, 2000). The ethnographic study of burglars in Britain by Bennett and Wright (1984) is particularly suggestive regarding the issue of motivation (Bailey & Brownlow, 2000). When asked what their main reason for offending was, most burglars not surprisingly reported money.

However, over half of the offenders spontaneously elaborated on their response, noting other satisfactions associated with offending. Many of the offenders noted at some stage in the interview that they found the risks associated with offending exciting.

Briefly, in the case of situational factors, some causes of the increased violence have been identified. The accessibility of guns, global warming, violence against women and children in schools and homes, and also the widespread exposure to violent entertainment media are some of the example that contribute to the high level of violence and aggression in modern societies. Recent psychological research has yielded promising new treatments, new empirical discoveries, and new theoretical analyses. Situational factors include any important features of the situation, such as presence of a provocation or an aggressive cue (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). Like the person factors, situational factors influence aggression by influencing cognition, affect, and arousal (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

When exploring the differences in the roles heredity and environment play in human aggression, it is not an easy question, one that the scientific community has been grappling for years. The current consensus seems to be that both heredity and environment play significant roles in determining our intricate personalities, including the areas of violence and aggression (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

Similarly, researchers have not yet determined the neurological and biochemical factors underlying alcohol related aggression. Once scientists have further elucidated these issues, researchers may be able to develop successful treatment approaches aimed at decreasing alcohol related aggression. Because alcohol related violence continues to be a significant public health problem, further research on the relationship between antisocial disorder and alcohol related aggression clearly is warranted.

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