

# Human aggression and prejudice



The word aggression is utilized in the English language to describe a variety of actions which result to numerous definitions. This paper will define the word using the perspective of social psychology, which refers to aggression as deliberate behavior intended to cause psychological or physical harm (scanned -the social animal).

Aggression can be classified into two types, instrumental and hostile aggression. Instrumental aggression involves deliberately inflicting harm for the fulfillment of another goal, for instance in games like football, a defensive lineman will usually do whatever it takes to thwart the blocker and tackle the ball carrier, this would typically result to inflicting physical pain on the blocker so the defensive lineman could get to the ball carrier without being stopped (scanned-human aggression).

Hostile aggression involves hostility born of anger or frustration and whose only goal is to cause pain or damage, for instance if the same lineman believes the blocker is a dirty player and he goes out of his way to hurt the blocker even if it does not increase his chances of getting to the ball carrier, then he is displaying hostile aggression (human aggression).

One of the main concerns of social psychology regarding aggression is finding an explanation as to why aggressive behavior occurs, instead of an all-encompassing theoretical model, several theoretical standpoints have been developed. One is the ethological view, which sees aggression as internal energy inevitably incorporated to human nature; this energy is believed to be released in socially acceptable behaviors like sports and competition (Krahé, 2001).

Freud sees aggression as part of the death instinct; one of the two basic driving forces inherent in human nature, aggressive behavior is a means of directing destructive forces away from the individual and towards others (Krahe, 2001).

Biological views conclude that body chemistry and physiology is the key to understanding aggression. Biological causes include the stimulation of the amygdale; the area of the human brain associated with aggression, the effect of this stimulation is violent behavior (the social animal). Alcohol and its physiological effects is another factor because it lowers one's inhibition for deeds that garner social disapproval which include acts of aggression (the social animal).

An additional biological factor is testosterone, this can be observed in criminal records between the two genders; males are more likely to be convicted of violent crimes than women (the social animal). Cognitive neoassociationism declares that aggression is a reaction to aversive stimulation or frustration, which could be in the form of physical pain/discomfort, competition, psychological distress and the general arousal of negative emotions (Krahe, 2001).

An example would be the phenomenon called 'long hot summer', which worried national leaders because the number of occurring riots, rallies, and other acts of civil disobedience increase when temperatures soar and heat waves arise, apparently the general discomfort of prickly heat has a corresponding effect on people's temperaments (the social animal).

The Learning theory views aggression as a type of behavior that is acquired through processes like imitation and reinforcement, for example a child  
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realizes that he/she could win a dispute by pushing one's rival to the ground, this win is reinforced by the admiration of his/her peers and makes the child more likely to react in the same way when faced with a similar situation.

This is apparent most especially in the American culture where success is equated with defeating someone else (human aggression).

Imitation is best illustrated with Bandura's 1963 experiment wherein children were shown a video of adults either being aggressive towards a doll or displaying non aggressive behavior towards it, afterwards the children were given the same doll to play with and the children who watched the video of aggressive adults showed more aggressive behavior compared to those who watched non-aggressive models even without reinforcement. The perspective of social learning has been the key in the concept of media violence affecting aggressive behavior (Krahé, 2001).

Television frequently exposes children to role-models who are unapologetically violent; studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between the amount of media violence one is exposed to as a child and the amount of aggressive behavior exhibited during adolescence and young adulthood (the social animal).

## Prejudice

Social psychology could be defined as the antagonism towards members of certain social groups based on faulty judgment and flawed generalizations. Prejudice has three components, which roughly corresponds to the components of any attitude: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (scanned-prejudice).

Stereotyping is the cognitive aspect, these are a set of beliefs concerning the personal characteristics shared by a group of people, stereotyping disregards the fact that group membership is defined by subjective social norms that are not inherent and in-born.

The negative attitude directed towards people for no other reason than because they belong to a certain social group is the affective component, the evaluation of a unique individual is founded mainly on the person's group and individual characteristics are ignored. The behavioral component is discrimination; this is the acceptance or rejection of an individual based on the group the person belongs to.

The causes of prejudice could be explained with various theories. One is the group conflict theory based on competition for scarce resources, two groups competing for the same resources may threaten each other and create hostility, this in turn, creates negative evaluations of each other, for example Palestinians and Israelis fight over the same land and as a result they have mutually low opinions of the other (prejudice).