

Introduction captures how people feel about themselves generally

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



Introduction What contributes to aggressive behavior? Have the students who are bullying classmates in school a high or a low self-esteem? Perform hooligans vandalism as a result of a high self-esteem or is the opposite the case? Former research found contrasting relations between self-esteem and aggression. Some findings related high self-esteem to aggressive behavior while other findings attributed aggressive behavior to individuals with low self-esteem.

To further investigate this, it is necessary to understand the concepts of aggression and self-esteem. Aggression can have many expressions- child abuse, intimate partner violence, bullying, hooliganism, gang violence, terrorism, physical attacks. It is considered as any form of behavior intended to harm or injure another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment (Hewstone et al.

, YEAR). Aggression is characterized by its underlying motivation (to harm or injure another person/group), not by its consequences. This implicates that the actor must understand that his behavior has the potential to cause harm and consciously decides to do so (Hewstone et al. YEAR. Aggression is defined as the overall evaluation that we have of ourselves along a positive-negative dimension (Hewstone et al., YEAR).

Self-esteem is a part of our self-concept, the cognitive representation of our self-knowledge consisting of a sum of all beliefs we have about ourselves, giving coherence and meaning to our experience, including our relations (SOURCE). Self-esteem has a trait- and a state-dimension. Trait self-esteem captures how people feel about themselves generally overall and typically

most of the time, which basically stable in the course of a life (SOURCE) State self-esteem is a variable self-evaluation that changes in response to temporary experiences (SOURCE). Generally, over the course of a life a person has an almost stable self-esteem, which is slightly fluctuating in response to different situations. It is contingent upon different domains, which determine its rise and fall. The more the self-worth of a person relies on internal reinforcers (such as autonomy) than on external reinforcers (such as the opinion of others or grades), the more an individual is likely to be equipped for "mental crisis" and the self-esteem is more stable and higher.

In the following, the relation between aggression and high or low self-esteem will be investigated. High self-esteem predicts aggressive behavior. Many study findings relate high self-esteem to aggression. People with a high self-esteem see themselves more strongly in positive terms and have fewer negative self-views, as they are generally more confident in succeeding their goals. It is likely that people with a high self-esteem see themselves as likeable, competent or good-looking (Hewstone et al.).

All these attributes give an individual power, for example in terms of independence. This power and feeling of superiority to others can be manifested in aggressive behavior (Baumeister et al., 1996).

History delivers support to the high self-esteem - aggression thesis. The propensity towards violence of black Americans increased after the 1960s, the time where a lot of effort was put in enhancing the destroyed self-esteem of a whole group (Degen, 1996). Furthermore, people with a low self-

esteem are associated with traits and characteristics such as having an unstable self-image, avoiding risk, being shy and modest, emotional instability, avoiding risk and lacking confidence (Baumeister et al., 2000). This seems to contradict the forms of aggressive behavior- when someone is attacked (either physically or verbally), the person performing the aggressive act is exposed to risk and uncertainty as it is unclear what the consequences of the aggressive behavior will be. This contradicts a low self-esteem person's fear of risk, therefore it is not likely that a person with a low self-esteem performs aggressive behavior.

Additionally, aggression is frequently performed as an attempt to defend an opinion about oneself. As a person with low self-esteem is attributed to being confused of who he/she is, there is thus little support for engaging in an act of aggression that is considered as a response of a threatened/attacked self-image (Baumeister et al., 2000). Considering situations in which a person's self-esteem is fluctuating, proof can be found for the hypothesis that high self-esteem is positively related to aggressive behavior. For instance, people with manic depressions are less likely to perform aggressive acts when they are in the depressive phase, which is associated with low self-esteem, than when they are in the manic phase, in which a manic-depressive experiences a boost of self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2000). Furthermore, research found out that the likelihood of performing aggressive behavior increases when a person consumes alcohol.

Alcohol intoxication has been positively correlated to a momentarily boosting self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2000). Research conducted by Kernis,

Granneman and Barclay investigated the connection between hostility and self-esteem. Their results show that people with a high self-esteem cluster around the extremes of being "hostile" and "non-hostile". It was found out that participants having a high and stable self-esteem are least prone to hostility, while participants with a high but unstable self-esteem are scoring high on levels of hostility (Kernis et al., 1989).

Accordingly, it can be stated that aggressive individuals are a subset of people with a high self-esteem. Baumeister and colleagues inferred from these results a connection to narcissism (Baumeister et al., 2000).

Narcissism is defined as having grandiose views of personal superiority, an inflated sense of entitlement, low empathy towards others, fantasies of personal greatness, a belief that other people cannot understand one + BUCH (Miller et al., 2010, BUCH). Narcissism is linked to high but unstable self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2000).

Further research investigating the aggressiveness of people scoring high on narcissism showed that "narcissism is associated with a wide variety of aggressive responses to criticism and other threats to self-esteem, ranging from disdain and contempt to argumentativeness, anger, and more or less controlled aggressive and violent behavior" (Miller et al, 2010, p. 642; Ronningstam, 2005). Thus, narcissism cannot be defined as a direct cause of aggression, but as a risk factor that can contribute to an aggressive or violent response to a provocation or threat of the narcissist's self-image (Baumeister et al., 2005). It is therefore a defending mechanism, which implicates that narcissistic people do not engage in aggressive behavior when there is not

threat to their self-image. Low self-esteem predicts aggressive behavior. Even though there is strong evidence for the hypothesis that high self-esteem predicts aggressive behavior, there is also a lot of research proving that low self-esteem is related to aggressive behavior.

People with low self-esteem are described to be shy, insecure, negative towards themselves and their circumstances, depressed, unmotivated, having a negative self-image and lacking self-confidence (Guidon, 2002). Former research enabled the conclusion that low self-esteem predicts aggressive behavior. Rosenberg stated in 1965 that "low self-esteem weakens the ties to society, which implicates a decrease in conformity to social norms and an increase in delinquency" (Rosenberg, 1965). Furthermore, the lack of unconditional positive self-regard is linked to psychological problems, which includes aggression (Rogers, 1961). There are even proven theories that low self-regard motivates aggression, because aggression is considered as an antisocial behavior, which is driven by feelings of inferiority (Adler, 1956; Horney, 1950). Additionally, individuals with low self-esteem are inclined to real-world externalizing problems such as delinquency and antisocial behavior, which can be considered as aggression (Fergusson et al., 2002). Related to Baumeister's findings in 2000, Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, and Caspi conducted a series of three studies proving the opposite of Baumeister's findings in 2005.

In the first study, they investigated the correlation between self-reports and teacher ratings of self-esteem and self-reports of delinquency of 11 to 14 year old students from two schools in northern Carolina with diverse ethnic

backgrounds. Findings showed that high self-esteem and delinquency are negatively correlated (Donnellan et al., 2005). As study 1 did not include the correlation between delinquency and aggression, they analyzed in study 2 the relation between self-esteem and externalizing problems (this was assessed by teachers and parents). This study was conducted in New Zealand with students aged 11 at the first measures and aged 13 at the second measures. It confirmed the results of the first study - high self-esteem is negatively correlated with externalizing problems, participants with a low self-esteem were more likely to engage in antisocial behavior.

In a third study, Donnellan and colleagues investigated Baumeister's narcissism theory, by analyzing the relation between unrealistically high self-esteem, narcissism and aggressive behavior. Their results supported Baumeister's assumption that narcissistic individuals are prone to aggression, but low self-esteem does so as well. They concluded that low self-esteem and narcissism contribute independently to aggressive thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Donnellan et al., 2005). Their findings let them doubt about the correlation between high self-esteem and narcissism and they suggest to investigate that in further experiments (Donnellan et al., 2005).

Discussion/Conclusion The presented research findings show plausible importance for both hypothesis.

High self-esteem can contribute to aggressive behavior, as the power and feelings of superiority which are associated with high self-esteem is likely to be manifested in aggressive behavior (Baumeister et al., 1965) Aggressive behavior is often performed to defend the self-image, which people with high

self-esteem are more likely to engage in (Baumeister et al., 1965). The historic example of violence of black Americans (Degen, 1996) as well as the self-esteem enhancing influence of alcohol (Baumeister et al, 1996) strongly support this thesis. On the other side, low self-esteem weakens the ties to society resulting in a decreasing conformity to social norms and an increase in delinquency (Rosenberg, 1965).

Additionally, Donnellan et al.'s studies strongly support the hypothesis that low self-esteem predicts aggression. Nevertheless, researchers from both hypotheses found that narcissism can be seen as a predictor of prejudice (Baumeister et al., 2000; Donnellan et al, 2005).

As both hypotheses are backed up with strong support, it may be the case that not either high self-esteem or low self-esteem contributes to aggressive behavior. Aggression can be considered as a composition of many different sources and self-esteem is one of them, as well as narcissism. But to fully explain why a person acts in an aggressive manner, it is necessary to also take factors such as childhood experiences or other personality traits into consideration. Personally, the low self-esteem hypothesis seems to be more adequate. Aggression is a behavior that evokes attention and from the experiences I made, people who seek attention are often hiding dissatisfaction with themselves.

I consider aggressive behavior as a means to show superiority, which can be in many cases seen as a cover-up of insecurity. Nevertheless, I find the findings for both hypotheses plausible. e1 Checkenob das die autoren des

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