

To the first people to  
develop a base



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

To understand what causes aggression, it should first be understood what the term “ aggression” means. In general, it is hard to define aggression as it can come in different forms and is not always violent as many people assume. One definition that generally covers the meaning of aggression is by Berkowitz (1993,) who said that “ aggression is behaviour that is intended to hurt people both physically and emotionally.

” As aggression has such a vast amount of meaning, it is often questioned by psychologists what exactly causes people to experience these feelings, especially the debate of whether our scale of aggression is something that people are born with or is something that is manipulated and grown by the environment that different communities of people grow up in. The argument “ aggression is an innate response in humans” relates to the biological reasoning behind aggression, however other studies have also found evidence to suggest that there are other factors that can contribute to the levels of aggression that people feel. To have the best understanding of aggression, it is best to examine both social and biological theories in order to understand how aggression is formed. Some of the first psychologists to study aggression believed that aggression was more of a biological process rather than something that we develop over our lifetimes.

One of the first people to develop a base for the biological reasoning behind aggression was Freud. He came up with Instinct theory, which was based on the idea that aggression is an instinct contributed to by the life and death instincts that all humans feel and is something that is genetically developed and thus is inevitable. This argument leads to further research to be built on

it, such as the work of Lorenz (1966.) Lorenz theorised that all instinctive aggression was formed by evolution.

This is because for certain species to survive they would often have to fight over resources such as food, so by having a certain level of aggression, certain species of animals and humans could avoid extinction. Similarly, to Freud, he argued that these innate aggressive forces continue to build up over time and will eventually have to be released. What Lorenz's theory does not take into consideration is that in the modern era, most aggression humans express is carried out on other humans and therefore this is not in line with their theory of what we are born with aggression for. Overall this work has been found to have very little empirical evidence, but still had some key points to why aggression could be biological.

As Freud argued, it is important for people to be able to express anger to maintain wellbeing. However, aspects of society and social norms mean that often people cannot express their aggression to the person causing it. This is also known as displaced aggression. Often this only starts as frustration, however, if a person is not able to express this over a longer period, for reasons such as it could cause them to lose a friend or a job, then over time this forms into aggression.

Marcus-Newhall et al (2000) said that people who feel displaced aggression that people tend to take out their aggression on less powerful and accessible targets, such as family members and or complete strangers. To explain this, they came up with the analogy of "kick a dog," where is a worker is aggravated by their boss but cannot say anything, he will kick his dog when

he gets home as the dog can't retaliate at the same level that a superior could. This argument faces the problem in that it assumes that all frustration felt by people turns into aggression, but rather it can stem into other feelings such as despair, sadness and other emotions, so is not always violent as assumed. Although most theories suggest that we are all born with a level of aggression, there are other studies that have been conducted which have tried to understand what causes people to feel the levels of aggression that they do.

One of these people was Bandura (1963.) He developed the " Social Learning Theory," which was based on the ideas of Instinct theory and other social learning theories. He argued within this that aggression can be learnt through operant conditioning. This is the way in which people modify others behaviour through positive and negative reinforcement. If a child sees a role model carry out an aggressive act, then the child will internalise this and are likely to carry out deviant acts in the future. Bandura argued that this behaviour modelling is highest with family members. To test his theory, Bandura (1963) conducted an experiment with bobo dolls and child participants.

His study found that children who witnessed an adult model being aggressive towards the doll were more likely to reproduce that behaviour, which confirmed his theory that aggressive behaviour is learnt or replicated. This theory puts forward the argument that it could just be that generations of a family have learnt aggressive behaviour, rather than it being something developed through family genetics. What Bandura's study does fail to

consider is that there are people exposed to high levels of aggression but do not become overly aggressive themselves.

Sometimes when studying aggression, it can be hard to measure accurately peoples level of aggression, because the amount of aggression that they show can change. It has been found that when people are in larger groups, a sense of own identity is lost and instead people conform to the behaviours of a larger group. This is also known as deindividuation. During this, people have less self-awareness and therefore have been found to express behaviour that is aggressive. Diener (1976) conducted an observation of 1,300 children trick-or-treating.

He found that when children were in larger groups and their costumes masked their identity then they were more likely to perform anti-social actions. This may have resulted from the fact that people know that in modern society, aggressive behaviour comes with a form of punishment, however, if a culprit's identity is hidden, then they may perceive that their actions will be less likely to have consequences and therefore they are more aggressive. Silke (2003) analysed 500 violent attacks in Northern Ireland and found that the severity of the violent incidents increased when the attacker was masked. This could prove that some individuals are naturally more aggressive, but their expression of this aggression is suppressed by society. Despite all this, there are some fundamental issues with the theory.

This is because people be part of a multitude of different crowds, yet don't carry out aggressive acts, so there must be other factors within this that cause aggression to occur. For many people, there is a level of self-control

which allows most people to maintain control over the levels of aggression in most parts of their lives. However, when people drink alcohol, their ability to maintain this control is lowered, so the levels of aggression are increased. Taylor (1967) conducted a study in which participants chose whether to drink an alcohol or non-alcohol beverage. They were then provoked to see how they would react. His study found that it was much easier to provoke people who had consumed the alcoholic drink.

Although alcohol is thought to provoke aggressive behaviour, not all people who drink display aggressive behaviour, so it is thought that there is a biological element to how alcohol affects different people. Studies into the biological aspects of aggression have found that the amygdala, the part of the brain that plays a key role in processing emotion and therefore aggression, can affect the levels of aggression that people experience. In 1966, a man named Charles Whitman shot and killed 16 people at a University in Texas. In a letter left he asked for his brain to be examined and it was found that there was a small tumour pressing on his amygdala. This began the argument that he was not fully in control of his emotions and was expressing abnormal levels of aggression as a response to a tumour.

However, to suggest that this was the sole reason for this crime would be far-fetched as there are many people who are diagnosed with brain tumours and do not carry out deadly acts. Pardini et al (2014) found that male subjects with a lower amygdala volume and levels of aggression that were measured during childhood and their lives up to the point of the experiment. He then concluded that lower amygdala levels should be associated with more violent tendencies. Despite this research, it could be argued that

people would need the social circumstances to occur for them to express this aggression. Adding to this, it could be that what causes aggression to only varies from person to person but also depending on a person's gender. In most cultures, it is found that males are the more aggressive gender, and this is said to be because of the levels of testosterone in their bodies. Studies on animals have shown clear evidence that there is a link between testosterone and aggression, but in humans, it is not quite as clear-cut, as with many it is not that they are violent but that they like to assert dominance. It would also be inaccurate to suggest that women do not also display aggression as they do, but it is expressed more emotionally than physically.

Miller et al (1996) wanted to test the provocation of aggression between genders. They found that unprovoked men are more aggressive than women, but the level of this is massively reduced so that there is little difference between genders once provoked. It could also be argued that it is not just genetics that causes a gender difference, but rather than it is men conforming to the idea that they have to be more aggressive and assertive to "protect" women, as they are told to do by the norms of society. This could mean that it is not necessarily the case that men are more dominant but rather than they are forced by society to be.

To try and gain a greater understanding of aggression, the General aggression model was created that considers the role of social, biological and other factors of what causes people to act aggressively. It argues rather than human aggression being created by one factor, it is influenced by multiple factors. It also argues that levels of aggression are affected by a

<https://assignbuster.com/to-the-first-people-to-develop-a-base/>

person's "knowledge structures," which are built up over time and are developed with experience. It brings in the argument that there could be a range of biological and sociological factors that can cause a person to show aggression, and it is not simply that there has been one aspect of their lives that has caused a person to become aggressive. In conclusion, although many of the earliest theories developed believed that aggression was an innate response in humans, later theorists and the general aggression model have shown that there cannot simply be one factor that causes someone to feel aggression. Although social psychologists do not deny that innate tendencies exist, there can be social factors that cause the levels of this aggression to change and develop. For example, someone can naturally have frustration and aggression towards something, but if they aren't allowed to express it then this can build up due to social factors over time and cause an aggressive outburst.

There are ways that naturally expressed aggression can be heightened, through things such as alcohol, which causes increased aggression through heightening people's emotions. It is clear that aggression does have a biological base because aggression is expressed by everyone in some form or another, however how people decide to express this emotion can be shaped and changed by those around us and by society into people expressing much higher or lower levels than others. Therefore, it can be finalised that there is both biological and social reasons for people expressing aggression, and without both, levels of aggression would most probably be lower within the human race.