

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Aggression and Violence

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Prompted to think about aggression and violence, we may recall a personal incident, a friend's trauma, a community incident, or recent news. The vividness of these personal or recent events may overshadow the many kinds of aggression and violence that people experience as individuals, groups, communities, and nations. Some statistics from the World Report on Violence and Health (World Health Organization, 2002) suggest the ubiquity, severity, and extent of aggression and violence.

- As the result of violence, 1.6 million people die each year; countless more suffer physical and psychological injuries.
- In the twentieth century, 191 million people died in wars; more than half were civilians.
- In 2000, 200,000 young people died of violence; twenty to forty times that number had violent injuries requiring hospital treatment.
- For nonfatal violence, boys are more often victims of beatings than girls, while girls are more often victims of infanticide, neglect, and coerced prostitution than boys. In some countries one out of four women are abused by an intimate partner and one third of adolescent girls endure forced sexual initiation.
- Elderly people are at risk of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence.

As these statistics indicate, violence has many forms. It can be obvious or hidden, direct or structural, and it can be narrowly focused or pervasive. It can occur at all levels of analysis, from within an individual to between nations. Within these broad classifications, aggression and violence can be:

- *Physical/symbolic*. It is physical in assault and sexual abuse; it is symbolic in verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse.
- *Vigorous/passive*. It is vigorous in attacks; it is passive in the withholding or diverting of needed resources.
- *Means/end*. It is instrumental when it is a means to obtain valued goods or goals; it is an end in itself in sadistic, dominating behavior.
- *Sanctioned/prohibited*. It is sanctioned when it is authorized by public officials to wield, consolidate, and abuse power; it is prohibited when it is unlawful, abhorred, and punished.
- *Self-inflicted/inflicted on others*. It is self-inflicted when it is directed at oneself as injury or suicide; it is often directed at others.
- *Preserving/changing the status quo*. It can protect the political status quo; it can be used to accelerate social change.
- *Prosocial/antisocial*. It can be described as bringing about a better society; it can be described as destructive to people, security, and the physical and social infrastructure.

This chapter invites the reader to think about aggression and violence broadly, as complex constructs, rather than narrowly or stereotypically. Theories and research on aggression and violence offer an understanding of their nature, scope, and role in human experience.

When faced with aggression and violence in our lives or in the news, we may rely on readily available, simple, and stereotypical causal explanations. Theories and research on aggression and violence offer a more complex understanding of the origins of aggression and violence. The first section of this chapter is organized by an ongoing debate on the origins of aggression and violence: do they result from nature or nurture? This section begins with theories emphasizing the biological and dispositional origins of aggression and violence. It then describes theories emphasizing the interaction of nature and nurture, and theories emphasizing nurture or social context. Social context is particularly important because it influences forms that aggression and violence take, and it can ameliorate inborn tendencies.

Research and theory on aggression and violence have primarily focused on their biological, motivational, and cognitive roots, but the influence of morals, norms, and values has received less attention. The chapter's second section describes moral theories and discusses the importance of norm violations, moral judgment, disengagement of moral controls, moral exclusion, and structural violence

to an understanding of aggression and violence. The chapter concludes with implications of theory and research for practice, and it describes approaches that seek to reduce aggression and violence.

THEORIES OF AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE: FROM DISPOSITION TO CONTEXT

While aggression does not inevitably lead to violence and violence can occur without aggression (such as in natural disasters) the terms are closely related. In popular usage, aggression can be confused with assertion—the bold, energetic pursuit of one’s goals. The psychological definition of aggression makes clear that it is negative behavior: “any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment” (Baron, 1977, p. 7). A public health definition of aggression as self-directed violence, interpersonal violence, or collective violence is broader in scope and describes aggression’s biological, social, cultural, and political roots and its enactment (World Health Organization, 2002).

Aggression and violence occur at every societal level. In individuals, they can occur as suicide and self-mutilation; in interpersonal relationships, as rape and deliberately passing on infectious disease; within and between families, communities, regions, ethnic groups, and nations as struggles for political control and liberation. Envisioning these societal levels as points along a linear dimension of increasing size and social complexity does not fully capture the strong influence that large social levels (for example, ethnic, national, or religious communities) exert on such smaller levels. Like handcrafted, wooden Russian *matryoshka* dolls, smaller units—individuals, families, or communities—are nested within larger communities that are themselves nested within regions and nations. This nested model (see Figure 23.1) captures how culture, expectancies, and socially shared understandings from one level infuse and influence others. Individual aggression is more likely when one’s peer group, family, community, or society encourages or expects it. Although the influence among levels is bidirectional, an individual is usually less able to influence the cultural norms of larger social groups, such as her society, than vice versa. The nested model depicts contextual influences on aggressive and violent behavior, but it is highly simplified. Some levels are “thicker” and more influential than “thinner,” less influential levels. In addition, multiple sources of influence contribute to aggression and violence.¹ Individuals are nested in families as well as other close groups, such as friends and teams. Each context influences beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. These various influences may be congruent or discrepant. As the next section describes, aggression also results from internal as well as social influences.

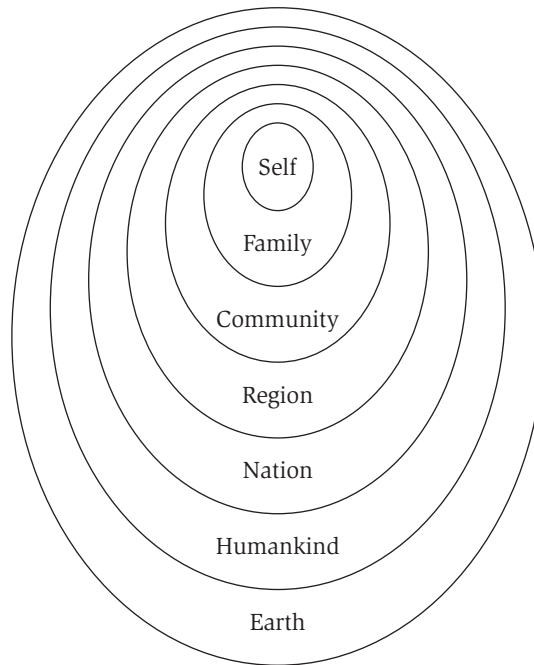


Figure 23.1. Nested Societal Levels.

Evolution, Sociobiology, and Physiology

Evolutionary theories describe the emergence of aggression and violence in conditions that protohumans may have faced. Informed by studies of animals and human groups in pre-industrial societies, these approaches describe aggression and violence as an adaptive, hardwired, physiological predisposition that has evolved over millennia (compare Waller, 2002).

Sociobiological research examines aggressive behavior among insects, fish, birds and, from these observations, extrapolates the meaning of aggression for humans. For animals, aggressive behavior is pragmatic: to obtain food, acquire or maintain leadership, or protect young or the flock. Intraspecific aggression benefits a species when it disperses members and promotes survival during catastrophes or periods of resource scarcity that kill off species members in one locale. But once adaptive behaviors do not invariably remain useful. Even if aggression and violence were adaptive for humans at one time, they may not remain so and should not be viewed as an inevitable product of our evolutionary ancestry (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1974).

Among humans, the physiological predisposition to aggress can be aroused by adverse environmental circumstances. In Shakespeare's (1595) *Romeo and Juliet*, Benvolio warns Mercutio that on "these hot days, is the mad blood

stirring" (Act 3, Scene 1). Research concurs. Interpersonal and mob violence increase in adverse environmental conditions when hot spells, extremely low temperatures, foul odors, excessive noise, or crowding make life unpleasant. Alcohol and drugs also provoke aggression and are implicated in domestic abuse, vehicular death, and more than half of reported homicides. Adverse environmental conditions, alcohol, and drugs do not inevitably result in violence but they do reduce self-restraint. Reduced restraint along with frustration, misperception, and poor communication can lead to violence. Though there is little doubt that people have inherited the potential for aggression, they have also inherited the potential for altruism, cooperation, and, most important, the potential for thoughtful problem solving for choosing behaviors suitable for attaining desired goals.

Deviance

The predisposition for aggressive behavior is associated with a number of abnormal physiological conditions including neurological deficits, abnormal neurotransmitter levels (for example, serotonin and monoamine oxidase [MAO]), hormonal imbalance, birth trauma, brain tumors, exposure to such toxic substances as lead, and various medical disorders. Compared with nonviolent offenders, criminally violent individuals are more likely to have experienced significant head injuries and exhibit neurological impairment. Physiological deviance can cause aggressive behavior, but aggression can also cause physiological deviance. High levels of the male hormone, testosterone, can be a consequence as well as a cause of domineering behavior (American Psychological Association, 1996).

Psychological deviance, such as schizophrenia and antisocial personality disorder, are sometimes associated with violent behavior. *Antisocial personality disorder* describes individuals who lack guilt and are grossly selfish, callous, irresponsible, and impulsive—characteristics that can lead to destructive conflict and violence. Some kinds of violence, such as rampage killings, gain wide media coverage although they account for only 0.001 percent of all killings. One hundred cases of rampage violence from 1949 to 1999 examined by the *New York Times* indicate that popular, simplistic explanations (that is, the killer was a disgruntled employee) fail to capture the serious mental health problems associated with this type of killing (Fessenden, 2000). The tragedy of rampage killings is that perpetrators often give ample and specific warnings about their desperate mental state and their murderous intentions beforehand but these warnings go unheeded. Preventative social services and responsive civic services could have prevented some of these rampages.

People with mental illness can be stereotyped as violent, but they are no more likely to be violent than people in the general population. Some people with mental illness behave violently toward themselves and others when they are off medications or when they abuse drugs or alcohol (like people in the

general population), but most do not. And like people in the general population, people with mental illness are sensitive to situational factors that constrain aggressive and violent behavior.

In spite of common stereotypes and fears, deviance does not account for most violence. Many people without physiological or psychological disorders behave violently, as exemplified by Holocaust bureaucrats and slave owners. In their society they were considered normal and were highly regarded because of their loyalty to their family, group, or cause. As the section on morals will discuss, this sense of responsibility and loyalty can itself inspire violence.

Disposition and Context

Disposition (also called personality or temperament) influences how an individual perceives and responds to conflict. Some people are unflappable; others are easily irritated. Although a hostile environment might provoke aggressive responses in anyone, people labeled “aggressive” see hostility in ambiguous circumstances, tend to react offensively to minimal provocation, and initiate overt aggression.

The media describes teens who perpetrate multiple murders, such as the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, as harboring pent-up grudges and being explosively angry and at the “point of no return” (Egan, 1998, p. 22). While these descriptions are plausible, they rely on disposition and understate the contribution of context. Attention to social context emphasizes the availability of semiautomatic weapons; an adult culture that ignores or is insensitive to adolescent needs and warning signs; a pop culture of violent rap lyrics, video games, television, and Internet sites (Huesmann, 1986); and a culture in which violence is an easy, attractive, and acceptable option for resolving conflict (Fainaru, 1998; Mifflin, 1999). Clearly, both disposition and context are important. Troubled youths with easy access to weapons, lax supervision, and a violent culture can be a lethal combination.

Dispositional explanations for aggression are not limited to individuals. In intergroup, institutional, interregional, and international conflict, dispositional explanations simplify conflict by depicting an opposing group’s culture as malevolent. This allows conflict participants and bystanders to view an entire political or ethnic group, or even an entire country, as dangerous, unprincipled, or evil.

Dispositional explanations for violence can also focus on individuals and societies. The Third Reich’s policy of genocide was partially the result of Adolf Hitler’s pathological but effective mix of demagoguery, charisma, and anti-Semitism and, at the state level, the Third Reich’s elitist, racist, and homophobic ideology. The Third Reich was also effective because it was supported by many ordinary individuals, groups, and institutions. Psychologically, it is easier to view political leaders or parties as causal agents rather than to see the more complex and

larger context with its prevailing and anticipated economic conditions; political institutions; available and scarce resources; conflict resolution practices; laws and legal procedures; and the degree to which the society is open or closed to new groups, traditions, and ideas. This complex understanding of aggression and violence implicates ordinary people who are harder to label as dispositionally evil.

Motivation

Motivational theories describe aggression as resulting from blocked human needs. Biological needs for food, water, and shelter are basic and must be met before higher needs can be satisfied for social attachment, self-esteem, creativity, understanding, self-actualization, and spiritual transcendence (Maslow, 1970). Basic needs are inborn, but family and cultural values shape how they are expressed and met. Though frustrated needs can result in competition, anger, and aggression, frustration also motivates constructive behavior. Frustrated biological or safety needs can mobilize war or community cooperation, and frustrated love needs can prompt self-destructive behavior and stalking or inspire other creative energies. Motivation theory focuses on an individual's needs, but social groups (for example, families, communities, states) also have basic needs for environmental resources (for example, land or clean water), security, and positive identity. These needs are at the heart of many protracted deadly intranational and international conflicts.

Frustration and Arousal

In 1939, a group of psychologists sparked controversy when they asserted that frustration causes aggression (Dollard and others, 1939). Building on earlier psychoanalytic ideas, they defined frustration as a state that emerges when circumstances interfere with a goal response. Their work spurred considerable research examining the relationship between frustration and aggression. **This research found that frustration activates the readiness to aggress, but it does not inevitably result in aggression; frustration can also generate constructive problem solving. Nor does aggression always result from frustration. It also results from competition, greed, and fear. A number of factors, including negative and positive feelings, past events, understandings about the situation (that is, what is happening, who is to blame), and displaced hostility, mediate the effect of frustration on aggression (Berkowitz, 1993).**

Context, too, matters. Guns, knives, or axes, have destructive potential in their own right and can be powerful contextual cues that spark violence. As Leonard Berkowitz (1968) quipped, "The finger pulls the trigger, but the trigger may also be pulling the finger" (p. 22). Frustration and arousal can lead to relative deprivation (Crosby, 1982), the sense of injustice that emerges when individuals or groups compare their lot with others. When these comparisons reveal

that one's own group is disadvantaged compared with similar groups, they can result in shared frustrations and the conviction that fairness has been violated. This can precipitate political unrest and violence (Gurr, 1970).

Gender

Both women and men experience intimate violence. In the United States, nearly 5.3 million women ages eighteen and older experience intimate personal violent assaults each year, and 3.2 million men experience such assaults. Many consist of pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, and hitting, but approximately 1.3 million women and 835,000 men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). Women are particularly vulnerable to violence in societies characterized by inequalities between men and women, rigid gender roles, and legal and cultural norms that support a man's right to sex (Levinson, 1989). They are also vulnerable in violent societies when torture-murders of young women reach epidemic proportions but go unchecked by civic authorities (*New York Times*, 2005; Ciudad Juarez also has experienced an epidemic of such murders).

Ninety percent of murderers in the United States are male, but when context, intensity, and type of violence are considered, the relationship between gender and violence is more complex. Women are increasingly charged with offenses against children, but they spend far more time with children than men, and men inflict more severe harm on children. Male-to-female and female-to-male violence assault rates are similar, but females inflict less physical injury unless weapons are used. The decline of intimate partner violence in recent years is primarily the decline of women killing men. This decline coincides with improvements in women's economic status and the increased availability of protective services for women, including legal advocacy and shelters, indicating how social programs can reduce violence.

Children learn about gender roles in violent conflict by watching adults. In *Bone Black*, bell hooks (1996) describes domestic violence from her perspective as a child:

Out of nowhere he comes home from work angry. He reaches the porch yelling and screaming at the woman inside—yelling that she is his wife, he can do with her what he wants. They do not understand what is happening. He is pushing, hitting, telling her to shut up. She is pleading—crying . . . Yelling, screaming, hitting; they stare at the red blood that trickles through the crying mouth. They cannot believe this pleading, crying woman, this woman who does not fight back, is the same person they know. The person they know is strong, gets things done, is a woman of ways and means, a woman of action. They do not know her still, paralyzed, waiting for the next blow, pleading. They do not know their mama afraid (pp. 146–147).

Research identifies some gender differences in aggression style among children. For boys and girls, direct, physical aggression toward peers is common



until age two. Direct aggression then declines as children mature but it remains more common among boys. As direct aggression declines, indirect aggression (such as badmouthing, gossip, smear campaigns, and socially isolating peers, also called relational aggression) becomes more common for boys and girls but remains more common among girls. Indirect aggression can inflict psychological and social damage. Attention to girl-on-girl bullying and aggression in the media (for example, the film *Mean Girls*) suggests that girls are getting meaner and more violent. This trend, however, has not been substantiated by research (Brown and Chesney-Lind (n.d.)). Researchers are only beginning to explore women's voice, anger, and resistance to better understand women's experience with, understanding of, and response to danger and violence (Fine and Weis, 2003).

Behaviorism and Conditioned Responses

From a behavioral perspective, aggression is not a genetically predetermined response. It is a response conditioned by stimuli that have been rewarded. Past reinforcement of aggression by praise, satisfaction, or attention increases the likelihood that an individual will employ aggressive responses; punishment decreases this likelihood. In the most primitive sense this behavior is learned but it is learned behaviorally rather than cognitively.

Criminal justice systems seek to strengthen the link between violence and punishment. The negative reinforcement of punishment is an effective deterrent only under specific circumstances: if the salience and certainty of punishment are high, if it occurs quickly after the offensive behavior, and if it is of considerable magnitude. This was demonstrated in a social experiment in which Minneapolis police officers responded to domestic violence with either on-the-spot arrest or counseling. Their responses were randomly assigned. Arrest, the punitive response, was a more effective deterrent of further domestic abuse even if the arrest was very brief (Sherman and Berk, 1984). While execution is commonly justified as a deterrent to violent crime, it inhibits homicide briefly. Following an execution, homicide rates drop but then rise above previous baseline rates. This suggests that execution advertises killing as a problem-solving strategy more effectively than it deters violence (Phillips and Hensley, 1984).

Social Learning

Social learning theory describes aggression as a way of interacting with others and solving social problems that is learned from watching influential role models enact aggressive behavior. Observation then segues into behavioral imitation (Bandura, 1983; Cairns, 1996; Staub, 1989). Media violence can contribute to social learning. It not only can desensitize viewers to violence and convey norms that justify violence, but it can also teach aggressive scripts for dealing with problems. Social learning is evident in copycat crimes following films or news with grotesque content.

Children learn essential survival skills from adults and older peers. Violence is then acquired as social learning gleaned from the local and wider culture as Geoffrey Canada (1995) describes:

If you wonder how a fourteen-year-old can shoot another child his own age in the head, or how boys can do a “drive-by-shooting” and then go home to dinner, you need to know you don’t get there in a day, or week, or month. It takes years of preparation to be willing to commit murder, to be willing to kill or die for a corner, a color, or a leather jacket. Many of the children of America are conditioned early to kill and, more frighteningly, to die for what to an outsider might seem a trivial cause. (p. 35)

Using nonviolent approaches to conflict, such as discussion and negotiation, in difficult social relations also requires social learning. Unskilled talking can escalate conflict. Constructive talk with an adversary takes communication and interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. These skills are more likely to be acquired, used, and effective if they have been taught and demonstrated at home, at school, in the workplace, in the community, in the media, and in the larger society (Opatow and Deutsch, 1999).

Social Cognition

Our understanding of ourselves is inevitably limited and what we know about others is even less complete. Although we can assume our understanding of a social situation is factual and accurate, it is often based on fragmentary information, inferences, and assumptions that can be biased and self-serving.

Social cognitions help us make sense of ourselves, other people, and our experiences. They include subjective interpretations about what is happening, labels for people and circumstances, and if-then scripts that hypothesize causality. Social cognitions are the way we process information, make decisions, and solve problems (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). From the perspective of social cognition theory, aggression results from hostile thoughts, fantasies, imagery, imagined intentions and from considering a limited rather than a full range of behavioral options. Less violent behavior can result from new ways of thinking about oneself, others, and the context. It can also result from envisioning alternative constructive responses to conflict.

Social cognition research describes social understanding as a sequential process. A person codes a social experience, selects an apt behavioral response, and enacts it based on rules that have been acquired during socialization and past social experience. Cognitive biases, deficiencies, and errors can occur throughout this process, from erroneously encoding cues to inadequately searching for responses, ineptly applying social mores, and bungling selected responses. As the next section describes, flaws in this process can result in two kinds of aggression.

Social Competence

Research on social competence in children differentiates between reactive and proactive aggression (Dodge and Coie, 1987). Reactive aggression is striking back in response to perceived provocation. Its behavioral symptoms include misreading others' intentions, short-tempered volatility, and overreacting to accidental annoyances or affronts. It can result from chronic exposure to life-threatening dangers, such as domestic or social violence or the death of loved ones. These experiences disrupt a child's sense of security and can lead to hypervigilance, unwarranted fear responses, and hostile attributions when faced with a minor provocations or ambiguous statements. Treatments include increasing the child's awareness of situations that trigger aggressive response, increasing the ability to understand others' behaviors and intentions accurately, anger control training, and exposure to admired role models who handle challenge without resorting to aggression or violence. Close, satisfying relationships characterized by reciprocity, cooperation, and competent communication about feelings can help children use assertive but less aggressive responses to challenges they face.

Proactive aggression is the initiation of verbal and physical aggression. It is such instigating behavior as domineering or bullying. Proactive aggression results from social experiences in which violence is reinforced as the preferred response. Coercive child-rearing practices and repeated observation of aggression in the media, in the community, and at home can give rise to proactive aggression. Proactively aggressive children may be able to accurately perceive others' behavior and intentions but they respond with a limited repertoire (fight or flee) or evaluate an aggressive response positively ("This will show them that I can take care of myself"). They may also attempt a nonaggressive response but encounter difficulty enacting it and bumble into aggression. Treatment for proactively aggressive children includes learning nonaggressive problem-solving strategies, receiving consistent punishment for aggression and reinforcement for nonaggressive responses, and raising their awareness of long-term negative outcomes of aggression and long-term positive outcomes of nonaggression.

Culture

Culture is the learned behavior of a group of people that includes their shared languages, core beliefs, norms, values, and traditions. Culture is evident in the way people use materials and resources, in their social relationships, and in their political, legal, and economic institutions. Because culture shapes patterns of thought and influences biological propensities by valuing particular kinds of behavior, it influences the form and intensity of aggression and violence.

There is cross-cultural variation in acceptable kinds and levels of aggression. Peaceful societies are characterized by tolerance in child rearing, acceptance of

self-expression, and support for institutionalizing humanistic values. Violent societies are characterized by multiple forms of aggression including homicide, theft, competition at work, strict child-rearing practices, sexual repression of women, and punitive approaches to human behavior at all periods of an individual's life from infancy to adulthood (Russell, 1972).

In some cultures, aggression is celebrated in entertainment and recreation. Roman gladiator contests are now viewed as depraved and cruel, but contemporary spectator events such as boxing, wrestling, and cock, bull, and dog fighting applaud aggression and violence. In some sports, brawls, playing dirty, and fan violence are part of the thrill. Aggression is also a key ingredient in participatory recreational activities such as hunting and its high-tech analog, laser tag. As a *Business Week* article states:

Why just daydream about demolishing your competitors? You may find more satisfaction in rubbing out rivals for sport at one of the increasingly popular places where you can wage war games for a modest fee. More and more business managers and employees act out their aggression these days at the country's 500 laser-tag arenas, where opponents in sci-fi-style gear shoot at each other with laser guns. (Berman, 1998, p. 22)

Nelson Mandela maintains that violent cultures can be turned around by individuals, communities, and governments, as happened in South Africa (World Health Organization, 2002). This transformation depends on changing durable aspects of the culture, including the way that social, legal, political, and economic structures normalize social hierarchies, power arrangements, and access to social and material resources by groups within the culture. Among the many influences exerted by culture, moral influences are potent. They influence obligations in social relations among individuals, groups, and at larger levels of analysis. Morals influence the kinds of aggression that are noticed or ignored, deplored or celebrated, and perceived as fair or unfair.

MORAL THEORIES OF AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE

Morton Deutsch's (1982) Theory of Interdependence and Psychological Orientation emphasizes that psychological orientations to social situations have moral as well as cognitive and motivational components. From this standpoint it is apparent that theories of aggression primarily emphasize biology, cognitions, and motives, and neglect aggression's moral component.

Morals are the norms, rights, entitlements, obligations, responsibilities, and duties that guide our behavior with others and shape our sense of fairness. Morals, conveyed by social learning and culture, are attuned to who is owed

what in particular contexts. Even when morals are unarticulated they can be deeply felt, particularly when people perceive a discrepancy between what should be and what is. Morals can deter aggression and violence when they instruct patience if faced with provocation, but they can provoke aggression and violence when they instruct honor-, reputation-, or status-preserving responses to provocation. Perceived violations of shared social norms can activate a sense of danger and injustice that charge conflict with great intensity.

In aggression and violence, morals, entwine with cognitions and motivations. Morals and cognitions are closely connected. Anger is described as cognitive and physiological, but it is moral too. While it results from cognitions that someone is responsible for one's suffering—that someone acted in a socially unjustified manner and that a negative occurrence would not have happened otherwise (Berkowitz and Heimer, 1989)—it is also a moral judgment that focuses on responsibility, blame, and violation of social norms. Morals and motives are also closely connected. Blame identifies particular people as responsible for one's failure to achieve an important goal. It is also based upon a person's understanding of prevailing moral norms and can prompt a sense of injustice that can be highly motivating and justify aggression.

Moral theories concerning violation of norms, social judgments, disengagement of moral controls, moral exclusion, and structural violence describe the relationship between morals and aggression and violence.

Norm Violations

Social norms guide behavioral expectancies about how people should behave toward each other. These norms are assumed to be widely known and shared within a group. Because social norms foster social coordination and communication, violations are disruptive and can be punished by gossip and ostracism. Violations of social norms also can set in motion attributions that emphasize malevolent motives and antagonistic interests, resulting in hostile reactions, conflict escalation, and violence. Norm violations are less likely to trigger this negative cycle if the norm violations are perceived as being transient rather than stable, unintentional rather than intentional, and when parties to a conflict (friends, community groups, or nations) have developed norms of redress. Norms of redress are procedures for bringing about retributive or reparative justice. They can effectively avert conflict escalation if they are in place and well established before norm violations occur (De Ridder and Tripathi, 1992).

Moral Reasoning and Judgment

Sociomoral reasoning examines how people judge their own and others' behavior. Aggression can be normative or norm-violating, depending on prevailing norms in the family, community, and culture. Sociomoral judgments of aggression consider an actor's intentions; the appropriateness, intensity, and nature of the

aggression; and the harm done. These judgments, which can be accurate or faulty, are influenced by such factors as the perceiver's gender, age, ideology, and feelings of affinity for the victim or the aggressor (Rule and Nesdale, 1976).

Research on the development of sociomoral reasoning indicates that as children mature, their ability to take multiple perspectives increases. They progress from simple, self-oriented thinking to complex and abstract analyses that take other perspectives into account. Some theorists describe moral development as occurring in an orderly progression of increasingly sophisticated reasoning. Others propose that moral reasoning is reactive to social context. Danger and threat, for example, can cause people capable of sophisticated sociomoral reasoning to revert to simpler egocentric thinking.

Domain theorists point out that moral reasoning can be sidestepped altogether by viewing behavior in nonmoral terms. Social behavior can be construed as occurring (1) in the moral domain, in which fairness, responsibility, and deserving pertain; (2) in the conventional domain, in which social conventions and structures are salient; or (3) in the personal domain, in which personal discretion and privacy are salient. Understanding others' behavior depends on knowing whether they view their behavior in moral or nonmoral terms. Adolescents, for example, can view smoking or drug use as a moral issue (right or wrong), as socially conventional behavior (hanging out with friends), or as a personal issue (their own preferences) (Berkowitz, Guerra, and Nucci, 1991). Similarly, abortion can be viewed as a moral issue or a matter of personal discretion (Smetana, 1982).

When applied to aggression and violence, domain theory has chilling implications. The moral implications of domestic violence are dismissed by aggressors who claim that their behavior belongs in the personal domain: "This is a family matter. Why do you want to make a big deal of it?" (Quindlen, 1994, p. A21). Hate-crime aggressors, too, invoke prevailing homophobic, misogynistic, or racist norms to describe violence as conventional rather than admit that it violates widely shared moral norms about human rights and dignity.

Disengagement of Moral Controls

Norms deterring aggression and violence come from within the individual and from socially shared norms. These norms are weakened during war, strife, and conflict, and gradually can lessen scruples about performing abhorrent acts under these circumstances. Brutal behavior can be condoned when it is construed as serving moral purposes and aimed at targets who are members of social categories that are viewed as without merit (Bandura, 1991). Under these circumstances, injurious behavior can be celebrated as a "moral victory" over the corruption of an adversary. Moral disengagement not only occurs in war. It also occurs in everyday life when it reduces restraints on harming or exploiting certain kinds of people.

Moral Exclusion

Moral considerations guide our behavior with those individuals and groups who are inside our scope of justice or moral community. The scope of justice is the extent to which one's concepts of justice apply to others (Deutsch, 1985). Moral inclusion means that considerations of fairness apply to others, they are entitled to a share of community resources, and they are entitled to help, even at a cost to oneself. Moral exclusion dispenses with these considerations (Opotow, 1990, 1993). When people view others as morally excluded, they are more likely to derogate them and justify mistreatment they experience (Lerner, 1980; Staub, 1985). Because it is difficult to see oneself or one's society as harmful or unjust, research indicates that three kinds of denial perpetuate moral exclusion: first, denying harmful outcomes by minimizing their duration or effects; second, denying others' entitlement to better outcomes; and third, denying one's contribution to violence by seeing it as negligible (Opotow and Weiss, 2000).

Those outside the community in which morals, rules, and considerations of fairness apply can be viewed as nonentities who can be exploited (for example, illegal immigrants, slaves), or they can be viewed as hated enemies who deserve brutal treatment and death. Whether people who are targets of violence are ignored as nonentities or hated as enemies, they are seen as less than human and the violence they experience can seem appropriate. In the Third Reich's Final Solution, the disappearances in Argentina, the genocide in Rwanda, and in too many other places and times, aggressors demonized hated victims while victims were invisible to indifferent bystander states. **It is this mix of indifferent and malignant moral exclusion that makes the sustained butchery of genocide possible** (Opotow, 2005).

Structural Violence

Structural violence, as distinguished from direct violence (Galtung, 1969), results from societal arrangements that normalize the way things are done, whose voice is heard or ignored, who gets particular resources, and who goes without. It includes unequal access to such social resources as education, quality housing, civic services, safe jobs, and political power. Unlike direct violence, it does not directly maim and kill. However, it does so indirectly by increasing exposure to risk, hardship, and danger. Because blame for structural violence is diffuse, those harmed by it are often suspected of causing their own debilitation. Structural violence flourishes when people who benefit from the status quo preserve their sense of morality by keeping themselves uninformed about the breadth and depth of structural violence and by avoiding questions that would yield answers they would rather not know. As a result, the advantage that race confers on White people at the expense of people of color and the advantage that gender confers on men at the expense of women is invisible, ignored, and disregarded (Opotow, 2001).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This chapter describes aggression and violence at various levels of analysis—within individuals and in small and large social systems. Because individuals live in social settings that influence their attitudes and behavior, effective conflict resolution addresses systemic as well as individual change. Change efforts consist of four steps: (1) accurately diagnose the situation, (2) design strategies, (3) implement solutions, and (4) conduct ongoing evaluations.

Diagnosis

Accurate diagnosis of violent conflicts considers issues, parties' motivations, and cultures. Interventions should be based on fact-finding and research rather than assumptions and anecdotes (World Health Organization, 2002). For example, research indicates that a juvenile justice system can harm girls when it focuses on the girls' crimes but not abusive conditions they have endured or how their abuse might be related to crimes for which they are charged. This leads to misdiagnoses and inadequate treatment that can begin a vicious cycle of violence and incarceration that drives these girls further into criminal behavior and the criminal justice system (Simkin and Katz, 2002).

Preliminary diagnostic work can identify presenting and underlying issues in aggression and violence, including parties' basic needs, fears, and interests. It can identify those affected by direct and structural violence, including secondary victims, such as children and elderly aged people, who depend on primary victims for their well-being. Diagnosis also needs to transcend prevailing norms that may render some kinds of people invisible and some kinds of violence acceptable, inevitable, or innocuous (compare Farmer, 1998). Myths such as "Violence is a natural part of life" or "I saw lots of violence as a kid and I turned out okay" deny the way that violence, enacted in relationships, in the culture, and in the media, actively shapes expectancies, perceptions, moral norms, and behavior.



Design Strategies

Because aggression and violence often have multiple causes, they can be effectively addressed by ecological models and coordinated multiparty efforts (World Health Organization, 2002). Intervention strategies for domestic violence, for example, can seek to create healthy family environments and provide professional help for distressed families; monitor public venues in which violence can occur; deal with situations with the potential for violence; address practices and attitudes that support gender inequality; and address cultural, social, and economic factors that maintain disparate access to goods, services, and opportunities.

Effective community antiviolence programs are tailored to the issues and resources of the community they serve (Greene, 1998). They listen to community members, including youth, and appreciate their knowledge and coping skills.

They teach participants to recognize warning signs of escalating conflict and to learn nonviolent means to resolve conflict. They utilize psychoeducational approaches including mentoring programs, family cohesion efforts, and counseling. They encourage youth-operated programs that teach young people the dire consequences of violent behavior. **Unless youth are involved in conflict resolution interventions as partners, hopes for a future culture of constructive conflict resolution and nonviolence are dim.**

Conflict resolution programs that work in conjunction with mental health and community agencies approach aggression and violence with a broad array of resources. Deterring domestic violence, for example, is more effective when representatives from advocacy groups, health and social service agencies, and the justice system cooperate. Conflict resolution efforts at the community, city, state, and national levels can benefit from collaborations that include medical societies, police leadership, elected officials, the media, and school systems (compare Currie, 1998; Hawkins, and others, 1999).

Implementing Solutions

“Fools rush in where angels fear to tread” is especially true for interventions involving violence. Solutions begun without careful diagnosis and design can cause additional harm. Because there are many kinds of violence, many kinds of aggressors, and many contexts in which violence can occur, no one intervention is suitable in every situation. In general, individuals need to recognize how pervasive violence is, how small arguments can precipitate violence, and how available weaponry contributes to violence. Three principles suggested by Morton Deutsch (1993) can guide development of context-specific conflict resolution training:

1. Control your own violence.
2. Do not provoke others.
3. Manage others' aggressive behavior when it occurs.

Control Your Own Violence. Effective conflict resolution intervention helps individuals reflect on their own conflict resolution style, distinguish between healthy and unhealthy ways of expressing anger, and become aware of the long-term consequences of their violent behavior. Individuals who understand their own conflict resolution style are aware of situations likely to provoke their emotional arousal; they learn to critically examine their justifications for anger, aggression, and violence; and they can realistically assess the gains and losses that result from violence. Individuals are more likely to use healthy ways of expressing anger if they can differentiate between assertive and aggressive responses, and if they can communicate assertive responses effectively.

Recognize What Provokes Others. Effective conflict resolution programs help individuals learn perspective taking to understand and avoid behaviors that

provoke others. Individuals who can take others' perspectives are likely to think more flexibly, acknowledge rather than deny problems, and approach conflict constructively, with flexibility and creativity that can make full use of available resources. Perspective taking is difficult in the arousal of intense conflict and it can be threatening when it reveals unpleasant truths about oneself or one's position.

Two antiviolence projects that teach participants what provokes others are Fight for Your Rights: Take a Stand Against Violence, cosponsored by the American Psychological Association and MTV, and the Alternatives to Violence Project, founded by Quakers and prison inmates in 1975. Fight for Your Rights: Take a Stand Against Violence helps youth recognize warning signs for suicide or murderous rage among peers. Youths exposed to incipient violence often lack training to evaluate its seriousness. This program teaches youth to seek out skilled assistance in order to deter violence among peers. The Alternatives to Violence Project encourages peaceful individuals and communities by teaching personal and interpersonal skills to facilitate perspective taking. These include communication, cooperation, trust, self-esteem building, creative approaches to conflictual situations, handling fear and anger without violence, awareness of stereotyping and prejudice, examination of power structures in society, and building the capacity for forgiveness.

Manage Aggression When It Occurs. Because aggression and violence can escalate rapidly, effective conflict resolution programs help individuals detect aggression in its early stages and learn to deescalate conflict. Early detection of incipient violence can nip it in the bud before conflict gains momentum and escalates out of control. At the interpersonal and international levels, human history has illustrated that violence has no limits. Therefore the earlier one faces up to dangerous situations the better.

Ron Fisher and Loreleigh Keashly (1990) propose that intervenors facing violent situations can deescalate conflict stage by stage. At the destructive stage parties try to destroy or subjugate each other. Intervenors act as peacekeepers who forcefully set norms, define unacceptable violence, and isolate parties if necessary to prevent violence from escalating further. At the segregated stage hostility and threats predominate. Intervenors discourage further hostility and help parties examine their conflict dynamics and develop ground rules that can move them toward negotiation. At the polarized stage conflicts undermine trust and respect; distorted perceptions and stereotypes prevail. Intervenors act as consultants who increase mutual tolerance by suggesting that parties scrutinize their assumptions about an adversary's unworthiness. They help parties identify mutually acceptable processes toward resolution by encouraging information exchanges that can later serve as a basis for negotiation. At the discussion stage perceptions are accurate, commitment to negotiation is stable, and parties believe in the possibility of joint gains. When needed, intervenors facilitate negotiation as mediators to help parties find win-win solutions.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a crucial but underused element of intervention and training. Because few violence intervention programs are rigorously evaluated for their efficacy, the World Health Organization (2002) urges that evaluation has a higher priority in all conflict resolution efforts. (Also see Flaxman, 2001, concerning school antiviolence programs.) Evaluation should not be an afterthought; it should be built into implementation strategies before programs actually begin. There are a number of compelling reasons to utilize formative evaluations (during program implementation) as well as summative evaluations (when a program is completed).

Reality Checks. Social contexts change, and aggression and violence can accelerate this rate of change. Evaluation builds in the opportunity to revisit program implementation plans with new insights and knowledge as they emerge. Diagnosis and design strategies, no matter how careful, can miss key elements and have unintended consequences. Evaluations check that the diagnosis—not only as it was but also as it continues to evolve—is accurate and well matched with design and implementation strategies.

Unintended Outcomes. The physician's maxim "First do no harm" has particular urgency in violent relationships. Evaluations can offer practitioners data about an intervention's ability to produce desired outcomes. Evaluative data not only serve research purposes but also offer a practical tool for ensuring that an intervention does, in fact, ameliorate violence and that positive outcomes remain stable over time.

Conflict Residues. Even when an intervention transforms a conflictual relationship into a more cooperative one, conflict residues can remain. These can serve as a kernel that later reproduces destructive conflict. A journalist describing intergroup violence in Indonesia reported, "This round of cruelties has roots deep in the past. And it is but one example of what Indonesia fears most: an explosion of religious and ethnic violence that roars out of control, fed by old hatreds and fresh grievances, defying the peacemaking efforts of local leaders and the restraining presence of armed soldiers" (Mydans, 1999, p. 50). Because conflicts transformed from active to quiescent can simmer underground and erupt later, periodic evaluation of key social indicators can monitor quiescent conflict to detect troubling shifts in social indicators.

Expanding Knowledge. Evaluations give practitioners and scholars a valuable opportunity to learn from interventions. This learning can identify effective processes and outcomes and pitfalls to avoid. This learning is specific to each context; what works in one context may not be effective or suitable for others. Evaluation, therefore, is a chance for the field to grow by accumulating knowledge about positive and negative effects of various kinds of interventions in different contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Interventions in violent systems pose special ethical difficulties. An intervenor in a violent relationship is a witness to past, current, and potential harm. Therefore, intervention has moral as well as practical urgency. Naming a relationship “violent” invokes particular norms, responsibilities, and obligations; remaining silent also has moral implications. Intervenors more comfortable with avoidance than forthrightly addressing violence may be unable to motivate parties to view their relationship realistically and seek help or find safe resolutions to conflicts they face.

Practitioners intervening in violent systems must be skilled at recognizing violence, coercion, and oppression in relationships. Identifying violence can be difficult. Domestic violence is underreported by psychologists conducting marital therapy, teachers and counselors in schools, and emergency room doctors. Research in hospital emergency rooms indicates that sensitivity, courage, and good training are needed to recognize and document domestic violence (Braziel, 1998). When directly asked, victims and batterers admit to violence. When the answer is yes, practitioners who ask the difficult questions need the skill or the mental health and public safety backup that can help parties sort out their options.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of the terms “photo ID,” “HAZMAT,” and “lockdown” in everyday speech after 9/11 (Rosenthal, 2003) demonstrates how violence not only has immediate effects, but also how it continues to ripple out and affect individuals, institutions, cities, and nations. Addressing aggression and violence effectively means addressing it proactively. Its root causes are not only biological, cognitive, motivational, and moral, but they are also systemic. Political, economic, legal, and such social issues as poverty, human rights violations, political repression, and economic privation give rise to aggression and violence. Effective schools, affordable health care, safe housing, full employment, and environmental safety are social investments that also ripple out in society and have long-term benefits to “haves” as well as “have-nots.” Because the expression and intensity of aggression and violence are susceptible to social context, public health initiatives such as gun control, curtailing media violence, and training parents and influential community members (for example, police, school personnel, psychologists, and doctors) to model cooperative conflict resolution processes can reduce the intensity and prevalence of violence.

Although aggression and violence affect all social classes, people with the lowest socioeconomic status are at highest risk. Preventative and protective services must be available to them if violence is to be prevented. The World Health Organization (2002) emphasizes that:

Upstream investment brings downstream results. There is a tendency worldwide for authorities to act only after violence has occurred. But investing in prevention—

especially primary prevention activities that operate “upstream” of problems—may be more cost-effective and have large and long-lasting benefits (p. 35).

Peaceful cultures not only reduce aggression and violence, but also sustain peaceful social relations by emphasizing distributive, procedural, and inclusionary justice (Opotow, 2002). They also address conflict forthrightly and constructively to foster tolerance of diverse perspectives, the free flow of information, and democratic participation (Opotow, Gerson, and Woodside, 2005). Consistent with this activist conception of peace, this chapter has encouraged awareness of the breadth and complexity of aggression and violence and the range of factors that can cause and moderate their expression. The challenge is to utilize this knowledge to foster a culture of social justice, moral inclusion, and peace in the lives of individuals, communities, nations, and the world.

Note

1. In this chapter I use either term, violence or aggression, depending on which is most appropriate to the context.

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