Emotions and Aggressive Behavior

Edited by

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Preface

Emotions play an important role in aggressive behavioral tendencies and responses. Emotions are not merely epiphenomena of aggression; they can be triggers, amplifiers, moderators, even ultimate goals of aggressive behavior. Insights concerning the functional relationship between emotions and aggression are not only of theoretical relevance; they are also crucial for finding solutions for efficient control, prevention, and reduction of aggression.

Although most researchers on aggression would probably not deny that emotions and aggression are strongly interrelated, the number of publications focusing explicitly on this relationship is relatively sparse. The present book therefore aims to fill this gap and to provide a compilation of papers that focus on theoretical elaborations and empirical findings on the emotion-aggression link.

The first glimmers of the present book were born in the autumn of 2005 at the X. Workshop Aggression, which we had the pleasure to organize at the University of Luxembourg. Most of the speakers who gave talks at this workshop were willing to contribute to this book project. Thus, the book brings together leading experts from fields such as social, personality, developmental, and physiological psychology presenting state-of-the-art research on the emotion-aggression link. The book describes assessment and treatment approaches, as well as theoretical concepts and research findings, and it presents an interdisciplinary perspective.

The book is roughly divided into five sections or parts. Part 1 deals with bibliometric analyses of psychological research on emotions and aggression. Part 2 deals with emotion-based motives and measures of aggression. Part 3 focuses on the relationship between anger and aggression. Part 4 investigates the emotion-aggression link in intergroup contexts. Finally, Part 5 deals with emotions and aggression from a developmental perspective.

Part 1: Historiography of Research on Emotions and Aggression

Part 1 consists of a single chapter by Gabriel Schui and Günter Krampen. Based on bibliometric analyses, Schui and Krampen investigate the development of psychological research on aggression and emotion between 1977 and 2003. Two findings are noteworthy: First, literature on the explicit relationship between aggression and emotion is hard to find; such publications cover only one tenth of a percent of the total psychological literature. Second, their analyses illustrate many similarities in the development of aggression and emotion research in the Anglo-American and German-speaking communities in the examined time span.

Part 2: Emotion-Based Motives and Measures of Aggression

Part 2 consists of two chapters. Leo Montada investigates the role of emotion-based motives for aggressive behavior. He begins with the provocative notion that understand-
ing the individual and social functions of aggressive behavior is crucial for attempting to prevent or reduce such behavior. Such a model perceives humans to be principally responsible for their actions, whereas merely investigating the “determinants” of aggression does not allow for responsibility ascriptions. Montada proposes an action-theoretical (or human-psychological) approach to understanding aggression, in which emotions can be understood (a) as indicators of the aggressor’s goals and motives, and (b) as the central key to aggression reduction.

Matthias Bluemke and Joerg Zumbach deal with the question of whether playing violent computer games increases both explicit and implicit aggression. This implies two research questions. The first question asks whether playing violent computer games is positively correlated with aggression, hostility, and anger proneness. The second question asks whether the effects are stronger on an implicit level (assessing automatic and spontaneous aspects of attitudes and dispositions) than on an explicit level (assessing controlled and deliberate aspects of attitudes and dispositions). The authors (a) highlight the advantages of implicit measures, (b) suggest that aggression research might profit from measuring (automatic) affective reactions and predicting behavior, and (c) describe two aggression-related Implicit Association Tests (IATs). Interestingly, they find reliable differences with regard to explicit and implicit aggression between “ordinary” PC users and users that frequently play (violent and nonviolent) computer games. However, they did not find any differences between players of violent and of nonviolent games.

Part 3: Anger and Aggression

Part 3 consists of four chapters. Roy F. Baumeister and Brad J. Bushman discuss theoretical perspectives on emotion and aggression and review the research on the role of anger on aggression. They argue that whereas the frustration-aggression hypothesis (including its derivatives) and catharsis theory have been dominating subjective (and even scientific) theories for a long time, recent research points to other theoretical contributions such as loss of self-control, self-regulation, and mood regulation. Baumeister and Bushman also discuss emotions that restrain and prevent aggression, such as guilt.

Sylvia Richter, Kirsten Jordan, and Torsten Wüstenberg review findings on the functional neuroanatomy of anger and aggression. These authors convincingly observe that recent research in cognitive neuroscience has already created new possibilities for investigating the physiological basis of anger and aggression. This chapter offers a very good introduction to research in neuroscience and one of its primary methods, functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). The authors also report findings from their own research group regarding the neurophysiological correlates of individual anger expression styles.

Georges Steffgen and Jan Pfetsch argue that anger and aggression are strongly interdependent and intertwined with each other. Very often, anger intervention programs also aim to directly or indirectly change aggressive behavior. Vice versa, trainings for aggression prevention or reduction often aim to reduce or change the experience of anger. A basic question is whether anger treatment necessarily reduces aggressive behavior. Steffgen and Pfetsch investigate the theoretical relationship between these two con-
cepts and refer to comparative and meta-analytic studies in order to assess the specific effectiveness of anger intervention programs. The chapter concludes with a summary of principles for anger treatments that should be considered in aggression reduction interventions.

Mario Gollwitzer questions the notion found in many popular and philosophical writings that vengeful reactions are irrational, limitless, affective, and unconnected to general principles of fairness or proportionality. First, he assesses the dimensionality of different goals and functions underlying vengeful reactions. Second, he investigates the relationship between revenge goals and the likelihood of actually engaging in particular vengeful behavior. Interestingly, participants were unlikely to take revenge if the particular action was likely to do harm to the offender. More importantly, anger about a particular provocation did not predict vengeful behavior. On the other hand, people are more likely to take revenge when they consider the revenge option to be instrumental for demonstrating powerfulness, for restoring social identity, for reestablishing justice, and for reducing anger. These findings suggest that revenge cannot simply be conceived of as irrational and purely affective.

Part 4: Emotions and Aggression in Intergroup Contexts

Part 4 consists of two chapters. Ulrich Wagner and Oliver Christ investigate extreme forms of violence and aggression between groups. The authors review research on intergroup aggression and suggest a heuristic model that combines different levels of explanations. Furthermore, they present data from two representative surveys and a panel of German adult respondents. They show that intergroup aggression against foreigners living in Germany is predicted by prejudice, and that this relationship is both mediated and moderated by intergroup emotions, especially anger.

Kerstin Schütte and Thomas Kessler focus on intergroup aggression as well as outgroup derogation. They agree that group-based emotions can explain negative behavior toward outgroup members, but they also distinguish between outgroup derogation and other forms of intergroup bias. Preliminary results support their notion that group-based anger constitutes an affective route to outgroup derogation. Cognitive appraisals of intergroup relationships such as outgroup threat increase as a consequence of group-based anger.

Part 5: Emotions and Aggression in a Developmental Perspective

Part 5 consists of four chapters. Angela Ittel examines the validity of mediating pathways in a longitudinal study predicting adolescent aggression by social anxiety, depression, self-esteem, loneliness, and perceived social integration. The mediator model was supported for girls only. Thus, the assumption that social integration serves as a protective factor against the aggression-evoking effects of a negative emotional disposition is only true for girls. Ittel discusses her findings in the context of gender-specific prevention approaches for adolescent aggression.
Tina Malti reviews research on guilt and aggression among children. She empirically shows that self-attributed moral emotions and gender have an interactional effect on aggression. Her results suggest that the manner in which moral emotions are associated with aggressive responses is different for boys and girls, which might be due to gender-specific interactions.

Florian Juen, Doris Peham, Barbara Juen, and Cord Benecke discuss the prevention of aggressive behavior in early childhood. They consider aggressive behavior to be the result of a dynamic mental process caused by insecure or chaotic family environments in early childhood, and they highlight the role of affect and self-regulation for such attachment-related developmental effects. Finally, they also discuss the consequences of their approach for the intervention and prevention of aggression.

In the final chapter, Johannes Bach discusses aspects of the prevention of emotional-social disorders, which include both externalizing behaviors (such as aggression and violence) and internalizing behaviors (such as anxiety and depression) in childhood and adolescence. Bach describes a general approach for treating emotional-social disorders as well as a particular program, the PESS (prevention of emotional-social disorders for children with special needs), which addresses children with cognitive and linguistic deficits. PESS particularly concentrates on emotional expression, perception, and regulation. Bach emphasizes that there is a large need for further development and evaluation of programs for children with special needs.

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Part 1

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