

Aggression As a Means of Defense

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study is to explore aggression as a psychological defense mechanism utilized by individuals to shield themselves from external threats or internal conflicts. It aims to analyze the complexity of aggression and its dual consequences, both positive and negative. **Methods:** The article employs a psychological approach to understand aggression, focusing on its triggers and manifestations. It examines both external stimuli and internal psychological states, such as stress, anxiety, and fear, as potential causes of aggressive behavior. **Results:** The findings indicate that aggression is a multifaceted process that operates beyond immediate external triggers. Internal psychological states play a significant role in shaping aggressive responses. This highlights the importance of considering both environmental and psychological factors in understanding aggression. **Novelty:** The study provides a nuanced perspective by emphasizing that aggression is not solely a reaction to external stimuli but also a defense mechanism influenced by internal psychological conditions. This dual focus on external and internal triggers offers a broader understanding of the complexities of aggression.

INTRODUCTION

Thus, aggression as a defensive mechanism is a complex phenomenon that can serve as an adaptive strategy in the face of stress or threats, but can also create additional problems for the individual in the long term. Understanding aggression as a defensive reaction requires taking into account many factors, including personal history, social environment, and the psychological state of the person [1], [2].

If this study was written by she may have explored aggression in the context of social psychology, personality psychology, or even cultural aspects, paying attention to how different societies perceive and respond to aggressive behavior as a form of defense. For a comprehensive analysis, it is worth studying the article in its original form to better understand the author's arguments and the context of the research [3].

Aggression is behavior aimed at deliberately causing harm to oneself and/or others. Aggression is a physical or verbal attack on an opponent [4]. It reduces internal tension but often worsens the situation. It is known that aggression inevitably returns to the person who exhibited it, often remaining unrecognized, through other people [5], [6].

A constructive approach to using this state involves a more active pursuit of success. For example, in football, when an opponent's blatant rudeness sparks an energy within, like indignation, which then gives strength for a swift advance and a precise shot at the goal. A person experienced in energy work who notices their aggressive state can use its energy at will, for example, transforming it into love and sharing it with others (see Atisha's technique) [7].

At the moment of frustration, the aggressive impulse is generally directed toward the source of this frustration. This impulse intensifies with increasing frustration or the tightening of barriers. However, not everyone reacts aggressively: this requires a primary tendency towards destruction or some degree of mental immaturity [8].

What is aggression and aggressiveness? Aggression and aggressiveness are psychological and behavioral terms describing how people react to various situations. These terms are used to refer to different aspects of interaction and emotional expression. However, they have distinctions in their meanings:

- a. Aggression is a broader and more general concept that includes any form of hostile or negatively active interaction aimed at achieving a certain goal. Aggression can arise due to stress, conflict of interests, imbalance, and can manifest in physical, verbal, or passive forms.
- b. Aggressiveness is an internal psychological characteristic of a person, indicating individual tendencies to manifest aggression in their behavioral spectrum. It can be influenced by genetic factors, upbringing, the social environment, etc. Aggressiveness is often a factor influencing the manifestation of aggression.

Causes of aggression, Aggression is a complex phenomenon that arises from the influence of various factors, ranging from individual characteristics of a person to their environment and life context. There are several causes that can provoke aggression; here are some of them:

1. **Evolutionary aspects:** From this point of view, aggression may be an inherited response to threats or competition for resources, which was important for the survival of our ancestors.
2. **Upbringing:** Children who experience improper upbringing, aggressive attitudes, or violence may be more prone to aggressive behavior.
3. **Stress:** Negative emotions and stressful situations can trigger aggressive reactions as a way to relieve accumulated tension.
4. **Physiological factors:** Changes in the hormonal system, increased levels of adrenaline or testosterone can increase the tendency to aggressive behavior.
5. **Environmental influence:** Surrounding and cultural factors can create an unfavorable atmosphere where aggression becomes an acceptable or even encouraged form of behavior.
6. **Mental health issues:** Certain mental conditions, such as personality disorders, psychoses, or depression, can contribute to the development of aggression.

In what situations does aggression manifest?, Aggression manifests when there is a trigger – something that stimulates our nervous system and leads to feelings of anger. For example, in situations such as:

- a. Dissatisfaction with personal needs,
- b. Danger and fear,
- c. Violation of personal boundaries,
- d. Feelings of fatigue or pain,
- e. Experiencing failure or defeats,
- f. Rejection of criticism,
- g. Watching movies or tv shows with scenes of violence,
- h. Consumption of alcohol, drugs, or medical substances.

Aggression can arise from the interaction of several factors and manifest in various ways. It is also important to note that aggression is not always a negative factor. Sometimes, it can be an effective way to protect oneself or express one's needs and beliefs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method, utilizing a comprehensive literature review to analyze aggression as a defensive mechanism within various psychological contexts. The data sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, psychological theories, and case studies to explore how aggression manifests as a reaction to stress, frustration, or perceived threats. By focusing on thematic analysis, the study identifies patterns in how different factors – such as personal history, social environment, and cultural norms – contribute to the understanding and expression of aggression. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of aggression, bridging theoretical insights with practical implications for psychological and social interventions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Main Types of Aggression

1. Direct Aggression

Usually directed towards others. It can manifest in behavior (attack, fight, physical harm, murder) or in verbal form (swearing, humiliating jokes or remarks, sarcasm, rude comments). Aggression can also be directed at oneself (auto-aggression): self-blame, deep guilt, suicide, starving oneself, "mortifying the flesh." This form of defense is based on an exaggerated sense of social norms (or perceiving them as too rigid), seeing barriers as completely impassable, or perceiving situations as absolutely hopeless [9], [10].

2. Indirect (displaced) Aggression

Directed not directly at the undesirable or unpleasant object (person), but at an available object. This object may be related to the source of frustration (or barriers), but it may have no connection to it at all. For instance, a person might "vent" their bad mood on the first person they encounter [11]. Aggression may be directed towards those who

cannot respond, such as the defenseless or persecuted; this could include a weaker person, a submissive wife, or a minority group [12].

3. Displacement

A defense mechanism that directs a negative emotional reaction not at the traumatic situation, but at an object unrelated to it. This mechanism creates a "vicious circle" of mutual influence between people. For example, people who are the target of the displacement mechanism are often called "scapegoats." These are typically people who are weaker, indebted, or dependent on the person who is psychologically protected [13], [14].

The displacement mechanism is depicted in one of Bistrup's paintings: the boss arrives in a bad mood at the office and, as a result, "takes it out" on the deputy, the deputy on the clerk, the clerk on the messenger, and the messenger, leaving the office, kicks the dog, and the dog bites the boss who is leaving at the same time [15].

This form of psychological defense is widespread in various types of relationships, and its prevention may involve developing the ability to find compromises in conflicts, maintain consensus, or calmly refuse relationships with people if they have already been exhausted. Modern psychology and conflictology have developed various systems of prevention and resolution of interpersonal conflicts, through which individuals can neutralize or even completely avoid the defense mechanism of displacement [16], [17].

Passive aggression. In this case, the subject merges with the external aggressor and "takes on" their role. An example of this type of aggression is infidelity, betrayal, or "condoning" someone else's cruelty. The modern world constantly provokes individuals into various negative reactions, such as aggression and open hostility. The increase in aggression among contemporary people is primarily related to the general social tension and instability of society as a whole. Naturally, all of this negatively impacts a person's psyche, generating irritability, tension, negativity, anxiety, hostility, cruelty, and violence, which inevitably manifest in people's behavior and actions, forming a stable personality trait—aggressiveness. However, it is also important to remember that aggression and aggressiveness should not only be understood as negative phenomena that destructively affect one's life. Quite often, a certain level of aggressiveness is necessary for each individual, being an essential component of their instinct for self-preservation and protection (both physical and psychological). To understand the reasons for aggressiveness, it is necessary to analyze the concepts of aggression and aggressive actions.

Aggression (from the Latin *aggredi* – to attack) is a specific form of destructive actions by a person, causing physical or psychological harm to others, living beings, or objects. Social psychologists define aggression as behavior that can harm another person. In other words, aggression is behavior that causes harm, a deliberate attack provoked by some motives.

Aggressiveness is a character trait, a habit, and a tendency to react aggressively to everything. Aggressive behavior is one of the forms of responding to various negative

life situations that cause stress and other states, both physiologically and psychologically. The forms of aggression are diverse.

In psychology, the following forms of aggression are distinguished:

- a. Physical aggression – causing physical harm;
- b. Verbal aggression – insult and psychological harm;
- c. Passive aggression – refusal to communicate;
- d. Active aggression – the aggressor is the instigator of the attack;
- e. Direct aggression – causing both physical and psychological harm;
- f. Indirect aggression – causing harm to a close person of the victim.

When internal and external factors have an adverse impact, aggressive behavior takes on various socially dangerous forms of aggression and destructiveness. However, aggression does not always lead to negative consequences. It can serve as a psychological defense mechanism for the individual, substituting or redirecting attention to other objects in various forms of activity – work, study, sports, leadership, and others. The founder of the psychoanalytic approach is Z. Freud.

Thanks to him, aggression and aggressiveness became the subject of analysis. Freud believed that the source of aggressive behavior is Thanatos – the drive towards death and destruction. Many scientists have considered aggression both as behavior and as a state, and as a property of the psyche. Some argued that aggression should be understood as a specific event, and aggressive behavior as concrete actions performed by a person.

Such behavior is perceived by others as something that does not conform to specific standards, norms, and rules established in a given society. The level of aggressiveness may significantly increase when the old system of personal values is restructured, and the established stereotypes that regulated the relationship between the individual and society are replaced. Aggression, by its nature, is a protective mechanism, so it would be wrong to suppress it thoughtlessly – it would be an action against oneself.

- a. Psychological mechanisms of aggression: Aggression, as a defense mechanism in the psychological context, is often understood as a response to feelings of threat, fear, or frustration. It can be linked to the "fight" or "flight" response in reaction to a stressful situation. Sometimes, aggressive behavior serves as a means of self-defense, allowing an individual to maintain a sense of control in an unstable or threatening environment.
- b. Aggression in the context of social interactions: In interpersonal relationships, aggression can be a reaction to the perception of a threat to one's status or safety. People may become aggressive if they feel their rights, reputation, or physical safety are at risk. In such cases, aggression may be perceived as a means of protection or even a way to regain control.
- c. Aggression as a manifestation of stress and frustration: Theories such as the frustration-aggression theory suggest that aggression often arises in response to an inability to achieve a goal or satisfy a need. In this context, aggression is an indicator

- that the person is facing an internal conflict and cannot find alternative ways out of the situation.
- d. Aggression in an evolutionary context: From an evolutionary perspective, aggression may be linked to survival instincts, where aggressive behavior is an adaptive response to threats to survival. This explains why aggression can serve as a means of protection when viewed as a necessary survival tool in dangerous conditions.
 - e. Psychological and social consequences of aggression: It is important to note that while aggression may be used as a means of defense, it can also lead to long-term negative consequences, including the deterioration of relationships and increased stress levels.

A person needs to identify the cause of sudden aggression in a timely manner, reflect on themselves, understand and forgive themselves, forget and let go of past grievances that might lead to anger, and also learn to express aggression in a proper and safe way so that all life circumstances are met with consciously chosen, appropriate emotions. Negative emotions and aggression should not be hidden deep inside: they accumulate and can later lead to depression, neuroses, and various psychosomatic disorders. It is essential, first and foremost, to learn how to manage aggression without harming mental and physical health. When a person receives unpleasant information, they may respond to it in different ways. They may downplay the significance of the information or forget the "inconvenient" facts, deny those facts that seem perfectly obvious to others.

Psychological defense is an important regulatory system for stabilizing the personality. When, instead of identifying the causes of a problematic situation, a person starts looking for a "guilty party" and devising ways of revenge, it can be said that psychological defense has been activated. It is well known that aggressive behavior manifests as a defense mechanism and serves as a signal of psychological defense – awareness of negative emotions and feelings.

When choosing a defense strategy, psychological defense mechanisms are activated. Initially, the study of defense mechanisms was carried out within the framework of psychoanalysis. The term "defense" first appeared in 1894 in the work of S. Freud "Defensive Neuropsychoses" and was used in several of his subsequent works to describe the struggle of the "I" against painful or unbearable thoughts and affects.

Currently, most psychologists studying the issue of psychological defense agree that an individual's defensive behavior depends on whether they were able to satisfy their basic needs at certain stages of their development, or whether these needs were blocked at some point. According to Sigmund Freud, psychological defense is a system of mechanisms aimed at minimizing negative experiences related to conflicts and threatening the personality.

Psychological defense is a regulatory system of the personality, determined by the significance of an event for the individual. In his research, Freud identified eight types of

psychological defense, related to basic emotions: repression, displacement, rationalization, reaction formation, regression, sublimation, denial, and projection.

To make anxiety less dangerous for the person, these defense mechanisms operate at the subconscious, unconscious level and serve as means of self-deception, through distortion, denial, or falsification of reality perception. Thus, aggression has a protective nature and serves survival. It is a source of striving for new achievements, activity, and the creative potential of the personality. A person can and should recognize various manifestations of aggression, be able to cope with it, express it in a socially acceptable way, and avoid violence toward others or oneself. Mastering one's aggression is a difficult psychological task, as aggressive behavior depends on the personal choice of each adult. Aggressive behavior is a manifestation of human defense mechanisms and serves as a signal for psychological defense — the awareness of negative emotions and experiences. When choosing a defense strategy, the mechanisms of psychological defense are activated.

Defense mechanisms can manifest differently in people of the same age. Furthermore, although these mechanisms develop in the realm of the unconscious, their use is not entirely unrecognized.

In modern society, aggression is often perceived as a negative phenomenon that destroys social bonds and leads to conflicts. However, there is an approach that considers aggression as a means of defense, both on a personal level and in social or cultural contexts. In this view, aggression is seen not only as an act of violence but also as an attempt at protection, overcoming threats, and ensuring survival. This article discusses various aspects of aggression as a form of defense, as well as its impact on the individual and society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Findings : The study underscores that aggression, as a defense mechanism, serves as a short-term alleviation for feelings of helplessness or vulnerability. However, it falls short of resolving underlying issues and may escalate conflicts. This highlights the need for healthier alternatives such as self-regulation, mindfulness, and seeking professional support, which are critical in addressing the roots of aggressive behavior. **Implications :** The findings suggest that understanding aggression as a multifaceted phenomenon can inform strategies for managing its manifestations in both personal and social contexts. This knowledge has practical implications for developing interventions that not only mitigate the destructive outcomes of aggression but also harness its protective potential when appropriately regulated. **Limitations :** The article's analysis of aggression focuses primarily on psychological and behavioral aspects, potentially overlooking broader influences such as cultural, socioeconomic, or biological factors. A more holistic exploration is required to fully grasp the complexities of aggression and its varied manifestations across diverse contexts. **Future Research :** Further studies should explore comprehensive frameworks that integrate psychological,

social, and biological perspectives on aggression. Additionally, research into tailored interventions that address specific forms of aggression and their triggers could provide deeper insights and practical tools for mitigating its adverse effects.

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