Emotions and Aggressive Behavior

Georges Steffgen · Mario Gollwitzer (Editors)
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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.

Georges Steffgen, Mario Gollwitzer (Eds.): Emotions and Aggressive Behavior
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.

Acknowledgments

We hope that most of the readers of this book will share our excitement and satisfaction with what has come out of it. We are indebted to many people who have contributed to this work. First of all, we wish to thank all the contributors who participated in this project and thus shared their expertise with the readers. Furthermore, we would like to thank Anna Baumert for preparing a translation of Montada’s chapter into English. Jan Pfetsch and Judith Götz have done the enormous job of checking formal aspects of the manuscripts, such as orthography, citations, and references. Jane Thompson agreed to proofread each and every chapter with regard to language, grammar, and expressions; she has contributed immensely to the improvement of the manuscripts.

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Part 1

Historiography of Research on Aggression and Emotion
Historiography of Research on Aggression and Emotion and Their Intersection in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century: Bibliometric Analyses of Psychological Research in German-Speaking and Anglo-American Research

Gabriel Schui and Günter Krampen

Aggression – i.e., aggressive and antisocial behavior as well as aggressiveness and antisocial personality (disorders) – has been a classic issue in basic and applied psychological research since the foundational period of psychology. In introductory texts (e.g., Heckhausen, 1989; Selg, Mees, & Berg, 1997), the respective research traditions focusing on aggression are mostly categorized into psychoanalytic (Freud, 1905, 1930) or ethological (Lorenz, 1963) instinct theories, frustration-aggression models (McDougall, 1908; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939), and social learning theories (Berkowitz, 1962; Bandura, 1973) as they are described from the turn of the 20th century until the 1960s and 1970s.

Even as early as the first half of the 20th century, personality – as well as social-psychology – centered theoretical foci could already be distinguished. This became more distinct with attempts to measure interindividual differences in different aspects of aggression, initially using projective tests, e.g., the Thematic Apperception Test, TAT, and the Rosenzweig Picture Frustration Tests (for an overview see Feshbach, 1970), at the end of the 1950s. Later, there were questionnaires with their explicit focus on differential psychology on the one hand, and the boom of experimental aggression research initiated by Buss (1961), Berkowitz (1962), and Taylor (1967) in the 1960s, on the other.

Starting in the 1970s, attribution and emotion-based approaches related to anger started to emerge (see Heckhausen, 1989, for an overview). Also, since the 1970s, these and the older approaches were flanked by sociobiological, neurobiological, and neurochemical aspects (natural sciences background) as well as socio-normative aspects (social sciences background, e.g., concerning responsibility, justice, retaliation, and justification) in literature reviews and integrative models.

Thus, there has been a diversification of aggression research since the 1970s that reaches beyond the classic contributions from social psychology and differential psychology and their application in (mostly) criminology as well as clinical psychology. This is already discussed in the literature review by Mummendey (1983) and more so in more recent ones (e.g., Geen, 1998; Krahé, 2001; Krahé & Greve, 2002).

Theoretical and empirical diversifications in basic aggression research encompass approaches from developmental, biopsychological, victimological, and emotion-theory based perspectives. Diversification in applied disciplines incorporates research concerning topics like child abuse, sexual abuse, bullying, mass media influences (educational
psychology), mobbing and bossing (organizational psychology), aggressive behavior, and its treatment in the context of certain disorders and with hospitalized patients (clinical psychology), anger reactions, and health (health psychology).

These recent diversifications in aggression research of the past 20–30 years led to a considerable increase in aggression-related descriptors in the “Thesaurus of psychological index terms” (Gallagher, 2004) published by the American Psychological Association (APA) (see Table 1). Presumably, they also contributed to the success of the “Workshop Aggression,” which has well-established itself as an informal meeting (without any formal institutional or organizational connection, similar to the “TeaP”) in the German-speaking community during the past ten years. Taking all of this into account, it is a worthwhile endeavour to empirically assess the developmental trends in aggression research in the last quarter of the 20th century using a bibliometric approach. Referring to the article by Wallbott (1991) on the “survey of a neglected borderzone” of social- and emotion-related psychological research, namely “das Emotionale in der Sozialpsychologie und das Soziale in der Emotionspsychologie” (Wallbott, 1991, p. 53), we also want to address the question of the development of literature in the intersection of research on aggression and emotion since the 1970s.

To accomplish these goals, we conducted a bibliometric survey of aggression and emotion-related literature published in the past 30 years, tracing developments in research and also possible thematic differences between the Anglo-American and German-speaking scientific communities. Specifically, we wanted to address three questions:

1. How many publications exist in the field of aggression research in the examined time-period?
2. How many publications exist in the field of emotion research in the examined time period?
3. How does the aggression-related literature intersect with that containing emotion-theory-based approaches?

Method

We used the psychological databases PsycINFO (Anglo-American focus) and PSYNDEX (focus on literature from the German-speaking countries) which have little intersection (PsycINFO contains approximately 4% of literature from the German-speaking countries which is mostly limited to journal articles). For collecting the bibliometric data, we compared different automated search strategies, such as simple free text searches, searches in publication titles or descriptors and also specific searches for literature reviews and meta-analyses, regarding their efficacy and efficiency. The same search strategies, spanning the publication years from 1977 to 2003, for which complete literature documentation is to be expected, are applied to both databases.

Due to considerable variations in absolute publication counts of aggression/emotion-related literature per year (showing a clear overall increase) and the difference of PsycINFO and PSYNDEX in total document volumes (PsycINFO is approximately eight times larger, see Tables 1 and 2), the absolute aggression/emotion-related publication counts per year are standardized with respect to the total number of publications per