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# Frustration-Aggression: Revisited

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## ABSTRACT

The entire history of human race is full of worst record of violence and aggression. Aggression precisely is just violent physical or verbal behaviour intended to hurt someone physically, mentally or both. Freud (1930) and Konard Lorenz (1966) thought it to be innate and instinctive tendency forcing one to resort to violence and aggressions. Baron, 1977; Berkowitz, 1969; Buss, 1961; Zillman, 1979 conceived aggression as acquired behaviour. The entire history of human race is full of worst record of violence and aggression. Aggression precisely is just violent physical or verbal behaviour intended to hurt someone physically, mentally or both. Freud (1930) and Konard Lorenz (1966) thought it to be innate and instinctive tendency forcing one to resort to violence and aggressions. Baron, 1977; Berkowitz, 1969; Buss, 1961; Zillman, 1979 conceived aggression as acquired behaviour. Yet another view held that frustration is the sole cause of aggression (Neal Miller, 1941). To conclude the discussion, It is felt that frustration may be responsible for aggression yet it is not the sole determiner of verbal and physical aggression. It appears that aggression is the byproduct of social learning along with several other instigator such as group mind or deindividuation and a host of social, cognitive and environmental factors that predisposed and precipitate aggression. Further society and culture may also contribute as facilitator or inhibitors of aggressive behaviour.

**Keywords:** Violence, Physical or Verbal behaviour, Instinctive tendency, Acquired behaviour, Facilitator or Inhibitors, Humanity.

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## Introduction

A cursory glance at the gamut of human history, right from the biblical era and prehistoric ages reveal a series of aggressions, violence, conflicts, upheavals and wars after wars that rocked centuries. And the present era of terrorism is the worst form of aggression which has engulfed the entire world. Its recent example may be that of the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Palestine bloodbath. Thus entire history of human race is based on the worst record of aggression and violence.

In view of increasing violence and aggression Sociologists and Psychologists need to address the problem which has engulfed the entire society. Precisely, aggression is just violent physical or verbal behaviour intended to hurt someone mentally and physically.

Freud (1930) suggested that aggression is an innate and inevitable underlying urge that should seek expression either in socially acceptable ways or otherwise in fights, quarrels, criticisms, name callings, insults or physical assault. Ethologist Konard Lorenz (1966) describes aggression as, “*the fighting instinct in beast and men which is directed against members of the same species.*”

Against the Psychoanalysts and Ethologists, majority of Social Psychologists conceive of aggression as acquired behaviour and believe that, “Any form of behaviour directed toward harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment “( Baron, 1977; Berkowitz, 1969; Buss, 1961; Zillman, 1979). Yet another view of frustration will always produce aggression. Controversial from its inception, the frustration aggression theory has been repeatedly revised and modified. One such case is that of Berkowitz (1989) who redeveloped the frustration aggression hypothesis to that extent which matches the objectives of the research being done recently seeking causes and effects of frustration. He used his logical ability to arrive at a conclusion that the negative effect being caused by frustration produces aggression. Even, Neal Miller (1941) one of the propounders of the model acknowledged that frustration does not always cause aggression. It is one of the causes of aggressive tendency but certainly not the only one (Buss, 1961).

Yet another view, stresses motivational and situational variables which may cause aggressive behaviour (Dollard, Doob, Mowrer and Sears, 1939) came to be called as “ Frustration-aggression hypothesis”. The Yale Psychologists postulated that “the occurrence of aggression always presupposes frustration” ( Neal, E. Miller, 1941). Frustration results when our goal is blocked. Dollard et. al, (1939) defined frustration as the state that emerges when circumstances interfere with a goal response : “ an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal response at its proper time in the behavioural sequence.” It is equally significant here to mention the works of Leander (2020) who not only concurred with the definition of frustration given by Dollard et.al. but also observed that blocking of any goal finally makes a satisfaction of a basic and fundamental need unsuccessful. Breuer and Elson (2017) in their study viewed motivational reasons and not affective condition to be responsible for the occurrence of frustration.

Berkowitz (1965, b; 1969; 1971) emphasized that interaction between environmental cues and internal emotional states such as anger may also instigate aggressive behaviour. Therefore, aggression is not solely contingent on frustration alone but may also be mediated by a readiness – an intervening variable between frustration and aggression. Thus, it is concluded.

First, all aggression is not produced by frustration, there may be other reasons such as direct attack (physical or verbal), experience of pain, orders from others or a direct desire for personal gain at others cost. Therefore, aggression may result from different reasons and in response to different factors.

Second, it is obvious that frustrated people do not always react aggressively through their thoughts, words or deeds. Keeping in view these facts Berkowitz (1978) contends that frustration is just one of a host factors that can potentially cause aggression. Thus, it is suggested that it is only when the degree of frustration is very high or very strong and when it is taken arbitrarily, it tends to augment the possibility of later aggression. In a nutshell frustration and aggression may often be related and it may be one possible cause of aggression.

## **Theories of Aggression**

Social psychology has references of theories other than frustration that place reliance on motivational factors. One such example is Zillman's excitation-frustration theory (1978-1979). According to him, the expression of aggression (or and emotion for that matter) depends on these factors: first, some acquired dispositions or habits of the individual, second, some sources of energization or arousal and, third, the individual's interpretation of the arousal state. Zillman went a step ahead when he suggested that energy may transfer from one situation to another.

Both, frustration-aggression theory and excitation transfer speak of drive or arousal as a necessary precondition for aggression. In spite of a number of inherent differences in them, each one of the two theories stress the manner in which internal drives and external events or environmental cues may come together to produce aggressive behaviour.

With the help of self-determination theory Ryan and Deci; (2000a, 2000b) provided a thorough basis to show the link between frustration and aggression. This works on the principle of failure of satisfying psychological need.

Yet another theoretical model came to light, called as Social learning explanation. It asserts that aggression is not instinctive because it is an acquired behaviour and not inborn. Bandura (1973) aggression with Berkowitz that situational cues are important know aggressive behaviour but emotions such as anger are necessary for incidence if aggression. They argue that aggression is learned, regulated and guided by some principles of learning as any other form of behaviour. Advocates of this position have suggested two methods: instrumental and observational learning (Bandura 1973).

The principle of instrumental learning underlies that any behaviour that is rewarded or reinforced, is more likely to be repeated in future. In the same way aggression that is not reinforced will stamp out.

The other method, observational learning is also called modelling. Through modelling we learn many aggressive behaviours first as children and later as adults, is attained by observation (Bandura 1973). In

observational Learning when children observe others act aggressively, the behaviours are noticed, stored in memory, recalled at appropriate time and enacted as and when required. Bandura, Ross & Ross (1961) studied the problem and provided some Empirical evidence to that effect.

## Models

Like other models, the social learning model does not attribute aggression to one or more factors. Instead, proposes that roots of such behaviour are highly varied and underline an intricate interplay if several factors such as past experience of aggressive behaviour, current conditions that promise either to reward or punish aggression, and host of social, cognitive and environmental factors that are likely to elicit or inhibit such actions.

Notwithstanding the complex nature of Social learning explanation on aggression, it has indeed two advantages: Firstly, it is more sophisticated, precise and more accurate view than earlier models of aggression, secondly, it is far more optimistic about possibility of preventing or regulating aggression among humans. Therefore, Social learning theory gained increasing support among school psychologists and is a much more accepted theoretical viewpoint on aggression.

For modern Social learning theorists, external rewards and punishments are often less important than internal feelings caused by guilt, shame and pride. Yet, Bandura and others of his ilk argue aggressive behaviour like other kinds of behaviour, is controlled largely by expectations of internal and external rewards and punishments.

Therefore, It seems unlikely that any single approach can explain such a broad range of phenomenon as aggression is. Some combination of factors drawn from all of the models used by Psychologists, Philosophers, Sociologists and Ethologists who made an effort to understand and study human aggression, its origin, dynamics and consequences, would be required to fully comprehend such behaviour. Apart from above referred approaches, some factors provoking aggression may also be considered. Such factors include more specific and immediate instigator in the environment that provoke aggression need a brief review herein.

1. Deindividuation i.e. when people are submerged in the identity and mentality of a large group, they become anonymous or deindividuated (Le Bon, 1895; Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952). The group context insulate individuals from feeling of social responsibility and fear of reprisal for proscribed acts (Zimbardo 1970).
2. Popular wisdom suggests that alcohol and use of drugs such as Marijuana tend to minimize any tendencies towards aggression Pihl, et.al. (1981) say that when intoxicated, people are more

responsive to acts of provocation and less conscious of their own behaviour and social or legal disapproval and action (Hull, 1981).

3. Environmental stressors are yet another instigator of aggressive behaviour. Such environmental stressors include excessive heat, noise and air pollution which may on many occasions contribute as an additional casual factor in aggression. These environmental stressors can make one annoyed, angry, irritable and uncomfortable (Griffit; 1970, Griffit and Veitch, 1971). Everyday experience and some empirical evidence demonstrate that negative feelings can increase aggression (Berkowitz, 1969; Bandura 1973). Baron (1977) has shown a curvilinear relationship between feelings and aggression.
4. Air pollution and crowding may also facilitate and stimulate aggressive behaviour. Air pollution can be annoying and bothersome (Mc Every, 1972) and may influence mental health leading to negative feeling and thereby more aggressiveness (Williams, etc.al. 1973). In the same way crowding may also precipitate aggression (Stokols, 1972; Worchel and Teddlie, 1976). The presence of a huge crowd may generate a sense of excitement whole taking out a procession march etc.
5. Lastly, personality factors may also be in some cases be responsible for making an individual more aggressive than others e.g. ascendance-submission. Similarly, an authoritarian, a dominant, and/or an impulsive person may get annoyed at anger provoking stimuli and respect d aggressively because of the lack of inhibition. An independent person has a stronger aggressive habit than a dependent easy going person.

## Conclusion

To conclude the discussion, It is felt that frustration alone is not the sole determinant of aggression. It is the resultant of social learning along with several instigators such as group mind or deindividuation and a host of social, cognitive and environmental factors that precipitate aggression. Further, man is neither aggressive or peaceful by nature. It was simply due to nature of conditioning that people have been subjected to. Society and culture may also contribute as facilitators or inhibitors of aggressive behaviour.

To end the discussion I quote Lewis Thomas (1981) who said....*"Our behaviour towards each other is the strangest, most unpredictable, and most accountable of all phenomena with which we are obliged to live. In all of nature there is nothing so threatening to humanity as humanity itself."*

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