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4

Aggression from an Attachment Perspective

Gender Issues and Therapeutic Implications

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Aggressive behavior in girls and women typically occurs within the context of close interpersonal relationships. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of research on the relationship between attachment and aggression and to discuss the function that aggressive behavior may play in close relationships. Clearly, not all aggressive and violent behavior can be explained in terms of attachment. We argue, however, that many aggressive acts in intimate relationships can be understood from this perspective. Furthermore, we propose that identifying the attachment function of aggressive behavior can help to delineate meaningful subgroups of individuals who differ in the function that their aggressive behavior serves, the targets of their aggressive acts, and in their therapeutic needs.

Specifically, we propose that from an attachment perspective, aggressive behavior can be understood: 1) a coercive attempt to provoke others

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into engagements; 2) a reaction to perceived rejection or threat of loss of close relationships; or 3) an instrumental act to gain power, control, or some other desired outcome.

We suggest that aggressive behavior in girls, compared to boys, more frequently reflects a coercive strategy to engage others and maintain their availability and responsiveness. Furthermore, girls are less likely than boys to engage in instrumental aggressive acts. We present empirical findings to support this view, illustrated by excerpts from attachment interviews with high-risk adolescent girls who speak about the situations that provoke their aggressive behavior and what they hope to achieve through it. Implications for therapeutic intervention are briefly reviewed, and cautionary notes regarding the limits of an attachment perspective are stated.

ATTACHMENT THEORY: FUNDAMENTALS

At the heart of Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) classic theory of attachment is the primacy of the human inclination for emotional bonds with others. Bowlby proposed that the attachment system is biologically based and essential for survival and well being across the life span. Bowlby's theory went further than simply explicating attachment as a fundamental human drive. Drawing on the principle of physiological homeostasis, he characterized attachment as a control system that serves to balance proximity to attachment figures during periods of distress, with exploration during periods of safety. To account for the goal-directed quality of interactions and continuity of attachment related behaviors over the life span, Bowlby proposed the notion of "internal working models", cognitive-affective structures that develop through experiences in care-giving relationships and guide future interpersonal expectations, behaviors, and responses. Internal working models provide mental maps of the key features of past experiences and procedural knowledge which guide behavior to ensure that attachment needs are met to the fullest extent possible in any given context.

The quality of interactions with attachment figures corresponds to the content of internal working models and the development of corresponding behavioral strategies. It is this aspect of Bowlby's model that speaks to the relationship of attachment to psychological well being versus pathology and formed the basis of initial classification systems in the field (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). The initial three category classification system identified three basic attachment patterns. Children who

experienced their primary caregivers as consistently available and responsive to their signals of distress were identified as having a fundamentally "secure pattern" of attachment. When distressed, secure children actively seek support; their exploration of the world is not hampered by heightened vigilance or concern about the whereabouts or reactions of their caregiver. The internal working model of the secure child encompasses a view of others as competent and caring and a view of the self as worthy of care and attention.

In contrast, children who experience their caregiver as *inconsistently* available and *inappropriately* or *inadequately* responsive were identified as having an "anxious-ambivalent" pattern of attachment. These children cannot be certain of their caregivers' availability or responsiveness, and therefore remain hyper-vigilant and preoccupied with securing their attention. The internal working model of the anxious-ambivalent child encompasses a view of others as unreliable, but at times responsive, and a view of the self as inadequate or lacking in characteristics that consistently attract care from others. Because these children are preoccupied with their caregivers' availability, their exploration of the environment is suppressed. Behaviorally, anxious-ambivalent children are frequently aggressive with their caregivers, demanding their attention yet unable to derive solace from their comfort. Displays of need are often exaggerated in a bid to "capture" the attention of their attachment figure. The term "preoccupied" is used to describe the attachment pattern of these individuals as adults (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). They express strong interpersonal needs, establish relationships quickly, and their interpersonal behavior is described as intense and demanding (Shaver & Hazan, 1993).

The third classic attachment pattern is that of the children who experience their parents as consistently rejecting of their needs (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These "anxious-avoidant" children learn early in their lives to disguise and/or diminish their attachment needs, even in the presence of their caregiver, for fear of rejection and punishment. Yet their apparent calm merely masks their true level of distress (Dozier & Kobak, 1992). The internal working model of the anxious-avoidant child encapsulates a view of others as rejecting and punishing of attachment needs, and a view of themselves as unacceptable and repulsive. Behaviorally these children avoid contact with their caregivers, focusing instead on peripheral features of their environment to distract their attention.

The term "dismissing" is used to describe the attachment patterns of avoidant children as adults (Main et al., 1985; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Dismissing adults minimize the importance of attachment relationships and are reluctant to express interpersonal needs. During the last decade,

two forms of avoidant-dismissing attachment have been differentiated in adults and adolescents: avoidant-dismissing versus avoidant-fearful (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Avoidant-dismissing attachment refers to the classic avoidant pattern of disengagement from attachment figures and denigration of the importance of attachment needs and associated feelings. In contrast, avoidant-fearful attachment is characterised by the tendency to avoid attachment figures due to fear of rejection coupled with the desire to pursue relationships. These two forms of avoidant attachment have distinctive correlates in adults and differ in the contexts that give rise to aggression, as we will later discuss.

ATTACHMENT AND AGGRESSION

Does attachment theory offer insight into the roots of aggression and violence? Bowlby (1973) believed so. He reasoned that although anger—at appropriate times and in appropriate amounts—is functional in preserving attachment relationships because it is an effective signal to attachment figure of distress, extreme anger, aggression, and violence are not. Bowlby (1973) noted that "the most violently angry and dysfunctional responses of all, it seems probable, are elicited in children and adolescents who not only experience repeated separations but are constantly subjected to the threat of being abandoned" (p. 288). He underscored the importance of threats to attachment as a determinant of aggressive behavior by drawing on Burnham's (1965) observations of violent adolescents: one adolescent who murdered his mother exclaimed afterwards "I couldn't stand to have her leave me". Another, a youth who placed a bomb in his mother's luggage prior to her departure on an airplane, explained "I decided that she would never leave me again" (p. 290, cited in Bowlby, 1973).

These case examples are powerful, but is there empirical support for a relationship between attachment and aggression? There is little question that attachment is an important determinant of general emotional and behavioral adjustment in both children and adolescents (Doyle & Moretti, 2001; Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardiff, 2001). In normative samples, youths who are securely attached to their mothers engage in more pro-social behavior, are perceived as more socially competent, are rated by adults as more empathic and compliant, and demonstrate higher positive and lower negative affect in social interactions than do insecure children (Allen & Land, 1999). In contrast, insecurely attached children show poor emotional regulation; are defiant, hostile, and aggressive toward mothers and peers; and suffer rejection from their peers (Allen & Land, 1999). Similarly in late

adolescence, securely attached youths are better able to regulate uncomfortable affective states, particularly feelings of anger, and are perceived as less hostile by their peers. They appropriately seek support from others in times of stress and more successfully manage the transition to high school (Allen et al., 2002; Florian, Mikulincer, & Bucholtz, 1995; Papini & Roggman, 1992). In contrast, insecure attachment in adolescence is associated with a range of mental health problems (Allen, Hauser, & Borman-Spurrell, 1996), including suicidality (Lessard & Moretti, 1998), and drug use (Lessard, 1994).

Turning to studies specifically examining aggression, research provides clear empirical support for the relationship between insecure attachment and aggression, both concurrently and prospectively: children and adolescents with insecure attachment patterns have significantly more behavior problems, including aggressive behavior, than are those with secure attachment (Allen, Moore, Kuperminc, & Bell, 1998; Doyle & Moretti, 2001; Lyons-Ruth, 1996). What *form* of insecure attachment is associated with aggressive behavior is less clear. Early studies identified higher levels of aggressive and noncompliant behavior in children with anxious-avoidant versus all other attachment patterns (Renken, Egeland, Marvinney, Mangelsdorf, & Sroufe, 1989). For example, anxious-avoidant attachment in infancy was found to predict negativity, noncompliance, and hyperactivity at 3.5 years of age, and higher ratings of problem behavior in grades one to three.

Studies of adolescents have also supported a relationship between avoidant attachment and delinquency or deviance. Rosenstein and Horowitz (1996) found that the diagnosis of conduct disorder in adolescent in-patients was associated with the avoidant-dismissing attachment pattern. Results also showed that dismissing attachment was associated with antisocial, narcissistic, and paranoid personality characteristics. Similarly, Allen et al. (1996) found that derogation of attachment, characteristic of the avoidant dismissing style, was associated with concurrent criminal behavior and drug use in adulthood among individuals who had been hospitalized for psychopathology during adolescence. These results mirror those found with children showing an association between avoidant attachment, behavior problems, and non-compliance. In contrast, more recent research suggests a relationship between "disorganized" attachment, characterized by the lack of a consistent behavioral strategy to meet attachment needs, and aggressive behavior in children. (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999).

To add to the complexity, recent studies of adolescents suggest a relationship between preoccupied attachment and aggressive behavior. Based on attachment interviews with at-risk adolescents, Allen et al., (1998) found

that preoccupied teens were more likely to engage in delinquent activities, including getting into physical fights and assaulting people than were secure teens. Similarly, Allen et al., (2002) found that anxious-preoccupied attachment at age 16 in moderately at-risk adolescents predicted increasing delinquent behavior between the ages of 16 to 18 years.

How can *different* patterns of attachment organization be similarly related to aggressive behavior? We believe the answer lies not simply in conceptualizing a relationship between insecure attachment and the *amount* of aggressive behavior, but in understanding how types of insecure attachment relate to the form, function, and the target of aggressive behavior. Recall that the anxious-preoccupied individual is unable to anticipate whether their attachment figure will consistently respond, and if they do, whether their continued availability can be depended upon. An effective means to eliciting the attention of an attachment figure, and maintaining engagement once it is established, is to display heightened expressions of need which may include, but are not limited to, extreme anger, threats, and acts of aggression and violence. Because the function of aggressive behavior from a preoccupied standpoint is to increase and maintain engagement within close relationships, targets of aggressive acts are most likely limited to established or potential attachment partners (i.e., parent, romantic partner, or close friend). Furthermore, we can predict that aggressive behavior will be elicited in contexts where the preoccupied individual perceives cues of potential abandonment. Greater depth of preoccupation will be associated with greater vigilance of abandonment and greater susceptibility to interpret ambiguous cues as indicative of this intent by others.

In contrast to the preoccupied individual who experiences at least intermittent reinforcement of attachment needs within close relationships, the fearful-avoidant individual has experienced consistent rejection. Longing for acceptance and closeness, but fearing rejection, the fearful-avoidant individual is also vigilant to perceptions of threat of rejection, loss, or abandonment. This is particularly acute in situations where the fearful-avoidant individual is, or potentially could become, dependent on others. Recall, however, that individuals with avoidant attachment tend *not* to express anger in close relationships because of fear of further rejection. Yet, evidence shows that avoidant individuals display clear signs of physiological agitation at separation (Dozier & Kobak, 1992). Hence, because anger cannot be expressed to the attachment figure, it may be displaced on other aspects of the environment (Ainsworth et al., 1978), including the self.

In sum, while preoccupied individuals typically direct aggression toward those they are close to, the fearful individual is reluctant to aggress in

close relationships. There is one exception to this general rule. Mayseless (1991) theorized that fearful-avoidant individuals may engage in aggressive and violent acts within close relationships when they feel pressured into intimacy. On the surface this seems paradoxical why would an individual who longs for acceptance and connection respond with anger and aggression when these are offered? If we keep in mind, however, that fearful-avoidant individuals fundamentally believe that others will ultimately reject them, it becomes clear that the opportunity for connection provokes intense anxiety, particularly when it is experienced as intrusive. This analysis is consistent with Dutton's (1999) observation that spousal abuse was observed most frequently in men characterized with fearful-avoidant attachment who perceived their partners as demanding and intrusive. Indeed, Dutton (1999) has theorized that the most volatile relationships involve the pairing of an anxious-preoccupied female, who demands engagement, and a fearful-avoidant male who wishes to be engaged but is unable to tolerate intimacy.

What about the dismissing-avoidant individual? In contrast to preoccupied and fearful attachment, which is characterized by over-activation of the attachment system, dismissing attachment is characterized by under-activation or suppression (Bartholomew, 1990). These individuals seem uninterested in attachment relationships with others, satisfied with their sense of self-worth and competency to manage in the world, and somewhat oblivious to the feelings and needs of others. It is therefore unlikely that aggression and violence have an interpersonal function or precipitate in the dismissing individual. Nonetheless, it is quite possible that dismissing individuals may aggress against others in order to meet instrumental goals, and to do so in such a way as to seriously fail to consider the rights and welfare of their victims. Thus, in contrast to both the preoccupied and fearful individual, the targets of aggression for the dismissing individual may not necessarily be restricted to individuals with whom they have close relationships. Instead, dismissing individuals may aggress against strangers and acquaintances alike. Furthermore, the function of their aggression may ultimately be to achieve an instrumental rather than interpersonal goal, and thus be unrelated to needs for connection and closeness with others. On the other hand, the need to achieve dominance and control over resources may figure strongly in their motivations for aggression.

In sum, an attachment model of aggression and violence may help us to differentiate the function and target of aggression across individuals who are frequently described as a homogeneous group (see Table 1). In the next section of this chapter we briefly consider the importance of gender in this analysis.

TABLE 1. ATTACHMENT PATTERNS IN RELATION TO THE FUNCTION AND TARGET OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Attachment Pattern	Function of Aggression	Target of Aggression
Preoccupied	To coerce and maintain engagement.	Intimate others perceived as existing or potential attachment figures.
Fearful Avoidant	Displaced expression of anger at caregiver; to distance others who demand intimacy.	Aggression shifted away from attachment figures and sometimes to self; Aggression targeted at attachment figures only under pressure for intimacy.
Dismissing Avoidant	To achieve instrumental goals.	Aggression targeted at intimate partners and strangers alike.

GENDER AND ATTACHMENT

Although research has not identified gender differences in the percentage of children, adolescents, or adults with secure attachment patterns (Ijzendoorn et al., 2000), there are gender differences in the distribution of insecure attachment patterns. In a study of young adults, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) report that the distribution of insecure attachment patterns disproportionately represents females in the preoccupied quadrant and males in the dismissing quadrant. Why might females be more likely to develop anxious-preoccupied attachment patterns and males to develop dismissing-avoidant attachment?

Research on parental socialization practices indicates that girls, in comparison to boys, are more frequently socialized to attend to the needs and well being of others and to judge their self-worth in terms of others opinion of them (Cross & Madson, 1997; Moretti & Higgins, 1999). In a recent study (Moretti, Rein, & Wiebe, 1998), we examined the degree to which young women and men perceived themselves to fall short of the standards that they held for themselves versus the standards that their parents and peers held for them, and how this was in turn related to symptoms of depression. As predicted, women but not men suffered from symptoms of depression when they perceived themselves to fall short of the standards that they believed their parents and peers held for them. That is, others' expectations were more important to young women than to young men in determining their emotional well-being. Our recent study (Moretti, Holland, & McKay, 2001) examining the relationship between self-perceptions and assaultive behavior in high-risk adolescents confirmed these findings. It is possible that in conditions that give rise to the development of insecure attachment,

socialization of girls to regulate in terms of close relationships—that is, to engage in "relational self-regulation"—can result in preoccupied attachment.

In contrast to girls, boys are more commonly socialized toward independence and autonomy in decision making (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997). An interesting line of research by Pomerantz and Ruble (1998) illustrates the subtle nature of these gender-typed socialization practices. This work showed that while mothers were equally likely to be "controlling" with their daughters and their sons, they were more likely to employ control without granting autonomy with their daughters than their sons. She also found that the use of control without granting autonomy increased the extent to which children accepted responsibility for failure. Although socialization toward independence may have many beneficial consequences, in the extreme it may result in a disregard for the wishes and welfare of others. Such an outcome would be consistent with the development of dismissing attachment, and may occur more frequently in males than females who are exposed to conditions giving rise to the development of insecure attachment.

In sum, gender-typed socialization practices, particularly in adverse conditions which undermine attachment security, may result in different types of insecure attachment patterns for girls and boys. Girls may be more likely to develop preoccupied attachment; in contrast, boys may be more inclined to move toward dismissing attachment.

GENDER, ATTACHMENT, AND AGGRESSION: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

A recent analysis of data from our study of high-risk adolescents offered the opportunity to examine the specificity of relationships between insecure attachment patterns and engagement in aggressive behavior (Obsuth, Luedemann, Peled, & Moretti, 2002). Participants were 105 boys and 65 girls, with a mean age of 14 years ($SD = 1.5$) who were provided family and community services at a provincial centre for youths with severe behavioral problems. Youths completed the Family Attachment Interview (FAI; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), a semi-structured interview modeled after the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main & Goldwyn, 1998). The interview contains questions and coding dimensions that are virtually identical to those included in the AAI, however raters using the FAI assess the extent to which the interview corresponds to each of four attachment prototypes (secure, preoccupied, fearful, dismissing) by assigning a rating on a 1 to 9 point scale, where 1 represents no correspondence and

9 represents an excellent fit. This procedure allows researchers to derive both categorical and dimensional ratings for each participant. Reliability and validity of the interview with high-risk adolescents have been established (Scharfe, 2002).

Not surprisingly, and consistent with previous studies of clinical populations, our findings showed that the vast majority of youths were predominantly insecure in their attachment pattern. Significant gender differences emerged in the distribution of insecure attachment patterns. As predicted, girls were more likely to be classified as preoccupied in their attachment organization (40%) than were boys (15%), whereas boys were significantly more likely to be classified as dismissing (31%) than girls (6%). No difference was detected in the proportion of girls and boys classified as fearful (42% and 35% respectively).

Youths also completed the Youth Self-Report (Achenbach, 1995), a commonly used and well validated measure of emotional and behavioral functioning, and the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Steer, & Garbin, 1988). Of interest to the current analysis were items that tapped aggression to *others* (e.g., "I physically attack others") versus aggression to *self* (e.g., "I deliberately try to hurt or kill myself"). Two scales were formed, each comprised of four items, to tap these two focal points of aggressive behavior. To assess the specificity of attachment to aggressive behavior, aggression scale scores were regressed onto dimensional scores representing each of the three attachment prototypes. With respect to aggression directed toward others, results confirmed that increases in preoccupied attachment were uniquely associated with higher levels of aggression toward others, $\beta_3 = .18$, $p = .03$; neither fearful nor dismissing attachment ratings were significant predictors. Gender did not moderate the relationship between preoccupied attachment and aggression toward others, suggesting that preoccupied attachment functions similarly for boys and girls. With respect to aggression toward self, findings also confirmed that higher ratings of fearful attachment were associated with higher levels of self-directed aggression, $\beta_3 = .25$, $p = .001$. Again, fearful attachment was similarly associated with self-directed aggression for girls and boys.

The unique relationships we found between preoccupied attachment and aggression toward others, and fearful attachment and aggression toward self, were reflected in the way that girls spoke about what provoked their behavior and what they hoped to achieve through it. For example, Anna, age 16, had been in 18 different placements since she was first placed into care at age 11. She was extremely demanding, aggressive, and sometimes violent to her foster parents. Anna described how her last placement finally broke down when a new foster child was placed in the same home. Unable to tolerate her foster mother's attention to this new child, Anna

threatened to kill them both. Anna stated, "My mom (foster mom) doesn't even notice me anymore! I love my mom so much! Why is she doing this to me?" Jacki, age 13, was expelled from school for harassing male peers. Eventually she was charged when she threatened to kill a boy who would not reciprocate her interests. Jacki stated, "I can't sleep because I think about him all the time." Not surprisingly, Jacki was easily lured into situations that placed her at risk because of her strong needs for acceptance and connection. Both Anna and Jacki were deeply preoccupied in their attachment organization. Unable to trust that others would meet their attachment needs, they engaged in persistent coercive behavior that they hoped would capture the attention of others, but which ultimately undermined their relationships.

In contrast, Susan's interview illustrated features of fearful attachment. By age 15, she had dropped out of school, hung around with delinquent peers, and frequently ran away from home. Although angry with her parents for placing her in care, Susan stated, "I'm homesick. I look forward to seeing my parents on visits but I don't think they miss me because they hate me. They're not proud of me. I don't think they would even miss me if I were dead. I'm not the little girl they wanted."

While these findings should be viewed as preliminary, they are consistent with the findings of Allen et al. (1998) and offer support for the specificity of relationships between attachment organization and aggressive behavior. The fact that preoccupied and fearful attachment had similar associations with aggressive behavior for both girls and boys is consistent with the fundamental assumptions of attachment theory: that attachment organization, rather than gender, explains whether aggression is likely to be directed externally toward others. Unfortunately this study did not lend itself to a careful analysis of the function and target of aggression as it relates to dismissing attachment. Further research using methods that differentiate the *form* in which aggressive behavior is expressed (e.g., overt versus relational), the *function* or goal it is intended to achieve (interpersonal versus instrumental), and the *target* to whom it is directed (others in close relationships, the self, strangers) is required to fully test the specificity of relationships between attachment and aggression that we have presented.

THERAPEUTIC IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical models that provide a general understanding of the etiology of clinical problems are useful in guiding intervention; those that offer a framework for understanding which individuals are likely to suffer

from *what types of problems*, and under *which conditions*, are far better. Attachment theory has the potential of informing intervention at this highly differentiated level, and thus is an important framework for organizing interventions targeted at problems of aggression. We have argued that aggression in girls, compared to boys, is most frequently an expression of coercive attempts to engage others. If this is the case, interventions are most likely to be effective when they assist girls to better meet their needs for interpersonal connectedness in ways that are neither hurtful to themselves or others. It is essential to support girls to develop a sense of healthy autonomy that allows them to remain connected in their relationships with others, but also to feel competent, worthy, and comfortable with their autonomy. Attachment is a developmental construct that reaches beyond the simple *content* of internal working models of self and others; other developmental processes, such as affect regulation and cognitive information processing, develop hand-in-hand with the emergence of attachment patterns. For this reason, it is important that interventions for aggressive girls address clinical needs related to the hyperactivation of the attachment system, including heightened vigilance to potential rejection and abandonment, reduced capacity to modulate affective responses, limited social skill issues related to managing interpersonal relationships, and poor integration between affective and cognitive experience. In this regard, it is essential that interventions take into consideration the fact that many girls who show severe aggressive and violent behavior have themselves been subjected to victimization, often of a severe and chronic nature (e.g., Moretti & Odgers, 2001; Reebye, Moretti, Wiebe, & Lessard, 2001).

Perhaps the most significant implication of an attachment perspective, however, is the importance of directing intervention strategies beyond the aggressive behavior of girls to the relational context in which they are embedded. Attachment is inherently a relational construct which demands a systemic focus beyond the individual (Moretti & Holland, 2003). Understanding attachment related behavior from a systemic perspective entails an appreciation for how individuals reinforce each other's perceptions and reactions within relationships. For example, as girls become more coercive of others' engagement with them, it is likely that their attachment figures retreat and reject them. This can only escalate their perceptions of abandonment and rejection and propel them into further and more extreme coercive measures. Interventions that help girls and caregivers to exit this coercive cycle are essential. The inclusion of interventions that target important relationships—such as Earls court's Girls Connection focus on mother-daughter relationships—are likely an important component of programming for girls.

Attachment theory is at the heart of a variety of intervention strategies, many of which have been empirically validated (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003). Our own work using attachment focused, multisystemic intervention strategies for girls and boys with severe conduct disorders has provided promising results that point to the critical importance of supporting families in finding new strategies to support greater attunement to, and support of, adolescent attachment needs (Moore, Moretti, & Holland, 1998; Moretti & Holland, 2003; Moretti, Holland, & Moore, 2002). We cannot review various approaches in the space of this chapter, but they should be given careful attention in the development of gender tailored interventions for girls.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF AN ATTACHMENT PERSPECTIVE

Perhaps the most distinctive advantages to understanding aggression from an attachment perspective are the developmental framework that it provides and the functional analyses that it provides for understanding behavior. Attachment theory helps us to understand how and why particular behavioral strategies develop, the function that they serve, and to whom behaviour is targeted. In doing so, it allows us to make sense of heterogeneity within populations of aggressive individuals, whether they are children, adolescents, or adults.

Attachment theory also holds the promise of integrating theories about aggression and violence that appear to diverge in very fundamental ways. For example, while some models of aggression hold that oversensitivity to rejection and low self-esteem give rise to aggression, others contend that the lack of regard for others and narcissistic high self-esteem is at the core of aggressive behavior (Bushman & Baumeister, 2002). How can two fundamentally different views of aggression be equally valid?

An attachment perspective provides compelling explanations of distinctive patterns of aggressive behavior and elucidates how each can develop from attachment related experiences. Furthermore, it gives rise to specific, testable hypotheses that can be assessed across a range of developmental periods. Importantly, attachment theory carries our perspective from individual to social context and back again, making us aware of the social embeddedness quality of human behavior. Finally, attachment theory provides clear direction about the development of interventions for individuals. In the case of girls, interventions must take the form of addressing their interpersonal needs, behaviors, and the interpersonal relationships that they seek to maintain.

No theory is without limitations, and attachment theory is no exception. Of high relevance to the field of aggression is the question of the relative importance of attachment insecurity in predicting negative developmental outcomes in "normative" versus high-risk contexts. Although similar *patterns* of outcomes are present in normative and clinical samples (Allen & Land, 1999), research shows that the relation between attachment and adjustment is *stronger* among children in high-risk contexts (e.g., poverty, low social support, parental psychopathology; Lyons-Ruth, 1996). How particular contextual factors and modeling of aggressive behavior influence the expression of aggression relative to attachment status remains unknown. Other issues, particularly significant to the adolescent developmental period, are also open to debate. For example, although recent studies show that parents continue to rank at the top as important attachment figures well into early adulthood (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997), we do not fully understand how adolescents negotiate the transition in attachment figures from parents to peers, and finally to romantic partners. Future research investigating these issues will do much to further our understanding of normative and atypical development of attachment and its significance for understanding aggression and violence.

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5

The Social Context of Children's Aggression

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Researchers and philosophers have long pondered the nature and origins of aggression among humans, but it is only recently that we have begun to understand the diverse forms that aggressive behavior can take as well as the complexity of its development. The goal of this chapter is to review current conceptualizations of aggression, with particular interest in how aggression varies as a function of both gender and development. Against this backdrop, we argue for a broader perspective on the socialization of aggression, which more fully considers the social context in which it develops and the influence of peers.

THE MANY FACES OF AGGRESSION

Historically, studies have focused primarily on overt, physical, and verbal aggression, which is more characteristic of boys than girls (e.g., Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Pioneering studies of "indirect aggression" by Feshbach (1969, 1971), however, lead to consideration of psychological forms of aggression, including social exclusion, isolation, gossip, rumor spreading, and public humiliation, that may more accurately capture the way that aggression is expressed by girls (see Crick, this volume;

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