

## Aggression Reduction Strategies: Effective and Ineffective

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A small number of over-arching intervention strategies appear to have significantly influenced the development and implementation of a very large number of specific approaches to dealing with school violence in U.S. schools today. These strategies—punishment, catharsis, and cohabitation—are reviewed, and the several bases for their ineffectiveness are described. In contrast, a series of substantially more effective perspectives on youth violence intervention are proposed—complexity, prescriptiveness, situationality, and aggression-as-learned-behavior—each of which has marked potential for yielding effective intervention outcomes.

It has been estimated that there are 225 to 300 approaches to the control of student violence currently in use in U.S. schools. The vast majority of these efforts are put in place on the basis of some combination of anecdotal evidence, collegial recommendation, impression, hearsay, hope, and often desperation—but rarely as a function of anything approaching a sound evaluation of efficacy. We all can, should, and repeatedly do urge that such evaluations systematically take place. However, violence waits for no one, nor can violence intervention efforts.

Increasingly, it is and should be the school psychologist who makes a significant contribution to such intervention selection and implementation decisions. As either a professional member of the school community, part of a school-crisis-management team, or an outside consultant, we are increasingly faced with the earnest question: What do *you* think we should do? In the present article, I would like to suggest a number of intervention qualities apparently characteristic of approaches that do, and those that do not, tend to yield violence-reducing outcomes.

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## INEFFECTIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

**Punishment**

By far the most popular response to adolescent and child aggression, and related perceived transgressions in U.S. schools, is punishment (Farley, 1983; Hyman, 1995; Hyman, Clarke & Erdlen 1987)—not punishment in its more benign and empirically based characterizations (time-out, response cost, over-correction, etc.) but punishment in its considerably more damaging manifestations. I refer, in particular, to corporal punishment, reprimands, and out-of-school suspension.

*Corporal Punishment.* Corporal punishment is now permitted in 23 states—a number unlikely to shrink in our current “get tough” political climate. Ten of those 23 states are located in the United States’ most aggressive region: the Southeast (Russell, 1989). There are approximately three quarters of a million applications of corporal punishment in the United States annually (Hyman, 1997). Minority youth, who constitute 30% of U.S. school children, receive 40% of such punishments (Richardson & Evans, 1992). Emotionally disturbed and learning disabled youngsters are similarly targeted disproportionately to their numbers (Jones, 1993).

In actual practice, instruments in addition to the popular paddle have been employed, including hands, fists, straps, hoses, bats, forced exercise drills, and the forced eating of noxious substances (Hyman, 1997). In an effort to delineate and regulate corporal punishment, and perhaps as an attempt to make oneself more comfortable inflicting it, most user school districts have established such policy and procedure regulations for its employment. Typically included are specifications regarding the size of the paddle, the number and intensity of strokes to be administered, the presence of a witness, and the need for prior parental approval.

*Reprimands.* Reprimands are a particularly frequent teacher and administrator response to student behaviors perceived as inappropriate. Colvin and Sugai (1989), Thomas, Presland, Grant, and Glynn (1978), and White (1975) have shown that teachers deliver an average of one reprimand every 2 minutes in both elementary and junior high school settings, a rate that substantially exceeds their rate of offering praise for appropriate behaviors. Evaluations of the effectiveness of reprimands have often yielded positive short-term results, including those instances in which its use was targeted to reduce aggressive behavior by students (Jones & Miller, 1974; O’Leary, Kaufman, Kass, & Drabman, 1970). Nonetheless, one is justified in wondering about its longer-term impact. Given what has been shown about the remarkable stability of aggressive behavior, the chronically aggressive student almost certainly was once a chronically aggressive preschooler and, as such, the target of a barrage of parental reprimands—yet the aggression continued.

*Suspension.* Suspension is also a common punishment strategy. Perhaps 97% of U.S. school children come to school safely every day, do their work more or less conscientiously, experience no aggression, and return home without fear or injury; 3% do otherwise. They are at times the perpetrators of serious aggression, and often of disruption-causing mayhem.

It is understandable that principals and teachers, acting on behalf of the greater good, feel that the optimal disposition for some members of the 3% is out-of-school suspension. Yet we believe that in many school districts such an administrative action is greatly overused. Table 1 lists the transgressions that may get one suspended in a fairly typical district.

The climate of the in-school community may be enhanced by the use of suspension, a quite important goal. Yet the youngster who is suspended is still a member of our larger community, and 3 days wandering the streets or watching TV at home do little to ensure that he or she returns better for the experience.

Why is the use of corporal punishment, reprimands, and suspension objectionable? First, their effects are often quite temporary. Perhaps the failure to achieve anything but short-term impact results from the manner in which such punishments, as actually employed, fail to reflect the several implementation conditions shown to influence their outcomes for the better. Specifically, the effectiveness of punishment has been demonstrated to be a joint function of its likelihood, consistency, immediacy, duration, severity, possibility of avoidance, level of instigation to aggression, level of reward for aggression, and characteristics of the punishing agent (Axelrod & Apsche, 1982; Van Houten, 1982).

Yet, because it often succeeds in the short-term, certain lessons are learned. The punisher learns "it works," and thus his or her level of punitiveness is sustained. The target youth learns "might makes right," and becomes that much more likely to pass the lesson on. The so-called "intergenerational transmission of familial abuse" (Graziano & Nameste, 1990; Widom, 1989) and our own finding in a national sample of incarcerated delinquent youths who responded with remarkably consistent harshness when asked how *they* would go about reducing aggressive behavior (Goldstein, 1990), are examples of such a lesson learned.

The massive overuse of punishment in U.S. schools should also be objected to because of what *is not* learned. If being hit, yelled at, or suspended has any informational value, it lies in its telling the student what *not* to do. It fails totally in teaching alternative, prosocial behavior. As we noted elsewhere:

A reprimand or a paddling will not teach new behaviors. If the youngster is deficient in the ability to ask rather than take, request rather than command, and negotiate rather than strike out, all the teacher scolding, scowling, and spanking possible will not teach the youngster desirable alternative behaviors. (Goldstein, 1988, p. 572)

## CATHARSIS

A second very popular, yet seriously flawed, aggression-reduction strategy—one widely believed in by both lay persons and educational and mental health professionals—is the catharsis strategy. The volatile youngster is urged by the physical education teacher to "get rid of anger" on the punching bag, not a classmate's head.

TABLE 1. Suspension Categories

Insubordination	Smoking
Fighting	Theft
Disruptive Behavior	Arson
Vulgar and abusive language	Extortion
Cutting class	Gambling
Leaving the school building	Destruction or defacement of school/personal property
Persistent disobedience	Sexual harassment
Loitering	Vandalism
Trespassing	Tardiness
Assault of a student	Indecent exposure
Assault of a staff member	Truancy
Striking a student	Failure to obey the reasonable request of a staff member
Striking a staff member	Leaving the classroom without permission
Threat of a student	Unprepared for class
Threat of a staff member	Falsifying information
Harassment of a student	Possession of stolen property
Harassment of a staff member	In an area where an illegal drug/alcoholic beverage was being used
Possession of an illegal drug	Possession of pornographic/obscene material
Use of an illegal drug	Disrespectful/uncooperative
Sale of an illegal drug	Refused to stay for detention
Possession of drug paraphernalia	Failure to follow in-school suspension rules
Possession of alcohol	
Use of alcohol	
Reckless endangerment	
Possession/use of a weapon/dangerous object	

The marital therapist instructs abusive spouses to blow off steam and beat the couch, not their spouses. Others urge similar “hydraulic” effects by viewing rather than doing violence—for example, via sports viewing on the mass media. What are the facts here?

### Historical View

Catharsis is the draining off, venting, or purging of an emotion, an experience that purportedly occurs vicariously (by observing and empathically identifying with another person) or directly (via one’s own behavior). The concept of catharsis first appeared in the vicarious sense, in connection with the reported emotion-purging experience of the audience at early Greek drama. The Freudian (1950) view—and that of Lorenz (1966), which reflects the ethologist’s perspective—were more direct with regard to aggression. Freud wrote that “there is a continuous welling up of destructive impulses within the individual representing an outgrowth of the death instinct” (p. 160). Lorenz held that in both animals and humans “aggressive energy is continuously being generated within the species member and seeks periodic release” (p. 161). In these views, therefore, aggression is inevitable, and the best that one can accomplish is to direct, channel, or regulate its periodic release or discharge via socially acceptable, minimally injurious, “aggressive” acts, such as debates or competitive sports. Proctor and Eckerd (1976) present this viewpoint clearly:

People's emotions are similar to steam locomotives. If you build a fire in the boiler of a locomotive, keep raising the steam pressure and let it sit on the tracks, sooner or later something will blow. However, if you take it and spin the wheels and toot the whistle, the steam pressure can be kept at a safe level. Spectator sports give John Q. Citizen a socially acceptable way to lower his steam pressure by allowing him to spin his wheels and toot his whistle. (p. 83)

The view of aggression as stored, constantly growing energy that, if directly or vicariously vented, leaves less of it in the person's reservoir is, as noted earlier, a very widely held belief in contemporary thinking. Is it correct? Let us see what relevant research has shown. Such research has been both abundant and of various types.

### **Static Comparisons**

One research approach is simply to compare the aggressiveness levels of persons who do or do not regularly engage in aggressive activities. If the catharsis notion is correct, those who have vented should show less aggression. Zillmann, Bryant, and Sopolsky (1979) compared contact sport athletes (football and wrestling) with noncontact sport athletes (swimming and tennis) and with nonathletes, and they found no between-group differences on behavioral measures of aggression. Le Unes and Nation (1981) compared football players and nonathletes in the same way, and Ostrow (1974) did so with tennis players and nonathletes. Their results matched Zillmann et al.'s in that there were no between-group differences on aggression, or to say it another way, there was no evidence that the expression of aggression reduces its occurrence.

### **Before-After Comparisons**

These are studies in which two groups are identified or randomly constituted, and one is given the opportunity to aggress. If the catharsis theory is correct, the after comparisons should reveal that the group permitted to express aggression is less aggressive than the comparison group. Ostrow (1974) and Ryan (1970) each conducted this type of study and found no support for this effect. More surprisingly, three other before-after comparison studies of catharsis found an opposite effect: Persons permitted to behave aggressively afterward become more aggressive, not less so—as the catharsis concept would predict. This result emerged in Hornberger's (1959) study in which some research participants were required to hammer nails; in Loew's (1967) investigation, requiring some participants to say a series of aggressive words; and in Patterson's (1974) comparison of football players and physical education students before and after the football season. Compared with their respective nonaggressive comparison groups, the nail hammerers, the aggression verbalizers, and the football players all became more aggressive—the direct opposite of a catharsis effect. J. H. Goldstein and Arms (1971) measured aggression

level in randomly selected fans just before and after an Army–Navy football game. Contrary to experiencing catharsis, fans of both winners and losers had increased levels of aggression after the game. The investigator's comment: "Exposure to the aggression of others seemingly acts to weaken one's internal mechanisms controlling the expression of similar behavior" (p. 165). Arms, Russell, and Sandilands (1979) replicated this result and showed, furthermore, that fan aggression increased after football and hockey matches (aggressive sports) but not after a swim meet (a nonaggressive sport).

### Archival Studies

These studies examined short-term or long-term records of aggression-expressing sports and other events that, if catharsis is a real phenomenon, should reveal its decrease over the course of the event. In five separate archival studies, Russell (1981) showed the opposite of a cathartic effect. Because catharsis by definition predicts that aggression should decrease as it is expressed, progressively less should occur as an athletic event progresses. In fact, aggression increased as the games progressed. A similar anticathartic result emerged in Russell's (1983) tracking of aggression between two teams. The more times they met over a season the more, not less, aggression took place. The early proponents of competitive sports as an ideal venting ground for human aggression saw sports in their grand vision as a substitute for war. Unfortunately, this cathartic vision, too, fails to find research support in archival studies of this phenomenon. Sipes (1973) showed a positive relationship, not the negative one that the catharsis theory would predict, between the degree to which combatant sports existed in a society and its degree of involvement in wars, conflicts, revolutions, and similar events. Similarly, Keefer, Goldstein, and Kasiary (1983) found a positive correlation between whether a country participated in the Olympics and the number of athletes it sent, on the one hand, and the number of wars in which it participated and its number of months at war.

### Laboratory Studies

Fully consistent with the research outcomes reported previously, Berkowitz (1964) conducted a series of investigations in which research participants were or were not shown either brutal but staged sports violence (e.g., the fight scene from the movie *The Champion*) or equally brutal, actual fights from hockey, football, and basketball. In all instances, those viewing the aggressive scenes, compared with nonviewing control group participants, significantly increased their own levels of aggression.

The several, methodologically diverse investigations (static comparisons, before vs. after comparisons, archival studies, laboratory based), most of which were conducted in the 1960s and 1970s, combine with more recent studies of the consequences of catharsis (Goldstein, 1986; Phillips & Hensley, 1984; Wann &

Branscombe, 1990) to converge as a strong conclusion: Catharsis is a myth. Sports violence increases participant and spectator violence; it does not decrease it. As Goranson (1970) aptly suggested:

I think that this is one of those rare occasions in behavioral research where an unqualified conclusion is warranted. The observation of violence does not reduce aggressiveness....Observed violence serves to facilitate the expression of aggression, rather than reduce aggression by “draining off aggressive energy!” (p. 12)

## COHABITATION

In the context of an examination of aggression-reduction strategies, cohabitation can be defined as the defeatist, overwhelmed, resigned sense that aggression is “human nature,” “will always be with us,” and that one has no choice but “to live with it.” Many holding this view live with it poorly, for example, the “burned out” teacher; the chronically fearful student; the many thousands of city-dwelling, elderly citizens who sentence themselves to solitary confinement every evening because of their high level of fear of becoming a violent crime victim should they venture outside their homes or apartments; and the millions (perhaps all of us) who are increasingly desensitized to, more tolerant of, more adapted to, and more expectant of high levels of aggression in daily living as simply “the way it is.”

I most definitely do not share this perspective. Much has already been accomplished in school, community, and other settings to successfully control, reduce, and even on occasion eliminate aggressive behavior. In the remainder of this article, I seek to build upon these constructive beginnings and point in the direction of a series of what I believe to be vital next steps toward the comprehensive goal of aggression reduction in our schools and our communities. These next steps, all of which require a change in our customary thinking about what constitutes effective means for reducing aggression, will focus upon intervention complexity, prescriptiveness, situationality, and the belief that aggression and its prosocial alternatives are learned behaviors.

## EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

### Complexity

There is a clear tendency, emerging especially perhaps from the “can do” ethos traditionally characteristic of the United States, to hope for and expect to find the “big solution” to major social problems. Thus, we seek the one breakthrough or intervention program that will wipe out poverty (e.g., the War on Poverty of the 1960s), cancer (e.g., various miracle cures), illiteracy (e.g., a sequence of early education/stimulation interventions), hunger/malnutrition (e.g., food stamps), drug

TABLE 2. Multiple Causes of Aggressive Behavior

Causes	Examples
Physiological predisposition <sup>a</sup>	Male gender, high arousal, temperament
Cultural context <sup>b</sup>	Societal traditions and mores that encourage/restrain aggression
Immediate interpersonal environment <sup>c</sup>	Parental/peer criminology; video, movie aggressive models
Immediate physical environment <sup>d</sup>	Temperature, noise, crowding, traffic, pollution
Person qualities <sup>e</sup>	Self-control, repertoire of alternative prosocial values and behaviors
Disinhibitors <sup>f</sup>	Alcohol, drugs, successful aggressive models
Presence of means <sup>g</sup>	Guns, knives, other weapons
Presence of potential victim <sup>h</sup>	Spouse, child, elderly, other

<sup>a</sup>Potegal & Knutson (1994), Zillman (1994)

<sup>b</sup>Goldstein (1996), Gurr (1989)

<sup>c</sup>Felson (1987), Goldstein (1994)

<sup>d</sup>Goldstein (1994), Romero (1985)

<sup>e</sup>Feindler & Ecton (1986), Goldstein, Carr, Davidson & Wehr (1981)

<sup>f</sup>Baron & Richardson (1994), Gibbs (1986)

<sup>g</sup>American School Health Association (1989), Center to Prevent Handgun Violence (1990)

<sup>h</sup>Simon (1991), Toch (1980)

abuse (e.g., “Say No” campaigns), and, most certainly, aggression as well. The “magic bullets” variously aimed at individual and collective aggression over the past few decades in both school and other settings have included a remarkably diverse array of programs. All such magic bullets miss the effectiveness target. The hoped-for breakthrough, whether for poverty, cancer, illiteracy, hunger, drug abuse, or aggression, is exceedingly rare—and less and less likely as the problem’s complexity increases. Simply put, I assert that complex problems will yield only to complex solutions. Every act of aggression, I believe, has multiple causes. When Johnny throws a book at his teacher (or draws a knife on the street), it is unproductive (for seeking possible reduction of such behaviors) to explain such behavior as caused by Johnny’s “aggressive personality,” “economic disadvantage,” “peer group encouragement,” “testosterone level” or other single causes. Johnny’s aggressive act, as well as all other acts of aggression, grow from an array of societal and individual causes. Table 2 concretely suggests the specific nature of such antecedents to aggression.

In broad outline, Table 2 seeks to highlight the complexity of cause as a way of indicating the necessity for parallel complexity of solution. While greatly underused, the philosophy expressed herein has often appeared elsewhere in various other guises. The call for complexity of solution has been heard before: from the community psychologist (Heller et al., 1984), the ecological psychologist (Moos & Insel, 1974), the environmental designer (Krasner, 1980), and the systems analyst (Plas, 1986). We ourselves have ventured into this realm earlier, in the context of school violence and means for its optimal reduction (Goldstein, Hartoonian, & Conoley, 1994). Much as

Table 2 implicitly proposes, our view was (and is) that to have even a modest chance of enduring success, interventions designed to reduce aggression toward persons or property in school contexts must be oriented not only toward the aggressor him or herself, but also at the levels of the teacher, school administration and organization, and the larger community context. Furthermore, an optimally complex intervention designed to reduce school violence ought to seek to do so by means of a variety of modes or channels. Therefore, the first requisite that we propose as necessary for the effective planning of a successful aggression reduction intervention is multilevel, multichannel complexity.

### PRESCRIPTIVENESS

Once an appropriately complex aggression intervention procedure has been developed or identified, how might it optimally be used? I believe successful aggression reduction will be substantially more likely to occur if interventions are applied in a differential, tailored, individualized, or prescriptive manner. The central question in prescriptive programming is which types of youth, meeting with which types of change agents, for which types of interventions, will yield optimal outcomes? This view runs counter to the prevailing "one-true-light" assumption underlying most intervention efforts. The one-true-light assumption, the antithesis of a prescriptive viewpoint, holds that specific treatments are sufficiently powerful to override substantial individual differences and aid heterogeneous groups of individuals.

Research in all fields of psychotherapy and education has shown the one-true-light assumption to be erroneous (Goldstein, 1978; Goldstein & Stein, 1976). Palmer (1975) and Greenwood's (1986) exhaustive reviews of delinquency intervention evaluations have shown it to be especially in error with regard to aggressive and delinquent adolescents. Instead, a "many-true-lights" perspective has been promulgated. In work with emotionally disturbed adults and children, for example, there is Kiesler's (1969) grid model matching treaters, treatments, and clients; Magaro's (1969) individualization of psychotherapy offered and psychotherapists offering it as a function of patient social class and premorbid personality; and our own factorial, tridifferential research schema for enhancing the development of prescriptive matches (Goldstein, 1978; Goldstein & Stein, 1976). In elementary and secondary education contexts, examples of prescriptive programming include Keller's (1966) personalized instruction; Hunt's (1971) matching of student conceptual level and teacher instructional style; and Klausmeier, Rossmiller, and Sailey's (1977) individually guided education model.

In the context of school violence, two promising prescriptions may be offered. Both await empirical scrutiny. The first grows from the seminal work of Dodge (1990). As Table 3 details, they have proposed that two major subcategories of aggression may be appropriately delineated: Proactive aggression is intentional injury to another as a result of a planful attempt to obtain material gain or

TABLE 3. Prescriptive Intervention by Type of Aggression

Proactive Aggression	Reactive Aggression
Object-oriented Goal: to obtain, dominate	Person-oriented Goal: to hurt, injure
Cold-blooded Example: bullying	Angry, volatile Example: temper tantrum
Crimes premeditated	Crimes of passion
Possible interventions: Consistent punishment for aggression Consistent reward for prosocial behavior Social skills training	Possible interventions: Anger-control training Empathy training

dominance. Reactive aggression, also termed angry or hostile aggression, is intentional injury to another as a result of arousal-motivated desire to hurt. The former, Dodge (1990) proposes logically leads to the recommendation of one set of interventions, the latter leads to a quite different prescription.

A second prescriptive proposal grows from an effort of our own (Goldstein, Palumbo, Striepling, & Voutsinas, 1995). In an attempt to obtain teacher perspectives and experiences bearing upon successful school violence intervention, we conducted a national teacher survey that yielded 1,000 descriptions of incidents of school violence at all class levels, and the techniques employed for their management. A cluster analysis of these incidents enabled us to group them in the categories indicated in Table 4, and array the incident clusters in order of increasing severity: horseplay and rule violation, for example, being mild forms; bullying and sexual harassment being intermediate level; and attacks on teachers or the use of weapons illustrating high levels of incident intensity.

Our prescriptive recommendation here, one fitting quite neatly the zero-tolerance climate increasingly characterizing schools in the United States, is "catch it low to prevent it high." If it is the case, as has been often demonstrated, that aggression is primarily learned behavior, and the rule-violating or cursing student receives peer attention and teacher indifference for his or her efforts, what has he or she learned? Perhaps that aggression indeed pays, and thus, it continues and likely escalates. Anecdotally, as well described in Kelling and Coles's (1996) aptly titled book, *Fixing Broken Windows*, a number of U.S. police departments have recently asserted that lowered crime rates in their respective cities are a result of heightened police attention to incivilities and "quality-of-life crimes": subway fare-beating, littering, illegal parking, panhandling, and the like. "Catch it low," they claim, "to prevent it high." There is a pregnant prescription here awaiting experimental examination for the management of school violence.

Additional possible prescriptive bases for intervention development or selection exist, each of which is promising, but none have been examined yet for their differential potency for differing types of aggression. I refer to such aggression

TABLE 4. Categories of In-School Aggression Incidents

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Horseplay
Rule violation
Refusal/defiance
Cursing
Threats
Disruptiveness
Bullying
Sexual harassment
Vandalism
Out of control
Student-student fights
Attacks on teachers
Use of weapons
Collective violence

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*Note.* Categories employed to classify 1,000 aggressive incident reports gathered from a national sample of teachers (Goldstein, Palumbo, Striepling, & Voutsinas, 1995).

categorization as overcontrolled versus undercontrolled, high intensity versus low intensity, early onset versus later onset, and overt versus covert (Feldman, Caplinger, & Wodarski, 1983; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Shannon, 1988; Wolfgang, Thornberry, & Figlio, 1987).

### SITUATIONALITY

Psychology's basic assumption, at least until the 1950s, was that the primary determinants of human behavior lie within the persons themselves (i.e., their personality traits or dispositional tendencies). Understand the personality better and, this belief held, the accurate prediction and control of behavior will follow. But as psychology progressed into the 1960s, it became increasingly clear that the cross-situational consistency of behavior, which should be evident if behavior is largely determined by dispositions the person brings to diverse situations, quite often did not occur. Price and Bouffard (1974) comment:

Several reviews of personality research have made it clear that traditional assumptions concerning the transsituational consistency of personality are in need of considerable revision....These studies have made it clear that (a) simple trait-oriented conceptions of personality must be replaced by much more complex conceptualizations and (b) the scope of these conceptualizations must be expanded from exclusively person-oriented conceptions to approaches which include the domains of situations, behavior, and their interactions. (p. 579)

Indeed, this call has been heeded. To a very considerable extent, modern psychology has moved away from the exclusive use of personality indices and increasingly relies on person-plus-situation interactional information to reach its understanding, prediction, and control goals. This perspective has found substantial expression vis à vis many different classes of behavior (Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981; Forgas, 1979; Magnusson, 1981), including aggression (Campbell, 1986; Cordilia, 1986; Goldstein, 1994; Marsh, Rosser, & Harris, 1978).

Personality information, of course, remains of major value. We can make lower-order successful predictions about future aggressive behavior, for example, if we know something about the hostility trait level of a given student, athlete, or prisoner. But how much deeper our understanding, better our predictions, and more effective our intervention efforts when we also factor in the situational research findings that

1. Aggression in a school context is greater in some physical locations (cafeteria, stairwells, bathrooms) than in others, and worse at some times of the year than others (March is the worst month in the United States; the last day of school is worst in Japan), the larger the school, and when the school's governance is either autocratic or laissez-faire, as contrasted to "firm but fair."
2. Aggression in an athletic context is greater for members of home teams than visiting teams, later in the season than earlier, later in the game than earlier, and when the team is in the middle rather than top or bottom of its league standings.
3. Aggression in a prison context is greater the larger the prison, the more external (in and out) the traffic, the more internal (within) the traffic, and the more racially mixed or gang-dominated.

Situations have many features purported to be potentially useful, when combined with personality information, to the understanding–prediction–control effort. These include its location, physical arrangement, entrances and exits, illumination, temperature, noise level, the people present, its time of occurrence, the actions that take place, its norms, rules, goals, roles, tasks, themes, expectations, ambiguities, and more. These and other situation characteristics are each potential antecedents or correlates of aggressive behavior, none of which are "in" the potential aggressor, all of which may substantially aid our ability to understand effectively, predict, and reduce human aggression.

School systems in the United States have eagerly reflected this situational perspective in a wide variety of violence preventions and violence reduction steps already taken. Table 5 conveniently depicts those several types of school-based efforts, listing the core environmental-design strategies developed and applied in a domain termed "environmental criminology" (Brantingham &

TABLE 5. Environmental Design Methods

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1. Target hardening (e.g., security screens, slash-proof seats)
  2. Access control (e.g., locked doors, blocked-off streets)
  3. Deflecting offenders (e.g., graffiti boards, home activity decoys)
  4. Controlling facilitators (e.g., control of aerosol can sales control, plastic "glass")
  5. Entry/exit screening (e.g., closed-circuit TV, merchandise tags)
  6. Formal surveillance (e.g., burglar alarms, tenant patrols)
  7. Employee surveillance (e.g., aisle mirrors, more employees)
  8. Natural surveillance (e.g., improved lighting, clear store windows)
  9. Target removal (e.g., exact change fares, removable car radios)
  10. Identifying property (e.g., vehicle parts ID, property marking with social security numbers)
  11. Removing inducements (e.g., rapid graffiti cleaning, small window panes)
  12. Rule setting (e.g., drug-free school zones, building design codes)
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Brantingham, 1991; Clarke, 1992; Goldstein, 1994, 1995). These strategies are premised on the assumptions of criminologists who assert that the supply of persons motivated to engage in aggressive and other antisocial behavior will always outdistance remedial efforts to alter such behavior, and that needed instead (or in addition) are means for altering the *opportunity* to engage in these behaviors, regardless of the motivations of potential perpetrators. The dozen strategies listed in Table 5, as applied to the problem of vandalism, capture environmental design strategies that decrease potential perpetrator opportunity to physically access possible targets of vandalism (Methods 1–5), decrease opportunity by causing potential perpetrators to believe the level of surveillance will cause them to be seen (Methods 6–8), or decrease opportunity by causing the consequences of a possible vandalistic act to be less attractive (Methods 9–12).

### AGGRESSION AS LEARNED BEHAVIOR

In addition to thinking about aggression complexly, prescriptively, and situationally, a final vital step in serious efforts to strategize about interventions targeted at aggression requires that we view such behavior as primarily learned. We will not repeat here the theoretical and empirical case against the competing, instinctive view of aggression. That marshalling of negative evidence, described earlier in the discussion of catharsis, convincingly shows the bankruptcy of the position that aggression basically derives from instinctive energy. What then is a sounder, alternative view? A mass of information has been gathered in recent years definitively demonstrating that the major source of aggressive behavior is human learning. Bandura (1969) was an early proponent and demonstrator (Bandura, 1973) of this view, and many have since followed (Baron, 1977; Eron & Huesmann, 1984; Goldstein, 1983; Montague, 1978).

But where and how is aggression learned? In most Western societies, and perhaps most clearly in the United States, there appear to be three major “classrooms” for aggression: the home, the school, and the mass media. In the American home, while “only” 4% of parents physically abuse their children (e.g., burn, fracture bones, shake to point of concussion), 90% make at least occasional, and sometimes frequent, use of corporal punishment (e.g., spank, hit, slap) (Straus, 1994).

What happens when an adult hits a child? The first frequent consequence is that the child ceases the behaviors that the adult perceived as aversive. Negative reinforcement is the cessation of an aversive event and, thus reinforced, the adult is now more likely to use corporal punishment in response to his or her child’s next perceived transgression. But it is not only the adult who has thereby learned the correctness of the adage “might makes right.” So, too, has the child. Bandura (1969, 1973) and many others have shown that aggression is learned in essentially two ways: directly or vicariously. Direct learning (the adult aggressor in our example) follows from reinforced practice, that is, the behavior is tried and brings the hoped-for, desired result. Vicarious learning (the aggressed-upon child in our example) occurs by observing others behave aggressively and receive rewards for doing so.

The American school is a second major location in which aggression is learned. Not only does this assertion appear to be correct via the pro-aggression influence of many adolescent peer groups (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Goldstein, Apter, & Harootunian, 1984; Manaster, 1977), and by means directly analogous to those described above for parents and their children. As noted in our earlier discussion of the use of punishment in America’s schools, the American teacher may often be a skilled—if inadvertent—instructor in “Aggression 101.”

Aggression is not only taught, and learned, in the formal educational setting of its schools and the less formal contexts of its homes. Its most potent teaching, if sheer numbers be the guide, occurs via the mass media: newspapers, books, comic books, radio, movies, video games and, in particular, TV. The impact of U.S. mass media on the behavior of its citizens is immense. One of its effects is to increase the level of violence in contemporary America. This assertion is still disputed in some quarters, but my reading of the combined evidence bearing upon the influence of TV viewing leaves little room for doubt or equivocation. The very heavy, almost unremitting diet of violence on TV in the United States is a very substantial contributor to both the acquisition of aggressive behavior and the instigation of its actual enactment.

Three decidedly negative effects of this media violence barrage have been consistently demonstrated, as indicated in Table 6. We learn to behave more aggressively, we are more fearful of becoming victims of aggression, and we grow increasingly less concerned about the violence we see perpetrated upon

TABLE 6. Demonstrated Effects of Television Violence

- 
1. Aggression effect
    - Increased copy cat violence
    - Increased self-directed violence
  2. Victim effect
    - Increased fearfulness
    - Increased mistrust
    - Increased self-protectiveness
  3. Bystander effect
    - Increased desensitization
    - Increased callousness
- 

others (Comstock & Paik, 1994; Donnerstein, Slaby, & Eron, 1994; Hoberman, 1990). School personnel would be wise to (1) teach critical TV viewing habits to the students for whom they are responsible; (2) join together to bring pressure to bear on the television industry to show fewer violent shows, and more adequately depict the painful consequences of violence; (3) invest greater creative energy in portraying prosocial behaviors; and (4) pass on to parents a series of positive guidelines (see Table 7) which when used at home may serve to minimize the pernicious consequences of heavy violent viewing noted above.

### SUMMARY

Student aggression is a difficult behavior to change. It is frequently well taught at home and by the mass media, encouraged and rewarded by peers, and thus is a continuing challenge for school personnel. In the real world of school functioning, the purportedly corrective response to such behavior frequently has been punitive (corporal punishment, reprimands, suspension), expressive (catharsis, ventilation), or defeatist (cohabitation, resignation). In contrast, aggression reduction strategies that capture the qualities of complexity, prescriptiveness, situationality, and responsiveness to aggression as learned behavior are likely to maximize their intervention outcomes, and thus substantially impact upon this difficult-to-change behavior.

TABLE 7. Television Guidelines for Parents

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1. Watch a few children's shows yourself. *Be* your child.
  2. Plan viewing in advance. Emphasize nonviolent shows.
  3. Monitor child's actual viewing. Explain undesirability of initiating violence.
  4. Watch some shows with your child. Contrast real and pretend.
  5. Provide interesting alternative activities, especially reading.
  6. Explain false or exaggerated commercial claims.
  7. Encourage legislation, television companies, and advertisers to increase non-violent programming.
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