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Aggression motivation and inhibition
Theoretical underpinnings and a new model

Ioan Ohlsson

Human aggression remains subject to extensive exploration and theoretical reflection. Historical explanations for aggression have shifted from single factors (i.e. poor affect regulation; Berkowitz, 1993), to more current integrated theoretical models covering multiple factors (Megargee, 2011). Despite this, conceptual debates and differences remain due to varying interpretations as to the nature of aggression, how it is displayed and its function(s) (Krahe, 2013).

Intent is emphasised as a fundamental consideration in differentiating aggression from non-aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Geen, 2001; Ireland, 2011). The concept of underlying motivation is therefore embedded within current definitional considerations of aggression. It remains important in understanding the decision to aggress by representing the core objectives and intentions of the aggressor. Ireland (2011) argues that the continued difficulties in establishing a universally accepted definition must influence a shift to considering both the form and motivations of aggressive behaviour.

The study of motivation is concerned with addressing why a particular movement or action is initiated, persists over time, or is inhibited, and the choices made as part of such processes (Mook, 1987; Weiner, 1992). A number of alternative terms, such as underlying intentions, desires, or functions (Matson, Tureck, & Rieske, 2012), are used in the literature and yet all have comparable meanings.

In terms of aggression inhibition, Averill (1983) was one of the first scholars to acknowledge that most individuals experience inclinations towards aggressive behaviour, yet they do not act on these owing to some inhibitory force. Berkowitz (1990) later added that tendencies towards aggression are inhibited due to the operation of a self-regulatory mechanism. Bettencourt et al. (2006) observed that theoretical development and testing of inhibitors for aggression had largely been neglected. Since then an increased interest in the empirical evaluation of aggression inhibition has unfolded. An example of a recent theory that emphasises an equal role for both motivation and inhibition in aggression is Finkel’s (2007) I Theory. Pronounced ‘I-cubed theory’ this framework sought to impose greater theoretical coherence on the factors capable of promoting as well as preventing aggression (Denson, DeWall & Finkel, 2012; Finkel & Slotter, 2009). I theory identifies three processes as pivotal to determining whether aggressive urges culminate in aggression or instead are overridden in favour of non-aggression. These three factors are the Instigators, Impellors, and Inhibitors with the initial letter of each representing the three I’s...
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in I^3 theory. Preceding models fail to attend to the possibility that urges to aggression are not always acted upon and thus place little or no emphasis on inhibition. There is a return to this notion later in this chapter.

**Typologies and known functions of aggression**

Due to evidence of its relative stability across contexts (see Kempes *et al.*, 2005), some researchers believe that distinct subtypes of aggression are identifiable (Loeber & Hay, 1997). A number of dichotomous distinctions exist in the aggression literature including those that attend to its form and those that consider its function or motivation (Little *et al.*, 2003). The direct versus indirect distinction encapsulated the forms of aggressive behaviour most clearly (Archer, 2001; Ireland & Murray, 2005). Direct aggression involves physical contact with an object or another person and is inclusive of behaviours such as hitting, kicking and pushing. Verbal forms of direct aggression include yelling, making hurtful remarks and threats towards another (Little *et al.*, 2003). Indirect aggression differs as it is based on the actions of the instigator and can include manipulation of a social environment to hurt the target, damaging its self-esteem or social status, using humour hurtfully or damaging interpersonal relationships through exclusion or malice (Ireland, 2011). Alternative terms, such as relational (Little *et al.*, 2003), covert (Bjorkqvist, Osterman & Lagerspetz, 1994), emotional (Bjorkovist, 1992), relational-appearing and social manipulation (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) are also utilised, yet essentially, they all describe indirect forms of aggression.

Separate distinctions exist that consider aggression motivation. Proactive aggression is characterised by planned behaviours generally executed without emotion. Arguably, it is closely related to social-learning models, which maintain that maladaptive behaviours such as aggression are learnt and reinforced over time by perceived or actual rewards (Cima & Raine, 2009). Reactive aggression, however, is characterised as an uncontrolled form of aggression, a largely impulsive response driven by emotion and likely to occur in response to a blocked goal (Berkowitz, 1989; Raine *et al.*, 2006). In recent years the mixed-motive aggressor has been acknowledged, based on the notion that motivation is a fluid concept and that individuals can present with both forms (i.e. reactive and/or proactive) at different times (Gendreau & Archer, 2005). Dodge *et al.* (1997) among others (i.e. Polman *et al.*, 2007) found that proactive and reactive types were highly correlated. Despite evidence that these motives can coexist (Gendreu & Archer, 2005), several studies neglect the mixed category, focusing on proactive and reactive as two distinct types (Raine *et al.*, 2006).

Support for the distinction between proactive and reactive aggressive motivations is provided by several studies in clinical and non-clinical samples of children and adults (Polman *et al.*, 2007; Raine *et al.*, 2006). These subtypes have also been related to distinct developmental experiences and individual profiles (Card & Little, 2006). Advocates of the proactive/reactive dichotomy argue its value lies in operationalising the concept of aggression, permitting more focused empirical and theoretical exploration (Raine *et al.*, 2006). However, Bushman and Anderson (2001) criticised the distinction on the grounds that it confounds different categories of information processing and facilitates confusion over motives for aggression. They recommend that the distinction be abandoned in favour of a structural model for motivation that considers its likely wider and varying dimensions. They argue that reactive and proactive themes are likely to form only a part of any such framework of understanding.

Beyond the reactive/proactive distinction, to the authors’ best knowledge few published studies have directly examined or identified the specific motivations for aggression. The available studies (see Table 5.1) are equally limited in respect of their low sample size and generalisability, methodological concerns from experimental research designs, bias as often motivations were
inferred by researchers from behaviours rather than elicited by self-report, and that the aggression motivation was not the primary focus of some studies.

**Aggression motivation, inhibition and reasoned action**

Prior to describing the Applied Integrated Model of Aggression Motivation (AIM-AM), it is perhaps important to briefly consider theories of human motivation and decision-making more generally. As these theories form the basis upon which this literature is applied to aggression by the AIM-AM. An understanding of this is also helpful to further understand why consideration of motivation in aggression is important.

In the motivation literature, two overarching metaphors resulted in alternative types of theories and the subsequent growth in the study of human motivations (Weiner, 1994). Cartesian dualism (Descartes [1596–1650], as cited in Weiner, 1994) described the coexistence of the mind and body. This resulted in considerations of humans as godlike, and their motivations an outcome of logic, knowledge and rational choice. The second, *machine* metaphor considers human

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### Table 5.1 Summary of studies exploring underlying motivations for aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s</th>
<th>Year published</th>
<th>Sample size and nature</th>
<th>Motivations identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coid</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>81 prisoners</td>
<td>Blow to self-esteem, Violence only solution, Pride in fighting skills, Minimal stress tolerance, Protest, Persistent subversion, Intolerance of rules, Subdue a rival, Homicidal urges, Provocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olson &amp; Lloyd</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>25 intimate partners</td>
<td>Restoration of face, Threat removal, Self-defense, Communication style, Family learned pattern, Rule violation, Gain attention/compliance, Personality factors, Pain of unresolved issues, Control, Promote comfort/security, Alcohol/drug use state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham et al.</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,507 non-clinical adults</td>
<td>Compliance and grievance, Social identity concerns, Excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urheim et al.</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>28 clinical inpatients</td>
<td>Irritability, Instrumental, Defense</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ohlsson (2016)*
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Motivation theories have accepted and incorporated these principal metaphors to varying degrees (Weiner, 1994). For instance, psychoanalytic, ethological, socio-biological, drive and Gestalt theories of motivation were guided by the machine comparison. Expectancy-value theories are associated with the godlike metaphor. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to review all theories of human motivation. The core focus of this chapter concerns the AIM-AM and how concepts such as predisposing developmental factors, socio-cognitive processes and affective states are integrated and linked to aggression motivation. This has parallels to expectancy-value theories of behavioural motivation that are primarily discussed.

Expectancy-value theories, such as that of Julian Rotter (1954), contend that our actions in any given context are motivated by the perceived likelihood of achieving a desired outcome, the subjective value of this for the individual, any associative costs, and the influence of prior outcomes through reinforcement. Rotter (1954) argued:

"The potential occurrence of a behaviour that leads to the satisfaction of some need is a function of the expectancies that these behaviours will lead to these reinforcements and the strength or value of these reinforcements."

Rotter’s seminal theory of motivation (1954) noted four key notions including: behavioural potential, expectancy, reinforcement and the psychological situation. Behaviour is therefore determined by our knowledge and selection of the best course of action (Rotter, Chance & Phares, 1972). Expectancy is determined by individuals’ past history and outcomes from comparable situations (Rotter, 1954). It is this expectancy that results in motivating the individual towards a desired action (Rotter, Chance & Phares, 1972; Weiner, 1994).

In any discussion of motivation, rational choice and aggression, it is worth considering the Theory of Coercive Action (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Aggression, referred to as coercive actions by the authors, is considered to result from a decision process made by the perpetrator to achieve relevant social goals. They define coercive actions as any act undertaken with intent to harm another person and to gain their compliance (Felson & Tedeschi, 1994). This social interactionist perspective argues that aggression always serves a purpose. That is, even reactive, expressive or emotionally driven aggression has an instrumental goal, such as the release of emotional arousal or the satisfaction of having a grievance recognised (Eisner, 2009). Felson and Tedeschi’s (1994) preference of the term coercive action rather than aggression centred on their desire to bridge voids and segregation of knowledge and understanding across disciplines.

According to this theory there are three types of coercive actions: threats, punishments and bodily force. These are not to be confused with the three main goals of coercive actions (i.e. to gain compliance, to restore justice and to assert or defend identities), which will be described shortly. Threats were dichotomised into contingent and non-contingent and could be subtle or explicit. They defined punishment as an action performed with intent to harm another. This is consistent with the working definition of aggression discussed in the preceding section of this chapter. Bodily force encompassed the use of physical contact to compel or constrain others’ behaviours.

Three major social goals were differentiated as the motivational underpinnings of coercive action. They include: controlling others, restoring justice for perceived wrongs, and asserting or protecting social/self-identity. The decision to aggress is mediated by the expectancy that the goal will be reached, the value of the respective goal and the estimated costs of the behaviour. Thus, rational decision-making is clearly a fundamental principle of the theory of coercive action.
(Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Graham et al. (2013) argue that this theoretical framework provides the most useful taxonomy for understanding aggression motivation in naturally occurring settings. However, very limited systematic research has focused on testing the validity of these motivations for aggression (Graham et al., 2013).

Principles and theoretical basis of the AIM-AM

The AIM-AM was developed from three research studies with adult males in the UK (Ohlsson & Ireland, 2011; Ohlsson, 2016). Prior to a detailed discussion of this new model, a summary of the research studies that assisted its formulation is briefly recapitulated.

Study 1: Aggression motivation and emotion (Ohlsson & Ireland, 2011)

Two hundred and six adult males participated in this study, which aimed to explore the components of aggression motivation, and their relationship with anger and social desirability. Four self-report questionnaires were utilised towards this aim. Following exploratory factor analysis aggression motivations were separated into four factors (positive outcomes, pleasure, protection, and social recognition and emotional management), as opposed to two (reactive and proactive) or three factors (reactive, proactive and mixed), which is an important finding. Exploratory factor analysis is a statistical method for exploring the structure of data by explaining the relationships between variables, and it summarises large collections of data into smaller related factors. The notion that any distinction based on only two elements (such as reactive vs. proactive with their focus on the presence or absence of emotion, and actions occurring as a result of blocked or intended goals), was found to be too narrow to account for the complexity of human aggression motivation. These results suggested that a more comprehensive framework is required for understanding aggression motivation, and one that moves towards consideration accepting aggression as dynamic and the outcome of multiple underlying motives and causal factors.

This study was also one of the first to examine directly the role of emotion, such as anger, specifically with motivation rather than simply with forms of aggression (see Roberton et al., 2012). Anger was demonstrated by this study to be linked to all aggressive motivations. The traditional view that emotion is only associated with certain motivations, such as reactive (Raine et al., 2006), was unsupported. This brought into question the validity of the reactive versus proactive distinction as applied to aggression motivation. This has implications for both researchers and practitioners whose adoption of this distinction for empirical study or clinical decision-making may consequently be flawed. This finding also emphasised that emotion has a prominent and central role in aggression motivation, and is most likely to be a contributory factor along with cognition, given they (cognition and emotion) are both inextricably linked in the literature (Huesmann, 1998; Omadahl, 2014; Schacter & Singer, 1962).

In contrast, social desirability was found to be associated with only the positive outcomes and social recognition and emotional management aggression motivations. This suggested that participants were less likely to respond in a socially desirable manner when their recent acts of aggression were motivated by pleasure, whereas aggression used in the pursuit of positive outcomes and social recognition and emotional management resulted more readily in socially desirable behaviour. This finding was consistent with the assertions of the Applied Model of Information Processing (AMIP: Ireland & Murray, 2005), which argued that compared with other socio-cognitive information processing models (i.e. Crick & Dodge, 1994), aggression can serve an adaptive function in certain contexts and conditions, such as in the presence of threats, provocation and
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conflict. It is also argued that certain settings provide frequent triggers and reinforcement to aggressive or non-aggressive actions.

Study 2: Aggression motivation, developmental factors and cognition (Ohlsson, 2016)

This study continued with the exploration of aggressive motivations, and examined how these related to individuals’ cognitions and developmental experiences. To examine this, 233 adult males completed three previously published and two newly developed self-report measures. Some measures were developed specifically for this research due to its novel focus and the consequent lack of suitable and validated equivalents. In terms of methodology, consideration of participants’ developmental experiences was also retrospective, which could be a limitation, but reliability coefficients for each measure were excellent.

There were several important findings from this research. First, a four-factor model of aggression motivation, based on those identified in Study 1 (as described above), was not supported by confirmatory factor analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis is a statistical technique used to verify the structure of a set of variables, in this case aggression, by testing different hypotheses that differing relationships exist. Therefore, a further exploratory factor analysis was undertaken that supported a three-factor structure that concerned motivations related to pleasure and emotional management, protection, and positive social outcomes. This finding added to the expanding evidence that a dichotomous distinction for aggression motivation (i.e. reactive vs. proactive) was not satisfactory. Protection and positive outcomes were themes repeated between Studies 1 and 2; however, a component structure for aggression motivation remained unclear.

Second, it was found that aggressors could not be distinguished in terms of their negative developmental experiences. This was contrary to core assumptions made by existing pathway models for aggression, namely the Sequential (Vitaro & Bredgen, 2005) and Parallel Models (Dodge, 1991). Briefly, the parallel model contends that proactive and reactive aggressions originate from different backgrounds and develop independently from one another. Specifically, that reactive aggression arises in response to punitive and harsh parenting, and proactive aggression as a consequence of more permissive parenting approaches that foster the use of such aggression. The sequential model focuses on the role of temperament or neurophysiological factors that predispose early displays of reactive aggression. If reinforced, learning takes place that results in later proactive forms of aggression.

Existing developmental models experienced difficulty in accounting for the findings from Study 2, and therefore the need for an alternative developmental perspective was apparent. The idea of a simultaneous development pathway model for aggression is proposed. This simultaneous model draws upon the principles of previous models, such as the notion that one form of aggression can become habitual and develop independently of the other (as described by the parallel model; Dodge, 1991), but also incorporates the principles of individual and environmental reinforcement of aggression (as indicated by the sequential model; Vitaro & Bredgen, 2005). A key difference would be that action reinforcement for motivations occurs simultaneously, and thus strengthens aggressive response tendencies and decisions towards the individual’s capacity to act. Speculatively, this model could explain the resulting development of mixed motive aggression over time through the reinforcement of mixed motives and indeed the presence of multiple motives within the same incident. The new simultaneous pathway proposed by this research has potential to address the limitations of its predecessors, which includes their over-focus on the reactive vs. proactive distinction, difficulties in accounting for multiple motivations, and research findings that the development of aggression do not always adhere to the sequential
or parallel formats (Ireland, 2009). There is need for further validation and testing of this notion and theoretical developmental model, which is discussed in the concluding comments of this chapter.

Third, this study found that the core developmental factors related to pleasure-motivated aggressors were problematic childhood behaviours, parenting styles that included elements such as praise and a preoccupied adult attachment. Problematic childhood behaviour was the most influential factor in this motivation. This finding is consistent with literature that indicated poor or misguided parenting is linked to a variety of internalised and externalised difficulties, including aggression (Gershoff, 2008; Stormshak et al., 2000). Yet, the finding that these three factors together reflected a developmental profile representative of pleasure-motivated aggression is novel. Therefore, the mechanisms and processes through which they culminate in this motivation for aggression remain unclear. As advocated by many existing integrated theories of aggression, developmental factors alone are not solely responsible for aggression, with factors in other domains such as cognition, affect and personality being of importance (Ferguson et al., 2008; Huesmann & Taylor, 2006).

Only negative childhood experiences characterised by maltreatment featured in the developmental profile for protection-motivated aggressors. This suggested that the developmental factors underlying this motivation are quite distinct, a finding consistent with previous research that suggested negative childhood experiences and early maladjustment have long-lasting psychological and behavioural impacts throughout life (Finkelhor et al., 2011). Such experiences were seen to have a contagion effect influencing individuals' cognitions, social information-processing that favoured hostile attributions and responses, and emotional functioning (Murray-Close et al., 2009). Whilst other studies have linked negative childhood experiences to general aggression (i.e. Sarchiapone et al., 2009; Kolla et al., 2013), this study was the first to examine their influence on underlying aggression motivation. Therefore, the finding of a single predictive characteristic should not be viewed as a limitation, especially given the wider domains potentially influenced by developmental factors, such as cognition, personality and emotion regulation.

Problematic childhood behaviours, negative childhood experiences and dismissive avoidant adult attachments featured as developmental factors most relevant to the positive social outcomes aggression motivation. This developmental profile is interesting given that it shares factors (i.e. negative childhood experiences and problematic behaviours) with other motives (i.e. pleasure and protection). Previous research has identified links between these factors individually and general aggression (Corvo, 2006). The most prominent factor in this profile is the adult dismissive-avoidant attachment style, given that it was not indicated in any other profiles. Insecure adult attachments are formed in childhood, as negative experiences influence internal working models and cognitive behavioural systems throughout life (Bowlby, 1988). The finding that no attachment styles were sole factors in a developmental profile of aggression motivation is consistent with arguments in the literature that the relationship between attachment and aggression could never be causal (Calkins & Leerkes, 2011). This study, therefore, added to the limited knowledge of the role of attachment in aggression motivation (Savage, 2014). It also indicated how single and multiple item developmental profiles exist for each aggression motivation.

Cognition was examined in Study 2, as it has long been indicated that aggression originates from biased cognitions and deficiencies in social information processing (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Crick & Dodge, 1994). Emotional arousal increases any misinterpretation with cognition and emotion both linked to aggression (Huesmann, 1998). Study 2 addressed gaps left by previous research through examining the specific associations between cognition (i.e. beliefs and schemata) and aggression motivations.
Study 2 examined whether normative beliefs were important in the new aggression motivations identified (i.e. pleasure and emotional management, protection and positive social outcomes). It was found that only participants motivated to aggress by positive social outcomes had elevated numbers of normative aggression beliefs. Essentially this evidence indicated that certain normative beliefs could be more important in some aggression motivations than others. This was further supported by findings that two particular beliefs (i.e. ‘if someone is aggressive towards you it’s okay to be aggressive back’ and ‘aggression is needed to stop others walking over you’) were predictors of aggression motivated by protection. This evidence indicated that the underlying beliefs influencing aggression motivations, such as positive social outcomes and protection, are distinct. It also suggested that normative beliefs may not be important in other motivations, such as pleasure, which could be underpinned by other factor/s such as personality and/or affect. This is consistent with views that the influence of social-cognition in all forms of aggression is overstated (Ferguson et al., 2008).

The importance of cognitive schemata in aggression was also highlighted in this study. Young et al. (2003) described an evolutionary basis for schemata with further life-course events reinforcing maladaptive and adaptive cognitions. Few prior studies had explored the influence of schemata on aggression, and none had examined adaptive and maladaptive schemata and their association with aggression motivation. This study was novel as it examined cognition and aggression motivation, and therefore is highly relevant to our understanding of the underlying cognitive characteristics of aggression. Young et al. (2003) stated that negative influences from others and/or trauma have a role in the development of maladaptive schemata. In relation to schemata intolerant of others, for example, this would suggest there has been developmental learning that others are irritating, uncaring and interpersonal relationships not worthy of attention. This is relevant to the finding that some cognitive schemata were predictors of certain aggression motivations (such as protection) and highlights the potential aetiological and cognitive factors important in the formation of this aggression motivation.

The view, however, that aggression is solely underpinned by maladaptive schema was challenged by the results of this study. Elevated rates of the positive schemata in general and individual schemata (i.e. calm and controlled), were associated with participants’ aggression motivated by positive social outcomes. The mere presence of positive schemata may be insufficient to thwart aggression as some had previously considered (Milner & Webster, 2005). This study indicated that even positive schemata, such as being hardworking or easy going, could associate with aggression in certain circumstances (Ireland & Murray, 2005). The need for a broader and multifaceted approach to treatment and research considering cognitive schemata and aggression is, therefore, illustrated.

Study 3: Aggression motivation and inhibition, personality and regulation (Ohlsson, 2016)

Building on the previous two studies, this research further examined the components of aggression motivation and inhibition, and their association with interfering personality disorder traits and emotion regulation strategies. Two hundred and thirty-four adult males participated in this study. Each completed three published self-report measures (exploring aggression motivation, personality and emotion regulation) and one measure (Aggression Inhibition Questionnaire) that was created specifically for this study as one was not available in the literature. Two of the most prominent emotion regulation strategies, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gross, 2014) were considered. Traits of the ten recognised personality disorder traits by current classification systems were considered.
The most important findings from this study were as follows. First, the three-factor solution for aggression motivation identified in Study 2 was supported as a good fit with these data by confirmatory factor analysis. This model essentially consisted of positive social outcomes, pleasure and emotional management and protection motivations. This indicated that the existing specified distinction for aggression motivation, as either reactive or proactive (Raine et al., 2006), was not supported, confirming concerns in the literature relating to the oversimplified and generalised use of this distinction (Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Ireland, 2011). The finding that some motivations, such as protection and pleasure, demonstrated stability between studies supported contentions described by motivational theorists, that even diverse behaviours could be driven by few underlying motives (Reiss, 2004). These motivational components were also found in other studies (i.e. Urheim et al., 2014) adding to their validity and importance in conceptualising aggression motivation.

Second, somewhat consistent with previous research (Finkel, 2007), a four-factor model of aggression inhibition was found using exploratory factor analysis. This included the components; empathy and consequence evaluation, lack of success and need to protect self, traits and beliefs unsupportive of aggression and emotional control. However, not all these components were entirely aligned with existing frameworks. For instance, some parallels may be drawn between Finkel’s (2007) personal and situational inhibitors and this study’s components of traits and beliefs unsupportive of aggression and lack of success and need to protect inhibitors, respectively. Yet clear differences emerge with regard to the empathy and consequence evaluation and emotional control inhibitors, which also cannot be easily accounted for by other frameworks. It is unclear whether these differences emanate from sample variations, or differences in terms of the nature of the frameworks themselves (i.e. theoretical versus applied). For instance, it would be challenging to assess comprehensively the influence of evolutionary inhibitors practically, whilst it would not be possible to refute the evolutionary basis of aggression theoretically (Tremblay, Hartup & Archer, 2005).

Third, certain maladaptive personality traits were found to be predictors of individual aggression motivations. In particular, the personality characteristics of antisocial, narcissistic or schizoid traits predicted aggression motivated by positive social outcomes. A profile inclusive of antisocial and dependent traits was related to aggression motivated by protection. Borderline and antisocial traits were further predictors of the pleasure aggression motivation. These findings are important given that only one personality trait predicted more than one aggression motivation. Antisocial personality traits were ubiquitous to all aggression motivations, suggesting they could reflect a more generic personality marker for aggression. Its core traits, including disregard for rules and willingness to violate the rights of others toward one’s personal interests, could explain its broader association to these varying aggression motivations.

The fact that the majority of maladaptive personality traits were more specific in terms of their association to each motivation is important. It indicates the possibility that personality profiles for each motivational distinction can be identified, which contrasts with the view that all traits are relevant to all forms of aggression. It is not being suggested here that each individual has only one distinct personality-to-aggression motivation profile. It is perhaps likely that the same individual could have different profiles at different times and these contribute to their habitual use of aggression. Identification of distinct personality profiles for each aggression motivation could have wide-ranging implications, particularly if considered in terms of their core characteristics, and how these combine and interact with other factors (such as cognition and/or affect) to influence decision-making to engage in aggression is important.

Furthermore, this study identified that certain personality traits inhibited aggression. Obsessive–compulsive personality traits, for example, predicted the lack of success and need to protect self inhibitor. In contrast, avoidant and schizoid traits predicted the inhibitor traits and beliefs
aggression. It could be that underlying characteristic features of these traits (i.e. sensitivity to negative evaluation and avoidance of social situations and interactions as found with maladaptive avoidant personality) function to promote non-aggression in certain circumstances. For example, avoidant individuals may relinquish their position in a conflict situation with another and not engage in aggression due to concerns over being evaluated negatively by others. The mechanisms and processes underlying the relationship between personality and non-aggression, however, remain unclear and could not be ascertained from this research due to its exploratory nature and relatively narrow consideration of aggression inhibition.

The fact that some aggression inhibitors were found to be unrelated to personality is important and suggestive of the involvement of other factors. This would fit with the view of other researchers (i.e. Nestor, 2014) that in combination with other factors, personality can influence the magnitude and direction of behavioural actions. It is conceivable that these underlying factors could include a variation of the emotional, cognitive and developmental factors that influence aggression motivation. Further research would be needed to prove or disprove this premise. Nonetheless, there is a need for integrated models of aggression to recognise the more specific role of personality in aggression motivation and inhibition, as this appears inadequately considered and addressed in existing integrated theories (Ferguson et al., 2008).

Study 1 found emotion, notably anger, was related to all aggression motivations. Therefore, emotion regulation was an important avenue of investigation, and its significance with regards to aggression and non-aggression was demonstrated. Expressive suppression, for instance, predicted use of the protection aggressive motive and the lack of success and need to protect the self inhibitor. The finding that emotional suppression was linked with aggression is consistent with the literature (Roberton et al., 2012).

Cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression were, however, not related to all aggression motivations and inhibitors. No significant associations were found with pleasure or positive social outcomes motivations, or with the empathy and consequence evaluation inhibitor. This could be due to the fact that only two regulatory strategies were studied from a number of other possibilities (Gross & Thompson, 2007). It could also be that emotion regulation does not have a salient underlying role in the culmination of these motivations or inhibitors. This is plausible given that evidence from the current and previous studies implicated developmental, personality and cognitive factors as being more influential to these motivations and inhibitors.

The literature indicates that cognition and emotion are related concepts. This was further evident when the emotion regulation data were examined, as the regulation strategy of expressive suppression predicted the inhibitory component traits and beliefs unsupportive of aggression. Cognitive re-appraisal was also the strongest predictor of the emotional control inhibitor. In the aggression literature, cognition and emotion are considered united in their creation of an internal state that induces aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). The current research indicated cognition and emotion could equally induce an internal state that inhibits as well as motivates aggression. This adds further weight of evidence to the contention of this research and current chapter that similar underlying factors (i.e. cognition, affect, developmental and personality) could underlie aggression and non-aggression, with differences in their content and characteristics resulting in alternative outcomes. How these factors relate and manifest in these outcomes is formulated by the AIM-AM, which is considered next.

Applied Integrated Model of Aggression Motivation (AIM-AM)

The Applied Integrated Model of Aggression Motivation (AIM-AM) is presented diagrammatically in Figure 5.1. It is represented as a Knowledge Integration Map (KIM) of insight gained into
Figure 5.1  Applied Integrated Model of Aggression Motivation (AIM-AM)

**Developmental and life experiences**
Core factors are: childhood aggression, dysfunctional family relations, exposure to neglect, exposure to physical abuse and trauma, insecure attachment, early onset antisocial behaviour and rejection by pro-social peers.

- **Pleasure** associated with problematic childhood behaviours and preoccupied adult attachment.
- **Protection** associated with negative childhood experiences.

**Positive social outcomes** associated with problematic childhood behaviours, dismissive avoidant adult attachment, and negative childhood experiences.

**Maladaptive personality**
Core factors are: antisocial, narcissistic, borderline and schizoid traits

- **Pleasure** associated with borderline and antisocial.
- **Protection** associated with antisocial and dependent.
- **Positive social outcomes** associated with antisocial, narcissistic and schizoid.

Avoidant, compulsive and schizoid traits associated with some aggression inhibitors.

**Cognition**
Core factors are: normative beliefs, and positive and negative schemata

- **Pleasure** associated with normative beliefs.
- **Protection** associated with normative beliefs and intolerant others schema.
- **Positive social outcomes** associated with calm/controlling schema.

**Affect regulation**
Research indicated emotion is linked to all aggression motivations, and certain regulation strategies relevant to some motivations.

- **Protection** associated with expressive suppression.

Regulation strategies associated with some aggression inhibitors.

**Appraisal and decision-making**

**Decreased risk of aggression**

**Increased risk of aggression**

Evaluation and reinforcement
aggression from the literature and research discussed within this chapter. A KIM is a form of concept mapping, which is an analytical tool that depicts the components and articulates the relationship between concepts (Schwendimann, 2014), in this instance aggression motivation and inhibition.

According to the AIM-AM, developmental and life experiences promote vulnerabilities towards aggression. These result in the generation of, or adjustments to, cognition, which is pivotal in appraisal and decision-making processes linked to aggression. Cognitions bias social information processing, filter stored behavioural scripts, and overcome internal and external inhibitors to aggression. These cognitive structures include beliefs and schemata, which are influenced by affect through biased processing and reducing capacity for non-aggression cognition. Emotion regulation is incorporated via an ability to directly influence arousal states depending upon the goal of and regulatory strategy utilised. It is also contended that an individual’s personality influences cognitions that promote aggression. Collectively, these underlying characteristics contribute to aggression motivation and an increased risk of aggression. Subsequent response evaluations and action reinforcements occur, and learning experiences promote future tendencies towards aggression.

In terms of what could inhibit aggression, it is contended that developmental factors promote vulnerabilities towards habitual aggression whilst certain life experiences through learning processes are also capable of promoting self-control. Cognitions, personality traits, emotion regulation and appraisal processes underpin aggressive inhibitors, such as empathy and negative consequence evaluation. The AIM-AM contends that inhibitors and motivations compete in rational-choice judgements, and non-aggression is linked to their increased influence in decision-making. Post action evaluations and reinforcement return to contribute to cognition. The significant role of cognition in inhibition as well as aggression motivation is outlined. The AIM-AM contends that the core underlying characteristics of both aggression and possibly non-aggression are similar and are composed of developmental, personality, affect and cognitive factors. Yet the nature, content and combination of these factors relate to alternative outcomes (i.e. aggression or non-aggression). In Figure 5.1, the concept of aggression inhibition is represented separately and more tentatively as it was only examined in one study compared to motivation, which was considered in all three studies as discussed above.

Existing integrated models of aggression (General Aggression Model: Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Catalyst Model: Ferguson et al., 2008; Algebra of Aggression Model: Megargee, 2011) delineate how multiple factors interact and culminate in aggression. This principle is apparent in the AIM-AM through its inclusion of several important factors drawn from the literature as most relevant to aggression, namely, developmental, cognitive, affect and personality. The AIM-AM was influenced by the views noted in the Catalyst Model (Ferguson et al., 2008), in highlighting the importance of personality and its impact on cognition and aggression. A further core component of the AIM-AM drawn from the literature and research evidence is emotion regulation. Deficiencies in terms of a narrowed range of strategies or their inflexible application are linked to emotion dysregulation (Gross, 2014). These become associated with cognition through their influence on affect and either motivate or inhibit aggression.

The AIM-AM was influenced by existing theoretical propositions whilst also providing several new ideas to the field. It can be seen that the AIM-AM elicited concepts from theories such as the Information-Processing Model of Aggression (Huesmann, 1998). For instance, as shown in Figure 5.1, developmental factors and emotion were acknowledged and linked to cognition and cognitive processes. The notion that underlying cognition is strengthened through its repeat generation and reinforcement was incorporated and originates from this theory. Ireland and Murray’s (2005) Applied Information Processing Model extended Huesmann’s (1998) views,
highlighting the notion of simultaneous appraisal and response generation processes. Certain environments and culture are likely to increase cognitive processing towards aggression, according to Ireland and Murray’s model (2005). These principles were incorporated in the AIM-AM through its described pathways between life experiences, cognition, and appraisal and decision-making domains.

Drawn from motivation theory, another notion in the AIM-AM is that aggression can be underpinned by a limited number of core motivations (Reiss, 2006). The findings of this thesis in terms of protection, pleasure and positive social outcomes motivations are incorporated as shown in Figure 5.1. The propositions of I3 theory (Finkel, 2007) and the Algebra of Aggression Model (Megargee, 2011) concerning the importance of both motivations and inhibitors have also been integrated into the AIM-AM. They described a form of ‘response competition’ between alternative courses of action. This parallels the human motivation and rational choice literatures, which emphasise ‘cost vs. benefit trade-offs’ and rational choice in behaviour (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2004; Rotter, 1954; Weiner, 1994). These concepts are also adopted by the AIM-AM, forming the basis of the situational/response appraisal and decision-making domain, as illustrated in Figure 5.1. The notion of evaluation and reinforcement proposed by the AIM-AM was drawn from information-processing models of aggression (Crick & Dodge, 1991; Huesmann, 1998) and the General Aggression Model (GAM) (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). In line with these models, it is indicated that feedback processes influence future aggression and non-aggression through learning and reinforcement of associative cognitive structures.

Throughout this chapter several aspects of the aggression literature and current research findings were examined. Yet, four much broader and new conceptual ideas can be drawn from these discussions, which were incorporated into the AIM-AM. First, are the new component structures for aggression motivation and inhibition that expand existing distinctions more widely and are the best representation of these concepts, according to this research. Second, current models are not often easily applied to all populations, or aggression and non-aggression throughout the lifespan, due to their difficulties in accounting for potentially unique developmental and life experiences. Retention of factors was emphasised by other models, such as personality and cognition, and thus a blending of conceptually important factors in aggression was proposed.

Third, the integration of pathways to aggression and non-aggression in a single applied framework is described. This is not entirely a new idea (i.e. Finkel et al., 2007; Megargee, 2011), whilst the notion that similar underlying factors (e.g. developmental, personality, cognition and affect) could underlie both is. Finally, as opposed to traditional pathway models to aggression (i.e. parallel and sequential), this chapter and its underpinning research described how sequential reinforcement of multiple motivations can occur. This idea is not evident in the current aggression literature and is capable of overcoming some of the limitations of existing models.

Conclusion

This chapter considers aggression motivation and inhibition. The research discussed examined several neglected areas of study, which included consideration of these constructs and their association with developmental, cognitive, affect regulation and personality factors. The research considered in this chapter has culminated in the development of the AIM-AM, which it is hoped provides the basis for continued research and guidance to practitioners working to attenuate harm caused by habitual aggression. Although the research considered is not without its limitations, such as its use of self-report and newly devised measures, that concepts were not examined within participants over time, and that the component models of aggressive motivation
and inhibition were examined in the same type of population. With this information, and further evaluation and refinement of the ideas put forward, motivation and inhibition should remain prominent in future considerations of aggression.

References


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