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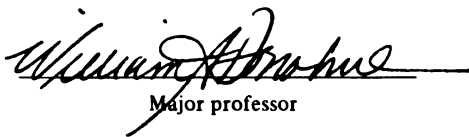
A Perspective on Aggressive  
Behavior of Adolescent Boys

presented by

Rachel Louise DiCioccio

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A PERSPECTIVE ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR OF ADOLESCENT BOYS

By

Rachel Louise DiCioccio

A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
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## ABSTRACT

### A PERSPECTIVE ON AGGRESSION OF ADOLESCENT BOYS

By

Rachel Louise DiCioccio

This thesis presents and applies a conceptual understanding of the aggressive behavior of adolescent boys. This conceptual framework consists of three main components: interactionist perspective, cognitive social learning theories, and impulse control factors. The integration of these three elements creates a strong theoretical foundation for understanding aggression. This approach was applied to the self-reported accounts of seventh grade boys. The results suggest that the subjects who consistently demonstrated aggressive behavior, also showed signs of poor information processing and a lack of impulse control. This suggests that a deficit or absence of one or both of these components, encourages aggressive tendencies.

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To my parents, for inspiring me  
to take on the world.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Interpersonal violence is one of the leading causes of death in today's society. One population particularly at risk is adolescents. According to various reports (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992), homicide ranks among the top five causes of death for children. Adolescents demonstrate these violent and aggressive tendencies with their peers, families, and strangers. Nationally, the number of youth arrested for violent crimes increased 50% between 1987 and 1991.

Research shows that the school environment has become a stage for adolescent violence. The majority of child related violence occurs within schools or on school property (McDermott, 1983). Violence within the school can be related to the individuals involved, the school, the community, and the individual's family structure.

Unfortunately, the majority of our understanding of adolescent violence is limited to statistics that explain the results of violence and aggression. For the most part, we do not know how children view conflict, aggression, and violent behavior. Why do children perceive violence as being the "best" option? How do they evaluate their goals and the consequences of violent behavior? Finally, how do

they justify their actions? Answers to these questions would provide explanations and insight into adolescent violence.

Another weak link is the lack of concise and clear theoretical reasoning of what adolescent violence really is. Aggression has been defined as an act in which a person attempts or threatens to harm another person, regardless of the ultimate goal of the act (Felson, 1984). This definition explains aggression as a process used to reach a desired outcome. Examples of this would include defending oneself, punishment, teaching a lesson, and saving face (Felson, 1984). Using this definition, research on aggressive behavior has been based on several different theoretical perspectives. Adolescent aggression has been studied from a frustration-aggression perspective (Dollard, Doop, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears, 1939; Berkowitz, 1989; Buss, 1963) and an interactionist approach (Felson, 1984; Tedeschi, Gaes, and Rivera, 1977). At the same time, cognitive theories of social learning and social information processing have provided explanations for aggressive behavior in children (Bandura, 1978; Dodge, 1990). Although these theories provide strong arguments, there is not a strong theoretical understanding about the factors that influence adolescent violence and aggression.

There are two main goals of this thesis. The first aim is to develop a clear conceptual understanding of the problem of adolescent violence. The second goal is to apply this theory to actual cases of aggressive behavior. Through

the integration of interactionist and cognitive learning theories, and the inclusion of individual and social variable influence factors, a theoretical foundation is established.

The conceptual framework proposed in this thesis is comprised of four elements. The first component is the situational factors. This defines the context of the incident by identifying the individuals involved, the location of the incident, and the issues of conflict. The second component in this model is information processing. It is at this point that the individual evaluates the situational factors, identifies the possible outcomes, and weighs their benefits and losses. The third aspect of the framework introduces individual skill variables and social influence variables as components of impulse control. When an individual is overwhelmed by anger, the results are impulsive and destructive actions (Felson, and Tedeschi, 1993). The ability to control this impulse allows an individual to have more influence over the conflict. The final component of this model is the aggressive response. There are three possible options which can be used to determine the outcome of the incident: 1) physical violence, 2) verbal aggressiveness, and 3) abstinence. The outcome that is chosen is determined by the individuals information processing and the degree of impulse control.

The second part of this thesis examines adolescent aggressive incidents. The goal is to conduct a study that is based on interviewing adolescents with a history of

violence. Through self-reported data, aggressive incidents will be evaluated in order to be further understood. First, it is necessary to review the literature and survey the different approaches to aggression. Considering these different perspectives, it is then important to organize a model that integrates these theories, as well as introduces a new conceptual framework.

### Literature Review

#### Frustration-Aggression

Research in the area of aggression is based on two major approaches: frustration-aggression and interactionist theories. The frustration-aggression hypothesis assumes that frustration is the sole antecedent of aggression (Buss, 1963). Dollard, Doop, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939) identified that the strength of frustration and punishment variables determine the intensity of aggression. This theory generalizes, by making the assumption that aggression is always the consequence of frustration. In order to justify this theory, it is necessary to adopt Dollard's definition of frustration. Frustration in this context is defined as the "interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response at its proper time in the behavior sequence" (Dollard, Doop, Miller, Mower, and Sears, 1939). This explains that when an individual anticipates achieving a goal, and this goal is thwarted, the result is frustration.

Further evaluation of this theory, however, points out several faults in this assumption. The first criticism is that the frustration-aggression hypothesis neglects the possibility that aggression can be a learned instrumental behavior (Berkowitz, 1989). This theory also fails to recognize that not all aggressive acts have hostile intent (Berkowitz, 1989). Aggression is not only used to do harm, but also as a way of obtaining another objective. For these reasons the frustration-aggression hypothesis does not provide a strong theoretical foundation for the study of aggression.

### Interactionist

The second hypothesis to understanding aggression is from an interactionist perspective. Some of the most significant research on aggression is derived from the interactionist approach. Symbolic interactionism, although general and vague in its explication of certain concepts, does provide insight into aggression. Symbolic interactionism defines the way in which a person interprets a situation, and plans a course of action. When the plan that is decided on involves harm-doing in some way, the action can be defined as aggressive (Felson, 1982). This approach is based on the assumption that an individual is responsible for understanding the responses of three types of others: significant others, generalized others, and people who serve as the audience. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the significant and generalized others in an

aggressive situation (Felson, 1982). This means that an individual's aggressive behavior is influenced by the presence of meaningful people, as well as strangers. This also includes the behavior conducted in private and how it may reflect the internalized audience (Felson, 1978; Mead, 1934). Although the presence of an actual audience is a powerful determinant of aggressive behavior, symbolic interactionism also recognizes one's own self perception as influential. This view suggest that individuals tend to behave in ways consistent with internalized values and identities (Felson, 1978). Symbolic interactionism explains aggression through three different theories: impression management, coercive power, and punishment. Each one of these explanations approaches aggression from a different perspective.

Impression Management. Derived from symbolic interactionism, Impression Management Theory stresses the importance of an external audience as a determinant of ones behavior. Impression management borrows the basic assumptions of symbolic interactionism in that it accepts that individuals respond to a symbolic environment, that the role taking process is crucial, and that the respondent faces a great deal of difficulty when predicting behavior (Felson, 1982). The difference is that for impression management theory the person's behavior is determined by their perception of what will make them look favorable in the eyes of the audience (Felson, 1982). When aggression is



studied as impression management it centers on the role of the self in the situation (Felson, 1984). In this way it is perceived as a face saving behavior when one interprets an action as an intentional attack. When a person perceives that their image or persona has been insulted, they are likely to retaliate. It is the original disapproval that casts or places the respondents in an unfavorable identity (Wienstein & Deutschberger, 1963). Because of the significance of the audience, the respondent must act to counteract this insult and nullify their negative image. Aggression in this way serves as a reward (Felson, 1982). Retaliation is most likely when third parties are around because the respondents' face saving needs are intensified. Important to note, however, is that if third parties act as mediators of the conflict, the aggressive behavior is less serious and both parties are able to back down without losing face (Rubin, 1980).

Although Impression Management Theory provides a strong argument for aggression as a face saving mechanism, it fails to provide an explanation for two other important aggressive and violent situations. The first weakness is that it does not account for aggression that is used strategically to obtain rewards (Felson, 1984). Violent acts such as robbery are not performed to maintain a positive image, but rather to gain a tangible reward. Second, this approach also does not account for initial attacks of aggressive behavior. Face saving and honor maintenance are only relevant when people feel they have been attacked

(Felson, 1984).

Coercive Power. The second interactionist theory discussed in this paper is coercive power. Coercive power can be used to explain many different domains aside from aggression. When discussed in terms of aggression, it is associated with self defense, revenge, reciprocity, and self presentation. Tedeschi, Gaes, and Rivera, (1977) explain this theory as the use of aggression to influence people when other methods fail. After weighing the benefits and losses, the respondent must decide if the actions will produce and justify the rewards. Tedeschi and Bonoma (1977) explain that when an individual can not persuade or manipulate the target to meet their demands, then the success of their influence is dependent on injury, immobilization, and destroying the target.

The respondent must consider three important factors when using this approach: 1) what values the target controls, 2) the probability of success, and 3) the potential cost (Tedeschi, Gaes, Rivera, 1977). When using coercive power, the goal is achieved when the respondent chooses a target and type of influence that will successfully use these three factors. The key is to reach one's interpersonal objectives with the least amount of personal losses (Tedeschi, Gaes, Rivera, 1977). Factors that contribute to an individual's use of coercive power are a lack of self confidence, failure to perceive costs, fear, self presentation, face saving maintenance of authority,

reciprocity, self defense, perceived justice (Tedeschi, Gaes, Rivera, 1977).

Although aggression as coercive power is able to explain initial attacks and retaliation, unlike impression management, it is limited in its explanation (Felson, 1984). First, harmful acts that are used as face saving are not always coercive. Actions that help an individual avoid losing face in front of a significant other do not also work to force the others to change their behavior.

Secondly, the main intention of harmful acts is not always to influence others (Felson, 1984). Coercive aggression that is used to maintain justice is not an example of social influence. There is aggressive behavior that is acceptable as the means to a justifiable end.

Punishment. Punishment is conceptualized as a third interactionist perspective. This approach suggests that aggression is legitimized when it is identified as punishment for a wrongful act (Felson, 1984). Punishment can be defined in terms of the legal system and informal acts. Legal punishments are controlled by the state and govern what penalties are appropriate for what offenses. Informal acts of punishment can range from a reproach to a verbal/physical attack, and can be carried out by persons who have observed the violation (Felson, 1984). The rationale for both of these types of punishment is the same: deterrence and retribution. Deterrence defines punishment as a way of discouraging others from committing future

offenses. Retribution refers to a person's desire to punish someone for their misbehavior. The punishment approach suggests a control process that occurs early in the encounter (Felson, 1984). The product of this process is punishment, and it is demonstrated in the form of physical attack, insults, or reproaches.

### Literature Critique

These three interactionist perspectives offer insights into the different ways in which aggression is used to accomplish a goal. However, these explanations are incomplete in addressing certain issues. Impression management, coercive power, and punishment, each describe the various reasons individuals engage in aggressive behavior. Impression management interprets aggressive behavior as a face saving mechanism, when an individual feels they under personal attack (Felson, 1984). Coercive power defines aggression as a last resort, an influential mechanism (Tedeschi, Gaes, and Rivera, 1977). Finally, punishment illustrates aggression as a response to a misbehavior (Black, 1983). These three approaches are only successful in explicating aggressive behavior as it pertains to specific conflict situations. These interactionist approaches fail to provide a rationale that encompasses a wide range of cognitive factors, individual factors, and situational factors.

When creating an all inclusive explanation for aggression, it is necessary to recognize cognitive and

social learning factors as instrumental elements in explaining aggression. The way in which an individual interprets and evaluates information greatly influences their perceptions of an aggressive attack (Dodge and Coie, 1987). At the same time, these perceptions regulate how an individual chooses to retaliate to an aggressive attack (Dodge and Coie, 1987). In this way information processing plays a key role in the development of aggressive conflict.

These interactionist explanations also fail to discuss the factors that restrain an individual from engaging in aggressive behavior. What are the motivations that allow an individual to control their desire to be aggressive? What process takes place when an individual chooses not to use aggression to punish or coerce? This restraint is defined as impulse control. Through the influence of individual and social variables, an individual is able to prevent the escalation of a conflict into violence, by maintaining impulse control.

Further investigation into the area of aggression stresses the need for a conceptual framework that incorporates the existing interactionist literature, and integrates cognitive theories and the concept of impulse control. The combination of these three components establishes a theoretical understanding that can explain aggression to a much greater extent.

### Conceptual Framework

There are three variables used to explain the

conceptual framework of this thesis: situational factors, information processing, and impulse control. Together, these variables offer an explanation for aggressive behavior. These variables present a variety of factors that influence the individual and the situation of an aggressive incident. The variables do not provide a sequential understanding of the factors leading up to aggressive behavior, but rather represent the different components that contribute to aggression.

### Situational Factors

The initial stage of this model is the existence of an aggressive situation. The aggressive conflict is defined by the individuals involved and the logistics of the incident. The relationship the respondents has with the antagonist is a strong determinant of the use of aggression. The antagonist can be a family member, such as a parent or sibling, a friend, an acquaintance, a superior, (such as a teacher) and also a stranger. Depending on the connection between the the two individuals, the aggressive ramifications are established.

The second situational factor of a conflict is the setting of the incident. Where the conflict takes place has a definite bearing on the degree of aggressive behavior. Aggressive conflicts that take place within the school are influenced differently than those that take place at home.

Finally, the presence of other people at the time of an aggressive incident plays a powerful role in determining the

degree of aggressive behavior. Third parties intervene in conflicts for a variety of reasons: at the request of the individuals involved, of their own accord, or to impose their own decisions (Rubin, 1980). The presence and involvement of third parties in an aggressive conflict, plays a major role in the outcome of the incident. Depending on how influential the party is, the individual's interpretation of the conflict is altered.

### Cognitive Social Learning

The first phase of the conceptual model introduces cognitive social learning. Under the heading of cognitive learning, there are four different perspectives that deal with aggression. Within the framework of social learning theory, aggression is explained by how aggressive patterns develop, what provokes aggressive behavior, and how aggressive actions are sustained (Bandura, 1978). The origins of aggression are established through observational learning, reinforced performance, and structural determinants (Bandura, 1978). Bandura (1978) explains that the instigation of aggression includes physical/verbal assaults, instruction control, and influencing incentives, while regulators of aggression are punishment, external controls, and self reinforcement. The most influential of these three is the origins of aggression (Bandura, 1978). Observational learning of aggression allows a child to acquire a large repertoire of aggression while bypassing the lessons of trial and error. These lessons are most strongly

enforced by family members. Studies of family aggression show that parents who use aggressive solutions tend to have children who use the same resolution tactics with others (Hoffman, 1960).

One theory used to justify aggression is Social Learning Theory. Social learning analysis contends that defensive aggression is maintained by the individual's anticipated consequences rather than the immediate effects (Patterson, 1967). For example, a child views their aggressive actions as a means of reaching a desired goal, without considering the actual consequences of the aggressive act.

An influential determinant of one's behavior is not only the perceived ability to perform the action, but also the consequences one foresees as being a result of that action (Perry, Perry, and Rasmussen, 1986). Significant to the aggression and social learning relationship are two classes of social cognition: 1) perception of self-efficacy, and 2) response-outcome expectancies. Research suggests that part of a child's motivation to act aggressively comes from a misguided perception of the projected outcome. Although social learning theorists view self-efficacy perceptions and outcome expectations as causal influences on aggressive behavior, this is not to suggest that a child reviews these possibilities each time they are presented with a conflict (Perry, Perry, and Rasmussen, 1986).

The cognitive theories of attribution, decision making, and information processing can be applied to aggressive and



violent behavior problems in children (Dodge, 1980). Attribution Theory explains that based on logical principles, individuals search for causes of events and respond behaviorally according to those attributions (Kelley, 1971). It is when illogical principles are used that attributional errors are made. Dodge (1980) finds that an individual's inability to evaluate situational factors, or accurately interpret situational outcomes encourages attributions of hostile intent, and therefore warrants an aggressive response. An individual's aggressive retaliation is a direct function of the degree to which they attribute negative feelings to a provocateur (Epstein and Taylor, 1967).

Also theorized under the theory of attribution, is the concept of "hedonic relevance" or motivational significance (Jones and Davis, 1965). Motivational significance defines the individuals incentive to commit the aggressive act. This theory explains that an individual's motivational significance of an act to the respondent will effect the probability that the respondent will make correspondent inferences about the perpetrator of the act (Jones and Davis, 1965). For example, when a child's toy is broken by a peer, there are several factors that influence their interpretation this action. If the toy had a high hedonic relevance to the child, then they are more likely to attribute malicious intent to the peer than if the toy was unimportant. It is this motivational significance that encourages aggressive retaliation.

The third theory from a cognitive learning perspective is decision making theory. Decision Making Theory is based on the cognitive principle individuals use in making judgments and decisions (Dodge, 1980). A common problem that people face is how to distinguish and sort through the abundance of stimulus information. Two key issues when making these inferences are representativeness and availability (Dodge, 1980). Representativeness deals with the way in which stimulus is classified according to certain characteristics. For example, if a child has been verbally abused by male peers repeatedly, they might fear a new peer just because they are male. Availability is similar in that it is based on judgments of the likelihood of an action taking place and on how frequently it is stored in memory (Dodge, 1980).

The Information Processing Theory is an extension of Attribution Theory and Decision Making Theory in that it views an individual's actions as a result of the processing of social cues (Dodge, 1982). When a child can not properly interpret someone else's actions, the decision making skills used to choose the response are impaired. Acting on these misunderstood social cues will increase the probability of aggressive and deviant behavior. Dodge (1980) uses the social cognitive theory to maintain that aggressive behavior is directly influenced by poor and inadequate patterns of information processing. A child's perception of the antagonists intent is what determines an aggressive response (Dodge, Murphy, and Buchsbaum, 1984). For instance, a child

who is bumped in the lunch line can interpret this action as accidental or intentional. The child's response will reflect their interpretation. This rational suggests that successful development of information processing skills will result in less aggression and more constructive conflict (Dodge, and Crick, 1990).

Three kinds of processes are particularly crucial: encoding and interpretation of cues, response decision, and response enactment (Dodge, 1980). The lack of one or all of these skills will increase the potential of aggressive behavior. The first step is encoding information. This is a process of selecting the relevant information from a multitude of stimulus cues. Failure to properly encode the cues will increase the possibility of an aggressive response to a peer's actions (Dodge, 1980).

After the cues are encoded, it is necessary to interpret them and give them meaning. If the peer's behavior is clear, it is simple for the respondent to make an accurate interpretation, however if they are not, the the respondent has a greater tendency to misinterpret and and place attention on malicious and benign information (Dodge and Newman, 1981). Finally the respondent accesses the possible behavioral responses. The individual,s skills of accessing the appropriate strategies for resolution are tainted at this point, if the first two steps have been impaired. Misinterpretation of social cues and poor response access and evaluation are deficient processing skills which lead to aggressive behavior.

### Impulse Control

The examination of aggressive and violent behavior in children includes an evaluation of individual and social influence factors. Research in this area provides insight into the relationship between information processing and the development of impulse control. Impulse control represents the second phases of this theoretical model. Significant to aggressive and violent behavior is the influence of individual and social influence factors. Central to this approach is the idea of impulse control. Impulse is defined as the motivation that drives an individual to respond to a situation in a certain way. In recognizing the existence of impulses, an individual exercises self reflective skills. It is this self reflection that identifies impulse control or the lack of impulse control. The level at which an individual is able to control their impulse determines the outcome of the conflict (Felson and Tedeschi, 1993). Berkowitz (1962) suggests that impulsive violence usually starts out as verbal aggression and culminates into physical aggression. For example, children who have been insulted by a peer are likely to want to retaliate physically. Without control over this impulse, children are more likely to use physical force to control the situation, perhaps by hitting the threatening other.

Impulse control is achieved when successful interpersonal skills are combined with positive social influence. Interpersonal skills are an individual's internal capabilities or resources for interpreting and

responding to conflict. Positive social influence is the prosocial external control over an individual's impulse. The influence serves as leverage against acting on negative impulses.

Elements of impulse control are divided into two categories. Individual skill variables include: 1) self-esteem, 2) communication skills, and 3) conflict management skills. The second category of social leverage variables include: 4) parenting, 5) attachment to school, 6) a moral validity of the law, and 7) awareness of health and nutrition. These seven variables are the core of successful impulse control. It is the lack of, or insufficient development of, these variables that makes individuals, particularly adolescents, more susceptible to violence, drug and substance abuse, promiscuity, and law violations (Fagan, 1987).

#### Individual Skill Variables: Self-Esteem.

Self-esteem is a skill which influences a child's behavior and their decision making process. Without a feeling of self-esteem or a sense of self-confidence in their ability to make and follow through with decisions, children are unable to make successful decisions regarding their behavior (Dryfoos, 1990). Low self-esteem can hinder the development of decision making and problem-solving skills. Dryfoos (1990) contends that positive self-esteem and a strong sense of self-identity, fosters children's ability to regulate their own behavior. Although this

source does not directly refer to violent behavior, it draws a significant connection between self-esteem, decision making, and regulating behavior.

Dryfoos (1990) also identifies the importance of self-esteem in acknowledging that there is a relationship between low self-esteem and delinquent behavior among children. Low self-esteem can serve as an important predictor of problem behavior. Analysis to date, however, has been unable to provide a measurable correlation between self-esteem/locus of control and delinquency. The absence of proof may be do to the fact that in multiple variable studies, self-esteem does not demonstrate high levels of significance.

#### Individual Skill Variables: Communication Skills.

Communication skills are the essence of interpersonal interaction. The way in which individuals interact with others, perceive others, and respond to others is a reflection of their communication abilities. Communication skills are necessary in order for individuals to listen to others, develop proposals, and bargain over goals (Donohue, 1992). It is when these skills are inadequate and impaired, that the individual resorts to aggressive and violent behavior to resolve the conflict (Infante, 1987).

#### Individual Skill Variables: Conflict Management Skills.

Conflict management skills are an obvious component of impulse control. Knowledge in conflict reduction and

problem solving leads to successful conflict management. Awareness of the conflict, proper diagnosis of its nature, and a rational approach towards handling the situation achieves a win/win resolution. According to Tedeschi (1983), conflict management also relies on an individual's ability to evaluate the possibilities and the outcomes. He contends that the probability of aggressive behavior is dependent upon the rational evaluation of alternatives. People who are unable to remove themselves from the emotional tension of the conflict have a hard time arriving at a clear understanding of the dispute and in turn do not adequately judge their alternatives. Individuals who are unable to accurately assess benefits and losses are more likely to engage in conflict.

One approach toward equipping children with conflict management skills is through peer mediation. Peer mediation is a school based program developed as an effective way of resolving situations that are difficult to address through traditional means (Dryfoos, 1990). The process of peer mediation encourages children to engaged in decision making that effects their own lives. Mediation training and involvement in the resolution process helps children to recognize their actions and apply problem-solving skills to reach a solution.

#### Social Leverage Variables: Parenting.

Fagan (1987), argues that inadequate parental bonds have a direct correlation with delinquent behavior. From

childhood to adulthood the major source of social control comes from the family (Hawkins and Weiss, 1985). This is a crucial element in the development of a child's understanding of self and others. The absence or breakdown of these socializing agents leads to juvenile delinquency (Hirschi, 1969). Parenting is the most powerful and influential force in a child's life. Through the development of attachments and bonds to parents, children learn to form other crucial bonds that are necessary in order to be productive. Children who do not develop these parental bonds fail to the value of other relationships, and therefore do not value their loss.

Social Leverage Variables: School and Education.

Fagan (1987) contends that an attachment to parents will lead to an attachment to school and commitment to education. Recognizing the importance of an education allows a child to value their accomplishments and more importantly, their future. Children who do not receive appropriate and effective sanctions for their actions, from parents and schools, are less likely to value their behavior and commitment to the broader society (Fagan, 1987).

Social Leverage Variables: Moral Validity of the Law.

Fagan's (1987) integrated model suggests that youth who lack family support and tend to experience failure in school are most vulnerable to becoming involved in illegal activities and violence. Without a foundation of support



and commitment, children cannot differentiate between loss and achievement. Children who are faced with negative information about themselves from the home and school often discard the rules and values of the society which has put them in this disillusioning position (McGuire, Prestly, 1985). Socialization through direct contact and social institutions encourages cultural learning, social learning, and social bonds, three key components necessary for the reduction of violent behavior.

#### Social Leverage Variables: Health and Nutrition.

Although there have been claims that suggest a connection between juvenile delinquency and dietary inadequacies, there has been no credible evidence to support these findings (Gray, 1983). At the same time evidence does support a relationship between caffeine and hyperactivity. In a study conducted with grade school children, results reported that high caffeine use caused nervousness, frustration, and easily aroused anger (Rapoport, 1986).

These seven elements define the significant factors of impulse control development. It is when an individual has learned and experienced these components, that they have a positive perspective of conflict. Without these skills and leverage variables a child is not equipped with the proper tools needed to overcome aggressive and violent tendencies, when involved in a conflict.

This conceptual model is successful in providing a strong foundation for the explanations of aggressive

behavior. Through the synthesis of interactionist approaches to aggression, cognitive social learning theories, and the individual skill and social leverage variables of impulse control, a basis for understanding aggression is presented. Interactionist theory defines the scope of aggressive behavior. Cognitive learning represents the information processing that takes place during an aggressive conflict. Finally, impulse control demonstrates an individual's capacity to govern their own aggressive desires and actions.

### Research Questions

The fundamental groundwork of this thesis originated in an earlier study conducted by Felson (1984). Through Felson's (1984) original evaluation of aggression, the skeletal framework for this thesis is established. Felson's (1984) analysis of aggression is conducted through the self-reported data of aggressive and non-aggressive individuals. The data collected from these transcripts is used to rationalize different aspects of the interactionist theories.

Born out of this study is the basis for this thesis. Using self-reported data of adolescent boys, this thesis is a modified replication of Felson's (1984) study. By asking the same script of interview questions, and dividing aggressive conflict into three categories, this thesis explores aggressive behavior in the same context of Felson's (1984) study.

The fundamental assumptions guiding this thesis involve how an individual interprets an aggressive situation, what governs their decision making processes, and what are the impulse control factors that determine their aggressive tendencies. The literature review argues for the connection between information processing and impulse control, and how they serve as determinants of aggressive behavior.

This rationale will be applied to the transcripts collected for this study. This thesis poses five research questions regarding adolescent aggression:

- R1: What is the sequence of behaviors respondents recall from their own accounts of situations in which they recall violence, non violent overt conflict, and covert conflict?
- R2: What are the situational factors that influence violence, non violent overt conflict, and covert conflict?
- R3: To what extent do respondents demonstrate information processing biases in their accounts?
- R4: What are the individual skill variables that individuals demonstrate?
- R5: What are the social leverage variables that individuals demonstrate?

The theories explicated in the literature review and the conceptual framework provide the groundwork necessary to

conduct a study of aggressive behavior. By using the guidelines of Felson's (1984) study, this thesis altered some of the evaluative components, but replicated the general analysis of aggressive behavior through self-reported data.

## Chapter II

### Methodology

The present study takes a theoretical approach to identifying what occurs in aggressive and violent attack episodes. Three levels of intensity were observed: incidents of physical violence, incidents of verbal aggression, and incidents in which the respondent chose to abstain. (Felson, 1984). Through the use of self-reported data, adolescents were interviewed about their experiences with these different aggressive situations. Transcripts of these interviews were coded and evaluated. The position and types of actions, the position and type of accounts, and the choice between retaliation and abstinence were all examined, to further uncover the motivating factors and thought processes behind aggressive and violent attacks.

#### Subjects

Twenty five seventh grade boys, enrolled in a midwestern public junior high school, were interviewed for this study. After obtaining human subjects approval, the students were chosen according to their detention and behavior records. The experiment or study group consisted of nineteen boys, whose records reflected excessive involvement in school related conflict. The comparison

group was comprised of six students whose records showed no accounts of aggressive or violent behavior, and who were chosen randomly from a class list.

### Preparation of Materials

A script of questions, developed by Felson (1990), was chosen to discuss situations of varying severity (Appendix A). Each question addressed a different dispute response. The questions asked for complete descriptions of the most recent incident that involved slapping, hitting and punching, the most recent argument that involved screaming, yelling and name calling, and the most recent incident in which the respondent was extremely angry, but chose not to do or say anything. For each incident, the respondent was asked to discuss what the conflict was over, their relationship to the antagonist, who was present during the conflict, and how the incident started and ended.

The second half of the questions dealt with issues of family structure, family attitudes toward conflict, and awareness of the use of weapons. The interviewer was trained in conducting these interviews to assure that the questions would be open-ended so as not to lead or influence the respondent.

### Procedure

After a list of students was compiled, each child was informed about the study and what they would be expected to do. At this time consent forms and a letter of explanation

was sent home to the parents. Each subject was individually interviewed for approximately 30 minutes. During this time they were asked to describe, in detail, the three incidents in the questionnaire, and discuss the issues dealing with family, conflict, and weapons. All the interviews were recorded in order to be transcribed at a later time.

### Sequencing

The description of each type of incident was rewritten in sequence form so that each action could be studied individually. Every action was given a number to order the events and recreate the encounter (Appendix B). In order to sequence the conflict, it was necessary to first reorganize the incident. Many times the respondents would report the incident out of the natural order, or use different terms to describe the same action. The same attack could be described as a slap early in the interview and a punch later on. For this reason it was important to recreate the incident as exact as possible so that one action was not counted twice. At the same time the respondent's accounts and explanations were recorded to their corresponding action. Sequencing each incident allowed each action to become a single unit of analysis. Through simplifying the description, the sequence rebuilt the incident according to the respondent. This would allow the coding of these events to be more precise. Each transcript was sequenced by the interviewer and an assistant. After comparing the two decisions a final sequence was agreed upon.

### Measurement

Three types of participants were identified in these transcripts: the respondent, the antagonist, and the third parties present at the time of the incident (Felson, 1990). The respondent was the student who was interviewed for this study. They were responsible for reporting the information about each incident. The antagonist defined the individual engaging in conflict with the respondent. This is the person the respondent viewed as the enemy or the problem. In these transcripts, the relationship of the antagonist to the respondent was as a peer, a family member, or a school faculty member. During these different conflict situations, there was also the element of a third party. This refers to those people who were present at the time of the conflict, but did not get involved in the actual dispute. The third parties represented in these transcripts included peers, family members, teachers, and neighbors. In the sequencing each action was identified with one of the three participants.

The coding scheme that was adopted was developed by Felson and Steadman (1983) to classify earlier work on homicide and assault (Felson, 1984). For this study however it was necessary to alter this scheme to more accurately measure the information reported in the transcripts. In addition to the original ten action codes, ten more classifications were introduced. These new categories dealt with actions pertaining to both the individuals and to the third parties involved in the incident. See original



(Appendix C) and revised version (Appendix D).

The first round of coding was conducted by the interviewer and an assistant. In both cases the codes were chosen from the extended list of twenty categories (Appendix C). The coders agreed on the actions approximately 77% of the time.

Final coding scheme - In order for the coding scheme to demonstrate a clear distinction between the actions that occurred, it was then necessary to combine the twenty categories into broader and more inclusive groups. Categories one through four defined actions that were performed by either the respondent or the antagonist in the situation, while category five explained the actions and intervention of the third parties involved in the incident (Appendix E).

Category 1 - Physical / verbal abusive behavior --- This category consists of actions that intend to physically or mentally harm the other individual involved. This includes physical attacks, insults, threats, and physical/verbal precipitating acts.

Category 2 - Behavior encouraging conflict - The actions in this group are attempts made to in some way influence the target and precipitate the conflict. This category includes reproaches, rule violations, orders, and noncompliance.

Category 3 - Steps toward resolution - This category identifies the ways in which the respondent or the antagonist approach solving the conflict. This includes

mediation, submission, and abstaining from involvement.

Category 4 - Influential activities - This category consists of activities that have the potential to encourage or deter the incident. These actions can be play, uncontrolled, unintentional, and regular activities.

Category 5 - Third party actions - This category only defines the actions performed by the individuals outside of the immediate conflict, but presents at the time of the incident. Included in this are passive presence, verbal escalatory intervention, verbal de-escalatory intervention, physical escalatory intervention, physical de-escalatory intervention, and punishment.

Each action was coded on two levels. The first level determined which general category the action demonstrated (e.g.. physical/verbal abusive behavior and resolution attempts). The second level of coding defined the specific acts performed by each individual (e.g. physical attack, insult, and threat). By using this coding scheme, the transcripts were re-coded by the interviewer and two assistants. The coders were in 100% agreement when coding the general action categories. The specific action types were agreed upon 92% of the time. The differences were discussed and resolved, and a final code was decided upon.

After collecting the transcripts and conducting the elaborate coding scheme, the data was ready for evaluation. The results drawn from this study provided tangible explanations and conclusions about aggressive behavior.

## Chapter III

### Results

Through the analysis of the coded transcripts, qualitative conclusions were drawn about the varying degrees of aggressive incidents. Each of the three questions are represented by a separate table. The tables consist of each distinguishing action, as identified under the five major descriptive categories. Every code was tabulated for each sequence slot. The majority of the actions in each question took place between the first sequence slot and the tenth sequence slot. For this reason the tables reflect only the first ten actions of every aggressive incident. With this set-up, the figures are clearly presented for each separate action. From this table, the results can be evaluated according to each action, as well as being assessed as a flow pattern for all the aggressive behavior that was coded. By looking at the quantity of codes in each category, for each level of aggressive severity, significant conclusion can be drawn about adolescent aggression. The results are as follows:

Table I  
Question One

Sequence slots	Physical Attack	Insult	Threat	Perceptivating Act	Reproach	Rule Violation	Order	Noncompliance	Meditation	Abstinence	Submission	Play	Uncontrolled	Regular	Passive Activity	Verbal Presence	Verbal De-escalation	Physical Escalation	Physical De-escalation	Punishment
1A	1B	1C	1D	2A	2B	2C	2D	3A	3B	3C	4A	4B	4C	4D	5A	5B	5C	5D	5E	5F
1	2	3	1								2		2	2			3			
2	4	2		1	2	1	1	1					1				2			
3	3			3			2		3						3				1	
4	4	1	1				1	1	1		2				2		1		1	
5	8	1					1							1	1		1			1
6	2	1	1	1					1		1				1	1	3		1	
7	8	2				1					1								1	
8	7														2		1	1	1	1
9	8																1		2	1
10	3		1								2						1	1		1

In question one, the main activity of the individuals involved in the incident centers around physical/verbal abusive behavior. Physical attacks (1A) are a consistently dominant action throughout every incident. The greatest concentration of physical attacks is located towards the end of the sequence slots. Insults are the second most frequently used action. These numbers demonstrate a steady flow of verbal abusive behavior that accompanies physical attacks.

The actions of category two are used only in the

beginning of the encounter. Orders and noncompliance are used the most. The table suggests that orders and noncompliance may be used initially as a form of retaliation, but then individuals resort to stronger and more direct abusive behavior as the incident continues.

Category three is also insufficiently represented in Table I. There is evidence that there are attempts made towards resolution by the individuals early on in the incident, but are not successful in de-escalating the conflict.

The results for question one clearly show that category four only takes place in the beginning of the aggressive encounter. There is no account of an aggressive situation returning to normal behavior or activities prior to the incident. This suggests that category four's activities could be the issues that the conflict centers around. Playing and unintentional actions can be misinterpreted as intentional or threatening, and therefore instigate aggressive conflict.

Finally, there is strong representation of category five. Each of the six different actions of category five are coded, demonstrating definite evidence of third party influence. Out of the six actions, the most significant is verbal escalatory intervention. This is represented throughout the ten sequence slots. The results show that rarely do third partys verbally try to de-escalate a situation, and that there is a greater chance of a third party just watching then taking steps to resolve the

conflict.

When summarizing the overall flow pattern for question one, it is evident that the table is heaviest at the two extremes: physical/verbal abusive behavior, and third party intervention. From this table the general course of action for aggressive encounters is initiated by an undirected activity, and from there becomes a conflict. The actions of the incident start out with physical and verbal abusive behavior, specifically physical attacks and insults. As the behavior continues, some verbal attempts are made to either retaliate or resolve the conflict. As the incident escalates, verbal attempts give in to more abusive tactics.

The number of third party intervention attempts that take place explain that physical behavior promotes verbal escalatory intervention from the audience. What is also significant, however, is that there is evidence of an almost equally strong attempt made to physically de-escalate the situation. By sequence slot eight, category two, three, and four are no longer present, and the majority of the individuals resort back to physical aggression as a solution.

Out of twenty-one reported incidents of physically aggressive conflict, eleven resulted in some type of punishment. The other remaining ten were ended by either third party physical intervention, submission, threats, or physical attacks.

In addition to the qualitative table, to analyze the results of question one, it was necessary to run a lag

sequential. Running a lag would explain how often one act followed another. Specifically, the lag program was used to show how many times a physical/verbal abusive behavior was followed by the other main categories. There were two significant statistical findings. First, category four, activities, had a Z value of -1.969. This shows that category four will significantly not follow a physical or verbal attack. The second important finding is that category five, third party intervention, had a Z value of 2.613. This explains that third party involvement, whether positive or negative, follows abusive behavior more than by chance alone. The lag sequential run did not show any other significant statistics concerning the ordering of aggressive actions. The conclusion drawn from this is that there was no pattern of hitting and then identity saving, but rather individuals hit, a crowd forms, and then anything can happen.

Table II

## Question Two

Sequence slots	Physical Attack	Insult	Threat	Persecuting Act	Reproach	Rule Violation	Order	Noncompliance	Mediation	Abstaining	Submission	Play	Uncontrolled	Regular	Passive Activity	Verbal Presence	Verbal De-escalation	Physical Escalation	Physical De-escalation	Punishment
1A	1B	1C	1D	2A	2B	2C	2D	3A	3B	3C	4A	4B	4C	4D	5A	5B	5C	5D	5E	5F
1	1	5		2	1	6					1		3							
2		11		1	1	2					1	1	1	1						
3		9				2		1	2	1		2		2						
4		5	1	1			2		1	1					1	3	1			
5	1	2					1	1	1	1		2		2	2	1				
6		4	1			1			2	3		1		1		1				
7		2				1	1	1												1
8		2								1					1					1
9						1					1			1						1
10									1											1

Question two only deals with verbally aggressive conflicts. As the table shows, the most widely used action was insults. The results explain that insults are a constant throughout all the aggressive encounters. Although the actual numbers decrease slightly towards the end of the sequence slots, overall the high number of insults that are exchanged suggest that the two individuals focus on using an insult as the main form of retaliation.

Category 2 is only used early on in the conflict. Rule violations are used the most, followed by noncompliance.



Category two consists of the weaker verbal violations (e.g. reproach, rule violation, orders, and noncompliance). The table suggests that these actions were used in the beginning of the conflict, but did not produce the desired result, and therefore the individuals continued to use insults.

A major contrast to question one, is the use of resolution tactics in Table II. After the initial insults and verbal attacks take place, all three types of resolution styles are demonstrated. Mediation is attempted during the middle of the conflict. Submission and abstinence are used more often as a step toward resolution. Although the individuals tried to resolve the incident, there is only one conflict that is actually ended through abstinence.

Significant to question two is the occurrence of category four, activities. These actions take place early in the encounter, as well as in the middle and the end. It is important to note, however, that the most commonly used activities are under the classification of "uncontrolled". These actions were not influenced by the individuals involved in the conflict and therefore, can have both a positive or negative effect on the outcome of the incident. For example, a classroom bell ringing, is an uncontrolled activity. This can encourage a conflict because when the bell rings, individuals are let out of class and are free to engage in a confrontation. The bell can also act as a deterrent of conflict by forcing an incident to diffuse.

Third party intervention in a verbal conflict centers around passive presence, and verbal de-escalatory

involvement. These results suggest that when a conflict is only verbal, an audience will form, but not encourage the individuals to continue to fight. As expected, physical intervention is never used.

There were a total of eighteen verbally aggressive conflicts. The conclusions to these incidents were much more diversified than in question one. The most actions used to end the conflict were submission, abstinence, third party verbal de-escalatory intervention, and punishment. However, interviews reported that noncompliance, uncontrolled, and mediation were also used to conclude the incident.

Table two suggests that a verbal resolution pattern is much more prominent when there is no physical escalation in the conflict. Individuals will attempt to reconcile the situation through some form of mediation if they have not been threatened by a physical attack. The results also imply that third parties do not find verbal conflicts to be interesting overall. An audience will form to watch the incident, but is not enticed enough to encourage and participate the fight.

An important aspect of question two, deals with the individual's accounts of their actions. Throughout the transcripts the respondents explained their reasons for not engaging in a physical confrontation. These accounts define why the situation did not escalate to a more violent situation. The accounts for question two can be put into four categories: 1) fear of harm to themselves; 2) fear of

harming the other individual; 3) fear of punishment; and 4) fear of harming the relationship with the other individual. Fear of physical harm to themselves or the antagonist was due to an individuals body size, age, sex, and grade in school. Fear of punishment was either through the school or from a parent. The results propose that being reprimanded by a parent was a stronger deterrent then the threat of suspension from the school. Finally, the transcripts did reveal that some students refrained from physical contact because it would place their relationship with the other person in jeopardy.

Table III  
Question Three

Sequence	1A	1B	1C	1D	2A	2B	2C	2D	3A	3B	3C	4A	4B	4C	4D	5A	5B	5C	5D	5E	5F
Physical Attack																					
Insult																					
Threat																					
Perceptuating Act																					
Reproach																					
Rule Violation																					
Order																					
Noncompliance																					
Mediation																					
Abstaining																					
Submission																					
Play																					
Uncontrolled																					
Unintentional																					
Remissive Activity																					
Passive Presence																					
Verbal De-escalation																					
Verbal Escalation																					
Physical Escalation																					
Physical De-escalation																					
Punishment																					

Question three considers incidents in which the respondent abstained from any participation in the conflict. There was no physical or verbal contact made by the respondent. The results in table three indicate that there were a high number of insults and reproaches being committed by the antagonist in the situation. There is also evidence of other physical and verbal abusive behavior that takes place even though the respondent chose to walk away from the situation.

The greatest number of actions were attempts toward

resolution, specifically abstinence. There are accounts of mediation taking place as a first step in resolving the conflict. When these efforts failed, the individual chose to remove themselves from the situation.

As in the other two tables, category four is really only present in the early part of the encounter. The respondent felt that it was necessary to eliminate themselves physically from the situation, in order to prevent the conflict from escalating.

There are only three reports of third party intervention taking place when the respondent walked away from the confrontation. There were no reports of any crowds forming to listen and watch the two individuals. Only once did someone attempt to verbally escalate and de-escalate the conflict. Since the hostility was only one-sided, the incident did not become a huge display for others to watch.

Overall, since question three asked for accounts of abstinence, it was expected that the majority, if not all conflicts would be resolved in that manner. As the results demonstrate, resolution tactics were the most frequently used, and in turn influenced the other categories. Because the respondent chose to abstain from any physical or verbal conflict, there was a considerable less amount of abusive and confrontational behavior. The results suggest a strong correlation between aggression and third party intervention. First, it can be assumed that with a lack of aggression, there is a lack of third party interest. Secondly, the results suggest that when there is no third

party presence or instigation, aggression is less likely to occur.

As noted for question two, accounts for the respondent's actions, help to explain their reasons for abstaining from aggressive conflict. Three out of the four categories are the same as question two: fear of harm to themselves; fear of harming others; and fear of punishment. Exclusive to question three is the worthiness of the conflict. Several of the transcripts indicate that the respondent chose to walk away from the conflict because it did not seem to be significant in their opinion. The respondent abstained from involvement with the antagonist because the ends did not justify the means. This implies that the risk of an unwanted outcome discouraged the respondent's involvement.

These results have strong implications about the reasons adolescents participate in aggressive behavior. The evaluation of these results provides explanations to substantiate the conceptual framework that is presented here. Applying a theoretical understanding to the data will allow further investigation of adolescent's perceptions of aggressive and violent behavior.

## Chapter IV

### Discussion

Interpersonal violence is one of the leading causes of children dying in the United States and all across the world. As the casualties of adolescent violence continue to mount, so to does the need to understand, address, and prevent aggression. In order to tackle this staggering issue, it is necessary to apply a conceptual understanding to the data collected on aggression and with this information, project recommendations.

#### Research Questions

From the data collected for this thesis, several explanations for aggressive behavior are provided. The tables demonstrate how certain actions are performed more than others, depending on the type of aggressive situation. This information provides insight as to the "weapons" children use to fight in different situations. The tables also underscore the significance of a third party. The results explain that the presence of other individuals during a conflict is an important determining factor of the use of aggressive behavior.

In Table I, the results demonstrate that when physical abusive behavior initiates the conflict, it sets the stage

for the incident. Once the physical attack takes place, both the respondent and the antagonist continue to use physical abusive behavior. There are very few attempts made to verbally mediate or resolve the conflict. Consistent throughout all physical encounters is the involvement of third parties. The results show strong participation by third parties, either to accelerate or de-accelerate the incident. This suggests that physically aggressive behavior provides enticing entertainment to the other people present.

Table II explains that when verbal attacks are the only type of aggression, the individuals involved are more prone to use verbal resolution tactics to solve the conflict. If there is no physical escalation, individuals attempt to reconcile the incident through some form of mediation. A significant contrast to Table I is the involvement of third parties. When there is no physical aggression, third parties demonstrate less involvement with the conflict.

As expected, Table III describes conflicts that were resolved through abstinence. When the respondent chose not to encourage the conflict, the antagonist was influenced to use less aggressive behavior. Interestingly, the lack of third parties in this type of incident is both a reason and a result. When there is no aggression, there is a lack of third party interest and involvement. At the same time, without the presence of an audience, the encounter is less likely to escalate into physical aggression. This highlights the influential control of a third party, and how significant they are in determining aggressive behavior.



The evaluation of the situational factors of the reported incidents suggest several conclusions. All of the physically aggressive conflicts were between the respondent and their peers. Although the location of the conflicts varied, physical attacks were committed against friends, classmates, and other children of the same approximate age. This infers that physical aggression was used when the respondent perceived the antagonist as an equal, or less powerful opponent.

Verbal aggression and abstinence was used in situations in which the respondent had less control. If the antagonist was physically stronger, older, or more intimidating than the respondent, the conflict demonstrated more verbal aggression. If the antagonist was an authority figure or an adult relative, the respondent kept their anger inside and chose not to react. This suggests that depending on what type of individual the antagonist is, both physically and socially, the respondent will react in what they think will be the most successful way.

In order to understand the information processing biases of the subjects, it is necessary to evaluate their accounts of the the situations. The most significant finding is that all twenty five subjects viewed themselves as being the victim of the conflict. When discussing the incidents, the boys felt that they were wrongfully attacked or provoked in some way by the antagonist. Another unique finding is that the respondents reported that the antagonists were the ones that had misinterpreted the

situation, and therefore used physical aggression to settle the conflict. The respondent perceived their actions as necessary in order to protect themselves and their image.

To find out the implications this information suggests about impulse control, it is necessary to evaluate what kind of data the respondents reported. The majority of students interviewed for this study were able to recall episodes in which there was only verbal abusive behavior, and times in which they chose to abstain from any aggressive behaviors. What is interesting about this is that even though they have demonstrated this control in the past, they do not always refrain from physical aggression. Since they were able to recognize and recall the three different types of aggressive situations, there is proof that there are factors that help control the child's impulse.

What are the reasons why an individual does not always demonstrate impulse control? Why are children able to express the appropriate accounts for why they did not become violent, but yet unable to use that rationale on a regular basis? Impulse control is a very fragile concept in that in order for it to take place, there must be the presence of positive individual and social leverage variables.

When there are missing variables such as self-esteem, or parental bonds, the chain is weak and vulnerable. Without all the components of impulse control, adolescents are not equipped with the skills needed to interpret the situation, and process the necessary resolution tactics.

### Conceptual Framework

Because of the lack of theoretical reasoning of what really encourages and deters adolescents violence, there are a limited number of explanations and recommendations for ways to reduce aggressive behavior can be reduced. This thesis presents a conceptual framework that fills in a significant gap in understanding adolescent aggression. There are three main components used to explain adolescent aggressive behavior: situational factors, information processing, and impulse control factors. Together these three elements offer a rationale for aggression.

The first component is situational factors. The results emphasize a definite influence of different situational circumstances. The data suggests that the relationship between the respondent and the antagonist plays a major role in determining the degree of aggressive behavior. There is also strong evidence that explains that when third parties are present, conflicts have a greater chance of becoming physically abusive. This evidence underscores the need to include situational factors as one of the determinants of aggression.

Information processing is the second aspect of the conceptual framework presented in this thesis. The subjects that were interviewed, demonstrated information processing biases in the way they interpreted the role they played in the conflict and the intent of the antagonist. Viewing themselves as the victim, the respondent justified their use of physically abusive behavior by describing it as a defense

mechanism. This suggests that the respondent might be using aggressive behavior because they feel that it is the only way to protect themselves. This implies that when an incident is misinterpreted, the individuals are more prone to use aggressive behavior.

Finally, the individual skills and social leverage factors that represent impulse control are demonstrated through the respondents ability to recognize the different ways they have solved conflicts. The fact that the respondents could recall incidents in which they held back, or controlled their anger identifies the use of some impulse regulating agent. Moreover, the fact that the respondents were able to use this control for specific reasons and when dealing with particular individuals, identifies the presence of individual skills or social leverage factors.

#### Prevention and Intervention

In the future, efforts made to reduce adolescent aggressive behavior should focus on three areas. First, as this study suggests, social leverage variables play a significant role in influencing the use of aggressive behavior. The most important variable is the development of parental bonds. Through these relationships evolves an attachment to education, positive values and morals, and a feeling of self worth. Since these qualities are not automatic, it is necessary to not only stress their importance, but to teach and encourage them to both adults and children.

Another approach directed toward the reduction of adolescent aggression, is to make children aware of the effects of violence, and to teach them ways to keep themselves and others from using aggressive behavior to solve a problem.

The first step to accomplishing this is to instruct children to refrain from encouraging their peers to fight. Either as the primary individual involved, or as an audience member, promoting aggression and violence is harmful. As the results demonstrate, the influence of one's peers has the potential to escalate or de-escalate a potentially threatening situation.

The final suggestion is to educate adolescents on how to reduce aggressive conflict. It is not only important to be aware of the harm of violence, but to also know alternatives to using aggression to solve a problem. The most successful approach to enlightening children to their options is to equip them with conflict management skills, and establish a peer mediation program within the school. Conflict management skills provide children with the proper tools necessary to recognize and process a situation, and positively influence the outcome. Realizing that there does exist constructive conflict encourages more mediated approaches towards resolution.

Peer mediation programs not only serve as an actual form of school discipline, but more importantly empower children with the ability to regulate and influence their own environment. By eliminating the unknown, and the gap

between violator and punisher, successful conflict resolution becomes a tangible and rewarding skill. When children are given some control over their environment, they have a much greater value for it, and in turn work harder to preserve it.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions



**SCHOOL CONFLICT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS****I. Questions about Physical Contact**

1. Recall the last dispute that you can remember clearly, that you were involved in, where there was some kind of physical force used.

2. Give me some background about the people in the dispute and their relationship to each other.

3. Give me some information about the situation surrounding the dispute. Where did it take place, who actually witnessed the disputes?

4. What and who was the cause of the dispute? What was the specific problem that led up to it?

5. How did the actual dispute start? What words were exchanged, if any, between the parties?

6. When did it actually start?

7. What other words were exchange while the incident was going on?

8. How did the incident end?

9. Do you know if anyone was high on drugs or alcohol during the dispute?

**II. Questions about Overt Conflict with on Violence**

1. Now, recall an incident involving a bad argument with someone, which involved screaming, shouting, or name calling, but no physical contact.

2. Give me some background about the people in the dispute and their relationship to each other.

3. Give me some information about the situation surrounding the dispute. Where did it take place, who actually witnessed the disputes?

4. What and who was the cause of the dispute? What was the specific problem that led up to it?

5. How did the actual dispute start? What words were exchanged, if any, between the parties?

6. When did it actually start?

7. What other words were exchange while the incident was going on?

8. How did the incident end?

9. Do you know if anyone was high on drugs or alcohol during the dispute?

### **III. Questions about Conflict Avoidance**

1. Now, recall a dispute in which you were really mad at another person, but said nothing about it. You kept your anger inside.

2. Give me some background about the people in the dispute and their relationship to each other.

3. Give me some information about the situation surrounding the dispute. Where did it take place, who actually witnessed the disputes?

4. What and who was the cause of the dispute? What was the specific problem that led up to it?

5. What made you decide not to say anything to the other person about the problem?

6. How are you likely to handle this incident in the

future?

**III. Weapons Questions**

1. Are gun or knives available to you if you wanted them?
2. Do you think it is a good idea to carry a weapon?
3. Do any of your friends carry weapons?

**IV. Personal Information**

1. Describe your household? How many people and who are they?
2. Is there a lot of conflict in your home? How do other peoples in your home handle conflict?
3. What do they tell you about how you should handle conflict?

## APPENDIX B

### Example of Sequenced Transcript

### Sequence of Events

**Question 1** = Physical Fight      **Action** = Events according to  
**Question 2** = Verbal fight              Boy<sub>1</sub>  
**Question 3** = Anger held in      **Accounts** = Reasons and  
    justification according  
    to Boy<sub>1</sub>

Boy<sub>1</sub> = Demps

#### Question 1

This location of this incident was in the yard of the participant. The time of the fight is estimated at taking place during the afternoon. The individuals involved were playing games with each other. The relationship between the two individuals was as acquaintances. They lived in the same neighborhood.

#### Actions

#### Accounts

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 01. Boy <sub>1</sub> throws acorn at Boy <sub>2</sub>                           |   |
| 02. Boy <sub>3</sub> is hit in head with acorn                                  |   |
| 03. Boy <sub>3</sub> walks over to Boy <sub>1</sub>                             |   |
| 04. Boy <sub>1</sub> tries to explain actions                                   | 04. Boy <sub>1</sub> is scared  |
| 05. Boy <sub>3</sub> pushes chest of Boy <sub>1</sub><br>"a couple of times"    |   |
| 06. Group forms saying stop   | 06. Boy <sub>1</sub> gets mad<br>cause of bad temper<br>and worried about<br>health |
| 07. Boy <sub>1</sub> punches Boy <sub>3</sub>                                   |   |
| 08. Boy <sub>1</sub> falls to ground in the act<br>of punching Boy <sub>3</sub> |   |
| 09. Boy <sub>1</sub> and Boy <sub>1</sub> roll on the ground                    |   |
| 10. Boy <sub>1</sub> pulls knife on Boy <sub>1</sub>                            |   |
| 11. Boy <sub>1</sub> 's mom comes out of house screaming                        |   |
| 12. Boy <sub>1</sub> runs to mom  |   |

13. Boy<sub>3</sub> scratches (stab) Boy<sub>1</sub> with knife
14. Mom calls police
15. Boy<sub>3</sub> runs down street

### Question 2

The location of this incident was in the hallway of the school. The time was during the school day. The individuals involved were waiting to go to their next class. The relationship between the two individuals was as acquaintances.

#### Actions

01. Boy<sub>2</sub> screams in Boy<sub>1</sub>'s ear
02. Boy<sub>1</sub> tells Boy<sub>2</sub> to stop
03. Crowd listens
04. Boy<sub>2</sub> does not stop
05. Boy<sub>1</sub> calls Boy<sub>2</sub> names
06. Boy<sub>1</sub> yells threats of physical violence at Boy<sub>2</sub>
07. Boy<sub>2</sub> walks away
08. Boy<sub>2</sub> apologizes in class to Boy<sub>2</sub>

#### Accounts

02. Boy<sub>1</sub> is very mad

### Question 3

The location of this incident was in the school. The time was during a class and afterwards in the hall. The relationship between the boys was that they were classmates.

#### Actions

01. Boy<sub>2</sub> picks on Boy<sub>1</sub> during class
02. Boy<sub>2</sub> hit and pushes Boy<sub>1</sub> in the hall
03. Boy<sub>1</sub> pulls back to hit Boy<sub>2</sub>
04. Boy<sub>1</sub> hold anger in and walks away

#### Accounts

01. Boy<sub>1</sub> is mad
04. Boy<sub>1</sub> decides it is not worth it

## APPENDIX C

### Felson's Coding Scheme

## Felson's Coding Scheme

1. **Physical attacks:** including physical violations, pursuing for physical attack, and drawing and struggling for a weapon.
2. **Insults:** direct attack on identity, including instances of yelling.
3. **Threats:** including challenges and dares, and nonverbal threatening gestures.
4. **Rule violations:** including annoying behavior, failure to discharge an obligation, ignoring, causing another's loss inadvertently, boasting, inappropriate demeanor, and violating property.
5. **Reproaches:** including accusals, complaints, protests, and commands to cease some action,
6. **Accounts:** and explanation of conduct.
7. **Submission:** including apologies, crying, pleas not to attack, and fleeing.
8. **Orders:** including requests and commands.
9. **Noncompliance:** including refusals to comply and doing nothing when the antagonist has called for action.
10. **Mediation:** actions that attempt to reconcile the opposing parties.



## APPENDIX D

### Initial Twenty Codes

**Action Coding Scheme****Individual**

- (0) **Uncontrolled** = happenings that are not affected by the individuals involved in the incident
- (1) **Physical Attacks** = Physical violations, pursuing physical violations
- (2) **Insults** = Direct attacks on identity, instances of yelling
- (3) **Threats** = Challenges and dares, impending harm unless target complies
- (4) **Rule Violations** = Failure to act on obligations, violating property
- (5) **Reproaches** = Accusals, complaints, protests, to find fault
- (6) **Submissions** = Apologies, compliance, fleeing
- (7) **Orders** = Commands to gain compliance
- (8) **Noncompliance** = Refusal to obey or agree
- (9) **Mediation** = Actions that attempt to reconcile apposing parties
- (10) **Play** = Verbal and physical prosocial activity
- (11) **Unintentional attack** = Physical or verbal actions not meant to harm
- (12) **Regular activity** = Activities that people conduct every day or on a regular basis

(13) **Verbal/physical precipitating acts** = Any attempt made  
by an individual to encourage conflict

(14) **Abstaining** = Walking away from conflict, saying nothing

**Third Party**

(15) **Passive presence**

(16) **Verbal escalatory intervention**

(17) **Verbal de-escalatory intervention**

(18) **Physical escalatory intervention**

(19) **Physical de-escalatory intervention**

(20) **Punishment**

(21) **No code possible**

## APPENDIX E

### Revised Final Five Category Coding Scheme

**Action Codes**

**Category 1 -- Physical/Verbal Abusive Behavior --**Actions that intend to physically or mentally harm the other individual involved.

- A. Physical Attack**
- B. Insult**
- C. Threats**
- D. Precipitating acts**

**Category 2 -- Behavior Encouraging Conflict --** Attempts made to influence the target and precipitate the conflict.

- A. Reproach**
- B. Rule violation**
- C. Orders**
- D. Noncompliance**

**Category 3 -- Steps toward resolution --** Ways in which the respondent or the antagonist approach solving the conflict.

- A. Mediation**
- B. Abstaining**
- C. Submission**

**Category 4 -- Activities** that have the potential to encourage or deter the conflict.

- A. Play**
- B. Uncontrolled**
- C. Unintentional**
- D. Regular activities**

**Category 5 --Third party Actions --** They only define that actions carried out by the individuals outside the immediate conflict, but who are present during the incident.

- A. Passive presence**
- B. Verbal De-escalatory intervention**
- C. Verbal Escalatory intervention**
- D. Physical Escalatory intervention**
- E. Physical De-escalatory intervention**
- F. Punishment**

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