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From self-control capabilities and the need to control others to proactive and reactive aggression among adolescents

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the associations between aspects of control (self-control capability and the need to control others) and forms of aggression (reactive and proactive). Data were derived from a structured questionnaire administered to 660 male and female adolescents with an average age of 14.99 years, from two urban schools in northern Israel. Findings demonstrate a negative association between the need to control others and the capability to control the self. Findings also show that proactive violence is especially associated with high need to control others, whereas reactive violence is linked more closely to low self-control capability. The effects of gender and age on control and aggression factors are also shown. Findings are discussed on both the behavioral and the motivational levels.

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One of the most accepted distinctions between different types of aggression is between reactive and proactive aggression (Dodge, 1991; Dodge & Coie, 1987; Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Price & Dodge, 1989; Pulkkinen, 1996; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). There is a theory that reactive violence stems from a frustration-aggression model proposed by Dollard, Doob, Miller,

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Mowrer, and Sears (1939) and later refined by Berkowitz (1978). According to this approach, aggression is a hostile, angry reaction to an experienced frustration and it seems to be highly associated with low self-control capability. By contrast, the concept of proactive violence stems from the social learning theory of Bandura (1973). This theory claims that aggression is an acquired instrumental behavior motivated by an anticipated reward, and it seems to be associated, to a great extent, with a strong need to control others. When the frustration-aggression and the social learning theories were introduced, they were regarded as competing, but over time, it became clear that each refers to a different type of aggression (Bandura, 1983; Berkowitz, 1983). Based on the characteristics of proactive and reactive aggression, it seems that they are, at least partially, features of control. The purpose of this study is to explore the associations between various aspects of control (self-control capability and the need to control others) and various forms of violence (reactive and proactive).

There is wide agreement that reactive and proactive forms of aggression are products of different delineations of social information processing (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge, 1980). Thus, the social information processing model provides an integrative framework for these theories. This model describes a cyclical decision-making process, with social behavior as its outcome. The process begins when information about a given social situation is acquired, continues with the processing of this information, and ends with an action taken to cope with the situation, and so forth. It consists of six interrelated steps: (1) encoding situational and internal cues, (2) interpreting the cues, (3) selecting or clarifying a goal, (4) generating or accessing possible responses, (5) choosing a response and (6) enacting the response (behavioral enactment). Research has shown that aggressive and non-aggressive individuals differ at various stages of social information processing (Dodge, Pettit, McClusky, & Brown, 1986; Kendall, 1995). Furthermore, reactive and proactive forms of aggression were found to be related to deficiencies at different stages of social information processing (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Dodge & Coie, 1987).

Reactive aggression is a defensive response to provocation or trouble, a way to defend oneself and to retaliate against abuse (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). Such conduct seems to be an impulsive, defensive reaction paired with anger and a loss of control (Boulton & Smith, 1994; Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay, & Lavoie, 2001; Crick & Dodge, 1996; Roland & Idsøe, 2001). Children behave in a reactively aggressive manner when they feel threatened or provoked (Dodge & Coie, 1987). Reactive aggression was specifically correlated with problems in the first two stages of information processing (i.e., encoding and interpretation of cues) (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Dodge & Coie, 1987; Schwartz et al., 1998).

Proactive aggression, on the other hand, is a goal-directed, deliberate and cold-blooded action, useful for achieving goals. It is offensive and provocative, requires no stimulus and may be characterized by pleasure or satisfaction (Boulton & Smith, 1994; Brendgen et al., 2001; Crick & Dodge, 1996; Roland & Idsøe, 2001). Such conduct seems to be an initiated behavior (Vitiello & Stoff, 1997) displayed in the absence of provocation or anger (Brendgen et al., 2001). Proactively aggressive individuals base their aggressive behavior on the assumption that this is a suitable means of achieving a particular objective or end (Dodge & Coie, 1987). Proactively aggressive individuals attack in order to steal, tease, scare, or coerce (Cornell et al., 1996; Dodge, 1991; Dodge, Lochman, Harnish, Bates, & Pettit, 1997; Vitaro, Gendreau, Tremblay, & Olinny, 1998; Vitiello & Stoff, 1997). Proactive aggression was found to be correlated with problems in the

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