



**Understanding Violence:  
Where Violence Comes From  
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We are surrounded by violence on a daily basis. It can be seen in our streets, movies, newscasts, heard in our music, and read in our newspapers. Though we are surrounded by violence, some of us cannot fathom becoming a violent person while some have no problem using violence as a means to an end. There are two major theories that explain why an individual becomes violent; the psychosocial perspective and the biological perspective.

The psychosocial perspective explains that violence and aggression are learned responses to frustration. This perspective theorizes that a child learns aggressive behaviors by observing others. So, if a child watches mom or dad curse or yell as someone cuts them off in traffic, then that child has learned that he/she too should respond the same way to similar situations. The psychosocial perspective also states that violence and aggression can be learned as a way to achieve a goal. This perspective bases this on the fact that children learn through rewards or punishments. If a child witnesses someone or experiences an event where violence is rewarded, then that child believes that in certain situations violence will be tolerated and rewarded. This social learning idea puts the influence of violence and aggression on the surroundings of children. Peers, family, and the environment are highly influential in this perspective. A child that is influenced by aggressive people learns how to implement aggression into his/her life.

On the other hand, the biological perspective does not put any influence into one's surrounding as a cause for violence and aggression. This perspective states that it is the biological make-up of individuals that makes them violent. Violence and aggression are brought out through permanent biological problems or through temporary biological problems. Permanent biological problems may be related to genetic issues, brain trauma, psychological problems, or other type of permanent physical damage done to the body. Temporary biological problems can stem from brain seizures or through drug and alcohol use. In this case, someone is only violent or aggressive temporarily as opposed to someone who is just born to be aggressive or violent.

The explanation for violent behaviors comes down to the basic nature versus nurture argument. Are some people born violent (nature) or do we learn to become violent (nurture)? The problem with the psychological perspective is not everyone who experiences violence becomes violent. For example, not every child who is physically abused will grow up to be a physical abuser. The problem with the biological explanation is that it is extremely difficult to prove. Tests on brain functioning as it relates to violence is not conclusive.

The main reason for understanding violence is to develop an appropriate prevention strategy. The psychosocial perspective focuses on developing coping skills for frustrating situations and having more severe punishments when someone exhibits violent behaviors. The biological perspective explains that medications can be used to alter one's moods or that a surgical procedure can alter an individual's aggressive nature. Whatever the root cause of violence may be, the effects of it cannot be denied. The next article on violence will focus on its effects on a family.