

Anthropological Perspectives on Aggression: Sex Differences and Cultural Variation

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The purpose of this special issue of *Aggressive Behavior* is to present various topics and perspectives on the anthropology of aggression and conflict. First, a brief introduction to the articles in this issue is provided. Second, anthropological findings on sex differences in aggression are considered. The cross-cultural pattern is for males to engage in more frequent and more severe physical aggression than females. These observed sex differences are in accordance with the evolutionary concepts of sexual selection and parental investment. Simultaneously, it is clear that a host of proximate cultural influences also affects levels and styles of aggression in both females and males. Anthropological findings related to the *indirect aggression* concept also are discussed and tentatively related to gender. In the third section of this article, the nature and ramifications of the tremendous cross-cultural variation in aggression are explored. It is clear that nonviolent cultures exist, as do a range of more violent ones. It is also clear, as illustrated in several examples, that aggressive cultures can become dramatically more peaceful, and vice versa. Aggression can be viewed within the broader frame of conflict management; most cultures, in fact, use a variety of mechanisms for dealing with conflict that do not involve aggression. In addition, consideration is given to *intracultural* variability in aggression, the multidimensionality of aggression, cultural meaning (beliefs) and aggression, and the controversy over actor-based (emic) vs. observer-based (etic) interpretations of aggression. *Aggr. Behav.* 24:81-95, 1998. © 1998 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

In recent years, the corpus of anthropological research on aggression and conflict has continued to grow and diversify. Various anthropological subfields—psychological, ecological, evolutionary, political-legal, applied anthropology, and others—offer insights about aggression. This special issue of *Aggressive Behavior* offers an anthropo-

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logical sampling of research topics, theoretical perspectives, and recent developments related to aggression. This introductory article begins the sampling by considering two topics of research. First, I discuss anthropological findings related to sex differences in aggression, including the nature of sex differences in cross-cultural perspective, evolutionary considerations, and variation in types of aggression, specifically *direct* and *indirect* approaches. Second, I consider the cross-cultural continuum of peaceful and violent cultures, and, in so doing, highlight certain topical areas and controversies. For example, attention is given to how to assess the level of aggression within a culture, culture change in aggression, the multidimensional nature of aggression, the debate over emic (actor-based) vs. etic (observer-based) interpretations of aggression, and the diversity of conflict management options cross-culturally.

In the subsequent articles, the presentation of cultural perspectives on aggression and conflict continues. In "Yanomami: An Arena of Conflict and Aggression in the Amazon," Les Sponsel [this issue] presents a thorough and multifaceted critical review of research conducted among the Yanomami, a culture that has become famous beyond anthropology for extreme aggressiveness. Sponsel convincingly argues, however, that the extent of Yanomami aggression has been greatly exaggerated and that there are numerous problems associated with characterizing the Yanomami as fierce or violent. Sponsel explores many ramifications and implications of this conclusion, suggesting that "the analysis has more general implications for the epistemology of the study of aggression."

Clay and Carole Robarchek have had the remarkable fieldwork experiences of studying one of the most peaceful cultures on the planet, the Semai of Malaysia, and also one of the most violent cultures, the Waorani of Amazonia [e.g., Robarchek and Robarchek, 1992, 1996]. In "Reciprocities and Realities: World Views, Peacefulness, and Violence Among the Semai and Waorani," Robarchek and Robarchek [this issue] compare the two cultures, noting many similarities, and they offer a psychocultural interpretation of the tremendous differences in these cultures related to aggression. Giving particular attention to norms of exchange in the two cultures, Robarchek and Robarchek suggest that investigation of the culturally constructed world views related to exchange, reciprocity, and other areas of life "contributes to an understanding of the character of sociality generally in these two societies, including their diametrically opposed dispositions toward violence in human relations." In addition, a lesson derivable from Semai culture is that humans have the capacity to live nonviolently. Robarchek and Robarchek [this issue] write, "Physical violence is extremely uncommon: adults do not fight; husbands do not beat their wives nor parents their children. Homicide is so rare as to be virtually nonexistent."

Mary K. Meyer's article, "Negotiating International Norms: The Inter-American Commission of Women and the Convention on Violence Against Women," which deals with an interplay of politics, cultural, values, and social structure, could have been written by an applied or political-legal anthropologist. In fact, Meyer is a political scientist, specializing in Latin America, whose focus is similar to that of anthropologists researching the interplay of culture, politics and human rights issues [Colson, 1995; Mahmood, 1996; Messer, 1993]. Meyer [this issue] analyzes the importance of the newly negotiated *Convention on Violence Against Women*, suggesting that the *Convention* "breaks new ground by defining violence against women as a violation of women's human rights and identifying the duties of states to address the problem." One of the contributions of Meyer's article is to describe a multilevel approach to the problem of

violence against women that extends from community grassroots to the level of regional institutions [also see Fry, 1994a].

During the past 15 years or so, Carolyn Nordstrom has conducted fieldwork in war zones, from Eastern Europe to Sri Lanka and Mozambique [e.g., Nordstrom, 1997]. In her article, "Deadly Myths of Aggression," she draws on her numerous field experiences "under fire" to challenge the validity of certain commonly held assumptions about warfare. Nordstrom [this issue] suggests that common cultural conceptions of war—for instance, those based on the media, military texts, literature, and war museums—deviate tremendously from how wars are actually fought. Nordstrom [this issue] writes that without actual research in war zones, "it is impossible to distinguish between fact and fiction in the formal presentation of war." Nordstrom [this issue] calls for a new empiricism in the study of war and peace building.

Both Nordstrom and Sponsel note that "war" and "warfare" are very general terms that have been used to describe a multitude of conflict phenomena. Some anthropologists, notes Sponsel, lump together raiding, feuding, and warfare, whereas others distinguish these types of aggression from one another. Sponsel also suggests that to use a general category called war to lump together under one label diverse kinds of "tribal" belligerencies as well as "modern" conflicts neglects the tremendous cross-cultural variation as well as the magnitude of structural, cultural, and technological differences, reflected, for instance, in doing battle with bows and arrows vs. stealth bombers.

The many references about war in Sponsel's [this issue] and Nordstrom's [this issue] bibliographies will not be cited redundantly here, but additional recommended sources for readers interested in anthropological treatments of "tribal" war, feuding, raiding, and the like include Bohannan [1967], Haas [1990, 1996], Harner [1972], Heider [1979], Keiser [1986], Otterbein [1996], Symons [1979, chap 5], Thoden Van Velzen and Van Wetering [1960], and Vayda [1976], and additional, nonoverlapping references dealing with anthropological perspectives on recent or ongoing wars, group conflicts, and/or national-to-global security issues include Brassett [1986], special issues of *Cultural Survival Quarterly* [1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b], Foster and Rubinstein [1986], Fry and Fry [1997], Mahmood [1996], Nordstrom [1997], Rubinstein and Foster [1988], and Turner and Pitts [1986].

Together, the articles in this issue of *Aggressive Behavior* reflect the diversity of anthropological-style research currently being conducted on aggression and conflict, but these articles certainly cannot represent all of the topics and theoretical perspectives within anthropology. In addition to the references cited in the articles, readers seeking additional perspectives on the anthropology of aggression and/or rich bibliographic sources are referred to Black [1993], Brown and Schuster [1986], Fry and Björkqvist [1997], Haas [1990], Kurtz [in press], Levinson and Ember [1996], Sponsel [1996], and Sponsel and Gregor [1994]. In the remainder of this introductory article, I discuss, first, some anthropological considerations of sex differences in aggression and, second, several ramifications and issues related to cross-cultural variation in aggression.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SEX DIFFERENCES

Several conclusions emerge from a consideration of the anthropological data on sex differences and aggression. First, sex differences in physical aggression clearly exist. Second, females may employ *indirect aggression* more than males, but here more data are necessary before a definitive conclusion can be reached. Third, evolutionary theory

offers an ultimate explanation for observed sex differences in aggression, and more proximate cultural influences clearly are important as well.

The cross-cultural evidence shows men to be more *physically* aggressive than women. It is virtually always men who raid, ambush, feud, and meet on the battlefields [Burbank, 1987, p 71, 1994, p 202]. Cross-culturally, men also tend to commit more homicides than women [cf. Burbank, 1994, p 202; Daly and Wilson, 1988]. In comparing male-male homicides to female-female homicides, Daly and Wilson [1988, p 161] conclude from their extensive review of the literature that “intrasexual competition is far more violent among males than among females in every human society for which information exists.” Overall, behavioral findings and criminological statistics show that *physical* aggression is both *more frequent* and *more severe* among males than among females [e.g., Burbank, 1987, 1994; Daly and Wilson, 1988; Fry, 1992a; Hines and Fry, 1994; Kuschel, 1992; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974, p 368; Romanucci-Ross, 1973; Taylor, 1979]. Furthermore, this pattern of sex differences (which is typical of primates and mammals generally) is understandable through evolutionary models of sexual selection and differential male-female parental investment [e.g., Bus, 1992; Daly and Wilson, 1988; Jolly, 1985, pp 247–248; Symons, 1979]. Symons [1979, p 142] observes that in humans, female body weight is 80%–89% of male body weight on the average. Drawing on the work of Sherwood Washburn, Symons [1979, p 142] concludes, “If one focuses on the anatomy that is primarily responsible for sex differences, it becomes clear...that human males have evolved roughly *twice* the aggressive apparatus of females” [emphasis in original]. In accordance with parental investment theory, Symons [1979, pp 153, 163] proposes that men fight more than women because men are evolutionarily adapted to compete over women more than vice versa: “Although ethnographic reports may sometimes have an androcentric bias that obscures the subtleties of female-female competition, it is certain that intense competition evidenced by organized fighting and killing—as is common among men—occurs nowhere among women.”

Based on the findings of a cross-cultural survey of societies, Burbank [1987] emphasizes that simply because men are physically more aggressive than women does not mean that women are always nonaggressive. Burbank [1987] reports that women do engage in physical aggression in 61% of 137 cultures she examined, and her findings as to why women are aggressive suggest that in the majority of cases women’s aggression involves competition over males [see Cook, 1993, p 36]. Fifty-two percent of all female-female aggression was provoked by a husband’s adultery, while another 21% involved competition among rivals for the attention of a man [Burbank, 1987, pp 92, 93].

Cook [1992, 1993, p 63] reports that out of 18 instances of physical aggression she observed on Margarita Island off the coast of Venezuela, 8 (44%) involved women being physically aggressive. Cook [1993, p 63] writes, “In San Fernando, the use of verbal and physical aggression by women is a frequent and expected occurrence.... Upon several occasions I observed women engaged in ferocious verbal fight among themselves which were accompanied by fist waving, insults, and the hurling of pebbles at the feet of their opponents.” Various instances of female physical and verbal aggression also have been described among Argentines, Australian Aborigines, Bellonese, Chinese, Zambians, Zapotecs, and other cultures [e.g., Burbank 1987, 1994; Björkqvist and Niemelä, 1992a; Glazer, 1992; Hines and Fry, 1994; Kuschel, 1992]. Hines and Fry [1994, p 232] write that “women in Argentina do engage in physical aggression. They may push and shove each other in lines or hit their husbands or boyfriends. But women’s

physical aggression is perceived as less frequent, less severe, and relatively harmless compared with men's aggression." The same is the case among the Zapotec, where women are less often physically aggressive than men and women's attacks are comparatively mild, generally consisting of slapping, pulling, and pushing [Fry, 1992a, p 196]. Hence, women in some cultural settings obviously engage in physical aggression, although they are generally less physically aggressive than men. Such findings are in accordance with the evolutionary predictions that intermale competition over females will be more pronounced than interfemale competition over males.

Aggression can be verbal as well as physical, and indirect as well as direct, and women may express competition differently than men. Bellonese women make considerable use of verbal aggression, as contrasted to Bellonese men's greater use of physical threats and assaults [Kuschel, 1992, p 184]. In Argentina, both sexes are verbally aggressive [Hines and Fry, 1994], and this finding corresponds with several reports that suggest that both men and women use verbal aggression [Burbank, 1987; Cook, 1993; Frodi et al., 1977; Glazer, 1992, p 164; Lagerspetz et al., 1988, p 404]. However, verbal aggression can take many direct and indirect forms, such as gossip, ridicule, criticism delivered in front of others or behind the victim's back, song duels, derogatory poems or songs composed and shared about someone else, jokes about someone, insults, and so on [Briggs, 1994; Cook, 1997; Kuschel, 1992]. The many subtleties of how men and women use various types of verbal aggression in different cultural contexts has barely been explored.

Indirect aggression involves use of social networks, third parties, elements of the social organization, and/or other covert means to inflict harm on another individual [see Björkqvist and Niemelä, 1992b; Fry, in press]. By using indirect aggression, the attacker can inflict physical, psychological, and/or social harm on a victim, perhaps without ever being detected [Lagerspetz et al., 1988]. Anthropological studies from different cultures provide illustrations and conceptual elaborations of the indirect aggression construct. Indirect aggression, as expressed within the social context of a given cultural meaning system, might entail, e.g., the spreading of malicious gossip about someone, arranging for the social exclusion of a rival from group activities, blocking social benefits that an individual would otherwise accrue, arranging for a third party to attack the victim (either verbally or physically), practicing witchcraft or sorcery directed at harming the victim, and so on.

Research indicates that at least in several cultural contexts, females may make greater use of indirect aggression than males, although members of both sexes have been found to employ indirect tactics; examples of females employing indirect aggression, perhaps in greater frequency than males, have been noted for Finland [Björkqvist & Niemelä, 1992b], Argentina [Hines and Fry, 1994], and Mexican Zapotec [Fry, 1992a]. For instance, among Argentines of Buenos Aires, "women, more than men, favor indirect aggression...respondents tend to agree that women, more than men, judge others, gossip, lie about others, exclude persons from social events, and interrupt conversations" [Hines and Fry, 1994, p 231].

To summarize, cross-culturally men tend to engage in more physical aggression, and more severe physical aggression, such as homicides, than women. However, women also are reported to engage in physical aggression in many cultures. As will be discussed next, some cultures have very low levels of physical aggression overall, among *both* sexes. Cultural patterns are clearly very influential regarding the expression of

both male and female aggression [e.g., Cook, 1992, 1993; Howell and Willis, 1989]. There are numerous cross-cultural examples of both men and women acting verbally aggressive [Burbank, 1987, 1994], but “verbal aggression” is a catch-all label, and more research is needed on the numerous subtypes of verbal aggression and their usage in different cultural contexts. There is tentative evidence from several cultural settings that women may make greater use of indirect aggression than men. Finally, sexual selection and parental investment theory provide an evolutionary explanation for the observed general cross-cultural patterns of sex differences in competition and aggression, a conclusion that in no way denies or minimizes the impact of proximate cultural factors on male and female aggression [Fry, 1987].

CROSS-CULTURAL VARIATION IN AGGRESSION: ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIES

Intercultural Variation

Montagu [1978, p 5] notes that the cross-cultural range of variation in aggressive behavior is tremendous, from nonaggressive to highly violent societies. Descriptions of physical violence in various cultures can be found, e.g., in Chagnon [1992; but see also Sponsel, this issue] for the Yanomamö of Brazil and Venezuela, Greenberg [1989] for the Chatino of Mexico, Harner [1972] for the Jívaro of Ecuador, Heider [1979] for the Dani of New Guinea, Knauff [1987] for the Gebusi of New Guinea and for homicide rates in various cultures (but also see cautions in Robarchek and Robarchek [this issue, note 2]; Sponsel [1996, note 7], regarding Knauff’s treatment of homicide rates), Robarchek and Robarchek [1992, 1996, this issue] for the Waorani of Ecuador, and Vayda [1976] for the Maring of New Guinea, the Iban of Borneo, and the Maori of New Zealand.

In addition, there is a growing literature on cultures with *low* levels of physical violence. Much information is available about the nonviolent Semai Senoi of Malaysia [Dentan, 1968, 1978, 1992, 1995; Robarchek, 1979, 1980, 1989, 1994, 1997; Robarchek and Dentan, 1987; Robarchek and Robarchek, 1992, 1996, this issue]. Fabbro [1978] summarizes information about seven relatively peaceful societies, such as the Siriono of Bolivia and the Hutterites of North America [also see Dentan, 1994]. Discussions and analyses of a Mexican Zapotec community with a low level of physical aggression are provided by Fry [1988, 1992b, 1993, 1994b] and O’Neill [1979, 1981, 1989], and Hollan [1988, 1997] discusses the nonviolent Toraja of Indonesia. Descriptions of various cultures “at peace,” such as the Buid of the Philippines and the Piaroa of Venezuela, appear in a volume edited by Howell and Willis [1989]. Montagu [1978] edits a volume wherein the contributors give special attention to learning and socialization processes in nonaggressive societies. Contributors to Sponsel and Gregor’s [1994] edited volume describe and analyze several additional peaceful cultures. Finally, Ross [1993, chap 3] reviews information about five “low-conflict” societies, e.g., the Papago of North America and the Norwegians.

The previous lists of citations should not imply that all or even most societies can be dichotomized as either violent or nonviolent. As Silverberg and Gray [1992, p 8] suggest, rather than polarizing societies as either violent or nonviolent types, perhaps it is more realistic to view societies as scalable along a continuum ranging from violent to peaceful. Thus, the previous lists of cultures are intended to provide anthropological

citations related to societies that lie toward the extreme ends of a cross-cultural continuum on which many societies occupy intermediate positions.

Intracultural Variation

A consideration of the cross-cultural variation in aggression raises several theoretical and conceptual issues. The first issue is that in addition to intercultural variation regarding aggression, *intracultural* variation sometimes exists as well. There is a long-standing yet recently questioned tendency within anthropology—usually based on an implicit assumption of intracultural uniformity, which may or may not be true—to generalize about the characteristics of a culture based on fieldwork in only one or several villages, communities, bands, and so on. When considerable variation exists among intracultural entities, generalizations may lead to misrepresentations about the level of aggressiveness or other features of a culture. For example, it would be incorrect and misleading to generalize that Zapotec culture overall has a low level of aggression based solely on data from one peaceful Zapotec community, “La Paz,” in which both O’Neill and I have worked [Fry, 1992b, 1993, 1994b; O’Neill, 1979, 1981, 1989].

In-Group vs. Out-Group Aggression

A second issue to consider in assessing levels of aggression involves whether to focus on in-group aggression, out-group aggression, or both. Some cultures have very low levels of both in-group and out-group aggression, such as the Buid [Gibson, 1989] and the Semai [e.g., Dentan, 1968, 1978; Robarchek, 1980, 1989]. For instance, regarding Buid responses to both in-group and out-group conflict: “...simple withdrawal is the preferred solution to conflict. The socially approved response to aggression is avoidance or even flight. The Buid language is rich in words for fear, fleeing, and escape from danger, none of which carries negative moral overtones” [Gibson, 1989, p 66].

On the other hand, as Dentan [1992, p 218] observes, some societies with very low in-group physical aggression may be willing to engage in externally directed aggression. Ross [1993, pp 53–56], e.g., notes that the internally peaceful Papago of southern Arizona and northern Mexico defended themselves against raiding Apaches. Still other societies exhibit moderate to high levels of both in-group and out-group aggression, such as among the Waorani [Robarchek and Robarchek, 1992, 1996, this issue].

Cultural Changes in Aggressiveness/Peacefulness Over Time

A third issue to consider in assessing the level of aggression of a culture is that levels of both in-group and out-group aggression can change over time [Fry and Fry, 1997, pp 14–15]. Sponsel [1996, p 106] notes that “the transformation of warlike societies into peaceful ones has occurred repeatedly in human history.” Similarly, Dentan [1992, pp 215–216] discusses apparent shifts in levels of aggressivity among the !Kung San over several decades, wherein they seem to have experienced a two-decade period of relative peacefulness, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, which was interspersed between more aggressive periods.

Greenberg [1989] describes how a Chatino community in Mexico, which was once fraught with violent murders and maimings, instituted an agrarian reform and, in a movement initiated by the women and later supported by the majority of villagers, banned alcohol consumption—a major social change—which drastically reduced the bloodshed. Greenberg [1989, p 231] explains that “sick of seeing their men killed in

blood feuds, the women of the village had organized and had managed to pass an ordinance prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol and the carrying of knives or guns. These measures were effective and put an end to the blood feuding and factionalism in the village.” This ban on alcohol was strictly enforced to the point that should a villager be seen drinking in a neighboring town, that person could be jailed and fined upon returning to the village, even if sober.

Besides illustrating a culture with a high level of aggression, the Waorani, who are described by Robarchek and Robarchek [this issue], also dramatically demonstrate the human capacity to enact cultural change, specifically, to bring about peace. Although not becoming an inherently nonviolent society, the Waorani have managed to reduce their homicide rate by *more than 90%* in a matter of a few years. Robarchek and Robarchek [1996, p 76] explain: “The killers are still there—many were our friends and neighbors—but with relatively rare exceptions, they have stopped killing. They were not conquered or incarcerated, nor were they incorporated as equals into the socioeconomic system of Ecuadorian society. Rather, new leaders emerged who possessed new information and offered a new set of alternatives” [also see Robarchek and Robarchek, 1992].

Thus, the level of aggressiveness within a society can change quite markedly, as illustrated by the Chatino, Waorani, and other cases. Implications of this observation are that cultural comparisons regarding aggression should include a specification of the time frames involved. Also, awareness of the potential for culture change may at times account for discrepancies in descriptions of aggression and peacefulness given by different fieldworkers for the same culture but at different times periods [e.g., related to the !Kung, see Dentan, 1992, pp 215–216; Draper, 1978, pp 31–35; and Knauft, 1987, p 458]. A final implication, relevant for reducing violence, is that cultural transitions toward lower levels of aggression can be both dramatic and rapid.

Aggression as a Multidimensional Construct

A fourth conceptual issue related to assessing the aggressiveness of any particular culture as well as to making cross-cultural comparisons is that *aggression* and, more generally, *conflict* are multidimensional concepts. For example, possibly relevant dimensions of physical aggression might include spousal aggression; physical punishment of children; infanticide; homicide; capital punishment; interpersonal fighting with fists, clubs, sticks, and spears; and group raids, ambushes, and battles. By some indicators, a culture could seem quite tranquil while by other indicators the same society could seem more violent. This observation about multidimensionality is relevant, of course, to any attempts to scale societies along a peaceful-to-violent continuum, as suggested by Silverberg and Gray [1992].

Some of the challenges posed by the multidimensionality of aggression are reflected in Fabbro’s [1978] comparison of seven societies, all of which he characterizes as “peaceful” based on a set of criteria (e.g., no wars, no collective internal violence, little or no structural violence, little or no interpersonal physical violence). Although Fabbro’s [1978] overall assessment is that all seven societies have a low level of physical violence, the multidimensionality issue comes into play as infanticide is noted in two cultures but not in the other five, the physical punishment of children is noted in three cultures but not in the other four, and spousal aggression is noted in three societies but *not* in one society (and for the remaining three societies, its presence or absence is not directly commented

on by Fabbro). In a summary table, Fabbro [1978, pp 79–80] classifies four societies as having “*little* physical violence,” and of those four, “lethal physical violence” is also noted for two; the remaining three societies are classified as having “*some* physical violence,” and one of these three is noted to have “lethal physical violence.” Finally, Fabbro [1978] at times mentions particular cultural beliefs that may directly or indirectly relate to aggression and peacefulness—e.g., noting fear of violence in one society and that violence is abhorred in another society. It is clear that some aggressive acts, of various types and occurring at various rates, may occur in societies that are at or near the tranquil end of a cross-cultural, peaceful-to-violent continuum. It also follows that arranging societies along a continuum of peaceful to violent, although possible, may not be as clear-cut an undertaking as it might have seemed at first.

The Importance of Cultural Meaning and the Emic-Etic Debate

The challenges of comparing societies due to the multidimensionality of aggression is further illustrated through a consideration of the Gebusi of New Guinea. Also, the Gebusi case simultaneously serves to introduce a fifth conceptual issue, namely, the importance of understanding cultural meaning, belief systems, and the overall cultural context within which aggressive and peaceful behaviors occur [Fry, 1993].

Knauff [1987] draws attention to the paradox posed by the Gebusi and certain other societies as well: The Gebusi are very tranquil in everyday life and devalue violence, yet they have a very high homicide rate. Among the Gebusi, the physical punishment of children is extremely rare, anger and aggression are considered unbecoming and anti-social, good-humored camaraderie—“good company”—is a typical feature of interaction and is highly valued, and disputes over land or resources are infrequent [Knauff, 1987]. At the same time, the Gebusi homicide rate is at least equivalent to 568 per 100,000 for this culture of about 450 persons [Knauff, 1987, p 462]. Most homicides entail the killing of sorcerers who are believed to be responsible for illness and death. Thus, the key to a full interpretation of homicide lies within the Gebusi cultural meaning system.

...The killing of sorcery suspects by adults is thought to be a communal duty—an act to expunge human malice that cannot be eliminated by any other means. The adult violence that does occur in Gebusi society tends to be quickly over, extreme, and subsequently played down or ignored. Conversely, good company is reasserted and reemphasized. On a day-to-day and week-to-week basis, anger and aggressiveness are strikingly absent; aggression is rare, even though it is extremely violent when it does occur. Homicide tends to occur in a highly delimited and socially sanctioned context: the attribution of sorcery following the sickness death of someone in the community. This context is strikingly and effectively dissociated in Gebusi psychology from normal, everyday life [Knauff, 1987, p 475].

While a consideration of the cultural meaning is obviously an important aspect of understanding aggression, some authors have taken extreme positions about the centrality of cultural meanings. Heelas [1989; also see Gibson, 1989, p 61], e.g., sees no value in etic (observer-based) definitions of aggression: “We must resist asserting that Ilongot youths are aggressive simply because they lop off heads; that Samoan fathers are aggressive simply because they beat their children; or, for that matter, that the British were aggressive when they lined up to exterminate the indigenous people of Tasmania” [1989, p 240]. To illustrate his argument, Heelas [1989] proposes that Yanomamö

wife-beating should *not* be considered aggression because inflicting physical injuries is how a husband shows that he “cares” for his wife. Silverberg and Gray [1992, p 12] find Heelas’ argument unconvincing and see value in both emic (actor-based) and etic (observer-based) perspectives: “Just because beatings may signify ‘caring’ to some Yanomamö women (how many is unclear) does not negate the etic reality of the beatings as violent acts” [Silverberg and Gray 1992, p 12]. Chagnon’s ethnographic observations [e.g., 1992, pp 124–125, 135] indicate that wives attempt to avoid being beaten by their husbands; in other words, they are not eager recipients of this type of husbandly “care,” a point noted by Silverberg and Gray in their critique of Heelas’ interpretation. The cultural context of Yanomamö wife-beating also suggests that this so-called “caring” occurs when a husband is angry at his wife and that much of it results from a husband’s sexual jealousy [cf. Chagnon 1992, pp 7, 124–125, 191, 192]. Chagnon [1992, pp 124–125] writes, for instance: “Some men are given to punishing their wives by holding the glowing end of a piece of firewood against them, producing painful and serious burns....It is not uncommon for a man to injure his sexually errant wife seriously and some men have even killed wives for infidelity by shooting them with arrows.”

Clearly, there is utility in both emic and etic perspectives. What is the point of arguing for the “correctness” of one approach to the total exclusion of the other? For instance, when the research goals are culturally comparative, then an etic perspective on aggression is critical, and when the goals are culturally interpretive, i.e., oriented toward understanding the belief system within a particular culture, focusing on emic “participant understandings” obviously is of central importance [Silverberg and Gray, 1992, p 12]. Furthermore, within a single study, emic and etic approaches need not be polarized to the point of mutual exclusivity. For instance, in studying the child-disciplinary practices employed in two Zapotec communities, I combined ethnographic and ethological methods to address both emic and etic considerations: “Ethnographic observations recorded in fieldnotes provide information on the cultural context and the cultural meaning of particular actions [i.e., an emic orientation], while the systematic sampling and precise definition of behavior elements employed during ethological observation permit quantitative as well as qualitative analyses to be performed [i.e., an etic approach]” [Fry, 1993, p 182]. Similarly, to return to the Gebusi case, clear, observer-based etic descriptions of the observable tranquillity of daily life and an objective calculation of homicide rates, when combined with an emic understanding of actor-based beliefs about maintaining “good company,” sorcerers, the reasons why sorcerers should be killed, and other facets of the cultural meaning (belief) system, provide a more complete and a more sophisticated understanding of aggression in this given cultural context than either a purely emic or a purely etic orientation does on its own.

Aggression Within the Broader Frame of Conflict Management

Wherever a society lies on the peaceful-to-violent continuum, certain mechanisms exist for dealing with conflict. Black [1993, chap 5] proposes a five-part typology of conflict management that includes *avoidance* of interaction, *self-help* (unilateral aggression), *settlement* (using a nonpartisan third party), *negotiation* to reach a joint decision, and *toleration*. For example, use of the avoidance approach is typical of the Buid [Gibson, 1989], Toraja [Hollan, 1988, 1997], and “La Paz” Zapotec [Fry, 1994b; O’Neill, 1981, 1989], and examples of third-party settlement procedures (sometimes with multiple third parties) are provided by the Kpelle *Moot* or “house palaver,” which airs a

dispute in front of a mediator [Gibbs, 1963], the Buid *Tultulan* or “collective discussions” [Gibson, 1989:66,75], the Semai *Becharaa'* or “formal dispute resolving assembly” [Robarchek, 1979, 1997], and the native Hawaiian *Ho'oponopono* or family-based “setting it right” meeting [Shook and Ke'ala Kwan, 1991]. In some societies, the emphasis is on punishing wrongdoers, but in many others, conflict management hinges on repairing strained or broken relationships [e.g., Gibson, 1989; Hollan, 1988; Robarchek, 1979, 1980, 1994, 1997; Shook and Ke'ala Kwan, 1991]. Some cultures have formal mechanisms for handling conflict, such as courts or arbitration boards, and other cultures rely strictly on informal mechanisms such as teasing, gossip, exclusion, ostracism, witchcraft, and so on [e.g., Cook, 1997; Fry, 1992a, 1994b; Hollan, 1988; O'Neill, 1981]. Olson [1997] provides an interesting illustration of informal conflict control, used on the Islands of Tonga, when he analyzes the *kava*-drinking circle to demonstrate how elders and other community members reinforce community values and how, through the use of humor and joking, inappropriate behavior can be criticized in a nonviolent manner, sometimes resulting in the reduction of conflict or the solution to a problem as the wayward individual learns of the dissatisfaction of the group and then makes a corrective change in behavior.

Cultures tend to have arrays of informal and sometimes formal conflict management processes and options. Certain types of aggression, or what Black [1993] labels self-help, may or may not be included in the culturally appropriate menu of conflict management options. Several recent anthropological works demonstrate the diversity of conflict resolution and conflict management strategies and options employed in different cultural settings [see Avruch et al., 1991; Fry and Björkqvist, 1997; Wolfe and Yang, 1996].

CONCLUSIONS

One purpose of this article, and the others in this special issue, is to present a sampling of topics and issues within the anthropology of aggression and conflict. This process has begun with brief considerations of (1) sex differences and (2) the cultural variation in aggression.

A cross-cultural consideration of aggression in females and males shows simultaneously that proximate cultural influences strongly affect the expression of both female and male aggression and that the overall pattern of sex differences in physical aggression is in congruence with evolutionary models. Phrasing a conclusion in this way avoids nature-nurture dichotomization [Fry, 1987]. This conclusion is based on cross-cultural observations that (1) females are not always nonaggressive, (2) male physical aggression is more frequent and more severe than female aggression, (3) in no culture is female aggression more lethal than male aggression, and (4) tremendous cultural variation exists in levels of male and female physical aggression and regarding how male and female aggression is expressed—recognizing that in some cultures one or both sexes may not engage in physical aggression at all.

The cross-cultural variation in aggression is remarkable. It is clear that nonviolent cultures exist, as do a range of more violent ones. Also, tremendous change can occur in the aggressivity level of a given culture, a point illustrated by the rapid shift toward peacefulness among the Chatino and Waorani. Along the peaceful-to-violent continuum, most cultures have a variety of mechanisms for dealing with conflict other than through

aggression [Black, 1993; Fry and Fry, 1997]. An implication for reducing aggression is to introduce new, and to enhance the use of existing, nonviolent informal and formal mechanisms for dealing with conflict.

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