

Rethinking 'senseless' violence: a new concept

Should we take it for granted that a violent person actually intends to hurt his victim? Possibly not, according to a novel theory by researcher Anthony R. Mawson.

Mawson notes that premeditated, intentional violence is rare, and that most acts of criminal violence "tend to arise from trivial disputes, often against a background of severe stress, and are performed impulsively in a state of intense emotion, and frequently under the influence of drugs or alcohol." The perpetrators of these crimes, he adds, often are unable to explain their motives and behavior.

Mawson theorizes that in many cases, violent attacks stem not from an intent to injure another person, but instead from a desire to obtain intense sensory input: "The biological goal of the behavior is sensory stimulation, while injury, for the most part, is an unwitting consequence of the behavior." This hypothesis, he says, is consistent with the fact that criminal behavior is strongly associated with alcohol and drug use, hypersexuality, and other behaviors related to sensation-seeking.

Mawson says that if much violence is actually stimulation-seeking behavior, then it may be possible to reduce this type of violence by providing its perpetrators with other, socially acceptable methods of obtaining sensory stimulation.

"Reinterpreting physical violence: outcome of intense stimulation-seeking behavior,"
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