

Cross-Cultural Differences in Aggression

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This chapter provides a cross-cultural overview of aggression in humans. The observation that cross-cultural similarities and differences exist in aggression suggests that a musical metaphor, variations on a theme, aptly applies. In certain musical works from symphonies to jazz compositions, a musical motif—a theme—can recur in alternative yet recognizable forms—the variations—perhaps at different volumes or tempos, or played by different instruments. The variations on a theme concept is clearly manifested, for instance, in Edvard Grieg’s “In the Hall of the Mountain King” (*Peer Gynt*, Suite No. 1, Op. 46).

This chapter will first and mostly consider cultural variations in aggression. It can be heuristically useful to conceptualize a cross-cultural peacefulness-to-aggressiveness continuum. A continuum model provides a more observation-based alternative to the problematic dichotomization of societies as either peaceful *or* aggressive. Some societies have achieved a very high level of internal peacefulness and some live without war, and hence they can be visualized as lying near the peacefulness end of the continuum. Cross-cultural comparisons also demonstrate that intergroup aggression increases with the complexity of social organization, with the hierarchal social structures of chiefdoms, kingdoms, and states exhibiting far more warfare than relatively egalitarian bands and tribal societies. Additionally, societies are not static and can become either more aggressive or more peaceful over time. A culturally comparative view indicates that the causes of aggression are multifaceted—including influences from such sources as learned values, socialization, social organization, economics and ecology, gender, and natural and sexual selection. Moreover, a study of peaceful and nonwarring societies suggests ways to reduce aggression within and among social groups—for instance, by restructuring institutions, promoting norms and values favoring peace over aggression, and socializing the young toward peaceful behavior (Fry, 2012).

A comparative perspective also reveals that, variations notwithstanding, certain themes persist in recognizable form across cultural settings, and these themes correspond with more general mammalian behavioral patterns. The first involves sex differences in physical aggression, wherein male aggression, when it occurs, tends to be more frequent and more damaging than female aggression. This does not mean that males everywhere are regularly aggressive but

rather that this theme interacts in degree of expression with a host of more proximate variables. A second overarching theme is that, as in mammals generally, restrained aggression, as opposed to unbridled violence, represents a recurring pattern in the expression of human aggression. A third theme is that the manifestations of aggression are heavily influenced by social learning and socialization processes in any sociocultural context—which brings us back to the variations side of the variations-on-a-theme metaphor. In the case of a highly social species with a long period of infant dependency, a high degree of behavioral plasticity, and reliance on learning and socialization by others, finding that aggression in that species is strongly affected by learning should come as no surprise. In each thematic case—sex differences, restraint, and importance of learning and socialization—variations on the central motif come into play, for example, in the ways that culturally specific attitudes, norms, and social structures influence social tolerance levels for aggressive behavior, types of aggression expressed, the interplay of female and male sex roles vis-à-vis aggression, the targets of aggressive acts that are seen as legitimate, and so forth. The variations-on-a-theme metaphor may serve as a useful reminder that both cross-cultural patterns and culturally based variations in human aggression are simultaneously apparent.

The terms “aggression” and “conflict” have multiple applications. “Aggression,” for instance, can be employed in describing a playground fight, the bothersome persistence of a telemarketer, child abuse, or drone strikes. Likewise, the word “conflict” can be applied to such diverse phenomena as psychic turmoil, political debates, and warfare. In this chapter, aggression is defined as the infliction of harm, pain, or injury on other individuals, and conflict as a perceived divergence of interests—where interests are broadly conceptualized to include values, needs, goals, and wishes—between two or more parties, often accompanied by feelings of anger or hostility (Fry, 2006; see also Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). An important point is that conflict need not be expressed through aggression. In fact, a consideration of cross-cultural data shows that people usually handle conflicts without using physical aggression. Humans have a remarkable capacity for getting along with each other peacefully, preventing physical aggression, limiting the scope and spread of violence, and restoring peace following aggression—all reflections of the restraint theme to which we will return later (Berndt, 1965; Fry, 2000, 2006, 2012; Koch, Altorki, Arno, & Hickson, 1977).

Cross-Cultural Variation in Aggression

Some societies anticipate and accept a certain amount of aggression, whereas others have achieved high degrees of social tranquility. We begin with a consideration of a highly peaceful society, the Ifaluk of Micronesia. Ifaluk is an atoll located halfway between Truk and Yap. A small population subsists by growing taro, fishing, and collecting breadfruit and coconuts. In 1947–1948, anthropologists Burrows (1952, 1963) and Spiro (1952) researched Ifaluk culture, and, about 30 years later, Lutz (1982, 1983, 1988) also conducted fieldwork on Ifaluk. All three researchers documented a lack of physical aggression among the people of Ifaluk and corresponding cultural expectations that people will not behave aggressively. Burrows (1952; see also Burrows, 1963, pp. 424–428) writes:

What is striking about Ifaluk ... is the fact that there is no discrepancy between its cultural values (the ideal culture) and its actual behavioral patterns (the real culture). Not one individual could remember a single case of murder, rape, robbery, or fighting; nor did the ethnographer witness such behavior in his seven-month study. It was almost impossible to convey to the people the

concept of murder, the thought of wantonly killing another person is so completely alien to their thinking. (p. 25)

In agreement with Burrows, Spiro (1952) states: "This culture is particularly notable for its ethic of nonaggression, and its emphasis on helpfulness, sharing, and cooperation" (p. 497). Spiro elaborates that "No display of aggression is permitted in interpersonal relationships; and in fact, no aggression is displayed at all" (p. 498). Minturn, Grosse, and Haider (1969) conducted a culturally comparative study of rape and concluded that Ifaluk is a society where men do not engage in rape. On the basis of her research on Ifaluk, Lutz (1982) explains that "murder is unknown; the most serious incident of aggression in a year involved the touching of one man's shoulder by another, a violation that resulted in the immediate payment of a severe fine" (p. 114).

Lutz (1982, 1983, 1988) explains that the Ifaluk response to violence is fear and horror, from which people flee, as illustrated by their reaction to the violence in US films. Following the Second World War, the US Navy brought movies, including Westerns, to Ifaluk, ironically on goodwill visits. Lutz (1988) tells how even decades later during her fieldwork the people of Ifaluk recounted "their panic on seeing people shot and beaten in those movies and relate[d] how some individuals were terrified for days afterwards. In a few such cases, the persons bec[a]me ill, and in many others, refused to see movies that arrived in later years" (p. 199). The Ifaluk people, in recalling this US film violence, reinforce for themselves their nonaggressive beliefs at the same time seem to mentally reaffirm that flight is the appropriate response to physical aggression. "In these rehearsals, they remind themselves and each other of the horrible consequences of violence which is casually accepted" (Lutz, 1988, p. 199).

Another Pacific society where warfare and cannibalism were accepted provides a stark contrast to Ifaluk as it shows the dramatic range of cultural variation and social attitudes about aggression. Large-scale chiefdoms on Fiji had six social classes. If ordered onto the field of battle by his chief, a man was expected to fight (Carneiro, 1990). Although standing armies did not exist on Fiji when rival Fijian chiefs engaged in war during the 1800s, the chiefs attempted to put as many combatants as possible into the fray. "Warfare among the Fijians was all-out and bloody, with no respect shown for sex or age. Women and children were killed ruthlessly and indiscriminately" (Carneiro, 1990, p. 199).

Depending on the outcome of a war, a chief could gain or lose power and status. The spoils of victory could mean enhanced prestige, a larger domain, and more tribute-paying subjects. War was accompanied by cannibalism. Fijian commoners were permitted to feast on enemies slain in battle, and consuming human flesh became a favorite meal of some of the chiefs (Carneiro, 1990). Perhaps the all-time record holder for the number of enemies eaten was a chief named Ra Undreundre, whose self-tallied count, recorded as notches on a log, totaled 900 war victims over his lifetime.

Ethnographic descriptions of additional societies with high levels of physical aggression include the Chatino of Mexico (Greenberg, 1989), the Gebusi of New Guinea (Knauft, 1987), and the Waorani of Ecuador (Robarchek & Robarchek, 1996, 1998). In addition to the Ifaluk, some of the most nonviolent societies described by anthropologists include the Batek of Malaysia (Endicott, 2013; Endicott & Endicott, 2008), the Paliyan of India (Gardner, 2000a, 2000b, 2004), the Sauteaux of North America (Hallowell, 1974), and the Lepcha of Nepal (Gorer, 1938/1967). Descriptions of internally peaceful societies and their methods of dealing with social conflicts nonviolently can be found in Bonta (1993, 1996, 1997, 2013), Fry (2006), Howell and Willis (1989), Kemp and Fry (2004), and Montagu (1978). Lists of

nonwarring societies and peace systems as well as lists of internally peaceful societies can be found in Bonta and Fry (2006) and Fry (2006, 2012).

Aside from the detailed ethnographic case studies, such as Ifaluk and Fiji, intercultural variability in aggression is reflected in comparisons of homicide rates and other forms of physical aggression. In a sample of nomadic forager societies, the incidences of ethnographically mentioned lethal events (whether manslaughter, homicide, feud, or warfare) ranged from 0 to 69 per society, with an average of 7.01 per ethnographic case (Fry & Söderberg, 2013). The cross-cultural variability of homicide is also shown in a study by Palmer (1965), who was able to assign each of the 40 societies in his sample a homicide score that ranged between 0 and 21, with the median score being 8.4. Cross-national comparisons in recent years also reflect the intersocietal differences in homicide rates. For 2012, the homicide rates per 100,000, lowest to highest, for selected world cities were: Singapore, 0.2; Hong Kong, 0.4; Reykjavik, Iceland, 0.5; Auckland, New Zealand, 0.7; Rome, 0.9; Paris, 1.8; New York, 5.1; Nairobi, 6.1; Juba, South Sudan, 12.0; Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 29.1; San Salvador, El Salvador, 52.5; and Panama City, Panama, 53.1 (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013, Table 8.4). Cross-cultural variation in aggression more generally is apparent in results published by Masumura (1977) on incidences of within-society aggression in a cross-cultural sample: 21 societies were determined to have low internal violence and 26 to have high internal violence.

A Peacefulness-to-Aggressiveness Continuum

A culturally comparative perspective suggests that societies can be aligned along a peacefulness-to-aggressiveness continuum that ranges between substantial violence at one pole and the near absence of violence at the other, with the majority of cultures lying in between (Fry, 2006). This cross-cultural variation in aggression is reflected in the range of internal and external conflict scores across a sample of 90 societies from around the world (Ross, 1993). Ross (1993, p. 84) discovered that levels of internal and external conflict positively correlate with each other ($r = .39$; $p < .001$; $N = 90$).

Fry (2006) employed the internal conflict scores for the 90 societies to arrange the societies along a 12-point peacefulness-to-aggressiveness continuum. Of the Lepcha of the Himalayas, one of the seven societies scored at the lowest rating of internal conflict. Ross (1993) writes:

Overt conflicts are relatively few and not very severe on the rare occasions when they occur. Theft is virtually unknown and the last authenticated murder took place *two centuries* before Gorer's fieldwork in the 1930's. ... Quarreling is so strongly disapproved that it is the responsibility of all to make every effort to prevent disputes or to stop them once they have broken out. (pp. 90–91, emphasis added)

Moving to the opposite end of the 12-level spectrum, the Jívaro of Ecuador had a saying, "I was born to die fighting" (Harner, 1972, p. 170). Ross (1993) writes of the Jívaro:

Concerns about conflict and violence affect most aspects of daily life. There is little institutionalized cooperation and little interpersonal trust. As a result, individuals, with some assistance from close kin and occasional friends, seek security in personal achievements and the establishment of reputations for aggressiveness. Feuding is pervasive and constant attention to possible threats is necessary for survival. (pp. 86–87)

In Ross's data, there are more societies at the peaceful end of the continuum than at the high conflict pole. Of the sample, 16% received the lowest or second lowest internal conflict score, whereas only 7% received the highest or second highest score (Fry, 2006). Otherwise, with some rises and dips, the cultures are rather evenly distributed across the spectrum of internal conflict. However, even so-called aggressive societies are not violent all of the time.

Visualizing a peacefulness-to-aggressiveness continuum is useful for several reasons. It highlights that to dichotomize between peaceful and aggressive misses much of the range of variation in aggressiveness. The vast majority of societies are neither highly peaceful nor highly aggressive but instead are spread out across the middle range of the cross-cultural distribution. The peacefulness-to-aggressiveness continuum highlights the extensive range of societal possibilities, including the possibility of creating peaceful societies.

Another point suggested by a continuum perspective is that the position of any given society may not be immutably fixed through time. The fact that a culture has a high level of physical aggression today does not preclude a shift toward peacefulness in the future. Shifts toward violence and shifts toward peacefulness have been ethnographically and historically documented to occur over years, generations, and centuries (Fry, 2006). For example, Robarchek and Robarchek (1996, 1998) describe how the Waorani of Ecuador managed to decrease their extremely high rate of homicide by over 90% in just a few years:

The catalyst that began the transformation of the Waorani culture of war was the entry into Waorani territory of two North American Protestant missionary women accompanied by two Waorani women. ... As bands became convinced that the feuding could stop, peace became a goal in its own right, even superseding the desire for revenge. ... The killing stopped because the Waorani themselves made a conscious decision to end it. (p. 72)

A similar case of a community plagued by murders and brutal attacks that managed to reduce rampant violence comes from a Chatino village in Mexico (Greenberg, 1989). The community brought about land reforms and enacted new laws. In a movement initiated by village women who were fed up with losing their men to blood feuds, the community government strictly enforced a new ordinance that banned alcohol consumption and the carrying of weapons. "These measures were effective and put an end to the blood feuding and factionalism in the village" (Greenberg, 1989, p. 231).

Another case of violence reduction has been reported for the Enga of New Guinea (Wiessner & Pupu, 2012). After the introduction of shotguns and M-16 rifles resulted in a bloodbath, Enga elders reintroduced traditional mediation mechanisms to resolve conflicts without violence. The effect was to dramatically decrease the killing (Wiessner & Pupu, 2012).

Willis (1989) describes another transformation among the Fipa of Tanzania away from civil war "to construct a peaceful, orderly, and prosperous society" (p. 137). History and anthropology provide examples such as the Chatino, Enga, Fipa, and Waorani of societies that have supplanted violence and war with more peaceful ways to deal with social conflict, sometimes with remarkable rapidity. Such cases contradict the assumption that nothing can be done to reduce violence within a given society.

Additionally, the fact that numerous peaceful societies exist at all, as represented on the peaceful end of the peacefulness-to-aggressiveness continuum, shows that humans clearly have the capacity to create social systems that manifest very low levels aggression. The ethnographic descriptions of over 80 highly peaceful societies prove that creating nonviolent social life is

entirely within the human potential and not merely a utopian fantasy (Bonta, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2013; Bonta & Fry, 2006; Fry, 2006, 2012).

Types of Aggression and Social Complexity

Are patterns of aggression related to social organization? Various anthropological findings suggest that they are. In the most basic form of human social organization, the nomadic forager band, each individual has a high degree of personal autonomy. Nomadic bands are egalitarian in ethos and behavior. In other words, authority is minimal and leadership is weak. This means that no one has the authority to order others to engage in intergroup violence. Malinowski (1941) made the apropos observation that, “Under conditions where portable wealth does not exist; where food is too perishable and too clumsy to be accumulated and transported; where slavery is of no value because every individual consumes exactly as much as he produces—force is a useless implement for the transfer of wealth” (p. 538). For these and other reasons, nomadic band societies are not warlike and most aggression that does occur is motivated by highly personal reasons such as sexual jealousy, competition over a member of the opposite sex, spousal disagreements, revenge, and insults (Fry, 2006; Fry & Söderberg, 2013).

As in nomadic band society, tribes lack definitive social hierarchies and clear class stratification. However, tribal societies tend to be segmented into subunits such as lineages on the basis of kinship. Consequently, grievances can fuel feuds between kin groups, and feuding is fairly typical in tribal societies (Reyna, 1994). Stratified, centralized societies—chiefdoms and states—open the door to more socially organized and expansive forms of aggression in the form of warfare, slavery, and other types of violence-based exploitation. As Reyna (1994) emphasizes, in centralized polities such as chiefdoms and states, the power of some people to dominate and control others increases many times over what is possible at the level of bands and tribes.

In assessing the overall relationship of aggression to social organization, Van der Dennen (1995) concludes that “one of the most consistent and robust findings is the correlation between ‘primitivity’ and absence of war or low-level warfare, or in other words, the correlation between war and civilization” (p. 142). Similarly, Haas (2001) reviews the worldwide archeological evidence and generalizes that “the level, intensity, and impact of warfare tend to increase as cultural systems become more complex” (p. 343). Haas (2001) also points out that economic and demographic variables, along with complexity, are part of the picture when it comes to understanding the origins of war.

This tendency for greater social complexity to be associated with war is also apparent in the worldwide archaeological record as the appearance of the first ancient state civilizations, beginning 5,000 to 6,000 years ago, ushered in wars of state expansion and conquest, standing armies, military leaders, evidence of fortresses, specialized weapons, barracks, and martial scenes on stelae, pottery, and walls (Fry, 2006; Haas, 1996, 1999, 2001). Such features of extensive and highly organized aggression are generally lacking among less complex societies (Fry, 2006; Malinowski, 1941; Reyna, 1994).

In conclusion, individually motivated aggression can occur at any level of social organization; the development of social segments such as lineages and clans (as in tribal societies) can facilitate intergroup feuding; warfare in its most elaborate forms enters the picture once the social hierarchies and authoritative leadership found in chiefdoms and states develop, along

with other changes toward social complexity. Ferguson (2013) proposes that combinations of interacting factors create the preconditions for the onset of warfare: “geographic concentration of critical resources, sedentism, high population density, food storage and/or livestock, social divisions creating separate collective identities, social and political hierarchy or ranking, monopolizable long-distance trade in valuable prestige goods, and major ecological reversals affecting food production” (p. 192). Most of these factors only became relevant during or just slightly preceding the agricultural revolution that began about 10,000 years ago.

Whereas it must always be kept in mind that aggression is strongly influenced by the sociocultural environment, nonetheless some overall patterns of the effects of social organization on the types of aggressive behavior manifested are apparent. The kinds of aggression observable in nomadic forager band societies stem largely from personal disputes. Evidence of interpersonal aggression stretches far back across the archeological record, whereas the earliest evidence for warfare is relatively recent, archeologically speaking, and occurs concurrently with a host of other changes toward complexity in human social organization (Ferguson, 2013; Fry, 2006; Fry & Söderberg, 2013; Haas, 1996, 2001; Malinowski, 1941; Reyna, 1994).

Themes That Cross-Cut Cultural Variations: Sex Differences and Restraint

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a cross-cultural perspective reveals themes as well as variations. To consider two examples, first, a cross-cultural perspective suggests that sex differences in aggressive behavior exist in humans. As a group, men behave more aggressively than do women. For instance, anthropology shows that it is virtually always men who ambush, feud, raid, and go to war (Burbank, 1987; Fry, 1998, 2006). This pattern of greater male aggressiveness is apparent across cultural examples: Fijian warriors from rival chiefdoms slaughtered each other as well as women and children; feuding Chatino men stained the streets of their Mexican village with blood; young Enga men from New Guinea, locally dubbed “Rambos,” created a bloodbath with shotguns and M-16s; and South American Jívaro and Waorani men conducted the revenge raids that became established patterns in their societies. As an evidence-based conclusion, nonlethal physical aggression also is more severe among males than among females (Burbank, 1987; Fry, 1998, 2006; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).

The cross-cultural theme that men are more physically aggressive than women is also clearly reflected in sex differences in homicides (Burbank, 1994; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Fry & Söderberg, 2013; UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). Irrespective of the overall rate of homicide for a society, the sex difference theme is consistent across countries and societies. “Some 95 percent of homicide perpetrators at the global level are also male; a share that is consistent across countries and regions, irrespective of the homicide typology or weapon used. The global male homicide rate is almost four times that of females (9.7 versus 2.7 per 100,000)” (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013, p. 13).

Not a single ethnographic case where the females of a society killed more frequently than the males of the same society has been located. Ethnographic studies, in parallel to worldwide crime statistics, support the conclusion that men kill substantially more than women. For instance, across 148 lethal events described for 21 nomadic forager societies, only 4% involved women as the perpetrators or participants (Fry & Söderberg, 2013; see also Daly & Wilson, 1988).

This does not mean that women never engage in physical aggression. Based on a sample of 137 societies from around the world, Burbank (1987) documents that in the majority of the sample women sometimes physically attacked others. Burbank (1987) also found that the majority of instances of physical aggression by women involved competition over a man. The point is that, whereas women are capable of committing acts of extreme aggression such as homicide and do engage in various types of physical aggression from time to time, from a cross-cultural point of view, women are less violent than men (Burbank, 1987; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Fry, 2006; Fry, Schober, & Björkqvist, 2010). An evolutionary perspective evokes the concepts of sexual selection and parental investment theory to offer functional explanations for the observed sex differences in humans, which correspond with sex differences of mammalian aggression more generally (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Darwin, 1871/1998; Fry 1998, 2006; Fry et al., 2010).

As a second theme, a cross-cultural perspective suggests that patterns of human agonism—which include noncontact threats and bluffs as well as physical aggression—for the most part correspond with the predominant patterns recorded across mammalian species wherein risks of serious injury and death are minimized, restrained agonism during competition is typical, within-species lethality is the exception rather than the rule, and evolutionary costs and benefits to fitness can be seen as reflecting a durable evolutionary legacy of adaptations for keeping aggression within limited bounds, thus collectively contributing to relatively noninjurious social life.

Fry and Szala (2013) put forth a sequence of progressively escalated agonistic behavior consisting of (1) avoidance of others; (2) noncontact displays such as vocalizations, visual threats, and, in humans, verbal insults, bluff and bluster, warnings, resolution proposals, and so forth; (3) ritualized or restrained physical fighting; and (4) unrestrained, serious, or lethal fighting. Fry and Szala (2013) propose that the first three approaches reduce risks to opponents and greatly outnumber the fourth—that is, severe fights or injurious and lethal altercations. Data from primatology and ethnography suggest that it is in the interests of rivals to “follow the rules” of restrained fighting so as not to expend unnecessary energy or to increase the risk of injury and death through severe fighting (Bernstein, 2007; Fry, 2006; Fry & Szala, 2013). Restrained forms of within-species agonism make theoretical sense and dramatically predominate in mammalian species including humans (Berndt, 1965; for examples, see Fry, 2006; Fry et al., 2010; Gómez, Verdú, González-Megías, & Méndez, 2016).

Contra the impression given by the news and entertainment media, from one society to the next, prosocial, cooperative, and helping behavior characterize most human social interactions. As in other social primates, restraint and noncontact behavior predominate during situations of human conflict (Fry, 2006; Fry et al., 2010; Fry & Szala, 2013). The overwhelming majority of human behavior is nonviolent. Across the cross-cultural landscape, conflicts are managed without physical aggression through withdrawal of one or both opponents, toleration of a situation, discussion of the issues, reprimands, withdrawal of support, negotiation of agreements, payment of compensation, third-party processes such as mediation or adjudication, sulking, apologizing, forgiving, reconciling, and so forth (Fry, 2006). Aggression is relatively rare and restrained in comparison to a plethora of other approaches to conflict and competition.

In correspondence with the within-species behavioral pattern among other mammals, human disputing behavior rarely entails severe aggression. Certainly this observation should not be taken as a denial that humans ever fight and kill, for, as we have seen, there is bountiful evidence—ranging from the Chatino, Fijians, Gebusi, and Waorani to Islamic State fighters

and terrorists—that humans are capable of within-species killing. Rather, the point is that serious, injurious fighting is exceptional rather than the norm, and that the same restraint in aggressive competition that is a hallmark of mammalian behavior generally also predominates in humans across a variety of cultural circumstances. Homicides, after all, are tallied per 100,000 per annum, not per 100 per annum. Even during the Second World War, all the European war deaths per annum between 1939 and 1945, coupled with domestic homicides, constituted less than 1% of the population (Malby, 2010). The overwhelming majority of human beings never kill anybody in the course of their lives. In fact, across the peacefulness-to-aggressiveness continuum of human behavior, the vast majority of people in any society awake on a typical morning and live through a violence-free day—and the rarity of physical aggression generally continues one day after the next. In other words, the overwhelming majority of people across cultures, even the most violent ones, pass a typical day without physically attacking anyone, without physically being attacked, and, in all likelihood, without personally witnessing any physical aggression among the hundreds or thousands of people they encounter.

Social life, however, does involve daily conflicts, and the vast majority of these conflicts are handled without any physical aggression and without any physical injuries. A cross-cultural vantage point shows that people will simply tolerate and avoid in response to many conflicts or engage in any number of conflict-resolution techniques (Berndt, 1965; Bonta, 1996; Fry, 2000, 2006, 2012; Koch et al., 1977). For example, humans regularly just walk away or bite their tongue; verbally reprimand, insult, threaten, or argue; negotiate, mediate, arbitrate, or litigate in court; punch, wrestle, or duel; and only very occasionally kill. The percentage of grievances, disputes, and rivalries that end with one or more corpses is minuscule compared to the number of such conflicts that are resolved by nonlethal means. Even among the societies located at the most aggressive end of the peacefulness-to-aggressiveness continuum, such as the Gebusi and Waorani, daily life generally is peaceful (Knauff, 1987). Even during the period when Waorani raiding was most intense, “years passed between raids” (Robarchek & Robarchek, 1998, p. 19). Robarchek and Robarchek (1996) report regarding the Waorani that “the only overt violence that we saw during both of our field trips was one instance of a child attacking his brother” (p. 66).

In conclusion, a theme of restraint emerges from the adoption of a culturally comparative view. Most agonism in humans occurs without any physical contact, making it by default non-injurious (Bernstein, 2007; Fry et al., 2010; Fry & Szala, 2013). With language available, a multitude of possibilities exist to deal with conflicts and competition that minimize risks to life and limb. Restraint generally prevails. The fact that even the highest recorded homicide rates per annum are merely a fraction of 1% of the population shows that killing in humans is the exception, not the rule. Given the importance of cultural influences on human aggression as reflected in the ethnographically comparative cases considered in this chapter, humans clearly can take various measures to prevent and reduce the expression of physical aggression within and among their societies (Fry, 2012).

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