



Psychological Mechanisms of the Influence of Empathic Characteristics on Adolescent Aggression

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Abstract: The author defines such concepts as aggression and empathy, considers development of the empathic abilities in juvenile age, and its correlation with the aggression. The author carries out a research aimed to reveal special features of the adolescent aggression according to the different empathy levels.

Keywords: aggression, aggressive behavior, empathy, adolescence.

In modern psychology, there is a certain confusion in the division of such definitions as aggressiveness, aggression and aggressive behavior. However, in our opinion, the most complete and accurate definition of aggressiveness given by M.Yu. Kondratiev, who believes that aggressiveness is a relatively stable personality trait, manifested in the subject's readiness for aggressive behavior, that is, for a sequence of actions aimed at causing physical or psychological damage, up to and including the destruction of an object, another person or group of people. On the other hand, aggression can be defined as "motivated destructive behavior that contradicts the norms and rules of coexistence of people in society, harming the objects of attack (animate and inanimate), causing physical harm to people or causing them psychological discomfort (negative experiences, a state of tension, fear, depression, etc.)." Meanwhile, there is an opinion about the disparity between the essential characteristics of aggression and aggressive behavior, and aggression in this case can be



considered something like a behavioral model, expressed in aggressive behavior itself. In this case, the behavior itself cannot be assessed from the point of view of its destructiveness or constructiveness, since its motivational component relates to a model of behavior, namely aggression. Psychological Dictionary edited by V.P. Zinchenko and B.G. Meshcheryakov defines aggressive behavior as one of the forms of response to various unfavorable physical and mental life situations that cause stress, frustration, etc. condition. Based on all of the above, it can be argued that in the structure of aggressiveness, aggression refers to its behavioral component.

According to one classification, aggression can be divided into:

- physical - the use of physical force against another person or object - and verbal
- the expression of negative feelings through verbal reactions, through their form (quarrel, screaming) and/or content (threat, curses, swearing);
- direct - directly directed against any object or subject - and indirect, expressed in actions that are directed in a roundabout way at another person (malicious gossip, jokes, etc.), as well as actions characterized by lack of direction and disorder (explosions of rage manifested in screaming, stomping feet, beating the table with fists, etc.)
- instrumental - aggression, which is a means of achieving a goal - and hostile - aggression, expressed in actions whose purpose is to cause harm to the object of aggression

The problem of aggression in adolescence becomes particularly relevant. Puberty, characterized by puberty, changes in the social situation of development, as well as serious intrapsychic transformations, prepares fertile ground for various forms of aggression and even cruelty. G.E. Breslav identifies, among other things, an insufficient level of development of communication skills and disturbances in relationships with peers as the main psychological characteristics that provoke aggressive behavior in children and adolescents. According to Breslav, at this time, two competing drives collide in the souls of future boys and girls: the need for intimacy and belonging to another and the desire to preserve and establish their own identity. The feeling of loneliness, the



loss of the integrity of the world, the discrepancy between one's real "I" and ideals (often false), as well as the desire to break one's dependence on parents, the need to independently make vital decisions leads to the need for aggression. This aggression is not always destructive. G.E. Breslav, like a number of other authors (E. From, A.A. Rean, Ya.L. Kolominsky), believes that in children, like in adults, there are two forms of aggression: non-destructive aggressiveness and hostile destructiveness. The first, being a necessary adaptation mechanism, encourages the child to compete in the world around him, protect his rights and interests, and serves to develop cognition and the ability to rely on himself. The second, non-adaptive in nature, is destructive and is characterized by the desire to cause harm for the sake of pleasure.

Emotional development in adolescence is directly related to changes in the adolescent's relationships with peers and parents. While communication with peers becomes an urgent need for him, in relations with parents there is a desire for isolation and emancipation [8]. Friendships become especially significant during this period, implying the desire for complete understanding and acceptance of the other. Although the ability to understand the emotions of another person at this age is at the initial stage of its development [9], researchers (I.M. Yusupov, N.P. Ansimova, O.V. Tyutyaeva) note a gradual increase in the abilities for empathy and assistance with age, which are components of the general ability to empathize. According to I.M. Yusupov, empathy is a holistic psychological phenomenon that connects the conscious and subconscious levels of the psyche, the purpose of which is "penetration" into the inner world of another person or an anthropomorphized object. Data from foreign researchers indicate strong connections between empathy and moral behavior. It is the ability to empathy, helping to reduce general anxiety and aggressiveness that increases in adolescence, that is the basis for friendly relationships. Highly empathetic children tend to explain their failures in interpersonal interaction by internal reasons, on the other hand, children with low empathy scores give them an external assessment. In addition, it was experimentally revealed that an attitude towards a sympathetic attitude



towards another contributes to the emergence of a feeling of guilt for the observed ill-being of the object, which can reduce the likelihood of aggression. In order to identify the characteristics of aggressiveness in adolescents, characterized by a certain level of empathy abilities, a study was conducted in May 2011 with the participation of 27 8th grade students of Municipal Educational Institution Lyceum No. 5 in Orenburg. The age of the participants ranged from 13 to 14 years. The stimulus material used was the "Methodology for diagnosing empathic abilities of V.V. Boyko" and "Questionnaire for diagnosing the ability to empathize by A. Mehrabien, N. Epstein" to identify the level of empathic abilities, as well as "Methodology for diagnosing the state of aggression (Bass-Darki questionnaire)" to identify the level of aggression.

The hypothesis of the study was the assumption that a low level of empathy in adolescence causes a high level of aggressiveness. The results of the diagnostic examination were processed in two stages. At the first stage, the obtained data were standardized and converted into percentages. Then, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient was calculated between the series of questionnaire data. At the second stage, the total group of subjects was divided into two subgroups: subjects with low and very low scores on empathic abilities and subjects with average and high scores on this scale. Next, in both subgroups, the percentage of individuals with high rates of propensity for aggression was calculated. To confirm the statistical significance of the differences, Fisher's ϕ test was used. Analysis of results using the methods of V.V. Boyko and "Diagnostics of the state of aggression (BassaDarki questionnaire)" based on the use of the Spearman correlation coefficient allowed us to draw the following conclusions. The level of empathic abilities of the subjects is in a very weak inverse correlation with the level of physical aggression ($r=-0.135$), but is in a statistically significant moderately expressed direct correlation with the level of indirect aggression ($r=0.441$; statistical significance at $p<0.05$).

As a result of calculating the percentage of individuals with high rates of propensity for aggression in the subgroups of subjects with low and very low rates of empathic abilities (1st subgroup) and subjects with average and high



rates of these abilities (2nd subgroup), we made the following conclusions. The number of subjects with a level of physical aggression in the first subgroup is higher than in the second. Thus, the number of subjects with an indicator of physical aggression above 50% in the first subgroup is 55% of the total number of group members, while in the second group this indicator is 42.9% (according to the Boyko and Bassa-Darki questionnaire). The number of subjects with a level of indirect aggression above 50% in the second group is higher than in the first (according to the Mehrabien-Epstein method: 57.1% in the second group and 38.5% in the first group; according to the Boyko method: 85.7% - in the second group, 35% - in the first group - $\phi^*_{em} = 2.505$, the differences are statistically significant at $p < 0.01$). The same is with the indicators on the "Feeling of Guilt" scales (according to the Mehrabien-Epstein method: 85.7% in the second group and 69.2% in the first; according to Boyko's method: 85.7% in the second group, 75% in in the first), "Verbal aggression" (according to the Mehrabien-Epstein method: 71.4% in the second group and 46.2% in the first), "Irritation" (according to the Mehrabien-Epstein method: 64.3% in the second group and 23.1% - in the first - $\phi^*_{em} = 2.228$, the differences are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$; according to Boyko's method: 55.6% - in the second group, 35% - in the first).

Thus, with a high level of empathy, the level of physical aggression may decrease, but overall aggressiveness will most likely remain unchanged, either undergoing incomplete sublimation (turning into indirect aggression), or into the internal plane - towards oneself (turning into a feeling of guilt), or accumulating and forming a state of irritation (actually, turning into irritation). In addition, a tendency towards physical aggression with an increase in the level of empathy may possibly turn into a tendency towards verbal aggression. However, it should be noted that the development of some individual types of empathic abilities, in particular, the penetrating ability of empathy, that is, the ability to feel another person, understand him and create a favorable atmosphere for interacting with him, improve his emotional state, can have a more effective corrective effect on aggressiveness of individuals, reducing it in



all main indicators. On the other hand, a high correlation between the level of general empathic abilities and certain types of aggression most likely indicates the high sensitivity of subjects characterized by high empathic abilities to the emotional background of the group (class), and the inability to resist emotional contagion. It is known that in adolescence the general level of aggressiveness, as a rule, is greatly increased, and persons who are able to sense an aggressive atmosphere stronger than others, in the absence of a high level of subjective control, are susceptible to identification with the group, with the emotions of the majority, which, perhaps, increases their aggressiveness .

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