

Ethics of Aggression Research

Papers From a Symposium of International Society for Research on Aggression

David B. Adams

Department of Psychology, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut

Three papers are presented from the first symposium on ethical issues in aggression research of the International Society for Research on Aggression held at the biennial meetings 1980 in Haren, The Netherlands. The symposium reflected a growing awareness of the Society that their research is a matter for public concern and scrutiny, both for its potentially good uses, and for its potential misuse and misinterpretation. A paper by Santiago Genoves, a Mexican anthropologist, outlined some of the issues concerning the dissemination of information and misinformation of aggression to the public, along with an extensive bibliography on the subject. A paper by Paul Brain, a British zoologist, addressed the issues surrounding the use of animals in aggression research and the arguments being used in public attacks upon it. Daniel Wikler, a practitioner of normative ethics from the United States, discussed ethics as theory and as practice and suggested some of the types of actions that the Society could consider undertaking.

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INTRODUCTION

The International Society for Research on Aggression initiated a new tradition at their 1980 meetings in Haren, The Netherlands, when they sponsored a symposium on ethical issues in aggression research, including

Address reprint requests to David B. Adams, Department of Psychology, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06457.

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the three papers that are presented here for publication. The symposium both reflected and stimulated the growth of awareness among Society members that our research is, on the one hand, potentially useful for alleviating problems of violence in the world, and, on the other hand, vulnerable to misuse and misinterpretation. The Ethics Committee of the Society planned the symposium as part of an ongoing program of discussion and action which is supported by a grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation.

The authors of the papers presented here were chosen to represent three of the major areas of concern and three different perspectives on the ethics of aggression research. Santiago Genoves is Professor of Anthropology at the Institute of Anthropological Investigations in Mexico City and has long been concerned, as a member of the Society and its Council, with human violence, its causes, and its representation in the mass media. At the meetings in which the symposium occurred, many of us had a chance to view his remarkable film "Pax?," based on his book entitled *Is Peace Possible*. Paul Brain is Senior Lecturer in Zoology at the University College of Swansea and is President-Elect of the Society. As an animal researcher in Great Britain, he is particularly concerned with the wave of concern, and in some cases actual attacks, upon animal research. Dan Wikler is Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin and has taken a temporary position as Staff Philosopher with the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research in Washington, D.C. He is in a unique position to provide a specialist's perspective on the ethical issues in aggression research.

The symposium was attended by a large portion of the Society members at the meetings and many of them took part in a vigorous discussion following presentation of the papers. In addition to discussion of specific points raised by the papers, there were a number of suggestions for future work such as those enumerated by Wikler at the conclusion of his paper. John Paul Scott, a former president of the Society, suggested that symposia such as this should become a regular part of the meetings, although specific concerns and problems may vary from year to year. Samuel Corson supported the idea that position papers should be prepared for discussion, endorsement by the Society, and eventual release to the public. And President of the Society, Pierre Karli, suggested that the Society Bulletin should be used as a forum where specific ethical issues could be discussed.

The Ethics Committee of the Society has continued its work since the 1980 meetings in light of the favorable response to the symposium. As suggested above, it is planning another such symposium at the 1982 meetings to be held in Mexico City, and is using the Society's Bulletin as a

forum for an ongoing discussion of ethical issues, it is also sending out and analyzing the responses to a questionnaire on ethical issues to be completed by members of the Society. In a related development, it has become involved in the planning of the curriculum of the newly created United Nations University for Peace that will soon open its doors in Costa Rica. Other possible actions include compilation of a basic bibliography on ethical issues in aggression research (already initiated in the papers presented here), compilation of a case history file, and sponsorship of a book on ethics of aggression and peace research, perhaps to be developed at an international symposium. The increased awareness and activity concerning ethical issues of the International Society for Research on Aggression anticipates what many of us expect to be an increased awareness of these issues by the general public. This was stated eloquently by a report of the American Association for the Advancement of Science concerning a study that found a great increase in the number of ethics committees in U.S. scientific organizations:

The 1980's will be a period of even further scrutiny of the professions, and it is time for the societies to become active participants in weaving the threads of science and technology into the fabric of our lives, in a way that enhances the very essence and dignity of our shared humanity.