

# Burning Books in Human History as Evidence of Extremely Aggressive Activation of the ‘Toxic Power Syndrome’

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## ABSTRACT

In this scientific essay, we highlight some common aspects of the issue of transferred aggression and symbolic aggression from the perspective of ‘innovative agonology’ – acronym INNOAGON. The cognitive goal of the essay is just the most general rationale regarding an open question: whether this new applied science will increase the chance of at least offsetting in the public space the pernicious, multidimensional effects of pervasive, commercially motivated violence and aggression. It would be ludicrous to equate the criterion for balancing the pathology of violence and aggression with the time and number of messages available to the two parties in the daily cycle. One is represented by entities for whom it is an attractive commodity or the dominant mode of action. The other - in addition to agonologists, individuals and collective actors who are aware (although not all of them refer to scientific evidence) that the continuation of such a practice on a macro level is a simple path to the self-destruction of global civilization. Potential perpetrators could be public affairs coordinators with the highest intensity of ‘toxic power syndrome’ and at the same time with access to nuclear and biological weapons. The claim that enhancing ‘creative power syndrome’ at every stage of ontogenesis is the most profitable investment of an individual is both a simple demonstration of the power of evidence-based argumentation. However, social circumstances unambiguously limit applications to the micro scale.

**Keywords:** Creative power syndrome, Self-defence, Toxic power syndrome

## INTRODUCTION

Scientific knowledge about violence and aggression comes from various sciences, and this is not an isolated case. Both of these phenomena, like many others, are and can be studied in different contexts. However, violence and aggression are among those phenomena that are commented on daily in the public space (as opposed to the many phenomena that are subject almost exclusively to scientific exploration and most often discussed in journals and at conferences in narrow circles of specialists). This is one of the most important reasons that it is in the public space that the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. But there are scientific and popular scientific works whose authors emphasize that sometimes this practice (of using the names

‘violence’ and ‘aggression’) interchangeably also takes place in the field of scientific research (eg. Vitiello and Stoff, 1997; Surzykiewicz, 2000).

This issue is not discussed in the public space, as the appeal (as horrific it may sound) violence and aggression for very many people is paramount. Only a secondary issue is whether the message is only verbal, only documented in video technology (including the film industry), or a combination of both forms. There are just as many supporters of so-called ‘strong action cinema’, or even horror cinema, as there are those fascinated by literature and fine art with themes of extreme horror, or finally watching live bloody fights of neo-gladiatorial fighters camouflaged under the attractive name of mixed martial arts (Piepiora and Witkowski, 2020; Kalina and Kruszewski, 2023). This being so, the primary issue is ultimately not the attractiveness of what is outside a person, but the inner needs that are in different relations either with the phenomenon of violence or aggression, or both together. Therefore, it is difficult to expect a reflection on the differences between the two phenomena to prevail among this kind of people. This observation does not change the known facts that there are people with innate (inherited) increased aggressiveness and there are also those who become aggressive over time as a result of environmental influences. The very vehicles of negative patterns are the 24-hour news services dominated by the topics of violence and aggression and the numerous offerings of bloody spectacles for entertainment.

In this scientific essay, we draw attention to some common aspects of the issue of displaced aggression and symbolic aggression from the perspective of ‘innovative agonology’ – acronym INNOAGON (Kalina, 2023; Kalina and Kruszewski, 2023). Not least due to editorial constraints, the cognitive goal of the essay is only the most general rationale regarding an open question: whether this new applied science will increase the chance to at least counterbalance in public space the pernicious, multidimensional effects of ubiquitous, commercially motivated violence and aggression.

## **SOME METHODOLOGICAL DILEMMAS**

Of course, it would be absurd to equate the criterion for balancing the pathology of violence and aggression with the time and number of messages available to the two parties in a daily cycle. One is represented by actors for whom it is an attractive commodity or the dominant mode of action. The other, in addition to agonologists, is represented by individuals and collective actors who are aware (although not all of them refer to scientific evidence) that the continuation of such a practice on a macro level is a straightforward path to the self-destruction of global civilisation.

This leading criterion is the strength of the argument, and since INNOAGON is a science, in estimating its possibilities, it would be a mistake to ignore its limitations. The most obvious one is the disproportionate competitiveness of science in relation to the attractions offered by literature, music, film art, sport, etc., but above all the ‘daily sensations package’ saturated with violence and aggression with practically unlimited access thanks to the Internet.

Paradoxically, the freedom of science, is at the same time a source of many self-limitations, without which, however, it would be difficult to achieve the required credibility of evidence identified with the realm of non-determinism. However, the freedom to define phenomena with identical names even by researchers representing the same discipline of science in many cases complicates the achievement of precisely consistent cognitive goals. The consequences can only be seen in areas of application. Evidence that the psychological concept of catharsis as a method of reducing aggressiveness has proved to be counterproductive is provided by everyday reality, in which consent to numerous varieties of violence and is the norm with a tendency towards further liberalisation.

Conventional wisdom about liberalisation does not fall within the canons of science - and this criterion is not limited to the field of exploration of the phenomena of violence and aggression. The boundaries of interpretation in science, in the most general sense, are determined by the subject matter of the individual disciplines. Even if the scopes of the names overlap to a greater or lesser extent, the procedures of the general methodology of scientific research are, among other things, there to rug up ambiguities when carrying out individual research projects. An example of such a dilemma is the phenomena of 'violence' and 'aggression' discussed in general terms in this essay with a further extension.

The terminological diversity of the phenomena discussed is further complicated, more or less, by the natural languages of the individual researchers. This happens especially in works on the borderline between two or more scientific disciplines. But there are works on the borderline of even several disciplines that can be translated into different languages without fear of terminological conflict. In our opinion, this criterion is met by Janusz Surzykiewicz's extensive monograph (736 pages), published in Polish in 2000 by the Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej ('Methodological Centre for Psychological and Pedagogical Assistance'). The title of the monograph, 'Agresja i przemoc w szkole' ('Aggression and violence at school'), clearly indicates the subject of the research and the addressee, while the subtitle 'socio-ecological determinants' supplements the information on the range of specific disciplines, which provide the basis for justifications and explanations.

Among other things, the author provides empirical data on four categories of aggression and violence: physical, verbal, psychological, against objects. This division is only partly in line with the recommendations of other authors - clearly, this refers to work published before 2000, before Surzykiewicz's monograph was published. The term 'aggression against objects, would be appropriate, for example, to the results of observations from the experiment of Bandura et al. (1963) - children faithfully imitated a model beating an inflatable doll with a hammer. Referring directly to the phenomenon of 'aggression against objects, studied by Surzykiewicz, to the experimental category of 'displaced aggression' (or 'redirected aggression'), is already problematic, if only because 'The displaced aggression questionnaire' (Denson et al., 2006) was only published in 2006. Therefore, in this work, we do not consider the phenomenon of 'displaced aggression against objects' as

equivalent to the phenomenon of 'aggression against things', which, as shown above, remains in the similarity relation of Bandura et al.'s (1963) study and Surzykiewicz's (2000) study.

Since in our own research we try to respect the complementary approach from the INNOAGON perspective (Kalina, 2023), we emphasise the possibility of observing - more easily identifiable - the phenomenon of aggression in two ways (direct observation and indirect observation) recommended by the specific methods and tools of this new science (Kaluźny, 2023). In a sense, the methodological framework for their application is defined by the theory of defence struggle and theory of combat sports (Kalina, 1991, 2000).

### **CERTAIN TYPES OF SPORTS FIGHTS AS A 'LABORATORY' OPPORTUNITY FOR DIRECT OBSERVATION OF VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION**

The area providing the most reliable and widely available observational data on the phenomena of violence and aggression is sport combat, primarily within combat sports and games (the former belongs to the so-called contact sports, and among the latter only part). The limitation of the possibility to record identical motor activities (precisely those directly related to acts of violence or aggression) is due to the peculiarities of the use of the so-called sports technique by athletes of the various combat sports and players of the individual games. It is different from the technique repeated rhythmically or according to the motor pattern of many individual sports - as in running, swimming, weightlifting etc. On the other hand, (stable factors in combat sports and games as in any other sport) are specified regulations (area and time of competition, permitted and prohibited acts, etc.). The frequency of a sportsman's violation of a fair play rule (and the most pronounced are aggressive acts) in relation to the number of fights (matches) he has fought is therefore a very simple indicator informing indirectly about his aggressiveness (this human trait is gradable).

INNOAGON offers yet another option for direct observation of combatants - 'testing fights in a vertical posture - TFVP' (Kalina et al., 2015, 2016). Easy to apply, safe TFVPs, even among children and adults who have no experience resulting from combat sports practice, are a convenient tool to use during complementary research. Klimczak and Chodała (2023), after a secondary analysis of the results of a year-long experiment by Joanna Syska (2004), just using TFVP and clinical psychological tests, conclude that the effectiveness of hand-to-hand combat is not determined by the need for a high level of aggressiveness. Self-defence exercises are a necessary adjunct to training, but tests to verify these defensive competences are already a form of motor simulation (Harasymowicz, 2022, 2023). As an aside, we note that the term 'self-defence' has been exposed for more than a century in a great many titles of scientific papers published in numerous journals that are not associated with struggle as the main subject of scientific exploration (Kruszewski and Gaśienica Walczak, 2023).

## **NON-MOTORIC SIMULATIONS AS A SIMPLE METHOD FOR INDIRECT OBSERVATION OF THREE PHENOMENA: PHYSICAL AGGRESSION; VERBAL AGGRESSION; AGGRESSIVENESS**

The advantage of studies based on non-motoric simulations (recommended by INNOAGON) is the reproducibility of the virtual situation in detail. This category of indirect observation mainly applies to fights qualified for non sport confrontation (Kalina, 2000; Kałużny, 2023).

With such a methodological approach, there is no room for a variety of understandings of the terms ‘violence’ and ‘aggression’. On the other hand, sporting combat itself within any combat sports, but only part of games (eg. rugby, ice hockey, handball, football), is some form of controlled violence, socially acceptable and legally permissible). Therefore, INNOAGON has adopted praxeological definitions: violence – physical pressure (physical force) or the application of chemical, electrical stimuli, etc., which causes the subject of action to be flung into a situation undesirable by him and becomes the object of someone’s action; aggression – is to initiate destructive fight or move in a verbal dispute from material arguments to those causing distress to the opponent [Pszczolowski, 1978].

However, the paradox is that boxing and any combat sports of the ‘mutual striking by competitors’ category in which knockout is allowed as a means of victory is a sanctioned relic of gladiatorialism. In other words, so-called noble sporting competition, based on the ideals of resurrected Olympism, allows public concussion and this is legal (we abstract from the risk of death in almost every sport not only at the professional level).

Such an explicitly critical argumentation still made sense before the expansion of neo-gladiatorism (camouflaged - as said above - under the attractive name of mixed martial arts) where the core of the spectacle is the mutual massacre of people in cages. But the paradox is compounded by referring to these neo-gladiator as “athletes” even in a great many scientific journals qualified for sports science and sport medicine. Since this is the truth, there is no rational indication that there will be any reflection in the public debate on the historical fact that there was no boxing tournament at the Stockholm Olympics (1912) - boxing was banned in Sweden at the time. In this century for the ubiquitous internet, the barriers prohibiting pathology, whatever it may be, are only apparent. The demand for these gory spectacles is so great that the worry for promoters is not the fear of restrictions, but of competing promoters able to make available a spectacle of more refined aggression.

In that case, what would constitute this force of argumentation of those who perceive the immediate and far-reaching destructive effects of the fascination with ‘violence and aggression’ on the one hand, and, on the other hand – by accepting both in the achievement of their own and/or the represented interest group’s goals. In our view, this force is new scientific knowledge, implemented from micro to macro scales, which remains in close relation to the hypothesis refers to the supreme criteria of the value of global civilization – survival of humans and nature in a non-degenerate form and responsibility for coming generations (Piepiora and Kalina, 2023).

At this moment of reasoning, on the one hand, memory brings back the long history of book burning by people, on the other hand, a cool mind (freed from emotion and prejudice) dictates the question of the most elementary reason for such actions.

### **THE PHENOMENON OF DISPLACED AGGRESSION AGAINST OBJECTS WITH A STRONG COMPONENT OF SYMBOLIC AGGRESSION AGAINST PEOPLE IS SOME FORM OF JUSTIFICATION FOR THE APTNESS OF THE TERM 'TOXIC POWER SYNDROME'**

Individual cases of book burning (documented especially by historical facts) are, in our opinion, examples of the realisation of the need for aggression by people with an extremely extreme degree of 'toxic power syndrome'. A more precise term would be 'burning of knowledge carriers', as, on the one hand, it is adequate to the destruction of papyri in distant times; on the other hand, the examples of the already ongoing war in cyberspace authorise the implication of a near-term destruction of knowledge fixed other than in books. 'Toxic power syndrome' is defined as 'a need experienced by an individual which is related to obtaining egoistic power over possibly greatest or specific number of people, objects and/or nature elements, (Kalina, 2016, p. 341). The author goes on to explain: 'In order to satisfy it, an individual is not able to refrain even from extreme destructive actions, treating ethical standards, rules of social coexistence and other people in an instrumental manner.'

Of exceptional cognitive value for inferring activation dominated by 'toxic power syndrome' are the acts of people (especially dictators) who bore witness to the destruction of established knowledge left behind by the most outstanding minds of various eras - precisely by burning books. This was already happening with Herostratos, the shoemaker from Ephesus. Dreaming of immortal fame, he set fire to the Temple of Artemis in 356 BC. The Temple of Artemis, one of the wonders of the ancient world, where the works of human thought were kept. Legend has it that when the caliph Omar captured Alexandria, he ordered the papyrus scrolls stored there to be used to fuel the public baths. No longer among the legends are the facts of the burning in German universities in 1933, of works associated with Jewish thought, and in 1938, during Kristallnacht. Similar events occurred during the Cultural Revolution in China (1965–1969) - in the summer of 1966, bonfires of outstanding works of world and Chinese literature were lit in the streets.

Censorship, on the other hand, is a good example of violence also in the sense that it makes one aware of the difference to the concept of aggression - when consistently used according to praxeological definitions. A collection of 100 such examples is the 1999 work by Karolides et al. Among them, the authors describe the history of censorship of the 1953 novel 'Fahrenheit 451' by Ray Bradbury. The author tells the story of a future society in which books are forbidden objects. In 1953, the book, as a carrier of knowledge, fulfilled the function of a symbolic enemy of people with extreme 'toxic power syndrome'. In the age of the Internet and artificial intelligence, the symbolism of burning books will only seemingly take on a different meaning. As the

possibilities for the accumulation and distribution of knowledge (especially valuable knowledge) expand, the activation of people determined to extreme aggression will evolve in ways fundamentally different from Ray Bradbury's science fiction, but the goals will remain identical.

Burning books (or otherwise destroying any medium of knowledge of value) is in some sense always a symbolic act of aggression directed at the author(s). Censorship is an act of violence, but the paradox is that this subtle distinction is irrelevant to authors who are no longer among the living.

## CONCLUSION

These most general premises refer to phenomena whose ranges of meaning overlap more or less distinctly, depending not only on the circumstances under consideration, the effects, the context and other details subject to direct or indirect observation, etc. This is the case with 'violence' and 'aggression', but already the scope of the name 'aggressiveness' includes people with inclinations either more towards violence or towards aggression, or to a similar degree towards both. It should be rather obvious that the terms 'aggressiveness' and 'toxic power syndrome' are not synonymous. Nor is there a simple correlation that people with increased 'toxic power syndrome' are at the same time characterised by increased aggressiveness. We have not discussed the phenomenon of 'creative power syndrome' in this essay. And it is 'an elementary innate cognitive-behavioural predisposition of a human being which is to a greater or lesser extent determined by a talent to a specific intellectual, motor or intellectual and motor activity which constitutes the basis for an individual to adapt to social environment, natural and artificial environment, building interpersonal relations in line with universal values and undertaking such activities in a conscious manner which will ensure possibly most comprehensive development of personality and all personal predispositions for the benefit of the common good'. Strengthening this potential at every stage of ontogenesis is the single most cost-effective investment. It is also the primary way to counteract the pathologies of violence and aggression. The last two sentences of this conclusion are not lacking in argumentative strength in an intellectual sense. However, social circumstances unambiguously limit applications to the micro scale.

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