“Does Willpower Always Keep Fists from Flying?: Considering When Self-Control Might Increase Aggression”

Benjamin M. Wilkowski, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Department of Psychology, University of Wyoming

Self-control has been defined as the ability to override momentary impulses in order to pursue long-term goals; and it is typically seen as a very good thing. Most theories suggest it is critically involved in controlling our anger and restraining aggressive actions. In the current talk, the author reviews several years of research conducted by himself and others testing this idea. The majority of findings to date support this account and find that self-control is typically linked to less aggression. However, several recent findings suggest that under certain circumstances, self-control can actually increase aggression. To make sense of these findings, the author proposes that self-control allows individuals to pursue distal goals when they conflict with more immediate ones. When aggression allows one to achieve a distal goal, self-control actually leads people to behave more aggressively.

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