A N D R E A S   B R A U N

Interpersonal Violence as an Intrinsic Part of The Civilizing Process
A Neurosociological Approach

Abstract

Even though Elias himself does not focus on an explicit theory on violence in *The Civilizing Process*, due to his research question on pacific social processes, violence is not generally theoretically excluded. Against this backdrop, and contrary to criticisms regarding a general loss as well as a biological rather than a sociological explanation of violence, and besides theories that explain meso and macro-level violence within Elias's framework, this article considers interpersonal micro-level violence as an intrinsic part of the civilizing process. Especially by supplementing Elias's assumptions of drive control and self-constraint with recent neuroscientific findings, it is possible to conceptualize interpersonal micro-level violence as situational exceedance of a subjective threshold of pain. Here, despite a normative civilized frame of behavior, aggression, as a (neuro)biologically-based reactive drive, is no longer controlled by socially learned self-constraint, leading to violence as a subjectively perceived rewarding behavior and socially performed action.

Keywords: Civilizing process; Norbert Elias; Neuroscience; A threshold of pain; violence.

T H E   C I V I L I Z I N G   P R O C E S S is certainly the most prominent work of Elias's oeuvre. However, although Elias has presented an in-depth theory and analysis to explain the societal change from so-called "barbaric" towards civilized societies, it was and still is exposed to certain criticisms [Dépelteau, Passiani, and Mariano 2013; Goudsblom 1994; Mennell 1989: 227-270]. These include, for instance the (seemingly) false analytical background regarding the historiographical analysis [Dunning 1989; Robinson 1987], and Elias's apparent posit of "violence as the absolute Other of civilization" [Malešević and Ryan 2012: 165]. The "inherent or causal relation between state formation and the cultivation of manners" [Redner 2015: 100] as well

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as a misleading "Freudian social theory" [*ibid*.: 101], or the rather idealistic sketch of modern societies that does not comply with the empirical presence of violence in the history of mankind until today, as most prominently held by Duerr [e.g., 1995]. But also inter-state wars [e.g., Joas 2003], the "war on terror" with acts of torture in particular [Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2014], the aspect of (globalized) organized crime in the framework of modern societies [Malešević and Ryan 2012], an "estimated 1.6 million people world-wide [who] died as a result of self-inflicted, interpersonal or collective violence" [World Health Organisation 2007: 6], or acts of individu-alized terrorism warfare [Kron, Braun and Heinke 2015; Smith *et al*. 2015], all characterizable as non-civilized, provoke Elias's approach. And even if recent studies, in contrast to these aspects, corroborate Elias's view of a general decline of violence in modern societies [Bessel 2016; Eisner 2001, 2008; Goldstein 2012; Pinker 2011], though also criticized in turn [Malešević 2014, 2017; Mann 2018], all of them point to its ongoing existence.

Although the empirical presence of violence can surely not be simply dismissed in general, the assumed absence of violence in *The Civilizing Process* seems to be slightly short-sighted. In particular, regarding interpersonal acts on the micro level, the criticism does not apply, as I argue, because the process-related decrease in violent behavior in modern societies, which is related to the increase in civilized behavior, can (at least implicitly) be read as a theory on micro-violence.[1] To put it more precisely, especially regarding Elias's [2000: 363-448] concise synopsis of the bodily-based civilizing process [Gugutzer 2004: 54-59; Paulle and Emirbayer 2016] and by supple-menting the meaning of drive and self-constraint with neuroscientific findings from the field of aggression and violence research, interper-sonal micro-level violence can be conceptualized as an intrinsic part of the civilizing process—thus is my thesis. Therefore, by neuroscientifi-cally redefining the meaning of drives, it is also possible to

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[1] The conception of interpersonal acts on the micro level used here focuses purely on physical violence experienced in face-to-face interactions. According to the Latin word *violentia*, this refers only to such acts of violence that are committed in a sudden, furious, and (somehow) intended manner to harm and hurt (other) persons without being related to cases and situations of (delegated) power and control possibly depending on instruments of power [Crowther 1995: 243, 864, 1268; Imbusch 2000: 31-32, 2005: 26-27]. Regarding the latter, this would ac-cord to the Latin word *potestas*, including an organized as well as institutionalized frame of action [Imbusch 2000: 31-32, 2005: 26-27]. Examples include the gender pay gap, mi-sogyny, or domestic violence due to both an institutionalized and culturally manifested hegemonic, or more precisely a patriarchal structure, for instance.

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differentiate between aggression as (neuro)biological behavior and violence as social action, which is in line with Elias's [1982, 2009c] rejection of a Lorenzian meaning of aggression and his view of individuals embedded in figurations that depend on the inseparable interplay of interactions, affects and normative behavior systems. Thus, on the one hand, my neuroscientific supplemented approach responds to Malešević and Ryan's [2012: 170-172] criticism of biological reductionism and a non-existing differentiation between aggression and violence in Elias's theory. On the other hand, besides several studies within the Eliasian framework indicating that civilized societies are not entirely free of violence on the meso and macro level [De Souza and Marchi Jr. 2017; Delmotte and Majestre 2017; Dépelteau 2017; Dolan and Connolly 2014; Dunning 2000; Dunning, Murphy, and Williams 1988; Elias 1982, 1996; Mares 2009], I finally present the first theoretical draft of a so far missing explanation of interpersonal violence on the micro level within Elias's theory of social constraint, self-control, and the muting of drives. As such, my approach can also enrich the general sociological research on micro-level violence. Because of the comprehensive background of Elias's theory, combining interactional figurations, a processual perspective, the meaning of the body and affects as well as a general frame of behavior-modulating social norms and by additionally integrating a (neuro)cognitive interplay concerning these matters, it is possible to explain situational micro-level violence depending on different macro and meso contexts. To name a current prominent approach in the broad field of sociological violence theories, this is, for instance, in contrast to Collins's [2009] theory, which focuses on both situations and emotions but neglects social background factors and the meaning of subjects [Collins 2009: 20-21; Equit and Schmidt 2016; Hauffe and Hoebel 2017; Wieviorka 2014]. And it is also in contrast to Ray's [2018] approach concerning the relation between violence and society. Even though he attributes importance to neuroscientific findings in a similar way, concerning both cognitive and emotional aspects, situations are of minor relevance here, compared to Collins [2009]. Thus, my approach thereby not only integrates different perspectives of current sociological theories of violence, and embeds individual motives in a broader social context [Knöbl 2017a, 2017b], but can (potentially) bridge the micro-macro-gap within the sociology of violence—additionally, by including a social, action, and society theoretical perspective originating from one theoretically inherent pen.

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In brief, therefore, my thesis uses the creativity of Elias's theory rather than testing it [Dépelteau 2017: 91; Spierenburg 2001: 102-103] "by keeping the good parts and fixing some weaknesses" [Dépelteau 2017: 91], and by referring to the following starting points. Regarding the recent debates on the use or misuse of Elias's theory to explain violence—in particular, the studies of Pinker [2011], who "heavily [draws] on Elias's theory of civilizing processes" [Malešević 2014: 69], or Goldstein [2012]—Malešević [2014, 2017] and Mann [2018] point to the fact that inter-state wars have not declined but shifted more toward conflicts on the economic or judicial level due to a high level of bureaucratization in the North. Against this backdrop, and contrary to Pinker's [2011: 483] statement that although "most of us [...] are wired for violence, even if in all likelihood we will never have an occasion to use it," violence on the micro level has shifted to more indirect forms—interpersonal conflicts are "settled without recourse to violence through third-party arbitration and the law-courts" [Mann 2018: 49]. And even if direct violent conflicts seems to have vanished on the macro and meso level, due to "a revival of liberal optimism" [*ibid*.: 41], they are swapped out to the Western periphery, still framed as civilized through peacekeeping organizations [Goldstein 2012], leading to a worldwide "replacement of inter-state wars by civil wars" [Mann 2018: 51; Goldstein 2012: 291; Malešević 2014: 78] within which brutality and "ferocious violence endures [...] with more body-to-body assault" [Mann 2018: 51] on the interpersonal micro level [Mann 2018; Malešević 2014, 2017]—not preventable by the peacekeeping organizations. In brief, violence continues to be an integral part of even civilized societies at the macro, meso and micro levels. Therefore, these observations also correspond to Elias's theoretical framework. Indeed, "even if violence is at the core of his study of (de) civilizing processes, Elias didn't really write much specifically on this central notion" [Landini and Dépelteau 2017: 2]. But this is, first and foremost, due to Elias's research interest in social processes and the process-related development of typical Western civilized "modes of behaviour" [Elias 2000: ix], and their pacification accompanied by state formation processes as well as the establishment of a specific Western civilized (non-violent) habitus due to social and self-constraint [Elias 1982, 1996, 2000: ix, 454; Goudsblom 2001; Mennell 1989, 2006, 2009: 99-100; Van Benthem van der Bergh 2012]. And, even though *his* focus is not explicitly on violence, "violence is never eradicated in Elias's views of civilizations" [Landini and Dépelteau 2017: 3]. It is "The Other Side of the Coin" [Mennell 2001], always in

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the shadow, or more specifically on the fringe of societies [Elias 2000: 415; Mennell 2001: 34]. Accordingly, (physical) violence on the macro and meso level also becomes visible "[d]uring times of social crisis—military defeats, political revolutions, rampant inflation, soaring un-employment" [Mennell 2001: 38], group-based terrorist acts, as well as domestic and inter-state wars up to genocides [Elias 1982, 2000: 372, 415, 2010: 77-170; Landini 2017: 16-20; Mennell 2001: 37-38]. In brief, when humans feel exposed to an increasing and no longer predictable risk, whereby both social control by groups and the monopoly of the state with its representative organizations decrease, leading to different group forming processes, and shifting (or at least trying to shift) the power balances in established-outsider relations [Elias 1982, 2000: 372, 415, 2008a; Mennell, 2001: 36-38]. Moreover, this also counts at the micro level because Elias [2000: 397-413] himself does not deny the existence of interpersonal (psychological and physical) violence at the micro level, as witnessed in intrigues, the struggles of social success, or in situations threatening subjective existence. Consequently, because civilization and decivilization pro-cesses stick together in an ambivalent and paradoxical relationship due to the double-bind process of violence—meaning that violence en-genders counter violence in an upward spiral [Dépelteau 2017: 89; Elias 1982, 1996; Mennell 2001: 38]—violence is not theoretically removed within Elias's framework, thereby providing the foundation for my thesis.

Before outlining my thesis, I will first briefly present the process of cultivating civilized behavior and the concept of drive control, as well as the muting of drives. Based on the understanding of violence as a gradual part of civilizing processes, the non-reductionist neurosci-entific explanation of interpersonal violence will be introduced to show that interpersonal violence finally can be seen as an intrinsic part of the civilizing process.

Societal Development and Self-Constraint: the Cultivation of Civilized Behavior

Following Elias [2000: 365-379], the cultivation of civilized be-havior is neither a planned nor intended product of the human ratio. It is the product of an unplanned process, characterized by the close intertwining of individual and societal development. Against this

backdrop, the civilizing process is the unintentional result of inverse chains of interdependence understood as figurations [Elias 2000: 365-366]: a non-dichotomous conception of social formations and individuals "to loosen […] [the] social constraint to speak and think as if "the individual" and "society" were antagonistic as well as different" [Elias 1978: 130; Elias 2009a]. Hence, the concept of figurations points to the fact that those social formations are not independent entities but plural associations of interdependent actors' interactions. In turn, the actors' cooperation is the prerequisite for situation-dependent inverse chains of interdependence in which the interdependency contains an allied as well as an opponent status; thus, also including (im)balances of tensions [Elias 1978: 131, 2009b; Elias and Dunning 1966: 396]. Assessing the cultivation of civilized behavior as correlation between societal development and self-constraint, the importance of figurations becomes obvious in comparing them with games because "[a] fundamental characteristic […] of practically all […] games, is that they constitute a type of group dynamics which is produced by controlled tensions between at least two sub-groups" [Elias and Dunning 1966: 390]. Here, "tensions are not extraneous, but intrinsic to the configuration itself" [*ibid*.: 391] yet controlled by "tension-balance" [*ibid*.: 397]. Thus, tension-balance results from the dynamical logic of the group process in which the cooperation of antagonistic and interdependent parties built upon a normatively regulated structural frame, generated out of the interwoven relationships [Elias 2009b].

Elias [2009b], as well as Elias and Dunning [1966], have pointed this out in detail with respect to the long-term development of football rules which saw a decline in the earlier dimensions of violent action on the playing field. Football was originally very rough and violent, resulting in fractures, wounds, and bloody head injuries due to the tensions between the parties involved. Over the years, however, as a product of the interwoven relationships between players, trainers, spectators and the emerging associations (the group process), violence was tamed; the tensions were balanced due to a higher degree of organization and the establishment of specific rules. Instead of violent actions, tactical decisions are now in the foreground to winning the game. On the one hand, these decisions maintain tensions while, on the other hand, they simultaneously balance them in terms of an individual as well as team cooperation and competition.

> This transformation, the development of a highly regulated, relatively non-violent form of group tension, from an early stage where the corresponding tensions were much more apt to discharge themselves in one or another form of

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violence, is at the core of the long-term dynamics of the game of football. [Elias and Dunning 1966: 393]

This example of the transformation from violent behavior to civilized behavior on the playing field,

> […] is representative—one might almost say symbolic—of certain aspects of the long-term development of European societies. […] There, too, one encounters, as one does in the development of football, both a higher level of organisation and higher levels of self-restraint and of security compared with the past. [Elias and Dunning 1966: 393-394]

Transferred to the aspects of social and self-constraint, we can see that self-constraint—in terms of a self-regulating (violent) drive control—is the process-related product of emerging differentiated societies. More precisely, it is a product of increasing figurational interdependencies and the associated pacification of societal spaces by a national monopoly on the use of force as a form of social constraint. And this process leads to an ongoing reproduction of the cultivated civilized behavior that is mediated and maintained over generations by socialization [Elias 2000: 365-379]. In other words, the national monopoly on the use of force leads to the absence of continuous intrasocietal and interpersonal (physical) violence due to the bodily-embedded aspect of drive control by self-constraint.

Rationalization, Normative Action Frames, and the Concept of Drive Control

Besides the national monopoly on the use of force, the advancing division of functions (e.g., the functional division of labor), as well as an increasing rationalization, also play an important role, in particular regarding the muting of drives [Elias 2000: 397-413]. Both the advancing division of functions and the increasing rationalization lead to a greater level of interdependencies and mutual dependencies among society's members. Within this process-related context of societal development, and thus in contrast to pre-modern societies, "a more long-sighted view of […] other people" evolves "to the extent that the advancing division of functions and their daily involvement in long human chains accustom them to such a view and a greater restraint of the affects" [Elias 2000: 400]. Humans are no longer categorized exclusively as "friend" or "foe," but the image of others becomes more shaded and free from current emotions [Elias 2000:

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399]. That is, the perspective on, and the image of, other people become more rational, that is psychological, leading to a restraint of affects and violent drives; at least in terms of (overt) physical violence.

Hence, rationalization and the division of functions change the interpersonal relationships from within: they establish specific normative behaviors and guidelines as action frame, leading to drive control and self-constraint in relation to the evolving monopoly on the use of force, law, and the judiciary. But, following Elias [2000: 268-277, 344-362], this is also bound to the intertwined evolvement of the monopoly of taxation: associated with the evolving monopoly on the use of force is a processual change towards a central power of disposition, within which the former wartime levies became situationally independent. Thus, the dissolution of the estate-based society leads to the formation of a general system of taxation, now related to all societal members, and to strong chains of interdependence. Furthermore, this coincides with a high degree of organizational division of labor and functions to administer these finances and duties, finally leading to the intertwined evolvement of both monopolies. That is why both are the driving force behind the civilizing process [Elias 2000: 268-277, 344-362]. This is because of the higher levels of organization and security, as mentioned above, that sanction ("barbaric") affective explosions of violence. Of course, this is not the case for single persons or groups (e.g., mob law) as in pre-modern societies, but for all members of society due to the process-related figurational establishment of normative rules and social institutions from within the interdependent interactions. Thereby, Elias [2000: 397-413] explains the decrease of violent behavior in civilized societies by referring to Freud's [1990: 408-410] concept of id, ego, and super-ego. The postulated linkage of id, ego, and super-ego can be seen in the context of the evolving normative action frame (the super-ego), and the subjective awareness of long-sighted interdependencies (the ego), in which drives (the id) differentiate in the course of rationalization. This process leads to a productive, instead of destructive, drive control that is vital for society's survival. In order to ensure the existence and continuity of civilized societies, the absence of drive-based violent behavior, therefore, relies on self-constraint as a function of social constraint, which is, as already mentioned, continuously mediated by socialization. "[T]o put it briefly and all too simply, 'consciousness' becomes less permeable by drives, and drives become less permeable by 'consciousness'" [Elias 2000: 410].

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Drive Control and the Muting of Drives: the Meaning of Shame

Also quite central in governing the process of drive control, self-constraint and the general regulation of behavior, is the sociogenetic development of shame that can be understood as the fear of social degradation and the fear of the societal superiority of others [Elias 2000: 414-416; Paul 2007: 78-80].

In the development and change of societies toward civilized ones, sociogenetic development represents a societal change in which social constraints become incorporated as self-constraints without being questioned [Elias 2006: 436]. Elias [2000: 1-182, 2006: 436, 2008b] illustrates this by many examples in *The Civilizing Process* including washing oneself or the natural body functions. For instance, in the Middle Ages, washing oneself was not a daily normality, but a form of respect expected towards superior persons [Elias 2006]—a pattern of social constraint. However, with the change in societal structures, the shift from individual decentralized rulers to life at court, and the rise of a new social hierarchy—including a new upper class of people with a different social status (the Bourgeoisie)—the chains of interdependencies as well as the disgust and repugnance of others' body odor increased [Elias 2000: 45-98]. The former hierarchically-based social constraint led not only to the development of "hygiene manner books" as a normative action frame (the super-ego). These modes of behavior were incorporated, mediated and maintained over generations by socialization (leading to the id-based drive control), accompanied by the fear of feeling ashamed or inferior to others (the awareness of long-sighted interdependencies in the ego). This process also applies to natural body functions. In the Middle Ages, defecating and urinating in public spaces was considered quite normal. However, associated with the disgust of the body odor of others, "they are gradually invested with feelings of shame and repugnance, until eventually performed only in the strictest privacy and not even spoken of without acute embarrassment" [Mennell 1989: 39]. Linked to the change of societal structure and the increasing chains of interdependencies, feeling disgusted or being ashamed about one's own or another's natural body functions leads to spatial privatization as well as to self-constraint regarding one's own appropriate (socially learned) behavior [Elias 2008b, 2008c]. Finally, in both cases, the societal constraint transforms into self-

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constraint in order to avoid feeling or being ashamed as a result of the awareness of social norms, social relations, and future-oriented (expectation-)expectations that form shame as a complex cognitive emotion [Elias 2000: 3-98, 365-379; 2008b; Mennell 1989: 36-60; Zinck and Newen 2008: 14].

In brief, the (historical) emergence of shame, embarrassment, and repugnance results from an increasing societal differentiation that can be described as sociogenesis. While compliance with specific codes of conduct formerly only existed as a social constraint from the upper towards the lower class, this behavior changed with the transition to court society [Elias 2000: 45-182; Mennell 1989: 36-60]. With the emergence of a new upper class (the Bourgeoisie), behavior patterns were mixed or transported downwards. This was based, on the one hand, on the imitation of the superior by the inferior classes and, on the other hand—due to the increasing division of labor—on the greater dependence of the upper upon the lower classes [Elias 2000: 45-182; Mennell 1989: 107-111]. Thus, from the formerly existing social constraints, self-constraints emerged by incorporating the external regulations forming them into a specific habitus. But, according to the cultivation of civilized behavior, this change toward a drive controlled hence civilized behavior rests not on rationality but upon a dynamic that can be traced back to the fact of an increasing mutual observation extended over longer chains of interdependencies [Elias 2000: 45-182]. Consequently, a "threshold of shame and repugnance" [Mennell 1989: 104] results from a respect for others and the fear of social degradation, as well as the fear of other persons' societal superiority [Elias 2000: 414-416; Paul 2007: 78-80].

Following Elias [2000: 414-421], however, the fear of subjective inferiority and of being at someone's mercy are not direct results of others' physical superiority or direct physical threats. They are the product of an expected future conflict between the members of one's personal chains of interdependencies and the normative frame that reflects the social opinion. For these reasons, the fear of social degradation cannot be fought directly by physical or other forms of (offensive) assaults. Because, on the one hand, due to the established and incorporated civilized normative action frame and the specific habitus, both of which tame violence, there is no direct physical threat. On the other hand, physical assaults would violate the civilized normative action frame and, in turn, lead to shame due to the social integration in the long-sighted chains of interdependencies. As direct

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physical assaults do not comply with the civilized normative action frame, finally, one has to fight against oneself to avert the fear of social degradation. This is, however, only possible by drive-controlled self-constraint, according to the interwoven affect regulating and restraining inner-battle between ego (the subjective awareness of long-sighted interdependencies) and Id (the drives) [Elias 2000: 416]. Because shame and repugnance are virtually the frameworks in avoiding violent actions [Paul 2007: 78-80], these emotional and (more or less) cognitive inner-human processes are the explanatory basis for the muting of drives and thus for the decrease of violence in the civilizing process.

Considerations on Macro- and Interpersonal Micro-Violence as Gradual Parts of The Civilizing Process

Although violence in modern societies is repelled for the benefit of civilization due to increasing drive control and self-constraint, it is not extirpated. Indeed, physical violence and violent acts are not a permanent daily life-threatening risk for every member of society. To some extent, however, violence is still part even of modern societies. Elias [2000: 415] himself points this out in stating that violence is to be found on the fringes of society. Therefore, contrary to Malešević and Ryan's [2012] criticism, violence cannot be seen as the fundamental opposite of civilization, but rather as part of it [Elias 1982, 2000: 415; Landini 2017; Mennell 2001]. If violence really were the opposite of civilization, it would be entirely outside of civilization and not on its fringes. Due to its fringe character, violence can appear as a gradual epiphenomenon of modern societies, which is supported by the view of the civilizing process as a swell-like movement [Elias 2000: 382]. In contrast to a linear view, aligning extreme values based on a civilized–decivilized–civilized–etc. model, violence is still more or less part of the civilization movement [Dépelteau 2017; Elias 1982; Mennell 2001]. That means the existence of violence in civilized societies is similar to a sinus curve in which the extent of violence depends on a gradual periodical, instead of a uniform distribution of discrete positive (civilized) and negative (decivilized) values. The gradual existence of violence in modern, thus civilized, societies can be shown both on the macro and the micro level. Regarding inter-state wars, for instance, it can be stated that these violent acts on the macro level do

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not originate from anywhere, due to the double-bind process. They typically result from slowly increasing process-related conflicts and aggression up to the actual assault, followed by a long-term weakening process to a final (more or less) peaceful, thus civilized, phase as can be illustrated by the rise and demise of the Nazi Regime and the subsequent process of de-Nazification [Elias 1982, 1996, 2010]. This clearly shows that civilization and violence are not fundamental opposites but integral parts of a gradual process that can also be identified on the micro level: for instance, regarding the shift from physical to psychological violence in modern societies, as stated by Elias [2000: 397-413] regarding the rise of intrigues and the struggle of social success. As a subjective assumption of power and/or intentional damage to others, bullying represents a more current form of intrigues in civilized societies. These non-spontaneous acts are characterized by an ongoing process, aimed at discrediting others for one's own advantage [Espelage and Swearer 2003: 368; Hymel and Swearer 2015: 293; Olweus 1994: 98]. On the one hand, this type of psychological violence (e.g., insults, denigrations, and [sexual] harassment) requires long-sighted tactical skills to maintain the perpetrator's civilized behavior as perceived from outside the situational context. On the other hand, somehow simultaneously, the non-civilized (psychological) violent behavior is furthermore executed and increases in time; up to a point where physical damage (ranging from psychosomatic problems to suicides) may actually be caused [Hoel and Einarsen 2015; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts 2007; Rayner and Hoel 1997; Rigby 2001].[2] Here, too, civilization and violence are integral parts of a gradual process rather than fundamental opposites.

But, besides the stated shift to psychological violence, according to Elias's description and explanation, also physical violence can occur on the micro level and be seen as a gradual (always possible) act of violent behavior in modern societies. Not only in (extreme) life-threatening situations, but also in situations generally subjectively perceived as threatening, the use of physical violence in the sense of self-defense is (always) possible. Situations such as (armed) robberies, (armed) assaults and/or brawls with one or more

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[2] Cases of domestic violence in modern societies are also characterized by an ongoing process aimed at discrediting other persons via psychological violence (e.g., insults, emotional abuse, financial abuse) up the point where physical (and also sexual) violence is committed [COULTER et al. 1999; GARCIA-MORENO et al. 2006; JOHNSON 2006; SOHAL, FEDER and JOHNSON 2012]. Here, too, long-sighted tactical skills are required to maintain the perpetrator's civilized behavior as perceived from outside the situation.

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perpetrators are often—though not always—characterized by previous moments and pathways in which the threatening situation is avoidable by the possibility of flight, the use of de-escalation strategies, or the voluntary surrender of the potential prey [Kane and Wilder 2009].

Imagine a situation in which a person is approached negatively or insulted by another. For instance, in a bar, a club or even on the street where someone (more or less intentionally) oversteps the personal space of another. Or situations in which someone is more or less intentionally touched, jostled or directly addressed in a negative manner with phrases such as "Why are you staring at me/my girlfriend/boyfriend?". Such encounters can be subjectively perceived as threatening situations, that are to be avoided. One can first try to ignore this by leaving the situation. If this is not possible, one can still (re)act in a de-escalating manner (with the additional option of calling the security or police), trying to avoid the now increasingly obvious assault. Here, however, the situation becomes more threatening, tense, and "violence is in the air"—perhaps also accompanied by pushes and pulls. And if flight and/or de-escalating actions are not options, the gradualness of violence increases up to the point where the assault becomes real, and the previously civilized behavior (e.g., de-escalation) becomes void. At this point and depending on one's own justification and ability to use physical violence, interpersonal violence becomes an option, thereby turning the original situation into a non-civilized and thus overtly violent one [De Becker 1998: 110-112]. This example shows a gradual narrowing of action alternatives in which (physical) violence becomes a subjectively perceived situational solution [De Becker 1998; Kane and Wilder 2009]. Especially with regard to micro level situations, namely, independent of situations framed by riots, revolutions or class differences, not only psychological but also physical violence can still occur in civilized societies. That is the case, in particular, if the compensation and control of drives and fear become more and more difficult, reaching a point where there are no longer any (civilized) coping strategies [De Becker 1998; Kane and Wilder 2009]. In a state such as this, one can argue that emotional and cognitive effects lead to the point where the subjective threshold of self-constraint is exceeded, and the use of (physical) violence turns into a situational and (re)action-related non-civilized alternative; thus, a possible subjectively perceived rewarding behavior.

ANDREAS BRAUN

A Non-Reductionist Explanation of Interpersonal Violence: Neuroscientific Findings Regarding Aggression and Violence

Although quite in line with some arguments and hints in *The Civilizing Process*, such a cognitive-based reading of interpersonal violence, as presented above, can still be criticized; at least concerning the recent critique of Malešević and Ryan [2012] focusing on a biological explanation of violence of this sort. Considering Elias's work on violence, their criticism rests upon an,

> […] essentialist ontology of the subject so that violence is posited as a biological fact rather than an intrinsic part of the Civilising Process itself. The consequence of this is that Elias is unable to provide a plausible explanation of violent action. [Malešević and Ryan 2012: 170]

Furthermore, Malešević and Ryan's [2012: 170-172] approach is strengthened by references to (1) a non-existing differentiation between aggression and violence as psychological, or more specifically sociological constructs in Elias's work; (2) Elias's view of "humans as essentially animalistic creature motivated by biological impulses" [Malešević and Ryan 2012: 171] such as drives, instincts and the herewith combined view of "violent behavior as innately pleasurable" [Malešević and Ryan 2012: 171]; and (3) Elias's general understanding of humans as animals lusting for violence. Although this criticism is to some extent comprehensible, especially the notion of humans as animals and the orthodox view of drives and instincts, the general rejection of a biologically-based explanation of violence is not shared here. This is in reference to recent neuroscientific findings from the field of aggression and violence research that can fruitfully supplement Elias's concept of drive control and self-constraint.

Such an approach may be irritating, at first glance, on the one hand, because sociology pays little attention to the human brain in interactions, according to its status as a necessary condition similar to gravitation or oxygen [Baecker 2014: 18; Bammé 2017: 286]. And on the other hand, because there may be a risk of governing social sciences by the science-deterministic (taken-for-granted) myth of the neurosciences [Hasler 2012]. Nevertheless, the potential fear of the abolition of sociology due to a biological determinism or even reductionism is rather a pessimistic one, as these disciplines do not have to be mutually exclusive but can enhance each other [Brock 2016: 561-562; Franks 2010: 1]. This is shown by Gazzaniga's [1986] "The Social Brain" or Damásio's "Descartes' Error" [1994] but also by

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recent developments in the new field of neurosociology [Baecker 2014; Brock 2016; Franks 2010; Franks and Turner 2013a]. Especially regarding the future development of sociological theories in general as well as the sociological violence research, cognitive neurosciences matter. They do not promote a biological reductionism in any way, but emphasize the mutual significance of the brain, neuronal processes, and social contexts [Franks 2010: 1-17; Franks and Turner 2013b: 4; Lakoff 2013; Norman *et al*. 2013; Ray 2016, 2018: 15-23; Swedberg 2016: 18]. Against this backdrop, in the following, only such approaches from the field of cognitive neuroscientific aggressions and violence research will be taken into account—but only as supplements of the still sociological explanation, which is founded and framed by Norbert Elias's theoretical work.

By doing so, Malešević and Ryan's [2012: 170-172] first and second objection can be diminished, due to new perspectives on drives suggesting a not solely biological determination. Furthermore, aggression and violence do not have to be considered separate but rather as an associated process. As I argue, by supplementing Elias's concepts of drive control and self-constraint with recent cognitive-neuroscientific findings from the field of aggression and violence research, it is possible to outline an explanation of violence that is, on the one hand, biologically rooted but, on the other hand, bound to social contexts and interdependencies—thus a neurosociological approach. The therefore selected neuroscientific approaches thereby refer to a multiperspective consideration of neuronal, emotional, affective, and social processes. Thus, they do not solely focus on single factors or determinants such as, for instance, genes[3], emotions, or neurotransmitters. Instead, they refer to an interplay of multiple and different brain regions as well as social and neurobiological factors in order to explain aggression and violence [Coccaro *et al*. 2007; Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004; Eisenberger, Lieberman and Williams 2003; Eisenberger *et al*. 2006; Krämer *et al*. 2007; Lang, Bradley

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[3] The use of genes in explaining violence is not shared here because it is "unlikely that genes directly code for violence" [VIDING and FRITHX 2006: 6085]. Even though "there are a number of highly robust findings that have been replicated so consistently that any objective, empirically guided scientist would have to believe" [BEAVER *et al*. 2018/ S. 276f.], the actual genetic polymorphisms regarding violence, aggression, and antisocial behavior [BEAVER *et al*. 2018: 269-272; FER-GUSON and BEAVER 2009: 288-290] do not point to "any strong associations between these polymorphisms and aggression outcomes" [VASSOS, COLLIER and FAZEL 2014: 473]. The approximately 50 percent heritability of antisocial or aggressive behavior [BEAVER *et al*. 2018: 277; VASSOS, COLLIER and FAZEL 2014: 471] can hardly be integrated into a meaningful theoretical sociological explanation of the complex process of violence.

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and Cuthbert 1998; Lotze *et al.* 2007; Siever 2008; Singer *et al.* 2006]. Additionally, they are all based on unisex fMRI studies, taking both mentally disordered and healthy subjects into account [Coccaro *et al.* 2007; Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004; Eisenberger, Lieberman and Williams 2003; Eisenberger *et al.* 2006; Krämer *et al.* 2007; Lang *et al.* 1998; Lotze *et al.* 2007; Siever 2008; Singer *et al.* 2006], thus bypassing the problem of being limited solely to pathologic disorders [Ray 2018: 22].

To put it schematically, briefly from top to bottom, the selected approaches take into account the interplay of long-term-memory (saved socially learned behavior), the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC) located in the prefrontal cortex (PFC) and associated with the amygdala, and the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), as shown in detail in Figure I [Bauer 2011; Coccaro *et al.* 2007; Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004; Eisenberger, Lieberman and Williams 2003; Eisenberger *et al.* 2006; Krämer *et al.* 2007; Lang, Bradley and Cuthbert. 1998; Lotze *et al.* 2007; Siever 2008; Singer *et al.* 2006].

The orbitofrontal cortex "integrate[s] sensory and visceral motor information to modulate behaviour [...] and has direct connections to the [...] amygdala" [Kringelbach 2005: 693], which is important for goal-directed behavior [*ibid.*: 693]. The anterior cingulate cortex—with its dorsal (dACC) and rostral-ventral (rACC) parts—is jointly responsible for cognitive and emotional processes [Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004: 298]. The dorsal part of the ACC (dACC), associated with the prefrontal cortex (responsible for the motor system and the frontal eye field), is of central responsibility for the top-down or bottom-up processing of external stimuli [Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004; Karnath and Thier 2003]. The rostral-ventral part of the ACC (rACC), in contrast, is associated with the nucleus accumbens (part of the limbic system; contributes to happiness/addiction), the amygdala (fear/anxiety), the insula (disgust), the hypothalamus (stress), the hippocampus (arousal; "reptile brain"), and the brain stem (controlling essential life functions), all parts of the limbic system that is involved in the evaluation of the salience of emotional and motivational informations [Bauer 2011; Eisenberger and Lieberman 2004; Karnath and Their 2003; Krämer *et al.* 2007: 204]. Following Bauer [2011], the combination of all of these parts can be summarized as the human motivation and aggression system including a subjective threshold for evaluating the use of violence, thereby not only taking emotions, neurotransmitters, social factors, and the control of decision making into account but avoiding an

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FIGURE I.

The Neuroscientific Interplay Regarding Aggression and Violence
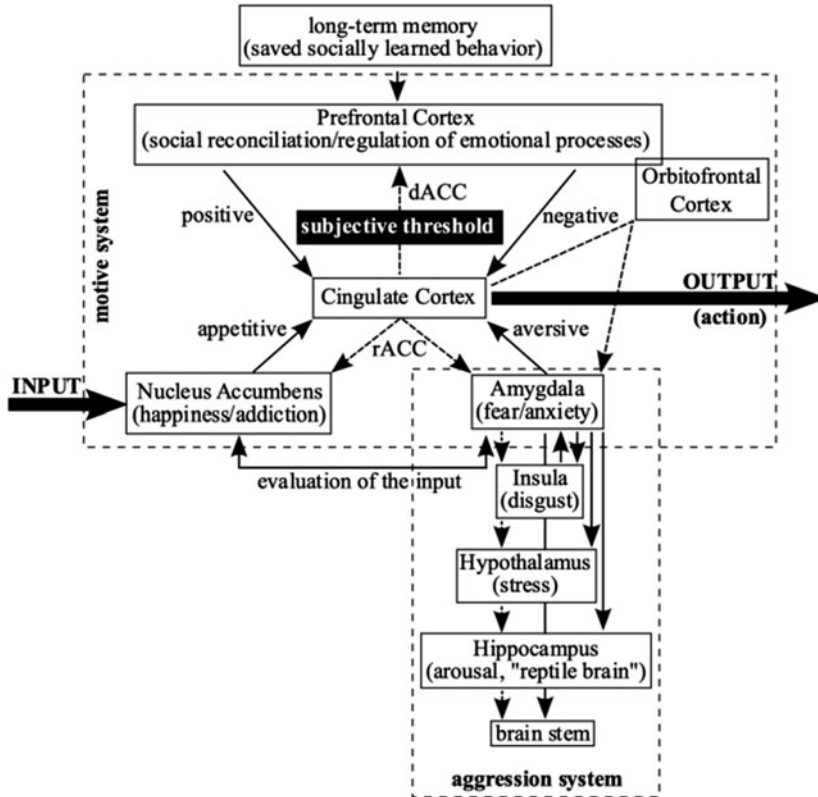
a priori monocausal assumption for explaining aggression and violence.

In a similar way, Larry Ray [2006, 2018] also takes neuroscientific findings into account to explain violence, by integrating approaches concerned with the interplay of emotional arousal in the limbic system, socially learned background feelings and the comparison via individual networks and the within integrated solidary aspect of justifying violence—based on endogenous (intra-individual) or exogenous (inter-individual) incidents [Ray 2016: 350]. Thereby, following Scheff [1988: 397, 1997: 12, 2004], Ray [2016, 2018] focuses on the

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central meaning of shame as a master human emotion. Embedded in Scheff's [1988, 1997] concept, within which shame, that is the deference-emotion system, is the informal mechanism in maintaining social control, violence is the result of an actual or imagined rejection of this system in the context of long-term effective chains of interdependencies, which results in the transformation of shame into rage between and within the interactants. This process is always bound to self-perception or the perception of others [Ray 2016; Ray, Smith and Wastell 2004; Scheff 1988, 1997]. Against this backdrop, Ray [2018; Ray, Smith and Wastell 2004] captures violence both on the macro and meso level (e.g., hate crimes or racist violence) as well as in various power and/or status based interaction contexts on the micro level (e.g., domestic violence)—all explainable in the context of Elias's theory due to Scheff's emotional concept [Ray 2018; Scheff 2004]. However, this explanation—based on shame as a top-down regulating secondary cognitive emotion [Zinck and Newen 2008: 14]—is difficult to assign to those violent situations that are the bottom-up result of rage and fear as primary emotions [Collins 2009; Zinck and Newen 2008: 11-13]. Scheff's [1988] shame-rage spirals exclude this, given their initial direction of action, and even in Ray's [2016, 2018; Ray, Smith and Wastell 2004] approach there are no concrete hints as to how the mechanism concerning the transformation of shame into rage—according to Elias's "threshold of shame and repugnance" [Mennell 1989: 104]—is explained within the context of self-perception or the perception of others. In contrast, these aspects, both the evaluation of a situation via primary and secondary cognitive emotions and the herewith related mechanism regarding the use/non-use of violence [threshold of pain; Bauer 2011], are taken into account in the following explanation. This therefore also complies with the fruitful integration of psychology and sociology, as stated by Elias [2009c], against a backdrop where humans are viewed as not only bounded individuals, in terms of an external and internal effecting environment, but embedded in social figurations based on the inseparable interconnection of interactions, affects, and a normative social control system. Thus, as already mentioned, it is possible to present an approach which considers and emphasizes the mutual significance of the brain, neuronal processes, and the social. As such, violence can be seen as an intrinsic part of the civilizing process because it is an effect of a non-balanced, thus non-controlled, flared tension in situational configurations.

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Neuroscientific Supplements of Drive Control and Self-Constraint, or Interpersonal Violence as an Intrinsic Part of The Civilizing Process

Generally, and in concordance with Malešević and Ryan [2012], a biological explanatory model based on an orthodox view of drives as spontaneous and endogenous instincts—as postulated by Freud or Lorenz—is not useful in explaining violence, because of a one-sided and hence non-interactive assumption, or more specifically a non-reactive basic assumption. According to recent neuroscientific findings, however, drives react in fact to external effects, whereas the biological basis of this assumption is traced back to the human motive system, able to intensify human behavior patterns in terms of instincts by producing messenger substances such as dopamine for well-being or oxytocin for the willingness to cooperate [Bauer 2011: 29-33, 212; Hamm 2003: 562]. Messenger substances motivate human actions in appetitive and aversive, or more precisely appetitive and defensive behavior, in which the release of these substances depends on specific experiences and/or specific ways of behavior connected to associated (socially learned) positive and/or negative feelings [Bauer 2011: 32; Elliot, Eder and Harmon-Jones 2013: 308; Hamm 2003: 562; Lang, Bradley and Cuthbert 1998: 1248]. Evolutionarily, this concerns events that are vital for survival and can be distinguished via the classical dimensions of fight-flight, or more contemporarily via approach-avoidance [Elliot, Eder and Harmon-Jones 2013; Hamm 2003: 562]. In defining the more contemporary view of approach-avoidance, one can say that,

> [m]ost connect approach motivation to concepts of appetition, reward, and incentive, and connect avoidance motivation to concepts of aversion, punishment, and threat. In addition, there is considerable agreement that normal, adaptive functioning entails an appetitive physical and/or psychological orienting toward reward and incentive, and an aversive physical and/or psychological orienting away from punishment and threat (which may entail strategic movement toward or away […]). [Elliot, Eder and Harmon-Jones 2013: 308-309]

Against this backdrop, approach-avoidance can be understood as "directional actions […] that define pleasant and unpleasant affects in humans" [Lang and Bradley 2013: 230]. Thus, the motive system can be seen as target-oriented, trying to avoid threatening situations as quickly as possible via defensive behavior and promoting the willingness of rapprochement in pleasant situations; both depending on contextually appropriate (socially learned) behavior [Hamm 2003:

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562; Lang, Bradley and Cuthbert 1998: 1249]. More precisely, it is a process that can be seen as successful or unsuccessful self-constraint as a function of social constraint.

Against classical and traditional ideas, however, these relationships cannot be seen as purely automatic stimulus-response-like activations of fight or flight depending on (eliciting) cues [Lang, Bradley and Cuthbert 1998: 1249]. It is rather about inducing "similar heightened attention and arousal in the service of selecting an appropriate action, whether towards or away from the eliciting cue" [Lang and Bradley 2013: 230]. Instead of an easy and uniform stimulus-response-action, there exists a broad range and myriad variation in appetitive and defensive human action that can be selected [*ibid*.: 230-231]; namely, "depending upon the utility of a specific action" [*ibid*.: 230]. In other words: "[T]he motive system determines the general behavioral strategy, defense or appetitive acquisition. The specific somatic and autonomic patterns of affective responding are tactical, in that they are formed by the behavioral context" [Lang, Bradley and Cuthbert 1998: 1249].

Finally, one can say that only those actions that are based on activation of the motive system and that depend on specific contextual and situational behavior patterns comply with the (contemporary) view of drives [Bauer 2011: 32-33]. Thus, positing humans as instinctual and innately violent animals is still open to criticism, particularly if one regards the fact that cooperation, and therefore the avoidance of negative situations, is a rewarding behavior in human interactions [Axelrod 1984; Krämer *et al*. 2007]. In addition, co-operation according to a tit-for-tat approach may be either fair or unfair; it can even be characterized by (im)balances of tensions [Elias 1978: 131; Elias and Dunning 1966: 396]. While "fairness in social interactions shapes the nature of the affective link between people" [Singer *et al*. 2006: 467], nourished by positive cooperation, un-fairness and "selfish behavior that is detrimental to others effectively compromises this link" [*ibid*.: 467]. As a result of the latter, "empathic responses in the brain are diminished or abolished" [*ibid*.: 467]. This leads to negative perceptions of others and provokes one's emotional and empathic cognitive demands regarding social acceptance, positive cooperation, and fair interpersonal treatment; with the effect that aggressive behavior, which may lead to violent actions, is activated [Bauer 2011: 53-62; Krämer *et al*. 2007; Lotze *et al*. 2007; Singer *et al*. 2006]. That, however, does not mean that violent actions are actually committed; at least following Axelrod [1984], it is very likely that fair

cooperation is the (long-term) desired condition in interactions. Thus, it is important to note that the relationship between aggressive behavior and violent actions should not be interpreted as a simple linear process because even the consequences of aggression and violence are cortically weighted due to the human ability for empathy and anticipation [Bauer 2011: 56]. If and to what extent a person (re) acts in an aggressive and violent way depends on weighing up between an aggressive bottom-up and a moderating top-down impulse; both integrated into the coenesthesis (self-esteem) as part of the cingulate cortex [Bauer 2011: 56]. More precisely, it depends on the situational ability of the muting of drives, that is the (subjective) drive control as stated by Elias [2000].

Following Bauer [2011: 53-57], both impulses and the weighing-up process are part of the aggression system of the human brain: here, the bottom-up impulse depends on the valuation of the environmental stimuli that may trigger the aggression potential according to the seriousness of the (perceived) threat. In cases of (potential) pain and/ or other threats, the environmental stimuli firstly activate the centers of anxiety (amygdala) and nausea (parts of the insular cortex) and, depending on the type of perceived threat, the centers of stress (hypothalamus) and arousal (hippocampus) as well. If the perceived threat is classified as (highly) dangerous by these neurobiological systems, the typical reaction would be an aggressive, hence violent one; at least according to the orthodox view on drives. But, before reacting in this way, however, a second and mattering step is activated in the prefrontal cortex in cooperation with long-term memory. Here, the bottom-up created (potential) aggressive behavior is controlled top-down by evaluating and anticipating the consequences that may result if the aggression potential is transformed into violent behavior, both for oneself and the (social) environment. At this point, the motive system and the aggression system cooperate: they evaluate whether aggressive behavior and the potential use of violence are rewarding and adequate goals of action. This process not only indicates the mutual significance of neurobiological and social aspects, on the one hand, but is rather guided by the latter, on the other.

Therefore, this is a process that is quite similar to the interwoven affect-regulating and restraining inner-battle between ego (the subjective awareness of long-sighted interdependencies) and Id (the drives) [Elias 2000: 416]. Only if aggressive behavior and the potential use of violence are not moderated in this process, meaning that someone feels exposed to an increasing and no longer predictable

risk, violence will be committed. In brief, aggressive behavior and violent actions are only executed if a specific subjective threshold is exceeded. More precisely, violence becomes an option if the subjective threshold of pain ["*Schmerzgrenze*"; Bauer 2011] is exceeded, whereby pain is not only traced back to physical pain and threats, but also to social pain in terms of social rejection, exclusion and (subjectively perceived) unfair treatments. This accords to Elias's "threshold of shame and repugnance" [Mennell 1989: 104]. This is because these effects may also trigger pain in the corresponding brain areas, hence causing aggression [Coccaro *et al*. 2007; Eisenberger and Liebermann 2004; Eisenberger, Liebermann and Williams 2003; Eisenberger *et al*. 2006]. Here, the mutual significance of neurobiological and social aspects becomes obvious again. On the one hand, physical violence causing pain, thus inducing the neurobiological process of aggression, is weighted and evaluated by socially learned behavior and the anticipation of (social) consequences. On the other hand, negative perceived social encounters also trigger the neurobiological process of aggression, and are subject to the same weighing-up and evaluation process. If someone is (held) responsible for causing pain in this broader sense and their actions exceed one's subjective threshold of pain, the consequence is that this person is recognized as a threatening risk and has to be punished. This is because exceeding someone's individual threshold of pain leads to the subjective rewarding perception of aggression and violence. But aggressive behavior and the use of violence, as a situational action alternative executed for one's own defense, is based in fact not only on pure cortical processes, thus on the orthodox view on drives. They rather base on the cortical interplay of the motive and aggression system, and the social experiences learned and mediated by socialization; all processed in the coenesthesis (self-esteem) located in the cingulate cortex [Bauer 2011: 54, 61; Strüber, Lück and Roth 2008]. Therefore, this (neuroscientifically-based) interplay complies with the Eliasian perspective and argument regarding the muting of drives due to self-constraint as a function of social constraint.

Considering these findings, Malešević and Ryan's [2012: 171] criticisms of a pure biologically-based explanatory model of violence as well as the absent differentiation "between the psychological phenomenon of aggression and the sociological process that is violence" can be diminished. By supplementing Elias's concepts of drive control and self-constraint with the presented neuroscientific findings, the (neuro)biologically-based concept of aggression as

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reactive drive fruitfully can be integrated into the sociological process of violence: namely, as a result of social exclusion, social rejection, and (subjectively perceived) unfair treatment in chains of interdependencies that (may) lead to shame and repugnance; thus challenging the muting of drives with the possibility of causing aggression. Thereby, aggression—more precisely, impulsive aggression which is based on negatively perceived emotions such as anger or fear [Siever 2008: 429]—is the bodily-induced reaction to threatening environmental influences in relation to the anticipated social consequences in the cortical weighing-up process. Therefore, violence is the result of a failed subjective drive control in situational configurations in which the tensions that exist out of the dynamical logic cannot be moderated and thus balanced.[4] Again, this is due to the cortical weighing-up process *and* the dependence on socially learned and mediated modes of civilized behavior. Additionally, this assumption is quite in line with Elias's view of violence as being on the fringes of civilized societies, re-entering in (exceptional) situations in which drive control and self-constraint can no longer be sustained; Elias demonstrated this in his remarks on the fear of social degradation. The analogy to the neural process of weighing up between an aggressive bottom-up and a moderating top-down impulse and their coenesthesis-based integration can also be found here, namely in terms of Id (the impulses), ego (self-esteem) and the anticipated consequences that are framed by the societal normative regulation system of actions (super-ego). In this way, the absence, as well as the presence of interpersonal violence on the micro level, can be explained within the framework of Elias's theory: the pursuits of cooperation as a reactive drive in the human motive system generate both civilized and violent behavior due to chains of interdependencies which, in turn, depend on figurational tension-(im)balances. But again, violence only becomes an option if the personal threshold of pain is exceeded in such situations. Finally,

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[4] In addition to the situational view presented here, this may also count for deliberate and planned actions such as robberies. Here, the threat is not necessarily situationally imminent, but a (more or less) long-term outcome of subjective perceived social or physical threats causing individual motives for committing such a violent crime—for instance, ongoing money-based social exclusion or inequality, mobbing or addiction-based psycho-physical coercions of acquisition. That means that various subjective perceived threatening situations first trigger aggression but do not transform it into violence immediately. Here, the weighing-up process still works at first. However, it may lead to imagined individual violent motives if similar situational encounters occur over time up to the point where the accumulation of aggression and the imaginary intended violence can no longer be moderated. Thus, the threshold of pain is ultimately exceeded, transforming the previously imagined or planned violent act into reality.

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Malešević and Ryan's [2012: 171] criticism of a missing differentiated consideration of aggression and violence, that is the assumption that aggression and violence are two disciplinary-separated items, seems to be justified in no more than an analytical manner. This is because violence actually can be seen as an intrinsic part of *The Civilizing Process*: namely, as an (extreme) effect out of situational configurations in which existing tensions cannot be balanced—much less controlled—within the dynamical logic of situations that provoke and exceed the subjective threshold of pain of at least one of the parties involved.

Finally, the approach presented here forms the basis of an Eliasian micro theory of violence that takes social processes, bodily-induced aspects as well as (situational) interactions into account.

Conclusion

In this article, I have presented the first draft of a so far missing explanation of interpersonal violence on the micro level within the context of Elias's theory. I have done that with respect to *The Civilizing Process* and by supplementing Elias's concepts of drive control as well as social and self-constraint with recent neuroscientific findings out of the field of aggression and violence research. Against this backdrop, my approach reacts to the criticism of the general absence of violence within Elias's theory and the missing or misleading differentiation of aggression and violence [Malešević and Ryan 2012: 171]. Furthermore, and in addition to previous approaches focusing on macro and meso level violence within Elias's framework, I have shown, in particular, that interpersonal micro-level violence is not the opposite but an intrinsic part of the civilizing process.

This theoretical conceptualization is enabled by supplementing Elias's classical assumptions of drive control and self-constraint with the recent meaning of drives as being reactive to environmental stimuli and not spontaneous endogenous caused instincts, as in the orthodox view, as well as a specific cortical mechanism evaluating the subjective use/misuse of violence (the threshold of pain). Thereby, similar to Elias's "threshold of shame and repugnance" [Mennell 1989: 104], it depends on the general social-cognitive-biological interplay of human behavior in interactive figurations within a normative action frame.

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Considering aggression in terms of fear and anger as a reactive drive depending on subjective perceived threatening situations— meaning as tensions that are induced by and therefore are intrinsic to a situative configuration [Elias and Dunning 1966: 391]—violence is committed only in such cases in which these tensions can no longer balanced, hence, controlled by the subject. But, against the backdrop of this (neuro)biological base, violence is still not a stimulus-response like action. It is a social process or, more precisely, a social action. Before committing violence as a subjectively perceived rewarding behavior, aggressions are cortically weighed-up against the socially learned and the normative societal frame of civilized behavior. As such, if the aggression-induced physical and/or social pain caused here can no longer be moderated—that is, if self-constraint is no longer able to control the drives and tensions—this, finally, exceeds a subjective threshold of pain and leads to violence as social action in spite of a civilized normative action frame.

Against this backdrop, my approach could also enrich future sociological violence research. First, the clear differentiation between aggression as a neurobiological process and violence as social action depending on a threshold mechanism is useful as this aspect is still under-developed. For example, Collins's [2009] micro-theory on violence provides valuable insights on this matter. However, his concept of confrontational tension/fear as the mechanism or trigger for committing violence is theoretically undetermined. Here, the threshold of pain could enhance this concept because primary (fear/ anger) and secondary cognitive emotions (shame/repugnance) are taken into account to explain violence on the micro-level. Second, it provides for the integration of macro and meso level factors regarding the normative societal frame or a specific group-focused behavior frame, as in the development of football rules [Elias and Dunning 1966] or solidarity patterns within riots [Collins 2009]. Taking my approach of an Eliasian based theory of interpersonal micro-level violence into account, this could also enable us to bridge the macro-micro-gap in sociological violence research, because of the conceptualized interplay of societal and situation-dependent (subjectively evaluated) individual motives for the use/misuse of violence that depends on interactional social processes and figurations—thereby resulting from one theoretical inherent pen.

In general, further thoughts on neuroscientific as well as neurosociological considerations in explaining violence may also be fruitful for future research. In particular, exploring a combination of Ray's

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[2016, 2018] approach with my own could lead to a comprehensive analysis, integrating both macro, meso, and micro level aspects and primary as well as secondary emotions within direct interactional encounters and indirect affecting normative backgrounds, thus potentially providing a new way of sociological violence research.

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Résumé

Même si Norbert Elias n'a jamais proposé une théorie explicite de la violence dans son ouvrage Sur Le processus de Civilisation, notamment en raison de la priorité accordée aux processus sociaux pacifiques, la violence n'est pour autant jamais exclue de son cadre théorique. Contrairement aux critiques qui dénoncent tour à tour un vide théorique ou une approche plus biologique que sociologique de la violence, et outre les théories qui expliquent la violence aux niveaux méso et macro à l'intérieur du cadre proposé par Elias, cet article montre que la violence interpersonnelle au niveau micro constitue un élément à part entière du processus civilisationnel. En complétant les hypothèses d'Elias concernant le contrôle des pulsions et la maîtrise de soi par les découvertes neuroscientifiques récentes, il est possible de conceptualiser la violence interpersonnelle au niveau micro comme le dépassement situé d'un seuil subjectif de douleur. Ici, malgré l'existence d'un cadre normatif de comportement civilisé, l'agression, considérée comme pulsion réactive (neuro) biologique, n'est plus contrôlée par une maîtrise de soi socialement apprise, ce qui conduit à une conception de la violence comme comportement subjectivement gratifiant et action accomplie socialement.

Mots-clés : Processus de civilisation ; Norbert Elias ; Neuroscience ; Seuil de douleur ; Violence.

Zusammenfassung

Selbst wenn Norbert Elias in seinem Werk "Über den Prozess der Zivilisation" nie eine ausdrückliche Gewalttheorie anvisierte, insbesondere aufgrund seines Forschungsinteresses an friedlichen sozialen Prozessen, so ist die Gewalt in seiner Theorie nicht ganz abwesend. Im Gegensatz zu seinen Kritikern, die mal eine theoretische Leere, mal einen mehr biologischen als soziologischen Ansatz der Gewalt kritisieren, und neben den Theorien, die die Gewalt auf Meso- und Makroebene innerhalb des von Elias gesteckten Rahmen erklären, beschreibt dieser Beitrag, die interpersonale Gewalt auf der Mikroebene als ein vollwertiges Element des Zivilisationsprozesses. Ergänzend zu Elias Hypothesen bezüglich Trieb und Selbstkontrolle im Rahmen neuester neurowissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse, kann die interpersonale Gewalt auf der Mikroebene als Überwindung einer subjektiven Schmerzschwelle definiert werden. Trotz des bestehenden normativen Rahmens eines zivilisierten Verhaltens kann die Aggression, als reaktiver (neuro)biologischer Trieb verstanden, nicht durch die gesellschaftlich erlernte Selbstbeherrschung kontrolliert werden, was zu einem Gewaltkonzept führt, das ganz subjektiv als befriedigendes Verhalten und sozial vollkommene Handlung verstanden werden kann.

Schlüsselwörter : Zivilisationsprozess; Norbert Elias; Neurowissenschaften; Schmerzgrenze; Gewalt.