

The Aggressor's Mindset

In the street, the term survival of the fittest does not necessarily apply to the one who is the fastest runner, or the best fighter. There are many determining factors that conclude the survivor of a street altercation. Generally, the advantage usually lies with the aggressor or initiator. As the one who is initiating the fight, the aggressor maintains the upper hand by being able to continually 'up the stakes'.

People believe that the police are the first line of defence. This could be true should you find yourself inside a police station when attacked. The reality is that 'you' are going to be the first line of defence, and the aggressor knows this. He knows this for a number of reasons whether they be because there is not a police officer in sight, or the nearest police station is four suburbs away. However, most of all he knows this because he has done it all before, and he is still free to do it again.

Those who practice violence on the street are cunning, vicious, and, most notably, they cheat. There are no rules in street fighting. And street fights are much like a game where it's easy to win when you are the only one cheating, but a lot harder when everyone else is cheating too. The winner is going to be the person who is the best at cheating, not the better fighter, the person who can neutralise all the possible ways his opponent is thinking of setting up the game in his favour.

For the purposes of this essay, I am not going to discuss counter strategies for use in a street situation against an aggressor, but rather the mindset and tactics the aggressor can employ against you. It is through the information, knowledge, and tactics of the people and organisations below that I am able to identify and expand on the strategies used by an aggressor on the street.

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Types of aggressor

Who are you most likely to be assaulted by? According to the AIC, the average person most likely to be processed by the police is a male aged between 15 – 19 years. However, assault statistics state that males between the ages of 20-24 will have the highest recordings of assault charges. The average height and weight of an assault offender is 5'9" – 6'0" tall, and surprisingly, 79 – 86 kg, not the lumbering 100kg+ lummoX, lurking in the pub that most people would imagine. It should also be noted that attacks can happen at any time, any location, by anyone and for any number of reasons.

Street aggressors can be divided into two main categories, 'Amateur' or 'Professional', as defined by the fundamental purpose of their motive for attack

The Amateur is an egotistically driven individual, who is looking to assault someone simply because they believe it's within their power to do so. To be a victim of an Amateur, you do not have to be doing anything to bring it upon yourself. The majority of the time, victims are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Attacks by an amateur will usually be in social situations, while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Identifiable traits of the Amateur may be:

- a walk imbued with attitude (usually negative),
- elbows pushed away from the body - usually an attempt to increase the perception of physical size as well as to encompass more space within an area,
- verbally aggressive and rude to people within close proximity
- confrontations triggered after eye contact

'Ritualised' combative signs that may be apparent from the Amateur prior to initiation of combat may be:

- exaggerated splaying of arms to express exclamation,
- beckoning with finger,
- nodding of head,
- bulging eyes staring,
- acquisition of innate fighting stance,
- closure of distance during a confrontation.

The professional is a street aggressor who fits the category of serial mugger, rapist, or serial killer. These aggressors attack for reasons of profit, regardless of whether that profit is monetary or psychological. It is important to note that unlike the Amateur, this type of aggressor is not interested in seeing how good a fighter you are. When they attack, if you even see it coming, they will already have measures in place to ensure that they come out of the situation on top.

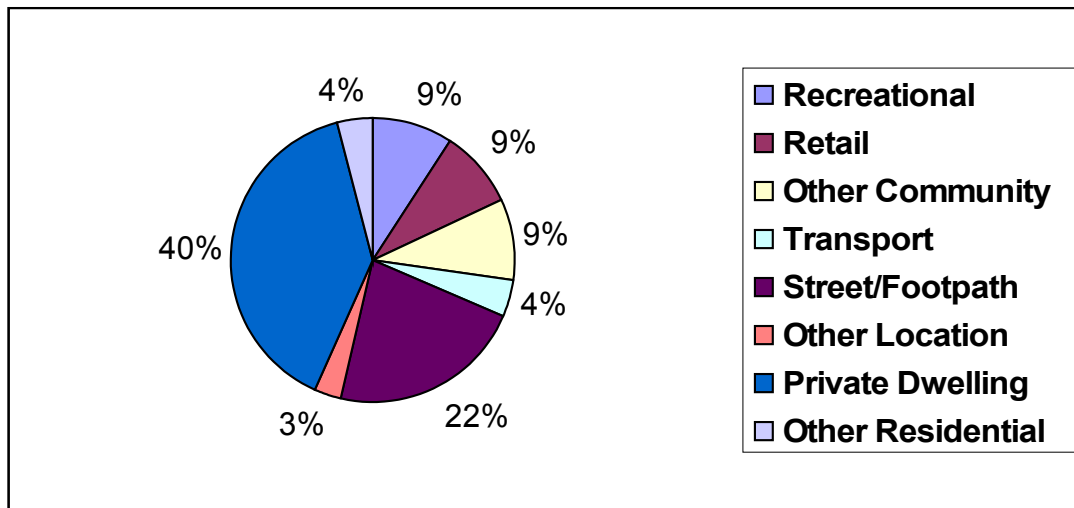
These aggressors are also much harder to identify as they merge into society and do not appear obvious. They tend to prey upon victims who do not have a 'situational awareness' i.e. they are oblivious to being watched, followed, assessed or set up by any number of means.

Victim selection

Studies have concluded that people who look like victims are far more likely to be targeted for violent crimes. So what makes a person a victim? There are numerous factors that help to decide whether a person will be targeted for a physical assault. Such factors include their posture and gait, which can often telegraph their confidence levels to anyone who may be watching. People who walk close to buildings, appear nervous, or constantly look around, as well as those who noticeably change their route of walking to avoid a person or people already have the appearance of the victim, and may allow an aggressor a reason to incite something.

When an aggressor strikes, they usually follow a step by step process of target acquisition. Although the amateur will tend not to be as tactical as the professional, he may employ any combination of the following tactics depending on the reasoning's for the attack. As previously stated, aggressors will generally seek out a victim who has no situational awareness. Attacks from professionals will usually occur in sparsely populated areas, out of view of witnesses to further reduce chances of being interrupted or caught.

According to the AIC, in the majority of cases for assaults on males, the attacker was a stranger, where in the majority of cases for females, the attacker was a relative or friend. As males are more likely to be attacked by a person unknown to them, the question is, where is this likely to happen? With around half of assaults occurring on the street, according to the AIC's assault statistics, the percentage of assaults occurring in the following locations were:



Once a target has been identified, the aggressor will usually stalk until they have reached a time or location that best suits their need for privacy and control. Stalking may or may not be obvious, depending on the person's situational awareness. If the aggressor suspects that the intended victim is aware of being stalked, depending on the purpose of the attack, the aggressor may decide to abort and find a more unsuspecting victim.

Victim/Aggressor Positioning

The aggressor will seek to place themselves in a position to either attack, surprise, or engage in a 'street interview' with the potential victim. At this point, the aggressor will usually employ one of a number of positioning tactics to set their intended victim up for a successful attack. These are often used in varying combinations with the street interviews.

'Closing' is the most common positioning tactic. The aggressor will walk directly up to the victim to get as close as he can. The aggressor knows that in a street situation, the closer he can get to a target, the more success he will have in his attempt to overwhelm and maintain control of the situation. The aggressor will be utilising the 'reaction delay' in the victim i.e. once an attack has been initiated the aggressor knows there will be shock, panic and a subsequent delay in either a counter attack or a defence.

'Surprise' will immediately follow a closing positioning technique. The aggressor will unexpectedly launch an attack, catching the victim off guard. In an ambush situation, the aggressor has taken a tactical position and the victim has essentially closed the aggressor in on themselves. This guarantees a reaction delay, as attacks will often come from behind, as a strike to the back of the head, possibly with a blunt weapon. This tactic also reduces the possibility of being seen or caught if the victim did not see the attackers face.

The 'Pincer' tactic is commonly used by two or more aggressors. The intention is that one will distract you, while the other circles behind. This can also be achieved by initially coming in from behind, and while the potential victim is focused on them, they can be herded into an awaiting aggressor hiding a short distance ahead. Even though people will generally avoid positioning themselves between two unknown people, in most situations the second attacker was never even seen.

The 'Surround' tactic is commonly achieved in groups or 'packs' of aggressors. There is a completely different mindset in this situation and is very common for the 'escalating interview' to occur, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. One aggressor will usually distract you, while the remainder of the group will surround you, cutting off routes of escape. Large packs of aggressors will tend to not walk directly up to an intended victim, but rather drift towards their general area to keep the victim unaware of their intentions. Weapons are common in larger groups, as is the possibility of alcohol or a substance being involved. Risks of serious harm or death are increased by the number of active participants, who in essence, feed off each other's growing animosity. Males are particularly notorious in this situation, as the need to defend one's ego is multiplied by their pack status.

Street Interviews

Street interviews are used when the element of surprise is not available, or the need for a more in depth assessment is required. Aggressors may also use them for more simple reasons, most commonly to close distance and reduce a potential victim's ability to defend themselves or flee. Street interviews are also often used to determine if an intended victim is a low risk, high gain target.

The first and most common type of street interviewing tactic is the 'reasonable request' interview. This particular tactic allows the aggressor to close the distance to conversational range, as well as retain the ability to make last minute changes to a predetermined plan of attack, or if the need to wait for better timing, location, or assistance by an accomplice's is required. The aggressor will approach the victim and ask a range of common requests, such as the time, smoke, change, or directions. While the victim is complying with their request, the aggressor will move into a surprise attack position. This is a very effective distraction technique, and generally allows the aggressor to land the first successful strike.

The next most common street interviewing tactic is the 'distant interview'. This is where the aggressor makes an assessment on the intended victim's body language at a distance and it is also where a person's situational awareness will determine whether they are a victim or not. This method is favoured by aggressors, as it provides the opportunity to pick the seemingly easiest and again, low risk, high gain target. As previously stated, most criminals are in plain view of their victims prior to any assault, however the intended victim fails to realise they are there. This also provides an opportunity to 'window shop' potential victims, who may be carrying a briefcase, handbag, suitcase, or have personal items of appeal.

The 'escalating interview' usually takes place in pack situations. It can start off as a reasonable request, but quickly escalate to a boiling point at which point the attack occurs. This can be an extremely dangerous situation, as not only weapons are common in this scenario, but it contains the pack mentality where the leader or 'mouth' initiates the first strike, which can be as limited as a push, and then is followed by an ongoing attack by the remaining pack members. It is common in this situation for the victim to be grounded and

kicked repeatedly by the pack. This has a tendency to continue well after the victim has been seriously injured.

When a 'Bully Interview' is used, an aggressor will initiate a verbal challenge, verbal assault, or aggressive questioning where no correct answer can be given, e.g. what the f**k are you looking at? Nothing huh? So you're saying I'm nothing? In this situation, the aggressor has a need to build himself up to be able to initiate the attack. By using verbal challenges, the aggressor hopes you will respond in kind, giving him the reason he needs to take the situation physical. This, combined with pushing, is also used as an intelligence gathering technique to ascertain your intentions and ability to fight back. This situation can be used in conjunction with other tactics and is common to be part of a complete process where it is initiated by the eye glare, which leads to a bully question, proceeds to an escalating interview, then concludes with the attack.

After the previous steps have been taken by an aggressor, and there is a positive assessment made, they will generally attack using the element of surprise. If there has been a negative assessment made, and the intended victim appears to be aware of what is going on, or appears to be taking counter measures, the aggressor may abort the attack and move on to a safer target.

If a positive threat assessment has been made by the aggressor, this is the point in time where hidden accomplices or weapons appear. The threats that follow are often very direct and extremely violent in nature, featuring intended outcomes by the aggressor such as "I'll kick your head in until you're in a coma!" The aggressor's goal here is to create a mental state where the victim is on the verge of panic and unable to react effectively.

In some cases, the aggressor will make an offer of not causing harm if the victim complies with his request. The likelihood of not being assaulted even if the victim has complied is quite low. The reasoning for this is that the aggressor does not want to make a scene which is going to change the physics of the situation he has just created, such as being observed by witnesses, increasing the odds of people assisting the victim, or being caught by authorities. Once the aggressor has what he wants, he may subdue the victim, to enable sufficient time to flee before authorities are notified. This may or may not be life threatening.

The attack

This is point where the aggressor engages the victim. Numerous outcomes can occur here. Some attacks may be minimal, involving one or two strikes intended to make the victim freeze up while they take what they want. Most however, will be frenzied and severe with the intent to disable or ground the victim before an effective counter attack can be launched. Although both the amateur and professional types of aggressor are acting under differing motives, both will exhibit one or more pre-assault signs. A singular sign by itself may be unrelated, however two or three together should be taken seriously.

Ritualised combat signs that an attack may be possible but not imminent:

- head, neck, shoulders go back,
- face is red, twitching or jerking,
- lips pushed forward baring teeth
- breathing is fast and shallow
- sweating

- thousand mile glare
- exaggerated movements
- finger pointing/head pecking
- totally ignores you
- gives you excessive attention during normal conversation, such as direct uninterrupted eye contact.
- changes from totally uncooperative to cooperative
- acts under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- directs anger towards inanimate objects such as tables, chairs, walls

Ritualised combat signs that an assault is imminent:

- face colour changes from red to white,
- lips tighten over teeth,
- breathing becomes fast and shallow,
- change of stance,
- hands close into fists (usually autonomic),
- bobbing up and down on feet, or rocking back and forth,
- makes target glances to your vital points,
- lowers head and chin (to protect his eyes and throat),
- cessation of all movements,
- shedding of clothing (most common),
- full sentences change to single syllable replies.

Advantages of the Aggressor

Most aggressors will have very real advantages over their intended victim. These have been created out of necessity, and refined in the environment of the street. The aggressor knows what works and what doesn't.

An aggressor will generally not attack unless he has full confidence in his abilities to win the physical encounter. An aggressor's confidence lies in his ability to use a 'king hit' strike repeatedly to the victim's head as opposed to the body, or vital points. It may also be because he has superior numbers in his group, or has a weapon concealed, but easily accessible for use.

An aggressor's experience comes from actual street application of techniques and strategies as opposed to a training venue, where the environment is essentially controlled. Factors such as fear, pain, and panic are removed when training in safe environments, whereas an aggressor's experience and abilities are forged from lessons learned on the street, be they good or bad.

Most street fighters have one or two techniques that they have mastered to a particular degree. This mastery stems from actual application in the real world. Due to this fact, most street aggressors know what works the majority of the time, as well as what does not. Combative training is developed under 'real' street conditions. The aggressor knows that even if he is stuck, even repeatedly, he will still be able to function.

A street aggressor's tactics are that of simplicity - the simpler something is, the easier it will work. Many competent fighters have been seriously injured in street encounters, as their

techniques have been too complex, fancy or just too rigid to be applicable. When an aggressor launches an attack, it is often a continuous barrage of punches until the intended victim has been grounded. These attacks are usually very brutal and violent, and the aggressor almost always takes the advantage of the first strike.

People watch reports on the news of violent crimes and firmly believe this will never happen to them. Because of this fact, when they are attacked they panic and hesitate which is very large advantage to the attacker. As the aggressor is the one who is initiating the attack, thus the one who wants to fight, he retains the advantage of planning not surprise, anger not panic, focus not fear.

Extraneous Variables

There are many opportunities in the street for unforeseen factors to have a large influence on an outcome. These influences may come from the environment, such as a weapon being found on the ground, whether it is a bottle, stick, syringe etc, or they may come from elsewhere such as additional people becoming involved, regardless whether they are on your side or not.

Most street aggressors will have some kind of backup to help them out, should they find themselves in trouble. It is foolish to consider that you are only in a fight with one person. This type of mindset combined with the resulting tunnel vision, can cause victim to fail to realise that there are other aggressors at his back, until it is too late. In many situations, particularly if it they are set up, an aggressor's accomplices will act as 'sleepers'. These sleepers will be in close proximity to the aggressor. However, they will not be identified until after the attack has been initiated.

There are an increasing number of instances where weapons were used before, during or after a confrontation. The instances of knives being used are increasing dramatically. A weapon can change the outcome of the situation from minor physical damage, such as bruising, to potentially fatal circumstances. If an aggressor engaged in an attack, and the victim escalated the situation by pulling a knife (regardless of whether or not he was intending on using it), the victim has now increased the potential danger of the situation from a beating with fists, to potentially fatal for himself should the aggressor gain control of the knife.

Most street fights will usually have friends looking in from both sides. These friends will often attempt to separate combatants in an effort to 'break up' the fight. This is very dangerous as, while the friend is pulling away the victim, they are causing the attacker to have an advantage by interfering with their friend's ability to defend himself, successfully put down the aggressor, or flee. This type of activity can occur before, during and after the fight as well. Aggressors will generally be able to work in a cohesive group much more effectively than those attempting to defend themselves, as they will probably have the advantage of having fought in a group situation before. The aggressor's group will always seek to utilise the 'strength in numbers' concept.

Why fight?

What drives someone to the point of possibly crippling or killing a total stranger? Reasons of pride and ego are most common. When an individual perceives that their ego has been challenged, they may feel a need to defend that ego. This reasoning is increased if peers are present. People will generally be more likely to let an insult 'roll off their back' when they are by themselves, as opposed to being with people from their social group. Chances of diffusing a situation in a group scenario are small. It is also important to consider the mindset within groups in the context that a challenge to one is a challenge to all.

Alcohol and drugs are also main contributing factors as to why fights occur. People do not have to be under the influence of either to start a fight. However, it can also be the acquisition of these substances that can cause people to become desperate. Drugs and alcohol restrict an individual's perception of reality, so much so that they may either not be aware of, or not care what they are doing, or in some cases, they are unable to consider the consequences of their actions.

There are three main categories of things that an aggressor may want – property, body, or life.

- Under the reasons of property, an aggressor could want specific things from you such as money, wallet, credit card, jewellery or clothing. Items that either contain money, or will provide him with money. Usually the easier something is to convert to cash or drugs, the more popular a target they are.
- Under the reasons of body, this may include pride or ego based assaults, sexual assaults, or purely the enjoyment of performing a violent act. Unlike the reasons of property, an aggressor acting under these goals will tend not to be appeased when the victim throws their wallet on the ground and runs away.
- Under the reason of life, any motive is possible. It could be one of the aforementioned reasons, which has escalated too far. A factor unforeseen by the aggressor may have changed the situation. It could be the result of a mental illness. It could be an accident. Either way, life is the ultimate property to be defended as, once taken, it cannot be returned.

Street fights are not choreographed like they are on TV, martial art demonstrations, or two person forms seen in schools, and they are not what people expect. Most street fights are very aggressive, fast, and gross in appearance. In most instances, it is a back and forth occurrence where the two combatants exchange punches repeatedly, usually with each of them grappling the other's shirt. Generally, the combatant who lands the first neutralising blow usually wins the fight. Even a well-trained fighter's technique will begin to get sloppy after the first few strikes are thrown. This is why, in the street, 'functionality of technique' is far more important than 'perfect technique'. If something is aesthetically pleasing but not practical, it is not going to be of use in the real world.

Most street fights are over very quickly, usually within the first 5-10 seconds. It is very rare to see a street fight last longer 15 seconds. Even with friends standing metres away from you, a fight can be over before they even have a chance to assist you. If the fight is not over quickly, it is highly likely it will involve ground fighting. This will usually happen when an attacker is getting pummelled by a barrage of strikes, since they will want to close the distance in an attempt to smother or control the attacks they are receiving. While the aggressor may not be a skilled ground fighter, he will generally know more than the average

person. When it goes to the ground, the possibility of escape is reduced, and the possibility getting kicked by the aggressor's companions is increased.

Maintaining situational awareness is the key to avoiding and surviving street fights.

Simply being a well trained fighter is not enough, especially if that well trained fighter never even sees the attack coming. The street is a dangerous place, and an individual needs to be prepared mentally and physically.

Crime statistics are increasing, especially with assaults involving the use of weapons. Knives in particular, are becoming more common and were the weapon of choice for 33% of homicides in Australia in 2003, according to the AIC.

Some street fighting systems teach fleeing after a fast compound attack on vital areas. However, this isn't always an option, especially if you have family or friends to protect. Surviving is achieved by knowing how dangerous situations unfold, as well as the preferred tactics of street aggressors, how to identify and avoid them. As stated by Sifu David Crook, 'a superior martial artist is someone who uses superior judgement to avoid situations which may require the use of superior skills'.