Aggression and violence are acts that are fed by emotions such as anger, angst, frustration, depression, lust, sadness, and love. Given that, it is important to understand that emotions require a state of autonomic arousal plus a learned social label that relates to the experience; these factors are what enable an individual to interpret and act upon the emotions that they are feeling. Some aggression is a normal aspect of human behavior to an extent, such as what occurs in activities like competitive sports or hunting. For example aggression, as an act of protection fed by the emotion of love, can be socially acceptable in appropriate circumstances. To make the transition from socially acceptable forms of aggression to socially unacceptable forms of aggression and violence underlying negative self worth and dysfunction must be present. Therefore I believe it is important to focus on internal psychological dysfunction and external exacerbating factors. There is not one theory on its own that adequately surmises both of these external and internal factors. Rather, I think that a combination of several theories together into one formulate a more comprehensive explanation.

 The first contributing theory is the social learning theory which was introduced by Albert Bandura. He believed that aggression is not inherited but learned from a process referred to as behavior modeling, where individuals learn aggressive responses from observing others. Behavior modeling is also known as observational learning; this process is comprised of four components that are influenced by the individuals’ behavior after being exposed to people who were exhibiting aggressive behavior.  These four components are attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation, all of which are essential for modeling the aggressive behavior.  Bandura also believed that experiences within an individual’s environment also influence their tendency to behave violently. Another theory that fits nicely here is that of displaced aggression. This theory asserts that individuals will carry out aggression against someone other than the source of instigation when the individual is unable to aggress against the instigator for whatever reason. For example, a child who gets physically abused at home or tormented at school may, in turn, take his aggression out by torturing animals.

Another relevant theory is that of the cognitive neo-association model. This theory states that frustration or aversive stimuli instigate aggressive reactions by creating negative effects. The individual will interpret the aversive stimuli with either a fight or flight response, and that will depend on how the person has perceived the stimuli. For example, if a child pushes another child on the playground the act can be perceived one of two ways, flight or fight. The child who was pushed can either get up and run away or act aggressively or violently towards the other child. The negative emotions generated from the incident can cause the child to respond in ways that have negative consequences.

 However while some individuals may learn aggression from their social environments, others are genetically prone towards aggressive behavior. Inherited traits give us a tendency towards behaving a certain way and our environment exacerbates that tendency. The Cognitive Script Theory is one based of functional cognitive processes. This theory emphasizes that behavior depends on stored behavioral repertoires, known as cognitive scripts, which are learned during early development. In response to environmental cues, possible cognitive scripts are mentally retrieved and evaluated by the individual. The choice of aggressive scripts, which prescribe aggressive behavior, depends on the past history of rewards and punishments, and on the extent to which children are influenced by immediate gratification as opposed to long-term consequences. These scripts are learned collectively over time and therefore are extremely resistant to change.

 Cognitive deficits encompass faulty thought processes and lack of adequate interpersonal problem solving skills. Individuals whose aggression and violence led to criminal offenses tend to be impulsive, self-centered, concrete rather than abstract in their thinking, and poor at interpersonal problem solving because they failed to understand how other people were thinking and feeling. Absence of coping skills, emotional immaturity and lack of critical thinking are all crucial contributing factors to aggression and violence and therefore must be countered with appropriate measures in the formative years