



Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory

Randall Collins

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In the popular misconception fostered by blockbuster action movies and best-selling thrillers--not to mention conventional explanations by social scientists--violence is easy under certain conditions, like poverty, racial or ideological hatreds, or family pathologies. Randall Collins challenges this view in *Violence*, arguing that violent confrontation goes against human physiological hardwiring. It is the exception, not the rule--regardless of the underlying conditions or motivations.

Collins gives a comprehensive explanation of violence and its dynamics, drawing upon video footage, cutting-edge forensics, and ethnography to examine violent situations up close as they actually happen--and his conclusions will surprise you. Violence comes neither easily nor automatically. Antagonists are by nature tense and fearful, and their confrontational anxieties put up a powerful emotional barrier against violence. Collins guides readers into the very real and disturbing worlds of human discord--from domestic abuse and schoolyard bullying to muggings, violent sports, and armed conflicts. He reveals how the fog of war pervades all violent encounters, limiting people mostly to bluster and bluff, and making violence, when it does occur, largely incompetent, often injuring someone other than its intended target. Collins shows how violence can be triggered only when pathways around this emotional barrier are presented. He explains why violence typically comes in the form of atrocities against the weak, ritualized exhibitions before audiences, or clandestine acts of terrorism and murder--and why a small number of individuals are competent at violence.

Violence overturns standard views about the root causes of violence and offers solutions for confronting it in the future.

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