Abstract

The present analysis presents an emergent theory which proposes that the same forces that typically create and intensify cooperative responses get inverted and perverted in competitive contexts, increasing competitive responses. Similarity, familiarity, perspective-taking, oxytocin, flattery, identifiability, face-to-face contact, passion expressions, happiness and gratitude expressions, and apologies have all been recognized as a social glue that binds people together. We propose that competitive contexts transform these same processes into a gasoline that inflames already aroused competitive impulses. In competitive contexts, similarity and familiarity create rivalry; perspective-taking, oxytocin, flattery, and passion expressions motivate self-protective behavior; face-to-face contact and identifiable counterparts intensify aggressive reactivity; and happiness expressions, gratitude expressions, and apologies invite exploitation. These amplified competitive feelings create a win-at-all-cost mentality and produce preemptive actions to prevent being exploited. Overall, a better description of many purported social-bonding mechanisms is that they are relational amplifiers, intensifying cooperative or competitive orientations.