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aggressive, *adj.* and *n.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /ə'grɛsɪv/, U.S. /ə'grɛsɪv/

Frequency (in current use):

Origin: A borrowing from Latin. **Etymon:** Latin *aggressivus*.

Etymology: < post-classical Latin *aggressivus* (1535 or earlier) < classical Latin *aggress-*, past participial stem of *aggredi* to attack (see *AGGRESS v.*) + *-ivus* *-IVE* suffix.

Compare French *agressif* (1793). In the specific use in psychology (see sense A. 6) after German *aggressiv* (early 19th cent.; 1907 (in the passage translated in quot. 1909) or earlier in psychological contexts); compare *AGGRESSION n.* 4.

A. *adj.*

1. Of or relating to aggression; involving attack; offensive.

Not recognized by dictionaries until the mid 19th cent.

- 1695 R. FERGUSON *Whether Preserving Protestant Relig.* 26 This the Prince of Orange and his mercenary Tools were sufficiently aware of, and therefore made that the Pretence both of the Invasion, and of the aggressive War, we made afterwards on France.
- 1716 *Tories Addr. to King G—e* 37 As if All-ruling Providence Were pleas'd to punish our Offence, By our Aggressive Treasons vile.
- 1749 S. RICHARDSON *Clarissa* (ed. 2) IV. 104 He proposes to avoid aggressive violence, if her Brother and he meet in town.
- 1824 S. SMITH *Wks.* (1869) 468 Jealous of the aggressive pleasantry of more favoured people.
- 1837 LD. PALMERSTON *Opinions & Policy* (1852) 362 The only Country in which financial difficulties constitute an obstacle to aggressive warfare.
- 1876 E. A. FREEMAN *Hist. Norman Conquest* I. ii. 36 An aggressive war, as distinguished from mere plundering inroads.
- 1904 *Westm. Gaz.* 8 Jan. 6/2 Lord Lawrence used to speak of England's aggressive policy in India as the 'K.C.B.' mania.
- 1993 S. J. ETTINGER *Pocket Compan. Textbk. Vet. Internal Med.* xliii. 119 Dominance aggression is generally presented as sudden, unprovoked aggressive attacks by intact, pure-bred male dogs at approximately two years of age.

2.

a. Tending or disposed to attack others.

- 1773 *Present State Brit. Interest in India* 164 An army of observation; ever ready to pour in, at any quarter, on the back of an aggressive enemy.

- 1840 H. H. MILMAN *Hist. Christianity* II. ii. ix. 260 To follow any vigorous impulse from a determined and incessantly aggressive few.
- 1868 W. PEARD *Pract. Water-farming* xvi. 163 Pike, and perch, the most quarrelsome, and aggressive fish.
- 1869 J. R. SEELEY *Lect. & Ess.* ii. 43 It included warlike and aggressive nations.
- 1907 C. MACALISTER *Old Pioneering Days in Sunny South* 146 One morning, in an up-country town, I witnessed a fierce brawl between an aggressive bagman and a tipsy shearer.
- 1918 A. G. GARDINER *Leaves in Wind* 63 I find Mr. Bernard Shaw far more tolerable and much less aggressive in conversation than on paper or on the platform.
- 2010 *Independent* 11 Jan. 18/2 A second wave of releases which is seeing additional species, including the aggressive snapping turtle dumped in the wild.

b. Med. and Biol. Of a disease, disease process, or infection: active; rapidly progressive; spreading or metastasizing, esp. quickly or extensively. Of a microorganism or its properties: causing such disease; highly pathogenic; virulent.

- 1851 *Lancet* 22 Feb. 222/2 I may here refer to certain experiments which I made some years since to test the aggressive and parasitic powers of fungi.
- 1856 *Med. & Surg. Reporter* 9 1 Since the first appearance of typhoid fever in the West, its course has been uniformly aggressive.
- 1884 *Lancet* 16 Feb. 299/1 Lupus occurring in single patches, slowly aggressive at their borders.
- 1906 *Clin. Jrnl.* 5 Sept. 334/2 Yet when pericarditis does appear [in acute rheumatism in children] it would not seem to have lost any of its virulence, for it appears to be more aggressive, more assertive, than hitherto.
- 1937 *Ann. Appl. Biol.* 24 269 It became increasingly evident that infection [with *Botrytis cinerea*] was of two types, 'aggressive' and 'non-aggressive'. The former causes blackening and death of part or the whole of the shoot system... The latter merely causes the death of localized areas of tissue.
- 1953 F. T. BROOKS *Plant Dis.* (ed. 2) x. 150 From January to April..the fungus may resume activity in suitable weather and again become aggressive.
- 1994 J. COE *What a Carve Up!* (1995) 329 The fevers and night sweats might well derive from something else entirely, some aggressive but treatable infection.
- 2002 *N.Y. Times* 28 June A14/4 The drug tamoxifen, widely prescribed for women with breast cancer..may cause a rare but aggressive cancer of the uterus.

c. Chem. Of a substance: that tends to attack and alter the structure of other substances; corrosive.

- 1888 *Ninth Ann. Rep. Ohio Soc. Surveyors & Civil Engineers* 139 Water is an aggressive substance... It is active, ever at work, either building up or pulling down.
- 1906 *Bull. Iowa Inst.* 8 437 A highly seasoned meal, during which the teeth have encountered..various aggressive chemicals, in our canned corn or even beef.

- 1957 G. E. HUTCHINSON *Treat. Limnol.* I. x. 665 If the pressure of CO₂ in the atmosphere is now raised, more CO₂ will enter the liquid phase and will start attacking any solid CaCO₃ still present. Such CO₂ is therefore said to be aggressive.
- 1978 *Environmental Conservation: Chemicals* (Shell Internat. Petroleum Co.) 6 Where especially aggressive materials are involved it is common practice for the pipes to be protected internally.
- 2011 H.-W. HELDT & B. PIECHULLA *Plant Biochem.* (ed. 4) iii. 103 The hydroxyl radical (\cdot OH) is a very aggressive substance and damages enzymes and lipids by oxidation.

3. Med. and Surg. Of medical or surgical treatment: involving intervention; active; intensive or extensive; radical.

- 1837 *Western Jrnl. Med. & Physical Sci.* **11** 536 We must..protract the use [of alterants] till through a gradual, slow process, the morbid action is overcome by gentle solicitation rather than by severe aggressive medication.
- 1861 *Chicago Med. Jrnl.* **4** 420 This course not only is attended by far less suffering in cases necessarily mortal, but by the more frequent recovery of cases which, under the aggressive form of treatment, seem likely to have come to the same termination.
- 1890 N. SENN *Princ. Surg.* x. 241 Modern aggressive surgery has greatly diminished the mortality of acute osteomyelitis.
- 1906 *Columbus Med. Jrnl.* **30** 518 Jugulating disease is not only a probability, but is almost a certainty, if active, aggressive intervention is made early.
- 1966 *Postgrad. Med.* **40** 94/1 (title) Aggressive treatment of acute hemorrhagic pancreatitis.
- 1977 *Ann. Internal Med.* **86** 366/1 The above findings would fulfill the criteria for a 'hypertensive crisis'..and require immediate aggressive therapy to lower blood pressure.
- 2005 *N.Y. Times* (National ed.) 14 Aug. I. 1/2 Many prostate cancer patients can choose a passive treatment, like watchful waiting, or a more aggressive therapy, like radiation or surgery.

4.

a. orig. U.S. Energetic, enterprising; self-assertive, pushful.

- 1855 *Presbyterial Critic & Monthly Rev.* **1** 365 The great success of the Methodist body, as an aggressive organization, is attributable to the possession of the great class of aggressive officers.
- 1880 *Public Health Rep. & Papers 1879* p. vii New York City had secured the Metropolitan Sanitary Act, which gave her a most efficient and aggressive Board of Health.
- 1889 *Rep. Postmaster-Gen.* (U.S.) 5 The service will never be vitalized for its highest good and compacted for the right kind of aggressive work until the burdens of these important officials are partly unloaded upon some other officer.
- 1905 *Dept. Bull.* (N.Y. State Educ. Dept.) 39 Aggressive educational statesmanship among teachers and public officials is the need of our time.
- 1910 *Hardware Dealers' Mag.* May 1200/1 (advt.) Wanted—A good, live, aggressive salesman who can sell pumps, windmills and gasoline engines on a commission basis.
- 1956 *Winnipeg Free Press* 19 Jan. 34/1 We require 2 salesmen!.. Only aggressive men need apply.
- 1959 H. E. SALISBURY *Shook-up Generation* xi. 154 'Aggressive group work'..means that instead of

sitting in offices..the Youth Board goes out on to the street, finds the youngsters who are in trouble..and begins to work with them right in the neighbourhood.

- 1966 *Which?* Aug. 268/1 Co-operative Societies are giving private industry an example of aggressive retailing.
- 2003 *N.Y. Times* (National ed.) 5 Jan. III. 11/4 Like many other Merrill executives, he was an aggressive seller of the company's stock through much of 2000 and 2001.

b. Finance. Of investment or an investment policy: adventurous, enterprising; not cautious or averse to risk; *esp.* concentrating on growth and high yields, rather than long-term security.

- 1899 G. C. MUSGRAVE *Under Three Flags in Cuba* xv. 364 While American capital is cautious, English capitalists are..making effective arrangements for aggressive investment [in Cuba].
- 1939 *Amer. Econ. Rev.* **29** 46 Representatives of this money on the board of directors may serve to hamper an aggressive investment policy.
- 1972 *N.Y. Times* 21 Feb. 43/2 The French Government decided that it could meet the 'American challenge' only by promoting mergers and aggressive investments to develop corporations of a worldwide scale.
- 1991 *Business Week* 18 Nov. 162/4 Aggressive growth investors should keep in mind that an actively managed portfolio will generally do better than a 'passive' investment that follows an index.
- 2007 *Observer* 29 Apr. (Business section) 4/2 Hedge funds have grown in popularity as their more aggressive stance can offer higher returns for investors than if they placed their money with conventional money managers.

5.

a. That catches one's attention forcibly or threateningly.

- 1875 *Peterson's Mag.* Apr. 266/1 She had a fondness for cheap adornments, for fine bonnets, and cups of aggressive colors.
- 1918 A. G. GARDINER *Leaves in Wind* 227 The aggressive, bullying horn which some motorists deliberately use.
- 1931 E. G. BOULENGER *Fishes* xiv. 111 In the Pollack..the lower jaw has an aggressive sweep.
- 1981 A. SILLITOE *Second Chance* 51 An aggressive banging of church bells.
- 1987 *Graphics World* Nov.–Dec. 3/2 The dark and 'aggressive' red..was previously the mainstay of post offices.
- 2001 *Computer Music* May 29/2 (caption) Here's a much more aggressive glissando.

b. orig. *U.S.* Of a taste, smell, etc.: powerful, harsh, astringent; *spec.* (of wine) having a marked acidic or tannic flavour (usually as an undesirable quality).

- 1881 *N.Y. Herald* 24 Dec. 5/1 There are so many..odors that... even the aggressive aroma of the

- Limburger loses its individuality.
- 1895 *Harper's New Monthly Mag.* Nov. 904/1 This [fruit]..is of gigantic size, and endowed with a correspondingly aggressive odor.
- 1936 *Punch* 1 Jan. 9/2 To-day Nutmeg was eating some of that appalling new cheese he persuaded you to get for him. It has a most aggressive bouquet.
- 1940 H. J. GROSSMAN *Guide to Wines, Spirits & Beers* vi. 83 The volcanic regions of..Etna produce a wine of great strength and aggressive bouquet.
- 1968 I. C. TAYLOR *Highland Whisky (An Comunn Gaidhealach)* 4 To some the powerful peatiness of Laphroaig [whisky] may be too aggressive.
- 1991 *Decanter* Aug. 59/2 Then came an aggressive grip of tannin..compensated for by a sweet, vinous aftertaste.
- 2002 *N.Y. Times* (National ed.) 11 Sept. D11/5 A California mourvèdre and an Alsatian riesling that go well with these aggressive flavors.

6. Psychol. Of, pertaining to, or characterized by, aggression (see AGGRESSION *n.* 4).

- 1909 F. PETERSON & A. A. BRILL tr. C. G. Jung *Psychol. Dementia Praecox* ii. 48 Women betray themselves by an unbridled aggressive gayety [Ger. *aggressive Lustigkeit*], the men by sudden disproportionate alcoholic and other excesses.
- 1913 A. A. BRILL tr. S. Freud *Interpretation of Dreams* iv. 134 In the sexual make-up of many people there is a masochistic component, which has arisen through the conversion of the aggressive, sadistic component into its opposite.
- 1917 B. GLUECK & J. E. LIND tr. A. Adler *Neurotic Constit.* (1921) v. 157 Forms of the aggressive impulse become accentuated through the feeling of inferiority.
- 1949 A. KOESTLER *Insight & Outlook* v. 56 A component..of aggressive-defensive self-assertion, has been recognized in laughter.
- 1950 B. WOOTTON *Test. Social Sci.* ii. 8 Aggressive behaviour means physical actions like letting off bombs, or, on a milder scale, giving vent to cross words or looks.
- 1995 P. A. TYLER in C. Hollin *Contemp. Psychol.* III. vi. 108 Depressed people, who are thought to be turning their unconscious oral aggressive impulses inwards, become more depressed when presented with aggressive images (a stylized picture of a cannibal).

†**B. n.**

Aggressive action or behaviour; an aggressive course. Usually with *the*.
Obs.

- 1698 J. SERGEANT *Non Ultra* 123 He had causlesly, and uncharitably, imputed the same to himself; which..is the distinguishing Character between Mr. Le Grand's Aggressive, and my *Defensive*.
- 1845 R. FORD *Hand-bk. Travellers in Spain* I. ii. 311 Sault..at once assumed the aggressive.
- 1875 *Pennsylvania School Jrnl.* Aug. 46/1 Finally the mother, in despair, left the aggressive, and tried the persuasive.

SPECIAL USES

aggressive beggar *n.* orig. *U.S.* a person who engages in aggressive begging.

In early use probably not as a fixed collocation.

- 1886 *Fun* 20 Jan. 30/1 (caption) *Aggressive beggar*.—'Parding, guv'ner. 'Ave yer a pipe of backer ter give a poor cove?'
- 1912 *Fort Wayne (Indiana) Jrnl.-Gaz.* 15 Aug. 10/7 Police are kept busy watching for *aggressive beggars* and pickpockets.
- 1985 *Los Angeles Times* 31 July I. 9/1 So many homeless street people clutter downtown sidewalks..that the city is considering a law to punish *aggressive beggars*.
- 2006 *Gloucester Citizen* (Nexis) 23 Aug. 7 Gloucestershire police launched a crackdown on *aggressive beggars* in the city centre,..enforcing a zero-tolerance policy.

aggressive begging *n.* orig. *U.S.* the (illegal) action of begging for money in a manner considered to be unduly threatening or intimidating, esp. as defined by a local by-law.

In early use probably not as a fixed collocation.

- 1976 *Anthropol. Q.* **49** 234 Behavior such as *aggressive begging*..may be viewed..as threatening and thus evoke realistic hostility.
- 1987 *N.Y. Times* 27 Oct. A18/1 '*Aggressive*' begging is defined in the law as 'with intent to intimidate'.
- 2006 *Maclean's* (Nexis) 16 Jan. 12 By cracking down on petty 'lifestyle' crimes—prostitution, drug use, *aggressive begging*—a city makes itself less susceptible to more serious crime.

aggressive mimicry *n.* *Zool.* mimicry (MIMICRY *n.* 2) in which a predator or parasite benefits from having markings or other features which make it appear harmless or attractive to a prey or host species.

- 1890 E. B. POULTON *Colours of Animals* xiii. 266 In most cases of *Aggressive Mimicry* one species resembles another in order to be able to approach it without exciting suspicion.
- 1933 *Science* 24 Feb. 201/1 Great zoologists..firmly believe that the pure Darwin principle explains..color evolution as seen in protective and *aggressive mimicry*.
- 1973 H. L. NIEBURG *Culture Storm* ii. 29 The zonetailed hawk..glides in the company of vultures because small animals have no fear of these carrion-eaters. This pattern has been called '*aggressive*' mimicry.
- 2002 M. D. GREENFIELD *Signalers & Receivers* iii. 68 In what may be the most spectacular example of *aggressive mimicry* among animals, female bolas spiders (*Mastophora*..) attract males of various moth species with a lure that includes compounds identical to major components of the female sex pheromones of those moths.

aggressive panhandler *n.* *U.S.* = *aggressive beggar n.*

In early use probably not as a fixed collocation.

- 1961 *El Paso (Texas) Herald-Post* 1 June 22/2 The city was peopled extensively by aggressive panhandlers.
- 1971 *N.Y. Times* 3 Oct. 8/1 Most recently, there has appeared a special category of aggressive panhandler, whose pitch often seems a threat.
- 1998 *San Francisco Chron.* (Electronic ed.) 16 Dec. B1 Bay Area merchants..have to deal with homeless in their doorways, aggressive panhandlers..litter and shoplifting.

aggressive panhandling *n.* *U.S.* = *aggressive begging n.*

In early use probably not as a fixed collocation.

- 1981 *New York* 19 Jan. 21/1 Quality-of-life offences such as aggressive panhandling, smoking in the subway, drunkenness, brawling, urinating on sidewalks and in the subways.
- 2002 *U.S. News & World Rep.* 14 Jan. 47/1 'We were too busy' to do anything about street prostitution, aggressive panhandling, graffiti, and low-level drug dealing.

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