Aggression and Antisocial Behavior

PSY 750
Advanced Social Psychology

Outline

- Defining Aggression
- How Is Aggression Learned?
- Internal and External Causes of Aggression
- General Aggression Model
- Antisocial Behavior

AGGRESSION
It will not stand, max.
Defining Aggression

- Aggression
  - Any behavior intended to harm another person who is motivated to avoid the harm
    - An intentional behavior
      - Not angry feelings
      - Not thoughts of harming someone
    - Intent is to harm
      - Not accidental harm
      - Not assertiveness or playfulness
    - The victim wants to avoid harm
  - Example of aggression: Shooting someone who is running away from you
  - Not aggression: A doctor gives a painful shot

Defining Aggression

- Violence
  - Aggression, with the goal of extreme physical harm
    - All violent acts are aggressive acts but not all aggressive acts are violent
      - e.g., Rape, aggravated assault, homicide
    - A child pushes another child out of the way
      - Aggression, but not violence
    - A child beats another child severely with a baseball bat
      - Aggression that is also violence

Types of Aggression

- Hostile aggression
  - Hot, impulsive
  - Often in direct response to something
  - Desire is to hurt someone
    - e.g., crimes of passion, spreading vicious rumors about ex after being dumped, punching someone who bumps into you

- Instrumental aggression
  - Cold, premeditated
  - A means to an end
    - Often to attain some kind of goal (e.g., money, justice)
      - e.g., murder-for-hire, spanking a child to prevent future bad behavior
Hostile or Instrumental?
- The attacks of September 11th
- An angry employee (who has just had his wages garnished) opens fire on the Human Resources office at work
- Yelling at a child because he got on your nerves
- Yelling at a child to prevent him from getting hurt
- The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq
- Spreading vicious rumors about your friend because you want to steal her boyfriend
- Spreading vicious rumors about your ex-boyfriend because you are angry about being dumped

Nature and Nurture
- Modern view: Most believe aggression is due to both nature and nurture
  - Both learning and predispositions are relevant
  - Cultural socialization and learning
    - Can increase or decrease innate aggressive impulses and aggressive behaviors
  - Example: Cats and Rats Study (Kuo, 1930)
    - Cats prey on rats instinctively
      - Kittens and rats raised together
        - 0% killed rats
      - Kittens raised in isolation
        - 54% killed rats
      - Kittens raised by rat-killing mother
        - 85% killed rats

Learning Theories of Aggression
- Aggression is a learned behavior
  - Modeling
    - Observing and copying or imitating the behavior of others
  - Bandura and colleagues (1961, 1963)
    - Bobo Doll Study
      - Children who saw the aggressive adult model were MANY TIMES MORE LIKELY TO ATTACK the Bobo doll with the mallet
      - Often repeating the exact words used by the adult model
      - Children who did not see the adult model attack the Bobo doll were EXTREMELY UNLIKELY to attack the doll
    - Observing aggressive behavior had lowered their inhibitions and taught them ways to aggress
Inner Causes of Aggression

- Frustration
  - Blockage or interference of a goal
- Frustration-aggression hypothesis (1939)
  - Aggression always stems from frustration
  - Frustration always leads to some form of aggression
  - e.g., Joe is frustrated because his computer crashes so he throws the mouse across the room
- A later formulation suggested the second statement was not correct but should be that one of the things frustration could lead to was aggression
- Later researchers suggested that aggression could come without frustration and frustration without aggression

Inner Causes of Aggression

- Bad mood is not necessary for aggression
  - Unpleasant moods can increase aggression
- Anger does not directly or inevitably cause aggression
  - The belief that lashing out in anger will make one feel better may lead to aggression
- Excitation transfer may increase aggression (Zillmann et al., 1972)
  - Group 1: Exercise
  - Group 2: No Exercise
  - Those who had exercised were more likely to aggress when provoked
  - Physiological arousal

Hostile Cognitive Biases

- Individuals may perceive the world differently and behave aggressively in response to their perceptions
- Hostile attribution bias
  - Perceive ambiguous actions by others as aggressive
    - e.g., When walking down the street Antonio is bumped by another pedestrian. He believes the other person bumped him on purpose
- Hostile perception bias
  - Perceive social interactions as being aggressive
    - e.g., Watching two people talk in a restaurant, Elena believes they are fighting
- Hostile expectation bias
  - Assume people will react to potential conflicts with aggression
    - e.g., Jamal believes that if he asks his roommate turn down his music he will react by hitting Jamal
Gender and Aggression

- Males are more likely to be aggressive without provocation
  - More likely to use direct, physical aggression
  - Commit more violent crimes in all cultures
- Females are nearly as likely as males to be aggressive in response to provocation
  - More likely to engage in relational aggression
    - Intentionally harming someone’s relationships with others (e.g., spreading gossip)
- When under stress
  - Males: Fight or flight syndrome
    - Response to stress that involves fighting or running away
  - Females: Tend and befriend syndrome
    - Response to stress that involves nurturing others and making friends

Social Interaction Theory

- Aggressive behavior is viewed as a means to influence social behavior
- The actor is a decision-maker whose choices are directed by the expected rewards, costs, and probabilities of obtaining different outcomes
- These coercive actions can be used to:
  - Obtain something of value (e.g., information, money, goods, sex, services, safety)
  - Exact retribution for perceived wrongs
  - Bring about desired social and self identities (e.g., toughness, competence)
- Explains aggressive behaviors motivated by distal or ultimate goals.
- Aids in the understanding of recent findings that aggression is often the result of threatened high self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 1996; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998)

Domestic and Relationship Violence

- Domestic violence
  - Occurs within the home, between people who have a close relationship
  - Domestic violence occurs all over the world
  - Leading cause of injuries to women between ages 15-44
- Surgeon General declared domestic violence the number one health risk in the United States in 1984
- Women attack relationship partners slightly more than men do...but without as much harm
- Physically weaker family members are at greatest risk
- Aggression is highest between siblings
Displaced Aggression

- Displaced aggression
  - Attacking a different or innocent target rather than the original source of anger
  - May be done because the source is unattainable or may not be safe to attack
    - e.g., Yelling at your spouse when your boss has made you angry
  - Displaced targets may be innocent or they may have committed a lesser offense
- Triggered displaced aggression
  - Minor triggering event increases aggression in angered participants
    - e.g., You are angry with your teacher because of a grade on a test, so when your boyfriend leaves his shoes in the middle of the floor and you trip over them you yell at him more than usual

External Causes of Aggression

- Weapons effect
  - Mere presence of weapon increases aggressive behavior
  - Berkowitz and LePage (1967)
  - Passively exposed participants to
    - Weapons (gun and revolver) or Neutral objects (badminton racket and birdies)
    - Participants asked to deliver electric shocks
  - Weapons exposure led to increased aggression
- Mass Media
  - Violent media exposure (TV, movies, video games) increases aggression
  - Violent Video Games

External Causes of Aggression

- Unpleasant Environments
  - Hot temperatures
    - Murder and assault rates increase
  - Loud Noise
  - Unpleasant Odors
    - Secondhand smoke
  - Crowds
- Chemical Influences
  - Testosterone (male sex hormone)
    - Linked to increased aggression
  - Serotonin (the "feel good" neurotransmitter)
    - Low levels linked to aggression
  - Alcohol
    - Linked to increased aggression
Alcohol and Aggression
- Violent crimes are often committed by individuals who are intoxicated
  - More than half of rapists report drinking prior to their crimes (McDonald et al., 2000)
  - 65% of homicides and 55% of domestic altercations involved alcohol (APA, 1993)
- Other factors on aggression have a stronger effect when someone is intoxicated
- How alcohol influences aggression
  - Reduces inhibitions
  - Narrowing effect on attention
  - Decreases self-awareness
  - Disrupts executive function

Threatened Egotism and Aggression
- Aggressive individuals are more likely to have high (rather than low) self-esteem
  - Have grandiose or inflated opinions of their worth
    - Think they are better than other people
    - Aggression may result from perceived challenges to their feelings of self-worth
- Aggressive individuals may be narcissistic
  - Feeling entitled to preferential treatment
  - Willing to exploit others
  - Low empathy
  - Grandiose fantasies
- Aggression is often the result of some type of perceived provocation
  - Football Brawl
  - Other factors increase or decrease effect of wounded pride (e.g., alcohol, crowds)

Culture of Honor
- Southern United States has a culture of honor
  - Places high value on individual respect, strength, and virtue
  - Accepts and justifies violent action in response to threats to one’s honor
  - Higher levels of violence in the U.S. South
    - Fewer gun ownership restrictions
    - Support for corporal punishment
    - Support for wars involving U.S. troops
    - More violent names (e.g., Shotgun Willy’s Daycare)
- Humiliation
  - Primary cause of violence and aggression in cultures of honor
  - May be an important cause of terrorism
    - Being occupied by a foreign nation may lead to humiliation
      - Wounded pride → Aggression
General Aggression Model

- Anderson & Bushman (2002) have been developing a general aggression model which incorporates many of the domain-specific models of aggression.
- Advantages:
  - More parsimonious than the existing set of mini-theories
  - Better explains aggression based on multiple motives
  - Will aid in the development of more comprehensive interventions designed to treat chronically aggressive individuals
  - Provides broader insights about child-rearing and developmental issues

Overview of the General Aggression Model

Person Factors

- These factors comprise an individual's preparedness to aggress
  - **Traits**: Fragile high self-esteem and narcissism
  - **Sex**: Males prefer direct aggression, whereas females prefer indirect aggression
  - **Beliefs**: Efficacy-related beliefs are good predictors of aggression
  - **Values**: Is aggression a preferred method for dealing with conflict?
  - **Long-Term Goals**: If the goal is to be respected and feared, then aggression may be an appropriate strategy
  - **Scripts**: What are the interpretational and behavioral scripts that a person brings to a social situation
Situational Factors

- These factors have consequences for aggression by influencing cognition, affect, and arousal
  - **Aggressive Cues**: The mere presence of guns increases aggressive behavior following frustration (Berkowitz & LePage, 1967)
  - **Provocation**: Insults, slights, other forms of verbal aggression, physical aggression, etc.
  - **Frustration**: The blockage of goal attainment (many provocations increase frustration)
  - **Pain and Discomfort**: Aversive conditions (e.g., heat, loud noise, unpleasant odor) may lead to aggression through increased negative affect
  - **Drugs**: Various drugs (e.g., caffeine, alcohol) may have indirect consequences for aggression

Defining Antisocial Behavior

- **Antisocial Behavior**: Behavior that either damages interpersonal relationships or is culturally undesirable
  - Can be (but not necessarily) aggressive
    - e.g., spreading rumors, littering, cheating
  - **Aggression may be antisocial or pro-social**
    - **Pro-social aggression**
      - When intent is for good of society
      - **Instrumental**
        - Examples: Police officer shoots criminal to end hostage situation or bystander tackles mugger to prevent someone from being robbed

Other Antisocial Behavior

- **Cheating**: An antisocial behavior that is widely practiced
  - e.g., Athletes taking performance-enhancing drugs
  - Which students are more likely to cheat? Those with lower academic ability and lower self-control
- **Stealing**: Deindividuation
  - Sense of anonymity and loss of individuality, as in a large group, making people especially likely to engage in antisocial behaviors such as theft (e.g., yelling obscenities at referee, looting)
  - People in deindividuated states are more likely to steal
Diener et al. (1976)
- Halloween Candy Study (Diener, 1976)
  - Observed 1,352 kids on Halloween at 27 homes in Seattle
  - Half were identified
  - Half remained anonymous
  - Some children were alone and some were in groups
  - Experimenter invited them to "take one of the candies" and left the room
  - Would children take only one candy as instructed or "steal" more than one piece?

Other Antisocial Behavior
- Littering
  - When it seems everybody else is littering, people are more likely to litter too
  - Males litter more than females
  - Young people litter more than older people
  - Crying Indian PSA
  - Woodsy Owl PSA
- Injunctive norms
  - Specify what most approve or disapprove of
  - Can be effective in reducing litter
- Descriptive norms
  - Specify what most people do
  - Have not been effective in reducing litter