

21 - 6. Aggression

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© SPMM Course 6. Aggression There are several types of aggression as outlined below.

- Hostile aggression: aimed solely at hurting someone.
- Instrumental aggression: used as a means to an end - may be self-defense or to attain something. Instrumental aggression is carried out for the purpose of achieving a particular goal e.g. kidnapping for ransom. Hence, it is often planned and not impulsive.
- Hostile (also called angry or affective) aggression is motivated by the need to express negative feelings, such as anger.
- Positive aggression: combating prejudice, self-defense.
- Pathological aggression: violence for the sake of being violent- may be associated with pathological personality.
- Overt aggression: This is readily observable, either reactive & impulsive or proactive, planned aggression.
- Covert aggression is much more subtle, e.g. telling lies, spreading rumours, excluding a child from a group of friends, etc. It is seen more in girls than boys.

Hydraulic or build up models

- Psychoanalysis Theory: Human aggression is due the death instinct Thanatos - an instinctive biological destructive death related urge that gradually builds up in everyone and must at some point be released.
- Evolutionary Theory: Through the process of natural selection, aggression ensures survival of the aggressor's genes passing from one generation to the other. It helps in the fight for the survival of the fittest.
- Lorenz studied animal aggression and proposed that features such as territorial imperative are linked to the survival benefits of aggression. According to him aggression is a fixed action pattern elicited by specific sign stimuli. But he found non-human aggression to be mostly constructive. Ritualisation refers to a series of stereotyped fight scenes, carried out by animals without actual physical harm to both the victor and the vanquished. Appeasement rituals or gestures form a part of such ritualisations in which certain behaviours (e.g., lying down, dropping and tucking one's tail) can reduce aggression expression.

Non-hydraulic models These models refute the notion of 'building up' and 'release'.

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- Genetic theory: It is controversial whether aggression is inherited; it is often the case in animal species. But in humans however, people may not necessarily inherit the tendency to be aggressive; instead they may inherit certain temperaments, such as impulsiveness, that in turn make aggression more likely (Baron and Richardson, 1994).
- Social learning theory: Bandura's 'Bobo Doll' experiments provide impressive demonstrations of the power of observational learning. When children observe an aggressive model, they often reproduce many of the model's acts precisely, especially if the model's aggression was rewarded. Vicarious conditioning refers to a kind of observational learning where learning is influenced by seeing or hearing about the consequences of others' behaviour. Observational learning can occur even when there are no vicarious effects of reinforcement, but the performance of an aggressive behaviour is more likely if vicarious reinforcement was observed instead of just seeing behaviour in isolation without knowing

its consequences. □ The frustration-aggression hypothesis was originally proposed by Dollard et al. (1939). It holds that frustration always results in aggression and conversely aggression will not occur unless a person is frustrated. But this is not true as sometimes frustration produces depression or withdrawal instead of aggression. The modified frustration-aggression hypothesis considers aggression to be one of the many possible products of frustration. In a meta-analysis including 49 studies, Marcus-Newhall et al. (2000) found consistent evidence that frustrated individuals show displacement of aggression from the source of the frustration onto a less powerful or more accessible target. □ Berkowitz (1993) later modified Dollard's proposal. This is called aggressive cue theory or weapons effect: Frustration produces not aggression but a readiness to respond aggressively; once this readiness exists, cues in the environment (e.g. knives, guns, etc.) will often lead a frustrated person to behave aggressively; neither frustration nor cues alone can trigger the aggressive behaviour. □ Generalised arousal theory maintains that arousal (e.g. physiological) from one source may energise some other response. This is called transferred excitation (Zillman). □ Festinger's deindividuation theory: According to this, people in-group context act uncharacteristically more aggressive as a sense of identity and belongingness and diffusion of responsibility occurs in groups. Similarly, uniforms can reduce individuality, promoting expression of aggression (hence its use in Police and military forces). But deindividuation does not always cause aggression. Media influences on aggressive behaviour: TV can influence through modelling effects. In a natural experiment at St Helena Island when TV was first introduced, some increase in prosocial behaviour was recorded, surprisingly. Media influence is mediated via

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