The Development of Aggression

Aggression in Schools

- Josephson Institute of Ethics survey
  - More than one in three students (39% of middle schoolers and 36% of high schoolers) say they don't feel safe at school
  - 43% of high school and 37% of middle school boys believe it is OK to hit or threaten a person who makes them angry. Nearly one in five (19%) of the girls agree
  - More than one in five (21%) high school boys and 15% of middle school males took a weapon to school at least once in the past year.
  - 60% of high school and 31% middle school boys said they could get a gun if they wanted to.
Definitions of Aggression

- Aggression as Instinct
  - **Freud** - Thanatos - basic component of human nature responsible for the generation of aggressive energy in all human beings
  - **Lorenz** - fighting instinct triggered by certain eliciting cues in the environment
    - basic fighting instinct directed against members of the same species
    - serves a basic evolutionary purpose
    - develop “instinctual inhibitions” - prevents them from killing members of their own kind.
  - Humans kill members of own species because have weak instinctual inhibition

- Behavioral definitions

- Aggression as a Social Judgment

- Kuo (1930) - Killing rats instinctual?
  - Illustrates the importance of environmental influences as determinants of aggressive behavior.
Definitions of Aggression

- **Behavioral definitions** - particular category of goal-driven behaviors
  - **Arnold Buss** - a response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism
    - emphasizes consequences of actions rather than the intentions of the actor
    - Any act that delivers pain - considered aggressive
  - **Intentional definitions** - behavior designed to harm another person who is motivated to avoid such treatment (Baron and Byrne, 1991)
    - includes acts - harm intended but not done
    - Excludes accidental injuries
  - **Hostile aggression** - major goal to injure a victim
  - **Instrumental aggression** - one person harms another as a means to a nonaggressive end
    - Same act can be classified as either hostile or instrumental or a mixture of both.
    - difficult to tell if behavior of older people is hostile or instrumental in character (intent)

- **Aggression as Instinct**
- **Behavioral definitions**
- **Aggression as a Social Judgment**
  - **Bandura** - aggression is a social label that we apply to various acts, guided by our own judgments about the meaning of those acts to us.
  - Our interpretation of Aggression - depends on social, personal, and situational factors (e.g., beliefs about aggression).
  - Condry and Ross (1985) study
Bandura’s Social Learning Theory of Aggression

- Treats aggression as a class of social behaviors that are acquired through the same processes as any other type of social behavior.

- Aggressive responses acquired in two ways:
  - Observational learning: cognitive process by which children attend to and retain in memory the aggressive responses they see others commit.
  - Direct experience: child reinforced for aggressive behavior will be more likely to resort to aggression in the future
    - Lovaas (1961)
    - Slaby and Crowley (1977)

- Aggression is maintained if instrumental in procuring benefits or satisfying objectives.

- Aggressive children have more expectancies about the outcomes of aggression:
  - more confident will yield tangible rewards
  - more certain that will be easy for them and successful at terminating others’ noxious behavior
  - more inclined to believe that aggression will enhance their self-esteem
  - More likely to value the outcomes (a) attach much more significance to their ability to dominate and control their victims

- Bandura: Internal states such as frustration may facilitate aggression but are not necessary
  - Any form of arousal can energize aggressive behavior

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Social Information-Processing Theory of Aggression

- Most important characteristic
  - Hostile attributional bias - tendency to view harm done under ambiguous circumstances as having stemmed from a hostile intent on
  - Depend on the ways in which the person processes and interprets information
- Dodge’s model of aggression
  - Children enter social experiences with a data base of past experiences (memory store) and a goal
  - Response to situation and social cues depend on **five cognitive steps or processes**
- Dodge (1980) - 2nd, 4th, & 6th graders work on a puzzle
  - Both aggressive and non-aggressive boys reacted more aggressively to a hostile intent than to a benign intent
  - Ambiguous - Cue distortion obvious for aggressive children

Social Information Processing

- Dodge-An aggressive response to environmental cues and whether you respond aggressively depend on how you cognitively process that cue.
  - Attention
  - Interpretation
  - Goals
  - Response search
  - Response decision
  - Enactment
Social Information-Processing Theory of Aggression

- **Reasons for attributing hostile intentions**
  - Aggressive kids provoke a large number of conflicts
  - More likely to be disliked
  - More likely to become targets of aggression
  - Nonaggressive kids harmed under ambiguous circumstances more likely to retaliate if harmdoer is an aggressive child
- **Weaknesses**
  - Does not address issues of how children became aggressive or why they have different information-processing biases
  - Ignore emotions

Who is the most likely to be involved in Aggression?

- **Olweus - Three core elements**
  - *Repeated aggressive behavior*
    - some kind of social relationship between the bully and victim
    - Aggression can be overt or relational
  - *Negative intent*
  - *Power difference*
    - larger child or several children picking on one or a child who is clearly more dominant.
    - Garden variety aggression - similar acts but between two people of equal status
Who is the most likely to be involved in Aggression?

- **Perry - 3rd graders in US**
  - 1 child in 10 was severely and repeatedly abused by highly aggressive classmates
  - found passive and provocative victims
  - Girls as likely to be victimized as boys
    - verbal rather than physical

- **Stable attribute**
  - Perry - 3 months later same children were victims
  - Olweus - 13 year olds were likely to retain their whipping boy status as 16

- **Why chosen as victims? (Perry)**
  - positive expectancies about attacking a victimized peer
  - victimized peers reinforce them by surrendering resources and showing signs of distress (or defeat).

Bullying

- **Bullies are a special breed of children**
  - 60-70% are never involved in bullying

- **Those who bully do it consistently**
  - Aggression starts at an early age
  - Takes a very special set of conditions to produce a child who can start fights, threaten/intimidate a peer, & inflict pain on others
  - Bullying causes a great deal of misery to others, and its effects on victims last for decades, perhaps even a lifetime
  - The person most hurt by bullying is the bully himself
  - Bullies turn into antisocial adults
  - Bullying is the sine qua non of domestic violence

  - battered women commonly describe what their husbands do as bullying
    - evidence does point to a direct convergence of bullying and battering across the life cycle.
Aggression during Grade School Years

- Physical aggression is still on the decline
- See retaliatory aggression - aggressive acts elicited by real or imagined provocations which are intended to harm the provocateur
- Hostile aggression on the rise even when disorderly conduct and instrumental aggression are declining (Hartup)
- More proficient role takers and are better able to infer the motives and intentions of other people.
- Dodge et al. (1984) - Intentions of child who knocked down block tower
  - Kindergarten - 42%
  - Second grade - 57%
  - Fourth grade - 72%

Aggression as a Stable Attribute

- Aggressive toddlers become aggressive 5-year olds (Cummings et al.)
- Amount of verbal aggression that a child displays at 6-12 is fairly good predictor of his/her tendency to insult, etc. later in adolescence (Cairns, Kagan, & Moss; Lerner et al.)
- Huesman (1984) tracked for 22 years
  - aggression for both boys and girls at age 8 - solid predictors of adult aggression and antisocial conduct at age 30.
- Group trends
  - no way implies that highly aggressive person can’t become relatively nonaggressive over time or vice versa
- Biological predispositions toward aggression
  - Rushton (1986)
    - 296 pairs of identical twins and 277 pairs of fraternal twins completed self-report measures of hostility and aggression
      - identical --> $r = .40$; fraternal --> $r = .04$
Revisit what Aggression is

- **Aggression**
  - perceived negatively by the victim
  - must be intentional (desirous of hurting or destroying the victim physically or psychologically)

- **One of the best known social predictors of future maladjustment**
  - **Overt Aggression** - harms others through physical damage or threat of such damage
    - pushing, hitting, kicking, or threatening to beat up a peer
  - **Relational Aggression** (social or indirect) - harms others through damage to peer relationships
    - social exclusion, rumor spreading, threatening to withdraw from a relationship, silent treatment

Examples of Aggression (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997)

- **Overt Aggression**
  - kicks or hits others
  - verbally threatens to hit or beat up children
  - ruins other peer’s things when he or she is upset
  - pushes or shoves other children
  - hurts other children by pinching them
  - verbally threatens to physically harm a peer

- **Relational Aggression**
  - tells peer he/she won’t play with the peer or be the peer’s friend unless he or she does what this child asks
  - tell others not to play with or be a peer’s friend
  - when mad at peer, this child keeps that peer from being in the play group
  - tells a peer that they won’t be invited to a birthday party unless he or she does what the child wants
  - tries to get others to dislike peer
  - verbally threatens to keep peer out of play group if peer doesn’t do what the child asks.
Revisit Sex Differences in Aggression

- **Crick & Grotpeter (1995)** - when attempting to inflict harm on others (i.e., aggression), children do what is most likely to thwart or damage social goals of target

- **Boys** -
  - use physical forms of aggression
  - hinders instrumental oriented dominance goals characteristic of boys

- **Girls** -
  - use relational forms of aggression
  - effective in hindering the affiliative, intimacy goals that tend to be more typical of girls

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Revisit Sex Differences in Aggression

- **Teacher assessment of Preschoolers (1997)**
  - **Nonaggressive**
    - 74% of boys; 65% of girls
  - **Overtly Aggressive**
    - 12% of boys; 3% of girls
  - **Relationally Aggressive**
    - 0% of boys; 26% of girls
  - **Both Aggressive types**
    - 15% of Boys; 7% of Girls

- **Take relational aggression into account** --> girls (22%) and boys (27%) are aggressive in almost equal numbers
Familial Influences on Aggression

- **Child-rearing practices**
  - Cold and rejecting - frustrating child’s emotional needs and model a lack of concern
  - Ignoring aggressive outbursts - legitimizes aggression and fails to provide opportunities to control it
  - Spanking - serves as a model for behavior trying to suppress.

- **Can the child be influencing the Parent?**
  - *Olweus (1980)*
    - Best predictor after rearing practices
      - Measure of child’s temperamental impulsivity
    - Active, impetuous temperament - exhaust mom

- **Parents as managers**
  - Lack of parental monitoring associated with aggression
  - Ability to influence depends on composition of the family
  - Awareness of child’s activities important as determining aggressive inclinations of child-rearing practices

- **Family as a social system**
  - *Cummings et al. (1985)* - experiment
    - Not only upset toddlers but increased their willingness to fight with one another as well
  - *Patterson* studied families with one highly aggressive child
    - Growing up in very atypical family environments
    - Coercive home environments
    - Negative reinforcement important
    - Mothers
      - Rarely use social reinforcement or approval; interpret neutral events as antisocial; rely on coercive tactics
Methods for Controlling Aggression

- Catharsis Technique
- Eliminating the payoffs for aggression
- Modeling and coaching strategies
- Create “nonaggressive” environments
- Empathy as a deterrent to Aggression