

# *Aggression*



Psy 240; Fall 2006  
Purdue University  
Dr. Kipling Williams

1

## *Layperson Definitions of Aggression*

- We commonly use the word aggression to mean:
  - assertive
  - competitive
  - Forward/“fresh”
  - risk-taking
  - dominant, powerful
  - angry
- Factors that predict aggression are different from factors that predict these behaviors

2

## *Working Definition*

- Social psychologists define *aggression* as:  
*intent to harm another*
- Problems with this:
  - hard to measure intention, so why don't we just say "Doing harm to others?"
    - Harming without intent *shouldn't* be called aggression
    - Not harming, but intending to do so, *should* be called aggression

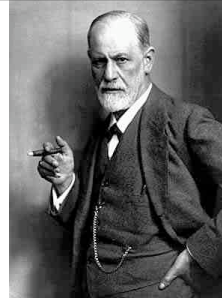
3

## Three Theoretical Perspectives on Aggression

- Psychodynamic (Freud)
- Sociobiological (Lorenz)
- Learning
  - I. Two-factor theory (Berkowitz)
  - II. Social learning (Rotter, Bandura)
  - III. GAM: General Aggression Model; (Anderson)

4

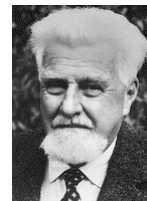
## Freud's Psychodynamic Perspective



- We all possess an *innate* drive for sex and aggression. They are *inescapable*.
- Society functions to inhibit direct expression of these urges, so we seek socially acceptable means to express them
  - sex: creativity, the arts
  - aggression: sports, competition
- *Hydraulic Model*: aggressive tendencies build up over time and must be released (catharsis)
- Can achieve catharsis vicariously: *watching violence can release pent-up aggressive tendencies*

5

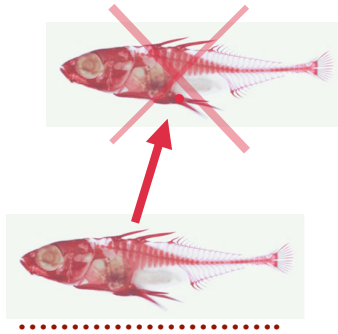
## Sociobiological Perspective: Lorenz



- Aggression is innate, necessary *and adaptive*
  - Genes for aggression are passed along, whereas genes for passivity are not.
- Situational or environmental cues interact with genetic predispositions:
  - *Arousal* caused by hormones, etc.
  - A situational cue or trigger: *hard wired, not learned*
- The case of the “stickleback fish”

6

## Stickleback Fish



7

## Learning I: Two factor theory of aggression (Berkowitz)

- We are *not* born with innate tendencies to be aggressive
- Two factors must co-occur in order to produce aggression:
  - Arousal (could be hormonal, could be externally induced)
  - External cue (learned to be associated with aggression)



8

## Origins of 2-factor theory

- Originally stems from the “frustration-aggression hypothesis”

*“Frustration, and only frustration, causes aggression, and only aggression”*

Research Example:

- Children building blocks with desk-shaking button

9

## *Problems with the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis*

- But, hypothesis overly strong and generally not supported, because:
  - Many things can instigate aggression
    - heat, insult, modeling or conformity
  - Frustration causes other feelings and behaviours
    - helplessness, perseverance, reactance

10

## Two-factor Theory

- *Internal arousal* +
- *External cue*, which is learned (via classical conditioning)

*Both must be present*

- Examples
  - Rifle study (lab)
  - Dunking booth study (field)
  - Horn-honking studies (field)

11

## The Presence of a Gun

	No Insult	Insult
No Gun	?	?
Gun	?	?
Badminton Racquet	?	?

*Amount of Aggression as defined by intensity of shocks*

12

## The Presence of a Gun

	No Insult	Insult
No Gun	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>
Gun	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Badminton Racquet	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>

*Amount of Aggression as defined by intensity of shocks*

13

## The Dunking Booth

	<i>No Insult</i>	<i>Insult</i>
<i>Pasture Backdrop</i>	?	?
<i>Guns &amp; Saloon backdrop</i>	?	?

*Amount of Aggression as defined by number of bean bags thrown*

14

## The Dunking Booth

	<i>No Insult</i>	<i>Insult</i>
<i>Pasture Backdrop</i>	Low	Low
<i>Guns &amp; Saloon backdrop</i>	Low	High

*Amount of Aggression as defined by number of bean bags thrown*

15

## Learning II: Social learning

- Aggression is learned, not innate
- We learn
  - either directly through reinforcement of aggressive behaviors; OR
  - by modeling others who are behaving aggressively
    - aggressive behavior must be rewarded
    - aggressive behavior must be seen as real

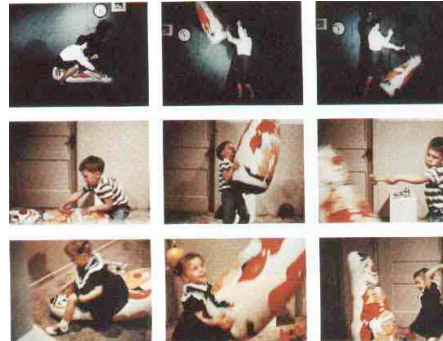
16



## Bandura's Bobo Doll Studies



- Participants were normal children
- Watched violent TV episode or various “control” episodes that were not violent
- Manipulated whether aggressor in video was rewarded or not
- Observed children in play area after they watched video
- Aggression defined as number of times the children hit the bobo doll



17

### *Results indicate that...*

- Viewing *rewarded* violence increases violent behaviors in children.
- Viewing *unrewarded* violence does not necessarily increase violence
- Choice of control groups are very important when conducting this research
- So, what are the effects of watching violence? Catharsis or modeling?

18

## *Media Effects on Suicide*

*Phillips, 1977, 1978*

- U.S. suicides increase after publicized suicide stories
- the more publicity given to the suicide story, the higher the suicide rate thereafter; and
- the rise occurs mainly in the geographic area where the suicide story is publicized

19

## *Media Effects on Suicide*

*Phillips, 1977, 1978*

- Additionally, automobile fatalities also increase just after publicized suicide stories;
- the more publicity given to the stories, the greater the increase in automobile fatalities, and
- the increase occurs mainly in the area where the story is publicized.

20

## *Media Effects on Suicide*

*Phillips, 1977, 1978*

- Also, single-car crash fatalities increase more than other types, and
- the driver in these crashes is significantly similar to the person described in the suicide story, while the passengers are not.
- THEREFORE:
  - suicide stories appear to elicit additional suicides, some of which are disguised as auto accidents

21

## *Media Effects on Homicide*

*Phillips*

- What sort of media-depicted homicide would be modeled?
  - Rewarded
  - Made exciting
  - Perceived as real
  - Culturally Justified
- What is shown on TV that fits these criteria?



*Heavyweight Prizefighting*

22

## *Media Effects on Homicide*

### *Phillips*

- Across U.S., homicide rates increased by 12.5% following highly publicized prize fights.
- The more publicized the fight, the greater the increase in the rate
- The relationship between prize-fight and homicide rate persisted after statistically controlling for day of week, seasons, and other extraneous variables

23

## *Media Effects on Homicide*

### *Phillips*

- *Hypothesis 1:*
  - Prize fighting triggers an increase in gambling, which in turn provokes anger, fighting, and murder.
  - However, increased homicide rate *did not* occur following the Super Bowl. Therefore, not supported.
- *Hypothesis 2:*
  - Prize fight merely precipitated a murder that would have occurred anyway, even in the absence of the prize fight.
  - Found no evidence of any *dip* in homicides soon after the peak. Therefore, not supported.
- *Hypothesis 3:*
  - Social learning / modeling hypothesis. Was there victim modeling? -- is a person is more likely to aggress against a target victim if his target is similar to the victim? This hypothesis **was supported**:

24

## *Media Effects on Homicide*

### *Phillips*

- White-loser prize fights are followed by significant increases in young, white male homicides; in contrast, Black-loser prize fights do not seem to trigger young, white male homicides
- Black-loser prize fights are followed by significant increases in young, Black male homicides. White-loser prize fights do not trigger significant increases in Black male homicides.

25

## *Violence in Japanese TV:*

### *Personal Observations*

- Japan has (or had) extraordinarily low violent crime rate
- Japan has explicit violence/nudity on TV, even on Sunday mornings
- How can this be?
  - Offenders NOT rewarded
  - The consequences of the violence are shown, not ignored. Grieving widows, children, etc.

26