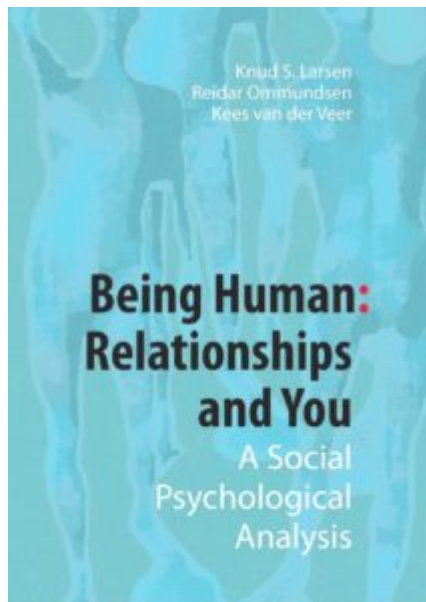


Being Human. Chapter 10: Aggression: The Common Thread Of Humanity



Not a day passes without reminders of the violent world in which we live. Pick up a newspaper on any given day and you will see multiple reports of aggression at the interpersonal as well as at group or international levels. Wars continue despite efforts to make the First World War the “war to end all wars”. Genocide is committed as we write these lines in Darfur and other regions of the world despite all protestations of “never again”. It is not possible to live insulated lives as violence affects individuals, families, communities, the nation, and the international system.

Many people are keenly aware of the misery caused by aggression and are trying to change political systems to ameliorate the consequences. Thousands of Americans and Europeans have moved their protests to the streets angered by the apparent indifference of politicians in bringing the current wars, like in Iraq and the Middle-East, to an end. Today’s paper also reports on the racism (see also chapter 9) that still lurks in our societies, on school children being killed in Thailand, on plans to introduce new missile systems in Poland with radar support in the Czech republic. The Palestinians have not yet come together in a unity government and see their efforts dismissed by Israel, another chapter in that ongoing conflict. Elsewhere the police has unraveled a drug smuggling gang and found, along with money and drugs, many guns. As you read this chapter today it is probably but an average day of continued violence in the world.

Aggression stimuli can be found not only in the media, but now also consumes significant space in the ever-growing Internet. The content of violent pornography is related to violence, as we shall see later in this chapter. Video games are often vivid depictions of massive and terrible violence. Some researchers have related these stimuli to real life aggression, facilitated by the ease of obtaining guns,

particularly in the United States. Daily television programming yields numerous violent episodes with nonchalant killing at the center of the action. Violent movies sell, and based on the results of social learning theory, they must have an effect on impressionable audiences.

Unlike in European countries that are less violent tens of thousands of people are murdered each year in United States. However, not only in the U.S. do we observe the phenomena of school killings, or men attacking others at their workplace. In recent years it has also happened in Germany and in The Netherlands, but with less frequency and scale compared to the US. At Columbine High School in 1999 two students turned guns and explosives on fellow students in an attack that costs several innocent lives. Their actions were an example of anger-based aggression as they went to their school with the intent and determination to hurt fellow students and staff. Similar episodes have occurred in other states (Newman, Fox, Harding, Metha, & Roth, 2004). Recently (April 16th, 2007) a 23-year old student in Virginia killed 32 people and wounded 25 others before he took his own life. A similar act of violence happened on November 7th, 2007, in Tuusula (Finland). An 18-year-old shot seven students and the headmistress inside his high school in southern Finland, before turning the gun on himself. He, calling himself Sturmgeist89', published a manifesto online on youtube demanding war on the "weak-minded masses" and pledged to die for his cause.

The difference in violence between Europe and the United States suggests the importance of cultural values. Some societies are more acceptant of violence whereas other countries have built into social inhibitions and control of aggression cues. The stimuli of guns in many homes in America, and their indifferent use in the media, are not independent of the actual violence in society.

Daily news also provides many sad examples of more intimate violence. Child abuse is common, as are other forms of domestic violence often associated with drug and alcohol use. The fact that societies have created centers where women can escape violence speaks volumes about the prevalence of family aggression and intimate violence. Rape centers present everywhere in the Western world, also point to the prevalence of aggression in society.

Since violence is everywhere in human society and in the animal world, is there an evolutionary basis for aggression? Do we still have these biological

components present in our genetic coding? Yet, the behaviors that had a survival function in our common early history are today dysfunctional. Predisposition to aggress may kill us one-by-one, or we may all die in the feared nuclear cataclysm of the future. We should remind ourselves that the carnivorous dinosaurs of the past are all gone.

1. Dimensions of aggression in the world

Although the cold war is over, the nuclear powers still possess tens of thousands of nuclear bombs that can be activated at a moments notice. Although annihilation is a singular experience the warlords of the world have ensured mutual extinction many times over. Social psychological factors play important roles in the development of military technology and strategy (e.g. Larsen, 1987). World War II took 50 million lives, but millions died before that period from other reckless wars or torture. Political leaders have not learned much as they still rely on force to reach political objectives, and millions have died since World War II. The purges of China and Eastern Europe were horrible. So too were the extermination of Native Americans in the United States and the Aborigines of Australia by European invaders (Brown, 1971).

The death toll yearly from war and other violence is about 1.6 million persons, including at least half a million homicides (Stolberg, 2002). American society makes a significant contribution to these statistics through endless wars and domestic homicide rates. Why is American society so violent? Some explanations point to a lack of social integration. As a country of immigrants the U.S. has little history and few common denominators which taken together diminish empathy toward victims of violence. In addition to the extermination of the native population, the U.S. also engaged in slavery until the civil war, and institutionalized violence toward Blacks afterwards as we saw in chapter 9.

Further, homicides occur in impoverished areas where people have few investments in stable social relations. Violence is often associated with drug cultures where masculine pride and retaliation for any slight or insult is as certain as it is stupid. The U.S., although rich in resources, has one of the highest income disparities in the world. Poverty brings many social ills that directly or indirectly generate aggression and mortality. Finally, the U.S is the only society in the world with an irrational attachment to firearms. Hundreds of millions of firearms exist in private homes, and instead of protecting are often used to kill others in close relationships. Family or other intimate partners commit the large majority of

violent crimes.

2. Two types of aggression

Aggression is defined as intentional behavior aimed at inflicting physical or emotional harm. Aggression should not be confused with assertive behavior. The willingness to stand up for one's rights, to speak out against injustice requires assertiveness. Assertiveness is especially necessary in societies that feed on conformity. Women today are becoming more assertive, are speaking up for fair treatment, and relating to men on a more equal basis. Speaking up is assertiveness, but unless it contains hostility and the desire to injure another, it is not aggression.

It is possible to differentiate between aggression carried out with a legal and good intent on behalf of society. Police officers act in aggressive ways, often to enforce laws that protect the rest of the community. Criminals are also aggressive, and most often at a cost to society. At times police aggression is violence without cause, as in the cases of unarmed people shot for no apparent good reason. In social psychology however, most often two types of aggression are recognized: Hostile and instrumental aggression

2.1 Hostile and instrumental aggression

Berkowitz (1993) made a distinction between instrumental and hostile aggression. Hostile aggression results from feelings of anger that aim at injuring or causing pain to the target person or group. The emotion of anger is the mediating variable in this type of aggression. However, warlords are less emotional and more calculating. Wars are often fought for resources of space, and other tangential rewards. Many wars are initially fought not with hostile intent, (which comes later along with war propaganda), but to reach some goal or end purpose. Hitler's war was for "Living space" according to his book *Mein Kampf*, but turned into a bitter hostile extermination campaign where dehumanizing propaganda was used to justify the action. The war in Iraq is the current example of endless wars. It was started for the instrumental purpose of removing Saddam Hussein, or perhaps for oil control, or protection of a client state of the U.S. However, the war became a hostile campaign aimed at the utter destruction of perceived enemies. It is probably fair to say that wars for the warlords are primarily instrumental, whereas for soldiers and populations they are hostile events.

So we can see it is difficult in practice to distinguish between instrumental versus

hostile aggression. Most murders are probably impulsive angry acts and a form of hostile aggression. On the other hand murders committed by the mob and gangsters are often purely instrumental. The mob seeks to remove a rival, or induce terror so it can continue with criminal operations (nothing personal sir!). At the level of rationalization many wars are fought initially for instrumental purposes, but take on the nature of hostile aggression as each side seeks to justify inhumanity and denigrate the enemy.

2.2 Torture is instrumental aggression

Whether describing the recent acts of the U.S. military in the now infamous prisons, or the so-called “rendition” program of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), torture is for some end or some purpose. That is also true of the torture practiced by other proto-fascist governments of the past. The burning of witches at the stake was instrumental in that the purpose was to save their souls. The Spanish Inquisition likewise used torture as an instrumental exercise as the perpetrators were engaged in the great “loving labor” of saving souls who were devilishly afflicted. People change when they engage in torture. To rationalize torture the victim must be denigrated, and the acts must be perceived as being for some greater good. Of course some sadists or psychopaths have no need for rationalizations, as the torture chamber is their natural environment.

Even though society holds individuals responsible for behavior, we know that peers and the social context influence behaviors that some individuals would never commit without that powerful encouragement. As we have discussed in chapter 7, Abu Ghraib did not result so much from individual evil as from the predisposing social context (Fiske, Ladsana, & Cuddy, 2004). Iraq was a combat environment that predisposed the prison guards to aggression, and at the same time viewed the inmates as disgusting and unworthy of sympathy.

Other research reported in chapter 7 demonstrated the ease by which inhuman behavior is elicited by obedience to authority (e.g. Milgram, 1963; 1974), and by conformity processes (e.g. Larsen, 1972a). In combat situations conformity pressures are especially high since going along with fellow soldiers is related to individual survival. Prison guards may observe the torture committed by other soldiers, and given the social context think it is all right to behave in similar ways. In other situations, including massacres committed by suicide bombers, war crimes are socialized events resulting from conformity and obedience.

In many cases the provocations leading to genocidal actions is witnessing the killing of fellow soldiers. This experience with hostility generates anger that is transferred to a largely innocent population. Torture is a gradual process starting with apparent legitimate forms of abuse that include “waterboarding” by the U.S. Repeated acts desensitize the perpetrator, and hostility gradually includes the willingness to the kill and mutilate civilians. Contributing to these violent outcomes is the behavior of governments that justify torture of enemy prisoners. Torture is also instrumental aggression since soldiers may sincerely believe they are doing a service by punishing, killing, and otherwise eliminating groups of people that seem so deserving of that treatment.

3. Theories of aggression

Thinkers about human violence have over the years put forward several theories of aggression. Some researchers who observed the near universality of aggressive behavior pointed to biology, genetics or instincts as the primary causes of aggression. Later learning theorists based on rich research evidence suggested that aggression, like other social behaviors, is learned.

3.1 Biological and evolutionary causes

Early thinkers in psychology believed that aggressive impulses were inborn, that all humans had an instinctive aggressive trait that would find expression in behavior if not inhibited by learning (Hobbes, 1651). Much later Freud (1930) was also a proponent of instinct theory. He saw human psychology as interplay between two primary instincts: the Eros (life instinct), and the Thanatos (death instinct). From Freud’s perspective aggression and in general destructive behavior was an expression of the death instinct.

Still later Lorenz (1966) argued that we have inborn mechanisms for both aggression and the inhibition of hostility. In modern times some researchers suggest that aggression is an inherited tendency that we share with other animals, particularly primates (Potegal & Knutson, 1994). Aggression has become part of our genetic inheritance because this behavior had survival functions, including access to mates and protection of defenseless children (Buss & Kenrick, 1998).

Biology must logically play a role. The potential has to be present in biology for any behavior to occur even if biological contributions are modest (Geen, 1998). For example aggression is partly determined by the presence of the so-called

male hormone testosterone (Dabbs, 1998). The neurotransmitter serotonin may also be involved in hostility and aggression is influenced by the reactivity of our sympathetic nervous system (Kagan, 1989). Since aggressive behavior is prominent in some families (Miles & Carey, 1997), and remains stable within individuals across the lifespan (Huesmann & Moise, 2000), a genetic contribution can be inferred. Research by Finnish psychologists show that some species can also be bred for aggressive behavior (Lagerspetz, 1979).

Most social psychologists have viewed instinctual sources of aggression with disbelief (see e.g. Larsen, 1973; 1977a). They point to the great variability of violence in different cultures (Hornstein, 1976). Variability can however also be attributed to different cultural inhibitions, and therefore does not disprove an inborn tendency toward aggression. The near universality of aggressive behavior among vertebrates suggests a dominant survival value of at least instrumental aggression (Lore & Schultz, 1993). However, the fact that it varies by culture in humans and can be modified would suggest that it is not rigidly programmed into human nature. Still most social psychologists would emphasize the basic learned nature of human hostility (Berkowitz, 1993; Geen, 1998).

3.2 Learned aggression

From learning theory we know that people learn through reinforcement, as well as by imitation. When a person finds aggressive behavior rewarding he/she is likely to repeat it on future occasions. In the military, reinforcement consists of medals, commendations, and promotions for aggressive behavior. Aggressive behavior is also rewarded in criminal gangs by promotion to leadership, and with a greater share of the spoils.

3.2.1 Reinforcement and aggression

In some societies children, particularly boys, are rewarded for aggressive behavior. Boys are told to fight back, and not to give way to bullies. Other societies make retaliation a cultural requirement, and punish those who do not comply. In one study (Geen & Pigg, 1970) participants were reinforced verbally while participating in a study administering sham "shock" to other participants. Those who were told they were doing a "great job" subsequently shocked at significantly more intense levels. If rewards lead to increased aggression, will punishing aggressive behavior inhibit violence? The answer is no. Other studies have shown that when children are physically punished for aggression parents actually model the behavior being corrected. Therefore aggression training may

produce more violent behavior away from home (Sears, Whiting, Nowlis, & Sears, 1953; Widom, 1989). Since the parents serve as models for imitation it is difficult to separate influences of reinforcement from those of social learning.

People as well as animals respond to rewards. If behavior is rewarded it is likely to be a lasting part of a person's behavior. The bully learns that his behavior brings rewards as it produces more influence on the playground at school, and perhaps he even obtains the lunch money of frightened children. The best hockey players are the most aggressive who spend extra time in the penalty box (Patterson Littman, & Bricker, 1967; McCarthy & Kelley, 1978). The lesson of 9/11 in the U.S. shows that terrorism can be very rewarding. If the goal of 9/11 terrorism was to cause fear and chaos, the perpetrators of air piracy succeeded beyond imagination. If the long-term objective of terrorism was to embroil the U.S. in long-term warfare, create permanent difficulties in air travel, 9/11 was very rewarding to the perpetrators. If the objective also included a torn society, and rejection of the U.S. policies by much of the world, the suicidal sacrifice brought great rewards to those who planned the aggression.

3.2.2 Observational learning

Rewards are only one motivator of learned aggression. Bandura, Ross, & Ross (1961) in a classic experiment demonstrated that children learn by the simple imitation of others. Children in a Stanford University nursery school were placed in a room with an adult. The room contained Tinker Toys and a large inflatable doll. After working with the Tinker Toys for a few minutes the adult concentrated his interest on the inflated doll, and begin to abuse it in a violent fashion. The doll was hit repeatedly, kicked, and thrown about while the adult yelled aggressive encouragements to "knock the doll" down, and "kick it". After the child had observed the adult outburst he was told that other children must now use the current toys, and he was placed in a different room with more toys that included the inflated Bobo doll and a mallet.

Comparative results showed that children who were not exposed to the adult modeling of aggression rarely picked up the mallet or hit the Bobo doll in the subsequent session. Children who were exposed, on the other hand, were more likely to aggressively attack the doll. It was as if the child had learned to be aggressive by observation, and had also learned the actual behavior of how to attack. Later (1979) Bandura identified aggressive models in the family, in gang culture, and in the mass media. Violent teenagers frequently abused as children,

learned aggression by watching their parents. Sadly, many abused children would later become abusive parents themselves demonstrating the power of social learning (Bandura & Walters, 1959; Kaufman & Zigler, 1987).

Today the average child may observe many models of aggression in the movies, on television, and on the Internet. It stands to reason that when children spend many hours watching violence, the consequences may be numbing. Initial violence observed in the media may cause a negative emotional response in the child. However, over time as the child is exposed to repeatedly aggressive events, the accumulation of observed aggression produces little reaction to violence as the child is desensitized.

Also many young people cannot easily distinguish between social reality and the media world. To some degree repeated exposure affects the world-view of the observer, and observing many aggressive acts connote a fearful world of violence. In turn an aggressive worldview may function as support for continued acceptance of aggression in the media. In particular aggression on television or in the movies are often justified if committed by the “good” guy, the one wearing the proverbial white hat. These influences may distort the child’s view of the real world.

3.2.3 Violent models in the media

The average child in the U.S. will see approximately 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence by the time he finishes elementary school (Eron, 2001). Other studies have analyzed television for content as well and show that 58 percent of all programs contain violence, most without any critical comments or evaluation. When it comes to prime time television, children and adults in the United States watch 5 or 6 violent episodes for each hour of television, and about 90 percent of children’s television menu contains components of violence (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). Often the violence is committed by admired and heroic figures and the aggression depicted therefore has the additional benefit of positive social sanction. On the whole, Eron and his co-workers have demonstrated high correlations between the amount of aggressive television viewed and subsequent hostile behavior (Eron, 1987; Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1996).

Eron & Huesmann (1984, 1985) found that viewing violence at age 8 predicted violent behavior at age 19. In another study (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, &

Eron, 2003) the investigators assessed the television habits of a large group of boys from childhood to adulthood. The researchers controlled for aggressive predisposition by examining separate groups trait aggression as the boys grew older. Holding constant for predisposition to violence at age 8, those who watched violent television were significantly more likely to commit various criminal acts when 30, compared to those who had little or moderate liking for aggressive television viewing (see also Huesmann, 1986)

The correlation between televised aggression and violent behavior can be inferred from the temporal appearance of television in the homes of United States and Canada and subsequent violence rates. The homicide rates doubled in the time period from 1957 to 1974 following the spread of violent programming. The temporal relationship between violent programming and violence in society can also be observed in several studies from South Africa and rural Canada (Centerwall, 1989; Williams, 1986).

However, it is always a problem in correlational studies to determine cause and effect. Could it be that children predisposed to violence also enjoyed watching aggressive television and later displayed aggressive behavior not caused by the television diet, but from the aggressive predisposition? While the Eron & Huesmann (1984, 1985) studies answered that objection and demonstrated cause and effect, it is also necessary to confirm the relationship by studying aggression in the laboratory. In a classic study Liebert and Baron (1972) exposed a group of children to a violent police drama, and then compared their behavior with a control group of children who saw an exciting sporting event with no violence. The violent and sports dramas both produced physiological arousal, but to what were these reactions attributed? Those children who watched the aggressive episode were later observed to be significantly more aggressive than the children exposed to the sporting drama. In another early study, juvenile delinquents who watched violent television diet were more aggressive compared to a control group (Leyens, Camino, Parke, & Berkowitz, 1981). In yet other studies, students who were deliberately angered in a laboratory study behaved more aggressively toward females afterwards (Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981).

Perhaps watching media violence in effect gives children as well as adults “permission” to be violent. Television violence seems to have the greatest effect on children who already had some predisposition to violence (Josephson, 1987). Watching a movie about police violence produced significantly more aggressive

acts during a floor hockey game, especially among those already rated high in aggression by their teachers. The educational environment provided permissive cover for aggressive behavior as showing the film in school must have implied approval in the eyes of children. Other studies have examined children with extensive and prolonged violent television diets (Parke, Berkowitz, Leyens, West & Sebastian, 1977). The great majority of these kids had no initial predisposition to violence, but became more violent after an extended period of exposure. In a meta-analysis of 230 studies Hearold (1986) demonstrated the convergent evidence that media violence is associated with antisocial behavior. Today there is little doubt that social learning of aggression occurs in the aftermath of watching aggressive television (Cantor, Bushman, Huesmann, Groebel, Malamuth, Impett, Donnerstein, & Smith, 2001; Geen, 1998; Huesmann & Miller, 1994).

The effect of media violence on aggression has been studied further by Geen & Thomas (1986). Their findings may be summarized as follows. The aggressive media stimuli produce emotional arousal in the viewer that spills over into behavior. Once aroused the individual is motivated and energized for other behaviors. Secondly, the aggressive stimulus disinhibits the viewer. As the individual observes massive gratuitous violence over long periods, a numbing of ethics and reason takes place. In other words sustained violence disinhibits the viewer allowing for more aggression (Bushman & Geen, 1990). Finally, as discussed in section 3.2.2, the violent content of television serves as social learning models for imitation. For example, the children attacking the Bobo doll in the Bandura experiment were simply imitating what they had seen the adult model perform.

Sadly, aggressive viewing habits have lasting effects. The emotional numbing may encourage people to use violence in solving the problems of life. Exposure to constant brutality also desensitizes and distorts the social reality as demonstrated by several investigators (Cline, Croft, Courrier, 1973; Drabman & Thomas, 1976). One consequence of media distortion is excessive fear of violence that does not correspond to real dangers in society (Radicki, 1989). Media distortion causes people to arm themselves with handguns, which are also aggression cues with only one functional purpose, that of killing other human beings.

3.3 Violent video games

Video games constitute an obsessive activity for many children and young people throughout the world. About 85 percent of U.S. teenagers play these games on a

regular basis (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). Significant time is devoted weekly to videos that contain a sickeningly level of violence and destruction (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999). Anderson & Bushman (2001) reviewed 35 studies on the effect of video violence and concluded that the games contribute to aggressive behaviors. Violent videos also have a negative effect on prosocial behaviors, as the participants in the above studies were less likely to help others or engage in altruistic behavior. The violent games increased the levels of aggressive thoughts and feelings, and produced changes in the body commonly associated with the 'fight or flight' syndrome: increased blood pressure and heart rate.

In a typical violent video experiment, students were asked to either play the game called "Mortal Combat" or another called "PGA tournament Golf". When the participants lost the game they were punished by a blast of white noise. Those respondents who were exposed to the violent video game gave stronger and longer blasts of white noise. As is true in the case of television violence, there is little doubt about the negative effects of violent video games for children and society (Anderson & Bushman, 2001).

3.4 Violent pornography and violence against women

Today adult "book" stores proliferate all over the Western world. In addition the Internet contain millions of images of naked women, and a significant portion of this material shows in various ways how to humiliate and aggress toward females. Learning theory would predict a relationship between viewing this material and aggression toward women including rape. Pornography at such high levels of consumption must also affect men's world-view of women, and the role women play or should play in heterosexual relations. In fact, research shows that pornography endorses the image of sexually submissive women where the man plays the role of overpowering reluctant females (Hansen & Hansen, 1990; St. Lawrence & Joyner, 1991). Pornography also endorses the idea that the use of coercion is pleasurable for women, and thereby indirectly promotes rape. At the very least, violent pornography distorts how women actually feel about coercion.

As pornography has spread throughout the world, attacks on women have also become more frequent (Court, 1985). Even the sale of soft-core magazines like Playboy is correlated with rape rates (Baron & Straus, 1984). The presence of pornography in the background of sexual criminals is well documented (Marshall, 1989; Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988). A unanimous statement by leading

scientists stated that exposure to violent pornography leads to aggressive behavior toward women (Koop, 1987). In an interview with serial killer Ted Bundy he acknowledged the habitual use of pornography. Perhaps he was also self-serving in blaming pornography and thereby diverting attention away from his own personal responsibility for his crimes. In sum, pornography causes harm to women (Russell, 1997).

But rigid sexual culture is also harmful to women. In the guise of protecting women some cultures prohibit any natural evolution of sexual relationships, and blame the victims of sexual oppression for any infraction. A recent court case (November, 2007) in Saudi Arabia that was reported in the news comes to mind. In that male dominated country, women are prohibited from leaving their houses without a male escort who is also a member of her family. The woman cannot drive in a car for example without violating these rigid taboos. In the court case mentioned above a woman was gang raped by seven men, after which the woman was given a sentence of 200 lashes and six months in prison for being in a car without a male escort of her family. In this case as in many other situations it was the victim who was blamed for the assault.

3.5 Sexual beliefs

Growing up many adolescents come to believe that women are supposed to resist and say no when they really mean yes to sexual advances (White, Donat, & Humphrey, 1995). Nearly half of the high school students in the U.S. believed that when a woman said no, she did not really mean it. These common sexual beliefs set the stage for miscommunications and date rape. Some universities have responded by requiring students to negotiate a contract prior to dating explicitly defining sexual conduct, and the limitations on their behavior. That requirement put a damper on the spontaneity of sexual behavior and was eventually discarded (Roiphe, 1994).

3.6 Violent pornography distorts the victims' reaction

Research shows violent pornography too has a numbing effect and decreases empathy with potential victims just like the effect of watching other types of violence. Typically in erotic violence the victim's response is distorted and out of touch with reality. If a woman is raped, she is shown smiling afterwards, and it is this response of showing sexual satisfaction that is crucial to the incidence of subsequent violence (Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981). Repeated exposure to violent pornography produces desensitization in much the same way as exposure

to general violence leads to an acceptance of aggression. More broadly erotic violence leads to an acceptance of violence against women (Donnerstein & Linz, 1994; Weisz & Earls, 1995).

In one important study (Check & Malamuth, 1981), participants were exposed to movies displaying either erotic or nonerotic aggression in a regular theater setting. Males exposed to erotic aggression subsequently displayed more aggression toward females, whereas female participants did not accept violence against their gender. Other research showed that repeated exposure to violent erotic films produced desensitization in several ways. The violent material became more acceptable, the participants showed less sympathy for victims of rape, and displayed less support for sexual equality (Malamuth & Briere, 1986).

Taken together, these and other studies show that exposure to sexually violent material produced greater acceptance of violence against women. It stands to reason that violent erotica is also responsible for aggressive behavior toward women in real life (Dean & Malamuth, 1997). Pornographic violence serves to focus aggressive feelings toward women rather than on other more appropriate targets (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988). A meta-analysis of 30 studies showed conclusively that violent erotica has aggressive consequences (Allen, D'Alessio, & Brezgel, 1995). The weight of the conclusions is that the violent component of erotica had the most serious anti-social effect on subsequent aggressive behavior.

4. Culture

Cultural situations determine whether inborn tendencies are actually expressed. Aggression is therefore a function of the interplay between inborn tendencies, the inhibitions or facilitation of culture, and the particular situation in which the behavior occurs.

As already mentioned American society is among the most violent in the world. Is it in the national character for Americans to be violent, or are there other explanations? Some researchers (Daly, Wilson, & Vasdev, 2001) have provided situational explanations for the high levels of violence in the U.S. They point to the frustrations of income inequality, which is far greater in the U.S. than in comparative countries where murder rates are lower. Others have suggested that a culture sensitive to threat, called a culture of honor, is mainly responsible.

4.1 Herding societies and the culture of honor

The southern part of the United States has historically been more violent than the North. It was here that the vast majority of lynchings took place, and a large amount of other person-to-person violence. Nisbett, (1993), showed that murder rates were significantly higher in the south, a situation he attributes to a culture of pride or “honor”. Southern whites are likely to endorse violence when threatened or suffering slights or insults. Later work (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996) supports the presence of a culture of “honor” preoccupied with a reputation for toughness, and an ability to retaliate swiftly against any insult or threat.

Part of the culture is also the reputed southern politeness in which people recognize that the honor of others serve as a stabilizing force in social relations. Since the politeness norm of the south of the U.S. is well understood, insults are equally salient and leave little doubts as to proper reaction. In one study (Nisbett, Polly, & Lang, 1995) the authors examined archival information for the presence of two types of murders. One type is argument-based murders that involve perceived threat to honor, like the perceived unfaithfulness of women to spouses or boyfriends. The other type of murder occurs in the course of some felony like a bank robbery. The rate for felony murders was about the same in the south and other regions of the U.S. However, argument-based murders occurred at a much higher rate in the south (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

Studies in the laboratory supported these regional findings of the effect of honor on aggressive responses (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996). Confederates of the experimenter insulted the participants deliberately by bumping into the subjects when passing while whispering “asshole”. Participants from the south, as expected, reacted more aggressively than those from the north. The researchers did not believe that regional differences in homicide were caused by the cruel history of slavery or the greater humidity in the south. Examining the historical record they noted that homicides were more common in relative cool mountain and rural areas where slavery was relatively uncommon. Nisbett & Cohen (1996) argued that the culture of honor was responsible, and is a variant of similar cultures found elsewhere in the world.

Cohen and his collaborators noted that in cultures, which historically produced a living by herding animals, people were especially sensitive to insults. As is well known from the history of warfare, groups all over the world stole or slaughtered domestic animals in raids on their enemies, and thereby destroyed the wealth of a

family or community in an instant. The culture of honor developed initially as a means of protection and to discourage attack from potential enemies. Central to the culture of honor is the idea that any attack is met with swift counteraction, and insults are not tolerated. Justice delayed is justice denied. When insulted or threatened, the code of survival of people from herding societies demanded a determined and immediate response to potential violence. In these societies children are taught not to back down, to meet each challenge head on, and not allow for bullying.

Gradually over time this herding culture became part of the social fabric of immigrants who came from these societies to United States. Primarily Scottish and Irish immigrants who herded animals from primordial times settled in the southern part of the U.S. Violence in this herding context had initially survival value, but over time a sensitivity to insults became a part of culture and automatic thinking. Today there is greater support for self-defense in the south, for the use of guns, for corporal and for capital punishment than in the North (Cohen, 1996; Podell & Archer, 1994). Violence is seen as appropriate in the protection of self, but indiscriminate aggression is not endorsed (Fischer, 1989). Child training is more likely to include spanking in the south. So, by means of modeling, children also learn from their parents to settle arguments or disputes by violence. These patterns of behavior have lost their survival function in modern society, but are still valued in the social institutions of the South (Cohen, 1996).

4.2 The culture of mobs

The phenomena of imitation crimes are well known by police and other observers. Social learning also plays a role when a criminal observes the violent conduct of another and seeks to commit a similar crime. Imitation crimes were observed early in the 19th century by the sociologist Tarde (1903). He noted that newsworthy crimes often led to similar outrages in other communities. People often commit violence in mobs where they can imitate the aggression of others. The cause of mob violence is deindividuation according to Zimbardo (1970). The individual acting in groups or mobs feels less personal responsibility for his aggressive behavior. Zimbardo noted that deindividuation was partially caused by anonymity since an unknown individual cannot be held to account for his violent behavior. For example executioners and the Ku Klux Klan wore hoods to disguise appearance, and thereby became anonymous to victims and observers of the violence. Deindividuation is also caused by diffusion of responsibility since the

individual feels less personal responsibility when the violence is committed with many others. The more people who are present at decision making meetings the less the sense of individual responsibility. The acts of lynch mobs are thought possible because no single person is held responsible for the murder (Watson, 1973; Mullen, 1986).

The difference between advising participants to aggress and actually “shocking” someone was investigated in an experiment (Gaebeline & Mander (1978). Those subjects whose role was confined to advising on how much shock to administer recommended much higher levels of shock, compared to those who actually did the shocking. A similar diffusion of responsibility occurs in mob lynchings (Mullen, 1986). In examining 60 lynchings in the U.S. the investigator discovered that the larger the mob the more brutal the murder and mutilation of the victim. Being in a large mob decreases personal responsibility, and whatever happens can be blamed on others. This group-produced enhancement of negative behavior was observed in another study employing shock. When a group of respondents were angered and given the opportunity to shock, they as a group administered much higher levels of shock compared to the shock administered by the single respondent (Jaffe & Yinon, 1983). Something happens to the sense of personal responsibility when people act in groups that lead to higher levels of hostility and violent behavior.

The size of the group also matters, as noted the larger the mob the greater the deindividuation. Racial riots in the United States and elsewhere demonstrate how large groups engage in indiscriminate violence and atrocities toward members of other groups with whom they have no personal relationship. The effect of deindividuation can also be observed in violent warfare where individual responsibility is disguised by the wearing of uniforms, and utilizing face or body paint.

Human history shows that it is much easier for old men to command young men to go to war, than to serve themselves in the front lines. Often the leading members of governments who are most bellicose risk no members of their own family. Since none are serving in the armed forces they sustain no personal risks from their aggressive actions and decisions. Groups create problems in risk taking by diffusing the responsibility for any action.

5. Gender and aggression

In all societies studied males have been found to be more aggressive, with only a few exceptions, like the Trobrianders (Benedict, 1935). Men commit nearly all violence associated with gangs and criminal activity (Kimmel, 2004). Eighty percent of those arrested in the U.S. for murder are men, as are 87 percent of those confined in prison for aggravated assaults. One has only to watch children at play to observe gender differences in aggression from the very earliest moments of social interaction.

5.1 Evolution and male aggression

The higher level of male aggression is most likely an evolutionary adaptation in the struggle for survival. In the early period of human development women were gatherers of food, and protectors of children. Men on the other hand had the task of killing animals for food, and engaging in combat to protect the family or tribe. Male aggression was often instrumental in obtaining women from enemy tribes, and often included the rape of women and the murder of their male protectors. According to evolutionary theory, rape was expressed historically as an unconscious drive to secure the survival of one's gene pool, and in the domination of others. The rape of women in warfare initially served these biological purposes (Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983). Like all human behaviors, that adaptation was modified and changed by social institutions, although never in warfare.

Women also express aggression in varying circumstances. Females express hostility in relationships through the use of gossip, by forming cliques and alliances, and by excluding the unworthy (Coie, Cillessen, Dodge, Hubbard, Schwartz, Lemerise, & Bateman, 1999; Dodge & Schwartz, 1997). Girls can be emotionally vicious, and put a high price on in-group status. A meta-analysis shows that men are much more physically aggressive than women, but the differences in behavior is narrowed when the behavior is provoked (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996). Men will in ordinary circumstances be more aggressive than females. For example, men are primarily responsible for road rage incidents. However, when women are subject to extraordinary frustration or insults, they also act aggressively. Have the gender role changes that have occurred over the past several decades produced a convergence of male and female aggressive behavior? Males still primarily commit violent crimes, whereas property crime rates have increased for women (Wilson & Hernstein, 1985; Chapple, McQuillan, & Berdahl, 2005).

Aggressive behavior is not consistent with most women's ideal self-concept. When

women commit aggressive acts they feel more guilt and anxiety (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). The gender difference holds in different cultural contexts as males express more aggression than females across different societies (Archer & McDaniel, 1995). Culture made a contribution to levels of hostility however, as women living in either Australia or New Zealand displayed more aggression than female respondents from Sweden or Korea.

5.2 Evolution and violence in close relationships

The pattern of gender related violence has led evolutionary psychologists to offer explanations pointing to the survival functions of violence. As noted in the preceding section they contend that violence is unconsciously motivated by the desire to pass on one's own genes and those of close relations. To observe the power of genes in relationships we have only to observe the outcome of divorce (Daly & Wilson, 1996). Typically after a divorce, the in-law member of the family has no more status. Despite a previous harmonious history of supportive in-law relations, divorce is typically not only between marriage partners, but also between families. Common offspring often become objects in a contest to control childrearing where the child's interest and desire of having two parents come second to each partners selfish wish to be in charge.

5.2.1 Genes and the treatment of stepchildren

"Blood" matters at the end of the day, as daughters move home to their parents, and most links of affection are broken. Being a blood related or not is also significant to the domestic violence experienced by the child. Typically stepchildren are treated worse than natural offspring. We have in the literature many tales of the wicked stepmother, who feels little or no compassion for the children of her husband. Men likewise treat the offspring of other men with less care, or with violence (Daly & Wilson, 1996; Wilson, Daly, & Weghorst, 1980). It is costly to be a parent, and evolutionary psychologists assert that parental love is unconsciously motivated toward ensuring the survival of one's own genetic pool. Looking after stepchildren makes no contribution to genetic survival. Stepchildren suffer higher frequency of mistreatment and more severe violence from stepparents (Daly & Wilson, 1996).

Relations between stepparents and children are more distant and complicated (Hobart, 1991). One of us had the experience of meeting a group of cousins he had never met before. At the end of an evening of family solidarity someone commented that it is "like we have known you all our lives". Common genetic pool

creates interests in family relations even when people are strangers. On the other hand stepchildren fare poorly. Daly and Wilson (1996) showed that they were 100 times more likely to suffer lethal violence by stepparents than genetic children. You might think this is due to some other factor in families that have stepchildren? However, the studies cited controlled for poverty, the number of children, and the inexperience and youth of the mother.

5.2.2 Males and the culture of honor

Men kill other men much more frequently than women kill women (about 20 times more frequently). Most male homicides occur after relative small disagreements that spin out of control (Mulvihill, Tumin, & Curtis, 1969). Why would men risk their lives for comparative trivial reasons? Remember our discussion of the “culture of honor”? These small arguments are not trivial in an evolutionary sense since they concern prestige and status that in turn are related to access to females (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Women generally don’t find it difficult to pass off their genes by attracting partners, but some men are left out, particularly where society approves of polygamous marriages. Is lack of availability of females an evolutionary reason for the greater promiscuity of males, a behavior we also observe among the chimpanzee, our closest animal relatives? Evolutionary psychologists would maintain that part of the aggression equation must include the desire to ensure survival of one’s gene pool to which male killing of other males made a contribution in our distant past.

Other factors may contribute, but are not easily separated from evolutionary explanations. A higher level of testosterone in males contributes to aggression, but is that hormone not part of the evolutionary adaptation? A sexist society may also be accepting of male dominance and control of women, which leads to higher levels of violence (Eisenstat & Bancroft, 1999). We have examples of “honor” societies where daughters are murdered by their parents for contemplating unions with a nonapproved male. But is that not also just another expression of the evolutionary demand to control the genetic pool? One conclusion is certain. Evolutionary psychology can explain, but cannot remove individual responsibility for contemptible acts of violence against women. Further, the changing cultural levels of aggression suggest that evolution cannot explain all forms of aggression, and that socialization must play a role. As we shall see other factors are also important in predicting aggressive behavior.

6. Frustration and aggression

Initially social psychologists believed that all frustration led to aggression (Dollard, Doob, Miller, & Sears, 1939). Early experiments showed that the more satisfaction that was anticipated the greater the frustration when thwarted. Also when a person is frequently prevented from realizing goals the frustrations accumulate over time. If frustrations occur when the goal is in sight the frustration is experienced more intensely (Miller, 1941).

A classic experiment (Barker, Dembo, & Lewin, 1941) demonstrated the frustration-aggression process among small children. The children were placed in a room where they were separated from attractive toys by a wire screen. In the control conditions the children were allowed to play with the desirable toys immediately. The children in the frustrated group were required to wait and were subsequently more destructive and aggressive toward the toys.

In another study Harris (1974) examined the frustration experienced as a function of how close to the goal the respondent was before being frustrated. An experimental collaborator was instructed to cut in front of others waiting for tickets to theaters, or entrance to restaurants. More anger was expressed if the cutting in front occurred when those waiting were almost ready to buy tickets or enter the restaurant. When the confederate cut into the second place and the next person was almost ready to purchase, the frustration experienced was more intense compared to when the confederate cut in front further down the line. One of us had a similar experience when being delayed by customs he sought to cut in front of the security lines in order to make the next flight. As it turned out the couple he cut in front of had also been delayed, and were in danger of not making their flight. It took much diplomacy to explain and apologize, and allow them to proceed while securing a place in the front.

The frustration-aggression hypothesis asserts that a person experiencing interference or blocking of goal related behavior reacts with the emotion of anger. Emotion of anger is the mediating variable between frustration and aggression (Geen, 1998). One reason that people resort to aggression is that it reduces negative emotions temporarily (Bushman, Baumeister, & Phillips, 2001). There are many sources of frustration in modern life. Family life is frustrating as people's expectations rarely match reality. That assertion holds true for emotional satisfaction in families, but also for the economic frustrations derived from the struggle to survive. Many families fight to survive in competitive societies. The lack of meaningful social security in some countries is experienced as stressful,

and leaves many families angry (Strauss, & Gelles, 1980).

Frustrations related to the economy accumulate, and people may vent their anger on innocent targets (Catalano, Novaco, & McConnell, 1997). Some of the displaced targets are personal to the aggressor leading to child abuse or spousal violence. Some acts of aggression are more impersonal and targets people who are not known to the perpetrators. Hovland and Sears (1940) provided a dramatic example when they correlated the price of cotton in the south with the number of lynchings perpetrated on black people. Whenever the price of cotton dropped, the southern economy suffered and the anger was displaced toward totally innocent targets.

Job related frustrations have led to dramatic shootings at various locations in the U.S. in recent years. Many people work in jobs that are much less than satisfying, putting in time just to survive. In the world economy, many students graduate with higher skills, yet the society is unable to provide jobs where these skills can be utilized. Often workers experience pressure from managers to improve performance. Frustrations are produced by the discrepancies between the expectations of workers and the leadership of the economic unit. Together, job related frustrations are related to the anger felt by many people in our modern societies (Houston & Kelly, 1989). In the current era of global capitalism frustrations accumulate as many workers have lost their jobs to cheaper labor from elsewhere. Workers have historically fought back, and recognized the importance of international unions since capitalism knows no border, and is not motivated by patriotism. However, this struggle has become more difficult as unions have lost members, and poor workers from elsewhere are happy for any jobs even those that exploit their labor. In such times of economic crisis national leaders may seek to divert attention by waving the flag and focusing on external enemies.

6.1 Aversive events and frustration

Any aversive event has the capacity to elicit frustration and aggressive responses. Many events fall into this category including prolonged pain, humiliation, perceived insults, fatigue and hunger. Have you noted how easy anger is brought on when you are hungry? Depriving the body of food will bring anger and aggression in some form. Berkowitz & Troccoli (1990) showed that producing pain in a person for as little as six minutes produced aggressive responses. Anything, which the individual perceives as aversive, may trigger hostility in the

form of anger responses, or instrumental behavior seeking to change the situation.

6.2 The influence of heat

People are comfortable within specified ranges of temperatures. Hot temperatures are experienced as frustrating and cause violence (Rotton & Cohn, 2000). Attribution matters since the anger may again be displaced toward innocent targets. Feeling the discomfort of high temperatures, some people will call on well-established aggressive schemas and vent their anger on family or other interpersonal targets (Anderson, Deuser, & DeNeve, 1995).

Are our moods and feelings related to weather changes? We see retired people move south in search of more sun in the winter and more agreeable temperatures. Our language provides examples of beliefs in the relationship between heat and aggression. Anger produces a change in body temperatures that we refer to as being “steamed”, or being “hot under the collar”.

There is something about the discomfort of excessive heat and its effect on aggressive behaviors (Anderson, 1987, 1989). The evidence shows clearly that higher temperatures are correlated with higher violence rates. Examining the crime rates in American cities, Anderson noted that the number of days where temperatures exceeded 32 degrees Celsius was a strong predictor of violent crime. Other studies show that violent crime is more likely to occur during the hot and humid summer months. An ingenious study on heat and aggression looked at the number of times baseball pitchers intentionally hit batters as aggressive acts. As the weather gets hotter the batters are hit with increased frequency (Reifman, Larrick, & Fein, 1991).

Another study examined students who responded to a survey in a room where the thermostat was set at 32 degrees Celsius, compared to another group who completed the survey at normal room temperature. Those who responded in the heated room reported more irritability and aggressive feelings. Other studies have linked heat to retaliation proclivity (Rule et al, 1987).

6.3 Attribution and aggression

Why is heat related to aggression? One explanation is that heat is aversive and therefore frustrating and this leads to the emotion of anger and hostile behavior. Another explanation emerges from attribution theory. Perhaps we feel

physiologically aroused by the heat and look for the best explanation for the bodily changes. One available target for attribution in the above mentioned baseball study was the batter on whom the anger was displaced. Attributions also contribute to the victimization of innocents by lynch mobs. Though innocent, victims are dehumanized and attributed traits that threaten social values and are therefore deserving of the violence. Attribution processes are responsible for the dehumanization that often accompanies mob violence. To facilitate mob violence the victim is attributed subhuman traits as Hitler and his cronies did effectively with the Jews, communists, Gypsy's, and in general with all who opposed the state. However, we do not have to go that far back in history as current affairs show ample examples of the effect of dehumanization. Rwanda, Darfur, the former Yugoslavia all come to mind as arenas of violence justified by dehumanization. Recent research on "infrahumanization" instigated by Belgian social psychologists show that people are less prone to ascribe "higher" emotional qualities to out-groups than they are to in-groups, implying "they" are not as human as "us" (Leyens, Demoulin, Dovidio, Fiske, Gaun, et al., 2003).

6.4 Retaliation

When we are attacked, other matters being equal, we will retaliate (Dengerink & Myers, 1977). Many studies on attack have used "shock" experiments to examine aggression in the laboratory. When the respondent perceives attacks as being intentional the result is retaliating behavior. Life teaches us in other ways that retaliation is a common human reaction to aggression. Retaliation is often used as a rationalization for going to war, or justifying attacks on others. Research (Dengerik & Myers, 1977) shows that aggression is frequently retaliatory, an "eye for an eye". Although cautioned by religion to turn the other cheek, most people are more motivated by rage or anger, and seek to give back in kind. Whether retaliation is culturally derived or emerges from basic biological needs to survive, attack brings counteraction where possible.

There are many social situations that discourage direct retaliation. Some attackers, for example, are too powerful, and have a great potential to counteract in return, which discourages retaliation. In other words, retaliation is limited by the power of the other party, and the nature of the relationship.

6.5 Crowding and aggression

Crowding is a psychological concept. It differs from physical density that refers to the number of people living together according to some standard measurement.

Crowding is the subjectively stressful feeling derived from having insufficient space. The same physical density that produces stress in Western countries, will not necessarily be experienced as crowding in Asia or other high physical density areas (Hall, 1966). Culture provides people with compensation for crowding through the use of elaborate norms of courtesy that reduce stress in the higher density areas. Regardless of these cultural differences, tolerance for density has limits and will eventually be experienced as stress.

The loss of control experienced in crowding produces aggressive reactions. Crime rates are much higher in inner city areas with higher population densities (Fleming, Baum, & Weiss, 1987; Kirmeyer, 1978). As biological beings there must be a balance in our space between privacy and interaction with others. When that balance is in doubt, the result is striking out with aggressive behavior or violent crime.

6.6 Economic wealth and frustration

Since we live in a material world perhaps an increase in wealth would reduce frustration and make us happy? Many people think that just an additional 10 to 20 percent in income would improve well-being and happiness (Strumpel, 1976). People in the Western world are raised with the idea that money buys happiness. Observe the jubilation of contestants on television when winning a prize; one would think money bought instant happiness! In the United States and several other industrial countries, people have experienced growing but inequitable affluence over several decades. Yet the economic wealth is often accompanied by personal or family unhappiness as seen in our divorce statistics. (Knowles, 1977). Our society manifests visible inequalities between the wealthy and those struggling to survive. While poverty is not a great thing, who can say honestly that wealth equates to happiness?

Frustration is not the same as deprivation. Living in a competitive society, rich people are frustrated by those whose wealth is greater. Look at the phenomena of the continuously larger homes built for the wealthy all over the world. When two people live in a house with 20 bedrooms and 5 bathrooms, we know that the size of the home means something more than meeting the housing needs of the occupants. The size of homes reflects the status of the wealthy and is a form of conspicuous consumption. Once wealth becomes a focus in life, nothing is ever enough. But are those who live in the large mansions any happier or less frustrated than those at the lower end of the income distribution (Diener &

Seligman, 2004)?

People are constantly comparing upwards, so it is not absolute deprivation that matters, but the envy derived from those who have and display more wealth (Suls & Tesch, 1978). The feelings of relative deprivation cause frustration and anger (Wood, 1989). Minority groups feel relative deprivation as the media, travel, and simple observation makes the wealth of those who consume conspicuously more salient. Protests calling for social change emerge out of feelings that one's group is relatively deprived compared to others (Walker & Mann, 1987). When television came into use in poor homes and displayed the conspicuous wealth of the rich, crime rates increased dramatically (Hennigan, Del Rosario, Health, Cook, Wharton, & Calder, 1982). Television soaps and other popular programs are not recorded in the homes of average people, but typically those of the wealthy. As a result wealth becomes a standard for comparison, and when people are unable to live like the rich they feel relatively deprived and frustrated.

Global warming and associated problems are produced by the desire for conspicuous accumulation. For the survival of society it is time to adjust downward in standard of living. Consumption is not only conspicuous, but threatens the very survival of the planet. We need comparison levels of wealth that are sustainable over the long run. In other arenas people have learned to adjust downward, and still experience human contentment.

For example people with severe handicaps adapt to the changing circumstances of their lives and still feel life satisfaction (Chwalisz, Diener, & Gallagher, 1988; Schulz & Decker, 1985). When people realize that there are always situations worse than where they find themselves in life, they feel less depressed (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989). Since relative deprivation exists in the world, we must learn to enhance downward. Unless you live in Darfur or places where AIDs is destroying individual or community life, you are not experiencing the worst frustration possible. Downward enhancement removes frustration for many, while many others look upward to relative deprivation for the motivation to cure social injustice.

6.7 Attribution of intent to harm: How we construe the situation

It is not stimuli that produce aggression, but how we think about the stimuli, and the intent we attribute to others. It is whether the behavior is construed as intentionally harmful that produces aggression (Worchel, 1974).

We have all experienced someone inadvertently frustrating our efforts. If the behavior is construed as not intentional, and the person apologizes, most of us will not take great affront. But let us examine another situation. An attack on a bartender who refused to serve drinks to an inebriated customer was in the news today. The customer took umbrage at the refusal of service, which he perceived as an insult, and attributed to the bartender. For the bar employee, her attribution about the customer's behavior was based on his violation of laws she was required to enforce as part of her employment. Perhaps she was also concerned about the well-being of the customer and the public when she refused service. The drunken customer attributed motives of insult to the bartender that resulted in a vicious attack. As is well known alcohol reduces a person's ability to construe the ramifications of behavior, and often contributes to the attribution of hostile intent. So the motives and the intentions attributed to the other person (in this case the bartender) determine whether a person is angered and retaliates (Reeder, Kumar, Hesson-McInnis, & Trafimov, 2002). In other words anger is more likely if the frustration is perceived as intentional, and not the consequence of some situational factor. If a car does not move when the traffic light turns green, people behind the car will begin to honk their horns. We believe the car is under the control of the driver, and if he does not move, it must be because of intent to stay put. When we believe behavior is under another person's internal control, we attribute responsibility for frustration to that person (Betancourt & Blair, 1992).

Most people do not retaliate if they are convinced that the provocation was not intentional (Kremer & Stephens, 1983). At times we are in situations where we do not know the intent. Once an irate car driver whom a friend of ours had inadvertently cut in front of, jumped out of his car to confront our friend aggressively. The truth was that the driver drove with such speed that our friend had not seen him, and the provocation was not intentional. This driver was not to be consoled by that fact, as he had already construed the provocation as intentional arrogance. So mitigating circumstances must be known before the incident, or it will have little effect. Johnson & Rule (1986) study showed that it mattered if an explanation was offered when a confederate treated students rudely. Some respondents were told the assistant was upset after receiving a low grade, others were offered no reason. Those participants offered this explanation did not attribute hostility to the confederate as the frustration of getting a low grade explained his behavior. Subsequently, the respondents that were offered an

explanation were less angered and aggressive at the confederate's rude behavior.

A car accident that is perceived as nonintentional will produce less aggression. However, if the accident is seen as a result of deliberate carelessness, or hostile intent, or otherwise unjustified, the attribution of intent contributes to aggressive behavior (Averill, 1973). Situations contribute to behavior as they are construed. The thwarting of goal realization may be perceived as intentional or nonintentional. It is the attribution that matters.

Furthermore, expectations matter in the construal of the situation. In one study (Kulik & Brown, 1979) students were hired to work on commission trying to motivate people to give money to a charity. Some participants were led to believe that contributions would be easy to obtain, and that the rate of positive responses would be high. Others were told to expect less success, and more difficulty in getting donations. The group with the high expectations was more aggressive when confronted with people who did not want to donate. They would speak harshly or slam down the phone more frequently than the solicitors whose expectations were low. So frustrations do not provoke aggression, but rather it is the anger that follows the construal of the situation. The situation must be construed in a way that anger and aggression is possible (Berkowitz, 1989; Gustafson, 1989).

People who want to avoid unpleasant reactions avoid provocations. If you are stopped for a traffic infraction, your response to the police officer is likely to be instrumental in order to avoid too large a fine. You could be hostile considering the potential fine, but that would not be smart. Most of us have automatic and intuitive construal of which reactions would be provocative, what behaviors would step over the line and cause an aggressive response. In one experiment (Baron, 1988), the participants were required to prepare an advertisement for a new product. The advertisement was subsequently criticized using either gentle or harsh feedback. When the criticism was gentle, with consideration for the feelings of the respondent, the response was muted. However, when the respondents were treated harshly (this advertisement is the worst I have ever seen) the respondents were far more likely to retaliate.

Some provocations cannot be avoided. The drunken customer to whom we referred in the beginning of this section (who by the way was an off duty police officer) could not be avoided; his attributions were clouded by intoxication. Could

the bartender have offered a more gentle rejection? Would the customer have been less angered if offered a cup of coffee on the house? Perhaps a gentle response would have worked and changed the attributions. On the other hand, maybe attempts at conciliation would have made no difference in the customer's drunken state. In sum, the attribution of intent is what matters in aggression.

6.8 Criticisms of the frustration-aggression hypothesis

Berkowitz (1993) showed that stimuli other than frustration contributed to aggression including pollution, crowding (see section 6.4.1), and pain (Rotton & Frey, 1985). Also, as noted some aggression is not based on anger, but is instrumental in reaching a valued goal. Olweus studied student behavior in Norwegian schools (1979; 1980) and found that bullies sought to dominate weaker opponents primarily in an effort to achieve status.

The assumption of the frustration-aggression hypothesis is that frustrations always lead to aggression. This position has been criticized in several ways. People who live in tyrannical dictatorships learn helplessness and resign themselves to their frustrations. The very poor and oppressed moreover feel helpless in construing another way of living. The concept of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975) asserts that when animals and people cannot avoid aversive conditions they do not respond to frustration with aggression, but rather with passivity or depression. Like the dogs facing unavoidable shock in Seligman's experiment, the severely oppressed learn they have no control over the outcomes of their lives. Learned helplessness includes the belief that behavior will not change circumstances or frustrations. In other words, people respond to frustrations not only with aggression, but also with resignation.

Whether frustration leads to aggression depends on several factors including the emotion of anger. In turn people's anger depends on attributions of the other party's intent to provoke. Anger is associated with our perceptions of the perpetrators responsibility, and the feelings of being treated unjustly and therefore wanting revenge. Some aversive events contribute to the construal of anger (Berkowitz, 1989, Berkowitz & Troccoli, 1990).

In turn, anger is not the sole condition leading to aggression, as cognitive processes (and attribution is a cognitive process) also intervene. Perhaps you have found yourself in an unpleasant situation at work and felt angry. You feel a lack of appreciation for your efforts, the boss has provided no pay increases for

some time, and has attributed poor work performance to what you consider your best efforts. However, you are fearful of the consequences if you speak up that the boss may retaliate with anger and aggression. The anger you feel might be more safely displaced toward a convenient target. Safer targets less likely to retaliate include spouses or children. They in turn may displace their anger on the dog; the dog goes after the cat, and the cat after the mouse. Many frustrating events do not lead directly to aggression depending on the construal of the power of the other party to retaliate. These intervening variables all point to the importance of construal processes in mediating between frustration and aggression.

6.9 The revolution of rising expectations and the construal of thwarted expectations

Frustration is not the same as deprivation. People living in poverty are extremely deprived, but as we have seen may respond with depression or resignation and not with frustration. The riots in the United States in the 1960's however, were the consequence of rising expectations of a better life, and not absolute deprivation (Frank, 1978). The most serious events did not occur in the areas of greatest poverty, but in areas where the conditions were comparatively better. The cause of the riots was not absolute deprivation, but pervading feelings of maltreatment among the minorities. What mattered in these riots was the construal of injustice by the Black community that is received less than the deserved outcome in life. When riots occurred it was because there were no other acceptable attributions of responsibility for the deprivations felt by most members of the minority community. Living in the age of television, Black people understood that others lived better, and furthermore the Black population did not resign themselves to the unequal treatment. Levi (1989) also noted the role of relative deprivation in the resistance of concentration camp prisoners. The prisoners who were less deprived and who had the time and possibility of opposing the Nazi's, were leaders of the camp resistance. In one rebellion the camp tailors who made clothes for the guards, and were somewhat useful to the Nazi's and therefore privileged, provided the means of rebellion and escape.

7. Violence as consequences of aggression cues

We are bombarded every day with media violence, and aggression related stimuli are everywhere in western society. When aggression cued objects like guns are present in social interaction, does that increase the likelihood of violence? In

Europe and countries that practice gun control, aggression cues are a matter of less concern. In the United States, however, there are hundreds of millions of handguns present in homes, in gangs, as well as among criminals. A classical experiment (Berkowitz & Le Page, 1967) studied handguns as aggression cues. As part of the procedure a confederate angered student participants. In the experimental condition, a handgun was present and left conveniently in sight. In the control condition a neutral object, a badminton racket, was left lying around. After being angered, the participants were asked to participate in a study that involved the application of electric “shock” to other participants. The results showed that those who were angered in the presence of a gun applied more intense shock than participants in the neutral condition (Frodi, 1975; Turner & Leyens, 1992). This study verified the importance of the presence of guns as aggression cues.

Although the gun lobby in the United States has had success with its slogan “guns don’t kill, people do”, these experiments show that guns can be the stimulus to violence, and handguns as aggression cues go a long way in explaining the high murder rate in the U.S. Where handguns are banned as they are in Europe, comparative results demonstrate lower rates of violence (Archer & Gartner, 1984). Guns become part of the schemas of children growing up in the U.S., along with a higher expectation of violence (Archer, 1994; Archer & McDaniel, 1995).

If aggression were elicited by aggression cues like handguns, a rational society would seek to limit the availability of these means of destruction. Jamaica in 1974 fought violent crime by enacting strict gun control as well as censoring violent gun scenes from television and movies robberies. As a consequence violent acts dropped by 25 percent, and nonfatal shootings by 37 percent. The presence of guns is a serious liability for American society with tens of thousands of murders each year, and an influential gun lobby that interprets the second amendment in the Constitution to include all guns. Some of the gun supporters would buy tanks or rockets for personal home defense if that were possible.

If black is associated with violence, black clothing can also be an aggression cue. At one point the (American) football team at the Oregon State University changed the colors of uniforms from orange to black. It did not improve their game, but the players became much more aggressive. In fact research shows that black clothing is associated with aggression (Frank & Gilovich, 1988). Teams who wore

black uniforms were consistently more aggressive in the National Football and National Hockey Leagues. In general anything associated with violence has the potential of providing aggression cues.

7.1 Drugs and alcohol intensify perceived insults.

The use of drugs and alcohol contributes to a large proportion of aggressive acts. Mind alternators reduce the inhibition of aggression that is coded in our biological inheritance, and also the inhibition we have learned from family and society. Sixty percent of all murders in the U.S. are committed while the offender is intoxicated. A high proportion of other violent behavior is also committed while under the influence including rape, child abuse, general assaults, and spousal violence (Lisak & Roth, 1988; Steele & Southwick, 1985).

Alcohol also increases sensitivity to perceived slights or insults that typically contribute to aggression (Taylor & Sears, 1988). We already saw that sensitivity manifested (see section 6.7) in the example of the attack on the bartender who refused to serve drinks to an inebriated consumer. The drunken aggressor attributed nonintentional infractions as a threat or as having hostile intent.

Sober people on the other hand are better able to evaluate the intent of any provocation. Since aggression is likely to bring retaliation, people not under the influence can better evaluate that reality. Is the temporary satisfaction that aggression accrues worth the broken bones, loss of life, arrest and prison that are likely consequences of violence? The drunken aggressor loses inhibitions and attends less to these life-altering consequences of aggression (Zeichner & Pihl, 1979).

Furthermore, alcohol also increases the effect of social pressure. Often violence is carried out in gangs where perpetrators commit acts of violence because "it seemed the thing to do". Reports of groups of young men attacking totally innocent victims occur not infrequently in the media. Most recently U.S. media reported on teenage gangs attacking the homeless, maiming and in some cases killing these defenseless people.

7.2 Schemas for aggression

As for other salient aspects of life, people have constructed schemas (see also chapter 4) related to aggression. Aggression schemas are organized beliefs about when aggression is appropriate, and define the situations that are cues for

hostility. A child that grows up throwing temper tantrums may come to consider that behavior as appropriate. People who are sensitive to status concerns feel that small insults to the self-concept are sufficient justification for retaliation. We recall the “culture of honor” previously described, where seemingly small provocation can result in severe retaliatory responses. Once we develop schemas for aggression they tend to be self-sustaining and we act in ways that maintain justifications (Huesmann, 1998; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997).

Aggression schemas work together with attributions of intent (Zelli, Dodge, Lochman, & Laird, 1999). Children who have stable aggression schemas possess selective attributions that the intent of others is hostile. Culture plays a role for the aggression schemas or the combination of aggression schemas and attributions of intent (Bond, 2004). Middle-east societies dictate revenge as necessary behavior when threatened or in retaliation. The mutually assured destruction in the civil war between Shia and Sunni Muslim sects is largely a consequence of a culture of revenge, where hostility is attributed to all acts of the other side, and the term innocent has lost its meaning.

Because of schemas aggression tends to be stable across human development (Olweus, 1979). Schemas become stable attitudes when aggression becomes acceptable as a solution for a variety of problems (Larsen, 1971). As a stable personality trait aggression can predict a variety of behaviors related to human adjustment. Aggression predicts dropout rates from school and criminal behavior (Hudley & Graham, 1992). Chronically aggressive children believe that others have hostile intent. This attributional bias affects the construal of all interactions. An attributional bias that anticipates hostility may in fact cause retaliatory responses (Graham, Hudley, & Williams, 1992). Aggressive minority youth have biased attributions, feel more anger, and are more likely to retaliate compared to nonaggressive minority youth. These attributions occur without the need for provocation or anger and are based on stable schemas and attitudes that contribute to ongoing aggression.

7.3 Schemas and school shootings

We began the present chapter pointing to school violence as a serious problem in the U.S., and in other countries. School shootings and resulting fatalities suggest that this is a problem that society cannot afford to overlook. In the U.S. hundreds of thousands of youth are affected by violence each year; many students carry guns to school for protection or for aggressive purposes. Gangs that inculcate

violence as an acceptable norm have enrolled many hundreds of thousands of young people in the U.S. (Egley & Major, 2004). Although not as severe, violent youth culture is also present in Europe and other parts of the world.

The school system has a significant effect on violence among young people. Bullies who are allowed to dominate and isolate their victims contribute to school shootings. Other important contributors include the family context, the presence or absence of aggression in the home, being members of gangs, the abuse the child has suffered in the past, and the use of alcohol and drugs in the social context. Access to lethal weapons is possible nearly everywhere in the U.S., but thankfully less so in other countries. Some neurological disorders may also contribute to violence, including hyperactivity (Sleek, 1998). School shootings are unnerving to parents and society since they seem to be unpredictable. In the aftermath, other students however recognize bullying as a factor, and anger of the shooters at being excluded. Most acts have occurred in rural areas, perhaps because urban areas are more acceptant of kids who are different (Newman, 2004).

The reduction of violence in schools requires the development of novel ideas that combine efforts of inclusion of all children and cooperation in the classroom. The jig saw puzzle classroom previously discussed in chapter 9 is an effort in that direction (Aronson & Gonzales, 1988). Working together in small groups where each student is dependent on others for learning has proven useful in integrating students and improving learning. Aggression in schools remains a serious problem that needs more scholarly attention (Baron & Richardson, 1994).

8. How do we reduce aggression in society?

Social psychologists have, through research, sought to understand how to reduce violence using a variety of strategies. Some strategies for violence prevention have borrowed from relevant theories including learning theories. Other approaches have emerged from an understanding that what causes aggression may also contribute to prevention. Some approaches assert that nonviolence will only become real when we can feel empathy, and learn to communicate, to negotiate and to compromise.

8.1 Punishment and social learning

Is punishment the solution to aggression in schools and society? Criminal law is based on the utility of both punishment and reform. In families parents seek to

effect a change in a child by punishing the aggressive behavior. Typical aggression training involves a parent spanking the child for hitting another child. What does the child learn from that? Remember the parent is also a model for imitation, as we know from social learning theory. Likewise society is a model when it collectively executes people and thereby justifies the very behavior for which the criminal is put to death. Research endorses the effectiveness of social learning modeling. Children of parents employing physical punishment are more accepting of violence (Vissing, Straus, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991). So since punishment models the behavior we are trying to prevent it might not be the solution to aggression for children.

While severe punishment has little utility in changing the child's aggressive behavior, milder forms of child training may make violence less appealing (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963; Freedman, 1965). Extensive studies in Norway (Olweus, 1991; 1995; 1997) showed the usefulness of mild punishment combined with educational efforts in changing bullying at Norwegian schools. Bullying was considered an important issue by the Norwegian government, and it was believed that parents had little information on the frequency of intimidation and consequences for their children and others in the school system. Successful change occurred after community meetings explaining the issue. Classes discussed ways of how to overcome bullying, and how to reach lonely or excluded kids. Teachers and administrators worked together to stop intimidation. If bullying still occurred, counselors stopped it by means of mild punishment, discussion with the affected parents, and therapy for the bully (Olweus, 1991).

But can punishment prevent adult crime? Some laboratory experiments suggest that violence can be reduced if the punishment is swift and certain to follow aggression (Bower & Hilgard, 1981). However, in most Western societies punishments are neither swift nor certain, and follow lengthy court appeals. Even in countries where punishment is swift and certain, violence executed by the state still advertises the social learning model effect that aggression is approved as long as you wear the white hat. For instance some states justify capital punishment by advocating that it prevents murder and extreme violence. However, countries that abolished capital punishment have no more violent crime than those who practice it. In the U.S. those states that abolished capital punishment did not experience a rise in murders (Archer & Gartner, 1984; Peterson & Bailey, 1988). Neither did they witness a reduction in murders after

the Supreme Court permitted the reinstitution of capital punishment. It would appear that capital punishment has no social utility. In fact, the U.S. with 3,000 men and women on death row, have higher murder rates than comparative Western countries like France or England.

8.2 Will victim reactions to pain reduce violence?

Aggressive responses are partly a biological adaptation that once was useful in early human history for survival purposes. Dogs often reduce aggression by displaying surrender in baring their throat to another more dominant dog. Are humans likely to respond in a similar way when victims of violence display symptoms of pain? If the victim is hurting will the attacker cease the aggression and show empathy for the suffering? Baron (1971a, 1971b, 1974) found evidence that pain display reduces aggression. When respondents in his studies were shown a pain meter, which correlated with the amount of electrical “shock” administered, the pain cue reduced the aggression. Perceived pain in the victim reduced shock in all cases except when the participant was extremely angry when the opposite actually occurred. Unfortunately, as we learn from life anger often inhibits empathetic processes.

It is obviously easier to kill and maim at a distance as it reduces human responsibility by interfering with empathetic processes. A friend who flew B-52's during the Vietnam War described a typical mission as a day in the office. The crew would cook a pie in the cockpit at 30,000 ft or more while unleashing the bombs. The pilots never saw the suffering on the ground unless they became prisoners. The diffusion of responsibility has been taken a step further by the military since that time in the use of robots and computer directed weapons of mass destruction. The physical and psychological distance created between the aggressive act and the victims is so great that empathetic processes are rarely aroused. Also interfering with empathy is the military culture that mandates killing and the dehumanization of the victims as unworthy of sympathy.

8.3 Changing schemas and attributions

Since chronic aggression emerges partially from well-developed schemas and faulty attribution, perhaps aggression can be reduced if we can change thinking. Those who have organized and stable schemas for aggression perceive a variety of stimuli as threatening or insulting and therefore subject to retaliation. We see well developed aggression schemas in youth gangs where sensitivity to insults are particularly high, comparable to those in so-called cultures of honor. Can we

change these attributions so fewer acts are considered insulting or threatening? That approach would require the intervention of society since aggressive behavior is often motivated by economic deprivation or the need for status in deprived communities.

Graham, Hudley, & Williams (1992) sought to change biased attributions in chronically aggressive children. The program was based on a 12-session intervention program designed to train hostile Afro-American boys to infer nonhostile intent after provocative interactions with peers. Among various subjects the boys were taught the meaning of intent, and what constitutes cues for hostile versus nonhostile intentions. If someone bumped into a boy how was that to be interpreted? Was it inadvertent and accidental or was it intended as a hostile act that required retaliation? Learning to discriminate between these events and attribute nonhostile intentions to some provocations led to a reduction of aggressive attributions in the children's perceptions. After the training program was completed, the children were less likely to endorse aggressive behavior. An independent source, the classroom teacher, also considered the boys less aggressive after the intervention.

Aggressive behavior is a complex product of many forces. Would intervention work with youth gangs? If there is a possibility it should be tried of course. Youth gang hostility is however a product of many forces that must be changed too. Among these negative forces are lack of parental guidance, insufficient job opportunities to help youth to perceive positive outcomes in the future, the presence of historical enmity between races and ethnic groups, and the presence of aggressive models that are admired in the gang culture.

8.4 Can distractions reduce anger?

Some people ruminate about perceived insults and when they do anger increases and motivates aggression. Can the opposite occur? Can we distract ourselves and get some distance between us and the perceived insult, and would that reduce aggression? We are told to count to ten before responding with anger in some situations. That advice is given to prevent us from reacting with rage while in an anger mode. Other distractions include walking away from the source of frustration. Last night at a basketball game a player incurred an unjustified foul from the referee. The audience was in agreement with the player who obviously felt very provoked. However, rather than responding to his anger the player walked away toward the team bench while he got a hold on his feelings. The

walking away distracted him sufficiently and the play continued. Studies have shown that ruminating on insults increases aggression, and distraction sometimes, but not always, reduces aggressive behavior (Bushman, 2002; Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998).

8.5 Catharsis: Is it useful?

The idea of catharsis came from the psychoanalytic theories of Freud (1930). Freud subscribed to the idea that if aggressive behavior was not sublimated it would increase over time. Some have likened Freud's model to a hydraulic pump where the accumulated hostility must find release in socially sanctioned ways or otherwise be released in violent acts. If aggressive impulses are not released bottled up feelings may cause mental disturbance or illness. When feelings of aggression are repressed long enough, illness may be the outcome (Pennebaker, 1990; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996).

Do these findings imply that aggression is healthy? One problem in venting anger is that doing so does not take into account the need to change the situation that provoked the anger. For example, being in an abusive relationship causes anger to build up over time in the victim. Going to the Gym or finding distractions might sublimate and dissipate some of that anger. However, efforts at catharsis will not solve the problem of abuse that caused the anger in the first place.

Further, we have evidence that expressing anger directly does not have any cathartic effects (Patterson, 1974). If aggressive behavior had cathartic effects, one would expect that the longer a player engages in competitive and aggressive sports the lower the level of hostility. In fact, the reverse occurred in this study, as the players became more hostile the longer the season. The cathartic concept also implies that watching violence may release pent-up aggression and therefore reduce subsequent hostility. One researcher studied a violent hockey game and drew the opposite conclusion (Russell, 1983). As the game progressed, the spectators became increasingly violent, and the state of anger arousal did not return to pre-game levels until several hours passed. Watching aggressive games actually increased feelings of aggression (Arms, Russell, & Sandilands, 1979; Branscombe & Wann, 1992).

If we direct aggression toward the source of our anger does that produce a cathartic response? Apparently not as this tends to increase future acts of violence (Geen, 1998). In one study (Geen, Stonner, & Shupe, 1975) participants who were

angered by a confederate and subsequently given the opportunity shocked the confederate at high levels. After administering the shock in this part of the experiment did a cathartic reaction occur? The answer is “no”, the respondent shocked at even higher levels later in the study. Typically these results are consistent with that experienced by most people in real life. An unresolved verbal confrontation is typically followed by more aggression. The cathartic effect must be considered largely mythological.

8.6 Confrontation and apology

If catharsis does not work, should we just bottle everything up? Perhaps there are cases in which we must suppress feelings of anger in the interest of the family or social harmony. However, in the long run this has negative effects on mental health (Pennebaker, 1990). Some research supports the importance of confronting the frustrating party in a nonviolent manner, to share the effect of the frustration and its consequences. Telling the other party in precise details what caused the anger and what mutual steps can be taken so the frustration does not reoccur or how it can be ameliorated, may reduce anger.

The confrontation procedure avoids direct aggression, and therefore does not bring denigration and other rationalizations into the picture. Think what it would mean to relationships if people could calmly discuss differences and frustrations while maintaining the dignity of the opponent or partner? The aim should be exchanging information that might encourage ways of reducing frustration, and improve relationships (Aronson, 1999). If it is not possible to talk directly to the person, it still might help to vent feelings to an empathetic other. Revealing emotions to others helps to reduce stress and is therefore supportive of mental health (Pennebaker, 1990). In the process of venting feelings, the person also often discovers insights into the issue, and an awareness of the contributions he has made himself to the frustrating behaviors.

On the other hand, if you find yourself contributing to the frustration can you do anything to improve the situation? One response to that question is obvious, you might even have practiced it, apologize! Most parties in conflict would take an apology seriously, and if sincerely meant it may disarm the other party and prevent hostility. Nations are often more immature than individuals, and sensitive nations often demand apologies over real or imagined insults. When the frustrating party takes full responsibility, the apologies reduce frustration and anger (Baron, 1988, 1990; Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994).

8.7 Social learning models of nonviolence

We have noted the intensity and prevalence of violent modeling in the media, and its affect on aggression. Every week a new movie makes its appearance and the primary action content is violence. It has been a cause of wonderment why the movie industry cannot find more models of nonviolence and produce excellent movies with themes like “Gandhi” or a current movie “Amazing Grace”. The former depicts the example of the great Indian leader and his nonviolent struggle against British colonialism, the latter the nonviolent struggle of the abolitionists of Great Britain to end the slavery trade.

These movies and others like them inspire and encourage people to participate in the human liberation project. Such noble aspirations are however counteracted by the many more performances in the movies or television of empty distraction or gratuitous violence. Yet, nonviolence is effective. We have only to remember the historical examples of nonviolent struggles that changed countries (e.g. India) or the internal life of nations (e.g. United States). In fact research shows that when children are exposed to nonviolent models they respond in more cautious ways to provocation (Baron, 1972; Vidysagar & Mishra, 1993). Nonviolence has demonstrated its utility in a variety of circumstances and could reduce violence in relationships both between individuals and nations.

8.8 Taking the position of the other side: learning empathy

As we have seen an important element in cruelty is the dehumanization of the victim. Denigration of the other party occurs for example by name calling, either between individuals, between racial or ethnic groups in society, or between nations. Perhaps the fact that the need to denigrate the victim is important to the aggressor, might leave room for a solution. Studies in social psychology on the administration of “shock” to victims show that it is difficult to inflict pain on strangers unless they are denigrated in some way (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1969; Feshbach, 1978). If we truly “felt” the consequences of aggression we would have less desire to participate in the aggressive act (we must exclude from this discussion psychopaths and warlords). Aggression is reduced when people develop empathy as demonstrated in several studies (Richardson, Hammock, Smith, & Gardner, 1994; Ohbuchi, Ohno, & Mukai, 1993). The question is how to create empathy for victims of violence. Taking the side of the opposing party takes not only courage, but also intellectual skills. Students who possess greater empathetic skills also display higher academic achievements (Feshbach, 1997).

8.9 Developing communication skills

Finally, to solve conflict between individuals, groups or nations we must develop some method other than revenge or aggression. History has shown that this merely increases retaliatory violence. We all become angry, that is a natural human response. What matters is how we express our feelings. We could reduce the overall violence if people had better communication skills. How can we communicate anger in a way that does not invite retaliation?

In many conflicts there is the possibility to negotiate and reach a consensus. Individuals with poor communication skills more often respond to provocations in violent ways (Toch, 1980). Formal training in communication could potentially benefit the solution of many conflicts. In one study students were frustrated, but those who had the benefit of communication training responded constructively to frustration and showed less aggressive behavior (Davitz, 1952). The educational system is now more aware of the benefits of training pupils in nonviolence (Eargle, Guerra, & Tolan, 1994). It takes communication skills learned by formal training to reduce aggression in many arenas of life (Studer, 1996).

Summary

Violence in the world is as old as the story of Cain and Abel. Today we are more aware of violence all over the world due to the media and the Internet. Aggression is everywhere, between strangers, in families, and between ethnic groups and nations. The dimension of potential aggression can be measured in the availability of tens of thousands of nuclear weapons that can be activated in minutes. Those who read history know that all weapons that have been developed have also been used and the nuclear age may still produce the day of total annihilation. History tells of endless wars and campaigns of extermination. The United States has a violent history for reasons of insufficient integration, socio-economic inequalities, and cultural attachments to firearms.

Research has defined two types of aggression. Hostile Aggression is mediated by anger and aims at causing injury or pain. Most murders are anger based, but the mafia sometimes commits cold calculated killings. The second type is called Instrumental Aggression and its purpose is to remove obstacles like uncooperative crime partners. Since all killing may include both components, they are difficult to separate. The burning of witches during the dark ages had the instrumental purpose of saving their devilishly afflicted souls. For torture to occur, moreover it is necessary to dehumanize the victim. It is a form of

instrumental aggression used to obtain confessions or humiliate the victims. Conformity to social pressure or obedience to authority causes torture to appear normal to the perpetrators.

Research reveals several theoretical approaches aimed at understanding aggression. The biological approach asserts that aggression is part of our genetic inheritance. For Freud, hostility was an expression of the Thanatos or death instincts. Other writers see aggression as a function of a broader biological inheritance that we share with the natural world. From this perspective aggression has a survival function. The presence of biological components related to aggression supports the genetic viewpoint. These components include hormones, neurotransmitters, the presence of the trait aggression in certain families that is stable across life spans, and the fact that animals can be bred for aggression.

Most social psychologists focus on learned aggression. Reinforcement theory suggests that people learn aggressive behavior by being rewarded. Bullies in school are rewarded for their intimidation by an increased status among fellow students. Reinforcement produces lasting aggressive behaviors. Observational learning, on the other hand, points to the effect of powerful models that children and adults learn to imitate. The social learning of hostility is produced by imitation of abusive parents, and by the many aggressive models in television, movies, the Internet, and in videogames. Social psychological research points to the numbing effect of repeated exposure to violence as a primary cause for the loss of empathy for victims and the willingness to accept violence.

The average child watches numerous killings on television while still in elementary school. Studies have shown a high correlation between this kind of exposure and violent or criminal behavior. Aggressive television diets at age eight may have profound lifelong consequences. Wherever violent television programming was introduced it was followed by increased violence in society. The relationship between media violence and aggression has also been supported by experimental studies. Media violence produces emotional arousal, disinhibition, and a numbing of ethics related to aggressive behavior. The evidence also supports the presence of social learning of aggression for video games and violent pornography. As pornography has spread throughout the Western world violence against women has increased. Rapists and serial killers have used pornography as a rationalization for their crimes. The porn industry has contributed to the sexual

beliefs that women really mean yes when they say no, and that they enjoy being abused. Overall violent pornography makes violence more acceptable; encourages less sympathy for victims, and less support for sexual equality.

The culture we live in matters to the prevalence of human aggression. Some societies are more violent than others and the United States is among the most violent countries in the world. Is violence simply controlled by national character or preference? Research points to situational variables including high-income inequality, cultural sensitivity to threat, lack of integration, and history as they all contribute to higher levels of aggression.

In addition, the aggression schemas derived from herding cultures affect the behavior of today. It is believed that the sensitivity to insults derives from herding cultures where livelihood could be destroyed in an instant by enemy raids. Any perceived threat therefore required decisive and determined responses. Violence for example is greater in the southern part of the United States than in other regions. Southern whites are more likely to embrace violence in response to perceived threat or insult. Southern politeness recognizes the honor of others, but also make insults more salient. Rates for murders based on arguments are much higher in the Southern states compared to other locations in the country. Violence in the south endorses the protection of the self, but not indiscriminately.

The culture of a particular social group can also be conducive to violence. Mobs inculcate norms of violence. Mobs can generate violence because of deindividuation. A participant in mob activity carries less personal responsibility for violence due to anonymity, diffusion of responsibility among many, and the polarization effect common to groups. Risk taking derived from group decisions contributes to wars, lynching, and other aggressive conduct. Group polarization is expressed in increasing hostile behavior.

Gender is related to aggression. Males are more aggressive in all cultures where the issue has been studied. Nearly all reported violence associated with gangs or criminal behavior are committed by males. Male aggression is most likely an evolutionary adaptation used for survival but now threatens existence on the planet. Evolutionary psychologists believe that male protection of the gene pool is responsible for a variety of violent behavior, especially against women. Women on the other hand express aggression in relationships through gossip or exclusion of targeted persons.

Genetic relationships are what matters in treatment of in-laws after divorce or in the neglect of stepchildren. Research points furthermore to a higher level of parental maltreatment of children when they are not genetically related. The murder of women by men is also related to protection of the gene pool. Evolutionary psychologists argue that perceived infidelity of women threatens the survival of the genes and research shows that domestic murders are more likely in situations where women are perceived to have more sexual freedom. Contributing to these statistics is the male culture of honor. Men kill each other frequently after apparent small arguments. The disagreements however are not trivial since they involve prestige and therefore access to women.

Research guided by the frustration-aggression hypothesis has made significant contributions to the understanding of aggressive behavior. Many sources of frustration can be identified in family life and in other parts of our modern societies. Anger is the intervening variable between frustration and aggression, and research shows that it can often be displaced toward innocent targets. Aversive events are frustrating and elicit anger-based aggression. Examples of aversive events are pain, humiliations, insults and heat. Heat is as aversive stimulus related to violence as is demonstrated by the rising crime rates during hot months.

Attributing subhuman traits to the targeted person helps justify aggression. Being attacked will also nearly always bring retaliation, the need for which is emphasized in rationales for warfare. Crowding moreover is an aversive psychological condition that differs from the mere measures of physical density. Crowding is experienced as stressful and is associated with violence and higher crime rates.

Being frustrated economically is also thought to bring aggressive responses. However, it is important not to confuse frustration for deprivation. It is not absolute deprivation that is frustrating, but the feeling of injustice that comes from relative frustration. When we compare ourselves to others, as in the case of minority groups comparing their fate in life to the majority, we may experience relative deprivation. So what brings human contentment is not conspicuous consumption. The survival of the world requires us to move downward in material consumption. Nevertheless the construal of thwarted expectations, the relative frustration we experience, contribute to individual's frustration.

Critics of the frustration-aggression hypothesis have noted that other stimuli may cause aggression as well. Some aggression is not even based on anger, like the instrumental aggression as the status needs of school bullies showed. Further, not all anger producing frustration leads to aggression. The severely oppressed often react to hopelessness with learned helplessness and resignation.

Violence may also be caused by aggression cues like handguns or (in some cultures) dark clothing. Where handguns are not permitted as in European countries, murder rates are significantly lower compared to the United States. Other aggression cues are drugs and alcohol. Drugs and alcohol contribute to violence as statistics show that the majority of murders occur under the influence. Using drugs or alcohol disinhibits aggressive responses, and the user is also more sensitive to insults. Drunken people are incapable of correctly attributing intent to insult, and react emotionally to minimal slights. Alcohol also increases the social pressure in gangs' intent on hurting others.

Schemas that define when aggression is appropriate behavior, are sensitive to aggression cues and hence facilitate aggression. Schemas work together with attributions in deciding whether the intent of the other party is hostile or not. Aggression schemas tend to be stable over the life span of people who are chronically aggressive. School shootings for example occur when schemas define an inhospitable school environment of dominant bullies. Family issues, child abuse, access to lethal weapons also all contribute to school violence.

What can be done to reduce violence in the world? Does punishing the aggressor work? It must be kept in mind that when a parent physically punishes a child, he/she also becomes a model for the aggressive behavior the parent is trying to inhibit. Children that are severely punished become more acceptant of violence and in turn may become abusive parents. Less severe punishment combined with counseling and community involvement has shown promise in reducing violence. Swift punishment may stop adult aggression, but the legal processes in Western countries make that outcome unlikely. The evidence shows that countries that have abolished capital punishment have no higher rates of murder and violence than those that retain the ultimate punishment.

A second way to reduce violence is the utility of empathetic processes. Research has shown that becoming aware of the pain inflicted on a subject reduces aggression. The problem with modern warfare is that aggression using long

distance technology inhibits empathy because of the large physical and psychological distances produced.

A third option is changing schemas? Work with chronically aggressive children supports the utility of intervention programs designed to change faulty attributions.

Fourthly, we can distract ourselves and thereby get a hold of our emotions in the face of frustration and hence prevent aggression. Sometimes we just need to put some distance between the frustration and response by counting to ten before responding to insults. Catharsis has not proven successful. Although it is unhealthy to repress feelings, expressing anger directly actually increases aggression as can be observed in violent hockey games. Further, sublimating aggression does not get at the cause that produced frustration in the first place.

Fifthly, we can confront the frustration in a nonviolent way and share the effect of the frustration with the other party. The effort should aim at encouraging mutual steps to reduce anger. By using nonviolent approaches, the need to denigrate the other party that fuels ongoing hostility is removed. Sincere apologies take the sting out of the frustration. We need more positive social learning models of nonviolence in the media to counteract the great imbalance that favors aggression and hostility.

Finally, learning to take the other side by developing empathetic skills could reduce aggression. Along with empathy, formal communication skills may help correctly identify intent. We may also learn to communicate anger that does not invite retaliation, and improve skills of negotiation and compromise.