

Aggression and Violence

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Aggression and Violence: Innate or Learned?



- o How many people believe that violence is innate?
- o How many believe that violence is a learned behaviour?

Is there a difference between violence and aggression?



Innate? Learned?

If violence is innate, then violence in sports and media is a good way **to release our feelings of aggression.**

If violence is something that we learn, then exposure to violence **encourages and teaches** us to become violent.

What is violence?

Violence (vī'o · lence):

Harmful action or treatment that may cause injury.

Aggression (u'greshun):

Violent action that is hostile and usually unprovoked; deliberately unfriendly behaviour

Violence and Aggression in Society



Sports
Movies
Sports Entertainment
Cartoons
News
Books

Where else?

Theories...

Innate:

- Freud (1915) - Believed aggression was an instinct that could not be eliminated; it could only be discharged through outlets such as sports.
 - Freudian psychologists believe that the more frustration one has, the more aggressive one becomes.
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Theories...

Learned:

- Violence is learned through observation, imitation and reinforcement.
- Studies show that children who watch violence on T.V. are more aggressive.

WHY?
We're not sure, but...

Learned cont...

We do know that:

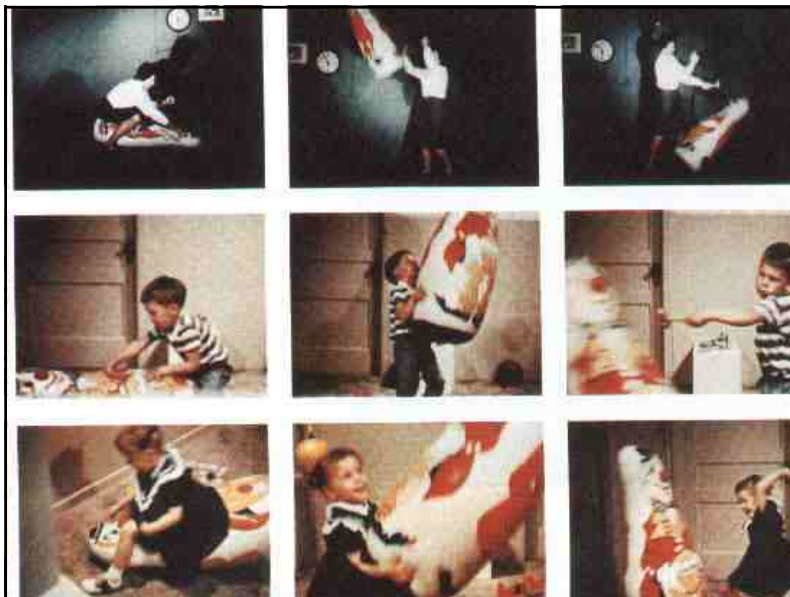
- T.V. teaches aggression through observation and imitation (e.g. children imitating wrestlers, copycat crimes...)
 - T.V. desensitises (e.g., violence seems less real)
 - T.V. distorts people's view of how to deal with conflict (e.g., traditional characters such as Batman)
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Learning by Observing

- ❑ Social learning theory focuses on what we learn from observing other people
- ❑ Observational or vicarious learning occurs when we see the consequences of other people's behaviour
- ❑ Vicarious reinforcement or vicarious punishment affects the willingness of people to perform behaviours they learned by watching others

Theories of violence and TV Social Learning Theory

- ❑ Albert Bandura - Argues that children "learn" their personalities from interactions with culture, role models, examples, etc.
- ❑ Acknowledges role of rewards and punishments in shaping children's behavior



Social Learning Theory: The Bobo Doll Experiment

- ❑ Experimental design - Children witness a model aggressively attacking a plastic clown "...the model pummels it on the head with a mallet, hurls it down, sits on it and punches it on the nose repeatedly, kick it across the room, flings it in the air, and bombards it with balls" (Bandura, 1973).
- ❑ After the video - placed in a room with attractive toys - no touching! - the children became angry and frustrated.
- ❑ The children were led to another room where there was a toy Bobo doll.
- ❑ 88% of the children imitated the aggressive behaviour.
- ❑ 8 months later, 40% of the same children reproduce the violent behaviour observed in the Bobo doll experiment

"Bobo" Dolls: A realistic view of TV violence?

- ❑ Found that subjects would tend to reproduce modeled acts when those acts were shown as being rewarded, but not when the acts were punished; all subjects, however, had "learned" the acts, because they could remember them
 - ❑ Other studies revealed that subjects could reproduce responses some months later, and would perform violent acts against adults dressed as Bobo doll, attempting to generalise results to wider sphere
 - ❑ ...but, experimentally controlled environment raises questions about generalisability
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Instigation / Arousal Theory

- ❑ What is role of emotion in connection between TV and violence? Instigation theory proposes that general emotional arousal leads to higher likelihood of violent responses in various situations
 - ❑ Studies tested role of "justification" in making connection between seeing violence and carrying it out, justification found to "trigger" emotionally violent response...
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Catharsis

- ❑ Based on notions from Greek drama, some theorists argued that televised violence would result in a lessening of violent reactions, by providing a way to "release" violent feelings, fantasies, etc.
 - ❑ Fantasies are substitutes for actual felt needs; studies found that institutionalised boys on aggressive TV diet were less aggressive toward peers and authority
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Conclusions of violence literature

- ❑ Though there continues to be controversy, generally social scientists conclude that there is some relationship between the presence of television in society and violence
 - ❑ Meta-analysis reveals undeniably positive relationship, along with...
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Violence Findings (Liebert & Sprafkin)

- ❑ Boys and girls display similar effects until about age 10, after which there is a divergence
 - ❑ “justified” violence is more effective than unjustified violence
 - ❑ “arousal” does increase aggression producing effects, but effect can be present without arousal
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