

Defining Aggression
Wednesday, 3/27/2024, 1:00 - 3:30pm

To Read Before Class:

Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D., & Sommers, S.R. (2019). Aggression: Why do we hurt other people? Can we prevent it?. *Social Psychology*. 10th edition. (pp. 365-401). New York, NY: Pearson.

Syllabus Goals:

1. Describe the core theories in social psychology and recognize key concepts within notable experiments.
2. Apply theories of social psychology to real-world situations.
3. Critically evaluate the ethics of infamous social psychology “research studies” and describe the consequent safeguards that have been adopted for human participation in research.

Lesson Learning Objectives:

1. Students will develop an understanding of aggression and will compare their own perceptions of the concept with how social psychologists define it.
2. Students will be able to identify the psychological, social, and cultural components that contribute to aggression within individuals and groups.
3. Students will be able to describe methods of releasing aggression, and will gain an understanding of which methods evidence suggests are effective vs. ineffective.

Lesson Activities:

- **Quick Write (3 min):** Think of an example from the media (TV, movies, books) where one character aggressed against someone else. Where did the aggression come from? Did that character seem to feel better after aggressing? What was the effect of their use of aggression?
- **Class Discussion (10 min)**
 - Students share examples from the quick write; connect to concepts from the textbook reading
- **Defining Aggression Activity (10 min)** (adapted from existing [APA Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools activity](#); see pages below for detailed instructions)
 - Students read 10 statements from the aggression questionnaire, and independently rate each as an example of aggression or not
 - Students don't put their names on their handouts
 - Instructor collects the handouts and redistributes them, so that each student has a different person's handout
 - This will make students more comfortable sharing responses, since they aren't saying their own
 - On the board, the instructor will collect data on which statements were deemed aggressive vs. non-aggressive
 - Under each statement number (1 through 10), the instructor will tally the number of hands raised for aggressive (A) and non-aggressive (NA)

- **Activity Results Discussion (20 min):** Instructor will lead students in a discussion of which statements were deemed aggressive vs. non-aggressive
 - What is important when considering how to define aggression? (e.g., intent, motive, self-defense, premeditation)
 - Focus on “landslide” items: nearly everyone rated as either aggressive or non-aggressive
 - What made this item in particular stand out as definitely aggressive (or not)?
 - Then, focus on items where there was lots of dissent (split in votes between aggressive vs. non-aggressive)
 - Ask students to debate whether the item is aggression or not – “defend” their opinions (if they feel comfortable doing so)
 - Review differing definitions of aggression
 - On the board, write out or project a slide with various definitions of aggression (see bottom of page 2 for definitions) for students to review
 - Which definition do you feel captures aggression best? Why? Does your favorite definition capture each of the statements rated as aggression from the activity?
- **Bobo Doll Study Activity (30 min)**
 - As a class, watch this short [video](#) on Bandura’s (in)famous Bobo Doll Study
 - Think-pair-share:
 - What are the important takeaways from this study?
 - Connecting to our reading, what are the psychological, social, and cultural components that contribute to aggression? Think on multiple levels: larger-scale cultural factors, individual-level factors (personal identity), situational factors!
 - Example answers: cultures of honor, sociopolitical movements/moments in time, gender, mental health, alcohol, heat, pain
 - Why might this study not be run today? What factors would a modern lens call out as unethical?
 - Discuss with a partner/small group and then share out
- **Think-Pair-Share Activity (15 min):** how can we release/decrease aggression? Is “catharsis” something that people can really achieve (through aggression, or other means)?
 - Connect to concepts/findings from the reading
 - Discuss with a partner/small group and then share out
- **Exit Slip (3 min):** reflect on the quick write from the beginning of class. With what you’ve learned today, do you still think that example fits into our definition of aggression? Were there any psychological/social/cultural contributors to the character’s aggression? Does it seem like the character felt a sense of “catharsis” after they aggressed, or would there have been a better way of releasing/decreasing their aggression?

Defining Aggression Activity: Instructions

1. Students receive a handout listing 10 ambiguously aggressive statements; instructor explains the activity.
 - Students are instructed not to write their names on the handouts
 - ~2 minutes
2. Students each independently read through the statements and circle either "aggression" or "not aggression."
 - ~3 minutes
3. Handouts are collected, shuffled, and redistributed to students
 - Redistribution is done to maintain anonymity for step 3, in order to avoid potential embarrassment for one's answers
 - ~2 minutes
4. The instructor goes through each of the 10 statements, and as each one is called, students raise their hands if their handout rates it as aggression, then for not aggression.
 - Instructor keeps tally of ratings for each statement on the board
 - ~3 minutes
5. Discuss the results
 - Debate specific items: who thought this was aggressive vs not? Why?
 - Focus on "landslide" items: nearly everyone rated as either aggressive or non-aggressive
 - What made this item in particular stand out as definitely aggressive (or not)?
 - Then, focus on items where there was lots of dissent (split in votes between aggressive vs. non-aggressive)
 - Ask students to debate whether the item is aggression or not – "defend" their opinions (if they feel comfortable doing so)
 - What is important when considering how to define aggression? (e.g., intent, motive, self-defense, premeditation, animals vs. humans, killing for sport vs. food)
 - ~10 minutes
6. Review definitions of aggression
 - *"Behavior intended to hurt another person" (Freedman, 1982).*
 - *"Any behavior whose intent is to inflict harm or injury on another living being" (McGee & Wilson, 1984).*
 - *"Hostile or forceful action intended to dominate or violate" (Lefrançois, 1982).*
 - *"Behavior that is intended to injure another person (physically or verbally) or to destroy property" (Atkinson et al., 1983,).*
 - *"A response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism" (Buss, 1961).*

- Which definition do you feel captures aggression best? Why? Does your favorite definition capture each of the statements rated as aggression from the activity? How do we connect this to the determinants of aggression that we read about in the textbook?
- ~10 minutes

