Aggression

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The statistics (2004, UCR)

- Murder: 16,137
- Forcible rape: 94,635
- Robbery: 401,326
- Aggravated assault: 854,911
“Now the bad news…”

- **FBI Uniform Crime Reports**
  - Built from reports from individual jurisdictions (some 40,000 of them)
  - Includes lots of local “definitions”
  - Includes only those *reported*

- **National Criminal Victimization Surveys**
  - National sample of over 65,000 people
  - Shows, by comparison to UCR, that as few as 1 in 10 rapes may be reported!
A definition

- Behavior intended to harm another
- Intention counts, not results
- So, accidents happen
- Forms of aggression
  - Instrumental – to achieve some purpose
  - Emotional – impulsive, in heat of moment
Variations in occurrence

- **Age:** lock away everyone from 14-24
- **Sex:** actually, lock away only boys
- **Location:** perhaps only in the South
- **Race**
  - African-Americans more likely victims
  - Most violence is intra-racial
  - Consequently, more African-American perpetrators, as percentage of their race
Potential explanations

- Evolutionary: intraspecific competition
- Behavior genetics: inherited tendency
- Testosterone: more is worse
- Serotonin: not enough

At this point, no really convincing evidence for one over another
Social factors

- Modeling and social learning
- Socialization differences: aggression encouraged, or at least tolerated, among boys more than girls
- "Culture of honor:" personal affronts give rise to violent responses
Cohen & Nisbett 1996

- Three related experiments with common procedures
- Confederate bumps into subject, calls him “asshole,” then handshake, testosterone, and judgments measured
- “Southerner:” at least 6 years in census 5, 6, or 7 (Delaware to Florida)
- Problem: median family income of 90K in 1994
Frustration-aggression

- Thorough description of the concept
- Original formulation too broad
- Evidence for displaced aggression in response to provocation
- But catharsis doesn’t work
- Berkowitz’s reformulation into negative affect (from a variety of sources)
Sources of arousal

- It’s the *heat*!
  - During hot *years*, or hotter *days*
  - But lots of explanations for more violence in the summer

- Excitation transfer (two factor theory)
- Negative affect from any source
- Prior provocations
Emotional aggression

- Input variables
  - Aversive experiences (frustration, heat)
  - Situational cues (weapons, models)
  - Individual differences (hostility, empathy)

- Affect – arousal – cognitions

- Higher-order thinking (interpretations of situation, other’s motives)

- Aggression
Media violence

- Copycat violence: would perpetrators have found some other way?
- Televised violence: the simple answer is YES! Effects are twice as strong as those for condom use and HIV
- Also true for gangsta rap and violent video games; short-term and long-term
Pornography and violence

- Unlike that for depicted violence, this relationship is *complex*
- Nonviolent pornography: No
- Violent pornography: Yes. Particularly of males toward females.
Intimate violence

- Half of murder victims killed by someone they knew
- 25% of college females report attempted or completed rape
- Half of these were “date rapes”
- In marriages, more severe violence by women, more final damage by men
Reducing aggression

- Improve quality of life to reduce frustration
- Reduce all forms of aggression in society
- Provide models of peaceful behavior
- Reduce media glorification of violence
- Provide fans, limit weapons
- Encourage communication, limit excessive drinking