Aggression Essay, Research Paper

Aggression 1

Running Head: AGGRESSION

Aggression: Dealing with the Aspects that we are faced with Day in and Day Out

Aggression 2

Abstract

We live in a society where aggressive acts happen every day, but do we really know what causes it? How can we help ourselves and others to understand what aggression is? First off, we need to define aggression, tell it’s causes and effects and determine the best way to deal with it. For example, aggression can be positive or negative, accidental or intended and physical or mental. Aggression is a continuing behavior in our world today and I feel that it is very important that we try to start controlling it now.

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Aggression is a critical part of animal existence, which is a driving force to humans, as we too are animals. The source of aggression within humans is an ongoing list so therefore, we must understand the definition of aggression. Aggression in psychology defined by the World Book Encyclopedia is hostile behavior that may hurt or upset other people. Such behavior may take the form of physical attack against people or their possessions, or verbal abuse (Larsen, 2000). There are many types of aggressive behaviors which we must differentiate from. Aggression may be an automatic response to such experiences as pain or danger. In other cases, it is a deliberate action with a definite purpose (Larsen, 2000). Some people act out of hostility to gain money, pleasure, power or prestige. Other aggressive behavior is intended to cause physical or psychological injury (Larsen, 2000). For example, an aggressive behavior can be negative or positive, accidental or intended and physical or mental.

There is no justification for violent aggression such as spouse, child, or sibling abuse, criminal assault, rape, bullying, or any other physical harm or psychological insult to another person. At a time like this, you don’t have to hide your feeling, express yourself. Of course, if your life is in danger, do whatever it takes to help you reach

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safety. Aggression can fall under a number of forms. Due to its relative nature, aggression is extremely hard to isolate and study.

A major distinction made in animal studies of aggression, and one that may well have profound implications for human aggression, is the difference between offensive and defensive aggression (Feshbach, Zagrodzka 1997). Much research has already been done indicating that different brain sites mediate predation and defensive aggression. Aggression can take many different paths. The act of hitting a wall to release aggression has some of the same roots as playing football and enjoying hitting the quarterback. A child yelling at their parents could be equated in its aggressiveness with someone honking their horn when they get cut off driving. Psychologist Arlene Stillwell performed an experiment where she assigned ordinary college students at random to play the role of a victim or a perpetrator in a small incident. Then she asked the students to describe the situation that had just happened. What she found was that both victims and perpetrators deformed the truth equally to present their sides in a better light. Victims would dwell on their lasting traumas from the incident while the perpetrator might make the act seem like a one-time action provoked by

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insurmountable circumstances. The resulting implication is that aggression is in the eye of the beholder (Baumeister 1997). Some acts are very easy to categorize as aggressive, while others are not.

As we know, aggression can take on many different routes. Here are two opposing views of aggression: (1) aggression in animals and humans is an inherited, spontaneous tendency much the same as the motivation to eat, drink and make love; (2) there is nothing inevitable about the expression of aggression, it depends as much upon experience and external factors as the internal state of the animal (Home Edition 2000). These two differing viewpoints are very important as we start looking into aggression.

To be called assertive is a compliment. To be told that you are aggressive is viewed as a criticism, and to be considered violent is to be condemned (Hirsch 1981). What is the difference between the three? The Webster’s Dictionary defines assertive as “positive; aggressive; and dogmatic.” Aggression is defined as “an unprovoked offensive attack, invasion, or the like” and violence as “rough or injurious physical force, action, or treatment; an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power…(1993). These dictionary definitions are obviously different from that of psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists.

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Aggression involves complete lack of concern for the other person and major emphasis on the “gimme” syndrome without consideration for the others involved (Hirsch 1981). Assertiveness, on the other hand, does not involve attack. It focuses on meeting one’s needs. Self-respect is an example of assertive behavior. It has been found that women who are assertive are often labeled as aggressive. Influencing this attitude is the concept that women are innately less aggressive that men, and therefore any demonstration of definite behavior is perceived negatively, since it is unexpected (Hirsch 1981). This raises the important question of whether or not females are less aggressive than males.

The Psychobiology of Aggression states that aggression is “…overt behavior involving intent to inflict noxious stimulation or to behave destructively toward another organism” (Hirsch 1981). There are many other definitions of aggression that each lead to a different step. What is the determining factor of these definitions is the concept that aggressiveness is negative. Therefore, when an assertive act by a woman is labeled as aggressive, it gives the woman the message that the act of standing up for her rights is unacceptable (Hirsch 1981). I feel that this idea is slipping away in today’s society because more women are

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standing up for what they believe in.

In the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, human aggression and violence was looked at concerning the impact of media violence on kids. Though there are many complexities in this realm of behavioral research, there is one clear and simple message that parents, educators, and public policy makers such as yourselves need to hear: playing violent video games can cause increases in aggression and violence (Anderson Ph.D. 2000). Here are a few of the facts that were highlighted concerning TV and movie violence by Professor Rowell Huesmann of the University of Michigan:

1. Exposure to violent TV and movies causes increases in aggression and violence.

2. These effects are of two kinds: short term and long term. The short-term effect is that aggression increases immediately after viewing a violent TV show or movie, and lasts for at least 20 minutes. The long-term effect is that repeated exposure to violent TV and movies increases the violence prone of the person watching such shows.

3. Both the long term and the short-term effects occur to both boys and girls.

4. The effects of TV and movie violence on

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aggression are not small (Anderson 2000). There is also some research that is focused on video games. It includes:

1. Video games are consuming a larger amount of time every year. Virtually all children now play video games. The average 7th grader is playing electronic games at least 4 hours per week, and about half of those games are violent.

2. Young people who play lots of violent video games behave more violently that those who do not.

3. Experimental studies have shown that playing a violent video game causes an increase in aggressive thinking.

4. Experimental studies have shown that playing a violent video game causes an increase in retaliatory aggression.

5. Experimental and correlation studies have shown that playing violent video games leads to a decrease in prosocial (helping) behaviors (Anderson 2000).

From infancy, humans learn how to perceive, interpret, judge, and respond to events in the physical and social environment (Anderson 2000). We learn about the world around us by observation, and by acting on that world. We also learn about the social world and how it works. We develop these observations by the day-to-day interactions

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that we other people doing whether it is real or imagined. Of course, our knowledge develops and expands over time. Children who are exposed to a lot of violent media learn a number of lessons that change them into more aggressive people (Anderson 2000). They believe that there are many bad people in this world that will hurt them. They learn to interpret negative events that occur to them as intentional harm, rather than as an accidental mistake (Anderson 2000). As these structures develop over time, they become imprinted and harder to change.

The definition of aggression portrays two distinct types of aggression, hostile and instrumental. Hostile aggression is aggression driven by anger and performed as an end in itself. Instrumental aggression is aggression that is a means to some other end (Myers 1999). Distinguishing between the two can be difficult at times. In studying these types of aggression, psychologists have focused on three main ideas: (1)There is an inborn aggressive drive, (2)Aggression is a natural response to frustration and (3)Aggressive behavior is learned (Myers 1999). The perfect example of this is sports in today’s society. In professional football, two worlds collide. “We” meets “me”(Kee and Grossman 1998). In a game in 1997, the helmet of Reggie Brown met Lamont Burns in a freak accidental hit

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during a game. He slumped unconscious, stopped breathing, and players from both teams gathered to cry and pray for the motionless Brown (Kee and Grossman 1998). We all know how much emphasis is put on sports and winning in today’s society. Is aggression one of the means required to win? Before games, teams organize chapel services in the NFL. In every sport, religion brings an element of redemption, the promise of delivery from a loss one day and a win the next (Kee and Grossman 1998). Present player Reggie White commented on football’s violence and religion. “What makes you think it is violent?” he asked. “Football is not violent. When a kid puts a gun up to another guy’s head and blows it off, that’s violence….Our game is aggression. We don’t go out to kill each other. We go out to win” (Kee and Grossman 1998). Instinctive behavior, an innate, unlearned behavior pattern exhibited by all members of a species can also come into play here.

Aggression has numerous reasons and consequences that must be analyzed in order to see what it arises from. A good example is the strength of nature and nurture. The features of nature are:

Genetic Inheritance of behavioral capacity for aggression

Physiological Control of aggression by brain,

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blood and hormones

Organism Why animals aggress. Control by genetic and physiological factors

The next aspect looked at was that of nurture. How our learning is influenced.

Society Societal organization, cultural and political determinants of aggression.

Ecology Large scale population characteristics and availability of natural resources (Ghiselli 2000).

These were just some of the determinants of human aggression that Dr. Ghiselli came up with. The information on the far right side was what he felt was a relevant contribution to the nature nurture aspects of aggression.

There are many sub-topics that can fall under aggression. The first example is the culturally prescribed passivity for females’ contrasts sharply with the masculine premium on aggressiveness and physical strength (Henry and Short Jr. 1954). This is when our society perceives men to be more aggressive than women. The next example is when a couple is about to get a divorce. If we make the assumptions (1) that the act of divorce is evidence of the expression of aggression against the spouse, and (2) that

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prior to the divorce, the spouse was a primary source of nurturance and love. We are able to suggest that for the divorced, the consequence of aggression was the loss of nurturance (Henry and Short Jr. 1954). In the widow’s eye, the loss of love was a consequence of death independent of aggression against the spouse. Another example is suicide or homicide. Clinical investigations of the psychoanalysts have suggested that suicide is aggression directed against the self. Both Menninger and Fenichel see suicide as the end of an unfulfilled wish to murder another person (Henry and Short Jr. 1954). In stating the frustration-aggression hypothesis, the same authors assume as a point of departure that “aggression is always a consequence of frustration,” and define frustration as “that condition which exists when a goal response suffers interference” (Henry and Short Jr. 1954).

Many cultures have expresses concern about the impact of excessive alcohol ingestion on human violence (Feshbach and Zagrodzka 1997). I have argued elsewhere, however, that the popular ’simple’ view that alcohol ingestion causes hostile behavior and, hence leads to violent crime, is based on a number of over-simplifications (Feshbach and Zagrodzka 1997). While much of this is society’s perception of alcohol and aggression, there may be no direct correlation.

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One strong argument supports that people have built-in aggression. Much like the theories of Freud, that people have instinctual aggression, whether sexual or violent, a multitude of scientists and psychologists believe that biology is crucial in the development of aggression (Myers 1995). Differences in physical strength also have provided for differences in aggression levels between the two sexes. Another important factor involving aggression of people are other people. Very few times does an aggressive act stand alone. There is almost always a mutual fault or shared blame. In half of the reported cases of domestic violence it was found that both spouses were violent, it just tended to be that one person was considerably stronger than the other (Baumeister 1997). Aggressive behavior has been a huge part of mankind since people first starting walking. Aggression follows us wherever we go.

How concerned are we really with human happiness and self-development? Aggressive expression of anger can cause permanent damage to relationships. Here are some action methods for reducing anger:

1. THINK–”Aggression will drive a wedge between us”

2. BE ASSERTIVE–Seek “Win-Win” Solutions

3. Take a “TIME-OUT” if someone gets too upset

4. Find constructive ways to release your high

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energy and arousal

5. Choose constructive (not self-destructive) expressions of anger

The summary of this article is very informative and contains many aspects for us to take with us.

To overcome anger and aggression,

choose EMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING

over assuming the worst intentions,

choose UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE CARING

over insensitivity

choose the HAPPINESS DOCTRINE

over the fairness doctrine,

choose ACCEPTING the unchangeable aspects of reality

over hostility–”it’s the way of things,”

take CONSTRUCTIVE ENERGETIC ACTIONS

to help get rid of the steam inside, and

remember, there is inherent justice for harmful behaviors and most of all, remember,

EVERY MOMENT OF ANGER IS ONE LESS MOMENT OF HAPPINESS

(Stevens PhD 2000).

As we have learned, aggression is a part of our society that started long ago and will probably never end. Any behavior that takes the form of physical attack or verbal abuse is aggression. We know there are many different types

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and forms of aggression to differentiate from. Aggression can be positive or negative, accidental or intended and physical or mental. A critical part of us as humans is the driving force of aggression. As a society, all we need to do is learn when to say when.

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Natalie Grow

York College

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Abstract

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