Aggression

IIE 366: Developmental Psychology

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Lecture 29

Understanding Aggression

1. Some Basics

2. Prevalence and Consequences

3. Why Do Children Resort to Aggression?

4. Influence of Parents on Children's Aggression

5. Impact of Violent Video Games

1. Some Basics

- Defining aggression
- Why is it important?

Defining Aggression

- Overt (or physical) aggression -- designed to harm another's physical or psychological well being (e.g., pushing, shoving, kicking)
- Relational (or social) aggression -- designed to harm another through damage to social relationships (e.g., keeps child out of group, talks behind back)

Why Is It Important?

- When children are aggressive, they are disliked, rejected, and isolated from peers.
- Children who are disliked, rejected, and isolated are prone to psychopathology and to deviant and criminal behavior.

April 20, 1999: Columbine High School

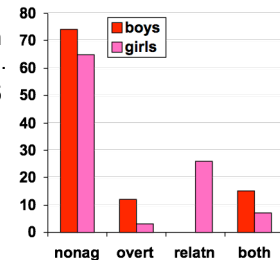- Killed 12 students and 1 teacher

Virginia Tech

- April 16, 2007. Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people
  - Moved to the US from South Korea when he was 8 years old
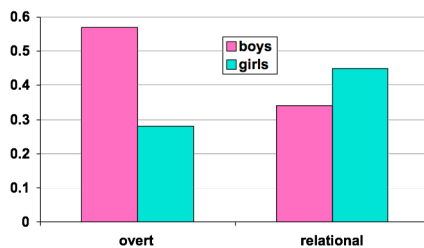 - Long history of mental health problems

2. Prevalence and Consequences

- Study by Crick et al. (1997) of overt and relational aggression in *preschool* children.
- Studied 65 3.5 to 5.5 year olds in a preschool.
- Teacher and peer assessments of behavior.

Correlations between aggression and rejection by peers

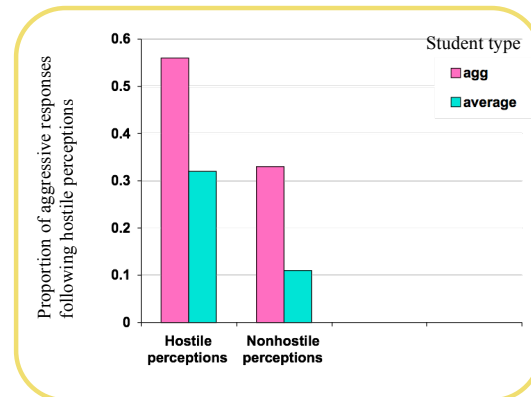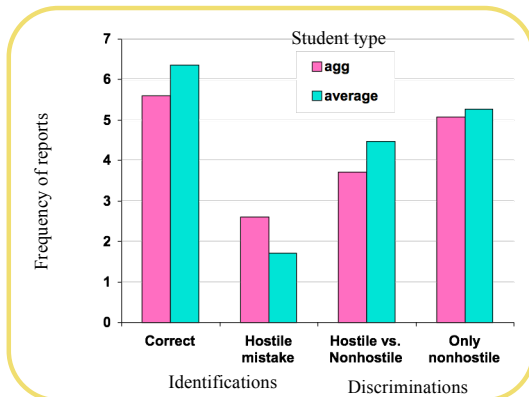## Results are very typical in showing....

- Overt aggression more common in boys than in girls.
- Relational aggression more common in girls than in boys.
- Both forms of aggression are negatively related to children's adjustment.

3. Why Do Children Resort To Aggression?

- Social information processing approaches emphasize children's interpretation of social information and a bias to respond to situations with hostility and anger.
- Studies of this biased processing usually involve showing videotapes in which one child hurts another child or breaks the other child's possessions.

Waldman (1996) study

- 8- to 12-year-old (grades 3-6) boys watched videotapes in which one child ruins another child's toy
- different versions: the act is
  - hostile
  - Non-hostile:
    - » accidental
    - » Prosocial
    - » Ambiguous
    - » Or, the first child didn't break the toy but was present and blamed by the second child
- asked "What did the first child do? Why? If you were the second child, what would you do?"
- Separately identify aggressive and non-aggressive children

Social interpretation

- Aggressive boys more likely to misinterpret another child's intentions.
  - But not just in general, discrimination among non-aggressive acts is normal
- When they do misinterpret, the typical error is to assume, incorrectly, that the other's behavior was hostile.
- Following hostile and nonhostile acts, aggressive boys are more likely to say that aggressive behavior is the appropriate response.

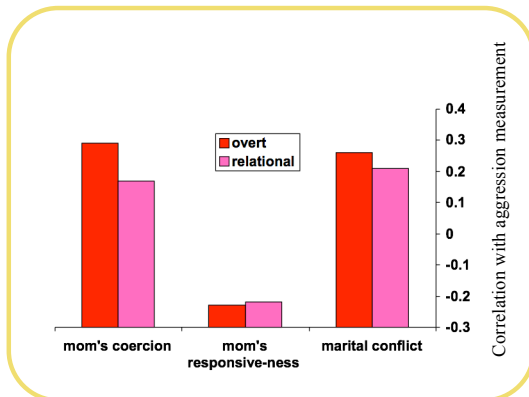## 4. Influence of Parents on Children's Aggression

- Direct effect: How parents treat children
- Indirect effect: How parents treat each other

Hart et al. (1998) study of Russian preschoolers and their parents

- Studied 207 3- to 6-year-olds attending nursery school and their parents.
- Lived in Voronezh, Russia, located about 250 miles south of Moscow.
- Measured parenting practices, marital conflict, aggressive behavior.

Measurements

- Parenting:
  - Maternal coercion: self-reported slapping, grabbing, yelling, use of physical punishment and shouting as discipline
  - Parental responsiveness: self-reported patience, being easy-going and relaxed, joking and playing, being responsive to child feelings/needs, giving comfort and understanding when child is upset.
  - Martial conflict: mother's and father's reports of overt conflict observed by the child
- Child aggression: teacher ratings
  - Relational aggression" causing harm through damage to relationships, such as social exclusion
  - Overt aggression" causing harm through damage to physical or psychological well-being, such as bullying, threatening, and use of physical force

Correlation with aggression measurement

overt
relational

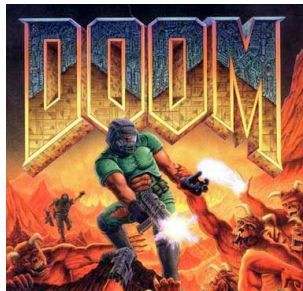mom's coercion | mom's responsive-ness | marital conflict

Conclusions

- Children more often develop overt and relational aggressive behavior when:
  - mothers are coercive toward them
  - mothers are unresponsive
  - there is more parental conflict at home
    - For sons, but not daughters
- Thus, Russian parents (like US parents) contribute to children's aggressive behavior both directly and indirectly.

5. Impact of violent video games

- Basics of video game use
- General model of impact of long-term exposure to video-game violence
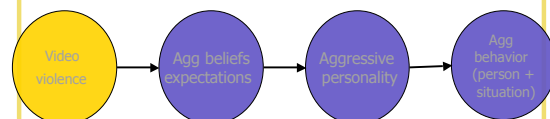- Results of meta-analysis

Basics of video game use

- 8- to 13-year-old boys average more than 8 hours of video game play weekly
- 15% of college men play at least 6 hours weekly; 3% play more than 20 hr
- 90% of adolescents report no parental oversight (e.g., don't check ratings)
- $17.9 billion sales in the US in 2007
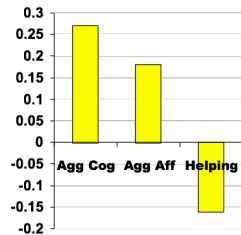 - 43% increase

Basics of video game use

- For most, the favorite game is violent
- Most popular games on www.gamerankings.com
  - Civilization Revolution: …features fast-paced, pick-up-and-play action involving strategic global domination...
  - Soulcalibbur IV: Swords will be honed and weapons optimized as...
  - SIREN: Blood Curse: Blood-splattered episodes of this Japanese Survival Horror...
  - Baldur's Gate II: …whether to ally with the law-disregarding Shadow Thieves…or the more secretive and disturbing vampires
  - Final Fantasy IV: …the first RPG to incorporate the innovative Active Time Battle system...
  - 1942: Joint Strike: …vehicles and weapons have the look and feel of WWII...
  - Metal Gear Solid 4: …in the middle of a futuristic battlefield.
  - Order Up!: a cooking game that will test your cooking and restaurant management skills.

General model of impact of long-term exposure to video-game violence

Video violence → Agg beliefs expectations → Aggressive personality → Agg behavior (person + situation)

Results of meta-analysis by Anderson and Bushman (2001)

- 35 studies of violent computer, video, or arcade games
- Total of 4262 participants
- Measured correlation between exposure to video violence and (a) aggression and (b) helping

To summarize....

- Overt and relational aggression are common in many children, usually with harmful consequences.
- Part of the immediate cause of aggressive behavior is misinterpretation of others' behavior.
- Parents contribute directly and indirectly to their children's aggressive behavior.
- Exposure to violent video games increase aggressive behavior and decreases helping.
  - ◆ Violent TV and movies have similar effects

Next time

- Gender