

Psychological Explanations of Criminal Behavior

Part II: Social, Learning, and Cognitive Perspectives

Theoretical Perspectives

1. Social Learning Theory
 - Domestic Violence
 - Media
2. Hostile Attribution Style Theory
3. Cognitive Theory

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

- National survey estimated that more than 16% of married American couples experienced an incident of physical assault within the previous year (Straus & Gelles, 1990)
 - Translates into 16 million couples
 - Most incidents relatively minor (slapping, pushing shoving)
 - Approximately 3.4 million experienced severe violence (beating up, kicking, or using a knife or a gun)

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

- Males and females commit violence at approximately the same rate within their relationships (e.g., Archer, 2000; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001a; O'Leary et al., 1989; Straus & Gelles, 1990)
- In one study (Straus & Gelles, 1988), both males and females were equally likely to strike the first blow in cases of spousal abuse.
- In approximately 25% of relationships, the male is the sole perpetrator of violence; in approximately 25% of relationships, the female is the sole perpetrator of violence; and in approximately 50% of relationships, the violence is mutual (e.g., Hines & Saudino, 2001; Morse, 1995; O'Leary et al., 1989; Stets & Straus, 1990b)

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

- These rates of intimate partner violence have also been replicated in a study of 90 nonwestern cultures, which included Middle Eastern communities, sub-Saharan African tribes, European peasant groups, South Pacific Oceanic societies, and North and South American tribal societies (Levinson, 1988).
 - Wife beating occurred in 84.5% of the cultures, whereas husband beating occurred in only 20.2%.
 - The rate of wife beating, which occurred in all or nearly all of the households in 18.8% of the societies surveyed, occurred frequently in those societies in which the men controlled the wealth and made most of the decisions within the households.
 - Wife beating was absent in societies in which women are dominant in the home and in economic matters and in which they can amass their own personal wealth.

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

- Consequences of domestic violence:
 - Alcoholism and drug abuse (Kilpatrick, Acierno, Resnick, Saunders, & Best, 1997)
 - Post-traumatic stress disorder and battered woman syndrome (Walker, 2000)
 - Depression and psychosomatic symptoms (Stets & Straus, 1990b)
 - Self destructive behaviors, such as suicide and self mutilation (Carmen, Ricker, & Mills, 1984)

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

- Intergenerational transmission of intimate partner violence may not be 100%, but the studies clearly show that one of the strongest predictors for violence in adult relationships is the experience of violence in the family of origin (Carroll, 1977; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995; Egeland, 1993)
- People who experience and who witness violence as children twice as likely to perpetuate violence in their own relationships (Bernard & Bernard, 1983).
- Has been replicated over three generations (Steinmetz, 1977)
- People who experience and witness family-of-origin violence are likely to use the same form of abuse that they had witnessed being used in their homes as children
 - For example, people who witnessed their parents bite each other are more likely to bite their partners than slap them (Bernard & Bernard, 1983).

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)

- Engagement in criminal behavior is dependent on the available rewards and costs for such behavior
- Perception of rewards is determined by individual factors, such as learning history and attitudes toward social behavior, as well as social factors, such as provisions of reward and punishment from family and peers

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

Social Learning Theory and Transmission of Domestic Violence (Herzberger, 1996; Eron, 1997; Kalmuss, 1984):

- When children see violence in their family being rewarded, they learn to resolve frustrations and conflicts with family members through violence
- Children learn to view violence in love relationships as appropriate and see the use of violence in the family to relieve stress, express anger, or control others as appropriate
- Children exposed to these methods never learn prosocial alternatives to solve family problems and, therefore, do not have strong alternative means for solving problems throughout life

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

Mediators of Social Learning Theory:

- Most children who witness violence do not become adult perpetrators themselves (Widom, 1989)
- Many protective factors break the cycle of violence (Egeland, 1993), including:
 - Having at least one other caring adult to provide emotional support to the child
 - Having intact, stable, satisfying relationships with an intimate partner
 - Experiencing psychotherapy as an adolescent or young adult
 - Having an insightful understanding of oneself and how the early abuse has affected one and one's relationships.

Social Learning Theory and Domestic Violence

Mediators of Social Learning Theory:

(Protective Factors Continued)

- Evidence suggests that abused children do not become abusers if they learn how to properly cognitively evaluate and interpret others' behaviors (Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990)
- Some abused children tend to develop deficient social-processing skills in that they do not attend to relevant social cues, attribute hostile intent to others, and lack the strategies to competently solve interpersonal problems.

Social Learning Theory and Media Violence

- US Senate committee report indicated television responsible for 10% of youth violence (Albiniak & McConnell, 1999)
- "Hyde Amendment"
 - known as the Children's Defense Act in 1999, which would have made it a federal felony, punishable by 5 years in jail, to expose children under 17 to materials with sexual or violent content (Reid, 1999)

Social Learning Theory and Media Violence

Huesmann (1986)

- Social behavior is guided by cognitive scripts that are stored in a person's memory
 - Script- processes, practices, or ways in which we typically approach tasks and problems
- Aggressive people are those who regularly retrieve and employ scripts that emphasize aggressive responding
- Children can learn aggressive scripts from many sources—including watching television
- The process is reciprocal—troubled and aggressive children often watch more television and identify with television characters to a greater extent than other children, and watching more television reinforces these violent scripts

Social Learning Theory and Media Violence

Savage (2004)

- Reviewed literature to examine link between exposure to television violence and criminal behavior
- Few relevant studies found
- Out of 23 studies of medium and high relevance
 - 9 report null effect
 - 7 report positive effect (3 found effect for girls only)
 - Matched designs (convicts versus no criminal history) raise possibility that prior aggressiveness is a confound
 - Need to include proper controls (e.g., watching a great deal of television could be associated with unemployment, depression, intelligence, whether the subject is a high school dropout or not, marital problems, etc)
 - 4 report negative effect
 - 3 report interaction between trait aggression and viewing violence

Hostile Attribution Bias

Hostile Attribution Bias
(Nasby, Hayden, and dePaulo, 1980):

Reactive aggressive behavior that occurs as a function of making a hostile attribution that the self has been threatened

Hostile attributional style is

- learned in childhood
- a personality-like characteristic
- a failure to learn to make benign attributions



Hostile versus Reactive Aggression

- Lorenz (1966) distinguished between cold-blooded predation (*instrumental or proactive aggression*) and frenzied anger (*hostile or reactive aggression*)



- Unique psychobiological mechanisms
- Hostile (reactive) aggression is universal in primates and must be "unlearned" or controlled through development
- Instrumental (proactive) aggression may be universal in some species but is more likely acquired through reinforcement.

Biological Underpinnings of Hostile Aggression

Knutson, 2004:

- Dorsal striatum is activated in anticipated satisfaction from punishing wrongdoers, a region that is also activated during anticipation of monetary gains and pleasant tastes
- Humans do not require extrinsic rewards for retaliatory aggressive behavior: Merely engaging in revengeful aggression brings pleasure to the brain, even when it brings other extrinsic costs



Biological Underpinnings of Hostile Aggression

"Human behavior is often governed by a competition between lower level, automatic processes that may reflect evolutionary adaptation to particular environments, and the more recently evolved, uniquely human capacity for abstract, domain-general reasoning and future planning" (McClure, Laibson, Loewenstein, & Cohen, 2004)



Cognitive Processes in Antisocial Behavior

Different social cognitive patterns associated with reactive versus instrumental styles of behavior

- Reactive antisocial behavior is performed in response to external social stimuli (that are perceived as negative or aversive)
- Instrumental deviant behavior is motivated by internal desires and goals (that are perceived as positive or attractive)

Cognitive Processes in Antisocial Behavior

Different social cognitive patterns associated with reactive versus instrumental styles of behavior

- Reactive antisocial behavior is performed in response to external social stimuli (that are perceived as negative or aversive)
- Instrumental deviant behavior is motivated by internal desires and goals (that are perceived as positive or attractive)



Instrumental Antisocial Decision Making Model (Fontaine, 2007)