

Leonard Berkowitz

AGGRESSION

Its Causes,
Consequences,
and Control



Aggression

*ITS CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES,
AND CONTROL*



Leonard Berkowitz

University of Wisconsin-Madison



Boston, Massachusetts Burr Ridge, Illinois
Dubuque, Iowa Madison, Wisconsin New York, New York
San Francisco, California St. Louis, Missouri

McGraw-Hill

A Division of The McGraw-Hill Companies

AGGRESSION

Its Causes, Consequences, and Control

Copyright © 1993 by McGraw-Hill, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a data base or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 QSR/QSR 0 9 8 7 6 5 4

ISBN 0-07-004874-6

This book was set in Palatino by The Clarinda Company.
The editors were Christopher Rogers and Fred H. Burns;
the production supervisor was Leroy A. Young.
The cover was designed by Carla Bauer.

Cover painting: Otto Dix: "Self-portrait as Mars"
Courtesy of Haus der Meimat, Freital.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Berkowitz, Leonard, (date).

Aggression: its causes, consequences, and control / Leonard Berkowitz.

p. cm. — (McGraw-Hill series in social psychology)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-07-004874-6

1. Aggressiveness (Psychology) 2. Violence. I. Title.

II. Series.

BF575.A3B43 1993

155.2'32—dc20

92-33589

Permissions Acknowledgments

The passages cited from Kadushin & Martin (1981) are from Kadushin, A. & Martin, J. (1981), *Child Abuse: An Interactional Event*. Columbia University Press, New York. Reprinted by permission from the publisher.

The passage from Bach & Goldberg (1974) is from Bach, G. & Goldberg, H. (1974), *Creative Aggression*. Doubleday, New York. Reprinted by permission.

The passages from the *New York Times* issues of July 18, 1990, Nov. 2, 1990, and Dec. 13, 1990 are copyrighted 1990 by the New York Times Co. and reprinted by permission.

McGraw-Hill Series in Social Psychology

CONSULTING EDITOR, Philip G. Zimbardo

- | | |
|--|---|
| <i>Leonard Berkowitz:</i> | Aggression: Its Causes,
Consequences, and Control |
| <i>Sharon S. Brehm:</i> | Intimate Relationships |
| <i>Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor:</i> | Social Cognition |
| <i>Stanley Milgram:</i> | The Individual in a Social
World |
| <i>Ayala Pines and Christina Maslach:</i> | Experiencing Social
Psychology: Readings and
Projects |
| <i>Lee Ross and Richard E. Nisbett:</i> | The Person and the Situation:
Perspectives of Social
Psychology |
| <i>Philip G. Zimbardo and Michael R. Leippe:</i> | The Psychology of Attitude
Change and Social Influence |

About the Author



Leonard Berkowitz, Vilas Research Professor in Psychology at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, grew up in New York City and attended New York schools. After service in the U.S. Air Force, he received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1951 and has been on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin—Madison since 1955, although he has also held visiting appointments at Stanford University, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Oxford, Cornell, and Cambridge Universities, and the University of Western Australia, as well as at the University of Mannheim. Professor Berkowitz was one

of the pioneers in the experimental study of altruism and helping but, since 1957, has been engaged mostly in studying situational influences on aggressive behavior, using both laboratory experiments and field interviews with violent offenders in the United States and Britain.

The author of about 170 articles and books, mostly concerned with aggression, he was also the editor of the well-known social psychology series *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* from its inception in 1964 to his retirement from this post in 1989. He has also written a number of textbooks on social psychology, has been on the editorial boards of several social psychological journals, and has served as the chair of the Publication Board of the American Psychological Association. Berkowitz has been president of the American Psychological Association's Division of Personality and Social Psychology and the International Society for Research on Aggression, and was given distinguished scientist awards by the American Psychological Association and the Society for Experimental Social Psychology.

Most relevant for the present text, his scientific career received an early boost from the publication of *Aggression: A Social Psychological Analysis* by McGraw-Hill in 1962, and it is appropriate that McGraw-Hill is also publishing this volume on aggression as his career nears its close.

This book is dedicated to all of the behavioral scientists who have sought, with considerable intelligence, insight, and scientific rigor, to understand what causes aggression and how this destructive behavior might best be controlled, and who have persisted in their research even though so many people in society at large remain unaware of what they have found.

Foreword



To discover where the *action* is in psychology, look to social psychology. In recent years, the field of social psychology has emerged as central in psychology's quest to understand human thought, feeling, and behavior. Thus, we see the inclusion-by-hyphenation of social psychology across diverse fields of psychology, such as social-cognitive, social-developmental, social-learning, social-personality, to name but a few recent amalgamations.

Social psychologists have tackled many of society's most intractable problems. In their role as the last generalists in psychology, nothing of individual and societal concern is alien to social psychological investigators—from psychophysiology to peace psychology, from students' attributions for failure to preventive education for AIDS. The new political and economic upheavals taking place throughout Europe and Asia, with the collapse of Soviet-style communism, are spurring social psychologists to develop new ways of introducing democracy and freedom of choice into the social lives of peoples long dominated by authoritarian rule. Indeed, since the days when George Miller, former president of the American Psychological Association, called upon psychologists to "give psychology back to the people," social psychologists have been at the forefront.

The *McGraw-Hill Series in Social Psychology* is a celebration of the contributions made by some of the most distinguished researchers, theorists, and practitioners of our craft. Each author in our series shares the vision of combining rigorous scholarship with the educator's goal of communicating that information to the widest possible audience of teachers, researchers, students and interested laypersons. The series is designed to cover the entire range of social psychology, with titles reflecting both broad and more narrowly focused areas of specialization. Instructors may use any of these books as supplements to a basic text, or use a combination of them to delve into selected topics in greater depth.

Leonard Berkowitz is recognized internationally as a leading contributor to the empirical investigation of the psychology of aggression. His pioneering laboratory studies stand as models of the systematic analysis of situational factors that stimulate aggressive behavior. Now in his most

far-ranging contribution, *Aggression: Its Causes, Consequences, and Control*, Berkowitz gives us a scholarly tour de force in which he integrates laboratory, field, and survey research findings into an elegant synthesis of the state of the art on this vital topic. His carefully worded conclusions distinguish the valid from the common-sense, but false, views of aggression. He critically evaluates the host of theories about the whys of aggression, highlighting the values and limitations of each. But this book goes beyond being the soon-to-be-classic resource on human aggression; it offers impressive new insights and the author's own perceptive interpretations on many aspects of the complex processes involved in human aggression.

His colleagues will welcome it as their primary reference on the scientific analysis of aggression. Students will learn much from it because of the accessible style used to convey scientific and popular viewpoints. Yet, it is possible that the major contribution of this book will lie in informing the intelligent layperson, and influencing leaders of our society, as to the state of current, accurate knowledge in the psychology of aggression and violence. There are few topics in social psychology of more pressing concern to societies everywhere than that of discovering effective means of preventing and reducing the destructive impact of the many forms of aggression we face in our everyday lives. Berkowitz's new contribution helps to focus us in directions from which new solutions may emanate for this age-old problem.

Philip G. Zimbardo
Consulting Editor

Preface



This book is written in hope that it will contribute in some small way to the alleviation of one of our most serious social problems: human aggression. Violence clearly tears at the fabric of society. When parents abuse their children they weaken the bonds of regard and affection that will tie their offspring to themselves and the social order. Frequent muggings and other street crimes lessen the citizenry's faith in their government and also seriously diminish the trust in others that is so necessary for social harmony and the effective collaboration with friends and neighbors in solving shared problems. In so many different ways people can make the world around them much more difficult and troublesome, and at times maybe even more dangerous, when they assault someone else or even encourage others to engage in such behavior. I hope, and believe, that society can do a great deal to lessen this all-too-prevalent aggression if it understands better the fundamental causes of this destructive conduct, what conditions increase the chances that any one person will attack someone else, and what steps are generally most effective in reducing the likelihood of aggressive behavior.

While this book may contribute to this understanding, it doesn't cover all of the many factors that play a part in aggression. It is primarily concerned with the psychological processes within the individual that help promote, or restrain, this behavior and the conditions in the person's past and immediate present that make it more or less likely that he or she will attack someone else when aroused. Nothing is said about the neurological and biochemical mechanisms that are involved in this action, and the book also looks only briefly at the role of hormones, even though biological influences obviously are very important. Nor do I review the psychiatric analyses of the more extreme forms of violence such as serial killing, although the chapter on violent personalities does touch on the behavior of diagnosed psychopaths. Attention is given to the effects of a number of factors emphasized by sociologists, such as poverty and cultural beliefs and values, but again, perhaps not as much as some might wish. By and large, the main focus is on the social psychology of aggression and violence.

Following along in the tradition of contemporary social psychology,

several of the chapters place special value on the findings obtained from experiments, and I frequently buttress my arguments by referring to the results of laboratory studies. This certainly doesn't mean that I neglect the often important observations gleaned from field studies and everyday experience or that I believe experimental research is always preferable to other modes of investigation in the social sciences. I have pointed out, in this book and in other writings, that laboratory studies are best employed for only certain purposes, the testing of particular causal hypotheses. It's also quite obvious that for ethical as well as practical reasons well-controlled experiments cannot possibly be carried out to investigate many significant questions, such as whether years of economic deprivation tend to breed criminal tendencies, or whether a parent's frequently repeated abuse of her child heightens the probability that the youngster will develop into a violently inclined adult. Only field studies of people in their natural settings can suggest answers to questions such as these, and the book reports a good deal of such "real world" research. Nonetheless, experiments can be carried out to test other ideas highly relevant to human aggression. As I will try to demonstrate, it is important for us to learn, for instance, whether persons exposed to decidedly unpleasant but psychologically nonthreatening atmospheric conditions are more likely to be assaultive than they otherwise would have been in a more comfortable surrounding and whether the sight of others fighting raises the odds that the viewers will be aggressive themselves. In these cases experiments give us the best chance of determining whether the factor of interest (e.g., the physically unpleasant situation), and not other possible influences, can indeed affect the probability of the given outcome (e.g., lead to greater aggression). No one claims that the results of any one study by itself are totally unequivocal. But we can gain greater confidence in the validity of the notion being tested if we have consistent findings over a number of similar experimental investigations, and so I've tried as much as possible to cite experiments whose results are supported by other similar findings.

However, it should be clear from the outset that this book does not attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of the great many investigations that could have been mentioned even in the topic areas I do take up, whether the studies are experiments or naturalistic observations. I regard the present work as a general introduction to the research and theory of human aggression more than a technical and scholarly review of the pertinent literature, and thus have deliberately selected only some of the pertinent investigations for special attention. In my view these studies are among the very best in their particular research area, and illustrate well the issues I discuss. I do not claim in any of these cases that the studies cited are the final word and that the questions they address are answered once and for all. But I do think they furnish generally good support for arguments I offer and the theoretical points I try to

make. Readers wanting to learn of other studies on the topics covered in this work will find that the chapter endnotes contain references to other, related investigations as well as the citations to the studies I do discuss in the body of this text. (The endnotes also occasionally report relevant details about these studies.) Yet even with these additional references, those with special interests in this area would do well to build on the discussion offered here by seeking further information from the many journals and texts I could have, but didn't, review in this book.

One final comment is warranted. Many of the matters discussed in this work are highly controversial and a number of them have political and ideological overtones. Readers might thus be tempted to characterize the position I take in these chapters in political terms, saying I'm a liberal—or a conservative—and then dismiss my arguments as politically biased. While I do hold fairly strong social and political opinions and cannot maintain that I'm free of ideological biases, I would like to note that the views expressed and the conclusions I've drawn range widely over the sociopolitical spectrum. With many conservatives, I believe a good deal of criminal violence is facilitated by inadequate personal restraints and that we need adequate social controls if we are to deal effectively with some violent offenders. At the other end of the political dimension, I think that American society gains little long-term benefit from capital punishment in its efforts to reduce homicide rates, and I am also convinced that the stresses and strains produced of poverty contribute to the development and maintenance of aggressive inclinations. The evidence requires such a mixture of positions. My sociopolitical beliefs and values might well have helped shape these particular views to some degree, but the stances I've taken in this book are also a response, to a considerable extent, to the findings obtained by empirical research. Social policies in areas such as the control and reduction of violence should rest as much as possible on good evidence obtained from scientifically sound research, and I've tried to rely on many of the best studies I know on this topic in writing this book.

Having this base in empirical research, this book is therefore in many ways a truly collaborative endeavor. It wouldn't have been at all possible without the dedication, skill and insights of the many investigators (including Al Bandura, Bob Baron, Ed Donnerstein, Len Eron, David Farrington, Sy Feshbach, Russ Geen, and Dolph Zillmann) who have sought to learn the causes and consequences of human aggression, and I'm pleased to acknowledge my indebtedness to them. I also want to thank Robert Arkin, University of Missouri, Columbia; Avshalom Caspi, University of Wisconsin, Madison; Len Eron, University of Illinois at Chicago; Robert Feldman, University of Massachusetts at Amherst; Roger Johnson, Ramapo College; Jacques-Philippe Leyens, University of Louvain, Belgium; Neil Malamuth, University of California, Los Angeles; Colleen Moore, University of Wisconsin, Madison; David Myers,

University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa; Steven Prentice-Dunn, Hope College; David Senn, Clemson University; and Charles Turner, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, who have read and commented on individual chapters; my students and colleagues in experimental social psychology, in Wisconsin and elsewhere, who have taught me much about many different facets of human behavior; and my editors, Christopher Rogers and Phil Zimbardo, who have been so encouraging and thoughtful in their recommendations. And I'm especially grateful to my wife, Norma, for the recommendations she made about some of the chapters, for the support she has given me as I've labored on this project over the years, and for the oh-so-many other reasons that I hope she knows.

Leonard Berkowitz

Contents



FOREWORD	xix
PREFACE	xxi
1 THE PROBLEM OF AGGRESSION	1
<i>What Is Aggression?</i>	3
<i>All Too Many Meanings</i>	3
Following Everyday Meanings 4 / Defining Aggression without Motivational Assumptions 5 / Aggression as Wrongful Behavior 5	
<i>The Goals of Aggression</i>	7
Aggression's Noninjurious Goals 8 / Different Kinds of Aggressive Goals 10	
<i>Wanting to Hurt</i>	10
The Present Definition 11 / Is Injury Always the Primary Goal? 11 / Other Distinctions 15	
<i>Some Words about Anger, Hostility, and Aggressiveness</i>	19
<i>Anger Differs from Aggression</i>	20
<i>Hostility</i>	21
<i>Aggressiveness</i>	21
<i>Summary</i>	21
<i>Notes</i>	23
PART 1 EMOTIONAL AGGRESSION	25
<i>What Is Emotional Aggression?</i>	26
<i>Impulsive (or Expressive) Emotional Aggression</i>	26

Other Possible Aggressive Aims 27 / They May Also Want to Hurt 27	
<i>Notes</i>	29
2 EFFECTS OF FRUSTRATIONS	30
<i>The 1939 Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis</i>	31
<i>Definition and Basic Propositions</i>	31
<i>Applying the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis</i>	33
<i>Do Only Some Kinds of Frustrations Produce Aggression?</i>	34
<i>Only Arbitrary (Illegitimate) Frustrations 35 / Thwartings Attributed to Another's Deliberate Misbehavior 37 / Why Attributions Can Influence Aggressive Reactions 38</i>	
<i>Frustrations Can Lead to Aggression Even When the Thwarting Is Not a Deliberate Mistreatment</i>	40
<i>Naturalistic Observations 40 / Experimental Findings 41</i>	
<i>Some Conditions That Increase the Likelihood of Aggressive Reactions to Frustration</i>	43
<i>Revising the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis</i>	44
<i>Attributions Influence the Degree of Felt Displeasure</i>	45
<i>Can Frustrations and Insults Be Compared?</i>	45
<i>Summary</i>	45
<i>Notes</i>	47
3 WE'RE NASTY WHEN WE FEEL BAD	48
<i>Negative Affect as the Root of Emotional Aggression</i>	49
<i>Animal Studies of Pain-Elicited Aggression</i>	49
<i>Fight and Flight Tendencies Can Occur Together 50 / Is the Aim of Aversively Stimulated Aggression Only the Cessation of the Noxious Stimulation? 50</i>	
<i>Human Aggression in Response to Aversive Events</i>	51
<i>The Great Variety of Negative Conditions That Can Evoke Aggression 51 / The Aggression Is Aimed Not Only at the Elimination of the Unpleasant Event 53</i>	
<i>Negative Affect, Aggressive Inclinations, and Anger</i>	55
<i>Negative Affect, Not Stress</i>	56
<i>A Brief Summary of the Present Theoretical Model 56</i>	
<i>Anger Often Accompanies Other Negative Emotions</i>	60

Anger Often Coexists with Other Negative Emotions 60 / Some Qualifications and Limiting Factors 64 / Are All Negative Feelings Alike? 68	
<i>Pulling Out Impulsive Aggression: The Role of Aggressive Cues</i>	69
<i>Reactions to External Cues</i>	70
The "Weapons Effect" as an Example of Reactions to Aggressive Cues 70 / Cues Associated with Unpleasant Events 75 / The Available Target's Connection with Unpleasantness 76	
<i>Summary</i>	79
<i>Notes</i>	81
4 DOES THINKING MAKE IT SO?	
<i>Cognitions and Emotion</i>	84
<i>Theories of Emotion</i>	85
<i>What Determines the Emotional Experience?</i>	85
<i>Cognitive Formulations of Emotion</i>	85
<i>What Interpretations Produce Anger? 85</i>	
<i>Experimental Demonstrations of the Role of Attributions in Emotions</i>	89
The Schachter-Singer Two-Factor Theory of Emotions 89 / The Misattribution Experiments 91 / Attributions in Excitation Transfer 93 / Attributions and the Effects of Mitigating Information 95 / Reinterpreting Attribution Effects from the Associative Network Perspective 96	
<i>Cognitions Don't Always "Make It So": Evidence of Noncognitive Influences upon Emotion</i>	97
<i>Effects of Expressive Reactions</i>	98
The James-Lange Theory of Emotions 98 / Effects of Facial Expressions and Other Muscular Reactions 99	
<i>Bodily Reactions and Cognitions: An Associative Network Interpretation</i>	101
Displaying Signs of Anger 101 / Moods Can Influence Thoughts 102 / Hostile Thoughts Can Result from Unpleasant Feelings 103	
<i>Thoughts Do Matter</i>	104
<i>Keeping Hostility Alive: The Ill Effects of Brooding</i>	104

Sharpening and Strengthening a Negative Conception 105 / Thoughts Can Stimulate Angry Feelings and Aggressive Inclinations 105 / The Concept of "Priming" 106	
<i>Thoughts Influence Restraints on Aggression</i>	107
Anonymity, the Risk of Being Caught, and Self-Control 108	
<i>Why People Can Hold Nonaggressive Values and Still Be Aggressive</i>	112
Out of Mind 112 / Not Seeing Any Inconsistency 113	
<i>Summary</i>	119
<i>Notes</i>	121
 PART 2 AGGRESSIVE PERSONALITIES	 125
 5 THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE VIOLENCE PRONE	 127
<i>Are Some People Consistently Disposed to be Aggressive?</i>	127
The Controversy about the Existence of Traits 127 / Two Kinds of Consistency 128	
<i>Demonstrations of Different Forms of Contemporaneous Consistency</i>	129
Consistency Between the Laboratory and "Real Life" 129 / Consistency between Forms of Aggression (Response Generalization) in Everyday Life 130 / Consistency Across Situations: Combining Stimulus and Response Generalization 131	
<i>Stability in Aggressive Behavior through the Years: Longitudinal Consistency</i>	134
The Olweus Review of Research on Longitudinal Stability of Aggression 134 / Two Noteworthy Investigations 135	
<i>How Aggressive Personalities Operate</i>	142
<i>Different Kinds of Aggressive People</i>	142
Emotionally Reactive versus Instrumental Types of Frequent Aggressors 142 / Some Examples of Instrumentally Oriented Aggressors 143 / Emotionally Reactive Aggressors 148 / The Type A Personality as Reactively Aggressive 154	
<i>Summary</i>	157
<i>Notes</i>	159