

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GROUP AGGRESSION

Arnold P. Goldstein

*School of Education, Center for Research on Aggression
Syracuse University, USA*



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John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158-0012, USA

Jossey-Bass, 989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741, USA

Wiley-VCH Verlag GmbH, Pappelallee 3, D-69469 Weinheim, Germany

John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd, 33 Park Road, Milton, Queensland 4064, Australia

John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte Ltd, 2 Clementi Loop #02-01, Jin Xing Distripark, Singapore 129809

John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd, 22 Worcester Road, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada M9W 1L1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-470-84515-5 (cased)

ISBN 0-470-84516-3 (paper)

Typeset in 10/12 pt Palatino by TechBooks, New Delhi, India

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham Wiltshire

This book is printed on acid-free paper responsibly manufactured from sustainable forestry in which at least two trees are planted for each one used for paper production.

Publishers' note

As this book is being prepared for publication, the Publishers have learned the sad news of Arnold P. Goldstein's death. We hope this book will be seen as a worthy part of Professor Goldstein's substantial contribution and legacy to research on aggression, to his colleagues, and to students of psychology and education.

All of us at John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., extend our deepest sympathies to his family and friends

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arnold P. Goldstein, PhD, was the Director of the Center for Research on Aggression at Syracuse University, Director of the New York State Task Force on Juvenile Gangs, and co-founder of the International Center for Aggression Replacement Training. He served on the American Psychological Association Commission on Youth Violence and on the Council of Representatives for the International Society for Research on Aggression. He was the author of 55 books and 100 articles on violence, aggression, delinquency, abuse, and related issues. His work was honored with numerous awards, including the Career Achievement Award from the American Psychological Association's Committee on Children, Youth, and Families (1996), the Senior Scientist Award from the APA Psychology Division (1996), and most recently, the 2002 Devereux Massachusetts Legacy of Caring Award.

SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

ABOUT THE SERIES

At the time of writing it is clear that we live in a time, certainly in the UK and other parts of Europe, if perhaps less so in other parts of the world, when there is renewed enthusiasm for constructive approaches to working with offenders to prevent crime. What do we mean by this statement and what basis do we have for making it?

First, by "constructive approaches to working with offenders" we mean bringing the use of effective methods and techniques of behaviour change into work with offenders. Indeed, this might pass as a definition of forensic clinical psychology. Thus, our focus is application of theory and research in order to develop practice aimed at bringing about a change in the offender's functioning. The word *constructive* is important and can be set against approaches to behaviour change that seek to operate by destructive means. Such destructive approaches are typically based on the principles of deterrence and punishment, seeking to suppress the offender's actions through fear and intimidation. A constructive approach, on the other hand, seeks to bring about changes in an offender's functioning that will produce, say, enhanced possibilities of employment, greater levels of self-control, better family functioning, or increased awareness of the pain of victims.

A constructive approach faces the criticism of being a "soft" response to damage caused by offenders, neither inflicting pain and punishment nor delivering retribution. This point raises a serious question for those involved in working with offenders. Should advocates of constructive approaches oppose retribution as a goal of the criminal justice system as incompatible with treatment and rehabilitation? Alternatively, should constructive work with offenders take place within a system given to retribution? We believe that this issue merits serious debate.

However, to return to our starting point, history shows that criminal justice systems are littered with many attempts at constructive work with offenders, not all of which have been successful. In raising the spectre of success, the second part of our opening sentence now merits attention: that is, "constructive approaches to working with offenders *to prevent crime*". In order to achieve the goal of preventing crime, interventions must focus on the right targets for behaviour change. In addressing this crucial point, Andrews and Bonta (1994) have formulated the *need principle*:

Many offenders, especially high-risk offenders, have a variety of needs. They need places to live and work and/or they need to stop taking drugs. Some have poor self-esteem, chronic headaches or cavities in their teeth. These are all "needs". The need principle draws our attention to the distinction between *criminogenic* and *noncriminogenic* needs. Criminogenic needs are a subset of an offender's risk level. They are dynamic attributes of an offender that, when changed, are associated with changes in the probability of recidivism. Non-criminogenic needs are also dynamic and changeable, but these changes are not necessarily associated with the probability of recidivism. (p. 176)

Thus, successful work with offenders can be judged in terms of bringing about change in noncriminogenic need *or* in terms of bringing about change in criminogenic need. While the former is important and, indeed, may be a necessary precursor to offence-focused work, it is changing criminogenic need that, we argue, should be the touchstone of working with offenders.

While, as noted above, the history of work with offenders is not replete with success, the research base developed since the early 1990s, particularly the meta-analyses (e.g. Lösel, 1995), now strongly supports the position that effective work with offenders to prevent further offending is possible. The parameters of such evidence-based practice have become well established and widely disseminated under the banner of "What Works" (McGuire, 1995).

It is important to state that we are not advocating that there is only one approach to preventing crime. Clearly there are many approaches, with different theoretical underpinnings, that can be applied. Nonetheless, a tangible momentum has grown in the wake of the "What Works" movement as academics, practitioners, and policy makers seek to capitalise on the possibilities that this research raises for preventing crime. The task now facing many service agencies lies in turning the research into effective practice.

Our aim in developing this Series in Forensic Clinical Psychology is to produce texts that review research and draw on clinical expertise to advance effective work with offenders. We are both committed to the ideal of evidence-based practice and we will encourage contributors to the Series to follow this approach. Thus, the books published in the Series will not be practice manuals or "cook books": they will offer readers authoritative and critical information through which forensic clinical practice can develop. We are both enthusiastic about the contribution to effective practice that this Series can make and look forward to it developing in the years to come.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

It is with mixed emotions that we write about this book. On one hand, we were delighted to have attracted Professor Goldstein to write a book for our Series. Professor Goldstein's research and writing on the topic of aggression and violence has had a significant impact among the academic community of teachers and researchers. More importantly, his work on changing violent behaviour, particularly his programme Aggression Replacement Training (ART; Goldstein, Glick, & Gibbs, 1998), has influenced the efforts of practitioners all over the world. The worldwide influence of ART was seen in 2001 with formation of the International Center for

Aggression Replacement Training (ICART). The formation of ICART was marked with a conference in Malmö, Sweden, which attracted over 750 delegates from 20 countries. That the first day of the conference was 12 September 2001 added a certain sombre emphasis to the proceedings. It is a remarkable testimony to Professor Goldstein's work that his research and publications are so relevant to today's issues, and that his contribution should be recognised on such a global stage.

The book Professor Goldstein has written for our Series looks at the phenomenon of aggression that takes place in groups. While there are, of course, singularly aggressive individuals who habitually behave in a violent manner, there are also occasions when the group takes over and the pack rules. On such occasions even the seemingly mildest of people can act in ways they would not have thought possible. The psychology of the group and, indeed, the crowd is well documented in the mainstream social psychology literature.

Like all good applied psychologists, Professor Goldstein knows his theory and he marshals what we know about group dynamics as a platform for understanding real-life aggressive behaviour. It is tempting to think of aggression and violence in its most extreme forms, such as robbery, rape, and murder, but aggression is much more pervasive than as seen in its most extreme forms. Anyone who has been the target for gossip, rumour, innuendo, harassment or bullying will testify that such forms of "low-level" aggression can be extremely damaging, in terms of both psychological and physical well-being. Professor Goldstein begins this book by considering various manifestations of low-level aggression, adding significantly to our understanding of how aggression is an implicit part of our culture. Moving through the more obvious groups – delinquent gangs and the mob – Professor Goldstein arrives at intervention. The overview he gives of types and styles on intervention begins to show just what is possible, the depth of effort and expertise needed to be effective, and the size of the task. As with all Professor Goldstein's books, his easy writing style makes it a pleasure to read and learn.

Our delight at having Professor Goldstein's book in our Series pales at the news of his recent death. The loss of Professor Goldstein is a major blow to the communities of academics and practitioners committed to reducing aggression in society. There is no doubt that Professor Goldstein had a great deal still to give and now that has been taken away.

If I (Clive) might be permitted at individual note, the loss of Arnie is deeply felt for me personally. I first corresponded with Arnie at the very beginning of my career and took great encouragement from the fact that so venerable a figure from the literature should write to me, concerned about my fledging efforts at research and practice. Of course, when you knew the man, you understood that that was exactly what he would do: he cared deeply about the prevention of aggression and, and as I'm sure others will also testify, encouraged the efforts of all those with similar concerns. Over the years, through continued correspondence, contributions to each other's edited books, and meeting at conferences, I came to count Arnie as one the closest of my academic friends. I last saw him in Malmö at the ART conference. I was honoured to be asked by Arnie give the opening paper at that conference and can honestly say that I have never been so nervous in my life! It's no easy task to present a theoretical paper on aggression in front of the master. Anyway, he said I did okay and that's good enough for me. I'll miss him dreadfully.

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PREFACE

Human history, written with a gloomy but accurate pen, is a litany of groups of persons seeking to hurt other such groups. Such efforts at, often successful, bodily and psychological injury go by many terms—rumor-mongering, group bullying, gang rape, mob aggression, feuds, riots, rebellions, insurrections, mass murder, war, genocide. Perhaps no human quality has been more evident, more damaging, and more enduring.

A wide array of professions center their efforts and energies on seeking better understanding of group aggression in its many incarnations, and in attempting to devise and implement means for its prevention, moderation, or control. Psychology is among these professions, and the present book seeks to present and examine its contribution in this context. I claim no primacy for what psychology has to offer. Instead, I seek to place its efforts alongside those of sociology, political science, criminology, and other relevant disciplines. The problem is uniquely immense. All contributions are welcome.

I begin by reflecting the fact that group aggression is typically a *group* phenomenon, not merely a behavior emanating from a random collective of separate individuals. As such, this book's journey begins with a detailed presentation of theory and research on those dimensions of group life that bear apparent or even probable relevance to the domain of aggression. How and why groups form, their goals, leadership, cohesiveness, conflict, norms, power structure, communication patterns, and, especially, relations with other groups, are among the topics considered. These and other arenas of group organization and functioning are offered in Chapter 1 as a template for informed consideration, in the chapters that follow, of the various major forms group aggression has taken.

Using this group dynamics template, I invite readers to join me in seeking to understand more fully the causes, nature, and modification of low-level group aggression (Chapter 2), bullying and harassment (Chapter 3), gang violence (Chapter 4), mob aggression (Chapter 5), and both established and emerging means for intervening effectively in this domain (Chapter 6).

Psychology's contribution to understanding and moderating group aggression is both modest (given the enormity of the problem), and yet significant as but one large piece in a multicomponent intervention effort. I explore this contribution here toward the dual goals of the continued expansion of its substance and continued application of its fruits.

Part I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

AGGRESSION-RELEVANT GROUP DYNAMICS

Over the past 75 years, a substantial wealth of literature has grown dealing with the structure and functioning of human groups. Theory, research findings, and creative speculation are its diverse formats. Its specific contents are numerous and varied, and include both an array of intragroup concerns (e.g., cohesiveness, leadership, performance), and topics focused upon between-group phenomena (e.g., conflict, cooperation, aggression). The generators of this knowledge base are largely social psychologists, but also include sociologists, criminologists, mediators, group therapists, group trainers, and professionals from yet other disciplines. The present chapter seeks to summarize those segments of this literature that are of apparent or even possible relevance to group aggression, and to offer it as a pool of information, many of whose particulars we hypothesize to be potentially relevant to the main concerns of this book. It is our contention, and already some of our experience, that viewing the chief topics constituting the group aggression theme—e.g., bullying, gang violence, riots—through the lenses of the group dynamics literature can aid greatly both in understanding their source and substance, and in reducing their frequency and intensity.

As noted, I describe and examine this literature in the present chapter. Where and when possible, in subsequent chapters I seek to draw upon it as a template clarifying better our understanding of the structure and processes involved when groups either perpetrate or are the targets of aggression by multiple others. Our template applying effort is, however, but a mere beginning. We hope that by thusly providing and utilizing the accumulated group dynamics literature, others will similarly be encouraged to do so.

THEORIES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOR

Realistic Conflict Theory

Competition between groups in the real world—nations, tribes, athletic teams, gangs, ethnic groups, and others—is a pervasive and enduring phenomenon, a phenomenon of major social and political salience and significance. As Forsyth (1983) observes: