

# Lectures on Aggression- Week 4

- Treatment of Carr (2003) – Ereserve
- Aggression in animals (Lorenz)- Ereserve
- The violent media effects thesis

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## Concepts

- “behaviour that is intended to hurt another person or group” (p.359)
- Defining feature: emotions in play

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Figure 10.1 (Carr, p.359)

Mode	Physical	Psychological
<b>Experience</b>		
Hot (expressive)	Jealous rage	Prejudice
Cold (instrumental)	Professional foul	Career sabotage

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## A rethink of aggression

- No consensus on what aggression is

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## Aggression has been defined as

- “behaviour that results in personal injury or destruction of property” (Bandura, 1973)
- “behaviour intended to harm another of the same species” (Scherer, Abeles, & Fischer, 1975)
- “behaviour directed towards the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment” (Baron, 1977)

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## Continued

- “the intentional infliction of some form of harm on others” (Baron & Byrne, 2000)
- “behaviour directed towards another individual carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm” (Anderson & Huesmann, 2003)

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# Aggression operationalised

- Eg. What counts as aggression in a social psychology experiment?
  - pushing, shoving, striking
  - Verbal insults, facial expression, threatening gestures
  - Pushing a button supposedly delivering a electric shock to someone else (Buss, 1961)
  - Ratings of children’s levels of aggressiveness (Eron, 1982)
  - A verbal expression of a willingness to use violence (Geen, 1978)

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# Aggression in the Home (Carr)

- Males as perpetrators of domestic violence (sociological and cultural factors)
- Gottman’s(2000) theory of positive balance in relationship
  - Positive/Negative experiences shouldn’t fall below 5 to 1.
  - Identifies tit-for-tat strategies in relationships as destructive of relationships

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# Aggression in the community

- The temperature aggression thesis
- The theory contested

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## The evidence from studies of aggression in animals

- Lorenz, Konrad. (1963). *On aggression*. London: Methuen.

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## An Ethological perspective on aggression

- Ethology: the study of animal behaviour in natural settings
- Aggression ... “the fighting instinct in beast and man which is directed against members of the same species” (Lorenz, 1963, p. ix)

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## Lorenz, K. (1969). *On aggression*. Norfolk: University Paperback.

- Studying animals in their natural habitat or simulated natural habitat
- An evolutionary perspective- a natural history of aggression
- Evolutionary significance of phylogenesis
- “Fish are far more aggressive towards their own species than towards any other” (1969, p.13)

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## Aggression- what is it good for?

- Answer 1: **Aggression in animals has a protective function** (prey defending against predator) The phenomena of “mobbing”
- Fighting role distinguished from hunter role (the former associated with aggression; the latter not)

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## Aggression- what is it good for?

- Answer 2: **Defence of the young.** “fighting like a cornered rat” is motivated by an invasion of an animal’s critical distance
- Readiness to fight is greatest in the animals’ familiar (home) territory and least furthest from home

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## Aggression – what is it good for?

- Answer 3: **Within a species, aggression spaces out animals so that they don’t compete for the same resources** (and starve)

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## Aggression – what is it good for?

- Answer 4: **Structuring animal society.**  
Establishing a “pecking order”
- Ritualised fighting- fighting fair.

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## Aggression – what is it good for?

- Answer 5: **Establishing the bond**
- Complex interplay of aggressive and mating instincts

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## Lorenz- conclusion

- Evolutionary perspective on the social life of animals

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## Aggression in sport

- Frustration/Aggression hypothesis
- Aggression-catharsis hypothesis
- Social learning theory

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## Aggression & Media influence

- Is there a relation between comic book reading and aggressive behaviour?
- Is there a relation between television viewing and aggressive behaviour?
- Is there a relation between videogame playing and aggressive behaviour?

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## The findings on videogames & aggression

- Van Shie & Wiegman (1997) – no relation
- Griffiths (1997) elevated levels of aggression in children but not in teenagers
- Kestenbaum & Weistein (1985): discharge of pent up energies thesis
- McLure & Mears (1986) No pathological tendencies among high-rate players
- Fleming & Rickwood (2001)- increased arousal following the playing of a 'violent' videogame

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## Violence on television –APA report

- Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others
- Children may be more fearful of the world around them
- Children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others
- Gerbner

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## A summary of Eron’s work

- Investigated the long-term effects of televisual violence (children to age 30yrs)
- Children who watched many hours of TV violence when they were in elementary school tended to show higher levels of aggressive behaviour when teenagers

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## Media effects (aggression): do they exist?

- Articles in newspapers and magazines routinely ask questions like: “Do gory videogames make children more aggressive?”
- Articles of the kind suggested above support a discourse which alleges violent media effects

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## The relation between visual media and behaviour

- The alleged culprits are **media texts**.
- How do people engage with media texts?
- They engage as **audiences**.
- **A theory of audience/text is required.**

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## Key elements in explaining relations with audio-visual media

- Representation
  - A theory of audience/text
- Cultural productivity

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## Representation & audiovisual media

- Audio-visual texts are a form of representation (to present again)
- The map is not the territory (the representation/that which is represented)
- First-hand (f2f) and second-hand accounts (audio-visual representation)

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## Fictional representation vs Non-fictional representation

1. Highly stylised violence in fictional programs (examples are shootings in a movie like Die Hard; the character vanquishing in videogames such as Mortal Kombat or Doom).
2. Ordinary everyday violence in news reports.

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## Representation

- A culture's preoccupations are preserved, stored, and disseminated in its representation
- Audience-text; reader-text. Engagement of audiences with audio-visual texts. Sense making, interpreting, appropriating.

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## Children's audio-visual media and aggression revisited

- How do audience members engage with violent audio-visual media?
  - Behaviour is mediated by cognition/ interpretation (texts have readers)
  - There is no knee-jerk relation between watching and behaviour
- Narrative conventions regarding the telling of (violent) stories

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## Cultural productivity

- Children's play is culturally productive
- Four cultural categories of games:
  - Competition (agon)
  - Chance (alea)
  - Simulation (mimicry)
  - Vertigo (ilinx)

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## Mimicry

“The temporary acceptance of, if not an illusion... then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe... One is thus confronted with a diverse series of manifestations, the common element of which is that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily shed his personality in order to feign another.” (Caillois, 1961, p.19)

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## Mimicry

- Piaget observed infants at around 9 months imitating the intonation patterns of adult speech (Piaget, 1962, p.51)
- Freud described the potency of mimicry in the so-called 'fort' 'da' game

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## Mimicry- Freud

- “Nor shall we be helped in our hesitation between these two views by further considering children’s play. It is clear that in their play children repeat everything that has made a very strong impression on them in real life, and that is doing so they abreact the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation (1961, pp.10-11)

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## Mimicry and the videogame

- A relation between player and videogame character
  - (Player 1: “like you are usually a cartoon character”; Player 2: “now I’ve fallen down and have to do it all over again –playing Sonic the Hedgehog); Player 3 jumps into the family couch “doing a Radon” [Mortal Kombat]

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## Research questions

### Audience/audiovisual media relations

1. Why do some audience members closely mimic what they see on audio-visual media while others do not? What salient aspects of character are mimicked?
2. How do children engage with audio-visual narratives? How do they contextualise violence and aggression?
3. How do issues in the child’s family connect with their use, and sense-making of aggression in audiovisual media?
4. What meanings are produced in children’s engagements with videogames?
5. What are the positive aspects of mimicry?

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## References (incomplete)

- Caillois, R. (1961). Man, play and games. ?
- Denham, G.W. (1998) Audio-visions: Domestic videogame play. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney.

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