

Aggressive Behavior



Discussion Questions

1. What is aggression?
2. What motivates aggressive behavior?
3. Are we born to be aggressive, or do we learn to be aggressive?
4. How do we differ in our aggressive tendencies?
5. How does media violence affect aggression?
6. How can we reduce aggression?



What is aggression?

What is aggression?

- **Aggression:** Behavior intended to harm another person
- **Violence:** Extreme acts of aggression
- **Anger:** Strong feelings of displeasure
- **Hostility:** Negative, antagonistic attitude



What is aggression?

- **Proactive aggression:**
Harm is inflicted as a means to a desired end

- AKA instrumental aggression
- No provocation or emotion
- Intentional

- **Reactive aggression:**
Harm is inflicted as a defense mechanism

- AKA emotional aggression
- Provocation
- Impulsive (even explosive)

What is aggression?

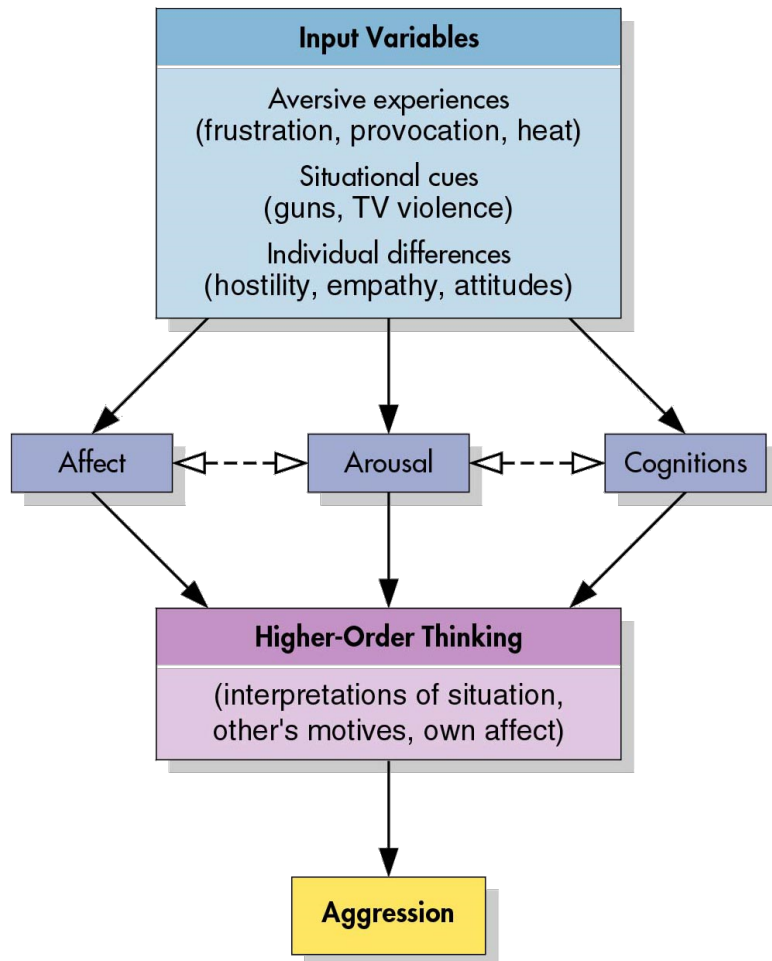
- Would a social psychologist define this as aggression?
 - Hurling insults at someone?
 - Spreading rumors about someone?
 - Swinging a stick at someone but missing?
 - Deliberately failing to prevent harm?
 - Hiring someone to slash someone's vehicle tires?
 - Murdering for money?



**What motivates aggressive
behavior?**

What motivates aggressive behavior?

- **General Aggression Model (GAM):**
Suggests aggression is the result of various factors within the aggressor and the situation



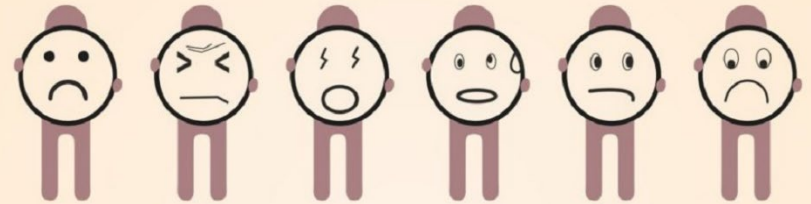
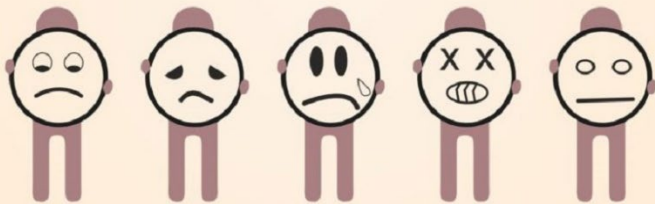
What motivates aggressive behavior?

- 1. Frustration-aggression hypothesis:** Says aggression is caused by the blocking (or frustrating) of one's efforts to reach a goal (Dollard et al., 1939)
 - Aggression is cathartic in that it releases excess frustration
 - **Displacement:** Deflecting aggression from the real target to a substitute

What motivates aggressive behavior?

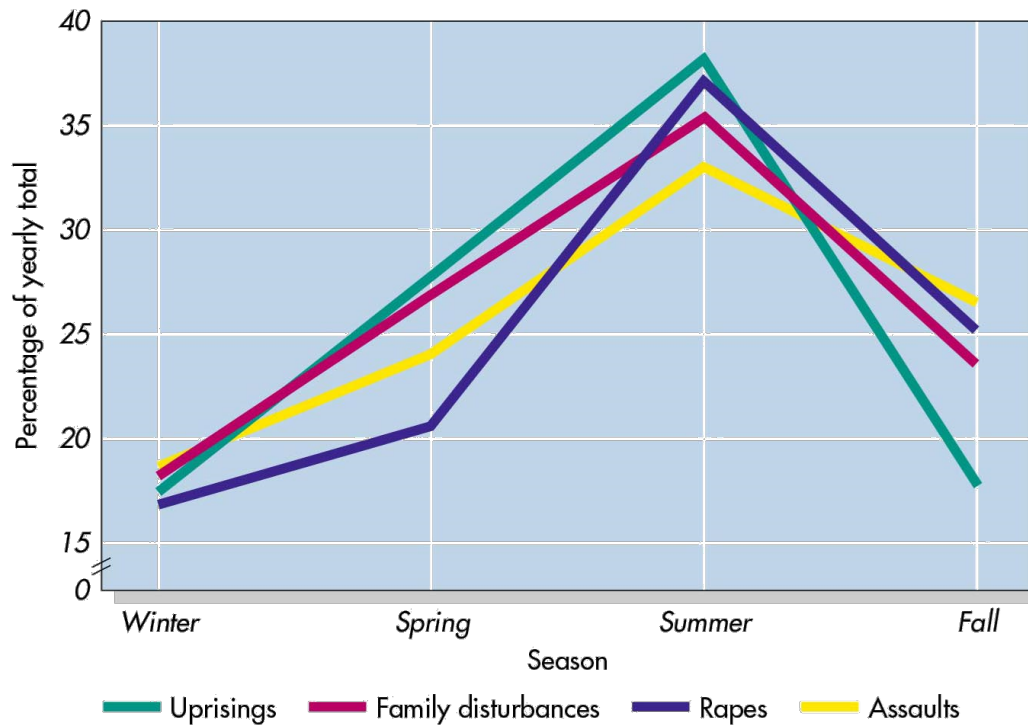
2. Negative affect and unpleasant experiences

- Noise
- Crowding
- Physical pain
- Jealousy
- Bad odors
- Insults
- Hot weather
- Threatened self-esteem
- Social rejection
- Losing
- Frustration



What motivates aggressive behavior?

Negative Affect – Hot Weather



(Anderson, 1987; Chang, 1972; Leffingwell, 1892; Lombroso, 1899/1911; Rotton & Frey, 1985)

What motivates aggressive behavior?

3. Intense physiological and psychological arousal

- **Excitation transfer:** Arousal from one stimulus can intensify emotional response to a second stimulus
 - E.g., exercise, noise, violent movies, arousing music, hot weather, pornography



What motivates aggressive behavior?

4. Aggressive cognitions

Automatic Cognition

- Activated by situational cues
- **Weapons effect:** The mere presence of a weapon encourages aggressive behavior

Deliberate Cognition

- Costs
- Norms
- Motives
 - **Hostile attribution bias:** Tendency to perceive hostile intent in others

What motivates aggressive behavior?

5. Lack of self-control caused by:

- High arousal
- Alcohol
- **Angry rumination:** Repeatedly thinking about anger-inducing events, thoughts and feelings, and revenge





**Are we born to be aggressive,
or do we learn to be
aggressive?**

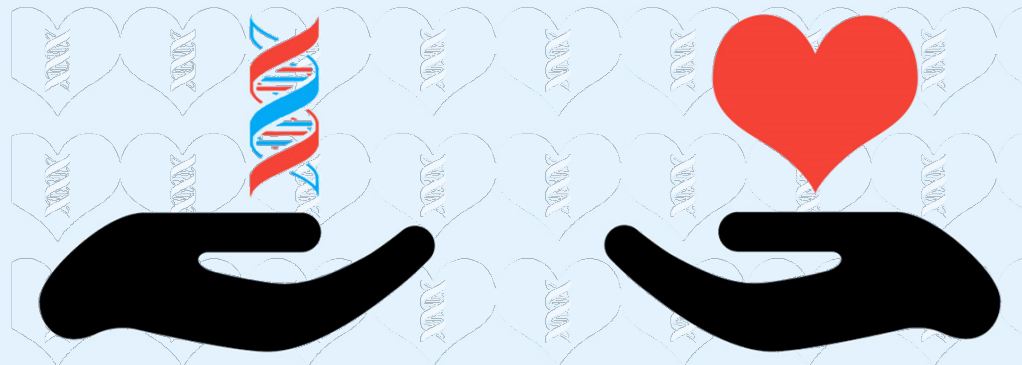
Are we born aggressive, or are we taught to be aggressive?

Evidence for Nature

- Testosterone
- Serotonin
- Brain impairment

Evidence for Nurture

- Observation
- Rewards
- Punishments



Are we born aggressive?

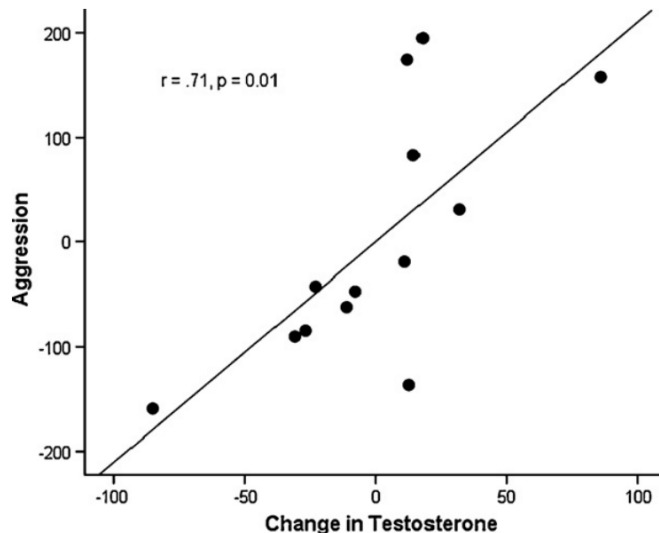
- Evolutionary psychology says:
 - Aggression is a universal, innate characteristic used to secure a mate
 - Aggression has evolved from natural selection
 - Genetic survival *motivates aggression* towards others and *inhibits aggression* toward relatives

Are we born aggressive?

- Evolutionary psychology says gender differences exist because:
 - Males use aggression to maintain status and secure a mate; females use aggression to protect their offspring
 - Males use physical aggression towards other men; women use relational aggression towards other females



Are we born aggressive?

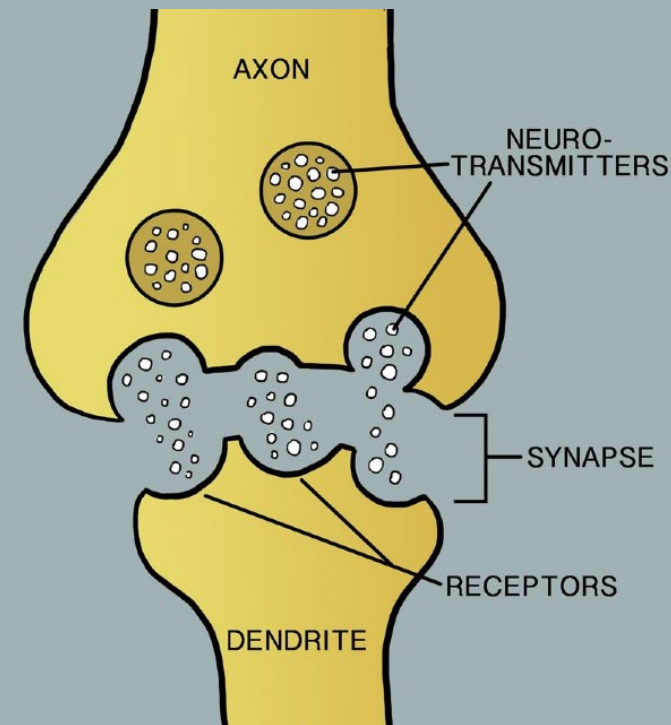


Carré et al., 2008

- Research suggests aggressiveness is partly heritable
 - Evidence A – Testosterone is positively correlated with aggression ([Carré et al., 2008](#); [Popma et al., 2006](#))
 - Decreasing testosterone can decrease aggression
 - But stress could play a role

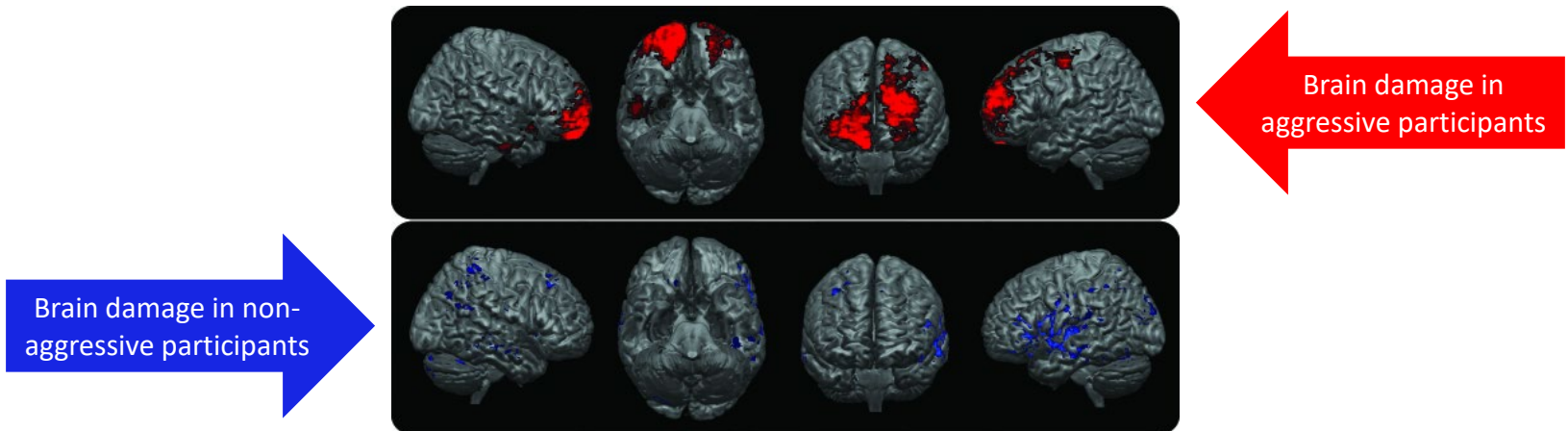
Are we born aggressive?

- Research suggests aggressiveness is partly heritable
 - Evidence B – Serotonin is negatively correlated with aggression ()
 - Increasing serotonin can decrease aggression
 - But negative affect and impulsivity also play a role



Are we born aggressive?

- Research suggests aggressiveness is partly heritable
 - Evidence C – Brain impairments are associated with increased aggression ([Pardini et al., 2011](#); [Rao et al., 2009](#))



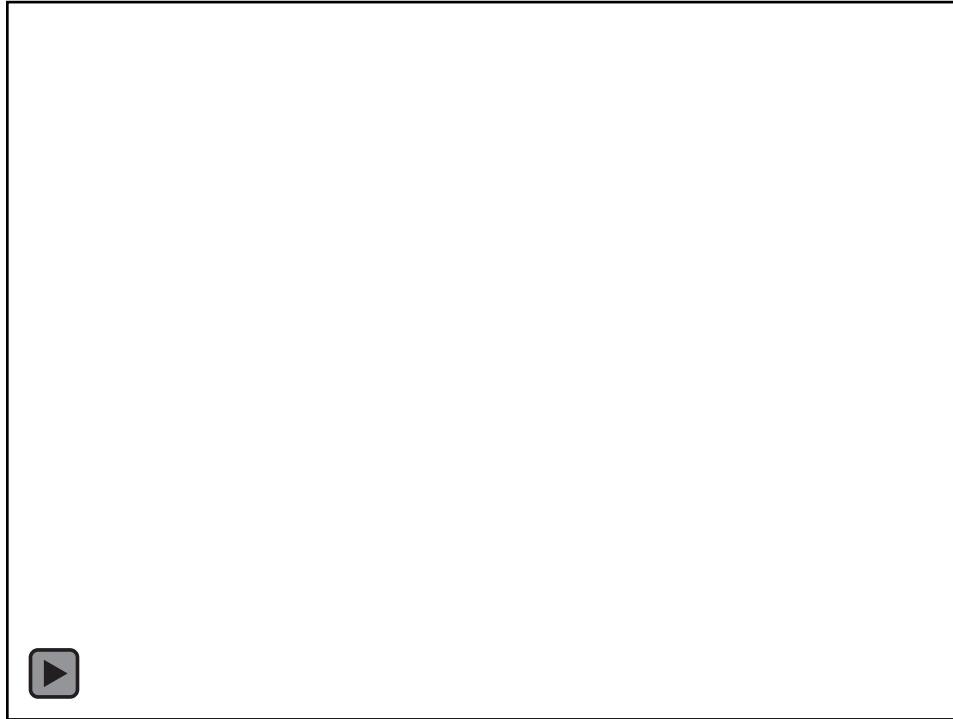
([Pardini et al., 2011](#))

Or are we taught to be aggressive?



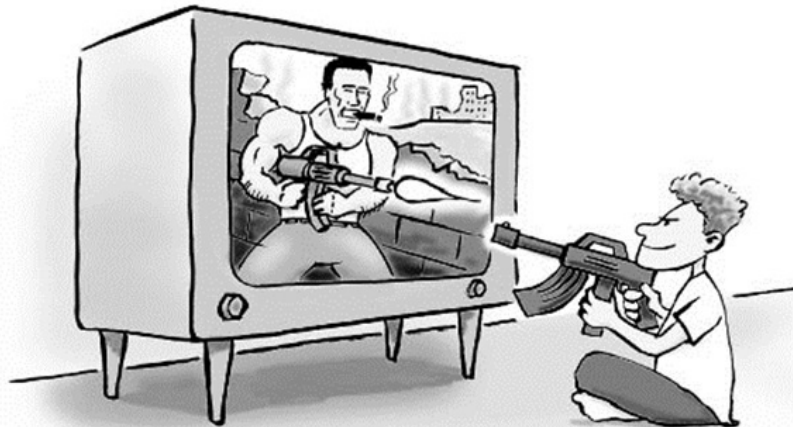
- **Social learning theory** suggests aggressive behavior is learned by observing other people's behaviors and the rewards and punishments that follow (Bandura et al., 1961)

Or are we taught to be
aggressive?



Or are we taught to be aggressive?

- Research suggests models promote aggression by:
 - Teaching specific aggressive behaviors
 - Promoting positive attitudes about aggression
 - Teaching aggressive scripts that guide behavior



Or are we taught to be aggressive?

- Research suggests aggressive behavior is more likely to occur when it has been:
 - Rewarded in the past
 - Unchecked in the past
 - Modeled in one's household or community



Or are we taught to be aggressive?

- **Positive reinforcement:** Giving something of value to encourage behavior
 - Aggression may produce desired outcomes (e.g., attention)
- **Negative reinforcement:** Taking away something unpleasant to encourage behavior
 - Aggression may stop undesirable outcomes (e.g., bullying)

Or are we taught to be aggressive?



- **Punishment:** The application of unpleasant consequences to discourage behavior
 - Absence of non-physical punishment can increase aggression

Or are we taught to be aggressive?

- **Corporal punishment:** Physical force intended to cause children pain
 - Cycle of aggression
 - Correlated with negative outcomes, including more aggression (Gershoff, 2002)



Or are we taught to be aggressive?

- Non-physical punishment can decrease aggression when it meets all these conditions:
 - Immediately follows the aggressive behavior
 - Is strong enough to deter the aggressor
 - Is consistently applied
 - Is perceived as fair and legitimate by the aggressor



**How do we differ in our
aggressive tendencies?**

How do we differ in our aggressive tendencies?

- Personality differences:
 - Childhood aggression predicts adulthood aggression

Traits associated with aggression:

- Low agreeableness
- Low openness
- High neuroticism

Traits associated with aggression *only after provocation*:

- High emotional susceptibility
- Type A personality
- High impulsivity
- High narcissism

How do we differ in our aggressive tendencies?

- Gender differences:
 - Men tend to be more *violent* than women across history and cultures
 - Men tend to use physical aggression; women tend to use relational aggression
 - Equally likely to aggress against a partner
 - Women more likely to be injured
 - Different social norms and consequences

How do we differ in our aggressive tendencies?

- Cultural differences:
 - Rates and forms of violence vary across cultures
 - Aggression rates highest in the US vs. other nations (Forbes et al., 2009; 2011)
 - Gun-related violence against individuals more likely in the US vs. other developed nations ([Grinshteyn & Hemenway, 2016](#))

How do we differ in our aggressive tendencies?

- Cultural differences:
 - Differences in values:
 - Rates higher in individualistic cultures where social harmony is less valued
 - Differences in attitudes:
 - Some cultures have more permissive attitudes about aggression
 - E.g., attitudes about guns more permissive in US

How do we differ in our aggressive tendencies?

- Subcultural differences:
 - Aggression rates highest among teenagers and young adults
 - Majority of murders are *intra-racial* (between members of the same race)
 - Murder rate highest in the South and West
 - **Culture of honor:** Prescribes that honor and social status be protected with aggression
 - **Machismo:** Prescribes that conflict be solved with aggression

How do we differ in our aggressive tendencies?

- Non-violent cultures characterized by:
 - Strong opposition to competition
 - Cooperation
 - Interdependence
 - Superordinate goals



How do we differ in our aggressive tendencies?

TABLE 11.2
Nonviolent Societies

In addition to those discussed in the text, this table lists a few of the other societies that Bruce Bonta (1997) identified as nonviolent.

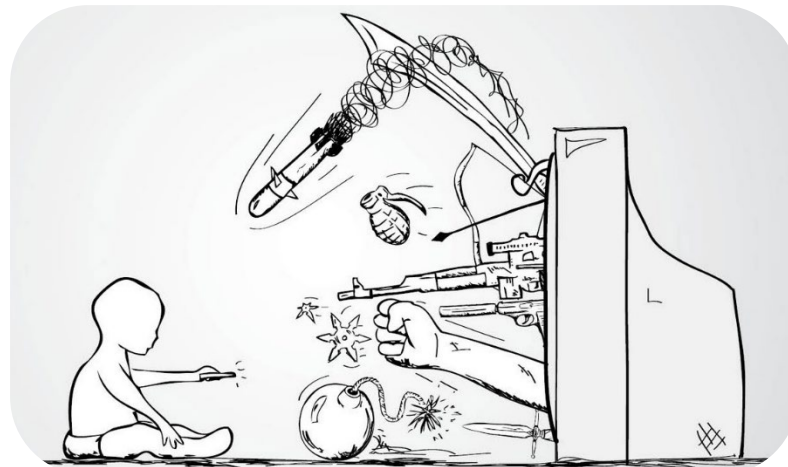
Society	Comments
Balinese (Indonesian island of Bali)	A researcher who was there for four years never even witnessed two boys fighting.
Glwi (Central Kalahari Desert of southern Africa)	They abhor violence and take pleasure from fortunate events only if they are in the company of group members.
Inuit (Arctic regions, including those in Siberia, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland)	They use strategies to control anger and prevent violence; they have a strong fear of aggression.
Ladakhis (Tibetan Buddhist society in northern India)	Villagers indicate that they have no memory of any fighting in the village.
Zapotec (Native American society in southern Mexico)	“Several researchers have been fascinated that one community is particularly peaceful, with very strong values that oppose violence, in contrast to other communities nearby where fighting and machismo are comparable with the rest of Mexico” (p. 320).



**How does media violence
affect aggression?**

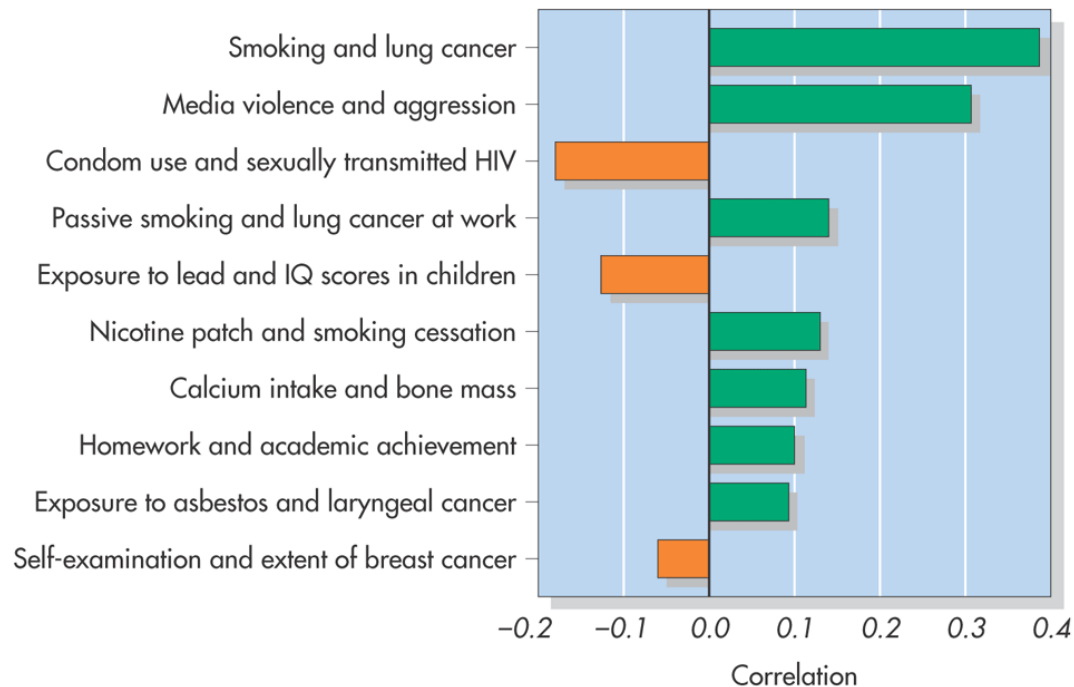
How does media violence affect aggression?

- Research using a variety of methods suggests exposure to media violence is an antecedent of aggressive behavior
 - Average young adult has viewed 200,000+ acts of violence on TV



How does media violence affect aggression?

- Correlation found using a variety of research methods

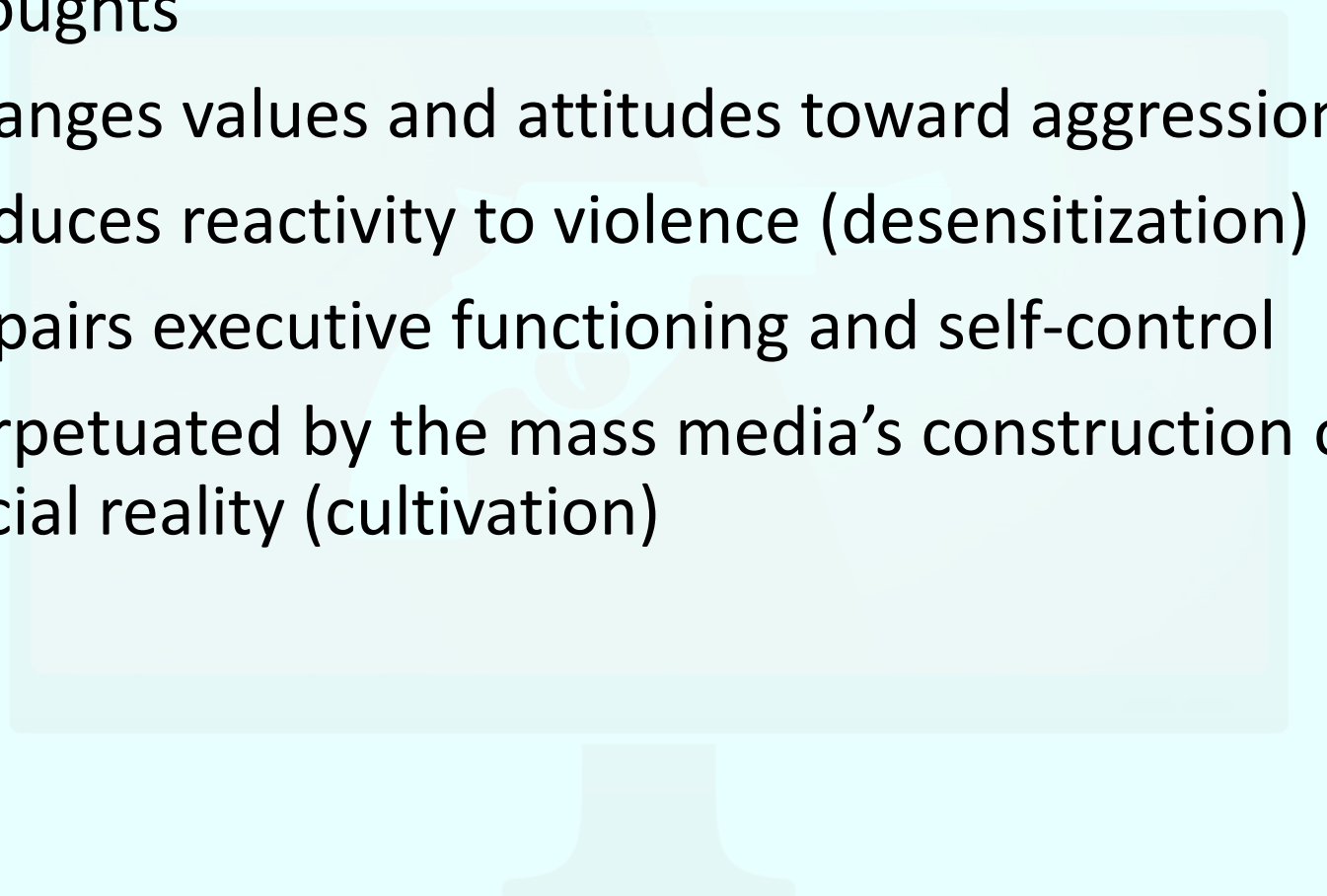


How does media violence affect aggression?

- Lack of connection between non-violent pornography and sexual aggression
- Positive correlation between:
 - Use of non-violent pornography and positive attitudes about violence against women
 - Use of violent pornography and male-to-female aggression



How does media violence affect aggression?

- Increases arousal, negative feelings, and aggressive thoughts
 - Changes values and attitudes toward aggression
 - Reduces reactivity to violence (desensitization)
 - Impairs executive functioning and self-control
 - Perpetuated by the mass media's construction of social reality (cultivation)
- 



**How can we reduce
aggression?**

How can we reduce aggression?

- **Micro-level approaches** attempt to address emotional and cognitive factors
 - Improve education, intelligence, reasoning, empathy, motivation, self-control, and/or affect
 - Use aggression replacement training
 - Use behavior modification
 - Address testosterone or serotonin levels



How can we reduce aggression?

- **Macro-level approaches** attempt to address situational and sociocultural factors
 - Reduce aggression by improving:
 - Living conditions
 - Social support
 - Educational and employment opportunities
 - Access to healthcare

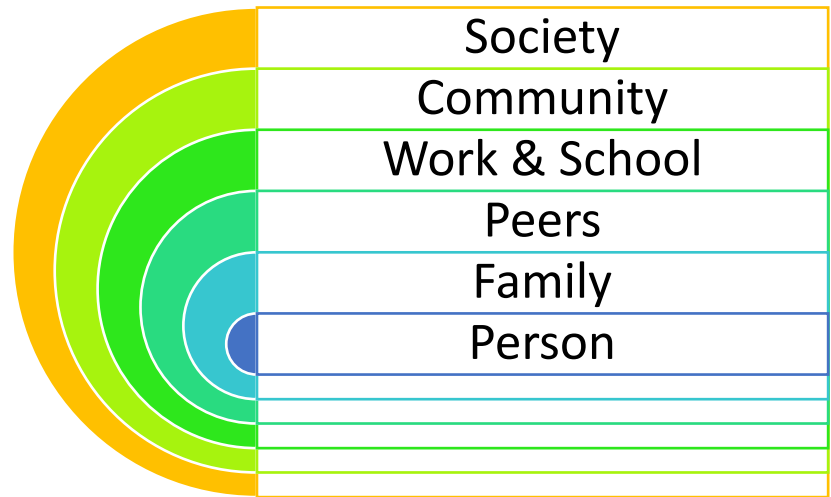


How can we reduce aggression?

- Macro-level approaches:
 - Reduce prevalence of guns
 - Model non-aggressive responses to stressors
 - Emphasize cooperation and shared goals
 - Increase costs and decreases rewards of aggression
 - Use public pressure to institute media self-censorship
 - Minimize exposure to media violence

How can we reduce aggression?

- **Multi-systemic approaches** attempt to address aggression at multiple levels simultaneously



How can we reduce aggression?

- Multi-systemic approach is used to address and prevent problems in organizations
 - Programs to teach empathy
 - Programs to train bystanders how to intervene
 - Programs to address bullying
 - E.g., [Olweus Bullying Prevention Program](#), empathy training programs, bystander intervention programs