

Aggression

# Aggression

- Physical aggression
  - Behaviour with the intent of causing physical harm to another person
- Relational/social aggression
  - Behaviour with the intent to cause harm to another person's self-esteem, status, or emotions
- Hostile aggression
  - Hot, impulsive, angry, with the intention of hurting someone
- Instrumental aggression
  - Cold, premeditated, aggression as a means to an end

# Aggression

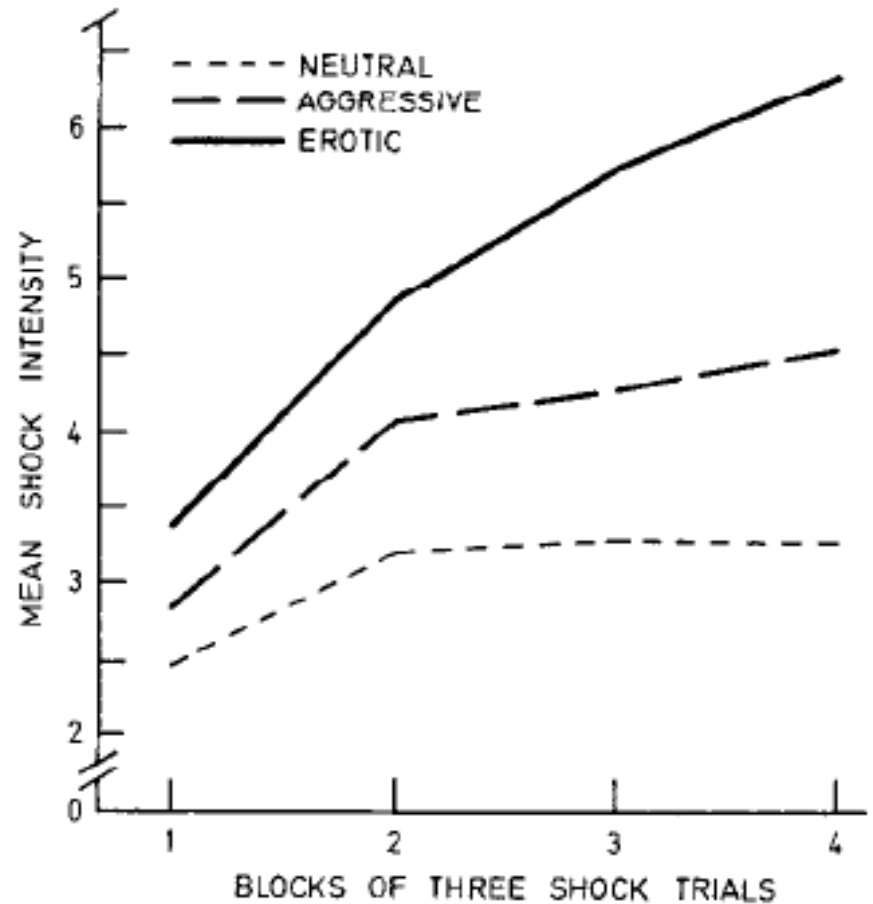
- Thinking back to earlier in the course, how would each of these topics be related to aggression?
  - Schemas
  - Stereotypes
  - Scripts
  - Emotions
  - Priming
  - Social influence
  - Attributions

# A couple theories

- Evolutionary predisposition towards *the capacity* for violence
- Aggression results from direct provocation by others
- Aggression results from frustration

# A couple theories

- Excitation transfer theory (Zillman, 1971; 1972)
  - Arousal in one situation can transfer to others
  - The effect of arousal is general and decays slowly with time



# A couple theories

- Social learning teaches individuals specific aggressive behaviours
  - Who is an acceptable target
  - Ways to aggress
  - Situations and contexts where aggression is acceptable
  - The famous Bobo doll experiment (Bandura, 1961/1963)

# Personal factors

- Type A personality – In a hurry, irritable, competitive
  - Engage in more hostile aggression
- Type B personality – Less hurried, less irritable, less competitive
  - Engage in less hostile aggression but equal amounts of instrumental aggression

# Personal factors

- Hostile attribution bias
  - Bidirectional causal relationship with aggression? (Matthews & Norris, 2006)
  - Often depends on the behaviour immediately *after* certain ambiguous actions
- High narcissism
  - Remember the link between high (explicit) self-esteem and aggression?
  - “Threatened egotism” (Brushman & Baumeister, 1998)
  - The “wounded narcissist”

# Personal factors

- High sensation seeking and impulsivity
  - Aggression is anything but boring!
- Emotional under-regulation and over-regulation (Roberton et al, 2012)
- Gender
  - Males more likely to engage in unprovoked and physical aggression
  - Females equally likely to engage in provoked aggression and more likely to engage in relational/social aggression

# Environmental factors

- Temperature
  - Curvilinear relationship, aggression increases with temperature up to a point
  - *Negative affect escape model* (Baron & Bell, 1976) - discomfort increases desire to aggress, but at some point one is so uncomfortable that escaping from circumstances is more important than aggressing
- Alcohol
  - More hostile attributions, impulsivity, lowered inhibitions (particularly in those who are not normally aggressive)

# Social factors

- Is violence in the media (TV, movies, video games) causally related to aggression?
- Inherently political, highly prone to availability heuristic and “common sense”
- Problems in the literature:
  - Operational definition of aggression
  - Generalizability from the lab to the real world
  - Differences between results for individuals and populations
  - Direction of causality
  - Meta-analyses and file-drawer problem

# Research on aggression

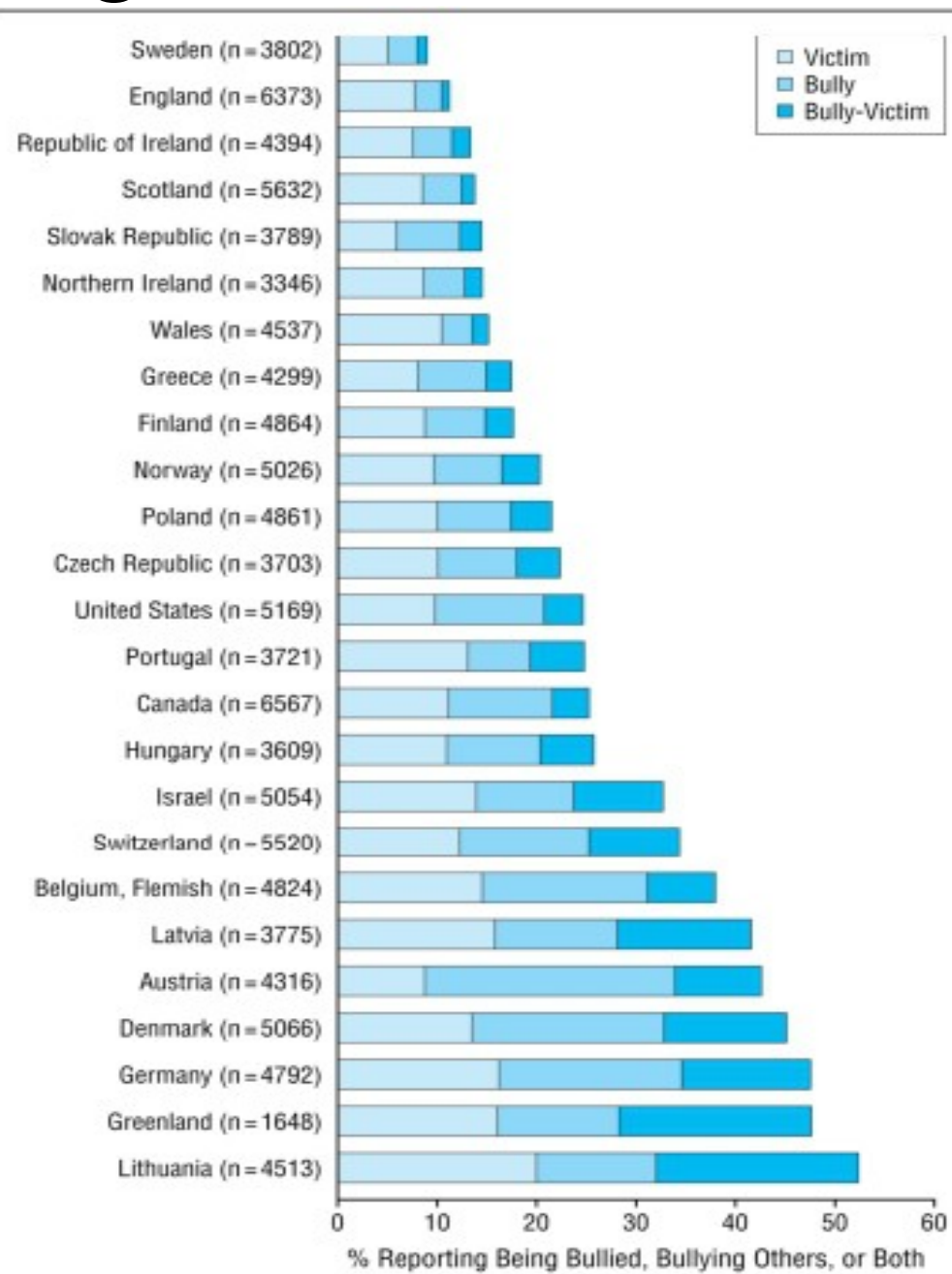
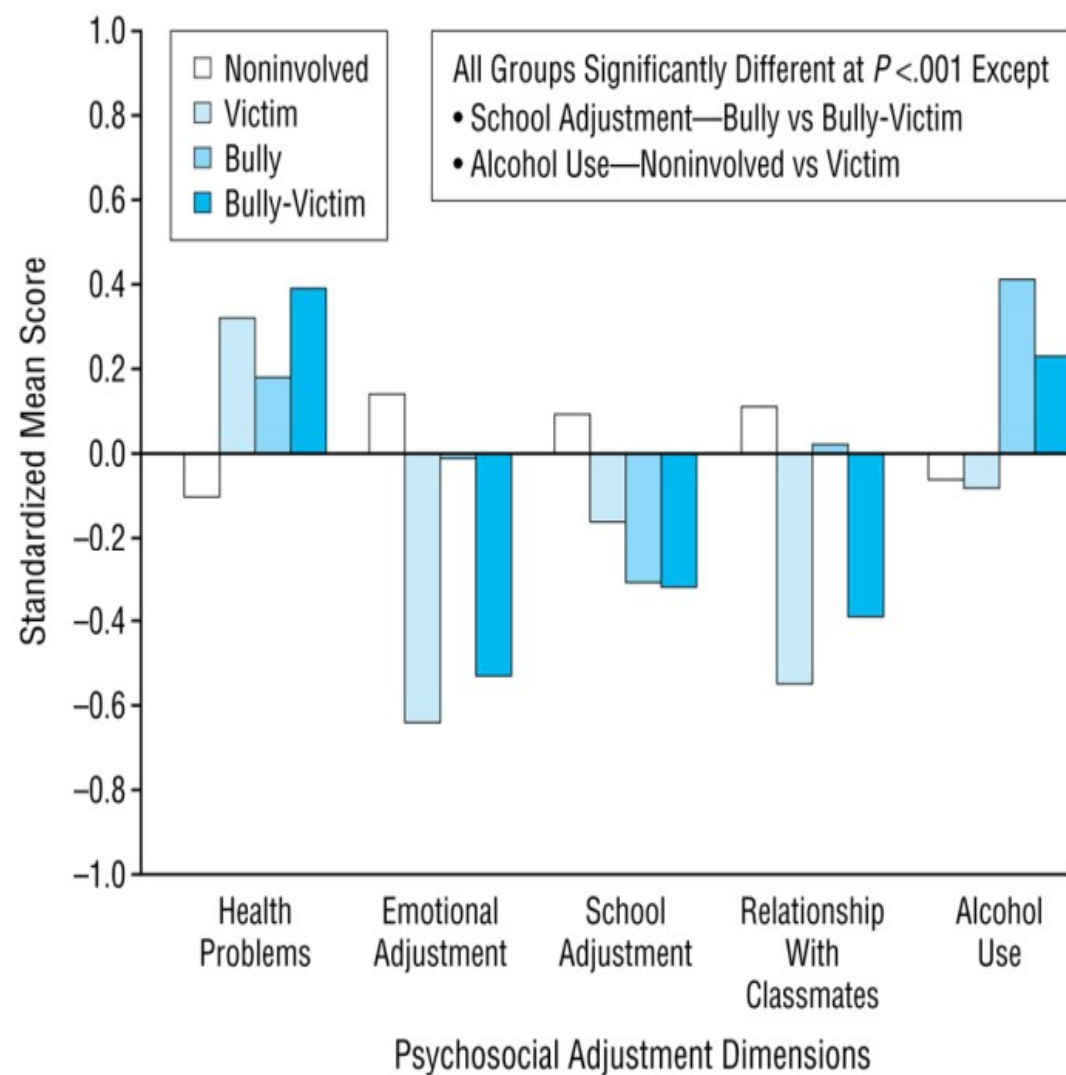
- Approaches to researching aggression have major limitations:
  - Self-report
  - Laboratory experiment (shock/noise paradigm)
  - Criminal records

# Bullying

- Recurrent aggressive behaviour, often towards one with less power than the perpetrator
  - Physical attacks, humiliation, social exclusion, extortion
- Most research takes place in children and teens, but bullying exists in workplaces, prisons, and other settings
- Across studies, about 10-11% of children report being victims, an equal number being bullies, and 4-6% as bully-victims
- Significant psychosocial effects on victims, perpetrators, and witnesses

# Bullying

- Nansel et al, 2004



# Bullying

- Bully characteristics:
  - Physically larger and better early motor development
  - More impulsive
- Victim characteristics:
  - More withdrawn, depressed, anxious
  - Less prosocial
- Bully-victims:
  - High levels of aggression and depression
  - Low on measures of academic competence, prosocial behavior, and self esteem
- Uninvolved characteristics:
  - Higher SES
  - Intact family

# Bullying

- What role do bystanders have in bullying?
  - Even if passive, lack of intervention has direct effect on the victim and bully
- Types of bystanders (Twemlow et al, 2006):
  - Aggressive/bully (encourage bully)
  - Passive (silent consent)
  - Avoidant (deny personal responsibility)
  - Abdicating (scapegoating, victim blaming)
  - Altruistic (try to reduce or stop bullying)

# Cyber-bullying

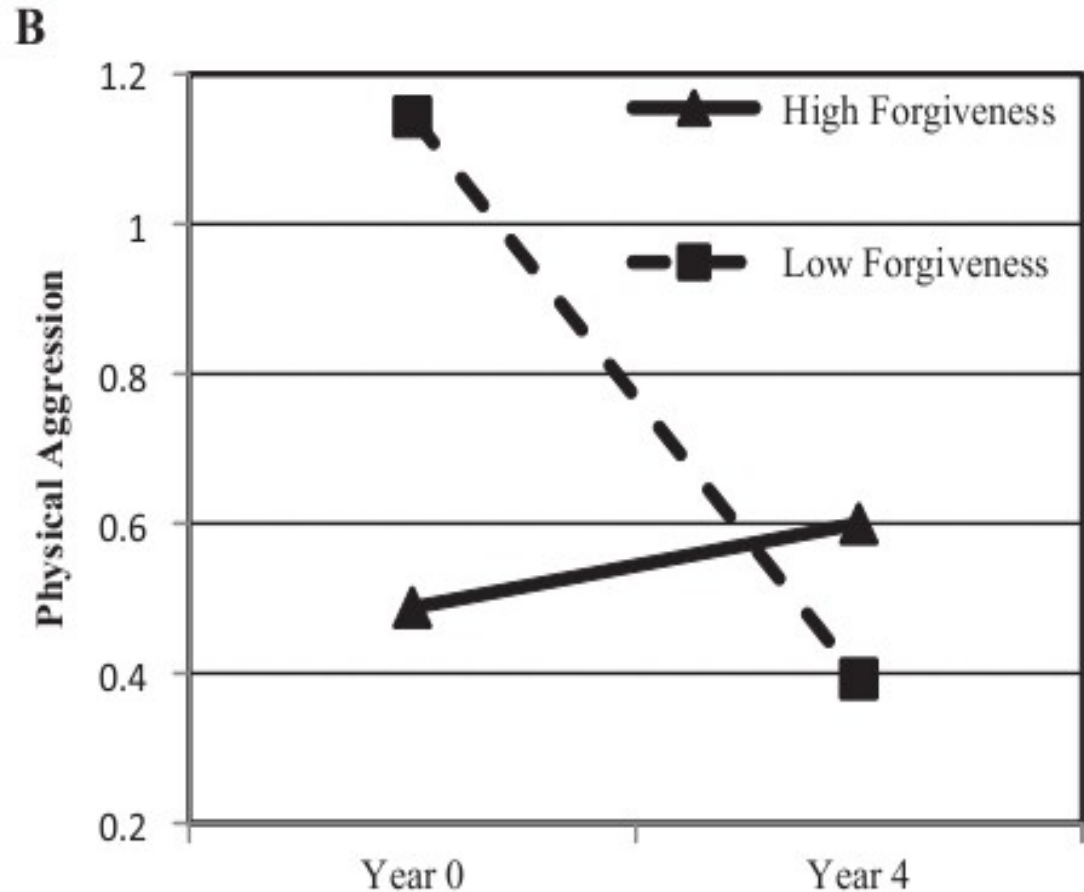
- Considered to have more potential for harm in two ways: able to be much more intense (psychological distance and anonymity) and pervasive (follows a victim home)
- Can take many forms:
  - Threats
  - Insults
  - Spreading rumours
  - Fake identities
  - Exposing confidential messages
- Best reaction is to not respond (Smith et al, 2008)
- Cyber-bullies are commonly victims of real world bullying

# Prevention of aggression

- Punishment only works if certain conditions are met:
  - Prompt
  - Certainty of occurring
  - Strong and unpleasant
  - Perceived as being justified and deserved
- Does this sound like the criminal justice system?

# Prevention of aggression

- Forgiveness
  - Reduction in motivation for revenge/avoidance
  - Because of the norm of reciprocity, forgiveness should reduce future aggression
  - But, in some circumstances it can result in continued aggression (McNulty, 2011)



# Prevention of aggression

- Anger management
  - Relaxation training
  - Understanding anger, “triggers”, taking responsibility
  - Communication skills
  - Problem solving skills