School violence and bullying: Measuring individual and contextual variables

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Or, why do good kids do bad things?
Ordinary Men, Christopher Browning

In mid-March 1942 some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while 20 to 25 percent had perished. A mere eleven months later, in mid-February 1943, the percentages were exactly the reverse. (p. xv)
Bernburg, 1898
August Landmesser
The Tsunami
How do they get that way?

• Is it a disposition?
• Or is it a situation?
WHAT CAN NORMAL PSYCHOLOGY TELL US?
General Psychology

• Social identity theory
• Cognitive dissonance
• Belief in a just world
Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)
The duality of *Detachment* vs. *Saturation*

- **Detachment**
  - The fear of being taken in, of losing our identity
  - A defensive posture

- **Saturation**
  - The need to be involved, open and passionate, connected
Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance

• How do we strive for internal consistency?
  – Consonant relationship
  – Irrelevant relationship
  – Dissonant relationship

• Magnitude
  – The importance of cognitions
    • The more reference points, the greater the effect
  – Ratio of cognitions
    • The ratio of consonant to dissonant variables
So, why do they do it?

• Mechanisms of moral disengagement:
  – Moral justification
  – Advantageous comparison
  – Displacement of responsibility
  – Diffusion of responsibility
  – Disregard or distortion of responsibility
  – Dehumanization
  – Attribution of blame

WHAT CAN ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY TELL US?
Psychopathology

• Disposition?
• Social information processing
• The Dark Triad
• Trauma / Depression
Disposition (or, you are what you are)

- Are some people simply aggressive?
Disposition?

Imagine that you are walking down the street in a hurry to get to a friend’s house, and a police car slowly pulls up next to you. The policeman gets out of the car and says, “Hey, you. We just got a report from a gas station owner nearby who says that his store has been robbed. We want to talk with you about it.”

- So the policeman stops you and you don’t get to your friend’s house. What do you think was going on in the mind of the policeman?
- How likely is it that the policeman questioned you because the policeman is being mean to you or is thinking that you robbed the store?
- How likely is it that the policeman stopped you because he thought you could help out with important information about the robbery?
- What would you do or say to the policeman if this happened to you?
- If you really wanted to get to your friend’s house as soon as possible what could you do or say that would help you?

The Dark Triad – ruthless self-advancement

• Machiavellianism
  – Manipulation, exploitation, and self-interest

• Narcissism
  – Grandiosity, egotism, and profound lack of empathy

• Psychopathy
  – Grandiosity, impulsivity, callousness, and a lack of remorse

• May exploit evolved cooperative behaviors, while eliminating need to reciprocate
  – Positive correlation with mate switching
Narcissism

• Threatened egoism
  – Self-absorption
  – Leadership
  – Exploitiveness

Assistant & Reinforcer

Help-seeker and defender, neg. correlation with bystander
Narcissism

Table 2

Summary of 2 (gender) by 2 (aggression) MANOVA on the three scales of NPI, perceived social status, and social motivation, n = 1661.

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*** p < .001

Aggressors and the dark forces

- Psychopathy
  - Narcissism
  - Impulsivity
  - Callous-unemotional
- Pure aggressors and aggressive-victims are more narcissistic
- Aggressive-victims are more impulsive
# Psychopathy

## Table 3: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Antisocial Process Screening Device Scales and Demographics in Predicting Three Types of Aggression for Pure Aggressors and Aggressive Victims

<table>
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<th>Pure aggressor (n = 281)</th>
<th>Aggressive victim (n = 222)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>( \beta^a )</td>
<td>( \beta^b )</td>
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<td>Twelfth grade</td>
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\( ^a \) Standardized regression coefficients without individual variables. \( ^b \) Standardized regression coefficients with all variables entered in the regression.

\( ^* p < .05, ^** p < .01, ^*** p < .001 \)

What happens to victims?

- Victims are traumatized, and suffer from depression

What happens to aggressors?

• Aggressors are traumatized, but no depression
The big question

• Are the perpetrators of evil events evil because what they did or who they are?
  – We need to use psychology to understand the “incomprehensibility” of extraordinary human evil
What is the relationship between psychopathology, personality, and human evil?

- **The “Mad Nazi” thesis**
  - Evil people or evil actions?

- **Rudolph Hess – loss of memory, amnesia, insane**
  - He attempted to take advantage of the general perception that only pathological people could implement and participate in atrocities

- **Allied propaganda – the Nazi leaders as a group of diabolical, sinister, viciously sadistic and demonically deranged lunatics**
  - Sound familiar (think of the types of discussions around suicide bombers)
The question:

- Not *if* there would be psychopathology, but *how severe* the psychopathology is.
  - Douglas M. Kelley and Gustave Gilbert
    - Assigned by the US Military to evaluate Nuremberg defendants
      - Used Wechsler-Bellevue Intelligence Test
        » Average IQ: 128
      - Rorschach – the plot thickens
Some measurement issues regarding the individual

- Differentiation between aggression and bullying?
- Participant roles and the ringleader bully?
- Triangulation of data for antisocial behavior
THE COLLECTIVE
Understanding group processes

• Obedience to authority
• Participant roles over time and events?
• Rapid changes in behavior are contextually driven
Obedience to authority?

• Milgram

Was this male aggression?

- Sheridan & King, 1972 (shock the puppy)
  - Men – 54%
  - Females – 100%
• Is there a difference between active and passive aggression?

• Is it a few bad apples? Or is it the bushel?

Structure and Classroom Management

Ms. Dina to Gilad: You are not sitting like a student. Sit correctly!

Roy to Gilad: Yeah! And you’ve also got your telephone in your hand! [shouting and staring at Gilad]

Gilad immediately adjusts his posture and puts his cell phone on the desk and looks at Roy, as if to ask for acknowledgement.

Roy to Ms. Dina: Ms. Dina, I think that you need to write a referral to the principal for Gilad’s disturbance! He’s not working!

Doron shouts at Gilad: Shut your mouth. I’ll kill you! Stop bothering already!

Ms. Dina sent a referral slip to the principal.

During a grammar lesson, Benny asked Ms. Dina a question about grammar.
Dor: Ms. Dina, why is this, like this?
Roy [shouting at Benny]: You moron. Idiot. Stupid and ugly.
Yuval: What's wrong with you? Leave him alone!

Yuval is sitting next to Roy and grabs his hand: I'm dying of laughter. I have a stomach ache from laughing so much.

As the teacher explains something, Gilad asks a question.

Roy (screaming): What are you? An idiot? She just explained that; are you doing this on purpose or are you just stupid?

The class is suddenly quiet. Gilad appears to be on the verge of crying.

Yuval to Roy (in a soft voice): Enough, leave him alone, you went too far.

Roy (shouting): He needs to shut-up. I can’t take him anymore.

Yuval (in a whisper to Roy): He's going to cry. Enough!
Some measurement issues regarding the collective

• Is qualitative data the only option?
• How do we link qualitative and quantitative data?
Where are we going?

• Issues of competitive victimhood
  – Understanding narratives

• Is there really any such thing as a bystander?
  – How nice for the bystander!
    • Active Bystandership
  – Aggressors see complicity as agreement
    • Silence is complicity
    • Group processes silence us