

aggression

Chapter 13

Origins of Aggression

- Freud – an instinct to aggress, natural for humans
- Evolutionarists - inherited tendency that increases reproductive fitness
- Biochemical and genetic factors
- But also social factors influence expression of aggression

Definition of Aggression

- Aggression is any form of behavior that is **intended to harm or injure** a person, oneself, or an object
- Need to distinguish between hurtful behavior from hurtful intentions
- Aggression is a behavior and should be distinguished from feelings of anger

Types of Aggression

- **Instrumental aggression:** attaining a goal by hurting others
- desire to obtain rewards or avoid punishment
- material, psychological, or social benefits
- e.g., boxing, slave trading, robbing, bullying, war...
- also called **proactive aggression**
- a more cool, calculating, deliberate, rational type...

Types of Aggression

- **Hostile aggression:** sole goal is to injure or hurt the victim, often triggered by anger
- e.g., a jealous rage
- also called **reactive aggression**
- often impulsive, irrational, emotional, losing your temper, “cinnet”
- even though may gain benefits at the end, that’s not the intention at the start

Types of Aggression

- The distinction is too simplistic
- e.g., a child hits another for taking her favorite toy, and grab the toy while the victim cries.
- motive is both cause pain in other (hostile) and recover the toy (instrumental)

Types of Aggression

Aggression may also be classified as:

- **antisocial**, or unprovoked criminal acts to hurt others
- **prosocial** , or dictated by social norms
 - e.g., law enforcement, parental discipline, obey commanders in wartime
- **sanctioned**, not required by norms, but well within the bounds, do not violate accepted moral standards (e.g., self-defense)

Gender and Aggression

- Males are more likely to engage in aggression that produces **pain** or **physical injury**.
 - More pronounced among **children** than adults.
 - More pronounced for **unprovoked aggression** than provoked aggression.
- Representation of aggression is different:
 - Women perceive their aggression as a negative loss of control
 - Men perceive aggression as a positive reclaiming of control

Gender and Aggression

- **Indirect aggression:** social manipulation where aggressor attempts to harm someone without face-to-face encounter
- Relational aggression
- e.g., gossiping, spreading bad/false stories, telling people not to associate with s.o., revealing s.o.'s secrets
- more frequent among girls and women

Personality and Aggression

- Irritability:
 - The tendency to explode at the slightest provocation.
- Rumination:
 - The tendency to retain feelings of anger following provocation.
- Emotional susceptibility:
 - The tendency to experience feelings of discomfort and inadequacy.

Biology of Aggression

- **Evolution** shaped our aggressive behavior patterns.
- We are innately aggressive species.
- Predicts differences between the sexes
 - Males more aggressive because aggression is primary way of gaining sexual access to females.
- Unlike instinct theory, focus on **genetic survival** (not individual survival).
- Differences over time or across cultures...

Biology of Aggression

- Individual aggressiveness partly due to **inheritance**.
- Identical twins tend to have more similar aggressive tendencies than fraternal twins.
 - Problem: identical twins treated more similarly than fraternal twins by parents.
- Suggesting environmental influence.
 - e.g., harsh punishment of aggressive behavior increases later aggression

Biology of Aggression

- Hormonal activity
 - clear influence on aggression, but exact nature is unclear.
- Focus of research has been **testosterone**.
 - linked to increased aggression.
 - found to affect conscious and unconscious thinking
 - provoke anger, inhibit empathy and fear.
 - disrupts and redirects neural activity that normally inhibits aggressive behavior.

AGGRESSION AS A REACTION TO NEGATIVE AFFECT

Sources of Anger

- attack
 - retaliation leads to escalation
- frustration
 - blocking or interfering with goal directed behavior
 - e.g., children and toys
 - family conflicts, job and money problems, even high temperatures
- expectation of retaliation
- competition

Frustration-Aggression

- **frustration-aggression hypothesis:**
frustration causes aggression.
- original propositions included:
 - Frustration will always elicit the drive to attack others.
 - Every act of aggression could be traced to some previous frustration.
 - Engaging in aggression causes **catharsis**.
 - reduction in the aggressive drive after aggression.

Frustration-Aggression

- the link is subject to rapid delay
- more likely to aggress if believes to be unfair and deliberate
- frustration is only one of many possible causes of aggression.
- there is little or no support for catharsis hypothesis.

Cognitive-neoassociationist model

- explains impulsive and affect-driven aggression
- **Heat hypothesis:**
- Hot temperatures increase hostile thoughts and feelings.
 - Discomfort related to aggression.
 - Effect is seen in behaviors such as murder, rape, assault, and spousal abuse.
 - Extremely high temperatures lower aggression-related crimes due to people being less socially active.

Cognitive-neoassociationist model

- Aggressive cues as “triggers” of aggression
- Most obvious cues are weapons (guns, knives, etc.).
- Less obvious cues include negative attitudes and unpleasant physical characteristics.
- Such cues also heighten aggression already present
 - A handgun kept at home for protection is 43 times more likely to kill a friend or family member than an intruder.

Alcohol Consumption

- Alcohol is involved in approximately 50% of all violent crimes.
 1. Alcohol weakens people's restraints against aggression.
 - adversely affects more controlled, effortful thinking (*disinhibition*).
 2. Inattention to personal or social standards
 - alcohol reduces *self-awareness*
 3. Expectations (Learned disinhibition)

LEARNING AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Social Learning Theory

- **Imitation** and **reinforcement** help children learn aggression
- *Periodic reinforcement* may make extinction very difficult
- Most often learn by watching without directly being rewarded:
 - *observational learning* or *modeling*
 - parents, TV, books, internet...

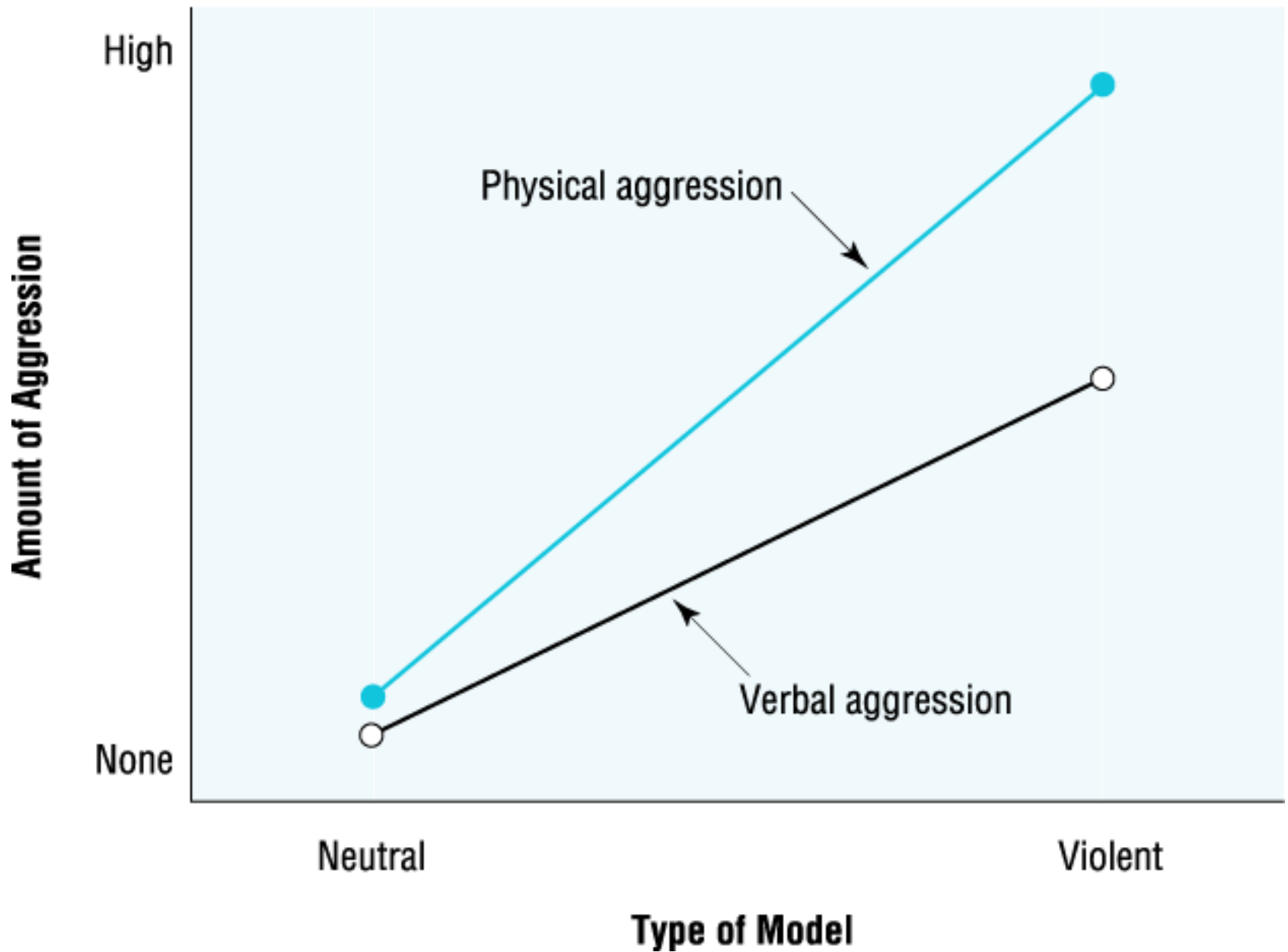
Social Learning Theory

- Bandura et al. (1961): Bobo Doll experiment
- Children watched an adult play :
 - first quietly with Tinkertoys
 - then either aggressively with a Bobo doll
 - or ignore the Bobo doll



Social Learning Theory

- after a mild frustration, children left in a playroom with a Bobo doll...
- children who saw the aggressive adult played more aggressively than others
- especially physical aggression was imitated more



Aggression by Children Witnessing Violent or Neutral Model

Bandura's Bobo Doll Experiment



Social Learning Theory

- Important to note that even they see it's punished, children still learn
- they can imitate later on if rewarded or asked to do so
- a parent's reaction to aggression is very important too
 - parents both sources of reinforcement and modeling

Attributions

- For aggression, an attack must be perceived as **intentional**
- If the other person has no control, then we don't feel as much anger
 - voluntary and unjustified – 59%
 - unavoidable accident or event – 2%
- e.g., shock level competition experiment
- chronically aggressive: bias for hostile intent, especially in ambiguous situations

Schemas for Aggression

- Reinforcement, imitation, attributions all contribute to schemas for aggression
- appropriateness of aggression, circumstances suitable for it, ways it should be expressed
- **aggressive scripts:** guides for behavior and problem solving developed and stored in memory
- violence in neighborhood, aggression from parents, friends, etc.

MEDIA VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

Media and Video Violence

- watching violent content on TV, does it lead to behaving more aggressive?
- theoretically it can lead to:
 - observational learning, seeing aggression being rewarded
 - learning aggressive scripts, be over-quick to respond aggressively to minor insults
 - especially those with a predisposition to aggression

Media and Video Violence

- **Lab experiments** generally find that watching violence on TV leads to more aggression
- TV violence *primes* aggression-related material in memory
- Lab versus real world?
 - provocation
 - alcohol consumption
 - anonymity
 - gender

Media and Video Violence

- Exposure to media violence results in:
 - Children acting more aggressively in their play behavior.
 - Choosing more aggressive solutions to social problems.
 - Behaving more aggressively toward strangers, classmates, and friends.

Media and Video Violence

- Field experiments find weak evidence
- Early exposure to TV violence is correlated with later aggression
 - preference for violent content by 8 is correlated with serious crime by age 30 **in males**

Violence in Video Games

- Exposure to high video-game violence is associated with heightened aggression.
 - both in the lab *and* is related to delinquency in the real world
 - especially for people with a history of aggression

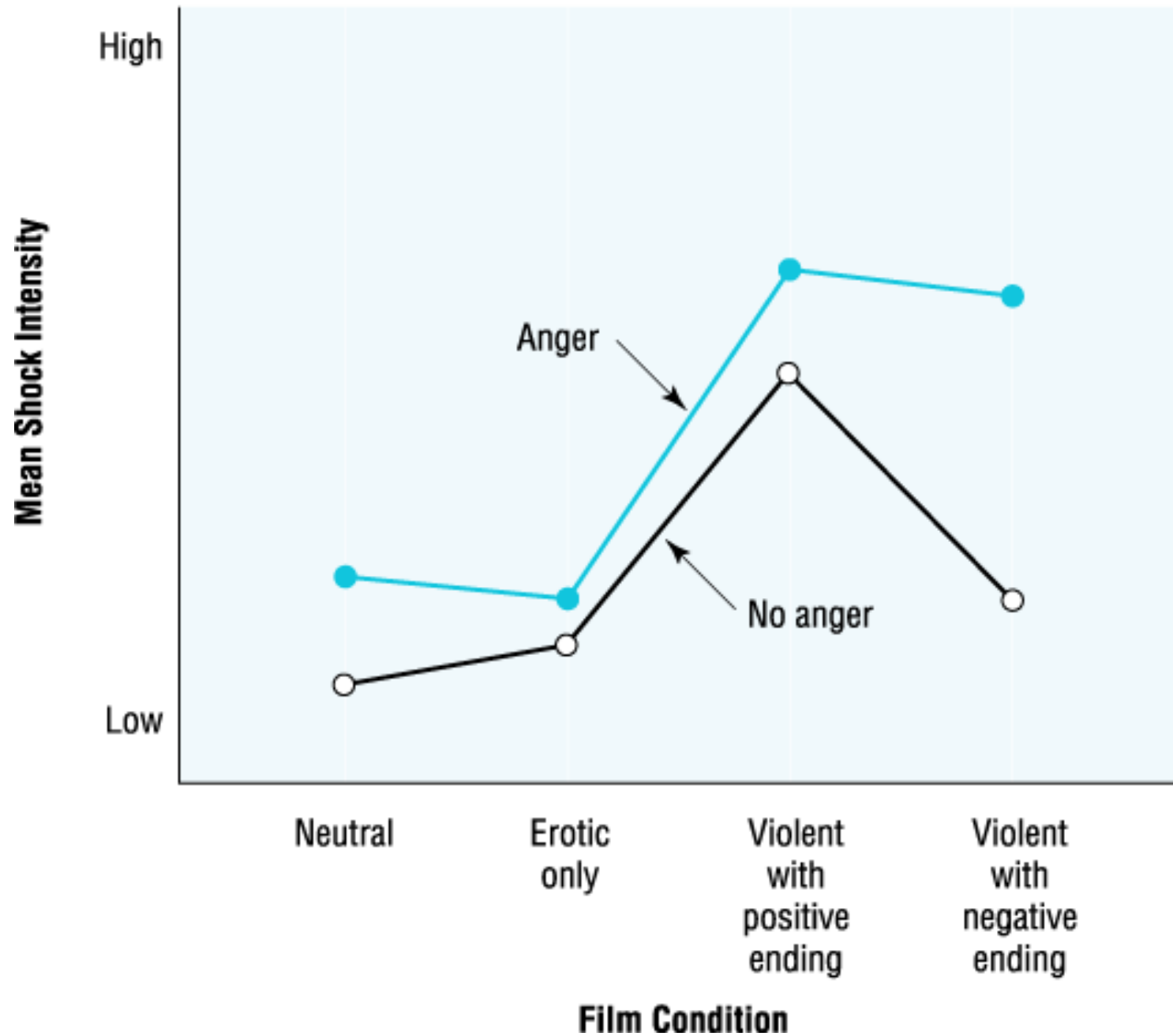
Desensitization

- Exposure leads to habituation to violence in real-life.
- **Desensitization** - less likely to regulate aggressive urges when angry

Media Violence and Sexual Aggression

- Does watching pornography promote sexual violence?
 - Research that examines this makes a distinction between *violent* and *nonviolent erotica*.
 - One hypothesis is that violent erotica may trigger aggression against women.

Shock Intensity as a function of prior angering and type of erotic film



Media Violence and Sexual Aggression

- exposure increases males' (but not females') acceptance of violence against women
- desensitization of men to violence towards women
 - do not perceive the material is violent and degrading to women
 - reduce support for sexual equality
 - lessen sympathy for rape victims
- pornography promotes “**rape myths.**”

Rape Myths

- Deep down women enjoy forcible sex.
- Any healthy woman can resist a rape if she wants to.
- Women ask for it.

Rape Myths

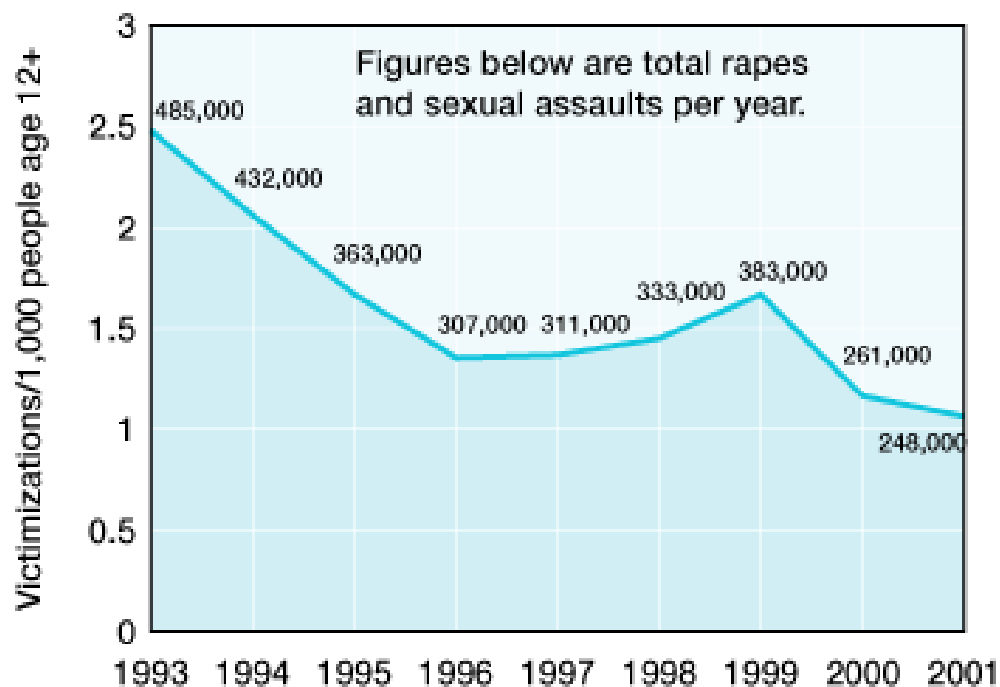
- Believers are less likely to empathize with rape victims.
- More likely to blame victims for causing assault.
- Heterosexual men more likely to believe than heterosexual women.
- Gay men are least likely to endorse myth.
- Convicted rapists hold strong beliefs regarding myth.
- Exposure to pornography increases men's rape myth beliefs.

SEXUAL AGGRESSION

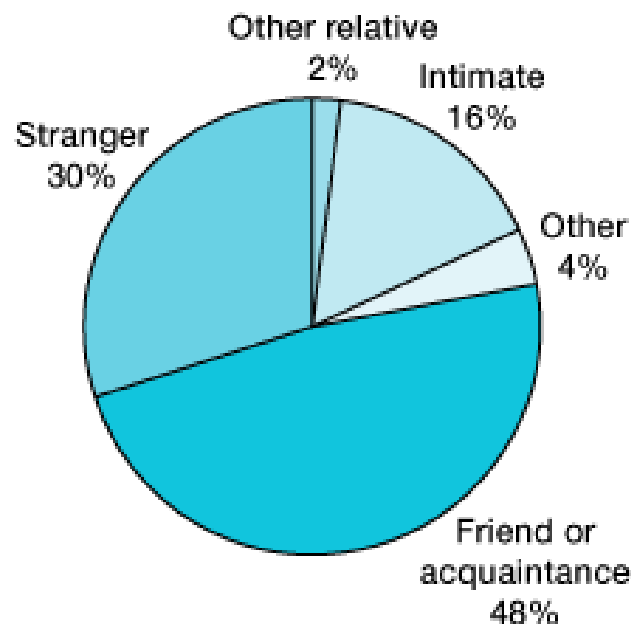
Sexual Aggression

- rape incidence has increased 21 percent in past 25 years.
 - Largest among all major crimes.
- More than 20% of women in the US have been raped at least once
 - almost one every six minutes
- 44% of victims younger than 18, 15% under 12 years
- only 36% actually reported!

Rape & Sexual Assault Continue Declining: Down by Half 1993–2001



Attacker's Relationship to Victim: 2001



Sexual Aggression

- **rape** is forced sexual activity without partner's consent
- involves sexual gratification
- but more about aggression and power, a man's need to control and dominate

Sexual Aggression

- Myth: woman walks down in a dark alley at night and assaulted by a mentally deranged or socially deviant stranger.
- Reality: 80% of victims know the rapist, over half of the cases spouse, relative, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend
- Between 28-50% of college women: having been forced into sexual activity against their will

Sexual Aggression

- many men interpret friendliness in women as interest in sexual activity
- things like:
 - who initiated the date
 - who paid for it
 - what was done in the date...
- could provide justification for rape

Sexual Aggression

- **Acquaintance rape** (*date rape*)
- 85 % of all rapes on college campuses.
 - Almost one-half believe that when a woman says no she does not always mean it.
 - Comes from sexual scripts adolescents learn
 - “*Token resistance*” contributes to belief that no is not always no.
 - Nothing justifies forcible sex.

REDUCING AGGRESSION

Reducing Aggression

- Punishment
 - Legal systems use aggression to punish violent criminals.
 - Three conditions required for punishment to be effective:
 - Punishment must be prompt.
 - Punishment must be strong.
 - Punishment must be consistently applied.

Reducing Aggression

- *fear of punishment or retaliation* may backfire:
 - work only in the immediate situation
 - generates anger
 - sparks counter-aggression
 - too expensive to be a wide-spread solution
- how about *reducing frustration*?
 - government steps sometimes effective
 - but can never completely eliminate it

Reducing Aggression

- learning to control or inhibit aggressive tendencies is important
- reducing exposure to violence
- social modeling
- internalizing anti-aggressive beliefs
- social skills training
- aggression anxiety

Reducing Aggression

- incompatible responses
- distraction
- pain cues of the victim
- apologies from the victim