The Relationship Between Attribution and the Level of Approval of Aggressive Behaviours—The Polish Study

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The designed studies aimed at verification of the thesis concerning the relationship of the perceived conditionings of aggressive behaviours, one’s own experience of being an aggressor or a victim and the acceptance of aggressive behaviours. A link has been found between attribution (genetic and social) and the tolerance of aggressive behaviours and the level of approval of aggressive behaviours. It is also concerned with students’ tolerance of aggressive people and the relation between factors such as sex, one’s own experience of being an aggressor or a victim. The study is based on the model of aggression of complex tree-stage and multicomponent construction and related to the situational-cognitive approach to coping with difficult situations including coping with helplessness which can be manifested by taking the role of an aggressor or a victim. The used instruments include Aggression Approval Scale (Frączek, 1985), Mini-DIA (Mini Direct Indirect Aggression) Inventory (Ostreman & Bjorkvist, 2008), and modified beliefs about Sexual Minorities Scale (Eliasoni & Raheim, 1996) studying attribution of aggressive behaviours. The study group consisted of 112 randomly selected resocialization and physical education students. The results of the analysis revealed that the factors significant for accepting aggression and for aggressive behaviours are not attribution, but the chosen field of study and one’s sex. The results may indicate that personality and knowledge about aggression and its conditioning affect attitudes. According to this theory, attributions of aggressive behaviour can be treated as permanent personal factors of “person in the situation”.

Keywords: approval of aggression, attribution of aggression, aggressive behavior, readiness for aggression, social behaviour

The study was designed in order to verify theses about relationships between perceived conditionings of aggressive behaviours, one’s own experience of being an aggressor or a victim, and acceptance of aggressive behaviours. It is also concerned with tolerance of aggressive people and the relation between factors such as one’s sex and one’s own experience of being an aggressor or a victim. It was expected that the approval of aggressive behaviours is lower when aggression is perceived as acquired in a social way.

The study was inspired by the results of sexual aggression studies. In a number of studies, a link has been found between aggressive behaviours, tolerance towards homosexuals, and attribution of sexual orientation (biological vs. social) (Agüero, 1984; Jayaratne, 2006; Dunn, 2010). Whitley examined almost 400 heterosexual students to check if, according to the attribution theory, affective reactions are moderated by perceived ability to control the reasons for the stigma. The study revealed that people who had a positive
attitude to homosexuals, defined the reasons for homosexuality as uncontrolled. Tygart claimed that there is a strong connection between postulating equal rights and support for sexual minorities, and belief that sexual orientation is genetically determined (Dunn, 2010). Belief in genetic determinism has also a positive influence on one’s attitude towards homosexuals in the study by Jayaratne (2006) and Dunn (2010). The study conducted by Dunn (in 2010) revealed a strong link between belief in biological determinism of sexual orientation and tolerance towards sexual minorities, as well as a higher level of aggression and intolerance due to environmental (social) attribution (and the ability to control these behaviours).

An interesting aspect of the topic is the influence of cultural differences on people’s attitudes and possibility to solve conflicts in a non-aggressive way (Frączek, 1985; Ramirez, 1993; Ramirez, Andreu, Fujihara, Musazadeh, & Saini, 2007).

The main aim of the study was to create support for people whose work involves/will involve solving conflicts and prevention of aggressive behaviours and disorders (students of rehabilitation, prevention, physical education, social workers, family assistants). The goal was to show them a link between their own experience, convictions, tolerance, and ability to take preventive or interventional measures, and to solve conflicts. Thus, the study is supposed to help students with their own development and with prevention of aggression.

Model of Study

The prevailing view is that development of aggressive behaviour may be connected with environmental and biological factors (Bandura & Walters, 1968; Patterson, Debaryshe, & Ramsey, 1990; Goldstein, 1998; Smetana, 2010).

The study was based on the model of aggression of complex tree-stage and multicomponent construction, which is tested very often (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

In this dynamic approach, one’s own experience, cognitive schemata, and structures of social knowledge can be indicated as a predictor as well as the result of aggressive behaviours (for example, long-term effects of video game violence).

Also the situational-cognitive approach (proposed by Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Berzonsky, 1980; Tyszkowa, 1986; Pettit, 2006) stresses one’s own experience and its influence on initiating cognitive processes in a given, often difficult situation. Thus the frequency of being a victim and an aggressor may have an influence on one’s attribution and attitude, and what follows—a way of dealing with difficult aggressive situations.

In the study, we searched for links between the variables, and assumed that the superior construct is readiness for aggression. It not only can play the role of a mediator to initiate the attitude of approval of aggressive behaviours, but also can act as an aggressor, a victim, and a person withdrawing from a conflict, or using mediation, confrontation, or assertive behaviours.

The study was designed in order to verify theses about relationships between perceived conditionings of aggressive behaviours, one’s own experience of being an aggressor or a victim, and acceptance of aggressive behaviours.

A link has been found between attribution (genetic and social) and tolerance of aggressive behaviours (direct and indirect aggression) and the level of approval of aggressive behaviours. The study is also concerned with students’ tolerance of aggressive people and the relation between factors such as one’s sex, one’s own experience of being an aggressor and a victim. If aggressive behaviour is perceived as acquired, lower level of approval was expected. In this study, three theses were verified:
(1) A link between attribution (genetic and social) and the level of approval of aggressive behaviours. Confirmation of a positive link between internal attribution of aggressive behaviours and approval of them was expected;

(2) A relationship between perceived conditionings of aggressive behaviours and one’s own experience of being an aggressor or a victim;

(3) On the basis of studies by Agüero (1984) and Jayaratne (2006), we expected differences connected to genetic or social attribution of aggressive behaviours, and higher tolerance of such behaviours connected with genetic attribution.

Methods

In order to analyze readiness for aggression, RIAI (Readiness for Interpersonal Aggression Inventory) questionnaire was used (Frączek, Konopka, & Smulczyk, 2008). The inventory consists of 30 positions measuring three kinds of readiness for interpersonal aggression (E-I (emotional-impulsive), N-P (habitual-cognitive), and O-I (personality-immanent)). Reliability factors for the scales are: 0.715 for E-I scale, 0.798 for N-P scale, and 0.695 for O-I scale.

To measure social and moral approval of interpersonal aggression, Inventory of Social and Moral Approval of Interpersonal Aggression was used, designed by Frączek in 1985. It is based on Polish adaptation of Questionnaire of Social Attitudes (Lagerspetz & Westman, 1985) and Questionnaire of Moral Attitudes to Aggression (Ramirez, 1985). The questionnaire consists of six situations (self-defence, defence of another person, no possibility to come to agreement, anger, defence of possessions, and punishment). The studied people define their approval of specific forms of aggression (irony, manifesting anger, threatening, beating, torture, and killing) on a three-level scale showing approval of the behaviours: never, sometimes, and always.

To study attributions of aggressive behaviours, modified version of BSM (Beliefs about Sexual Minorities) scale (Eliasoni Raheim, 1996) was used. In the original version, the scale studies convictions concerning the sources of homosexual behaviours. The scale consisted of eight questions, and the reliability factor for scale analyzing genetic attribution was 0.628, and social attribution was 0.439 (original version: 0.876 and 0.893) and to study the frequency of being an aggressor or a victim the Mini-DIA (Mini Direct Indirect Aggression) Inventory by Osterman and Bjorkvist (2008) was used.

The Study Group

In present study, 112 people took part. All over were above 19 years old (min. 20, max. 40). They were 88 women and 24 men, 91 of them were resocialization students and 21 physical education students. Due to the lack of balance, a number of resocialization students were randomly selected and thus another group arose, with equal numbers of women and men, and students of different specializations (see Table 1). The study was carried out in April 2012 at University of Zielona Góra.

Table 1
The Selected Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>The field of study</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resocialization</td>
<td>Physical education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Results

The search for a link between attribution and the level of approval of aggressive behaviours revealed insignificant relation in respect of biological and social attribution of aggressive behaviours in both studied groups.

Verification of hypothesis 1: A link between attribution (genetic and social) and the level of approval of aggressive behaviours. Confirmation of a positive link between internal attribution of aggressive behaviours and approval of them was expected.

It turned out that expecting aggressive behaviours to be behavioral scripts which will occur in future new situations resulted in correlation $r = 0.317$, with approving of killing, especially, in self-defence ($r = 0.326$, see Table 2) (according to the proverb: as the twig is bent so grows the tree).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expecting behavior</th>
<th>Social attribution of aggression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Torture</td>
<td>0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>0.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>0.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killing</td>
<td>0.317*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killing in self-defence</td>
<td>0.326*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the statistical analysis did not show differences between the students connected to genetic or social attribution of aggressive behaviours, and higher tolerance of the behaviours connected to genetic attribution; quite the opposite, a script concerning approval of killing in self-defence was found.

Thus, hypothesis 1 was rejected. No strong relation between attribution of aggressive behaviours and approval of aggression was noticed. Perhaps an important factor is people’s knowledge about sources of studied behaviour. In this case, pedagogy students’ knowledge about possibility to control aggressive behaviours might have been a factor modifying the results.

Hypothesis 2 concerning the relationship of perceived attribution of aggressive behaviours and one’s own experience of being an aggressor or a victim was rejected because no significant links were discovered in the studied groups.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social attribution</th>
<th>Verbal aggressor</th>
<th>Victim of verbal aggression</th>
<th>Indirect aggressor</th>
<th>Physical aggressor</th>
<th>Victim of physical aggression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>-0.259</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>0.302</td>
<td>0.259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetic attribution</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>-0.150</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.247</td>
<td>-0.169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 2: On the basis of studies by Agüero (1984), and Jayaratne (2006), we expected differences between the students connected to genetic or social attribution of aggressive behaviours, and higher tolerance of such behaviours connected with genetic attribution.

Discussion

The results confirmed the previous studies and revealed that there are no differences between women and
men connected to attribution of aggression. The field of study or one’s sex had no influence on the result. Perhaps the level of education and knowledge about the genesis of aggression is more advanced than about the conditionings of homosexuality, and that is why the study did not confirm the previous results. It might mean that a more subtle tool is necessary for future studies.

Nevertheless, in the course of the study, a link was found between one’s experience and higher level of approval of aggressive behaviours. There is a strong relation between higher tolerance of threatening and being a victim or physical aggressor more frequently, and between tolerance of behaviours such as killing and killing in self-defence, and using physical aggression more often (beating, pushing, pulling, or kicking others). This means that people who have used physical aggression or have been victims of physical aggression have a higher level of acceptance of certain aggressive behaviours, in this case, threatening.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim of physical aggression</th>
<th>Victim of verbal aggression</th>
<th>Victim of indirect aggression</th>
<th>Verbal aggressor</th>
<th>Indirect aggressor</th>
<th>Physical aggressor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irony</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening</td>
<td>0.406*</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>-0.266</td>
<td>0.357*</td>
<td>0.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torture</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>-0.066</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>-0.078</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>-0.278</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killing</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>0.114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. ** Correlation is relevant on the level 0.01 (mutually); * correlation is relevant on the level 0.05 (mutually).

Thus, one’s own experience may be a filter raising approval of aggressive behaviours.

The study also showed relations between the field of study and the level of approval of aggression. Differences were noticed in types of approval of aggression between resocialization students and physical education students (df = 17, t = 2.127, p < 0.005). Resocialization students showed a higher level of approval of aggressive behaviours in the form of irony in all situations (r = 0.456).

They also used verbal aggression more often, and had a higher level of personality-immanent readiness for aggression. The analysis of differences between the choice of study revealed that people studying resocialization had a significantly higher level of personality-immanent readiness for aggression, higher level of approval of irony as a way of solving problems, and used verbal aggression more often.

The results may indicate that the choice of study brings out certain personality traits, such as a higher level of approval of irony, which conditions occurrence of aggressive behaviours.

Numerous empirical studies indicate that there are differences in approval of aggressive behaviours, not only in social and cultural aspects, but also one’s sex and job (Lagerspetz & Westman, 1980; Frączek, 1985; Bem, 1993). Thus, differences in approval of aggressive behaviours were expected, in verbal and physical sphere, connected to one’s sex and field of study. The choice of study was treated as the effect of recognizing one’s own predispositions and personality aspects which might be developed. Different studies explain a higher level of approval of aggression in its extreme form (torture, beating, and killing) among men studying resocialization, whose career will involve work with people who have violated social and legal norms and serve prison sentences or are on probation. The results of the study by Duncan (2006) and Lagerspetz and Westman (1980) revealed that performing jobs involving enforcing law in an aggressive way, e.g., as a police officer or a
soldier, is connected with higher approval/tolerance of aggressive behaviours.

The last issue concerned the role of mediators in acceptance of aggression. The results indicate that a generally higher level of aggressiveness is connected with more frequent use of verbal aggression, or indirect aggression, and higher approval of irony, threatening, consent to beating and expressing anger. Thus the main mediator of an attitude to aggression is a personality factor, i.e., general readiness for aggression.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model of Conditionings of Acceptance of Aggression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model $R^2 = 0.327$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General level of aggressiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The results confirm that only the level of aggressiveness explains approval of aggressive behaviours. Experiences and attributions are irrelevant. Attribution of aggressive behaviours is important only as a predictor and social schema of behaviour in self-defence.

The results indicate that resocialization students prefer vertical hierarchy of power and clear-cut systems. This kind of pedagogy is closer to jobs such as police officers, soldiers than teachers. The results indicate that generally higher level of aggressiveness is connected with more frequent use of verbal aggression, or indirect aggression, and higher approval of aggressive behaviours (irony, threatening, consent to beating, and expressing anger).

The study showed that in order to create support for people whose work involves/will involve solving conflicts and prevention of aggressive behaviors and disorders (students of rehabilitation, prevention, physical education, social workers, and family assistants), we should show them a link between their own experience, personality (readiness to aggressiveness), their tolerance of aggression and ability to take preventive or interventional measures, and solve conflicts. This could be done in a cognitive way and by means of trainings and practice.

References


Dunn, P. (2010). Abuse around difference: A sociological exploration of gay men’s experiences of “hate crime” and policy responses to it (Doctoral dissertation, The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)).


