Hw01_building_models

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Building Models

Theories of deviant aggressive behavior

Theory I: Deviant aggressive behavior is learned from experience. Individuals in a society learn to do those things for which they receive rewards and to avoid those things for which they receive punishment.

Theory II: Deviant aggressive behavior is a symbolic expression of hostility toward personal authority figures. When an individual is frustrated in his personal life, he becomes angry toward parents, bosses, or public officials. He will express this anger by deviant aggressive behavior.

Theory III: Deviant aggressive behavior is the rational action of oppressed individuals. Social rules systematically discriminate among people. People who are most hurt by the rules are least likely to profit from conforming to them and thus do conform less.

Theory IV: Deviant aggressive behavior is a social role. Individuals are socialized into the role through contact with a deviant subculture.

Questions

Question 1) What social policy would be appropriate to reduce deviant aggressive behavior if Theory I were correct? Theory II? Theory III? Theory IV?

Theory I: Assumption 1: Individuals learn to do things for which they receive a reward Assumption 2: Individuals learn to avoid things for which they receive punishment Assumption 3: Deviant aggressive behavior is learned Consequence: People are deviantly aggressive when the reward they recieve for this behavior outweighs the punishment they receive.

If the assumptions of this theory are true, then deviant aggressive behavior could be reduced by simply reducing the reward gained through deviant aggressive behavior. From a policy standpoint, this might prove tricky. While individuals often police themselves in small groups, it is unclear how enacting a social policy that reduces reward attained from acting aggressively could be done. For example, if someone is aggressive towards me as an individual, I may choose to ignore them, which reduces the external reward they receive. However, it's unclear how policy could achieve this effect. Moreover, if an individual receives internal reward (e.g., a dopamine rush) from being aggressive, then no social policy could reduce this reward. A second, more feasible way reduce deviant aggressive behavior under this theory would be to increase punishment for this behavior such that it is greater than the internal + external reward attained by the aggressive individual. For example, someone mugging another person may induce internal reward (dopamine spike) and external reward (stolen money). To offset this reward, the punishment would need to be strict enough that the reward is overshadowed. Therefore, increasing the penalty for aggressive behavior is one social policy that could reduce deviant aggressive behavior according to this theory.

Theory II: Assumption 1: Individuals become deviantly aggressive when they are angry Assumption 2: Individuals become angry at personal authority officials when they become frustrated in personal life (i.e., they blame authority figures for their frustration) Consequence: People are deviantly aggressive when they are angry at personal authority figures.

This theory assumes aggression is deviant because it is expressed out of anger toward an authority figure, even if the authority figure is not the actual cause of the frustration in the individual's life. This allows for a

few points of intervention via social policy. One social policy initiative that might reduce deviant aggression would be to provide individuals with greater access to therapists (for example, through insurance or subsidies). With access to therapists, individuals may learn: 1) that not all points of frustration stem from authority; 2) that there are more effective ways of channeling their anger that will produce better outcomes; or 3) how to avoid becoming as frustrated in the first place. The cost of this policy might be offset by the reduced costs associated with decreased instances of deviant aggression.

Theory III: Assumption 1: Some individuals are oppressed systematically through social rules Assumption 2: People can become deviantly aggressive when oppressed Assumption 3: This deviant aggressive behavior is the rational outcome of a cost-benefit analysis of conforming (being non-deviant) Consequence: People who are most oppressed will be most deviantly aggressive

This theory assumes deviant aggressive behavior is not purely emotional or irrational, but instead is calculated. If the rules treat an individual unfairly, then the benefit of following the rules is lower, while the benefit of being deviantly aggressive is higher. This suggests that policy interventions aimed at reducing deviantly aggressive behavior should target 1) the most oppressed groups and/or 2) reduce the benefit gained from being deviantly aggressive. As with Theory I, increased penalization could reduce the reward/benefit of being deviant, such that conforming, even if unfair and low-benefit, is the more rational choice. Perhaps a better social policy would target Assumption 1 - namely, reduce systemic oppression. If it is true that the most oppressed people are the most deviantly aggressive, then it should be easy to identify who the most oppressed people are. Once identified, they could be interviewed and asked what aspects of social rules could be changed to eliminate or at least lessen their oppression. Steps could then be taken to implement a social policy based on this. For example, if a lack of job opportunities is mentioned as a form of oppression, then special work programs could be implemented that target these individuals and help them find jobs.

Theory IV: Assumption 1: People can be socialized into social roles Assumption 2: Deviant aggressive behavior is a social role Consequence: People who associate with deviant subculture become socialized into a deviantly aggressive role

This theory really only offers one point of intervention - contact with deviant subculture. One possible social policy would be to try to eliminate or reduce the influence deviant subculture. This could be done through legal means (e.g., banning key aspects of deviant subculture and increasing attention to areas where deviant subculture is high). However, this might backfire and make the deviant subculture larger and/or more extreme. Another possible social policy could be to offer alternatives to deviant subculture. For example, if a research group studied the most common reasons that people came into contact with deviant subculture, then programs could be established that compete with those reasons. If one reason people come into contact with deviant subculture is lack of extracurricular activities (i.e., out of boredom), then social policy could be aimed at after-school programs or weekend programs that provide a way for people to find new hobbies and associate with people not associated with a deviant subculture.

Question 2) During the past ten years, American society has been running a series of "experiments" with deviant aggressive behavior. Take any one of these experiments (e.g. #MeToo, mass shootings, political rhetoric) and discuss what we have learned about the four theories from this series of experiments.

The MeToo movement is perhaps one of the strongest social media social movements to occur. While there have been similar social movements, none of them that began and spread on social media has had quite the impact of MeToo. Targeting a specific type of deviant aggression, namely, sexual harassment and assault, MeToo has had enough social power to bring down some of the most powerful celebrities of our time. What was once spread as gossip and in whispers can now be spread to millions of people in a matter of minutes through social media, particularly through centralizing formats such as hashtags. Because of its combination of being powered by social networks and combatting a well-known form of deviant aggression, MeToo provides an excellent test of the four theories mentioned above.

Theory I suggests that people learn to be deviantly aggressive because they are rewarded for this behavior. For many of the powerful people who have fallen to the MeToo movement, this seems true. While sexual

harassment and assault often don't reward the aggressor by helping them climb ladders, it can provide "reward" internally, through feelings of power and dominance. Because feeling powerful makes us feel good, it creates a dopaminergic feedback loop, often referred to colloquially as the "reward circuit" of the brain. Because these deviant;y aggressive behaviors reward the aggressors in this way, they are more likely to continue this behavior, as theory I suggests. While no offocial statistics exist on whether or not MeToo has increased punishment enough to overshadow this reward and prevent the behavior from occurring, many men report feeling anxious or afraid around women now. Whether or not these feelings are merited, they do suggest that at least some men are now more careful about their behaviors, attempting to ensure they do not fall into deviantly aggressive behaviors such as sexual harassment. Therefore, there seems to be some merit to Theory I.

It is less clear if MeToo supports Theory II or Theory III. Theory II assumes people will become deviantly aggressive out of anger/frustration with life, which is blamed on personal authority figures. In many MeToo cases, the accused is not in a position to be frustrated with personal authority figures. In other words, they are not aggressive in defiance of authority, but rather are often the ones in authority. Similarly, the accused in many MeToo cases are not oppressed, but are often accused of oppressing. Moreover, they are often not hurt by social rules. Therefore, these two theories seem less supported in the case of MeToo.

While theory IV appears to be supported at first glance, it's not clear whether or not data from MeToo support this explanation for deviant aggression. On the one hand, there are some industries where MeToo seems to be more frequent, such as movie and television actors. However, there are many people in contact with those accused of sexual harassment who, presumably, have not committed it themselves. While it's possible that contact with people who commit sexual harassment and assault may be at increased risk of being in a situation where they would also commit this deviant aggressive behavior, it's not clear that this *causes* the deviant aggressive behavior.

Taken together, the the case of MeToo seems to support Theory I to the greatest extent, while rejecting Theories II and I. Theory IV is neither rejected nor supported in this case, and is still up for debate.

Waiting until the last minute

People often do things at the last minute (students turning in papers, professors grading exams, and so on).

a. Ask yourself why the observation might be true and write down your explanations.

Possible explanations for why people wait until the last minute: 1) They are busy 2) They overestimate their ability to complete tasks efficiently 3) They complete tasks they value or enjoy first 4) They forget about the task 5) They have trouble initiating tasks, especially when unmotivated

b. Generalize the explanatory model – that is, induce the most general, abstract model you can produce that still has the original observation as a consequence.

Model 1 - Accidentally forgetting (this model assumes people are largely responsible, just busy) When people become busy they prioritize tasks such that the tasks they are less motivated to initate are performed last. Over time they forget about these tasks due to a busy schedule, causing them to be completed at the last minute.

c. Induce an alternative model that also has the original observation as a consequence.

Model 2 - Intentionally forgetting (this model assumes people are largely irresponsible, and being busy makes it worse) People struggle to begin a task they don't enjoy, so they forget about it until closer to its due date. People often become busier than they think, so they are forced to complete other tasks first, putting the original task even further behind.

d. For each of the two general models produced in (b) and (c), derive two interesting predictions (four predictions in total). Be sure the logical connection between your model and your predictions is explicitly stated and that any assumed facts concerning the world are made explicit.

Model 1 Prediction 1: Tasks people are less motivated to pursue first are simple, but mundane

Prediction 2: Reminders about tasks lower on the prioritization list will decrease the chances that these tasks are completed at the last minute

Model 2 Prediction 1: If someone is given only one task, which they don't enjoy, they will still complete it at the last minute (This assumes they have no other work or social responsibilities during this time, such as a holiday where they are not expecting family or traveling).

Prediction 2: If a task is changed so that it becomes enjoyable, people will not complete it at the last minute.