

<Part 1 - Building Models>

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Deviant Aggressive behavior

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

In the prompt, four theories about the origin of deviant aggressive behaviors are suggested, which would imply different forms of interventions. The first theory, which can be summarized as social learning theory, explains that individuals internalize the incentive structure of behaviors given by society. This is a view consistent with the tradition of rational choice theory which posits that individuals conduct a cost-benefit analysis before they perform an action. Thus, one of the possible social policies to reduce deviant behavior is to impose extremely strict laws or regulations on targeted deviant behaviors to transform the parameter of the utility function of individuals. Additionally, the role of the education system for children should be taken as an important element considering that the effect of early learning is more important than the later periods in life courses. The second theory on a psychological status - anger - to account for deviant aggressive behavior. It explains that unhappy, angry, or frustrated people in more or less subordinate positions vent their negative feelings by committing deviant behavior. Therefore, I think providing access to therapeutic counseling service to frustrated individuals could be helpful to decrease the intensity and frequency of deviant aggressive behavior in a society.

The third theory states that deviant aggressive behavior is rationally induced by oppressed people. But unlike the second theory, this theory is in the line of rational choice theory, rather than based on the psychological status. If we accepted the third theory, the solution should be, at least in an abstract sense, focusing on getting rid discrimination socially imposed on people. This includes abolishing laws or rules to free those who were oppressed and implementing some affirmative action-style rules. For example, women's non-compliance to the traditional patriarchal family system or racial minorities' (e.g., African American) civil rights movements in the U.S. and the outcomes of these collective actions can be understood with this line of theory. (admittedly, the contexts for women's movement and civil right movement is not exactly the same as Marx's account.) The fourth theory gives us a cultural account for the origin of deviant aggressive behavior. It shares the importance of social learning with the first theory but the fourth theory does not directly invoke the assumption of rational individuals. Rather, it suggests unconscious (or subconscious) learning (e.g., socialization) happening when people are exposed to a deviant subculture that gives rises to deviant aggressive behavior. If this theory were true, the policymakers need to try to minimize the influence of deviant subculture to the broader population. Regardless of its desirability, I think implementing strict censorship could be one effective intervention that leads to the reduction of deviant behavior if the fourth theory were valid.

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.

Considering the saliency of the mass shooting events in the U.S. for the past decade, I decided to discuss the implications that we can draw in terms of the four theories about deviant aggressive behavior.

Admittedly, a mass shooting is a quite extreme case of deviant aggressive behavior, bringing heartbreaking consequences which writers should be wary of their language when discussing it; however, I think the extremity at the same time allows us to further contemplate upon the causes of the shockingly tragic event.

I think the first theory is not appropriate to explain the repeat of such events. This does not necessarily mean that the whole theory should be rejected when it is reflected in the case of a mass shooting. However, considering the fact that many of mass shooters either committed suicide after the shooting or shoot by police (USA today, 2015) and the others were sentenced to death lacking any concrete rewards of doing it, it appears hard to argue that committing a mass shooting is one form of rational action. (I believe that the first theory can explain well why pilfering in the workplace happens.) Simultaneously, I think that the third theory which is also partly based upon the tradition of rational choice theory does not do justice in terms of explaining the origin of mass shootings. Of course, this does not mean that the rational choice theory is totally irrelevant; the government might be able to limit the access of weapons to lay people or impose a high tax for having guns, which increase either actual financial burden or cognitive cost of possessing weapons that can be used for mass shootings and thereby reducing the possibility of them. But this is tangential to the main assumptions and arguments we can see in the first and third theory.

Given the hostility expressed by the mass shooters, it seems that the second theory in which the psychological status of individuals is pointed as the motive better explains the reason why the shooters do something terrible to everybody including themselves. The fact that a significant portion of mass shooters had suffered from mental illness and attempted suicide while or after the shooting especially signals that the individuals’ psychological factor should not be ignored when it comes to discussing such events. However, this does not reject the fourth theory in which the roles of socialization and subculture are highlighted. This is because not every angry, frustrated person in the world choose to be a mass killer; if we ask why they decided to get weapon and kill other unrelated people, we might need to think about the culture or cultural products such as movies, TV dramas, and etc. that show us the use of weapons without warning, even though it would not be easy to precisely measure the effect of culture. In sum, I think the extremity of mass shootings happened in the U.S. teaches us that the theories based on emotions or psychological status have a better fit than those based on rational calculation when it comes to explaining those kinds of deviant aggressive behavior.

Waiting until the last minute

It is not surprising to see people procrastinating on many things they (or we) have to do. Of course, the moment that we get something done is a quite pleasant time because it gives us at least a temporary sense of freedom but people often do not get things done until the very last moment. I could think of a few reasons reflecting my own experiences. First, we have to take care of zillion other things happening in our lives so some tasks can be pushed back on the priority list. The obvious issue here is that time is always scarce so people need to decide how they allocate their time. However, we all know that this is not the only case; many people (including myself) often procrastinate on what they need to do even though they have plenty time before the deadline, which actually defines the word “procrastinating.” I think, despite the affinity, laziness might not be a synonym for procrastination because it does not help us to think about a systemic model that might help us understand what happens under the hood in our minds.

In some senses, time pressure is one of the necessary elements that pushes us actually lead us to get somethings done, especially when the tasks require complex cognitive abilities which cost some degree of mental energy. One possibility, I think, is that our brain has partly evolved to save our mental energy as much as possible until we come across an urgency and otherwise pursue instant satisfaction. I think that not only modern or contemporary psychologists but also ancient (both Western and Eastern) philosophers knew the fact that we human beings have two different mental systems: the one for satisfying instinct desires; and the other side for rational planning. But the latter is much weaker than the former and moreover, I think we need the sense of fear or urgency generated from the instinct side to finally activate the rational side in our brain. They can be analytically distinguished but in reality, they always go hand in hand. Anyway, this abstract model would suggest that the feeling of pressure, especially from time pressure is necessary for us to take ourselves from many different things that give us instant satisfaction and focus on tasks we need to do.

Drawing upon the model proposed above, we can produce two basic predictions on procrastination. First, the time pressure given by the deadline boost the productivity but not necessarily guarantee the quality of the final products. This is because few people would even start to perform tasks unless the deadlines are close; however, if an individual starts a task when the effect of the time pressure on the productivity is at its highest point, the individual would miss the time that he/she could invest before that point. Second, the model suggests that we can mitigate our tendency of procrastinating by splitting given tasks smaller pieces. In other words, instead of setting a single deadline for a task, we can set up multiple deadlines for different parts of a task and make the most out of the cycles of fluctuating productivity along with deadlines. If the model described above is correct, we can expect that this workflow could reduce the number of (or proportion of) people who might entirely fail to meet the deadline for a given task. In sum, this cognitive model and related hypothesis imply that the systemic approach can improve the working habits of many people.

Another explanatory model about procrastination can take into consideration the individuals’ level of perfectionism. This model has in common with the previous model in the sense that it also takes into consideration a psychological factor but this gives less abstract theoretical statement regarding procrastination. In this model, we assume that the level of perfectionism in individuals forms distribution and it causes the varying degree of procrastination. This leads to the first hypothesis in which an individual with a high level of perfectionism even cannot kick-start the task they need to get done while worrying about a failure what one might face later. Additionally, we can also think of an individual who scores very low in hypothetical perfectionism scale also tend to procrastinate on things they need to do because they tend to lack a motive to make things better, which imply the quadratic relationship between the degree of perfectionism and individuals’ tendency of procrastinating. Moreover, as a corollary to the

first hypothesis, we could reduce procrastination of those with the high level of perfectionism by providing some types of therapy including medicine or counseling, which reduce the level of anxiety accompanied by perfectionism.

In actuality, the two models I described above do not conflict against each other. The first model captures the importance of a situational factor - time pressure - and the second model focuses on individuals' given mental background - the varying degree of perfectionism. Thus, it would be also interesting to think about the possible interaction between the two factors as well.