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ABSTRACT

Commuter students completed the Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire which asked about four interactions involving hostility ranging from silent anger to physical violence. Results showed that intense episodes typically occurred longer ago, and most opponents were known for more than a year. Intense episodes were more likely to occur at one's own home and involve blood relatives as opponents. Frequency of spouses and lovers as opponents remained constant across episodes. Though the frequency of anger for men and women did not differ, there were sex differences with respect to location, relationship to opponent, and sex of opponent. The only significant effect for age of respondent indicated that the youngest (19-20 yrs.) were least likely to become angry at strangers or casual acquaintances. (Author)

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Anger in Everyday Life: When, Where, and with Whom?

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### Anger in Everyday Life: When, Where, and with Whom?

Social psychological studies of aggression are most often one of two types: laboratory investigations of normal individuals which may or may not generalize to non-laboratory situations (i.e., Geen & O'Neal, 1976); or, surveys of criminal violence which may or may not apply to most individuals (i.e., Wolfgang, 1958; Amir, 1971). Both of these approaches to angry behavior are subject to Kvale's (1977) criticism that psychological paradigms usually "regard mental life as manifestations of some ahistorical and asocial inner entities" (p. 178).

In advocating a dialectical perspective, Gergen (1977a, 1977b) has likewise questioned the "central positivist assumption" that societies remain stable enough for behavioral knowledge to accumulate in a bit by bit fashion over time. Thus, while a water molecule would be expected to have the same characteristics whether studied in Britain in 1940 or China in 1980, it is very unlikely that laboratory aggression can similarly be isolated from the society in which it occurs.

The current study assumes that laboratory investigations of aggression can best be given meaning when they are related to anger people experience in their day-to-day lives. This would require filling the void for what Cvetkovich (1977) described as "behavioral census" research on naturally occurring aggression. The present research is a beginning attempt to record the frequency, location, and relationships of opponents during everyday angry episodes.

#### Method

##### Participants

Participants were 66 students enrolled in day and evening sections of social psychology at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, a 100% commuter university. Fifty-eight percent were female, 93% were white. The median age was 22 years (range 19-57 yrs.). Thirty-three percent were employed 14 or fewer hours per week, 37% reported working 15 - 34 hours per week, and 30% were working 35 or

more hours per week.

### Procedure

The Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire (IPCQ) was developed to assess interactions at four levels of anger. Participants were asked to "Think of the last time you were (1) angry or annoyed at a particular person and did not say or do anything about it; (2) angry or annoyed at someone and said something about it, but you did not scream or yell at the person; (3) angry enough to yell or scream at him/her (but there was no pushing, hitting, shoving or throwing things); and (4) angry at someone and one or both persons ended up pushing, hitting, shoving or throwing things." For each interaction, they were asked (A) How long ago did it happen? (B) Where were you at the time? (C) What relationship was this person to you? (D) What was the sex of the person? (E) At that time, how long had you known the person? (F) During the day after the incident, did you talk to the person less than usual? (G) Did you avoid the person after the incident? (H) Did your relationship end after the incident? The format was close-ended, except for Questions A and D, which were coded according to the six categories in Figure 1.

The IPCQ was given to students at the end of class and was returned by them at the next class meeting. A priori tests of results were made using chi-square analyses to contrast response frequencies across the four types of incidents, and t- and F-tests to analyze age and sex differences for the four incidents combined.

### Results

#### Difference between incidents

Figure 1 validates the authors' expectation that participants would recall milder incidents as occurring more recently. The modal time lapse for Type 1 and 2 incidents was between one day and one week; for Type 3 incidents, between one month and one year; and, over a year for Type 4 incidents ( $\chi^2=126.1, df=15, p < .001$ ).

Figure 2 shows that angry episodes occur differentially across location

( $\chi^2=21.5, df=9, p < .01$ ). Workplace accounted for 29% of unexpressed anger, but steadily decreased with increasing intensity of anger. Anger at a friend's or relative's home was more frequent for milder (Type 1 and 2) episodes ( $M=15.9\%$ ) than for the stronger episodes ( $M=5.75\%$ ). Anger in one's own home was the most frequent location for anger to occur, and was the only location where stronger anger ( $M=56.8\%$ ) was more likely to be represented than milder anger ( $M=32.6\%$ ).

The most striking result for the relationship by episode comparison was that sex partner (boyfriend/girlfriend/spouse) accounted for a constant 22-29% of all types of anger. Strangers and casual acquaintances comprised between 15.1% and 16.7% of Types 1, 2, and 4 anger, but only 4.5% of Type 3 anger. Friends accounted for 10-19% of all types of anger.

Blood relatives (parent, sibling, offspring) were the most frequent opponents and were the only ones who appeared more in the more intense Types 3 and 4 episodes ( $M=38.0\%$ ) than in milder episodes ( $M=21.95\%$ ). Offspring were cited in only .75% of milder episodes, but accounted for 7.9% of Type 3 and 4 episodes; siblings were the most frequent opponents cited for level 4 anger (25%). The a priori analysis for incident by relationship (sex partner, blood relative, friend, or stranger-casual acquaintance) was not significant ( $\chi^2=18.40, df=12, p < .11$ ); but, the contrast between blood relative and non-blood relative anger for mild versus strong incidents did show a significant effect ( $\chi^2=8.33, df=1, p < .005$ ).

Over 70% of all incidents occurred with opponents who had been known over a year. Type 3 and 4 episodes were more likely to involve an opponent known over 5 years ( $M=51.26\%$ ) than were Type 1 and 2 incidents ( $M=33.59\%$ ) ( $\chi^2=7.53, df=1, p < .01$ ). The more severe the incident, the less likely the opponent was to be female ( $\chi^2=8.83, df=3, p < .04$ ).

Figure 3 illustrates frequencies of "yes" responses to the three questions concerning post-incident avoidance behavior. Validating common expectations, more severe episodes resulted in decreased talking to the opponent ( $\chi^2=8.1, df=3,$

$p < .01$ ) and increased avoidance ( $\chi^2 = 13.5, df = 3, p < .01$ ).

### Sex differences

In order to contrast patterns for men and women, scores ranging from 1 to 4 were tabulated for each participant indicating how many incidents occurred at home, at work, at a friend or relative's home, in a public place, with a stranger or casual acquaintance, with a friend, with a sex partner, with a blood relative and with a female opponent. Scores of 1 to 24 were tabulated for length of time since the incident occurred and how long the opponent had been known by summing across the four incidents according to the six time lapse categories given in Figure 1.

Men and women showed no differences for anger occurring at a friend or relative's home, frequency (time lapse) of anger, or length of time opponents were known ( $t$ 's  $< 1.0$ ). Incidents were much more likely to occur at home for women ( $t = 3.16, df = 52, p < .005$ ). There was some suggestion that incidents were more likely to occur at work ( $t = 1.54, df = 52, p < .15$ ) and in public places ( $t = 1.41, df = 52, p < .20$ ) for men than for women.

There were also nonsignificant tendencies for men to be more likely to report anger involving friends ( $t = 1.85, df = 52, p < .07$ ) and strangers or casual acquaintances ( $t = 1.43, df = 52, p < .20$ ) and for women to report anger involving sex partners ( $t = 1.87, df = 52, p < .07$ ) and blood relatives ( $t = 1.55, df = 52, p < .15$ ). There was some evidence of a surprising tendency: men are more likely to report anger with a female opponent ( $t = 1.50, df = 51, p < .15$ ). Figure 4 reveals that this is due solely to differences in Type 3 incidents: while both men and women report each sex occurring as opponents at about equal frequencies for Type 1 and 2 episodes, the drop to about 30% of opponents being female occurs at Type 3 anger for women, but it does not occur until Type 4 anger for men.

### Age differences

There was limited opportunity to contrast anger in different age groups since no participants were under 19 and only four were over 40. However, analyses of variance were performed using the same scores tabulated for sex differences for the following age groups: 19-20 (n=12), 21-22 (n=18), 23-29 (n=13), 30-40 (n=8).

The only significant effect was that the 19-20 year old group was least likely to report anger involving a stranger or casual acquaintance ( $F=2.92, df=3, p < .05$ ). Parallel borderline effects indicated that 30-40 year old participants were most likely and 23-29 year old participants least likely to report anger at home ( $F=2.51, df=3, p < .08$ ) and anger which involved opponents known for a longer period of time ( $F=2.51, df=3, p < .08$ ).

### Discussion

A dialectical integration of aggression research would initially contrast reports of day-to-day anger with assumptions underlying laboratory paradigms. Some of the present findings may seem superficial when they confirm the "obvious". But the value of the results becomes clear when they are seen in a framework which incorporates findings that directly contradict the "obvious".

The most basic assumptions the authors had concerning anger were verified by items at the beginning and end of each episode: incidents predicted to be more severe were reliably more likely to have occurred longer ago and to be followed by more avoidance of the opponent. Interestingly, neither of these patterns differentiated Type 1 and Type 2 incidents, thereby suggesting that unexpressed anger is not more mild than anger expressed mildly (without yelling or hitting).

Goldstein's (1975) recent analysis of factors affecting aggression is to some extent a formalization of common sense expectations. In his overview "aggressive situations would include barrooms, public streets, vacant lots; nonaggressive locations include other peoples' homes, theatres, churches." (p.21) Absent from this framework are home and workplace anger, which, in the present study, represented over two thirds of all locations of angry incidents. While Goldstein felt

"other peoples' homes" were a "nonaggressible location", our participants reported "friend or relative's home" as the third most likely location of every type of anger. Despite the fact that "everyone knows" bars are associated with violence, not a single participant in this study listed a bar as the last place he/she was in a fight (though two listed restaurants).<sup>8</sup> The authors are not implying that people never fight in bars, but only suggest that bars may have been overrated as a "frequent" location of aggression.

In support of the Freudian view of ambivalence of emotional attachments, anger most frequently involved an intimate other (sex partner or blood relative). There was also some suggestion of heightened ambivalence from more permanent relationships due to a (nonsignificant) tendency for spouses to be increasingly represented and boyfriend/girlfriends to be decreasingly represented with increasing levels of anger. In line with the data on the prevalence of domestic violence (e.g., Gelles, 1972), the authors had expected sex partners to be more frequent opponents as level of hostility increased. It was thus surprising to discover that sex partners were represented as opponents for a relatively constant 26% of all types of anger.

That blood relatives were most frequently cited as opponents and were increasingly likely as opponents for stronger anger expression is consistent with Gelles' (1972) emphasis upon the family as a source of violence. Moreover, the only blank frequency in the expanded table the authors constructed to tabulate 8 relationships by the 4 incidents was un verbalized hostility to offspring: our participants reported hitting their children, screaming at their children, and one spoke softly to a child. But none reported becoming angry at their children and remaining quiet. This not only implies that verbal and physical force are very frequently used to solve family conflicts, but also suggests nonviolent methods of coping with offspring are actively avoided.

It would seem safe to agree that America has norms stipulating "certain



people are inappropriate targets of violence, such as women, the aged, and young children". (Gelles, 1975, p.21) But are women actually "inappropriate" targets of anger? The present data say "yes and no". Women are significantly less likely to be an opponent as intensity of anger increases. But these "inappropriate targets" comprised 30% of the physical violence opponents for both sexes. Men were even more likely than women to report a female opponent for the most recent yelling/screaming episode of anger expression.

A common sense psychology of instinct would certainly postulate a "need" among young men to prove themselves by not allowing real or imagined insults from strangers or casual acquaintances to go unpunished. Then, presumably, as they mature, they begin to realize the danger of aggressive encounters with a stranger whose potential is unknown and therefore shy away from such interactions. The first prediction which could be made from this theory -- that men would be involved in anger more recently than women -- received no support ( $t < 1.0$ ). The second prediction, that angry episodes with strangers decrease with age, was emphatically disconfirmed. Just the opposite was found, suggesting that popularized bravado by young adults is relatively rare, and that as people mature, they become more willing to confront a stranger or casual acquaintance.

The overwhelming majority of recently published studies of laboratory aggression have involved 18 to 20 year old strangers in unfamiliar surroundings. In contrast, the present study suggests that anger in unfamiliar locations is relatively infrequent, that this tendency becomes accentuated as one goes from mild to strong anger, and that violence between strangers is a particularly unlikely event for the 18-20 year old group. Together, these findings suggest that the current paradigm of aggression of the college sophomore analyzes a form of aggression that is not only one of the most unlikely to occur in our society, but *also one that* becomes increasingly rare as more extreme acts of violence are studied. The implication of this result is clear: to get at more typical anger, studies should involve familiar others, and preferably would take place in somewhat familiar

surroundings.

The methodology of using the IPCQ to investigate anger is diametrically opposite to the methodologies employed in most laboratory work. Behaviors typically scrutinized in experimental investigations of aggression are emitted by those trenchantly referred to as "subjects", who in fact are frequently treated as "objects" because the laboratory paradigm involves doing everything possible to prevent subjects from using their heads while under an experimenter's control. Contrariwise, research with the IPCQ is truly based on collaboration with "participants", who are urged to use their heads as much as possible to recall their experiences.

#### Conclusion

The central feature of naturalistic anger which reappeared throughout the findings was familiarity. Familiarity overshadowed popular preconceptions in determining that anger is more likely at one's home, workplace, or a friend or relative's home than at a bar. Due to intimate others being the most likely opponents, familiarity seemed to override the conventional prohibition against aggression toward women. Present results strongly suggest that if research on aggression is to generalize to hostilities most likely to occur in day-to-day life, a minimum requirement is to study some persons who are well acquainted with one another.

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FIGURE 1

Frequency of Six Time Lapse Categories for Four Types of Incidents

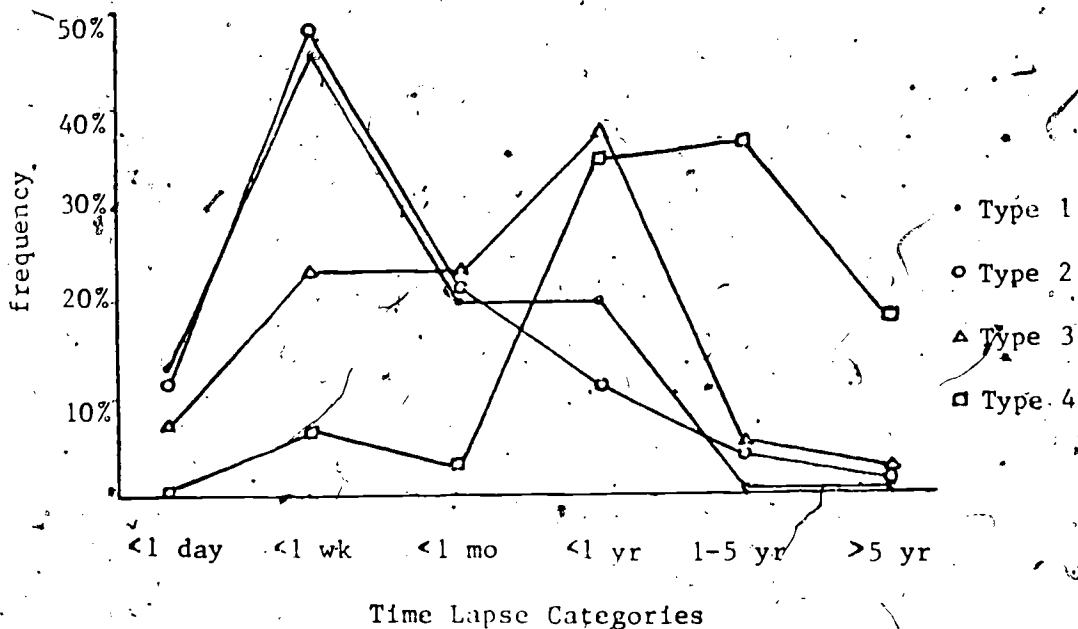
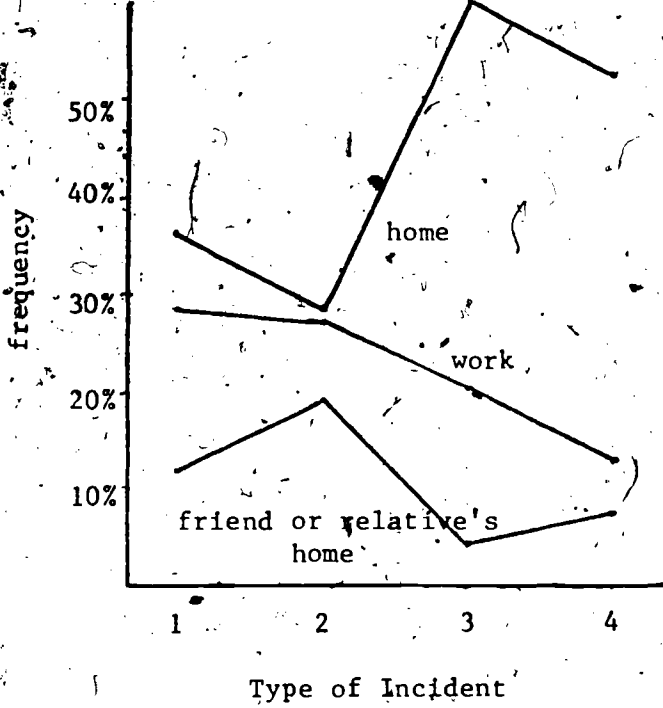
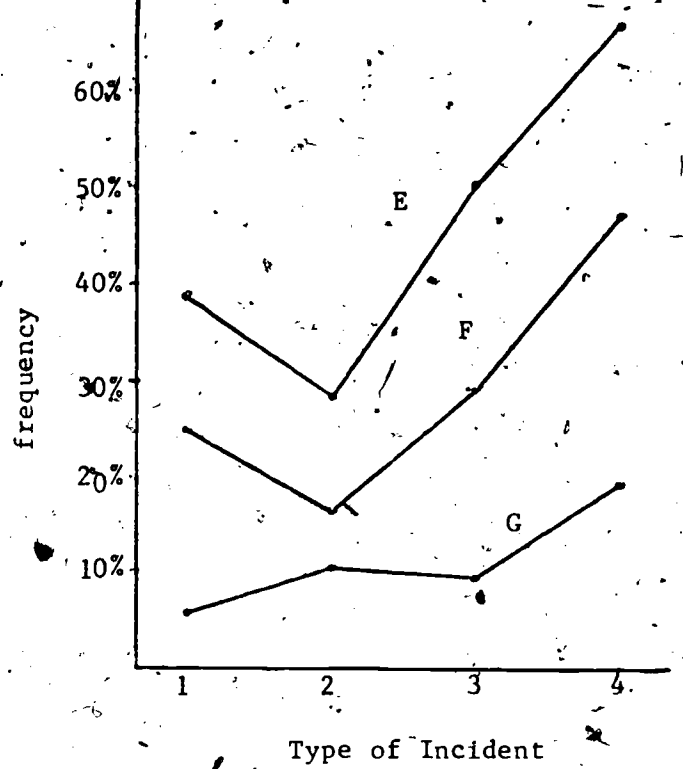


FIGURE 2

Frequency of Location for Four Types of Incidents



Frequency of "Yes" Responses to Questions E, F, and G for Four Types of Incidents



E: After the incident, did you talk to the person less than usual?  
 F: Did you avoid the person afterwards?  
 G: Did your relationship with the person end?

FIGURE 4

Percent of Women Reporting Female Opponents (♀) and Percent of Men Reporting Female Opponents (♂) for Four Types of Incidents

