



PERSONALITY AND AGGRESSION: THE DISSIPATION–RUMINATION SCALE

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Summary—This study attempted to examine aggression within a personological framework by using the Dissipation–Rumination Scale (Caprara, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 7, 763–769, 1986). Individual responses to a provoking situation in which there is a delay between instigation of aggression and opportunity to retaliate were examined. Forty males selected from the scale received either provocation or no provocation and after a 10-minute interval were given the opportunity to retaliate against a confederate. As predicted individual differences in responses were exhibited, with low dissipators–high ruminators displaying higher levels of aggression when previously provoked, $F(15.215) = 0.000$, $P < 0.05$. It was concluded that higher levels of aggression are exhibited by personality types who have the tendency to harbour thoughts and feelings of vengeance with the passage of time, when presented with a provoking situation. This was discussed in relation to the cognitive factors that affect the aggressive behaviour of individuals. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Individual differences in aggressive behaviour and related processes have received direct attention within the personological approach (Caprara, Barbaranelli & Comrey, 1992). The focus of much of the previous experimental research on aggression, has been on situational variables; e.g. frustration, environmental stressors and violation of norms, with less emphasis placed on individual differences variables (Geen, 1990). The personological approach attempts to examine how these variables moderate aggression, the cognitive and emotional processes that are involved and what factors determine why different types of aggression are exhibited in specific situations (Caprara, 1987; Caprara & Pastorelli, 1993). Studies concerned with individual differences in aggression have examined the constructs of Emotional Susceptibility, Irritability, Dissipation–Rumination and Fear of Punishment (Caprara *et al.*, 1992). Research on these constructs has tested impulsive aggression. This refers to involuntary responses towards internal and external stimulation (Feshbach, 1964). As a subtype of affective aggression, it refers to intent to harm, which is accompanied by “a negative emotional state in which the person is aroused, exhibiting anger especially after provocation”, (Feshbach, 1964). In an experimental situation this is shown as intent to harm or retaliation against the provocateur.

Unlike emotional susceptibility and irritability, dissipation–rumination addresses the possible cognitive processes that affect aggressive behaviour. This refers to the storing in memory of experiences of provocation, expectations, attributions, judgements and thoughts of retaliation (Caprara, 1987). Dissipation–rumination has been described as the “decrease or increase in aggressive conduct as a function of the lapse of time” (Konecni, 1975). It is also considered to be the “opposite ends of a single dimension of behaviour” (Caprara, 1986). At one end of the continuum there is a tendency toward rapid (high) dissipation and minimal (low) rumination, with minimal (low) dissipation and rapid (high) rumination at the opposite end. In order to examine this phenomenon in experimental situations the Dissipation–Rumination Scale was devised (Caprara *et al.*, 1985b). From the scale, those individuals who are found to be high dissipators–low ruminators, do not tend to harbour feelings of vengeance from a hostile situation. Low dissipators–high ruminators, however, are more likely to deliberate over thoughts of retaliation. The scale is therefore designed to test the level of hostility displayed by an individual when provoked by threatened self-esteem in any experimental situation. The Dissipation–Rumination Scale has been found to be a valid measure of hostility in these situations (Caprara *et al.*, 1985c; Caprara, 1987).

Previous studies using this scale found that Ss, when previously provoked (insulted) selected

Table 1. Treatment allocations

Personality type	Treatment
A High dissipators–low ruminators	Provocation
B Low dissipators–high ruminators	Provocation
C High dissipators–low ruminators	No provocation
D Low dissipators–high ruminators	No provocation

higher levels of shock than *Ss* in the no provocation condition (Caprara *et al.*, 1985c). Low dissipators–high ruminators who were previously insulted made less favourable evaluations of the provocateur, compared to high dissipators–low ruminators, who were also insulted. With the passage of time (24 hr) insult was found to be a powerful instigator of aggression. High dissipators–low ruminators displaying no evidence of dissipation (Caprara *et al.*, 1985c). Zelli (1984) examined irritability, emotional susceptibility and dissipation–rumination. Dissipation–rumination was found to be the best predictor of aggression and insult as a powerful instigator of aggression. As before, less favourable evaluations were made by low dissipators–high ruminators, when insulted than high dissipators–low ruminators, in the same condition.

Dissipation–rumination was examined in this study. Failure on a learning task was used in the provocation condition. Negative judgement of a *S*'s performance on a learning task has been found to be an effective measure of provocation in previous experiments (Caprara, 1982; Caprara & Renzi, 1981; Caprara *et al.*, 1983). Low dissipators–high ruminators have displayed higher levels of hostility and made less favourable evaluations towards the provocateur when similar provocation was used (e.g. Caprara *et al.*, 1985a). This tendency to harbour insult or failure was also reflected in the high level of aggression displayed by low dissipators–high ruminators 24 hr after provocation (Caprara *et al.*, 1985a). This highlights the power of provocation as an instigator of aggression.

In this experiment two groups were selected using the Dissipation–Rumination Scale. The *Ss* were assigned to four smaller groups according to treatment allocation (see Table 1).

Groups A and B were in the experimental condition. C and D were control groups. Assignment to the treatment group was random. Both personality type and treatment were independent variables. The dependent variable was the level of aggression displayed by each *S*. This was measured by the number of masks (blasts of white noise) delivered by the *S* on the Human Irritable Aggression Paradigm (Buss, 1961).

The hypothesis tested was: Low dissipators–high ruminators will display higher levels of aggression than high dissipators–low ruminators when previously provoked.

METHODS

Subjects

Forty undergraduate males were selected from 1st and 3rd year psychology classes. *S* selection was based on their responses on the Dissipation–Rumination Scale. *Ss* scoring above the 75th percentile were described as low dissipators–high ruminators. *Ss* found to score below the 25th percentile were categorized as high dissipators–low ruminators. Each *S* was then randomly assigned to one of the four treatment conditions, with 10 *Ss* in each condition.

Procedure

Ss selected on the basis of their responses on the Dissipation–Rumination Scale completed two tasks in this experiment. Each *S* was first asked to read and answer questions about a short passage by H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr Polly*. Provocation was negative feedback on performance in this memory task. Feedback was only given to *Ss* in the experimental conditions. Control *Ss* who were not provoked did not receive feedback.

In order to assess level of aggression after provocation, the Buss paradigm was administered to each *S* after a 10-minute interval. *Ss* were instructed about the game. They were informed they were playing an 'opponent' in the adjoining room. In order to play against the 'opponent', three buttons were used on the control panel in front of them. The buttons were marked points, deduct and mask.

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