

RESEARCH

Theories of Violence

Nicole Keenan

Virginia Tech, US
nicolefk@vt.edu

The current study examined the identity and interest-group theories in the context of domestic violence and hate crimes. Identity and the roles with which people define themselves, especially if the roles are violent in nature, can lead to elevated levels of domestic violence. Interest-group theory argues that by placing groups with different norms and values against each other, violence, especially visible in hate crimes, will reach elevated levels. In addition, counter-violence methods were discussed in regard to both theories that have been mentioned. For counter-violence, strategies and policy are two effective measures to reduce these types of violence. Through this discussion, it will be shown that violence is a learned behavior and something that can be controlled by alleviating factors such as negative labels or negative socialization involved in these theories.

Keywords: symbolic interaction theory; identity theory; interest-group theory; domestic violence; hate crime

Violence is an act that attempts to minimize the importance of those in the out-group, and multiple theories attempt to explain the causes of violence. One of these theories is the identity theory of symbolic interaction. According to Peter Hall (2016), "Symbolic interaction is a theoretical perspective that has roots in pragmatism with its emphasis on activity, processes, and dissolving dualisms." In this sense, symbolic interaction is the idea that people find importance based on the interactions that they have with the environment. The identity theory, formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, argues that the meanings that people give themselves develop from the roles that they fulfill. This theory argues that people divide their world into an in-group and an out-group, and might "discriminate against the out-group, thus enhancing their self-image" (McLeod, 2008). This clear division can contribute to violence against those seen as "other". The interest-group theory, developed by Thorsten Sellin (1938), is a type of conflict theory. In this framework, Sellin suggests that during periods of rapid social change, violence occurs because groups with different norms and values come closer together. In interest-group theory, violence consists of acts between groups with differing norms to assert power over another group. The cause of violence in this theory would be an attempt to maintain the norms of each group, even when they conflict with other groups.

Identity theories and interest-group theories have a lot in common. One similarity is the fact that both differentiate and discriminate against those seen as "other" using in-groups and out-groups. Another similarity is the idea that the values and norms of the group are of greater importance than individual ideologies. Identity theory posits the idea that labeling oneself into a group places a great importance on these groups and consequently, shapes the way that a person views themselves. In interest-group theory, the values and norms of the group act as the ultimate determinant in conflicts with other groups, even if an individual does not always believe in those ideals. Another similarity is the idea that in both identity and interest-group theories, an individual is likely to believe the group norms and values at a greater level the more entrenched they feel in the group.

Identity theory comes up in many places, be it a student who feels the need to constantly be in the library because that is what a "good student" does, or a police officer who becomes violent when they are not at work because the violent activities of their job generalize to their home life. Police and correctional officers are some of the strongest examples of identity theory. Officers, even those who, like Shane Bauer (2018), at the beginning of the job, feel that they have no proclivity for violence, have a stronger tendency to be domestic abusers. For their job, officers maintain a tough, macho attitude. They feel that they must use violence, be it tackling an assailant or, in some severe cases, using their guns or tasers to minimize threats. Police officers label themselves as such, and thus, the violence that is admirable in their line of work begins to integrate itself into their personal lives. As this label grows into a stronger part of their identity, so too does the violence that comes with it. Because of this, it is not uncommon for officers to begin to use this violence against partners, some

even going so far as shooting a partner. To illustrate, Bauer (2018) notes that although he viewed himself as anything but a macho man, during his time as a correctional officer, his views towards both himself and the prisoners had changed. This change in his values arose from the labels he placed upon himself and the way that correctional officers are expected to act in a workplace setting. This theory is very applicable to domestic violence because people who view themselves as violent or appear violent to others are more likely to act in violent manners. Police officers are not the only perpetrators of domestic violence, but the majority of people who commit this crime are seen leading violent lifestyles by their peers.

The ability to measure who is considered violent is very difficult, but by evaluating the labels that a person is defined by, especially if they are violent, it is easier to predict who will commit domestic violence and other violent crimes. Interest-group theory can often explain hate crimes because, during times of cultural change, the differences between groups of contrasting ideals often seem so great and insurmountable that members of each group may see violence as the only option to push their values onto other groups. One example of hate crimes resulting from interest-groups is the Greensboro sit-ins that took place during the Civil Rights Movement. Christopher Schmidt (2017) stated that “students began to see tangible results as a growing number of restaurants desegregated” but these results led to violent actions from people who opposed the movement. This violence came from a range of people but the harshest perpetrators were the members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Members of the KKK felt that the Civil Rights Movement was in direct opposition to their values and the norms which society had followed for many years, and thus they reacted by attacking black members of the community, especially those who were leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. The interest-group theory applies directly to hate crimes because when a person believes their values are being threatened, they feel it is imperative to do whatever it takes to make sure that the cultural change that is threatening those values is stagnated, and protect the norms that are already in place. This idea of doing whatever it takes can lead to violence such as that performed by the KKK and other hate groups around the world. Hate crimes are relatively easy to predict by criminologists and those within a community because if rapid social change is occurring, hate crimes will often occur when those changes are becoming apparent in society. Hate crime is harder to measure using this theory because there are instances of hate crimes occurring even after the social change is complete, such as KKK violence after slavery was abolished. Interest-group theory is well suited to explain hate crimes because it explains the way that societal norms can influence an individual to act out against members of groups fighting for social change. The violence occurring from both of these theories can be deterred utilizing counter-violence measures that alleviate conflicts within society.

Strategy is the best method to avoid violence in the identity theory. Strategies can be put in place to remove the connotations of violence with certain labels. If the police officer example holds true, when police officers see themselves more as protectors of society and less as crime fighters, then this label alleviates some of the negative associations between the job and violence. If this method of removing the significance of violence can apply to other labels, people who identify with these types of labels would be less likely to view themselves as violent and would become less violent as a result. Interest-group theory lends itself well to policy changes to eradicate violence during social changes. If the policy were to make social change move somewhat slower, it would potentially allow any opposing groups to cope with the gradual changes. Although violence exists even if social change is slower, Gérard Roland (n.d) argues that by gradually enacting change and allowing time for experimentation, violence is less likely to occur.

To conclude, in an earlier paper, I previously argued that human nature is good. As such, I discussed *What is Violence* by Anthony Arblaster (1975) and his focus on “actual, not metaphorical, violence for which human beings are responsible.” While I still believe that individuals are inherently peaceful, I believe that society often breeds violence by creating an “us versus them” mentality that can cause individuals to react violently. In this sense, my theoretical approach to violence necessitates a specification for an individual and their response to the societal factors that are present surrounding them. I would argue that the groups or labels with which a person defines themselves are the root cause of conflict and violence, especially when those groups become more important to a person than their sense of self and ideas of individualism.

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