Lecture Exercise #8 - Please submit your responses to the following questions using the drop box below.  This assignment is worth 4% of your final grade.  Comment on each of the issues listed below.  Full marks will be given for thorough responses that explain your thoughts and beliefs about the topics.

1. Aggression, Frustration, Instincts

Consider your definition of aggressive behaviour.  What acts are aggressive?  Is aggression an instinct?  What psychological influences (eg. Frustration) do you experience prior to behaving or thinking aggressively?

2. What kind of people become torturers?

Most people imagine that only “monsters” or psychopaths can routinely humiliate, torture, or murder others. In fact, numerous studies in social psychology have shown how everyday, “normal” people can commit unthinkable acts caused by the step-by-step power of the situation. Many of the same mechanisms manipulated in laboratory studies have been shown to underlie the origins of human torture and slaughter (Staub, 1989).

In one study, Gibson and Haritos-Fatouros (1986) investigated the procedures used to train Greek military police to become willing torturers. They discuss such foot-in-the-door techniques as the following:

Basic training

physically brutal initiation rites

swearing allegiance to symbol of authority

Reducing sensitivity to torture

recruits endure torture and scream chants about violence and killing

Systematic desensitization and social modelling

recruits gradually exposed to prisoners (bring food)

watch veterans torture and be rewarded for torturing

participate in group beatings

eventually perform solo beatings

Discuss: what psychological mechanisms (e.g. cognitive dissonance,upward/downward social comparisons, stereotyping) are at work here? What can ordinary people do to prevent themselves from becoming complicit in harming others?

References:

Gibson, J. T., and Haritos-Fatouros, M. (1986). The education of a torturer. Psychology Today, 20, 50-58.

Staub, E. (1989). The roots of evil: The origins of genocide and other group violence.  New York: Cambridge University Press.