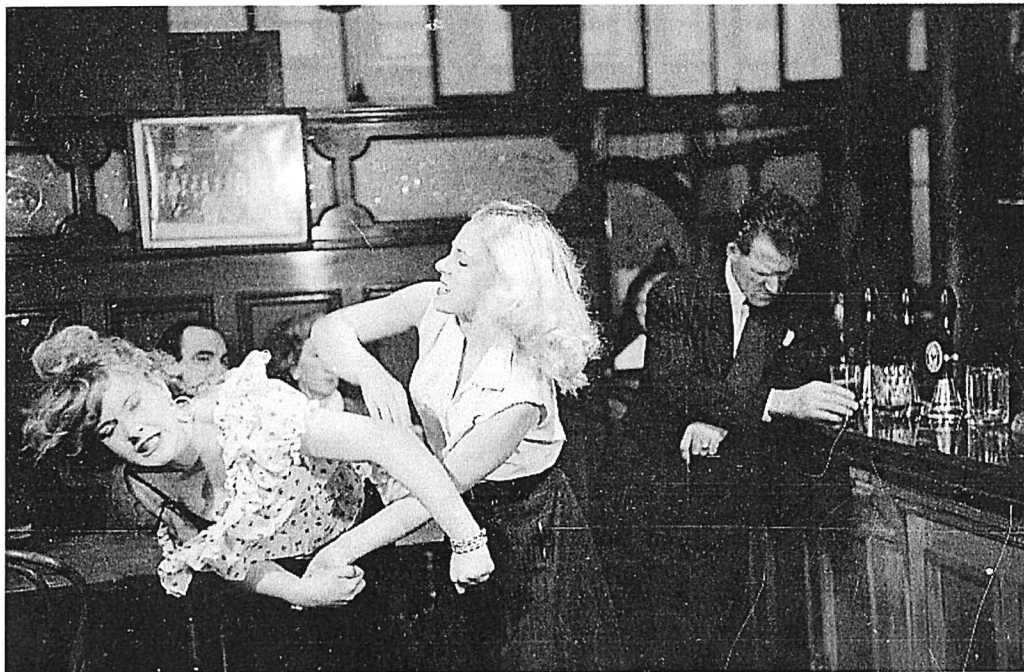


Chapter 12

Aggression

Why Do We Hurt Other People? Can We Prevent It?



Chapter Outline and Learning Objectives

Is Aggression Innate, Learned, or Optional?

LO 12.1 Distinguish evolutionary, cultural, and learning explanations of aggression.

The Evolutionary View

Culture and Aggression

Gender and Aggression

Learning to Behave Aggressively

Some Physiological Influences

Social Situations and Aggression

LO 12.2 Describe situational and social causes of aggression.

Frustration and Aggression

Provocation and Reciprocation

Weapons as Aggressive Cues

Putting the Elements Together: The Case of Sexual Assault

Violence and the Media

LO 12.3 Explain how observing violence increases violence.

Studying the Effects of Media Violence

The Problem of Determining Cause and Effect

How to Decrease Aggression

LO 12.4 Identify ways aggression can be diminished.

Does Punishing Aggression Reduce Aggression?

Can We Release Anger by Indulging It?

What Are We Supposed to Do with Our Anger?

Disrupting the Rejection-Rage Cycle

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Revel Interactive	Survey What Do You Think?	
	SURVEY	RESULTS
	Do you regularly play first-person shooter video games or watch TV shows or movies that depict acts of violence?	
	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	

The mass murder at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, casts a long shadow in American culture. There, in 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold went on a rampage with assault weapons, killing a teacher and 12 of their fellow students. They then turned their guns on themselves. As horrendous as it was, the death toll could have been much higher. The two shooters had made a videotape prior to the massacre in which they announced that they had prepared and planted 95 explosive devices (fortunately, due to a technical error, these failed to go off). The videotape shows the perpetrators gleefully predicting that, before the day was over, they would have killed 250 people.

Since then, dozens of troubled teenagers have apparently used Columbine as a template for revenge against the classmates they believe have taunted, bullied, or rejected them; some researchers even call this the “Columbine effect.” For example, in 2012, Adam Lanza carried out a similar rampage at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut. The police investigation discovered that Lanza was particularly obsessed with the Columbine massacre.

In the aftermath of every mass shooting, the country invariably seeks someone to blame. Were the parents at fault? Does our country make weapons too easily accessible? Does the media show too much violence, influencing our society’s behavior? Were all of the shooters crazy? Obviously, anyone who commits mass murder is not emotionally stable, but mental illness itself cannot explain most of these tragic outbursts; most mentally ill people, after all, are not mass murderers.

The violence that human beings inflict on one another comes in all too many varieties: war, mass shootings, fistfights and brawls, murder, sexual coercion and rape, and domestic abuse. In this chapter, we will try to understand some of the diverse causes of aggression. Are human beings innately aggressive? You rarely hear about a woman going on a shooting rampage; does that mean men are innately more aggressive than women? Can healthy people be inspired to commit violence by watching violent characters in films or playing violent video games? Can a society, a school, or a parent do anything to reduce aggression? If so, what specifically?

Needless to say, social psychologists don’t have all the answers, but we do have some of them. By the time you get to the end of this chapter, we hope you will have gained some insight into why humans would hurt other humans.

Is Aggression Innate, Learned, or Optional?

LO 12.1 Distinguish evolutionary, cultural, and learning explanations of aggression.

For social psychologists, **aggression** is defined as intentional behavior aimed at causing either physical or psychological pain. The intention to do harm is a necessary component of the psychological definition of aggression, and what makes aggression different from assertiveness. When people fight for their rights, compete in a sports

Aggression

Intentional behavior aimed at causing physical harm or psychological pain to another person

match, or act ambitiously in the business world, they are being assertive without being aggressive, because true aggression involves the intent to harm another. Aggressive action might be physical or verbal; it might succeed in its goal or not. If someone throws a beer bottle at your head and you duck so that the bottle misses you, it was still an aggressive act. By the same token, if a drunk driver unintentionally hits you while you're attempting to cross the street, that is not an act of aggression, even though the damage would be far greater than that caused by the beer bottle that missed. The important thing is the intention. "Violence" is an extreme form of aggression, as in acts of war, murder, and assault.

It is also useful to distinguish between types of aggression (Berkowitz, 1993). **Hostile aggression** is an act of aggression stemming from feelings of anger and is aimed at inflicting pain or injury. **Instrumental aggression** is an act of aggression that is an intermediary step toward a nonaggressive goal. Imagine you are going down the stairs toward a subway platform and you see the train paused with its doors open. You need to get on this train because you will miss your doctor's appointment if you don't. The problem is, all the passengers who deboarded the train are going up the stairs without giving equal room to the people who are trying to go down. You suddenly decide that you cannot wait and must rush forward to make your train. So, you use your shoulders and arms to push people out of your way, even though you know you could bruise someone or even knock people down. If you behaved aggressively purely out of the desire to make your train, then this is instrumental aggression. If, however, you felt angry that the people going up the stairs weren't sharing the space fairly and felt a desire to dole out a few bruises, then the same act (i.e., pushing people out of your way while going downstairs) would be hostile aggression.

Today, social psychologists and other scientists have made great strides in understanding the biological, social, cultural, and situational causes of aggressive behavior. Research has found that aggression has many complex causes and comes in many forms—from direct assault to indirect cruelty—but it's important to note that such behavior is not inevitable and that we possess the power to limit its frequency and consequences.

The Evolutionary View

It seems obvious that men are more aggressive than women. More than 90% of all mass murders (defined as killing at least four people in one location) are committed by men (Hillshafer, 2013). Men are more likely than women to get into spontaneous, unprovoked acts of "picking a fight" with a stranger, join in a flash mob bent on destruction and looting, and commit crimes of violence (murder, aggravated assault, rape). But as we will see, this fact doesn't necessarily mean that women are the shy, retiring, peaceful sex.

Evolutionary psychologists argue that physical aggression is genetically programmed into men because it enables them to defend their group and perpetuate their genes. In cultures all over the world—as diverse as the United States, Switzerland, and Ethiopia—male aggressiveness starts in childhood: Little boys are far more likely than little girls to engage in "nonplayful" pushing, shoving, and hitting (Deaux & La France, 1998; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Males are theorized to aggress for two reasons: first, to establish dominance over other males and secure the highest possible status and, second, males aggress out of sexual jealousy to ensure that their mate is not having sex with other men, thereby ensuring their own paternity (Buss, 2004, 2005; Kaighobadi, Shackelford, & Goetz, 2009). When females behave aggressively, in the evolutionary view, it is generally to protect their offspring. Do not get in the way of a mother bear—or, for that matter, a mother bird.

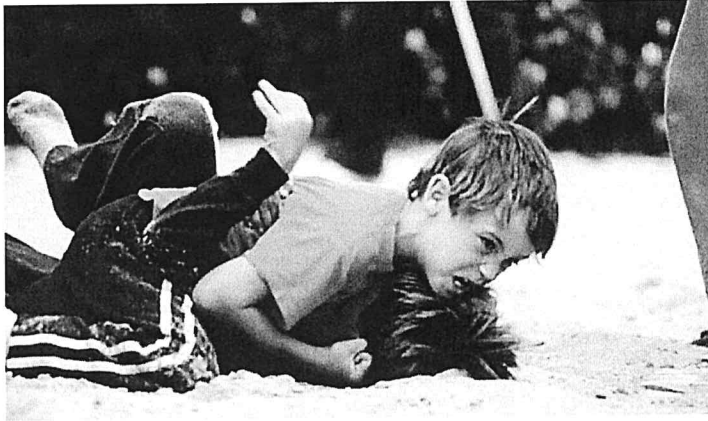
It is commonly believed that the hormone that fuels male aggression is testosterone, which both sexes have, although in higher proportion in males. Laboratory

Hostile Aggression

Aggression stemming from feelings of anger with the goal of inflicting pain or injury

Instrumental Aggression

Aggression that is done as a means to achieve some goal other than causing pain



Boys are more likely than girls, the world over, to roughhouse and pummel each other. Is this evidence of hostile or instrumental aggression—or just of physical play?

Challenge Hypothesis

Testosterone relates to aggression only when there are opportunities for reproduction

Dual-Hormone Hypothesis

Testosterone relates to dominance-seeking behavior only when the stress hormone, cortisol, is not elevated

aggression are only related when opportunities for reproduction are high (Buss, 2002). Similarly, the **Dual-Hormone Hypothesis** states that testosterone only relates to dominance behaviors when the stress hormone, cortisol, is low (Mehta & Josephs, 2010). Research on the Dual-Hormone Hypothesis shows that, in stressful or dangerous times (i.e., when cortisol is elevated), testosterone is related to systematically *less* aggressive and dominance-seeking behaviors. In other words, testosterone only predicts aggression when there is a chance to gain something from that aggression, suggesting a specific relationship between testosterone and instrumental aggression. Both the Challenge Hypothesis and the Dual-Hormone Hypothesis support the evolutionary explanation for aggression serving as a means for establishing dominance and securing mates.

It's also easy (and wrong) to get carried away with claims that men suffer from "testosterone poisoning." Most of the studies have been correlational, which suggests that causality can (and does) flow in both directions: That is, testosterone itself can slightly increase aggression, but being in an aggressive, competitive, or sexual situation increases the production of testosterone (Mazur, Booth, & Dabbs, 1992; Trumble et al., 2012). Moreover, testosterone shares a chemical precursor with the other primary sex hormone, estradiol, that is higher in women than men. Estradiol relates to similar psychological variables as testosterone, such as aggression and sexuality. In fact, the neurons that regulate the synthesis of estradiol also regulate aggression in both men and women (Unger et al., 2015), but we know that estradiol is higher in women than men. Understanding the nuanced differences between the way that testosterone and estradiol relate to aggression is an active research area that seeks to understand the biological contributions to sex differences in aggression.

AGGRESSION IN OTHER ANIMALS To determine the extent to which aggressiveness is innate or learned, some scientists have turned to experiments with nonhuman species. Consider the common belief that cats will instinctively stalk and kill rats. More than a half-century ago, biologist Zing Yang Kuo (1961) performed a simple experiment: He raised a kitten in the same cage with a rat. Not only did the cat refrain from attacking the rat, but the two became close companions. When given the opportunity, the cat refused either to chase or to kill other rats; thus, the benign behavior was not confined to his one buddy but generalized to rats the cat had never met.

Although this experiment is charming, it fails to prove that aggressive behavior is not instinctive in cats; it merely demonstrates that early experience can override it. What if an organism grows up without any contact with other organisms? Will it or won't it show aggressive tendencies? It turns out that rats raised in isolation, without any experience in fighting other rats, will attack a fellow rat when one is introduced

animals whose testosterone is removed become less aggressive, and those injected with testosterone become more aggressive (Moyer, 1983; Sapolsky, 1998). Testosterone levels are significantly higher among prisoners convicted of violent crimes than among those convicted of nonviolent crimes (Dabbs, 2000; Dabbs et al., 1995). Testosterone may lead to aggression by reducing our ability to control impulses. Testosterone is related to reduced activity in the orbitofrontal cortex, which is a key brain area for self-regulation and impulse control, and activity in the orbitofrontal cortex in turn predicts responding aggressively to unfair offers in a resource-allocation game (Mehta & Beer, 2010).

However, the link between testosterone and aggression heavily depends on the social situation. The **Challenge Hypothesis** states that testosterone and

into the cage; the isolated rats use the same pattern of threat and attack that experienced rats use (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1963). So even though aggressive behavior can be modified by experience, as shown by Kuo's experiment, some kinds of aggressive behavior apparently do not need to be learned.

We can gain still greater insight into our own biological heritage by observing the behavior of those animals with whom we have the most genetic similarity. Our closest relatives in the animal kingdom are two primates: the chimpanzees and the bonobos. Both species have 98% of their DNA in common with human beings, and chimps, bonobos, and humans all directly evolved from the same ancestor (Prüfer et al., 2012). Nonetheless, aggression differs a lot between us. The chimpanzee is known for its aggressive behavior; the females too can be pretty mean (Miller et al., 2014). It is the only nonhuman species in which groups of male members hunt and kill other members of their own kind—indeed, at about the same rate that humans in hunter-gatherer societies kill each other (Wrangham, Wilson, & Muller, 2006). Based on the research on chimps, we might conclude that humans, especially males, are genetically programmed for aggressive behavior.

However, living across the river from the chimpanzees and out of their reach are the bonobos, our equally close genetic relative. Unlike the chimp, the bonobo is known for its nonaggressive behavior. In fact, bonobos are often referred to as the “make love, not war” ape. Prior to engaging in activities that could otherwise lead to conflict, bonobos have sex, an activity that functions to diffuse potential conflict (De Waal, 1995). Thus, when the group arrives at a feeding ground, they first enjoy some sexual play and then proceed to eat peacefully. In contrast, when chimps arrive at a feeding ground, they compete aggressively for the food. Also, unlike the chimps, bonobos form female-dominated societies, keeping males in line and often behaving with remarkable sensitivity to others in their group (Parish & de Waal, 2000).

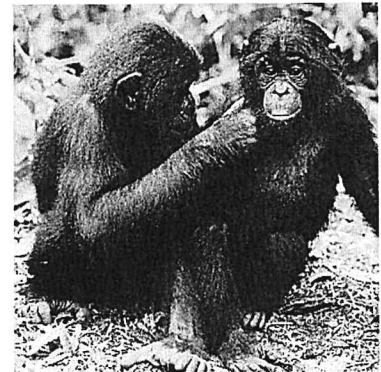
Unfortunately, the bonobo way of life is rare in the animal kingdom. The near universality of aggression strongly suggests that aggressiveness has evolved and has been maintained because it has survival value (Buss, 2004; Lore & Schultz, 1993). At the same time, nearly all organisms also seem to have evolved strong inhibitory mechanisms that enable them to suppress aggression when it is in their best interests to do so. Aggression is determined by the animal's previous experiences as well as by the specific social context in which the animal finds itself.

Culture and Aggression

Most social psychologists, therefore, believe that aggression is an optional strategy: We humans are born with the *capacity* for aggressive behavior, but how, whether, when, and where we express it is learned and depends on our circumstances and culture (Berkowitz, 1993). All males and females have testosterone and estradiol, after all, but their rates of aggression and violence around the world vary dramatically. Likewise, we seem to have an inborn tendency to respond to certain provocative stimuli by striking out against the perpetrator, but whether we actually do so depends on a complex interplay between these innate tendencies, a variety of learned inhibitory responses, and the precise nature of the social situation. You may be angry if a police officer stops you for speeding when all the cars around you were speeding, but it is likely that you will control your temper—and your behavior.

Thus, although many animals, from insects to apes, will usually attack another animal that invades their territory, we cannot conclude that human beings are similarly programmed to protect their territory and behave aggressively in response to specific stimuli. Three major lines of evidence support this more complex view of aggression: studies of cultures across time, studies across cultures, and laboratory experiments.

CHANGES IN AGGRESSION ACROSS TIME AND CULTURES Within a given culture, changing social conditions frequently lead to significant changes in aggressive



When people say that aggression is “natural,” they often point to our primate relatives. Chimpanzees (top) are indeed pretty belligerent and aggressive, but bonobos (bottom) would rather make love than war.

behavior. Consider the Iroquois of North America. For hundreds of years, the Iroquois lived peacefully as a hunting nation, without fighting other tribes. But in the seventeenth century, barter with the newly arrived Europeans brought the Iroquois into direct competition with the neighboring Hurons over furs, which dramatically increased in value because they could now be traded for manufactured goods. A series of skirmishes with the Hurons ensued, and within a short time, the Iroquois developed into ferocious warriors. It would be hard to argue that they became ferocious warriors because of some innate aggressive impulse; rather, their aggressive shift almost certainly came about because a social change produced increases in competition (Hunt, 1940).

It works in the other direction, too. Psychologist Steven Pinker (2011) amassed evidence that aggressive acts like war, crime, torture, and murder—though unquestionably still prevalent—have actually been steadily declining over the centuries (see Figure 12.1). Genocidal eruptions such as the Holocaust and contemporary wars are interruptions on a trajectory showing that violence has declined in the family, in neighborhoods, and between

nations. We now live in an era, Pinker argues, that is less violent, less cruel, and more peaceful than any previous period of human history. So, if you feel like times are pretty violent now, then imagine what life was like 3000 years ago! We are the same species as the people who lived then, so any innate human aggression has remained constant between us. What changed was the civilizing processes of settled communities and nation-states, and the rising belief in human rights. Many societies that were once warlike—such as the Scandinavians or Portuguese—have become the most peaceful on the planet. “Violence as entertainment” now takes place on movie screens and not in gladiator arenas where actual people were once torn apart to the cheers of audiences.

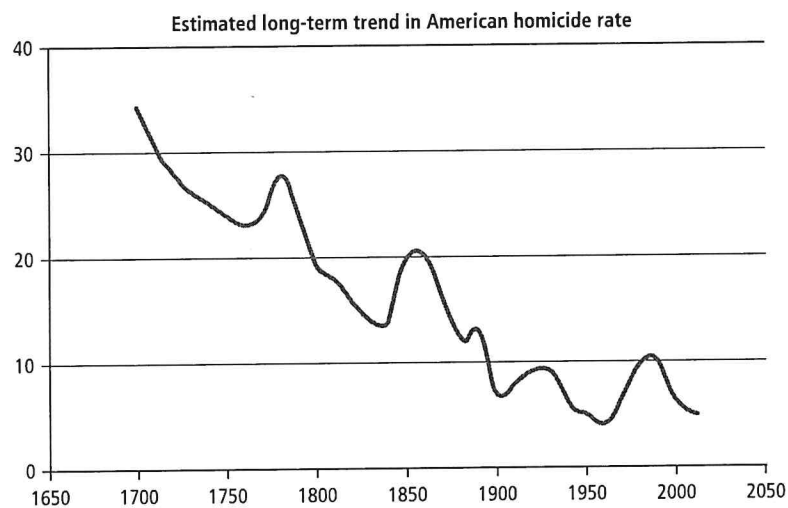
Moreover, not all societies have been equally warlike. Cultures embedded with cooperative, collectivist values have had lower levels of aggressive behavior than European societies (Bergeron & Schneider, 2005). Certain tribes, such as the Lepchas of Sikkim, the Pygmies of Central Africa, and the Arapesh of

New Guinea, live in apparent peace and harmony, with acts of aggression being extremely rare (Baron & Richardson, 1994). In close-knit cultures that depend on cooperation for the group’s survival, anger and aggression are considered dangerous and disruptive, and an offender will be ostracized or punished. When men live in cultures that lack internal and external threats to their survival—and, admittedly, not many cultures are so blessed—they are not raised to be aggressive, sex differences are minimized, and cooperation is encouraged (Gilmore, 1990; Kimmel, 2012).

For example, the Teduray, a hunter-gatherer culture in the Philippine rain forest, have established institutions and norms specifically designed to prevent aggression among themselves. In their societies, people are expected to pay special attention to the effect of their actions on the feelings of others. When a situation arises, such as adultery, in which there is significant risk that anger will lead to violence, specific members of a Teduray village work to placate the injured individuals. The Teduray believe that human beings are aggressive by nature but do all they can to reduce its expression within their group. They will, however, behave aggressively to protect themselves from aggression from outsiders (Schlegel, 1998). Altogether, if human aggression was a reliable response to provocative stimuli, then humans in all cultures would be equally aggressive.

Figure 12.1 Homicide rates have been steadily decreasing in America over the last 300 years

Claude Fischer



CULTURES OF HONOR Perhaps the strongest evidence against the notion that “men are naturally aggressive because of their testosterone” comes from experiments showing how cultural norms and expectations literally “get inside” people, causing them to behave differently under similar provocation.

For example, in the United States, there are some major regional differences in aggressive behavior and in the kinds of events that trigger violence. Homicide rates for White males from the South and Southwest are substantially higher than those for White northern males, especially in rural areas. Richard Nisbett (1993) hypothesized that the higher rates of violence derive from economic causes: Higher rates of violence occur in cultures that were originally based on herding, in contrast to cultures based on agriculture. Why would this be so? People who depend economically on agriculture tend to develop cooperative strategies for survival. But people who depend on their herds are extremely vulnerable; their livelihoods can be lost in an instant by the theft of their animals. To reduce the likelihood of theft, Nisbett theorized, herders learn to be hyperalert to any threatening act (real or perceived) and respond to it immediately with force. This would explain why cattle rustling and horse thievery were capital crimes in the Old West and why Mediterranean and Middle Eastern herding cultures even today place a high value on male aggressiveness. And indeed, when Nisbett looked at agricultural practices *within* the South, he found that homicide rates were more than twice as high in the hills and dry plains areas (where herding occurs) as in farming regions.

The emphasis on aggressiveness and vigilance in herding communities fosters, in turn, a *culture of honor* in which even small disputes put a man’s reputation for toughness on the line, requiring him to respond aggressively to restore his status (Cohen, 1998). Although the herding economy has become much less important in the South and West, the legacy of its culture of honor remains. These regions have rates of honor-related homicides (such as murder to avenge a perceived insult to one’s family) that are five times higher than in other regions of the country. High school students in culture-of-honor states are far more likely than students from other states to bring a weapon to school and to use that weapon. These states have more than twice as many school shootings per capita than do other states (Brown, Osterman, & Barnes, 2009). Whereas Pinker (2011) found that violence declines in democracies that allow the government to manage justice and determine the proper punishment for offenders—thereby removing the burden of revenge from individual citizens—men in cultures of honor tend to distrust governments and believe they are the ones who have the obligation to retaliate, personally and sometimes violently.

Gender and Aggression

If women aren’t very likely to get into fistfights, start riots, or shoot someone to defend their family’s reputation, does that mean that they are inherently less aggressive than men? Gender differences in aggression are obvious in the larger social world; in the private world of families and relationships, these differences aren’t always so clear.



The Teduray culture in the Philippines have developed norms and practices that mitigate aggression.



The early economies of the American South and West created a “culture of honor” in which a man was literally quick on the trigger if he thought another man was about to smear his reputation—or steal his cattle.

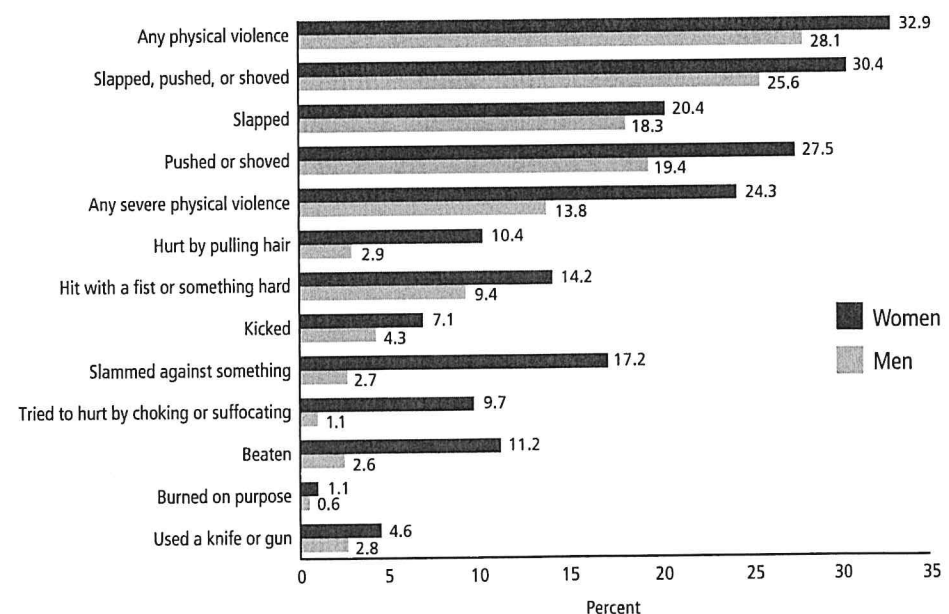
PHYSICAL AGGRESSION Most cases of *extreme* violence in the family are perpetrated by men: For example, 8 in 10 murderers who kill a family member are male. And when men beat up their victims, they inflict more serious injury than women abusers do. According to the Centers for Disease Control's national survey of violence between partners, women have a significantly higher lifetime prevalence of severe physical violence by an intimate partner (24.3%) compared to men (13.8%; Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014; see Figure 12.2), but the rates for men are not as low as societal views assume. When it comes to hitting, slapping, throwing objects, and battering, women, dare we say, don't pull their punches. In a study of nearly 500 first-year American college women who reported violence with their boyfriends, most reported reciprocal abuse (Testa, Hoffman, & Leonard, 2011). A few years ago, a review of more than 200 studies of community samples found no significant gender differences in the percentage of men and women who are physically aggressive with their partners (Straus, 2011). The causes are the same for both parties—including sexual jealousy, anger, to get partner's attention, revenge for perceived emotional abuse, and self-defense (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012).

There is often great overlap between males' and females' aggressive behavior. Indeed, in some studies that compared young boys and girls in levels of physical aggression, most of the boys and girls were similarly nonaggressive (Archer, 2004). Among adults, the sex difference in the willingness to inflict physical harm often vanishes when both sexes feel provoked and entitled to retaliate (Matlin, 2012). Adult women do not differ from men, on average, in their willingness to yell, be verbally abusive, humiliate or punish their children, and express aggression in similar ways (Archer, 2004). In a cultural community that admires physical aggression, both sexes may rely on violent tactics: In one international study, women from Australia and New Zealand showed greater evidence of aggressiveness than men from Sweden and Korea (Archer & McDaniel, 1995). A study of all known female suicide bombers throughout the world since 1981 found that "the main motives and circumstances that drive female suicide bombers are quite similar to those that drive men"—loyalty to their country or religion, anger at being occupied by a foreign military, and revenge for loved ones killed by the enemy (O'Rourke, 2008).

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION When we move out of the realm of physical aggression, sex differences actually flip: Girls and women are more likely than males to commit *relational aggression*—harming another person through the manipulation of relationships, usually in

Figure 12.2 Lifetime Prevalence of Physical Violence by an Intimate Partner

(U.S. Women and Men, NISVS 2010)



such covert acts as talking behind someone's back, spreading false rumors about the target person, shunning or excluding that person (Archer, 2004; McFadyen-Ketchum et al., 1996; Richardson, 2014). While relational aggression may seem more benign than physical aggression, its consequences can be equally severe. Phoebe Prince, a 15-year-old Irish girl living in Massachusetts, was targeted by a group known as the Mean Girls after she had a brief relationship with a popular boy at her school. Seven girls and two boys began a relentless campaign against her of verbal assault (including calling her "Irish slut" and "whore" on Facebook and other social media) and threats of bodily harm. After 4 months of being slandered and harassed, Prince committed suicide.

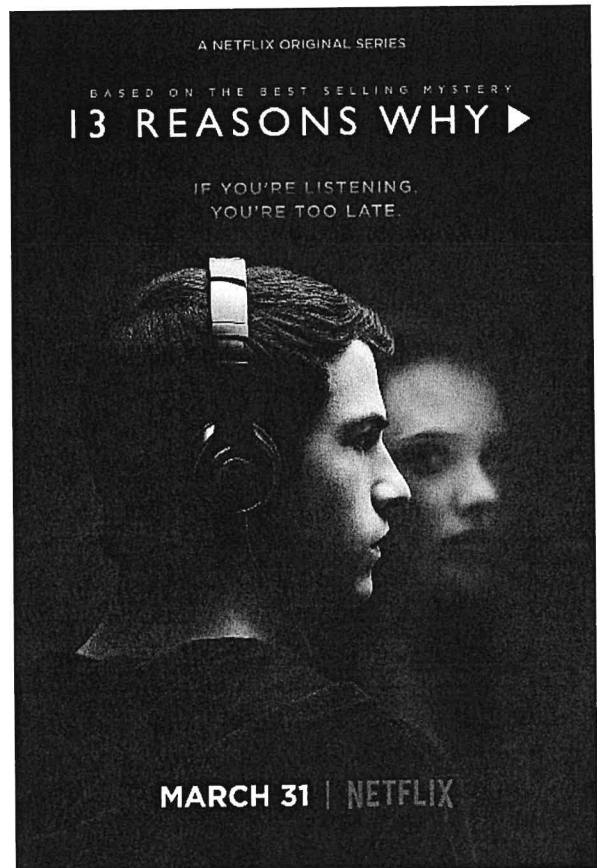
The average gender difference in relational aggression starts early: In one study of 3- to 5-year-old children playing in groups of three, the kids were instructed to use a crayon to color in a picture on a white sheet of paper. Three crayons were provided, but only one was a color (orange), and the other two were white. Naturally, the children all wanted the orange crayon. The boys used physical aggression to get it, hitting or pushing the child who had the orange crayon. The girls used relational aggression, spreading rumors about the child with the orange crayon or ignoring her to make her cry (Ostrov et al., 2004).

One especially harmful form of relational aggression is online bullying. Physical bullying, in which a stronger person intentionally humiliates or physically abuses a weaker one, has long been a fact of school life, and cyberbullying simply translates that impulse into a newer technology (Rivers, Chesney, & Coyne, 2011). Cyberbullying ranges from the less severe (prank calls and mild insults on instant messaging) to extremely severe acts (posting unpleasant or sexual photos on websites; distributing insults, nasty text messages, ugly rumors, etc.). According to a review prepared for the government on Child Safety and Online Technologies, the greatest source of danger that teenagers face on the Internet does not come from pornography, predatory adults, or sexting, but rather bullying and harassment, most often by peers (Palfrey, Boyd, & Sacco, 2010).

What is your own experience with gender differences in physical and relational aggression? See the Try It!

Learning to Behave Aggressively

Most of us take our cues from other people. If we want to know whether aggressive behavior is okay, we will look to see what others are doing or what others are saying about it—and whether they get away with it or are punished. We learn, almost



As depicted in the show *13 Reasons Why*, relational aggression can sometimes have devastating and tragic consequences.

Revel Interactive	Survey	Is All Aggression Equal
	SURVEY	
	RESULTS	
	Which type of aggression is more hurtful?	
	<input type="radio"/> Physical aggression <input type="radio"/> Relational aggression	

Watch BOBO DOLL EXPERIMENT



Social-Cognitive Learning Theory

The theory that people learn social behavior (e.g., aggression or altruism) in large part through observation and imitation of others and by cognitive processes such as plans, expectations, and beliefs

unconsciously, what our culture's rules are and what the norms are for men and women. Either way, those situations can shape, direct, encourage, or suppress people's individual wishes to behave aggressively or peacefully.

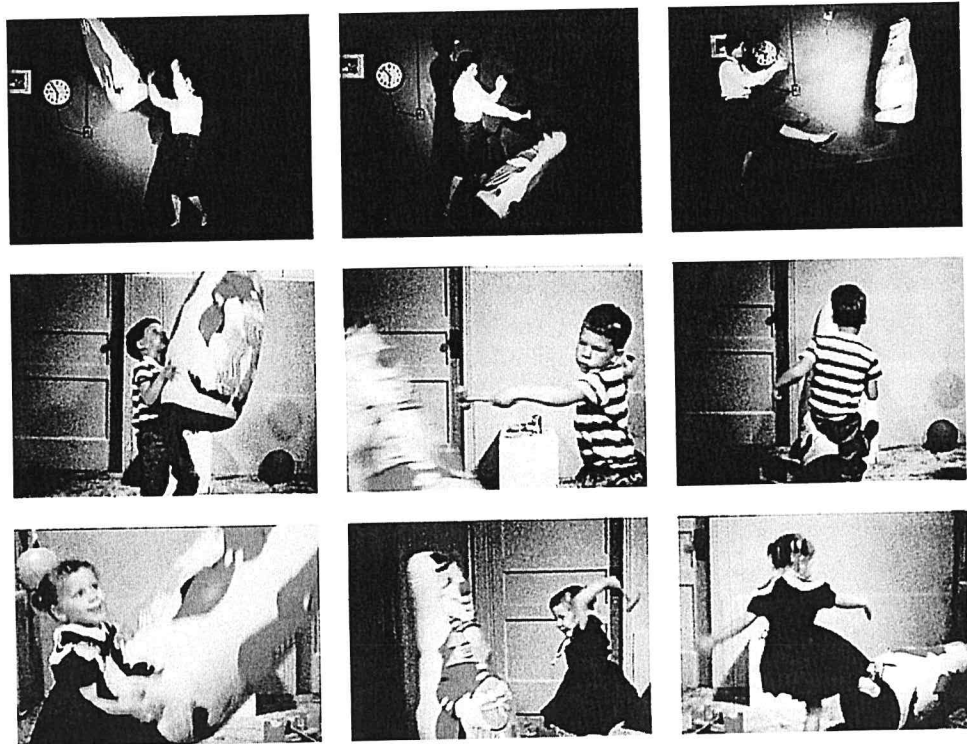
Social-cognitive learning theory holds that we learn social behavior, from aggression to altruism, in large part by observing others and imitating them—a process called *observational learning*. But observational learning in human beings cannot be fully understood without taking into account the thought processes and perceptions of the learner; that's the "cognitive" part of social-cognitive learning theory (Mischel & Shoda, 1995).

It's the reason that you and a friend can see the same vampire movie and one of you thinks it's stupid and the other thinks it's funny.

Children are especially susceptible to observational learning. In a classic series of experiments, Albert Bandura and his associates demonstrated the power of social learning on children's aggressive behavior (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961, 1963). Their basic procedure was to have an adult knock around a plastic, air-filled Bobo doll, the kind that bounces back after it's been knocked down. The adult would smack the doll around with the palm of a hand, strike it with a mallet, kick it, and yell aggressive things at it. The kids were then allowed to play with the doll. In these experiments, the children imitated the aggressive adults and treated the doll in almost exactly the same ways, as you can see in Figure 12.3. Some of them went beyond mere imitation, coming up with inventive new forms of beating up the doll. Children who did not see the

Figure 12.3 The Bobo Doll Experiment

Children learn aggressive behavior through imitation. In this classic study, the experimenter (top row) modeled some rather violent treatment of the doll—and the children imitated her perfectly (middle and bottom rows).



aggressive adult in action almost never unleashed any aggression against the hapless doll. This research offers strong support for the social learning of aggressive behavior—the power of watching and imitating the behavior of others.

In general, the more respected a person or institution is, the greater their influence as a role model. Brad Bushman and his colleagues (2007) explored the impact of religiously sanctioned stories of violence. They found that when a violent story was attributed to the Bible and when, in that story, God sanctioned the violence, the reader was more likely to behave aggressively afterward. The effect held for nonreligious as well as religious participants. Sports are another hallowed institution, in which the more aggressive players usually achieve the greatest fame and the highest salaries, and the more aggressive teams win more games. It usually doesn't pay to be a gentle soul.

Similarly, when children watch their parents or other adults they admire yelling, kicking, and acting in other aggressive ways, that is the behavior they will copy. One of the main predictors of whether women will commit physical aggression against their male partners, for example, is their having grown up in a household where they saw their mothers hitting their fathers (Testa et al., 2011).

What happens if we reverse things and expose children to nonaggressive models—to people who, when provoked, express themselves in a restrained, rational, pleasant manner? This question has been tested in several experiments (Baron, 1972; Donnerstein & Donnerstein, 1976; Vidyasagar & Mishra, 1993). Children first watched youngsters behaving peacefully even when provoked. Later, when the children were put in a situation in which they themselves were provoked, they were much less likely to respond aggressively than were children who had not seen the nonaggressive models.

Some Physiological Influences

It is hardly news that when people are drunk, hot, or in considerable pain, they are more likely to lash out at others, getting into fights and quarrels, than if they feel completely fine, sipping lemonade on a cool spring day. But why does the chance of aggression increase under these physical influences? Does it always?

THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL As most college students know, alcohol is a social lubricant that lowers our inhibitions against acting in ways frowned on by society, including acts of aggression (Desmond, 1987; Taylor & Leonard, 1983). Remember that the relationship between testosterone and aggression is partly explained by a relationship between testosterone and reduced activity in the orbitofrontal cortex that regulates impulse control (Mehta & Beer, 2010). Just like testosterone, alcohol lowers inhibitions. The link between alcohol and aggressive behavior has been well documented, and it appears even among people who have not been provoked and who do not usually behave aggressively when sober (Bailey & Taylor, 1991; Bushman & Cooper, 1990; Graham et al., 2006). This might explain why fistfights frequently break out in bars and nightclubs and why family violence is often associated with alcohol abuse. In fact, consuming alcohol in the last 4 hours makes you 3.6 times more likely to become a perpetrator of physical aggression and 1.36 times more likely to perpetrate relational aggression (Testa & Derrick, 2014).

How can alcohol increase aggressive behavior? Alcohol reduces anxiety and lowers social inhibitions, making us less cautious than we usually are (MacDonald, Zanna, & Fong, 1996). But it is more than that. By impairing the part of the brain involved in planning and controlling behavior, alcohol also disrupts the way we usually process information (Bushman, 1997; Bushman & Cooper, 1990; Hanson et al., 2011). This is why intoxicated people often respond to the most obvious aspects of a social situation and tend to miss the subtleties. If you are sober and someone steps on your toe, you would notice that the person didn't do it on purpose. But if you were drunk, you might miss the subtlety of the situation and respond as if that person had purposely stomped on your foot. If you and the offender are males, you might slug him. This response is typical of the kinds of

ambiguous situations that men tend to interpret as provocative, especially under the influence of alcohol (Pedersen et al., 2014).

There is another way in which alcohol facilitates aggression, however, and this is through what has been called the “think-drink” effect: When people *expect* alcohol to have certain effects on them, it often does (Marlatt & Rohsenow, 1980). Indeed, when people expect that alcohol will “release” their aggressive impulses, they often do become more aggressive—even when they are drinking something nonalcoholic. In a study of 116 men ages 18 to 45, experimenters gave one-third of the men a nonalcoholic drink, one-third a drink targeting a modest blood alcohol level, and one-third a stronger drink targeting a high blood alcohol level. Within each of these three groups, the researchers manipulated the drinkers’ expectancies of how much alcohol they were getting. They then measured the men’s behavior toward a research confederate who had behaved aggressively toward them. Remarkably, the actual quantity of alcohol that the men drank was less related to their aggressive behavior than their *expectations* were. The more alcohol the men believed they were drinking, the more aggressively they behaved toward the confederate (Bègue et al., 2009).

Of course, alcohol does have potent physiological effects on cognition and behavior. But those effects interact with what people have learned about alcohol, such as whether it provides an excuse to behave aggressively (or, as we will see, sexually) and how they expect to feel after consuming (Davis & Loftus, 2004).

THE EFFECTS OF PAIN AND HEAT If an animal is in pain and cannot flee the scene, it will almost invariably attack; this is true of rats, mice, hamsters, foxes, monkeys, crayfish, snakes, raccoons, alligators, and a host of other creatures (Azrin, 1967; Hutchinson, 1983). In those circumstances, animals will attack members of their own species, members of different species, or anything else in sight, including stuffed dolls and tennis balls. Do you think this is true of human beings as well? You probably will say yes. Most of us feel a flash of irritation when we hit our thumb with a hammer and know the feeling of wanting to lash out at the nearest available target. Indeed, in a series of experiments, students who underwent the pain of having their hand immersed in very cold water were far more likely to act aggressively against other students than were those who had not suffered the pain (Berkowitz, 1983).

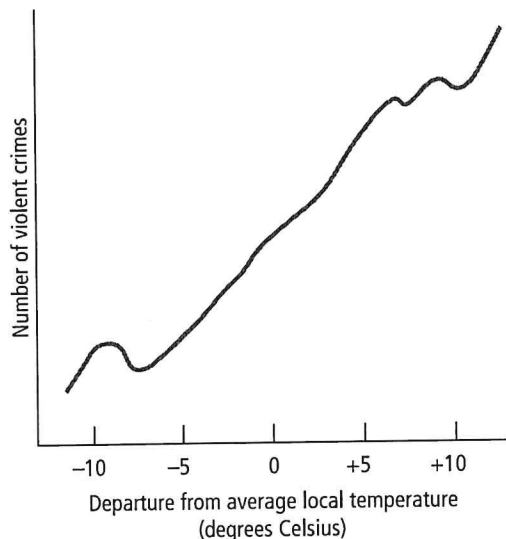
Other forms of bodily discomfort—such as heat, humidity, air pollution, crowds, and offensive odors—also lower the threshold for aggressive behavior (Stoff & Cairns, 1997). In major American cities from Houston, Texas, to Des Moines, Iowa, the hotter it is on a given day or a given average year, the greater the likelihood that violent crimes will occur (Anderson, 2012; Anderson et al., 2000; Rotton & Cohn, 2004). Figure 12.4 plots violent crimes on days that were below the average temperature through days that were higher than average. Smaller “crimes” increase, too: In the desert city of Phoenix, Arizona, drivers in non-air-conditioned cars are more likely to honk their horns in traffic jams than drivers in air-conditioned cars (Kenrick & MacFarlane, 1986). Even on the baseball field, heat and hostility go together. In major league baseball games when the temperature rises above 90 degrees, significantly more batters are hit by pitched balls (Larrick et al., 2011). In the National Football League, more penalties for aggressive infractions are given when games are played in hotter weather (Craig et al., 2016).

As you know by now, one must be cautious about interpreting events that take place outside the laboratory. The scientist in you might be tempted to ask whether increases in aggression are due to the temperature itself or merely to the fact that more people are apt to be outside (getting in one another’s way) on hot days than on cold or rainy days. So how might we determine that it’s the heat causing the aggression and not merely the greater

Figure 12.4 The Long, Hot Summer

Warm temperatures predict an increased likelihood of violent crime and other aggressive acts.

(Adapted from Hsiang et al., 2013)



opportunity for contact? We can bring the phenomenon into the laboratory. In one such experiment, students took the same test under different conditions: Some worked in a room at normal room temperature, while others worked in a room where the temperature reached 90 degrees (Griffitt & Veitch, 1971). The students in the hot room not only reported feeling more aggressive but also expressed more hostility toward a stranger whom they were asked to describe and evaluate. Similar results have been reported by a number of investigators (Anderson, 2012; Anderson et al., 2000; Rule, Taylor, & Dobbs, 1987).

Review Questions

- From a social-psychological perspective, a problem with evolutionary theories of aggression is that they fail to account for
 - different levels of testosterone among men.
 - different rates of aggression across cultures.
 - genetic influences on behavior.
 - differences between bonobos and chimpanzees.
- Which of the following men is most likely to act aggressively toward someone who insults him?
 - Ray, who grew up in Minnesota
 - Randy, who grew up in Massachusetts
 - Richard, who grew up in Louisiana
 - Ricky, who grew up in Maine
- Which of the following statements about gender differences in aggression is true?
 - In families, almost all acts of physical aggression are committed by men.
 - Girls are more likely than boys to express aggressive feelings indirectly, as by shunning or slandering a target.
 - Gender differences in physical aggression increase when men and women are insulted.
 - Because violence is so rare in women, female suicide bombers are much crazier than males who carry out these attacks.
- After watching his teenage brother beat up a classmate in a fistfight and walk away with the admiration of their friends, a little boy takes a swipe at another boy in the playground. He has acquired this behavior through a process of
 - cognitive learning.
 - parental support.
 - playing violent video games.
 - observational learning.
- What does the “think-drink” effect refer to?
 - If you think you’d like a drink, you’ll get one.
 - If you think alcohol releases your anger, it will.
 - If you think alcohol is harmful, you won’t drink.
 - If you think alcohol is healthy, you’ll drink too much.

Social Situations and Aggression

LO 12.2 Describe situational and social causes of aggression.

Imagine that your friend Kevin is driving you to the airport so that you can fly home for the Christmas holidays. Kevin has picked you up a bit later than you feel comfortable with; he accuses you of being overly anxious and assures you that he knows the route well and that you will arrive there with plenty of time to spare. Halfway to the airport, you are standing still in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Kevin assures you that there is plenty of time, but this time he sounds less confident. After 10 more minutes, your palms are sweating. You open the car door and survey the road ahead: Not a car is moving as far ahead as you can see. You get back in the car, slam the door, and glare at Kevin. He smiles lamely and says, “How was I supposed to know there would be so much traffic?” Should he be prepared to duck?

Frustration and Aggression

As this all-too-familiar story suggests, frustration is a major cause of aggression. Frustration occurs when a person is thwarted on the way to an expected goal or gratification. All of us have felt frustrated from time to time—at least three

Is road rage an inevitable outcome of frustration with fellow drivers? If so, how come not every driver gets as angry as this woman?





Many experiences in daily life are frustrating—and can lead to aggression.

Frustration-Aggression Theory

The theory that frustration—the perception that you are being prevented from attaining a goal—increases the probability of an aggressive response

or four times a week, if not three or four times a day! According to **frustration-aggression theory**, people's perception that they are being prevented from attaining a goal will increase the probability of an aggressive response (Dollard et al., 1939). This is especially true when the frustration is unpleasant, unwelcome, and uncontrollable.

Several things can increase frustration and, accordingly, will increase the probability that some form of aggression will occur. One such factor involves your closeness to the goal or the object of your desire. The closer the goal, the greater the expectation of pleasure that is thwarted; the greater the expectation, the more likely the aggression. In one field experiment, a confederate cut in line in front of people who were waiting in a variety of places—for movie tickets, outside crowded restaurants, and at the checkout counter of a supermarket. On some occasions, the confederate cut in front of the second person in line; at other times, in front of the twelfth person. The results were clear: The people standing right behind the intruder were much more aggressive when the confederate cut into the second place in line (Harris, 1974).

However, frustration does not always produce aggression. Rather, it seems to produce anger or annoyance and a *readiness* to aggress if other things about the situation are conducive to aggressive behavior (Berkowitz, 1989, 1993; Gustafson, 1989). What are

those other things? Well, an obvious one would be the size and strength of the person responsible for your frustration as well as that person's ability to retaliate. It is undoubtedly easier to become impatient and rude with an incompetent customer-service person who is miles away and has no idea who you are than to take out your anger against your frustrator if he turned out to be the middle linebacker of the Green Bay Packers and was staring you right in the face. Similarly, if the frustration is understandable, legitimate, and unintentional, the tendency to aggress will be reduced.

We want to emphasize that frustration is not the same as deprivation: Children who don't have toys do not aggress more than children who do. In the crayon experiment discussed earlier, frustration and aggression occurred because the children with white crayons were set up to expect that they would be coloring. This expectation was thwarted when they discovered their crayons did not leave marks on the white paper, prompting the aggression toward the child with the orange crayon. Frustration is about goal attainment, whereas deprivation is about resources.

On a national scale, thwarted expectations combined with frustration can produce riots and revolutions. Social scientists have found that it is often not *absolute* deprivation that creates anger and aggression but *relative* deprivation, which occurs when people see a discrepancy between what they have and what they expect to have (Moore, 1978). Relative deprivation theory can explain why riots seem to coincide with generally positive social movements; the movements inspire people to expect equal treatment, so they become frustrated when their expectations shift faster than their living conditions improve. For example, in 1967 and 1968, nationwide

Watch SURVIVAL TIPS! AWARENESS OF THE FRUSTRATION-AGGRESSION HYPOTHESIS



race riots occurred in the middle of rising expectations and increased social spending to fight poverty. The most serious riots did not erupt in the geographic areas of greatest poverty; instead, they exploded in Los Angeles and Detroit, where things were not nearly as bad for African Americans as they were in most other large urban centers. But conditions were bad relative to the rioters' perception of how White people were doing and relative to the positive changes many African Americans had a right to expect.

Similarly, the discrepancy between political hopes and realities can drive people to war. Syrians lived under autocratic rule for decades, but they expected this to change when President Bashar al-Assad took over the government. When Al-Assad did not deliver the anticipated reforms, unrest grew (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2013). Research on contemporary suicide bombers in the Middle East—including Mohamed Atta, who led the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, and the Tsarnaev brothers, who bombed the Boston marathon in 2013—shows that they usually have no psychopathology and are often quite educated and affluent (Krueger, 2007; Sageman, 2008; Silke, 2003). But they were motivated by anger over the perceived discrepancy between what they had and what they felt their nation and religion were entitled to. Thus, an important cause of aggression is relative deprivation: the perception that you (or your group) have less than you deserve, less than what you have been led to expect, or less than what people similar to you have.

Provocation and Reciprocation

Suppose you are working at your part-time job behind the counter, flipping hamburgers in a crowded fast-food restaurant. Today, you are working harder than usual because the other short-order cook went home sick, and the customers are lining up at the counter, clamoring for their burgers. In your eagerness to speed up the process, you spin around too fast and knock over a large jar of pickles that smashes on the floor just as the boss enters the workplace. "I'm gonna dock your pay \$10 for that one!" he shouts. "Grab a broom and clean it up, moron!" You glare at him. You'd love to tell him what he can do with this lousy job.

Aggression frequently stems from the need to reciprocate after being provoked by aggressive behavior from another person. Although the Christian plea to "turn the other cheek" is wonderful advice, most people don't take it, as has been demonstrated in countless experiments in and out of the laboratory. In one experiment, participants prepared an advertisement for a new product; their ad was then evaluated and criticized by an accomplice of the experimenter. In one condition, the criticism, though strong, was done in a gentle and considerate manner ("I think there's a lot of room for improvement"); in the other condition, the criticism was given in an insulting manner ("I don't think you could be original if you tried"). When provided with an opportunity to retaliate, those people who were criticized harshly were far more likely to do so than those in the "gentle criticism" condition (Baron, 1988).

Provocation and aggression are so strongly linked that they appear to overpower gender differences in aggression. While men are more aggressive than women under neutral conditions, provocation leads to aggression for both sexes (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996). Why would this be the case? Both men and women get angry when they are provoked, and anger reduces impulse control (Denson et al., 2011). So, similar to testosterone and alcohol, provocation leads to aggression through impeded self-control.

But to curtail an aggressive response, we must be aware of those mitigating circumstances at the time of the provocation. In one study, students were insulted

by the experimenter’s assistant. Half of them were first told that the assistant was upset after receiving an unfair low grade on a chemistry exam; the other students received this information only after the insult was delivered. All subjects later had an opportunity to retaliate by choosing the level of unpleasant noise with which to zap the assistant. Those students who knew about the mitigating circumstances before being insulted delivered weaker bursts of noise (Johnson & Rule, 1986). Why the difference? At the time of the insult, the informed students simply did not take it personally and therefore felt no need to retaliate. This interpretation is bolstered by evidence of their physiological arousal: At the time of the insult, the heart rates of the insulted students did not increase as rapidly if they knew about the assistant’s unhappy state of mind beforehand.

To help you identify your own triggers and responses to provocation, take this Try It!

Try It!

Insults and Aggression

Think about the last time you felt insulted by another person. Note down your answers to these questions:

- Who insulted you?
- What were the circumstances?
- Did you take it personally or not?
- How did you respond—with anger, patience, amusement, or something else?
- How do your answers relate to the material you have just finished reading?

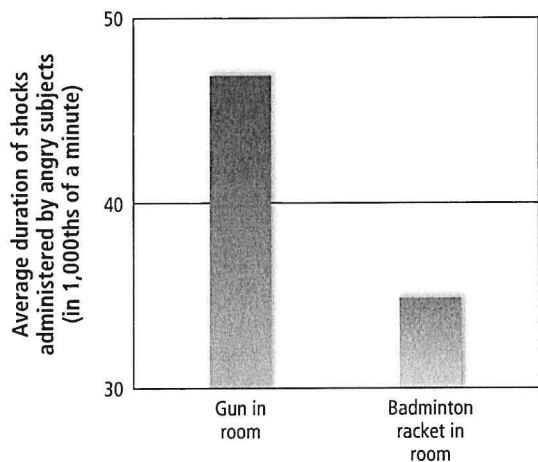
Weapons as Aggressive Cues

Certain stimuli seem to impel us to action. Is it conceivable that the mere presence of an aggressive stimulus—an object that is associated with aggressive responses—might increase the probability of aggression?

Figure 12.5 The Trigger Can Pull the Finger

Aggressive cues, such as weapons, tend to increase levels of aggression.

(Based on Berkowitz & Le Page, 1967)



In a classic experiment, Leonard Berkowitz and Anthony Le Page (1967) purposely angered college students by insulting them. Some of the students were in a room in which a gun was left lying around (ostensibly from a previous experiment) and others in a room in which a neutral object (a badminton racket) was substituted for the gun. Participants were then given the opportunity to administer what they believed were electric shocks to a fellow college student. Those individuals who had been angered in the presence of the gun administered stronger electric shocks than those angered in the presence of the racket (see Figure 12.5). The presence of a gun seems to trigger—so to speak—an aggressive response when a person is already primed to respond that way because of frustration or anger (Anderson, Benjamin, & Bartholow, 1998).

This provocative finding, which has been replicated many times in the United States and Europe, is now referred to as the **weapons effect**—an increase in aggression that can occur because of the mere presence of a gun or other weapon (Benjamin & Bushman, 2017). The effect is physiological as well as psychological: Male

college students asked to interact with a gun for 15 minutes show higher testosterone levels than do students playing a children's game for the same amount of time (Klinesmith, Kasser, & McAndrew, 2006). Such findings point to a conclusion opposite to the familiar slogan often used by opponents of gun control, that "guns don't kill; people do." As Leonard Berkowitz (1981) put it, "The finger pulls the trigger, but the trigger may also be pulling the finger."

Weapons Effect

The increase in aggression that can occur because of the mere presence of a gun or other weapon

Putting the Elements Together: The Case of Sexual Assault

One of the most troubling kinds of aggression is sexual assault, which can take many forms. Although "rape" is an upsetting word to many people, it is important to define it so that everyone agrees on what it means—and so that the law can reflect that meaning. For example, the law used to exempt married men, who were legally allowed to have forcible sex with their wives. In 2013, the Department of Justice revised the definition of *rape* to include the penetration of any bodily orifice with any part of the body or with any object, without the consent of the victim. Sexual assault is the broader term, including various other acts, but lack of consent remains the key criterion. In this section, we will consider how social psychologists draw on various kinds of evidence to help understand this phenomenon.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RAPE Some men commit rape out of a desire to dominate, humiliate, or punish their victims. This motive is apparent among soldiers who rape captive women during war and then often kill them (Olujic, 1998) and among men who rape other men, usually by anal penetration (King & Woollett, 1997). The latter form of rape often occurs in youth gangs, where the intention is to humiliate rival gang members, and in prison, where the motive, in addition to the obvious sexual one, is to conquer and degrade the victim. Men can be sexually assaulted and raped by women also, although many men are ashamed to admit it (Stemple & Meyer, 2014).

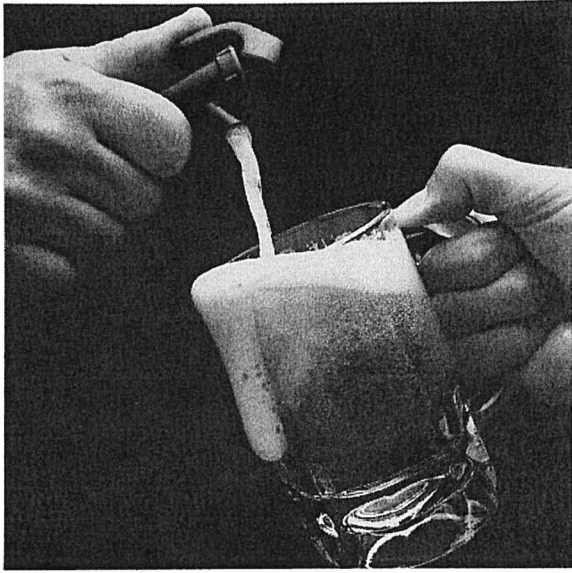
When most people think of a "rapist," they imagine a violent stranger or a serial predator. Some rapists are exactly that. They are often unable to empathize with women, may feel hostility and contempt toward women, and feel entitled to have sexual relations with whatever woman they choose. This may be why sexual violence is often committed by high-status men, including high school and college athletic stars, powerful politicians, and celebrities, who could easily find consenting sexual partners. They equate feelings of power with sexuality, angrily accuse women of provoking them, and endorse rape myths (Nunes, Hermann, & Ratcliffe, 2013; Thompson et al., 2011).

But the fact is that about 85% of all rapes or attempted rapes occur between people who know each other; the victim may even be having a relationship with the assailant (Koss, 2011; McMullin & White, 2006). Rape may occur as a result of *physical force* (having sex under actual or threatened violence), or through *incapacitation*: having sex with a victim who has been induced into a blackout with Rohypnol ("roofies"), who is drunk or otherwise drugged, or who has passed out (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014).

SEXUAL SCRIPTS AND THE PROBLEM OF CONSENT Everyone understands that a sexual predator who rapes a woman by overt force, threats of violence, or drugs used to render her unconscious has committed a serious crime. But what is going on with the large, additional numbers of women assaulted through "incapacitation" caused by their voluntary enjoyment of alcohol and other drugs? One answer may stem from the different **sexual scripts** that males and females learn as part of their gender roles in American society (Laumann & Gagnon, 1995). Sexual scripts are schemas for how sexual encounters play out between potential

Sexual Scripts

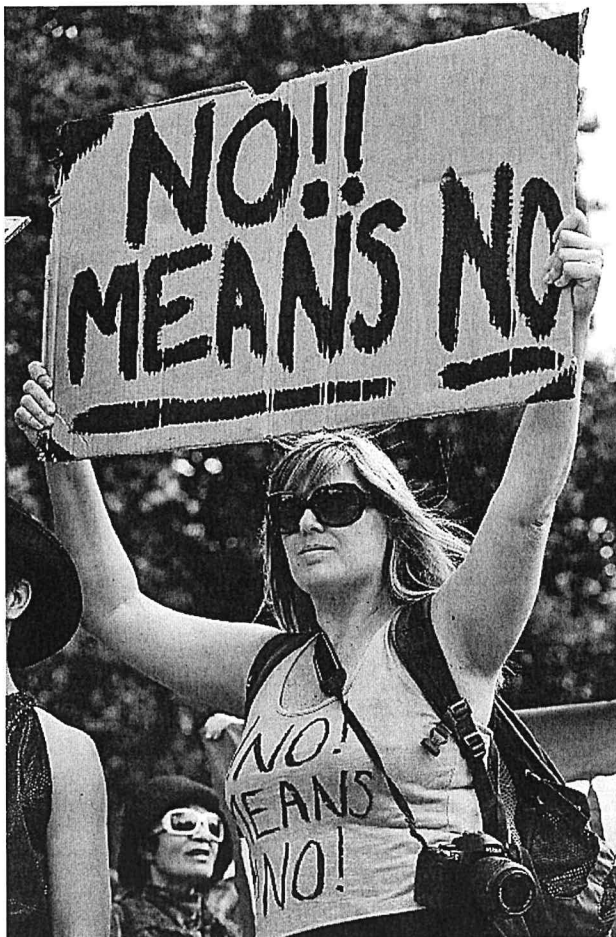
Sets of implicit rules that specify proper sexual behavior for a person in a given situation, varying with the person's gender, age, religion, social status, and peer group



A lot of campus rapes start here.

Whenever there's drinking or drugs, things can get out of hand. So it's no surprise that many campus rapes involve alcohol. But you should know that under any circumstances, sex without the other person's consent is considered rape. A felony, punishable by prison. And drinking is no excuse. That's why when you party, it's good to know what your limits are. You see, a little sobering thought now can save you from a big problem later.

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partners. Sexual scripts vary according to one's culture, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and geographic region, and they change over time. One dominant script in America for young straight women and men is that the female's role is to resist the male's sexual advances and that the male's role is to be persistent. In films, TV, and magazines, male characters frequently act out this traditional male script; many female characters still play the part of "sex object" and are judged by their sexual conduct (Hust et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2007). Sexual scripts for gay men and lesbians tend to be more flexible than heterosexual scripts because partners are not following traditional gender roles (Kurdek, 2005).

The existence of scripts that dictate notions about appropriate sexual behavior may explain why many people are confused or angry over the meaning of the word *no* in a sexual context. The repeated message of antirape groups—"What part of 'no' don't you understand?"—seems obvious. But American sexual scripts hold mixed messages regarding the meaning of this word; even if a woman wants sex, she is not supposed to seem too eager, which makes a "no" seem less absolute. In one survey of high school students, although almost 100% of the males and females agreed that the man should stop his sexual advances as soon as the woman says no, nearly half of those same students also believed that when a woman says no, she doesn't always mean it (Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Binderup, 2000). The resulting confusion may also explain why some college women feel they need to drink heavily as a prelude to sex (Cole, 2006; Howard, Griffin, & Boekeloo, 2008; Villalobos, Davis, & Leo, 2015). After all, if they are inebriated, they haven't said "yes," and if they haven't explicitly said "yes," no one can accuse them of being promiscuous.

Further complicating matters is that most couples communicate sexual interest and intentions—including a wish *not* to have sex—indirectly through hints, body language, eye contact, and other nonverbal behaviors. Studies find that sometimes young women try to convey "no" without saying no, such as by stepping a few inches back or pretending not to notice the man's advances. For their part, many men are motivated to overinterpret women's nonverbal actions as signs of sexual interest rather than just friendliness (La France et al., 2009). Given that nonverbal behaviors are ambiguous by nature, the most common cues people use are also the most likely to be misunderstood.

As a result of all of these reasons for miscommunication, the sexes often disagree on whether a rape has even occurred (Hamby & Koss, 2003; Villalobos et al., 2015; Yoffe, 2014). In a nationally representative survey of more than 3,000 Americans ages 18 to 59, nearly one-fourth of the women said that a man, usually a husband or boyfriend, had forced them to do something sexually that they did not want to do, yet only about 3% of the men said that they had ever forced a woman into a sexual act (Laumann et al., 1994).

Review Questions

1. According to frustration-aggression theory,
 - a. when people are frustrated, they almost always become aggressive.
 - b. when people behave aggressively, they feel frustrated.
 - c. frustration increases the likelihood of aggression.
 - d. frustration caused by deprivation causes aggression.
2. Noah was counting on his roommate George to help him on moving day, but George never showed up, and Noah is plenty annoyed. What might he say to himself to reduce his wish to retaliate or tell George off?
 - a. "That's just his personality; he's always thoughtless."
 - b. "I'm a better person than he is."
 - c. "I don't need his help anyway."
 - d. "I bet George is under a lot of stress about exams this week."
3. What is relative deprivation?
 - a. When people feel deprived of having close relatives they can count on
 - b. When people live in poverty and feel they have no hope of improvement
 - c. When people feel there is an unfair discrepancy between what they have and what they expect to get
 - d. When some people earn relatively less than others for doing the same work
4. The "weapons effect" refers to the fact that
 - a. many people have an emotional response to seeing a weapon.
 - b. the mere presence of a gun can provoke an aggressive response.
 - c. the mere presence of a gun makes people feel safer.
 - d. some weapons provoke more aggression than others.
5. Which of the following statements about rape is true?
 - a. Men who commit rape tend to be mentally ill.
 - b. Most rapes are committed by men who attack unknown women.
 - c. Most rapes are committed in the context of an acquaintance or ongoing relationship.
 - d. Men cannot be raped.
6. Having sexual intercourse with a woman who is drunk or otherwise incapacitated
 - a. is against the law.
 - b. may be morally wrong but is not illegal.
 - c. is acceptable if she seemed to consent.
 - d. is acceptable if she did consent.
7. "Sexual scripts" refer to
 - a. a stage director's instructions for actors in a love scene.
 - b. a set of rules governing notions of "appropriate" sexual behavior that people acquire in learning gender roles.
 - c. a set of unchanging rules that govern men's and women's sexual behavior.
 - d. rules that govern the sexual behavior of straight people but not of gay men or lesbians.

Violence and the Media

LO 12.3 Explain how observing violence increases violence.

Most American children are immersed in images of violence in all types of media: from television and movies to video games and the Internet. In fact, they are not only immersed, they are marinated in it! They see an unending parade of beatings, explosions, and bad guys committing brutal acts as well as good guys doing brutal things to catch them. Violence in films has more than doubled since 1950, and gun violence in PG-13-rated films has more than tripled since 1985. In fact, PG-13-rated films now contain as much violence as R-rated films (Bushman et al., 2013).

Many people—psychologists as well as the general public—are worried about all the mayhem that children and teenagers observe; they figure there *must* be significant consequences, starting with making guns seem cool and exciting (Bushman & Pollard-Sacks, 2014). For them, it is as obvious as the Bobo doll study that children imitate the violence they see on TV and in the movies and are otherwise affected emotionally by it. If *prosocial* videos can increase helpful behavior in children who watch them (see Chapter 11), surely the far more common antisocial, violent videos can increase antisocial, violent behavior.

For just as many others, though, this is a nonissue. How powerful can media violence be, they ask, if during the same years that gun violence in PG-13 movies tripled, real-world gun violence and overall violent crime by young people decreased

to record lows? Besides, they add, media violence consists of cartoon-like stories and images that “everyone knows” are not real. Indeed, that was the reasoning behind the Supreme Court’s 2011 decision that video games can be sold to minors no matter how violent the games are, including the popular *Mortal Kombat* and *Grand Theft Auto* series.

And so the debate rages on. In this section we want to sort through the evidence on both sides and come to what we think is the most sensible resolution.

Studying the Effects of Media Violence

How would you study the possible effects of media violence? Countless stories in the news would seem to provide a compelling answer. For example, several years ago, a man drove his truck through the window of a crowded cafeteria in Killeen, Texas; emerged from the cab; and began shooting people at random, killing 22. In his pocket, police found a ticket stub to *The Fisher King*, a film depicting a deranged man firing

a shotgun into a crowded bar, killing several people. Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the Columbine killers, enjoyed the video game *Doom*, and the Columbine murders themselves spurred many copycat acts across the United States (Aronson, 2000). Two teenagers in Tennessee took their guns and went out sniping at passing cars on a freeway, killing one driver, because they wanted to act out their favorite video game, *Grand Theft Auto*. And then there is the case of a man who, having seen a movie showing women dancing on screen, became convinced that all women were immoral and deserved to die. He then committed four brutal rape-murders before he was caught. The film that set him off was *The Ten Commandments*.

But social scientists know that anecdotes, no matter how interesting they may be, are not sufficient to answer the question of the effects of media violence. It’s too easy to cherry-pick

your examples to make a case either way; you could select examples of kids who play *Grand Theft Auto* and then go off to do their homework and take piano lessons. Accordingly, researchers have conducted experimental and field studies to try to untangle this complicated question.

EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES The beauty of the laboratory experiment is that it allows us to determine whether images in the media have any impact at all on the behavior of a random sample of people (see Chapter 2). In such an experiment, the situation is completely controlled; every factor can be held constant except for exposure to violence. The dependent variable, the participant’s behavior, can likewise be carefully measured.

Most of the experimental evidence demonstrates that watching violence does increase the frequency of aggressive behavior, angry emotions, and hostile thoughts (Bushman, Gollwitzer, & Cruz, 2015; Greitemeyer & McLatchie, 2011; Huesmann, Dubow, & Yang, 2013). In one early experiment, a group of children watched an extremely violent episode of a police drama. In a control condition, a similar group watched an exciting but nonviolent televised sporting event for the same length of time. Each child was then allowed to play in another room with a group of other children. Those who had watched the violent police drama later behaved far more aggressively



Does watching violent movies make children and adults numb to what violence really does?

with their playmates than did those who had watched the sporting event—the Bobo doll effect (Liebert & Baron, 1972). The research is not consistent, however, and some reviews of the experimental literature have found minimal or no effects (Ferguson, 2009, 2013; Sherry, 2001).

However, actively playing violent video games seems to have a stronger influence: Games that directly reward violence—for example, by awarding points or moving the player to the next level after a “kill”—are especially likely to increase feelings of hostility, aggressive thoughts, and aggressive acts, and this is true not only for American kids but also for those in other nations (Anderson et al., 2010; Carnagey & Anderson, 2005). A meta-analysis of 98 studies, with nearly 37,000 participants, found that both violent video games and prosocial video games have direct effects on their players (Greitemeyer & Mügge, 2014).

Another detrimental consequence of a diet of violence might be numbing people to difficult, violent, or unpleasant events (Thomas, 1982). In general, our bodies respond over time to repeated stimuli with either progressively less arousal—termed “habituation”—or more arousal—termed “sensitization.” If exposure to one violent event affects responses to the next violent event, then we can observe processes of either habituation or sensitization through people’s physiology. In one of the earliest experiments on this issue, researchers measured the physiological responses of young men while they were watching a brutal and bloody boxing match (Cline, Croft, & Courrier, 1973). The results supported the hypothesis that we habituate to violence. Those who had watched a lot of television in their daily lives seemed relatively indifferent to the mayhem in the ring; they showed little physiological evidence of excitement, anxiety, or other arousal. They were unmoved by the violence. But those who watched relatively little TV showed major physiological arousal; the violence really agitated them. Today, that “brutal and bloody boxing match” from a 40-year-old experiment seems tame compared to *Game of Thrones* or *The Walking Dead*. The very fact that violence has had to increase in gruesomeness and intensity to get the same reaction from audiences that mild violence once did may be the perfect illustration of the numbing effects of a diet of violence.

Although psychic numbing may protect us from feeling upset, it may also have the unintended effect of increasing our indifference to real victims of violence and others who need help. In one field study, people who had just seen a violent movie took longer to come to the aid of a woman struggling to pick up her crutches than did people who had seen a nonviolent movie or people still waiting to see one of the two movies (Bushman & Anderson, 2009).

And if the person needing help is not “one of us,” watch out. When you are playing a violent video game, you are likely to see yourself as the hero who is blasting those evil creatures out of existence. That’s fun, as far as it goes, but some research suggests it can go further: Once players get in the habit of dehumanizing the “enemy,” that habit can be carried over into how players come to regard real people, not just robots and life-like cartoons. In two experiments in England, researchers found that participants (male and female) who played a violent video game (*Lamers*) were later more likely to dehumanize

Does playing first-person shooter video games make people more violent or are people who have violent tendencies to begin with drawn to such games? Or could it be both?



immigrants to Britain, seeing them as somehow less human and deserving than native Britons, in contrast to the students who played a prosocial version of the game (*Lemmings*) or a neutral game (*Tetris*) (Greitemeyer & McLatchie, 2011; see also Greitemeyer, 2014).

Exposure to media violence, especially playing video games, may have these effects for three reasons: They increase physiological arousal and excitement, they trigger an automatic tendency to imitate the hostile or violent characters, and they activate existing aggressive ideas and expectations, making people more likely to act on them (Anderson et al., 2003). Movies and games also model social *scripts*, approved ways of behaving when we are frustrated, angry, or hurt. Violent media shows the public how to commit violence while simultaneously making it cool (i.e., normative).

LONGITUDINAL STUDIES Taken together, these experiments show that under controlled conditions, media violence has an impact on children and teenagers. The lab allows us to demonstrate that something of significance is happening, but it has a major limitation: Experiments cannot begin to capture the effects on a person who plays video games 20 or 30 hours a week and lives on a steady diet of action and horror films over weeks, months, and years.

To investigate that effect, we need to use longitudinal studies in which children are followed for a year or longer. The researcher has less control over the factors being studied, but it is a better way of determining the effects of what a child is *really* being exposed to. In addition, unlike most laboratory experiments that must use artificial measures of aggression (such as administering fake electric shocks or loud noises to the victim), longitudinal studies can examine seriously aggressive behavior. The disadvantage of this method is that people's lives are full of many other factors that can enhance or mitigate the effects of media violence.

Longitudinal research finds that the more violence children watch, the more aggressively they behave later as teenagers and young adults (Anderson et al., 2003; Eron, 1987, 2001). For example, one study followed more than 700 families over a period of 17 years. The amount of time spent watching television during adolescence and early adulthood was strongly related to the likelihood of later committing violent acts against others, including assault. This association was significant regardless of parental education, family income, and extent of neighborhood violence (Johnson et al., 2002). A more recent study followed 430 elementary-age children in the third to fifth grades over the course of a school year. The investigators measured three types of aggression—verbal, relational, and physical—and exposure to violence in television, movies, and video games. They measured both aggressive and prosocial behaviors in the children twice during the year, interviewing the children's peers and teachers as well as observing the children directly. They found that the children's consumption of media violence early in the school year predicted higher rates of all three kinds of aggression (verbal, relational, and physical) and less prosocial behavior later in the year (Gentile, Coyne, & Walsh, 2011).

The Problem of Determining Cause and Effect

Longitudinal studies find another consequence of watching a heavy dose of media violence: the magnification of danger. If I am watching all this murder and mayhem on the home screen, wouldn't it be logical for me to conclude that it isn't safe to leave the house, especially after dark? That is exactly what many heavy viewers do conclude. Adolescents and adults who watch TV for more than 4 hours per day are more likely than people who watch less than 2 hours per day to have an exaggerated view of the degree of violence taking place outside their own homes,

and they have a much greater fear of being personally assaulted (Gerbner et al., 2002).

Now, it is possible that watching violence made them fearful. But it is just as likely that they spend a lot of time indoors because they think there is danger in the streets. Then, being at home with nothing to do, they watch a lot of television. As this example illustrates, the greatest challenge involved in trying to interpret the data in most nonexperimental longitudinal studies and survey research is teasing apart cause and effect. The usual assumption has been that watching violence makes people more aggressive, but aggressive people are also drawn to watching violence.



Moreover, another entirely independent factor may be causing both. Some children are born with a mental or emotional predisposition toward violence; or learn it as toddlers from the way they are treated by abusive parents or siblings; or in other ways develop aggressiveness as a personality trait. In turn, this trait or predisposition manifests itself in both their aggressive behavior *and* their liking for watching violence or playing aggressive games (Bushman, 1995; Ferguson, 2013).

In an experiment investigating the interaction between temperament and exposure to violence, children watched either a film depicting a great deal of police violence or an exciting but nonviolent film about bike racing. They then played a game of floor hockey. Watching the violent film did increase the number of aggressive acts the children committed during the hockey game—but primarily by those who had previously been rated as highly aggressive by their teachers. These kids hit others with their sticks, threw elbows, and yelled aggressive things at their opponents to a much greater extent than did either the kids rated as nonaggressive who had also watched the violent film or the kids rated as aggressive who had watched the nonviolent film (Josephson, 1987).

Likewise, a few longitudinal studies have shown that exposure to violence in media or video games has the strongest relationship in children who are already predisposed to violence (Anderson & Dill, 2000). Thus, it may be that watching media violence merely serves to give them permission to express their aggressive inclinations (Ferguson & Kilburn, 2009). The same conclusions apply to the research on violent pornography (in contrast to nonviolent erotica). Meta-analyses repeatedly conclude that although there is, for men, a positive correlation between watching violent pornography and hostile, aggressive attitudes toward women, that association is largely due to men who already have high levels of hostility toward women and are predisposed to sexual aggression (Malamuth, Hald, & Koss, 2012).

Taking all this research together, we conclude that frequent exposure to violent media, especially in the form of violent video games, does have an impact on average children and adolescents, but the impact is greatest on those who are already prone to violent behavior. Obviously, most people do not become motivated to behave aggressively or commit an act of violence as a result of what they observe. As social-cognitive learning theory predicts, people's interpretation of what they are watching, their personality dispositions, and the social context can all affect how they respond (Feshbach & Tangney, 2008). Children and teens watch many different programs and movies and have many models to observe besides those they see in the media, including parents

Violent media does not potentiate violence in all children. Children who are predisposed to violence also prefer violent media, which amplifies the likelihood of aggressive behavior.

and peers. But the fact that some people *are* influenced by violent entertainments, with tragic results, cannot be denied.

One of the leading researchers who study media violence argues that it is “time to move forward with a more sophisticated perspective on media effects that focuses less on moral objections to certain content and more on media consumers and their motivations” (Ferguson, 2014). Given the research just discussed, we think there are at least five distinct reactions that explain why exposure to violence might increase aggression in those vulnerable “media consumers”:

1. **Norms:** *If they can do it, so can I.* When people see characters behaving violently, it may weaken their previously learned inhibitions against violent behavior.
2. **Observational Learning:** *Oh, so that’s how you do it!* When people see characters behaving violently, it might trigger imitation, providing them with ideas as to how they might go about it.
3. **Misattribution:** *Those feelings I am having must be real anger rather than merely my reaction to a stressful day.* Watching violence may put people more in touch with their feelings of anger and make an aggressive response more likely through priming. Having recently viewed violence, someone might interpret his or her own feelings of mild irritation as intense anger and then be more likely to lash out.
4. **Habituation:** *Ho-hum, another brutal beating. What’s on the other channel?* Watching a lot of mayhem seems to reduce both our sense of horror about violence and our sympathy for the victims, making it easier for us to live with violence and perhaps easier for us to act aggressively.
5. **Self-fulfilling Prophecy:** *I had better get him before he gets me!* If watching a lot of television makes people think the world is a dangerous place, they might be more apt to be hostile to a stranger who approaches them on the street.

Finally, however, let’s put this issue in larger perspective. The effects of the media pale in comparison to the biological, social, economic, and psychological factors that are far more powerful predictors of aggressive behavior: a child’s genetic predispositions to violence, low feelings of self-control, being socially rejected by peers (which we will discuss further at the end of this chapter), criminal opportunity, being the victim of childhood physical abuse, being in a peer group that endorses and encourages violence, and living in a community where aggression is a way of life (Crescioni & Baumeister, 2009; Ferguson & Kilburn, 2009).

Review Questions

1. Which of the following statements is true?
 - a. Watching violent shows makes most young children likely to imitate them.
 - b. Watching violent shows makes some children more likely to imitate them.
 - c. Playing violent video games has less of an impact on children than watching violence on TV or in the movies does.
 - d. Viewing television violence has no effect on people’s response to others in trouble.
2. According to social-cognitive learning theory, which of these factors intervenes between a person’s observation of media violence and his or her likelihood of imitating it?
 - a. Violence portrayed as part of a religious story
 - b. Violence endorsed by the government
 - c. How the observer interprets the violent story
 - d. Whether the observer is in a good mood
3. Watching violence in the media and behaving aggressively are positively correlated. What does this mean?
 - a. Watching violent shows makes children more aggressive.
 - b. Aggressive children are more likely to watch violent shows.
 - c. Growing up in a violent environment makes children aggressive and more likely to watch violent shows.
 - d. Answers a and c are correct.
 - e. All of the answers are correct.

4. What do experimental studies of media violence tend to find?
 - a. Watching violent films has little effect on aggressive behavior.
 - b. Playing violent video games has a stronger effect than watching violent shows.
 - c. Playing violent video games makes children feel better and less angry.
 - d. Children get used to media violence quickly, so it doesn't affect them.
5. What is the main problem in interpreting longitudinal studies of the effects of media violence?
 - a. Teasing apart whether media violence causes aggression or whether aggressive people are drawn to media violence
 - b. Separating studies of TV violence from those of violent video games
 - c. Identifying which children are more vulnerable to TV violence
 - d. Finding out if children who play video games will also prefer violent pornography

How to Decrease Aggression

LO 12.4 Identify ways aggression can be diminished.

“Stop hitting your brother!” “Turn off the TV and go to your room *right now!*” Most parents, trying to curb the aggressive behavior of their children, use some form of punishment. Some deny privileges; others shout, threaten, or use force, believing in the old saying, “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” How well does punishment work? On the one hand, you might think that punishing any behavior would reduce its frequency. On the other hand, if the punishment takes the form of an aggressive act, parents who are administering the penalty are actually modeling aggressive behavior—thereby inducing their child to imitate them.

Does Punishing Aggression Reduce Aggression?

Let's consider the complexities of punishment. As we discussed in Chapter 6, several experiments with preschoolers demonstrated that the threat of relatively severe punishment for committing a transgression does not make the transgression less appealing to the child. But the threat of *mild* punishment, of a degree just powerful enough to get the child to stop the undesired activity temporarily, leads the child to try to justify his or her restraint and, as a result, can make the behavior less appealing (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963; Freedman, 1965).

However, the use of *harsh* punishments to reduce aggression usually backfires; it may put a halt to a child's aggressive behavior in the short term, but children who are physically punished tend to become more aggressive and antisocial over time (Durrant & Ensom, 2012). Harsh punishments backfire for several other reasons, too. People may shout things they don't mean or, out of frustration, use severe methods to try to control the behavior of their children. The target of all this noise and abuse is then likely to respond with anxiety or anger rather than with a reaction of “Thanks, I'd better correct that aggressive habit you don't like.” In some cases, angry attention may be just what the offender is hoping to get. If a mother yells at her daughter who is throwing a tantrum, the very act of yelling may give her what she



Many tired, exasperated parents punish their children's misbehavior by shouting at them or hitting or grabbing them. But this usually backfires, making the child angry and resentful without stopping the misbehavior. On the contrary, it teaches children what to do when they are tired and exasperated—hit someone.

wants, namely a reaction from Mom. More seriously, extreme punishment like spanking and physical abuse is a risk factor in children for the development of depression, low self-esteem, violent behavior, and many other problems (Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). And, finally, punishment often fails because it tells the target what not to do, but it does not communicate what the person should do. Spanking a little boy for hitting his sister will not teach him to play cooperatively with her.

Because of these drawbacks, most psychologists believe that harsh punishment is a poor way to eliminate aggressive or other unwanted behavior. In certain cases, for example, when a bully is hitting a classmate, temporary physical restraint is usually called for. But is that the best strategy to keep a bully from behaving aggressively when the adult leaves the room?

USING PUNISHMENT ON VIOLENT ADULTS The criminal justice system of most cultures administers harsh punishments both as retribution and as a means of deterring violent crimes like murder, manslaughter, and rape. Does the threat of harsh punishments make such crimes less likely? Do people who are about to commit violent crimes say to themselves, “I’d better not do this because if I get caught, I’m going to jail for a long time; I might even be executed”?

Laboratory experiments indicate that punishment can indeed act as a deterrent but only if two conditions are met: Punishment must be (a) prompt and (b) certain (Bower & Hilgard, 1981). It must follow quickly after the aggression occurred, and it must be unavoidable. In the real world, these conditions are almost never met. In most American cities, the probability that a person who commits a violent crime will be apprehended, charged, tried, and convicted is not high. Given the volume of cases in our courts, punishment is delayed by months or even years. Because many things influence crime rates—the proportion of young versus older people in the population, poverty levels, drug policies, discriminatory arrest patterns—the relationship between incarceration rates and crime rates in the United States varies

considerably from state to state (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014). Consequently, in the complex world of criminal justice, severe punishment is unlikely to have the kind of deterrent effect that it does in the controlled conditions of the laboratory.

Given these realities, severe punishment is not likely to deter violent crime. Countries that invoke the death penalty for murder do not have fewer murders per capita than those without it (Fajnzylber et al., 2002). American states that have abolished the death penalty have not had an increase in capital crimes, as some experts predicted; the death penalty seems generally unrelated to homicide rates (National Research Council, 2012). Imagine someone in the throes

of a murderous rage: It’s not the moment when most people would stop and reason through their decision.

Watch PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT AND AGGRESSION



Catharsis

The notion that “blowing off steam”—by behaving aggressively or watching others do so—relieves built-up anger and aggressive energy and hence reduces the likelihood of further aggressive behavior

Can We Release Anger by Indulging It?

Conventional wisdom suggests that one way to reduce feelings of aggression is to do something aggressive. “Get it out of your system” has been common advice for decades: If you are feeling angry, yell, scream, curse, throw a dish at the wall; express the anger, and it won’t build up into something uncontrollable. This belief stems from

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic notion of **catharsis** (Dollard et al., 1939; Freud, 1933). Freud held a "hydraulic" idea of aggressive impulses: Unless people were allowed to express ("sublimate") their aggression in harmless or constructive ways, he believed, their aggressive energy would be dammed up, pressure would build, and the energy would seek an outlet, either exploding into acts of extreme violence or manifesting itself as symptoms of mental illness.

Unfortunately, Freud's theory of catharsis has been greatly oversimplified into the notion that people should vent their anger or they will suffer physically and emotionally; by venting that anger, they will become less likely to commit aggressive acts in the future. When we are feeling frustrated or angry, many of us do temporarily feel less tense after blowing off steam by yelling, cursing, or perhaps kicking the sofa. But do any of those actions reduce the chance that we will commit further aggression? Does the notion of catharsis square with the data?

THE EFFECTS OF AGGRESSIVE ACTS ON SUBSEQUENT AGGRESSION

Following Freud, many psychoanalysts believed that playing competitive games served as a harmless outlet for aggressive energies. But they were wrong. In fact, the reverse is true: Competitive games often make participants and observers *more* aggressive.

In one demonstration of this fact, the hostility levels of high school football players were measured 1 week before the football season began and 1 week after it ended. If the intense competitiveness and aggressive behavior that are part of playing football serve to reduce the tension caused by pent-up aggression, the players would be expected to show a decline in hostility over the course of the season. Instead, the results showed that feelings of hostility *increased* significantly (Patterson, 1974).

What about watching aggressive games? Will that reduce aggressive behavior? Unfortunately, no. Research on sports fans has focused more on their aggression than any other aspect of fandom (Wann et al., 2015). While you might think that sports fans would riot when their team loses, it seems like fans of a winning team are the most volatile. "Avid" baseball fans watched videos of baseball plays while in an fMRI, which measures brain activity. The more the reward-processing areas of the brain were activated by watching their team win, the more fans of the winning team said they wanted to do things like throw food or drinks at fans of the other team (Cikara, Botvinick, Fiske, 2011).

Outside the lab, in the real world, we see the same phenomenon: Verbal acts of aggression are followed by more of the same. Many people feel worse, both physically and mentally, after an angry confrontation. When people ruminate about their anger, talk to others incessantly about how angry they are, or vent their feelings in hostile acts, their blood pressure shoots up, they often feel angrier, and they behave even *more* aggressively later than if they had just let their feelings of anger subside (Bushman et al., 2005).

Contrary to the catharsis hypothesis, many fans who watch aggressive sports do not become less aggressive; they may become more aggressive than if they hadn't watched at all.

BLAMING THE VICTIM OF OUR AGGRESSION Repeated aggression is a downward spiral. When you hurt another person, you experience cognitive dissonance: The cognition "I hurt Darion" is dissonant with the cognition "I am a decent, kind person." A good way for you to reduce dissonance is to convince yourself that hurting Darion was not a bad thing to do. You can accomplish this by ignoring Darion's virtues and emphasizing his faults, convincing yourself that Darion is a bad person who deserved to be hurt. And you would be especially likely to reduce dissonance this way if Darion were an innocent victim of your aggression. In the experiments described in Chapter 6,



participants inflicted either psychological or physical harm on an innocent person who had not hurt them (Davis & Jones, 1960; Glass, 1964). Participants then persuaded themselves that their victims were not nice people and therefore deserved what they got. This certainly reduces dissonance, but it also sets the stage for further aggression because once a person has succeeded in finding reasons to dislike someone, it is easier to harm that victim again.

What happens, though, if the victim isn't totally innocent? What if the victim has done something that did hurt or disturb you and therefore, in your opinion, deserves your retaliation? Here the situation becomes more complex and more interesting. Acting aggressively toward someone who harmed you *increases* your hostility towards that person, thus feeding the anger; that originally made you aggress (Kahn, 1966).

What Are We Supposed to Do with Our Anger?

If aggression leads to self-justification, which in turn breeds more aggression, what should we do with our angry feelings toward someone? Stifling anger, sulking around the house, and hoping the other person will read our mind doesn't seem to be a good solution, and neither are brooding and ruminating by ourselves, which just prolong and intensify the anger (Bushman et al., 2005; Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998). But if keeping our feelings bottled up and expressing them are both harmful, what is the alternative?

First, it is possible to control anger by actively enabling it to dissipate. *Actively enabling* means using such simple devices as counting to 10 (or 100!) before shooting your mouth off. Taking deep breaths or getting involved in a pleasant, distracting activity (playing a game, taking a bike ride, or even doing a good deed) are active ways of enabling the anger to fade away. If this advice sounds suspiciously like something your grandmother could have told you, well, that's because it is! Your grandmother often knows what she is talking about. But there is more to anger than merely controlling it, as you will see.

VENTING VERSUS SELF-AWARENESS Dissipating anger is not always best for you or for a relationship. If your close friend or partner does something that makes you angry, you may want to express that anger in a way that helps you gain insight

into yourself and the dynamics of the relationship. You may also wish to express yourself in a way that solves the problem without escalating it by arousing anger in the other person. But for that to happen, you must express your feelings in a way that is neither hostile nor demeaning.

You can do this (after counting to 10) by calmly stating that you are feeling angry and describing, non-judgmentally, what you believe the other person did to bring about those feelings. Such a statement in itself will probably make you feel better to have "cleared the air," and because you haven't harmed the target of your anger with verbal or physical abuse, your response will not set in motion the

It's possible to actively dissipate feelings of anger.



cognitive processes that would lead you to justify your behavior by ridiculing your friend or escalating the argument. It is important that you speak in a way that does not cause your listener to become defensive or counterattack. Instead, you want to speak in a way that invites problem solving (“Look, we seem to have different notions about housework. Can we figure out how to resolve this?”). When such feelings are expressed between friends or partners in a straightforward, nonconfrontational manner, greater mutual understanding and a strengthening of the friendship can result (Christensen, Doss, & Jacobson, 2014).

Although it is probably best to reveal your anger to the friend who provoked it—at least if you are hoping to resolve the problem between you—sometimes the target of your anger is unavailable. Perhaps the person did something to you many years ago, or he or she has died or moved away. When you want to feel less angry about a bygone offense, one trick is to recall it from a third-person perspective. Students who recalled an angry experience from a first-person perspective reported feeling intense emotions and had an increase in blood pressure, whereas students who recalled an angry experience from a distanced, third-person perspective had less intense emotions and no increase in blood pressure (Ayduk & Kross, 2008). To see whether this technique can help you let go of anger over an unexpressed experience, take the Try It!

Research also finds it can be helpful to write down your feelings in a journal. In experiments with people undergoing traumatic events or who had been carrying a burdensome secret they had never shared with anyone, those who were instructed simply to write their “deepest thoughts and feelings” about the event or the secret felt healthier and even had fewer physical illnesses 6 months to a year later than did people who suffered in silence, who wrote about trivial topics, or who wrote about the details of the traumatic events without revealing their own underlying feelings. The benefits of “opening up” are due not to the venting of feeling but primarily to the insights and self-awareness that usually accompany such self-disclosure (Pennebaker, 1990, 2002). For example, one young woman realized that she had been carrying a lot of anger since her childhood over something another child had done to her. When she saw what she had written about the incident, she realized, “My god, we were both just kids.”

TRAINING IN COMMUNICATION AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS Feeling angry is part of being human, but we have to learn the right skills to express anger or annoyance constructively and nonviolently. In most societies, it is precisely the people who lack those social skills who are most prone to violent solutions to problems in relationships (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012). One way to reduce aggression, then, is to teach people such techniques as how to communicate anger or criticism in constructive ways, how to negotiate and compromise when conflicts arise, and how to apologize when they need to (Christensen et al., 2014).

Try It!

Controlling Your Anger

Are you feeling angry about a personal matter in your life? Try to describe the event from a third-person perspective. Think about the space in which the event took place, where you and others were positioned, and the clothing of all people

involved. Think about what you looked like from the outside, including your facial expressions during the event. Does viewing the situation differently in your mind’s eye lessen your anger?

Many elementary and secondary schools now train students to use nonaggressive strategies for resolving conflict, along with problem-solving skills, emotional control, and conflict resolution (Barnes, Smith, & Miller, 2014; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). For example, in one major longitudinal study, kindergarten boys who were already showing high levels of aggression were randomly assigned to either a 10-year intervention or a control group. The intervention included teaching them to feel more *competent* in managing their emotions, getting along with peers, and succeeding in school. At age 26, more than 10 years after the intervention was over, the young men were brought into a laboratory, where they played a game with a (fictitious) partner who provoked them to anger by stealing points from them. Those who had been in the intervention not only behaved less aggressively when given the chance to retaliate but even showed reduced testosterone reactivity to the provocation (Carré et al., 2014).

GETTING APOLOGIES RIGHT What if you are not the person who is feeling angry, but the one who caused it in someone else? How should you apologize in a way that won't make the other person even angrier? Typically, any apology sincerely given and in which the perpetrator takes full responsibility is effective. Notice the "sincerely" part and the "full responsibility" part. The bland, token apologies offered by many public figures or corporate leaders when they've been caught doing something illegal or immoral don't count (Smith, 2014). Corporate Twitter accounts spend more time apologizing to user complaints posted on Twitter than tweeting new content (Page, 2014). To maximize the likelihood that someone will accept your apology, you must genuinely say you are sorry and reassure the person that you will not do the same thing again. Do not try to explain your behavior at the moment of the apology.

The person will be most likely to forgive you without aggressive retaliation if you follow that formula (Eaton & Struthers, 2006).

Of course, the offender must believe that an apology is even necessary, and here we see a gender difference. In a study in which young women and men kept daily diaries noting whether they committed an offense or experienced one, the researchers found that men simply have a higher threshold for what constitutes an offensive action warranting an apology. When everyone was asked to evaluate actual offenses they had experienced in the past or come up with imaginary ones, again the men rated them all as being less severe than women did. You



can imagine the unfortunate consequences of this discrepancy in cross-sex close relationships: A woman might feel angry or slighted that her partner doesn't even notice an offense that she thinks is serious enough to warrant an apology, and the man might feel angry that she is being oversensitive and thin-skinned (Schumann & Ross, 2010).

COUNTERING DEHUMANIZATION BY BUILDING EMPATHY As we saw, most people find it difficult to inflict pain on a stranger unless they can find a way to justify it, and the most common way of justifying it is to dehumanize the victim (Caselman, 2007). By building empathy among people, aggressive acts should be

#trending

“Re-accommodation”: The United Airlines Debacle

On the evening of Sunday, April 9, 2017, the passengers of United Flight 3411 had just finished settling in their seats aboard a flight from Chicago, Illinois to Louisville, Kentucky. Unbeknownst to them, four United Airlines employees arrived at the gate just after boarding and told the flight crew that they needed to get to Louisville immediately to service a flight leaving from that airport the next day. Flight 3411's crew offered the passengers \$400 and then \$800 to give up their seats, but no one was willing to do it for that price. So, the flight attendants announced they would pick passengers at random to be removed from the flight.

One of their random choices was a 69-year-old medical doctor from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, David Dao, but Dr. Dao said he would not deboard the plane because he had to see patients the next morning. Airport security was called, and disturbing cellphone videos taken by other passengers show the security guards forcibly removing Dr. Dao from the plane, banging his face on an armrest and dragging him, bloodied and disoriented, off the plane while other passengers gasp and cry, “My God, what are you doing?” and “No, this is wrong!” Dr. Dao suffered a concussion, had a broken nose, and lost two of his front teeth.

Perhaps needless to say, the Internet was outraged. But it was not until United's CEO, Oscar Munoz, provided the compassionless apology “for having to re-accommodate [the passenger]” and said that United had “followed established procedures” that the backlash on social media surged. Twitter erupted with hashtags that mocked United Airlines, such as #NewUnitedAirlinesMottos and #BoycottUnited. At the heart of the public outcry was the question: How could

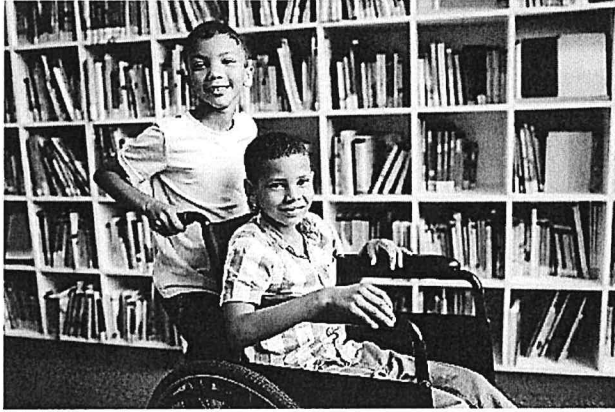
such disproportionate violence occur in the course of a commonplace business transaction? Instead of expressing remorse and promising that this would never happen to any future United Airlines passenger, Munoz tried to justify the beating, thus botching the opportunity to make things right.

Instances of especially bad customer service are coupled with rising rates of anger and aggression among airline passengers—a phenomenon known as “air rage.” The foundation for this phenomenon is relative deprivation; airlines sell the idea that flying is a luxury service through their advertisements, but most travelers' experiences can hardly be described as “luxé.” The mismatch between flyers' expectations and airline service delivery coincides with increases in air rage (Hunter, 2006). In turn, dealing with angry customers takes its toll on service employees, leading to burn-out and increasing the chance that the employee may act more aggressively if a conflict breaks out with new customer (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). In this case, Dr. Dao's minor provocation, folding his arms tightly when the officer told him to get off the plane, was perceived as an insult and violence ensued.

The frustration-aggression hypothesis also explains actions on both sides. Dr. Dao was so close to his goal of flying home—he was already in his seat!—before he was told to leave, thus increasing his frustration and making him less likely to comply with the request. For the flight attendants and airport security, there were two goals that were being thwarted: finding seats for the United employees and ensuring the plane took off reasonably close to the scheduled departure time. When Dr. Dao became an obstacle to the achievement of these goals, aggressive impulses took over.

more difficult to commit. The research data lend strong support to this contention. In one study, students who had been trained to empathize—that is, to take the perspective of the other person—behaved far less aggressively toward that person than did students who had not received the training (Richardson et al., 1994). In a similar study, Japanese students were told to shock another student as part of an alleged learning experiment (Ohbuchi, Ohno, & Mukai, 1993). In one condition, the “victims” first revealed something personal about themselves; in the other condition, they were not given this opportunity. Participants gave weaker shocks to the victim who had revealed personal information. It's harder to harm a stranger if you have made a personal connection with that person, and this is true whether the stranger is your neighbor, a homeless person, a sales clerk, or a civilian enemy.

Norma Feshbach (1989, 1997), who has pioneered the teaching of empathy in elementary schools, designed a 30-hour empathy-training program for children.



Children who are taught to put themselves in others' shoes often have higher self-esteem, are more generous, and are less aggressive than children who lack skills of empathy.

self-esteem, were more generous, and were less aggressive than were students who had not participated in the program. As perspective-taking requires cognitive flexibility, it should not surprise us to learn that students who develop greater empathic ability also tend to have higher academic achievement (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009).

The kids had to think hard about questions such as "What would the world look like to you if you were as small as a cat?" and "What birthday present would make each member of your family happiest?" Thinking about the answers expands children's ability to put themselves in another's situation. The children also listened to stories and then retold them from the point of view of each of the different characters in each story. The children played the role of each of the characters, and their performances were videotaped. The children then viewed the tapes and talked about how people look and sound when they express different feelings. At the end of the program, the children not only had learned to be more empathic but also had higher

Disrupting the Rejection-Rage Cycle

At the beginning of this chapter, we described the massacre at Columbine High School and discussed some of the speculations about what might have caused that horrifying event and the many other school shootings like it. Could these tragedies have been prevented?

To be sure, many of the shooters were severely mentally ill. Seung-Hui Cho, who murdered 32 of his fellow students at Virginia Tech University in 2007, had a lifelong history of mental problems, delusions, and aberrant behavior that had been increasing in the previous year; as a boy, he had written that he wanted to "repeat Columbine" (Hillshafer, 2013). The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooter, Adam Lanza, and Elliot Rodger, who killed six people in Santa Barbara, California, in 2014, had a history, since childhood, of mental problems that had recently been worsening. Some investigators have concluded that Harris might have been a psychopath who was easily able to fool adults, including his own psychiatrist; Klebold suffered from major depression (Cullen, 2010). But it would be a mistake to dismiss the Columbine massacre and most other school shootings as being a result of individual pathology and let it go at that. Such an explanation leads nowhere, because Harris and Klebold had been functioning effectively. They were getting good grades, attended class regularly, and did not present serious behavior problems to their parents or to the school authorities. Klebold had even gone to his prom three days earlier. True, they were loners, but so were many other students at Columbine High School.

Thus, to dismiss their horrifying deed as solely the result of mental illness would lead us to miss something of vital importance, something that might help us prevent similar tragedies: the power of the social situation. Elliot Aronson (2000) argued that Harris and Klebold were reacting in an extreme manner to a school atmosphere that creates an environment of exclusion and mockery, making life difficult for a sizable number of students. Most high schools are cliquish places where students are shunned if they belong to the "wrong" ethnic group, come from

the poor part of town, wear the “wrong” clothes, or are too short, too fat, too tall, or too smart. After the shootings, Columbine students recalled that Harris and Klebold had been taunted and bullied. Indeed, one student justified this behavior by saying, “Most kids didn’t want them there. They were into witchcraft. They were into voodoo. Sure we teased them. But what do you expect with kids who come to school with weird hairdos and horns on their hats? If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease ‘em. So the whole school would call them homos” (Gibbs & Roche, 1999).

In the video they left behind, Harris and Klebold spoke angrily about the insults and bullying they endured at Columbine. “Perhaps now we will get the respect we deserve,” said Klebold, brandishing a sawed-off shotgun. Indeed, the motivation behind the vast majority of rampage killings is an attempt to transform feelings of shame, humiliation, and rejection into feelings of pride. Social rejection is the most significant risk factor for teenage suicide, despair, and violence (Crescioni & Baumeister, 2009; Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006; Stillman et al., 2009). When a team of researchers investigated 15 school shootings that occurred between 1995 and 2001, they found that in 13 of them, the killers had been angered by bullying and social rejection (Leary et al., 2003). In the immediate aftermath of the Columbine massacre, countless young people posted messages online, describing their anguish over being rejected and taunted by their popular classmates. None of these teenagers condoned the shootings, yet their Internet postings revealed a high degree of empathy for the suffering that they assumed Harris and Klebold must have endured. A 16-year-old girl wrote, “I know how they feel. Parents need to realize that a kid is not overreacting all the time [when] they say that no one accepts them?”

How do we stop the cycle of bullying and aggressive retaliation? Over the school year of 2013 to 2014, a massive bullying intervention involving more than 24,000 middle school students was conducted in New Jersey by Elizabeth Levy-Paluck and her colleagues (Paluck, Shepherd, & Aronow, 2016). The intervention was designed on the idea that social norms are best conveyed by people who are well-known and liked in their communities, like popular kids who were cool with lots of different social circles. The researchers first mapped out the social networks of 56 middle schools and then randomly assigned students in some of the schools to create an “anticonflict intervention group.” Students in the anticonflict intervention groups designed anti-bullying campaigns with high-quality print media and easily sharable digital images that were implemented in their schools. One year later, schools with anticonflict intervention groups showed a 30% reduction in disciplinary reports for peer conflict. Notably, this effect was stronger for schools where more popular, well-liked kids were involved in designing the anti-bullying campaigns.

Research from social psychology shows that it should be possible to make our schools safer, as well as more pleasant and humane, by bringing about a change in the negative, exclusionary social atmosphere and by building empathy among schoolchildren. And, by the way, Columbine High School now has an antibullying program in place.



In the past decade, many schools have adopted bullying prevention programs to change norms regarding a form of aggression that can otherwise become dangerously prevalent among adolescents.