

18BPS62C SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY-II

UNIT-2

INTRODUCTION

Defining **aggression** seems simple: Aggression is any behaviour that hurts another. But further thought makes us recognize it is not the outcome, so much as the intention, that we must consider. Following Krebs (1982), we will define *aggression* as any behaviour intended to harm another person that the target person wants to avoid. According to this definition, a bungled assassination is an act

of aggression while heart surgery—approved by the patient and intended to improve his or her health—is clearly not aggression, even if the patient dies. The intended harm may be physical, psychological, or social (for example, harm to the target’s reputation) In the past, aggression involved face-to-face assaults against others, either verbal or physical) or indirect efforts to harm them through such tactics as spreading malicious rumors about them. But now, there are many new—and deadly—ways to harm others. Sexting can be one of them, but so, too, can using the Web to spread embarrassing photos with other kinds of content and “smear campaigns,” designed to harm the targets’ reputations. In one college course offered at Indiana University, the professor Googles students prior to the first day of class—and then reports to them embarrassing postings this process has uncovered. Not surprisingly, there are always a few posts the students wish would disappear—for example, photos of them posing half naked, or engaging in actions they now find embarrassing and wish had never occurred.

Overall, many people believe that we are now living in an age when humiliating others is viewed as more acceptable than it was in the past. Do you ever watch *American Idol*? Then you know what happens to performers who are dismissed early on: often, they are ridiculed harshly before millions of viewers. And special websites designed to demean strangers now exist (e.g., PeopleofWalmart.com, which shows photos of shoppers at Walmart in very unattractive poses and clothing). So yes, we do live in a new age, but the age-old desire to harm others can find many new forms of expression. And, of course, more “traditional” forms of aggression—from terrorism through serial killings and genocide—are still very much with us and remain an unsettling part of the human story.

Given the pervasiveness of aggression and violence (and its human costs), it is not surprising that social psychologists have sought to obtain a greater understanding of the roots of

aggression—to gain insights into its nature and causes. The ultimate goal of such research is to use this increased knowledge to develop improved techniques for reducing aggression in many different contexts (e.g., Anderson et al., 2010; Baumeister, 2005). In the present chapter, we summarize the knowledge gained by social psychologists through several decades of careful research. To do this, we proceed as follows.

First, we describe several *theoretical perspectives* on aggression, contrasting views about its nature and origins. Next, we examine research illustrating important determinants of human aggression. These include *basic social factors*, the words or actions of other people, either “in the flesh” or as shown in the mass media (e.g., Fischer & Greitemeyer, 2006); *cultural factors*, such as norms requiring that individuals respond aggressively to insults to their honor; aspects of *personality*, traits that predispose some people toward aggressive outbursts; and *situational factors*, aspects of the external world such as high temperatures and alcohol. After examining the effects of all these factors, we turn our attention to a very common but disturbing form of aggression to which children and teenagers are often exposed: *bullying* (repeated victimization of specific people by one or more other people). Finally, we examine various techniques for the prevention and control of aggression.

Perspectives on Aggression: In Search of the Roots of Violence

The system is operating better than in the past, getting through airport security can still sometimes take a long time, and be somewhat stressful. In fact, on a recent trip, one of us had his very small overnight bag pulled off the line and carefully searched. What was the problem? A water bottle he had forgotten to empty before getting on line. The inspector took it away, and that was the end of the process. but it was not pleasant. In the past, this kind of intense inspection—including full body scans—was not part of flying, so why do we have it now? You almost certainly know the answer: because of acts of aggression against innocent victims known as *terrorism*. The tragic events of 9/11 were a “wakeup” call for Americans—and the citizens of every other country—reminding them that there were people out there who were perfectly willing to kill and injure other people they didn’t know and who had done them no harm. This, of course, raises a very basic question: Why do human beings aggress against others in such savage and frightening ways? Social psychologists—along with many other thoughtful people—have pondered these questions for centuries and offered many explanations. Here, we examine several that have been especially influential, ending with those that have recently emerged from social psychological research.

The Role of Biological Factors: Are We Programmed to Aggress?

The oldest and probably most famous explanation for human aggression attributed it to biological factors, our basic nature as a species. The most famous supporter of this theory was Sigmund Freud, who held that aggression stems mainly from a powerful *death wish* (*thanatos*) we all possess. According to Freud, this instinct is initially aimed at self-destruction, but is soon redirected outward, toward others. A related view was proposed by Konrad Lorenz, a Nobel Prize-winning ethologist, who suggested that aggression springs mainly from an inherited *fighting instinct*, which ensures that only the strongest males will obtain mates and pass their genes on to the next generation (Lorenz, 1966, 1974). Until recently, most social psychologists rejected such ideas. Among the many reasons they did were these: (1) human beings aggress against others in many different ways—everything from excluding them from social groups to performing overt acts of violence against them. How can such a huge range of behaviours all be determined by genetic factors? (2) The frequency of aggressive actions varies tremendously across human societies, so that is much more likely to occur in some than in others (e.g., Fry, 1998). If that's so, social psychologists wonder, "How can aggressive behaviour be determined by genetic factors?" With the growth of the *evolutionary perspective* in psychology, however, the situation has changed. While most social psychologists continue to reject the view that human aggression stems largely from innate (i.e., genetic) factors, some now accept the possibility that genetic factors may indeed play *some* role in human aggression. For instance, consider the following reasoning, based on an evolutionary perspective (recall our discussion of this theory in Chapter 1). In the evolutionary past (and even at present to some extent), males seeking desirable mates found it necessary to compete with other males. One way of eliminating such competition is through successful aggression, which drives such rivals away. Since males who were adept at such behaviour may have been more successful in securing mates and in transmitting their genes to offspring, this may have led to the development of a genetically influenced tendency for males to aggress against other males. In contrast, males would not be expected to possess a similar tendency to aggress against females; in fact, development of such tendencies might be discouraged because females would tend to reject as mates' males who are aggressive toward them or even ones who are aggressive in public, thus exposing themselves and their mates to unnecessary danger. As a result, males may have weaker tendencies to aggress against females than against other males. In contrast, females might aggress equally against males and females, or even more frequently against males than other females.

Drive Theories: The Motive to Harm Others

When social psychologists rejected the instinct views of aggression proposed by Freud and Lorenz, they countered with an alternative of their own: the view that aggression stems mainly from an externally elicited drive to harm others. This approach is reflected in several different drive theories of aggression (e.g., Berkowitz, 1989; Feshbach, 1984). These theories propose that external conditions—especially frustration—arouse a strong motive to harm others. This aggressive drive, in turn, leads to overt acts of aggression. It can be initiated by several factors discussed below (e.g., provocations from others), or even by the presence of a weapon in the room (Anderson, 1998). By far the most famous of these theories is the well-known **frustration- aggression hypothesis**

(Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowerer, & Sears, 1939), and we discuss it in some detail in a later section. Here, we just want to note that this theory suggests that frustration— anything that prevents us from reaching goals we are seeking—leads to the arousal of a drive whose primary goal is that of harming some person or object—primarily the perceived cause of frustration (Berkowitz, 1989). Furthermore, the theory suggests that frustration is the strongest, or perhaps the *only*, cause of aggression. Social psychologists now realize that this theory is somewhat misleading, but it still enjoys widespread acceptance outside our field, and you may sometimes hear your friends refer to it in such statement as, “He was so frustrated that he finally blew up” or “She was feeling frustrated, so she took it out on her roommate.” We explain later why such statements are often truly misleading.



Drive Theories of Aggression: Motivation to Harm Others

Drive theories of aggression suggest that aggressive behaviour is pushed from within by drives to harm or injure others. These drives, in turn, stem from external events such as frustration. Such theories are no longer accepted as valid by most social psychologists, but one such view—the famous frustration-aggression hypothesis—continues to influence modern research, and many people’s beliefs about the causes of aggression.

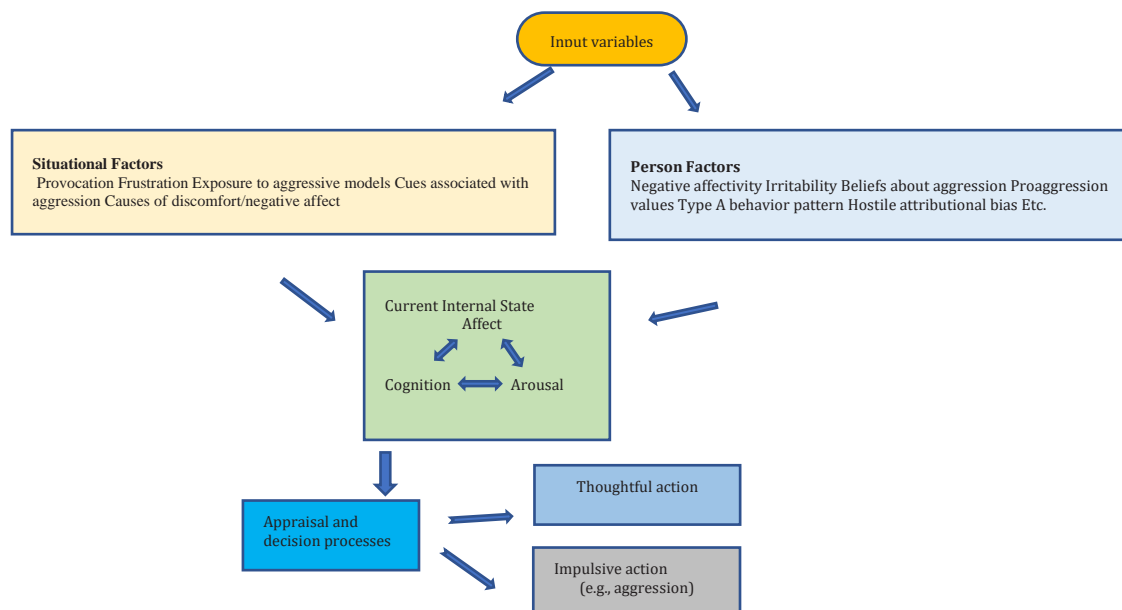
Modern Theories of Aggression: The Social Learning Perspective and the General Aggression Model

Unlike earlier views, modern theories of aggression (e.g., Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Berkowitz, 1993; Zillmann, 1994) do not focus on a single factor (instincts, drives, frustration) as the primary cause of aggression. Rather, they draw on advances in many areas of psychology in order to gain added insight into the factors that play a role in the occurrence of such behaviour. One such theory, known as the *social learning perspective* (e.g., Bandura, 1997),

begins with a very reasonable idea: Human beings are not born with a large array of aggressive responses at their disposal. Rather, they must acquire these in the much the same way that they acquire other complex forms of social behaviour: through direct experience or by observing the behaviour of others (i.e., social models—live people or characters on television, in movies, or even in video games who behave aggressively; Anderson et al., 2010; Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Bushman & Anderson, 2002). Thus, depending on their past experience and the cultures in which they live, individuals learn (1) various ways of seeking to harm others, (2) which people or groups are appropriate targets for aggression, (3) what actions by others justify retaliation or vengeance on their part, and (4) what situations or contexts are ones in which aggression is permitted or even approved. In short, the social learning perspective suggests that whether a specific person will aggress in a given situation depends on many factors, including the person's past experience, the current rewards associated with past or present aggression, and attitudes and values that shape this person's thoughts concerning the appropriateness and potential effects of such behavior. Building on the social learning perspective, a newer framework known as the **general aggression model (GAM)** (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), provides an even more complete account of the foundations of human aggression. According to this theory, a chain of events that may ultimately lead to overt aggression can be initiated by two major types of *input variables*: (1) factors relating to the current situation (situational factors) and (2) factors relating to the people involved (person factors). Variables falling into the first category include frustration, some kind of provocation from another person (e.g., an insult), exposure to other people behaving aggressively (*aggressive models*, real or in the media), and virtually anything that causes individuals to experience discomfort—everything from uncomfortably high temperatures to a dentist's drill or even an extremely dull lecture. Variables in the second category (*individual differences across people*) include traits that predispose some individuals toward aggression (e.g., high irritability), certain attitudes and beliefs about violence (e.g., believing that it is acceptable and appropriate), a tendency to perceive hostile intentions in others' behaviour, and specific skills related to aggression (e.g., knowing how to fight or how to use various weapons).

According to the general aggression model (GAM), these situational and individual (personal) variables lead to overt aggression through their impact on three basic processes: *arousal*—they may increase physiological arousal or excitement; *affective states*—they can arouse hostile feelings and outward signs of these (e.g., angry facial expressions); and *cognitions*—they can induce individuals to think hostile thoughts or can bring beliefs and attitudes about aggression

to mind. Depending on individuals' interpretations (*appraisals*) of the current situation and restraining factors (e.g., the presence of police or the threatening nature of the intended target person), they then engage either in thoughtful action, which might involve restraining their anger, or impulsive action, which can lead to overt aggressive actions (see Figure for an overview of this theory).



The GAM: A Modern Theory of Human Aggression

As shown here, the general aggression model (GAM) suggests that human aggression stems from many different factors. Input variables relating to the situation or person influence cognitions, affect, and arousal, and these internal states plus other factors such as appraisal and decision mechanism determine whether, and in what form, aggression occurs. (Source: Based on suggestions by Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

Bushman and Anderson (2002) have expanded this theory to explain why individuals who are exposed to high levels of aggression—either directly, in the actions of others, or in films and video games—may tend to become increasingly aggressive themselves. Repeated exposure to such stimuli serves to strengthen *knowledge structures* related to aggression— beliefs, attitudes, schemas, and scripts relevant to aggression.

As these knowledge structures related to aggression grow stronger, it is easier for these to be activated by situational or person variables. The result? The people in question are truly “primed” for aggression. The GAM is certainly more complex than earlier theories of aggression (e.g., the famous frustration-aggression hypothesis; Dollard et al., 1939). In addition, because it fully reflects recent progress in the field growing understanding of the fact that what people *think* is crucial in determining in what they actually do—it seems much more likely to provide an accurate view of the nature of human aggression than these earlier theories—and that, of course, is what scientific progress is all about.

Causes of Human Aggression: Social, Cultural, Personal, and Situational

Here's an actual incident that occurred not very long ago in a bar. Charles Barkley, a professional basketball player, entered a local bar at the same time as another man. (Barkley stands 6' 6" and weighs 252 pounds.) Both stepped up to the bar and Barkley ordered a drink. Seemingly, without provocation, the other fellow picked up a glass of water and hurled the contents at Barkley. What should Barkley do? Water is harmless and will dry very quickly; the two men are strangers who will probably never see each other again. In addition, Barkley is a stranger in town and it is possible that the water-throwing offender has many friends standing by, ready to help him; in other words, it could be a setup for Barkley—something professional athletes sometimes encounter from fans of rival teams. Rationally, therefore, Barkley should just look the other way and avoid trouble, right? What do you think he actually did? Without hesitation, he simply picked up the offender and threw him through the front window of the bar. What would you do in a similar situation? Would you, too, lose your temper and react strongly? Or would you follow a less dangerous course of action, such as leaving the scene? This would probably depend on many factors: Are you as tall and powerful as Barkley, so that you easily handle people like this stranger who annoyed you? Have you already had several drinks or none? Who else is present—friends, strangers, perhaps undercover police officers? Are you in a good mood or a bad one? Is it pleasant in the bar, or hot, steamy, and uncomfortable? What explanations for this stranger's provocation pass through your mind? Research by social psychologists has shown that *all* of these factors—and many others, too—can play a role. In other words, aggression doesn't stem from one primary factor or just a few; rather, as modern theories of aggression suggest (e.g., Anderson & Bushman, 2002; DeWall, Twenge, Gitter, & Baumeister, 2009), it is influenced by a wide range of social, cultural, personal, and situational conditions. We now review some of the most important of these factors—conditions that increase the likelihood that people will engage in some form of aggression.

Basic Sources of Aggression: Frustration and Provocation

Aggression, like other forms of social behaviour, is often a response to something in the social world around us. In other words, it often occurs in response to something other people have said or done. Here are several ways in which this can—and often does—occur.

FRUSTRATION: WHY *NOT* GETTING WHAT YOU WANT (OR WHAT YOU EXPECT) CAN SOMETIMES LEAD TO AGGRESSION

Suppose that you asked 20 people you know to name the single most important cause of aggression. What would they say? The chances are good that most would reply *frustration*. And if you asked them to define frustration, many would state: “The way I feel when something—or someone— prevents me from getting what I want or expect to get in some situation.” This widespread belief in the importance of frustration as a cause of aggression stems, at least in part, from the famous frustration-aggression hypothesis mentioned in our discussion of drive theories of aggression (Dollard et al., 1939). In its original form, this hypothesis made two sweeping assertions: (1) Frustration *always* leads to some form of aggression and (2) aggression *always* stems from frustration. In short, the theory held that frustrated people always engage in some type of aggression and that all acts of aggression, in turn, result from frustration. Bold statements like these are appealing, but it does not mean that they are necessarily accurate. In fact, existing evidence suggests that both portions of the frustration-aggression hypothesis assign far too much importance to frustration as a determinant of human aggression. When frustrated, individuals do not always respond with aggression. On the contrary, they show many different reactions, ranging from sadness, despair, and depression on the one hand, to direct attempts to overcome the source of their frustration on the other. In short, aggression is definitely not an automatic response to frustration.

Second, it is equally clear that not all aggression stems from frustration. As we have already noted, people aggress for many different reasons and in response to many different factors. Why, for instance, did Jessica Logan’s classmates heap abuse on her after her boyfriend posted nude photos of her on the Internet? Were they frustrated in any way? Was Jessica the cause of such feelings? Probably not. Many factors other than frustration no doubt played a role. In view of these basic facts, few social psychologists now accept the idea that frustration is the only, or even the most important, cause of aggression. Instead, most believe that it is simply one of many factors that can potentially lead to aggression. We should add that frustration can serve as a powerful determinant of aggression under certain conditions—especially when it is viewed as illegitimate or unjustified (e.g., Folger & Baron, 1996). For instance, if a student believes that she deserves a good grade on a term paper but then receives a poor one, with no explanation, she may conclude that she has been treated very unfairly—that her legitimate

needs have been thwarted. The result: She may have hostile thoughts, experience intense anger, and seek revenge against the perceived source of such frustration—in this case, her professor.

DIRECT PROVOCATION: WHEN AGGRESSION (OR EVEN TEASING) BREEDS AGGRESSION

Major world religions often suggest that when provoked by another person, we should “turn the other cheek”—in other words, the most appropriate way to respond to being annoyed or irritated by another person is to do our best to ignore this treatment. In fact, however, research findings indicate that this is easier to say than to do, and that physical or verbal provocation from others is one of the strongest causes of human aggression. When we are on the receiving end of some form of provocation from others—criticism we consider unfair, sarcastic remarks, or physical assaults—we tend to reciprocate, returning as much aggression as we have received—or perhaps even more, especially if we are certain that the other person *meant* to harm us.

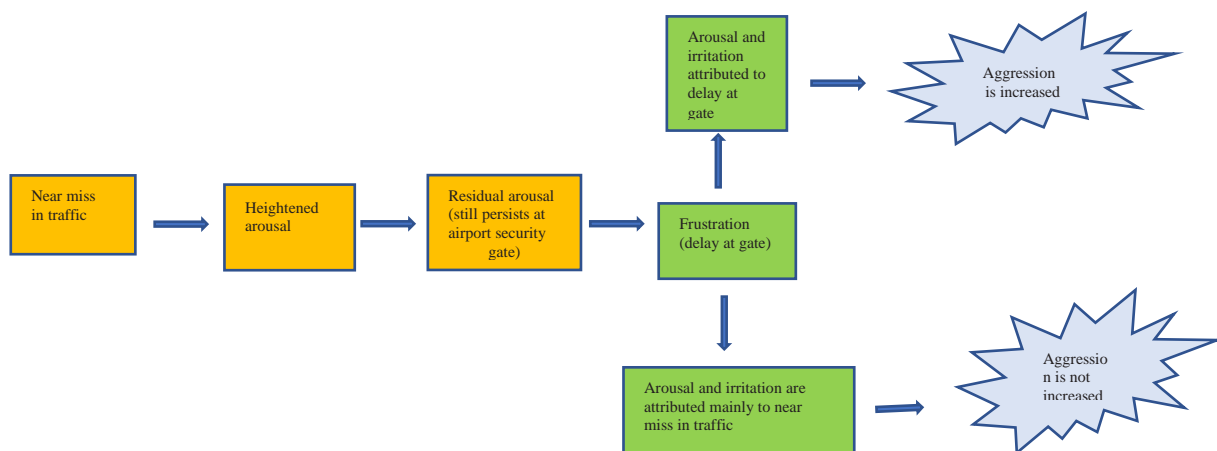
What kinds of provocation produce the strongest push toward aggression? Existing evidence suggests that *condescension*—expressions of arrogance or disdain on the part of others—is very powerful (Harris, 1993). Harsh and unjustified criticism, especially criticism that attacks *us* rather than our behavior, is another powerful form of provocation, and when exposed to it, most people find it very difficult to avoid getting angry and retaliating in some manner, either immediately or later on (Baron, 1993b). Still another form of provocation to which many people respond with annoyance is teasing—provoking statements that call attention to an individual’s flaws and imperfections, but can be, at the same time, somewhat playful in nature (e.g., Kowalski, 2001). Teasing can range from mild, humorous remarks (e.g., “Hey—you look like your hair just went through an electric mixer!”) through nicknames or comments that truly seem designed to hurt. Research findings indicate that the more individuals attribute teasing to hostile motives—a desire to embarrass or annoy them—the more likely they are to respond aggressively (Campos, Keltner, Beck, Gonzaga, & John, 2007).

In addition, research findings indicate that actions by others that somehow threaten our status or public image are important triggers of aggression. For instance, in one revealing study (Griskevicius et al., 2009), participants (male and female college students) were asked to describe the primary reason why they had performed the most recent act of direct aggression against another person. A substantial proportion—48.3 percent of men and 45.3 percent of women—described concerns about their status or reputation as the main cause of their aggression—threats to their self-identity (see Chapter 4). In sum, others’ actions—especially when they are interpreted as stemming from hostile motives— from a desire to harm *us* are often a very powerful cause of aggression. What about emotion? Does it, too, play an important role in triggering aggression? Your first reaction is probably “Of course! People aggress when they are feeling frustrated or angry—not when they are happy or relaxed.”

EMOTIONS AND AGGRESSION

The view that strong emotions underlie many aggressive acts makes good sense, and seems intuitively obvious. But think again: Do all instances of aggression involve strong emotions or feelings? Actually, they do not. For instance, people who have a grudge against someone sometimes wait for long periods of time before attempting to harm their enemies—they wait until conditions are “right” for doing the most damage with the least risk to themselves. An old Italian saying captures this idea: “Revenge is the only dish best served cold.” It suggests that when seeking revenge, it is sometimes best to do so *after* intense emotions have cooled—the result may be a more effective strategy! Here’s another example: Paid assassins—professional killers who murder specific people—do so simply because they are paid for completing this task. Usually, as many movies have illustrated, they don’t know these individuals, and feel no anger toward them; but this is their job, and the most effective ones do it coolly, with no emotional “baggage” to get in their way. And here’s another complication in the simple idea that “aggression stems from or always involves strong emotion.” Experts on emotion generally agree that often, our moods involve two basic dimensions: a positive–negative dimension (happy to sad) and an activation dimension (low to high). This raises an intriguing question about the role of the “feeling side” of life in aggression: Can heightened arousal facilitate aggression even if it is unrelated to this behaviour in any direct way? Suppose, for instance, that you are driving to the airport to meet a friend. On the way there, another driver cuts you off and you almost have an accident. Your heart pounds wildly and your blood pressure shoots through the roof; but fortunately, no accident occurs. Now you arrive at the airport. You park and rush inside because you are already late for your flight. When you get to the security line, a person in front of you is very slow to open his briefcase and also slow to remove his shoes. In addition, he hasn’t placed his liquids in a separate small bag, so the agent must sort through them now, while you wait. Quickly, you become highly irritated by this person, and say, mainly to yourself, “What a jerk; why don’t people like that stay home? I may miss my flight because of his stupidity . . .” And if you could, you would push him out of the way and move forward to catch your plane. Now for the key question: Do you think that your recent near miss in traffic may have played any role in your sudden surge of anger at this other passenger’s slowness? Could the emotional arousal from that incident, which has persisted, be affecting your feelings and actions inside the airport? Research evidence suggests that it could (Zillmann, 1988, 1994). Under some conditions, heightened arousal—whatever its source—can enhance aggression in response to provocation, frustration, or other factors. In fact, in various experiments, arousal

stemming from such varied sources as participation in competitive games (Christy, Gelfand, & Hartmann, 1971), exercise (Zillmann, 1979), and even some types of music (Rogers & Ketcher, 1979) has been found to increase subsequent aggression. Why is this the case? A compelling explanation is offered by excitation transfer theory (Zillmann, 1983, 1988). This theory suggests that because physiological arousal tends to dissipate slowly over time, a portion of such arousal may persist as a person moves from one situation to another. In the example above, some portion of the arousal you experienced because of the near-miss in traffic may still be present as you approach the security gate in the airport. Now, when you encounter a minor annoyance, that arousal, which is no longer salient to you, remains and intensifies your emotional reactions to the annoyance. The result: You become enraged rather than just mildly irritated. Excitation theory further suggests that such effects are most likely to occur when the people involved are relatively unaware of the presence of residual arousal—a common occurrence, since small elevations in arousal are difficult to notice (Zillmann, 1994). In fact, the theory may even help us to understand why tragic events such as the abuse of prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison by U.S. soldiers occurred and why it aroused such strong reactions in many people who learned about it (Breen & Matusitz, 2009). Excitation transfer theory also suggests that such effects are likely to occur when the people involved recognize their residual arousal but attribute it to events occurring in the present situation (Taylor, Helgeson, Reed, & Skokan, 1991). In the airport incident, for instance, your anger would be intensified if you recognized your feelings of arousal but attributed them to the elderly man’s actions rather than the driver who nearly cut you off (see Figure 10.6). Overall, it’s clear that the relationship between emotion and aggression is more complex than common sense suggests.



Excitation Transfer Theory

This theory suggests that arousal occurring in one situation can persist and intensify emotional reactions in later, unrelated

situations. For instance, the arousal produced by a near miss in traffic can intensify feelings of annoyance stemming from delays at an airport security gate. (Source: Based on suggestions by Zillmann, 1994).

Social Causes of Aggression: Social Exclusion and Exposure to Media Violence

Negative emotions do not appear to mediate the effects of rejection on aggression. Another possibility is that rejection by others initiates a *hostile cognitive mind-set*—it activates cognitive structures in our minds that lead us to perceive ambiguous or neutral actions by others as hostile in nature, and to perceive aggression as common in social interactions and as an appropriate kind of reaction (e.g., as suggested by the general aggression model; Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Tremblay & Belchevski, 2004). Evolutionary theory, too, suggests that a hostile cognitive mind-set or bias might follow from exclusion. In the past, human beings needed others—and cooperation with them—to survive. So, being excluded from the group was a very serious and threatening matter. This, in turn, suggests that exclusion by others would be interpreted as a very hostile action.

To test this reasoning, and find out if hostile cognitive bias does indeed underlie the effects of social exclusion on aggression, DeWall et al. (2009) conducted a series of studies. In one, some participants learned that their partner in an experiment had actively rejected them—refused to work with them—while others learned that their partner couldn't work with them because of factors beyond the partner's control—another appointment. To find out if rejection triggered hostile cognitive bias, both groups were then asked to complete word fragments that could be completed to form aggressive or nonaggressive words (e.g., “r _ pe” can be either *rape* or *ripe*). It was predicted that those who had been rejected would be more likely to complete the words in an aggressive way, and that was just what was found. In a follow-up study, participants completed a personality test and then were told that their scores indicated that they would either spend the future alone (i.e., they would be rejected by others) or that they would spend the future closely connected with other people in meaningful relationships. Next, they read a story in which another person acted in ambiguous ways. Afterward, they rated the extent to which the actions of the person in the story were accurately described by several adjectives related to hostility (e.g., *angry*, *hostile*, *dislikable*, *unfriendly*). It was predicted that learning that they would be socially excluded in the future would generate a hostile cognitive bias and lead participants in this group to rate a stranger's ambiguous actions as hostile. Again, this prediction was confirmed by the results. Finally, to determine if this hostile bias increased aggression, participants in both groups were given an opportunity to aggress against the

stranger in the story; they were told that this person was seeking a position as a research assistant, which they needed badly, and were asked evaluate the stranger's suitability for the position. Negative evaluations, of course, would prevent this person from obtaining the needed position. It was predicted that participants told they would experience social exclusion in the future would rate this person lower than those told they would experience a rich, full social life. Once more, the findings confirmed these predictions.

MEDIA VIOLENCE: THE POTENTIALLY HARMFUL EFFECTS OF FILMS, TELEVISION, AND VIDEO GAMES

This fact raises an important question that social psychologists have studied for decades: Does exposure to such materials increase aggression among children or adults? Literally hundreds of studies have been performed to test this possibility, and the results seem clear: *Exposure to media violence may indeed be one factor contributing to high levels of violence in countries where such materials are viewed by large numbers of people* (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Bushman & Anderson, 2009; Paik & Comstock, 1994). In fact, in a summary of research findings in this area (Anderson, Berkowitz, et al., 2004), leading experts on this topic who have provided testimony in U.S. Senate hearings on media and violence offered the following basic conclusions:

1. Research on exposure to violent television, movies, video games, and music indicates that such materials significantly increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior by people exposed to them.
2. Such effects are both short term and long term in nature.
3. The magnitude of these effects is large—at least as large as the various medical effects considered to be important by physicians (e.g., the effect of aspirin on heart attacks).

In other words, social psychology's leading experts on the effects of media violence agree that these effects are real, lasting, and substantial—effects with important implications for society and for the safety and well-being of millions of people who are the victims of aggressive actions each year. Many different types of research support these conclusions. For example, in short-term laboratory experiments, children or adults exposed to violent films and television programs have been found to show more aggression than others exposed to nonviolent films or programs.

Cultural Factors in Aggression: “Cultures of Honor,” Sexual Jealousy, and the Male Gender Role

cultural factors—beliefs, norms, and expectations in a given culture—suggesting that aggression is appropriate or perhaps even required under certain circumstances. Social psychologists have taken careful note of this fact in recent research on what is known as cultures of honor—cultures in which there are strong norms indicating that aggression is an appropriate response to insults to one’s honor. This is a theme in many films about the Old West, in which characters felt compelled to have a shoot-out with another person because their honor had somehow been sullied and is also seen in Asian films that present epic battles between warriors who possess seemingly magical powers.

SEXUAL JEALOUSY Infidelity—real or imagined—occurs in every society, even in ones that greatly restrict informal contact between women and men. But even if actual infidelity does not occur, *sexual jealousy*—the suspicion or fear that it might—can be a powerful motivator of aggressive behavior (e.g., Kaighobadi, Schackelford, & Goetz, 2009; Kaighobadi, Starratt, Schackelford, & Popp, 2008). In cultures of honor, such behavior by women is viewed as especially threatening to male honor (e.g., Baker, Gregware, & Cassidy, 1999), and can result in drastic responses—severe punishment for both the women and men involved in such contacts.

Not surprisingly, sexual jealousy is related to aggression against one’s unfaithful partner. In fact, in the United States, 20 percent of all reported incidents of nonfatal violence against women are performed by intimate partners (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003)—some 600,000 assaults each year! Moreover, 30 percent of all female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). Although sexual jealousy did not play a key role in all of these events, it has been found to be present in a large proportion of them. In one sense, the link between sexual jealousy and aggression is not surprising: Jealousy is a powerful emotion and is often closely associated with intense feelings of betrayal and anger. On the other hand, assaulting intimate partners—the ones we love most—is also puzzling. How do people overcome strong restraints against seeking to harm people with whom they enjoy such close and intimate bonds? An evolutionary perspective suggests that sexual jealousy, although present in both men and women, may have somewhat different foundations. For men, it may stem primarily from concern that children in the relationship are not, in fact, theirs—they are the offspring of sexual rivals. For women, in contrast, it may stem from the need for the resources and support that a mate provides. In fact, for men, sexual jealousy is focused on sexual infidelity, whereas for women, it is often focused on emotional infidelity—the

withdrawal of emotional support by a mate who is involved with other females (Buss, 2000; Thomson, Patel, Platek, & Shackelford, 2007). However, recent evidence suggests that this difference is not as clear-cut as was previously believed, and that in fact, the two genders overlap with respect to the factors that lead them to experience sexual jealousy (Eagly & Wood, in press). Evolutionary theory further suggests that to lessen sexual jealousy—and avoid the rage it often generates—men engage in *mate-retention behaviors*—actions designed to prevent a partner from engaging in infidelity. These include keeping a partner under close surveillance, threats of punishment for infidelity, showing affect and care, public signals of possession, and actions designed to drive off or threaten potential rivals. The more attractive a mate, or the younger she is, the more men tend to engage in such actions (Starratt, Shackelford, Goetz, & McKiddin, 2007).

How can evolutionary theory account for dangerous assaults against intimate partners, and more violent fatal ones? One hypothesis is that this stems from paternal uncertainty—men’s inability to know, with absolute certainty, that their children are theirs (i.e., genetically). This may have led to a tragic tendency to eliminate unfaithful mates— and their offspring. While such a hypothesis is very controversial and drastic in nature, it is consistent with the fact that men are most likely to kill their intimate partners when they threaten to leave the relationship, thus confirming suspicions of sexual infidelity. Whatever the actual causes of the strong link between sexual jealousy and aggression, it is clear that jealousy is indeed a powerful cause of aggression and that, moreover, violence stemming from it—or from other factors that threaten a man’s honor—are excused or condoned in many cultures, including, especially, in cultures of honor (e.g., Puente & Cohen, 2003; Vanandello & Cohen, 2003). Clearly, then, cultural factors play a key role in both the occurrence of aggression and in how it is perceived and evaluated.

PRECARIOUS MANHOOD: THE MALE GENDER ROLE AND OVERT AGGRESSION

Different cultures define “manhood” in contrasting ways, but around the world, it seems to involve more than mere maturation—attaining full growth and sexual maturity. Rather, the transition to manhood is often marked by special ceremonies, and involves a boost in status.

Personality, Gender, and Aggression

Informal observation suggests that this is so. While some individuals rarely lose their tempers or engage in aggressive actions, others seem to be forever “losing it,” with potentially serious

consequences. And in fact, recent evidence (Carre, McCormick, & Moundloch, 2009) indicates that we can even accurately estimate others' aggressiveness from the appearance of their faces! In this surprising research, participants looked at the photos of male strangers and then estimated how aggressive they were likely to be. When aggression by these individuals was actually measured in a special laboratory game involving the choice between taking points away from or giving them to an opponent, their predictions of the stranger's aggressiveness were found to be accurate. What aspect of the face did they use for making such predictions? The width-to-height ratio of strangers' faces (i.e., the wider they are relative to how high they are). The larger this ratio, the more aggressive were the strangers predicted to be. And indeed, width-to-height ratios *were* significantly related to actual aggression.

THE TASS MODEL: TRAITS AS SENSITIVITIES TO VARIOUS SITUATIONS

Social psychologists note that *situations* are important too, and that social behavior often derives from a complex interaction between situational factors and personal traits or other characteristics (e.g., Kammarath, Mendoza-Denton, & Mischel, 2005). One theory that takes careful account of this fact is known as the TASS model—the traits as situational sensitivities model. This model suggests that many aspects of personality function in a threshold-like manner: Only when situational factors are strong enough to trigger them do they influence behavior. (In contrast, a more traditional model of how personality factors influence behavior suggests that such factors are most likely to exert strong or clear effects in ambiguous or “weak” situations—ones that don't require people to behave in certain ways.)

THE TYPE A BEHAVIOR PATTERN: WHY THE A IN TYPE A COULD STAND FOR AGGRESSION

Do you know anyone you could describe as (1) extremely competitive, (2) always in a hurry, and (3) especially irritable and aggressive? If so, this person shows the characteristics of what psychologists term the Type A behavior pattern (Glass, 1977; Strube, 1989). At the opposite end of the continuum are people who do not show these characteristics—individuals who are not highly competitive, who are more relaxed and not always fighting the clock, and who do remain calm even in the face of strong provocation; such people are described as showing the Type B behavior pattern.

Additional findings indicate that Type As are truly hostile people; they don't merely aggress against others because this is a useful means for reaching other goals, such as winning athletic contests or furthering their own careers. Rather, they are more likely than Type Bs to engage in what is known as hostile aggression—aggression in which the prime objective is inflicting

some kind of harm on the victim (Strube et al., 1984). In view of this fact, it is not surprising to learn that Type As are more likely than Type Bs to engage in such actions as child abuse or spousal abuse (Strube, Turner, Cerro, Stevens, & Hinchey, 1984). In contrast, Type As are *not* more likely than Type Bs to engage in instrumental aggression—aggression performed primarily to attain other goals aside from harming the victim, goals such as control of valued resources or praise from others for behaving in a “tough” manner.

NARCISSISM, EGO-THREAT, AND AGGRESSION: ON THE DANGERS OF WANTING TO BE SUPERIOR

Do you know the story of Narcissus? He was a character in Greek mythology who fell in love with his own reflection in the water and drowned trying to reach it

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN AGGRESSION

First, gender differences in aggression are much larger in the absence of provocation than in its presence. In other words, males are significantly more likely than females to aggress against others when they have *not* been provoked in any manner (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996). In situations where provocation *is* present, and especially when it is intense, such differences tend to disappear. Second, the size—and even direction—of gender differences in aggression seems to vary greatly with the *type* of aggression in question. Research findings indicate that men are more likely than women to engage in various forms of *direct* aggression—actions aimed directly at the target that clearly stem from the aggressor (e.g., physical assaults, pushing, shoving, throwing something at another person, shouting, making insulting remarks; Bjorkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994). Interestingly, though, the size of such differences appears to be decreasing (Odgers et al., 2007) and rates of direct aggression—including violent behavior—are increasing among women.

Bullying: Singling Out Others for Repeated Abuse

Bullying—a form of behaviour in which one person repeatedly assaults one or more others who have little or no power to retaliate (Olweus, 1996). In other words, in bullying relationships, one person does the aggressing, and the other is on the receiving end. While bullying has been studied primarily as something that occurs between children and teenagers, it is also common in other contexts too, such as workplaces and prisons (e.g., Ireland & Archer, 2002; Neuman & Baron, in press) (see Figure 10.16). Indeed, research findings indicate that fully 50 percent of people in prison are exposed to one or more episodes of bullying each week (Ireland & Ireland, 2000). In this discussion, therefore, we consider research on bullying in many different contexts.

The Characteristics of Bullies and Victims

Many people who are bullies in one context become victims in other situations, and vice versa (Neuman & Baron, in press). So there are various combinations to consider—those who appear to be pure bullies (people who are always and only bullies), pure victims (people who are always and only victims), and bully-victims (people who switch back and forth between these roles, depending on the context).

Reducing the Occurrence of Bullying: Some Positive Steps

Bullying can have truly devastating effects on its victims. In fact, there have been several cases in which children who have been repeatedly bullied by their classmates have actually committed suicide. First, bullying must be seen to be a serious problem by all parties involved—teachers, parents, students, prisoners, guards, fellow employees, and supervisors (if bullying occurs in work settings). If bullying occurs, people in authority (teachers, prison guards, supervisors) must draw attention to it and take an unequivocal stand against it.

- Potential victims must be provided with direct means for dealing with bullying—they must be told precisely what to do and who to see when bullying occurs.
- Outside help is often useful in identifying the cause of bullying and in devising programs to reduce it.

Programs that have emphasized these points have produced encouraging results. Overall, then, there appears to be grounds for optimism; bullying *can* be reduced, provided it is recognized as being a serious problem and steps to deal with it are implemented.