CHAPTER 10: INTERPERSONAL AGGRESSION

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 10 explores the dynamics of interpersonal aggression. The chapter opens with a definition of aggression and outlines different types of aggression (e.g., instrumental and hostile aggression). A discussion of gender differences in aggression is also presented in the opening section of the chapter. The next major section covers biological explanations for aggression. The section moves from the "macro" level, discussing ethology and sociobiology, to the "micro" level, discussing neurological and hormonal influences on aggression. A subsection discusses the complex relationship between alcohol and aggression, showing that physical and psychological factors interact to produce the effect. The next major section begins the discussion of more traditional social psychological explanations for aggression. First, the frustration-aggression hypothesis is covered followed by a discussion of Berkowitz’s update to the early hypothesis. The importance of negative affect (i.e., anger) and the factors that arouse negative affect are discussed. Next, the social learning theory is explored and how social learning contributes to the acquisition of aggressive behaviors. The role of observational learning is covered extensively. In this section the notion of aggressive scripts is discussed along with information on the relationship between aggressive scripts and aggression. Subsections follow on the role of the family in socializing aggression, emphasizing the impact of aggressive parenting. The role of culture is also discussed. Nisbett’s research on the Southern "culture of violence" is covered extensively. Sections are also included on the relationship between exposure to violent television and aggression, and the relationship between exposure to sexually violent materials and violence against women. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ways to reduce violence, focusing on family intervention and cognitive/behavioral techniques.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

What Is Aggression?

Levels and Types of Aggression
Gender Differences in Aggression
Explanations for Aggression

Biological Explanations for Aggression

Ethology
Sociobiology
Genetics and Aggression

The Physiology of Aggression

Physiology and Aggression: Summing Up

The Frustration-Aggression Link

Components of the Frustration–Aggression Sequence
Factors Mediating the Frustration–Aggression Link
The Social Learning Explanation for Aggression

The Socialization of Aggression

Aggressive Scripts: Why and How They Develop

The Role of the Family in Developing Aggressive Behaviors

Child Abuse and Neglect

Family Disruption

The Role of Culture in Violent Behavior

The Role of Television in Teaching Aggression

Exposure to Violent Video Games

Viewing Sexual Violence: The Impact on Aggression

The Impact of Sexually Violent Material on Attitudes

Men Prone to Sexual Aggression: Psychological Characteristics

Reducing Aggression

Reducing Aggression in the Family

Reducing Aggression with Cognitive Intervention and Therapy

The Beltway Sniper Case Revisited

Chapter Review

KEY TERMS

**Aggression**: Any behavior intended to inflict either psychological or physical harm on another organism or object. (p. 358)

**Hostile aggression**: Aggressive behavior stemming from angry or hostile impulses, with a primary goal to inflict injury on some person or object. (p. 358)

**Instrumental aggression**: Aggressive behavior stemming from a desire to achieve a goal. (p. 359)

**Direct aggression**: Overt forms of aggression such as physical aggression (hitting, punching, kicking, etc.) and verbal aggression (name calling, denigration, etc.). (p. 359)

**Indirect aggression**: Aggression that is social in nature, such as social ostracism and deliberate social exclusion. (p. 359)

**Relational aggression**: A form of aggression having direct and indirect components involving the use of social ostracism and rejection (indirect aggression) and direct confrontation (direct aggression). (p. 359)
Symbolic aggression: Aggressive behavior that interferes with a victim’s advancement toward a goal. (p. 359)

Sanctioned aggression: Aggressive behavior that society accepts or encourages. (p. 359)

Ethology: A theoretical perspective that views behavior within the context of survival and emphasizes the role of instincts and genetic forces. (p. 362)

Sociobiology: A theoretical perspective that views social behavior as helping groups of organisms within a species survive. (p. 362)

Hypothalamus: A structure in the limbic system of the brain associated with aggressive behavior. (p. 364)

Frustration-aggression hypothesis: A hypothesis that frustration and aggression are strongly related, suggesting that aggression is always the consequence of frustration and frustration leads to aggression. (p. 370)

Heat effect: The observation that aggression is more likely when people are hot than when they are cool. (p. 372)

Social learning theory: A theory that social behavior is acquired through direct reinforcement or punishment of behavior and observational learning. (p. 374)

Observational learning: Learning through watching what people do and whether they are rewarded or punished and then imitating that behavior. (p. 374)

Aggressive script: An internalized representation of an event that leads to increased aggression and the tendency to interpret social interactions aggressively. (p. 376)

Social-interactional model: A model suggesting that antisocial behavior arises early in life and is the result of poor parenting, leading a child to develop conduct problems that affect peer relations and academic performance. (p. 377)

Culture of honor: An evolved culture in the southern and western United States in which violence is more widely accepted and practiced than in the northern and eastern United States, where no such culture exists. (p. 381)

Social information-processing view of aggression: A view stating that how a person processes social information mediates aggression. (p. 392)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of Chapter 10, you should be able to:

1. Define aggression and talk about several types of aggression that social psychologists have studied.

After reviewing the four main types of aggression outlined in the chapter, you should be able to interpret specific acts of aggression in terms of the function(s) they serve. You should be able to compare and contrast hostile, instrumental, direct, indirect, relational, symbolic, and sanctioned aggression.

2. Discuss gender differences in displays of aggressive behavior and offer several possible reasons for such differences.
First, you should recognize the types of aggression (e.g., physical versus verbal aggression) on which males and females differ and the extent to which real-life behaviors parallel the differences achieved in laboratory settings. Also, you should be able to link gender differences to brain differences, hormonal differences, differences in empathy and sympathy, parenting techniques, and general socialization processes that operate from infancy onward.

3. **Discuss the biological explanations for aggression.**

You should be able to articulate the main points of ethological and sociobiological approaches to aggression. You should understand that these two approaches look at aggression as a behavior that helps organisms survive and adapt to the environment. You should be able to discuss the genetic underpinnings of aggression. You should also be able to discuss the physiological underpinnings of aggression, including the contribution of hormones and brain neural circuitry. You should be able to discuss the effects of alcohol on aggression, specifying that there are both physiological and psychological aspects to the alcohol-aggression link.

4. **Discuss the link between frustration and aggression.**

You should be able to discuss the main points of the original frustration-aggression hypothesis, and specify the factors that contribute to frustration. You should know about the update to the original hypothesis, which suggests that frustration will lead to aggression only if negative affect is aroused (e.g., anger). You should be able to specify the factors that contribute to anger, especially how attributions about intent and perceived injustice affect aggression. You should also be able to discuss the heat effect and how it relates to frustration, anger and aggression.

5. **Describe the social learning approach to explaining aggression.**

You should be able to articulate the main principles of social learning theory and talk about the importance of observational learning in transmitting aggressive behaviors. You should be able to discuss the cognitive mechanisms underlying observational learning and show how aggressive scripts develop. You ought to know how aggressive scripts operate and how they relate to aggression. You should also understand how the family plays a role in socializing aggression, most notably through aggressive parenting. Specifically, you should be able to articulate the main ideas of the social-interactional model of aggression, recognizing the contributions of aggressive parenting and its origins. You should be able to discuss the link between child abuse and aggression, as well as the link between family disruption and aggression. You should also understand how child abuse and family disruption relate to aggression.

6. **Discuss the role culture plays in aggression.**

You should be able to show how cultural influences relate to levels of aggression. Specifically, you should be able to discuss the notion of the “culture of honor” and how such a culture relates to aggression and acceptance of aggression. You should be able to describe the regional differences that have been found that relate to aggression.

7. **Describe the role that televised violence plays in aggression.**

You should be able to discuss the research investigating the relationship between watching violent television programs and aggressive behavior. You should know that there is a small, but consistent, relationship in which watching violent television causes increased aggression. You should understand that not all children are affected equally and be able to articulate the factors that mediate the impact of violent television on aggression. You should understand that the impact of televised violence on aggression is relatively small and that positive behaviors can also be transmitted via television. You should also understand that televised violence affects people differently depending on their personality characteristics.

8. **Discuss the role of playing violent video games in aggression.**
Here you should know that research has shown a link between playing violent video games and aggression for both males and females. You should also understand that the link between violent video games and aggression is quite strong, but not as strong as the link between televised violence and aggression. You should be able to discuss how playing a violent video game activates parts of the brain associated with aggression. You should also be able to discuss how the gender of a video game character differently affects males and females.

9. Discuss the relationship between violent pornography and violence against women.

You should be able to describe and discuss the research on the relationship between pornography and violence against women. You should know that not all forms of erotica lead to increased violence against women and be able to specify which forms do and which forms do not. You should also be able to discuss how exposure to sexually violent materials affects attitudes as well as aggressive behavior. You should also understand that not all men are affected in the same way by sexually violent material. You should be able to describe the characteristics of men who are prone to sexual violence.

10. Talk about how family intervention can reduce acts of aggression.

You should be able to describe the parenting styles associated with fewer acts of aggression. Research examining the antecedents to aggressive behavior allows psychologists to make recommendations as to how parents can curb the onset of child aggression. They place particular emphasis on teaching and reinforcing prosocial behaviors, while stressing the inappropriateness of aggressive behaviors.

11. Show how cognitive intervention is used to reduce aggression.

You should be able to discuss the cognitive approach to reducing aggression, which focuses on teaching an individual to reinterpret situations so that they are not perceived as aggressive. They should also know how cognitive and behavioral management techniques are used to reduce aggression.

**KEY QUESTIONS**

These questions appear at the beginning of the chapter. As you read the text, answer these questions as a way to learn the material.

1. How do social psychologists define aggression?
2. What are the different types of aggression?
3. What are the gender differences in aggression?
4. How can we explain aggression?
5. What are the ethological, sociobiological, and genetic explanations for aggression?
6. What role do brain mechanisms play in aggression?
7. How does alcohol consumption relate to aggression?
8. What is the frustration-aggression hypothesis?
9. How does anger relate to frustration and aggression, and what factors contribute to anger?
10. How does social learning theory explain aggression?
11. What are aggressive scripts, and how do they relate to aggression?
12. How does the family socialize a child into aggression?
13. What is the role of culture in aggression?
14. What role do the media play in aggression?
15. What are the effects of playing violent video games on aggressive behavior?
16. What is the link between sexual violence portrayed in the media and sexual aggression toward women?
17. How can aggression be reduced?
PRACTICE TESTS

Multiple-Choice

Choose the alternative that best completes the stem of each question.

1. Marcia gets mad at her upstairs neighbor and one night breaks out the window in her neighbor’s car. This is an example of
   a. hostile aggression.
   b. instrumental aggression.
   c. relational aggression.
   d. sanctioned aggression.

2. __________ aggression is social in nature, such as social ostracism and deliberate social exclusion.
   a. Direct
   b. Indirect
   c. Instrumental
   d. Hostile

3. Research on gender differences in aggression shows that
   a. males use more direct aggression than females.
   b. females show more guilt over using aggression than males.
   c. males use all forms of aggression more than females.
   d. both a and b
   e. none of the above

4. According to research cited in your text, high levels of “free plasma tryptophan” (TRP) are associated with
   a. expressing anger verbally for males but not females.
   b. expressing anger verbally for females but not males.
   c. outward expression of hostility for females more than males.
   d. outward expression of hostility for males more than females.

5. Laboratory research shows a __________ gender difference in aggression, and real-world research shows a __________ gender difference in aggression.
   a. large; small
   b. small; large
   c. small; small
   d. large; large

6. A theoretical perspective that views social behavior as helping groups of organisms within a species to survive is
   a. ethology.
   b. social learning theory.
   c. sociobiology.
   d. sociology.

7. Research shows that genetics and __________ interact to affect aggression.
   a. the common (shared) environment
   b. the noncommon (unshared) environment
   c. all aspects of the environment
8. Research shows that genetics are  
a. more important for females in aggression.  
b. more important for males in aggression.  
c. equally important for males and females in aggression.  
d. of little importance for males and females in aggression.  

9. Research on the role of brain structures in aggression has found that stimulation of parts of the  
	_________________________ leads to aggression.  
	a. hypothalamus  
	b. cerebellum  
c. temporal lobes of the cortex  
d. brainstem

10. Early exposure to testosterone serves a(n) _______________ function, whereas exposure to  
testosterone later in life serves an _______________ function.  
	a. establishment; activation  
b. organization; activation  
c. activation; organization  
d. setting; organization

11. Research on the effects of alcohol on aggression shows that alcohol is associated with a decrease in  
the neurotransmitter  
a. norepinephrine.  
b. acetylcholine.  
c. endorphin.  
d. serotonin.

12. Research on the effects of alcohol on aggression shows that alcohol is associated with a decrease in  
activity in the executive cognitive functions (ECF) which is associated with depression of activity in the  
_________ in the brain.  
	a. hypothalamus  
b. amygdala  
c. prefrontal cortex  
d. temporal lobes

13. According to the frustration-aggression hypothesis, the strength of frustration is affected by  
a. the strength of the original drive.  
b. the degree to which a goal-directed behavior is blocked.  
c. the number of behaviors that are blocked.  
d. both a and b only  
e. all of the above

14. According to your text, displaced aggression is affected by  
a. the strength of the original drive.  
b. the degree to which a goal-directed behavior is blocked.  
c. the number of behaviors that are blocked.  
d. the intensity of the original provocation to aggression.

15. According to Berkowitz’s (1989) updated version of the frustration-aggression hypothesis, frustration  
a. always leads to aggression.  
b. will lead to aggression but only if at least three behaviors are blocked.
c. will lead to aggression but only if it arouses negative affect like anger.
d. will lead to aggression, but only if it is hot out.

16. Which of the following is true?
   a. The intent behind an attack is more important than the intensity of the attack delivered in determining retaliatory aggression.
   b. The intensity of an attack delivered is more important than the intent behind the attack in determining retaliatory aggression.
   c. The intensity of an attack delivered and the intent behind the attack are equally important in determining retaliatory aggression.
   d. Neither the intensity of an attack delivered nor the intent behind the attack is important in determining retaliatory aggression.

17. After a "bad call" by a referee at a basketball game, fans begin to throw things at the officials. This is an example of ______________ instigating aggression.
   a. anger
   b. inequality
   c. intent
   d. perceived injustice

18. After watching a violent movie, Alan imitates some of the aggressive behavior that he saw in the film. This finding is most consistent with the ______________ explanation for aggression.
   a. social learning
   b. biological
   c. frustration-aggression
   d. sociobiological
   e. none of the above

19. Which of the following was NOT listed as a phase through which aggressive scripts develop?
   a. acquisition
   b. encoding
   c. recall and commission
   d. retrieval and emission

20. According to the social-interactional model of aggression, aggression arises
   a. early in life as a result of poor parenting.
   b. early in life as a result of the interaction between genetic makeup and the environment.
   c. later in life as a result of poor parenting.
   d. early in life but has no relationship to later aggression.

21. Which of the following was listed in your text as an example of verbal and symbolic aggression?
   a. Insulting or swearing at a child
   b. Stomping out of the house
   c. Throwing or smashing something
   d. both a and c
   e. all of the above

22. According to your text, in addition to fostering aggression, child abuse also
   a. reduces the IQ of the child.
   b. desensitizes the child to the suffering of others.
   c. makes the child more sensitive to the suffering of others.
   d. both a and b
   e. both a and c
23. Research on the relationship between family disruption and crime indicates that family disruption
   a. is related to higher homicide and robbery rates, but only for African Americans.
   b. is related to higher homicide and robbery rates, but only for whites.
   c. is the single best predictor of homicide rates among African Americans.
   d. has a greater effect on adult than juvenile crime.

24. According to your text, aggression is lower in cultures that show
   a. high levels of moral discipline.
   b. collectivist values.
   c. egalitarian values.
   d. all of the above
   e. both a and c only

25. Which of the following is true of the relationship between watching television violence and aggression?
   a. There is a link between watching television violence and aggression, although not necessarily a
      causal one.
   b. Viewing justified violence on television increases aggression.
   c. There is a link between watching violent television and aggression for males, but not for females.
   d. all of the above
   e. both a and b only

26. Research on the effects of playing violent video games on aggression shows that playing violent video
   games
   a. increases aggression only among males.
   b. increases aggression only among females.
   c. increases aggression among males and females.
   d. does not significantly increase aggression.

27. Research on the link between pornography and aggression against women indicates that
   a. all forms of erotica lead to increased aggression against women.
   b. mild forms of erotica (e.g., Playboy pictures) may actually inhibit aggression against women.
   c. only video formats depicting nonviolent erotica increase aggression against women.
   d. there is no relationship between pornography and aggression against women.

28. Research on the characteristics of men who are predisposed to commit rape leads to the
    conclusion that
    a. several characteristics combine to increase a man’s predisposition to commit sexual violence
       against women.
    b. only psychoticism was found to significantly predict a man’s predisposition to commit sexual violence
       against women.
    c. situational factors are more important than physical characteristics in predicting who is predisposed
       to commit sexual violence against women.
    d. just about all males are predisposed to commit sexual violence against women.

29. The cognitive approach to reducing aggression stresses.
   a. teaching parents nonaggressive parenting techniques.
   b. teaching an individual to reinterpret situations in a nonaggressive way.
   c. reducing the amount of television a child watches.
   d. limiting exposure to violent pornography.

30. Teaching a person new social skills, such as listening to others and finding nonaggressive ways to
    solve problems, is most consistent with the _________________ approach to reducing aggression.
a. family systems  
b. social learning  
c. cognitive  
d. emotional

Fill-in-the-Blank

31. ____________________ is any behavior that is intended to inflict harm (whether psychological or physical) on another organism or object.

32. ____________________ stems from some aggressive drive, and its primary goal is to inflict injury on some person or object.

33. ____________________ behaviors such as spreading rumors intend to prevent another person from achieving a goal.

34. When society accepts, encourages, or even sanctions a form of aggression, we call this _____________________.

35. ____________________ views behavior in the context of survival and emphasizes the role of instincts and genetic forces in behavior.

36. Scientists who study ____________________ are interested in the evolutionary significance of social behavior such as altruism and aggression.

37. The ____________________ is a structure in the brain associated with aggressive behavior.

38. Research suggests that there is a neural circuit in the brain involving the limbic system and the ____________________ that organizes aggressive behavior.

39. Alcohol has been found to affect ____________________, which affects planning and most likely accounts for the increases in aggression following alcohol consumption.

40. Research shows that in addition to the pharmacological effect of alcohol on aggression ____________________ also have an effect.

41. The idea that aggression is always a consequence of frustration, and that frustration always leads to aggression, is called the _____________________.

42. ____________________ occurs when an individual expected to perform certain behaviors and those behaviors are prevented from occurring.

43. When direct aggression against a source is not possible, and we vent our frustration against another target, this is known as _____________________.

44. Anger is likely to occur following an aggressive act if the victim perceives ____________________ behind the aggressive act.

45. The observation that aggression is more likely when people are hot than when they are cool is known as _____________________.
46. _____________________ states that aggression, like many other behaviors, is learned.

47. A(n) _____________________ is an internalized representation of an event that leads to increased aggression and a tendency to see the world as a hostile place.

48. According to the _____________________, antisocial behavior (such as aggression) arises early in life and is the result of poor parenting (harsh, inconsistent discipline, and poor monitoring of children).

49. _____________________ involves name calling, stomping around the house, and throwing things.

50. The _____________________ is a view emphasizing how a person processes information about how the world affects aggression.

Answers

Multiple-Choice

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Observation
This observation involves getting permission from a local day-care center to go in and observe children at play. Find a day-care center that groups children into at least three different age groups (most do). Count the number of boys and girls in each group. Next, for each age group, observe them during free play and count the number of aggressive acts you see. Aggressive acts can be physical (shoving, pinching, etc.) or verbal (yelling, saying mean things, etc.).

Youngest Group

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<td>Number of physically aggressive acts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of verbally aggressive acts

Answer the following questions:

1. Did you find any gender differences?
2. Was the difference greater at any particular age?
3. Some research suggests that males are more physically aggressive than females, especially at earlier ages, whereas females are more verbally aggressive than males. Do you think this is due more to biological differences, or do you think differences in aggression are socialized?

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Are You Prone to Road Rage?
One type of aggression that has been on the rise in recent years is road rage. Road rage is defined as the situation in which one or more drivers uses his or her vehicle as a weapon intending to commit harm on another driver or escalates a driving incident into another form of violence. For this exercise, evaluate yourself for the tendency toward aggressive driving and road rage. Use an Internet search engine to find a Web site with a self-test for road rage (one can be found at: http://www.queendom.com/tests/minitests/fx/road_rage.html or http://www.healthylife.net/body/roadRageTest.html). Use other Internet resources to more fully explore road rage. Specifically, you could explore:

The formal definitions of road rage,
The frequency of road rage incidents
The severity of road rage incidents.
What can be done if you are prone to road rage.
What you can do to prevent becoming a victim of road rage.