Chapter 12

Aggression: Why We Hurt Other People? Can We Prevent it?
What Is Aggression?

An *aggressive action* is intentional behavior aimed at causing either physical or psychological pain.
**What Is Aggression?**

*Hostile aggression* is an act of aggression stemming from feelings of anger and aimed at inflicting pain.
What Is Aggression?

*Instrumental aggression* is aggression that serves as a means to some goal other than causing pain.
What Is Aggression?

• Is Aggression Inborn, or Learned?
  Scientists do not agree on whether aggression is innate or learned. The debate has been raging for centuries.
What Is Aggression?

• Is Aggression Instinctual? Situational? Optional?

Even in the most aggression-prone species, aggression is an optional strategy and is determined by the organism’s previous social experiences and by the specific social context in which the organism finds itself.
What Is Aggression?

• Aggressiveness and Culture

The evidence is inconclusive on whether or not aggression has an instinctual component, but it is clear that aggression can be modified by situational factors. Two examples of this are aggression among the Iroquois and the regional differences in aggressive behavior in the United States.
Neural and Chemical Influences on Aggression

- Pain, Discomfort, and Aggression

Both animal and human studies show that pain will increase the probability that an organism will aggress.

Other forms of bodily discomfort (heat, humidity, air pollution, offensive odors) may also act to lower the threshold for aggressive behaviors.
Chapter Outline

III. Social Situations and Aggression
Social Situations and Aggression

- Frustration and Aggression

*Frustration-aggression theory* says that frustration, the perception that you are being prevented from obtaining a goal, will increase the probability of an aggressive response.
Social Situations and Aggression

• Frustration and Aggression

The closer someone is to a goal, the greater the frustration when one is thwarted and the higher the probability that the person will act aggressively.
Social Situations and Aggression

- Frustration and Aggression

  Aggression also increases when frustration is unexpected. The perception of relative deprivation, feeling that one has less than one deserves or has been led to expect or has less than similar people, can increase aggressive behavior.
Social Situations and Aggression

- Being Provoked and Reciprocating

People usually feel the need to reciprocate after they are provoked by aggressive behavior from another person.
Social Situations and Aggression

• Being Provoked and Reciprocating

If we think the provocation was unintentional, we are unlikely to reciprocate. And if there are mitigating circumstances, we may not aggress, so long as the circumstances are known at the time of the aggression.
Social Situations and Aggression

• Aggressive Objects as Cues

An *aggressive stimulus* is an object that is associated with aggressive responses (for example, a gun), and whose mere presence can increase the probability of aggression.
A major cause of aggression is social learning. Bandura and associates (1961) demonstrated *social learning theory*, the theory that we learn social behavior (for example, aggression) by observing others and imitating them.
Social Situations and Aggression

• Violence in the Media: TV, Movies, and Video Games

A number of long-term studies indicate that the more violence individuals watch on TV as children, the more violence they exhibit years later as teens and adults.
Social Situations and Aggression

• Violence in the Media: TV, Movies, and Video Games

Repeated exposure to horrifying events has a numbing effect on our sensitivity to those events.
Social Situations and Aggression

- Violence in the Media: TV, Movies, and Video Games

  Adolescents and adults who watch more than four hours of television per day are more likely than people who watch less television to have an exaggerated view of the level of violence that occurs outside their home and they have a greater fear of being personally assaulted.
Social Situations and Aggression

• Violence in the Media: TV, Movies, and Video Games

At least five reactions to media violence help explain why exposure to violence in the media might increase aggression: “If they can do it, so can I.”, “Oh, so that’s how you do it!”, “I think it must be aggressive feelings that I’m experiencing.”, “Ho-hum, another brutal beating; what’s on the other channel?”, and “I had better get him before he gets me!”
Social Situations and Aggression

- Violent Pornography and Violence Against Women

During the past three decades, almost half of all rapes or attempted rapes are attributed to date rape. Scripts are ways of behaving socially that we learn implicitly from our culture. The sexual scripts adolescents are exposed to suggest that females should resist males’ sexual advances and that males should be persistent.
Social Situations and Aggression

• Violent Pornography and Violence Against Women

There has been an increase in the availability of magazines, films, and videos depicting vivid, explicit sexual behavior.
Social Situations and Aggression

• Violent Pornography and Violence Against Women

However, experimental evidence regarding the effects of pornography on violence against women is very complex. One conclusion that can be made is that violent sexual pornography presents a clear problem for our society and it increases aggression against women.
Chapter Outline

IV. How to Reduce Aggression
How To Reduce Aggression

• Does Punishing Aggression Reduce Aggressive Behavior?

For children, harsh punishment provides a model of aggression and does not prevent a child from engaging in the forbidden behavior when the child is unsupervised.
Does Punishing Aggression Reduce Aggressive Behavior?

The threat of mild punishment, swiftly administered, does, however, seem to reduce aggression. The combination of education and mild punishment has been successful in efforts to reduce the occurrence of bullying behavior.
How To Reduce Aggression

• Does Punishing Aggression Reduce Aggressive Behavior?

For adults, the research evidence is mixed. Laboratory experiments suggest that under ideal circumstances punishment can reduce aggression. But in real life, punishment occurs under anything but ideal conditions.
How To Reduce Aggression

• Catharsis and Aggression

The common belief that one can “blow off steam” and “get it out of your system” is an oversimplification of Freud’s psychoanalytic notion of *catharsis*. 
How To Reduce Aggression

• Catharsis and Aggression

  According to this idea, performing an aggressive act relieves built-up aggressive energies and hence reduces the likelihood of further aggressive behavior.
How To Reduce Aggression

• Catharsis and Aggression

  However, controlled studies suggest that attempting to reduce one’s anger by acting violently increases, rather than decreases, subsequent aggression and hostility.
How To Reduce Aggression

- Catharsis and Aggression

Research has found that when people are allowed to express their aggression, they later feel greater dislike and hostility toward their victims.
How To Reduce Aggression

• Catharsis and Aggression

This effect is magnified when a nation is at war. Being at war weakens the population’s inhibitions against aggression, leads to imitation of aggression, makes aggressive responses more acceptable, and numbs people and makes them unsympathetic toward the victims. Also, war legitimizes the use of violent solutions to address difficult problems.
How To Reduce Aggression

What Are We Supposed to Do with Our Anger?

There is an important difference between being angry and expressing that anger in a violent and destructive manner. Expressing anger nonviolently is an assertive response that avoids the dangers of either violent expression or of repression of the feelings.
How To Reduce Aggression

• What Are We Supposed to Do with Our Anger?
  One way to reduce aggression in another person is for the person who caused the frustration to take responsibility, apologize, and indicate it won’t happen again.
How To Reduce Aggression

• What Are We Supposed to Do with Our Anger?

Children exposed to models who behave nonaggressively when provoked show a much lower frequency of aggression than children who were not exposed to these models.
How To Reduce Aggression

• What Are We Supposed to Do with Our Anger?
   In most societies it is the people who lack proper social skills who are most prone to violent solutions to interpersonal problems.
How To Reduce Aggression

• What Are We Supposed to Do with Our Anger?

  Thus one way to reduce violence is to teach people how to communicate anger and criticism constructively and how to negotiate and compromise.
• What Are We Supposed to Do with Our Anger?

Building empathy, for example by teaching empathy in school, not only reduces aggressiveness but also can increase self-esteem, generosity, and positive attitudes.