

## Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VI

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

3. Explain how social psychologists study human behavior.
  - 3.1 Compare motivations underlying helping behaviors versus aggressive behaviors.
5. Analyze the conclusions of empirical research in social psychology.
  - 5.1 Identify the circumstances and motivations that influence helping behaviors.
7. Examine how our own biases influence perceptions of various behaviors.
  - 7.1 Describe how behaviors can be perceived as requiring help.
  - 7.2 Discuss the application of the bystander effect to a social situation.

Course/Unit Learning Outcomes	Learning Activity
3.1	Unit Lesson Chapter 10, pp. 303–312, 315–318, and 320–326 Chapter 11, pp. 333–339, 342–347, and 351–361 Unit VI Scholarly Activity
5.1	Unit Lesson Chapter 10, pp. 303–312, 315–318, and 320–326 Unit VI Scholarly Activity
7.1	Unit Lesson Chapter 10, pp. 303–312, 315–318, and 320–326 Unit VI Scholarly Activity
7.2	Unit Lesson Chapter 10, pp. 303–312, 315–318, and 320–326 Unit VI Scholarly Activity

## Reading Assignment

**Chapter 10:** Helping and Prosocial Behavior, pp. 303–312, 315–318, and 320–326

**Chapter 11:** Aggression, pp. 333–339, 342–347, and 351–361

## Unit Lesson

### Helping and Prosocial Behavior

*Prosocial behavior* is any act done with the intention of benefiting another person or group (Heinzen & Goodfriend, 2019). *Altruism* is the desire to help another person out of selfless concern for his or her well-being. Researchers who study prosocial behavior and altruism examine whether people are born with these behaviors or learn them. They are also interested in why people help others, even if it does not benefit them. What do you think the difference is between prosocial behavior and altruism? Can you determine how prosocial behavior and altruism are connected?

One explanation as to why people might help others is based on *evolutionary psychology*. Explaining altruistic behavior is problematic for the theory of evolution because sometimes people act altruistically, even if it might decrease the chance of passing their genes on to the next generation. Some people have died while helping others, but they often do so in order to benefit their family groups more broadly. This, in turn, can ensure that

certain familial genetic pools are passed on through reproduction. Could this potentially mean that people help even if it means they will not get something in return?

Why do you help others? Is it because you expect to be helped in the future? Recall from Chapter 7 that the *norm of reciprocity* suggests that we do things to help others with the expectation of an increased likelihood for them to help us in the future (Heinzen & Goodfriend, 2019). According to this norm, sociobiologists propose that when helping nonrelatives, individuals expected that altruistic acts would be returned in kind, which furthered their own survival. Much of what you do can be explained by *social exchange theory*—the desire to maximize your rewards and to reduce costs, including avoiding or reducing your own negative emotional states. This theory is based on self-interest, but that self-interest does not necessarily have a genetic basis. What are your thoughts about this theory?

If, after reading about social exchanges, you thought it did not reflect true altruism, you are correct. Do you think that people always help others to benefit themselves? Can you think of an example of when you helped to benefit yourself? What about an example of when you helped even though you received nothing in return? Batson (1991) proposes an alternative idea to explain why people help. He suggests that people do help out of the goodness of their hearts because of their ability to experience *empathy* for a person in need. According to Batson's *empathy-altruism hypothesis*, when you feel empathy toward someone, you will help him or her for unselfish reasons. How might you be able to apply Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis to the real world in order to increase helping?

Could personality explain the desire to help others? That is, are some personalities more prone to helping others versus other types of personalities? Various personality characteristics have been connected with helping behavior, but consistent evidence is lacking in the consensus of a helping personality trait. Thus, it is unlikely that personality solely determines helping. Other factors that might influence individual differences in helping include religious and cultural upbringings that place value on altruism and helping others in need. Unfortunately, as Darley and Batson (1973) found in their classic Good Samaritan study, these values may not be enough to provide help if people are in a rush or have other things to do. Gender may also contribute to differences in helping behaviors, as *gender socialization* typically steers males to be more agentic and females to be more communal (Heinzen & Goodfriend, 2019).



The bystander effect states that the more people that view an event, the less likely people are to help  
(Corepics Vof, 2010)

If you get hurt, would not you want to be in a large group to increase the odds that someone will help you? Well, according to some social psychologists, you may not. As mentioned in Chapter 8, diffusion of responsibility can influence when people take action. Latané and Darley (1970) were interested in the murder of Kitty Genovese in New York, which occurred on a busy New York street. They hypothesized that the larger number of bystanders present led to the failure to help. To test this hypothesis, they conducted an experiment. Participants sat in separate booths and were asked to communicate over an intercom. On the intercom, the other participant faked having a seizure. The experimenters manipulated participants' perceptions of how many other people were present during the seizure. What do you think the results were? When

the participants believed more people were present, they were slower to help. This became known as the *bystander effect*. What would you do if you saw someone who needed help? Do you think that your decision to help would vary based on the number of bystanders present? View the following video clip to learn more about Latané and Darley's interest and work on the bystander effect and the potential for bystander intervention:

Video Education America (Producer). (2009). *Bystander intervention* (Custom Segment 13) [Video file]. Retrieved from

<https://libraryresources.waldorf.edu/login?url=http://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=147775&xtid=129134&loid=507035>

The transcript for this video can be found by clicking the “Transcript” tab to the right of the video in the Films on Demand database.

Latané and Darley (1970) also developed a five-step model of helping to explain when people are most likely to help others. You can see a summary of the model depicted in Figure 10.2 in your textbook, but they suggest that a person needs to 1) notice and 2) recognize the event as an emergency first. If there is no emergency, there is no need for aid. Then, a person needs to 3) take responsibility for providing and 4) know how to provide the necessary help. Finally, a person has to 5) decide to actually act on the helping behavior because even if there is need and a person can help, the costs may outweigh the benefits of helping.

## Aggression

Distinctive from assertiveness, *aggressive* action is intentional behavior aimed at doing harm or causing pain to another person who does not want to be harmed (Heinzen & Goodfriend, 2019). Though many people may automatically think of physical acts of aggression when considering the term, the intent to harm aspect allows for a much broader range of behaviors to be included. Aggression can be categorized in a variety of ways, including different aggressive behaviors and triggers of aggression. *Hostile/reactive aggression* is when someone reacts impulsively to perceived threats. Distinct from this form of aggression, *instrumental/proactive aggression* involves harming others in order to gain some type of resource. The difference between these forms of aggression is that instrumental/proactive aggression is more thought out and reason-based, though both may act as anchors of an aggression continuum. Despite the existence of aggression at all documented points within human history and the ease in which aggressive responses can escalate, data have shown an overall decline in worldwide violence.

Like prosocial behavior, evolutionary theory has also been used to explain aggression. What do you think evolutionary theory would suggest about aggressive behaviors? Genetic influence alone may not be enough to explain aggression, but some researchers suggest that aggression may be useful in securing higher social status and its accompanying resources, such as the ability to reproduce successfully. Other researchers have found evidence for biological mechanisms across all sexes that contribute to aggressive behaviors, such as engaging in the fight response to threats and higher levels of testosterone (Heinzen & Goodfriend, 2019).

Aggression also can be explained using the context of cultural influences. Are men more aggressive than women are? Research suggests that men engage in physical aggression more often than women do, but gender differences are much smaller when people, of any gender, are provoked (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996). In addition, research indicates that women engage in more verbal aggression (e.g., gossiping, spreading rumors) when compared to men. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that humans, despite gender, are capable of engaging in aggressive behaviors. It is also important to note that cultures emphasizing gender equality and individualism exhibit less female victimization. In essence, gender roles can dictate how and to whom aggression is expressed. Can you think of other ways cultural forces may influence aggressive tendencies and outcomes?

What else contributes to aggression? Social learning is a major factor for aggression. Noting this, Albert Bandura (as cited in Heinzen & Goodfriend, 2019) developed the *social learning theory*. Children learn to act aggressively when such behavior is rewarded or socially sanctioned, such that aggression can be learned rather than inherited. In a classic experiment using Bobo dolls, Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961) showed that children indeed imitated novel aggressive behaviors modeled by adults and other children. To learn more about this study, watch the short video below:

Online Classroom Ltd. (Producer). (2007). *Bobo doll experiment* (Custom Segment 71) [Video file]. Retrieved from

<https://libraryresources.waldorf.edu/login?url=http://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=147775&xtid=40125&loid=507042>

The transcript for this video can be found by clicking the “Transcript” tab to the right of the video in the Films on Demand database.

Other support for social learning as a cause of aggression comes from long-term studies revealing relationships between watching violence on television as children and exhibiting greater violence later as teens and adults. Notice the usage of the term *relationship* because causality cannot be determined from these studies. Evidence from experimental research, however, has also revealed that watching violence in the media increases aggression in children. Despite this connection to aggression, media sources can provide positive outcomes, too. For example, in a series of experiments, participants who played a prosocial video game were more likely to help after playing the game than those who played a neutral game (Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2010).

Physical pain increases the likelihood that both animals and humans will act aggressively. Bodily discomfort, like humidity, heat, air pollution, or offensive odors, might also contribute to aggressive behaviors. Why might these factors contribute to aggression? Can you think of any examples from the media in which one of these factors were cited as a reason that someone or a group of people acted aggressively?

Another source of aggression can be frustration. Frustration occurs when you feel like an expected goal or gratification is blocked (Heinzen & Goodfriend, 2019). Frustration is higher when we are close to a goal, and so is the likelihood of aggression, as the aggression functions as an attempt to reclaim what goal is being lost. Usually, it is anger or annoyance that makes you ready to act aggressively, rather than frustration.

The common belief that you can blow off steam and get it (aggression) out of your system is an oversimplification of the *catharsis hypothesis* (Heinzen & Goodfriend, 2019). The idea is that aggressive thoughts and behaviors are reduced when you purposefully engage in aggressive behaviors (or even watch others act aggressively). Although some psychologists believe strongly in the catharsis hypothesis, controlled studies suggest that acting aggressively or viewing aggression instead increases aggression and hostility, rather than reducing it. Results are similar even when aggression is directed to the source of anger. Thus, there is no support for the catharsis hypothesis or even getting revenge, regardless of how it feels at the time. Instead, committing aggressive acts reduces the barriers toward further aggression and aids in justifying aggressive acts. A better approach to dealing effectively with aggression is to try to establish cultural norms that value peace and model forgiveness when instances of anger and aggression arise.



You have probably experienced frustration at one time or another. Do you think that you would have been more likely to engage in aggression at this time?

(Alphaspirit, n.d.)

Prosocial and aggressive behaviors are portrayed as opposites, and at face value, they are. However, when you investigate what drives behavior, both can function similarly. Whether helping or hurting, people are constantly interacting with and responding to others, and they are typically trying to gain something out of the interaction. Some of these tendencies may be biologically driven, but there is strong evidence that we primarily learn both of these tendencies from the social world in which we are raised and live. As with anything, too much of helping or hurting can be detrimental. You do not want to hurt others unnecessarily or too often, but you also do not want others to take advantage of your kindness either. Finding a balance can start by simply taking note of what the social environment needs. By accurately assessing what the situation calls for, we can all be more purposeful and beneficial with our actions.

## References

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- Heinzen, T., & Goodfriend, W. (2019). *Social psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Latané, B., & Darley, J. M. (1970). *The unresponsive bystander: Why doesn't he help?* New York, NY: Appleton-Century Crofts.

## Suggested Reading

The PowerPoint presentations below serve as a companion to the chapters in this unit. You are encouraged to view them for a deeper understanding of the material presented in this unit.

Click [here](#) to view the Chapter 10 PowerPoint Presentation. Click [here](#) to view the presentation as a PDF.

Click [here](#) to view the Chapter 11 PowerPoint Presentation. Click [here](#) to view the presentation as a PDF.

*In order to access the following resources, click the links below:*

There are many different reasons for aggression, some of which you learned about in this unit. One of those reasons is revenge. Read the article below for a psychological perspective of revenge.

Grobink, L. H., Derksen, J. J. L., & van Marle, H. J. C. (2015). Revenge: An analysis of its psychological underpinnings. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 59*(8), 892–907. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/default+domain/ZUnpCl2ZFpQcueNR2Num/full>

In this unit, you learned about the bystander effect. What affect does a camera have on bystander affect? The article below delves into this question.

van Bommel, M., van Prooijen, J.-W., Elffers, H., & van Lange, P. A. M. (2014). Intervene to be seen: The power of a camera in attenuating the bystander affect. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5*(4), 459–466. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/default+domain/lsIGFpfmqNhsJvq9dxYp/full>

## Learning Activities (Nongraded)

Nongraded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.

Test yourself on concepts covered in Chapters 10 and 11. Mastering this material will help you complete the assignment in this unit. Click the links below to view the flashcards and quizzes for each unit.

Click [here](#) for the Chapter 10 Flashcards. Click [here](#) for the Chapter 10 Quiz.

Click [here](#) for the Chapter 11 Flashcards. Click [here](#) for the Chapter 11 Quiz.