CHAPTER 13:

PRO- AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Why do people walk past or ignore a person in a bus shelter who is having a stroke? What makes some people ignore repeated and desperate screams for help? Why do other people spontaneously run to the aid of someone who is being attacked in the street? Why was there such enormous public support for the appeal for the victims of the Victorian bushfires in 2009? These are real examples of anti-social and pro-social behaviours.

KEY KNOWLEDGE

Pro- and anti-social behaviour of the individual:
→ characteristics of, and factors influencing,
  pro-social behaviour: situational (bystander intervention and effect), social norms-reciprocity principle; social responsibility norm; personal (empathy, mood, competence); altruism
→ characteristics of, and factors influencing, anti-social behaviour: diffusion of responsibility; audience inhibition; social influence; cost-benefit analysis
→ social learning theory, including the work of Albert Bandura
→ explanations of aggression from ethological, biological, psychodynamic and social learning perspectives.

(VCE Study Design 2013)
### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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  - Bystander intervention
  - The decision-stage model of helping
  - Social norms
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Pro-social behaviour

Characteristics of pro-social behaviour

Pro-social behaviour is helping behaviour that benefits other people and society in general.

Pro-social behaviour is usually voluntary, because it is intended to benefit others. It includes aiding and assisting, charity, cooperation, friendship, rescuing, sacrificing, sharing, sympathy, trust, and bystander intervention.

Sometimes pro-social behaviour can be altruistic because it involves helping others for no reward, and this might also be at a personal cost to the helper.

Pro-social behaviour can be an automatic response to an immediate situation, or it can be deliberate and occur over time.

Explanations of pro-social behaviour

Why do people help others? Pro-social behaviour is of interest because psychologists have found that it is explained partly by nature, and partly by nurture. Table 13.1 summarises explanations of pro-social behaviour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological (nature)</td>
<td>This explanation is part of socio-biology, which sees pro-social behaviour as genetic – humans naturally assist others as a way of protecting our common gene pool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental (nurture)</td>
<td>This is the view that pro-social behaviour is not innate, but that it is learned during the socialisation process. It suggests that classical and operant conditioning, and social learning (also referred to as observational learning) all contribute to the development of pro-social behaviour. Children can learn pro-social behaviour by copying the pro-social behaviour of others around them, and through being rewarded for appropriate behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction between biological and environmental factors (nature and nurture)</td>
<td>This approach suggests that although we might be born with an innate tendency to help others, exactly how we help is the product of social learning.</td>
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</table>
Factors influencing pro-social behaviour

There are several specific influences on the likelihood of people engaging in pro-social behaviour. These include the situation (the characteristics of the situation), social norms, personal characteristics of the helper, and altruism.

THE SITUATION

The characteristics of the particular situation will have an influence on whether an individual will behave in a pro-social way. If a situation is a clear-cut need for help, it is more likely that people will assist. If the situation is ambiguous, then help might not be forthcoming.

The environmental setting can also influence the likelihood of help being offered to people in need; for example, people in rural settings are often more inclined to help each other than people living in densely populated urban settings.

Whether or not the situation is an emergency is one relevant factor that affects how a potential helper might react. Emergency situations (for example, a flash flood, car accident, explosion, heart attack or mugging) are:
- usually dangerous
- unusual occurrences; something rarely experienced by the helper
- sudden and unexpected
- require immediate action to offset the risk to victim’s life or well-being.

Non-emergency situations, on the other hand, are:
- less dangerous (for example, ongoing illness, disability or poverty)
- a familiar occurrence (for example, problems associated with old age or young children needing support)
- predictable and expected happenings (for example, old age, drought-affected families, ongoing illness or poverty)
- require deliberate and planned action (for example, planning to work with a charity, or donating money or time on an ongoing basis).

Write your own examples or personal experiences of emergency and non-emergency situations that require the assistance of another person or people. Try to think of at least five such situations.
Bystander intervention

One of the most influential aspects of a situation is whether a potential helper is alone or with other people. **Bystander intervention** is where a person voluntarily helps someone else. The **bystander effect** is where a bystander is more likely to help others in an emergency when he or she is alone than when there are other bystanders around.

**FIGURE 13.1** The number of bystanders in any situation influences the likelihood of help being offered.

The decision-stage model of helping

The decision-stage model of helping (Latané & Darley 1970) is a model of the situational influences on bystander intervention. It says that when confronted with a situation that might require their assistance, potential helpers go through five stages in deciding to help:

1. noticing the need for help
2. deciding that it is an emergency
3. deciding to take responsibility
4. deciding on a way to help
5. taking action to help.

If a bystander stops at any one of these steps, he or she will not provide assistance. Most bystanders tend to stop at Stage 3, where they decide that it is not their responsibility to help (see Figure 13.2).

How people interpret a situation will influence whether they will help. Sometimes, for example, a bystander will look at other bystanders and see that they are taking no action. The bystander assumes that he or she is the only person who is confused about what to do. However, the other people on the scene are also making the same assumption, and therefore no help is given to the person who is genuinely in need.
Do we notice that help is needed?

- Yes

Is the situation an emergency?

- Yes

Does the potential helper take responsibility?

- Yes

Does the potential helper decide on a way to help?

- Yes

Does the potential helper take action to help?

- Yes

HELP IS GIVEN

NO HELP IS GIVEN

**TABLE 13.2** The effect on bystanders of various factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>ELEMENTS</th>
<th>EFFECT ON BYSTANDERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The victim</td>
<td>Similarity of victim to the bystander (e.g. in terms of gender, age, race)</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some relationship to bystander</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bleeding or injured</td>
<td>Less likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Member of a stigmatised group</td>
<td>Less likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The situation</td>
<td>Many bystanders</td>
<td>Less likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No other bystanders</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited time</td>
<td>Less likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urgent need for help</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bystander</td>
<td>Similarity to victim (gender, age, race)</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some relationship to victim</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative responses to features of the victim (prejudices, judgments about grooming, presence of blood)</td>
<td>Less likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge or expertise in how to help the victim</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mood (good)</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arousal (high)</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
<td>More likely to help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 13.2** The decision-stage model of helping (adapted from Latané & Darley 1970)
SOCIAL NORMS

A very important influence on the development and maintenance of pro-social behaviour is social norms. A norm is a form of action or behaviour that is standardised and expected in a society; in other words, behaviour that society regards as ‘normal’. Norms are learned, and they provide a background for human social interaction.

Generally, it is expected in most societies that pro-social behaviour is normal, especially when there is minimal cost to the helper. Society might approve of, and even reward, examples of pro-social behaviour through recognition and acknowledgment. On the other hand, anti-social behaviour is disapproved of. In extreme cases, anti-social behaviour is punished with a jail sentence.

Two norms that are influential in pro-social behaviour are the reciprocity principle and the social responsibility norm.

The reciprocity principle is often expressed as ‘do unto others as they do unto you’, because it describes the social expectation of reciprocity between people. We feel grateful if someone does us a favour and often feel the need to do that person a favour in return. If the favour someone does us involves a significant effort, then we are likely to feel more indebted to that person.

The social responsibility norm is where members of a society are expected to provide help to people who are dependent or in need, without the expectation of favours being returned. Examples of this norm include donating money or time to charity; assisting the frail, impaired, sick and vulnerable members of society; and caring for members of our family. However, people are only expected to help others who are genuinely in need. People who have behaved irresponsibly and are perceived to be responsible for their own problems – for example, gamblers experiencing financial hardship – are less likely to receive help.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HELPER

We have already noted that both biological (nature) and environmental (nurture) factors influence pro-social behaviour. Although we might be born with a predisposition to act in a particular way, past experiences and the immediate circumstances of the individual will influence a person’s pro-social behaviour.

Empathy

Empathy is our emotional response to another person’s distress. We find it unpleasant to see another person suffering, so we take action to help and thus alleviate the suffering. There are several different explanations for why empathy causes pro-social behaviour:

- Arousal – Bystanders help others in distress because it relieves the unpleasant emotional feeling that comes from empathising with those who are suffering. This explanation sees bystanders assisting others for selfish reasons rather than a genuine concern for others in distress – helping others reduces the bystander’s unpleasant levels of arousal, as well as allowing the bystander to avoid any feelings of guilt that might result from a failure to help.
- Similarity – We are more likely to feel empathy if we perceive those in need to be similar to ourselves; the greater the similarity, the stronger the feelings of empathy and arousal are likely to be. This is because the helper can more easily identify with the person in need – ‘that could be happening to me’.
- Some helpers genuinely feel sad for the victim. By helping the victim, the helper also feels better.

FIGURE 13.4 Following natural disasters, such as the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires, many members of the public donate money and goods to help the victims.

Mood

A person’s mood has been found to influence their propensity to behave in pro-social ways. Generally, people who are in a good mood are more likely to demonstrate pro-social behaviour than people who are in a bad mood.

Research has also found that when people are made to feel good by succeeding at a task, they are more likely to be helpful than those who have failed in a task. Similarly, people who hear good news or experience good weather are more likely to feel optimistic and positive towards others and help them.

Research has also found that when people feel bad or depressed, they are more likely to focus inwardly towards themselves rather than outwardly towards others in need.
Competence

The way bystanders perceive their competence to deal with an emergency will influence whether they will provide help. For example, a study has found that people with first-aid training are more likely to help in emergencies than people who have no such experience (Shotland & Heinold 1985). (See pages 393-6 for a more in-depth discussion of the bystander effect.)

MOOD

Provide two examples of how your mood has influenced whether or not you provided help to someone.

ALTRUISM

Altruism is a unique influence on pro-social behaviour where, for no personal gain and sometimes at great personal cost, a person helps others due to a deeply felt concern for fellow human beings.

FIGURE 13.5 Engaged couple Angus Ritchie and Meggie Borda have opted for a gift registry with various charities on their wedding day, with one charity in their list being the Arrow Bone Marrow Transplant Foundation. Cancer patient Katie-Lee Brown is just one person who will benefit.

1 Using dot points, summarise and illustrate the social norms that influence pro-social behaviour.

2 Create a table to summarise the personal factors that can influence pro-social behaviour. Include your own examples in your table.
The bravery of DPI [Department of Primary Industries] Fisheries Officer Rodney Barber is a shining example of the dedication of all the Fisheries Victoria staff, the Minister for Agriculture, Bob Cameron said today.

Mr Cameron said Mr Barber’s heroic efforts in rescuing an injured abalone poacher trapped on a beachside cliff were appropriately recognised today when he was awarded a silver medal for bravery at Government House.

‘Mr Barber’s actions demonstrate to everyone the important role Victoria’s Fisheries Officers play in protecting the sustainability of the State’s fishing resources for legitimate commercial operators and recreational fishers,’ Mr Cameron said.

Mr Barber, a 38-year-old Senior Fisheries Officer, swam 80 metres through swells, breaking waves and a shallow reef, to rescue the man who had tried to evade Fisheries Officers and police on 13 May 2003.

‘The poacher was trapped on a ledge at the “Blowhole,” near Flinders, by rising tides and a 1.5 metre swell,’ Mr Cameron said.

‘He was suffering hypothermia, a broken wrist, a broken toe, knee ligament damage and a hip injury.

‘Boats could get no closer than 80 metres and an aerial winch rescue by helicopter was deemed too dangerous.

‘Mr Barber, with little regard for his safety, donned a wetsuit and towed a lifebuoy from the boat to the ledge, despite being buffeted by heavy waves.

‘He then helped the man onto the lifebuoy and towed him back to the waiting boat where the abalone poacher was treated before being taken to hospital.

The rescued man was later given a nine month suspended jail sentence on three poaching-related charges.

‘Governor John Landy presented Mr Barber with the Royal Humane Society’s silver medal for bravery and, on behalf of the people of Victoria, I also offer him my sincerest congratulations for his selfless actions,’ Mr Cameron said.

Media Release, Minister of Agriculture, Victoria, 17 December 2003

BRAVERY

Read the extract ‘DPI officer’s bravery award well deserved – Cameron’. Rodney Barber proved to be an example of exceptional pro-social behaviour. Using your knowledge of the causes of pro-social behaviour, write an account of what you understand to have been some factors that prompted the brave actions of this bystander.
Anti-social behaviour

Characteristics of anti-social behaviour

The opposite of pro-social behaviour is anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour is behaviour that is harmful to others and, ultimately, to the community.

Anti-social behaviour can take many forms. It can be hostile (meaning emotional, impulsive and driven by pain or distress) and be in response to a immediate situation; or it can be instrumental and the result of deliberate planning over time. Two types of anti-social behaviour that are particularly harmful to individuals and to society are aggression and prejudice. Aggression is discussed later in this chapter, while prejudice is covered in Chapter 14.

Explanations of anti-social behaviour

Why do people engage in anti-social behaviour? As with pro-social behaviour, there are several possible explanations. Table 13.3 summarises these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF EXPLANATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological (nature)</td>
<td>Anti-social behaviours, such as aggression, are seen as genetic, where humans instinctively behave to protect themselves and other members of their species, and to compete for scarce resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental (nurture)</td>
<td>This is the view that anti-social behaviour is not innate, but is learned during the socialisation process. It suggests that classical and operant conditioning and also observational learning all contribute to the development of anti-social behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interaction between nature and nurture</td>
<td>This approach suggests that, although we might be born with an innate tendency to some forms of anti-social behaviour, exactly how we act in anti-social ways is the product of learning from the environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 13.6 Road rage: why do you think people engage in anti-social behaviour?
Factors influencing anti-social behaviour

Factors influencing anti-social behaviour include the situation and the bystander effect.

THE SITUATION

Just as a situation influences whether a person will behave in a pro-social way, it is also a factor that can influence anti-social behaviour.

THE BYSTANDER EFFECT

We have seen that bystander intervention is where a person voluntarily goes to the aid of another who is in need, and the bystander effect is where the likelihood of bystanders helping is influenced by the number of bystanders present at the scene – the more bystanders there are, the less likely it is that one of them will provide help.

Kitty Genovese

The attack and murder of Kitty Genovese in New York, 1964, inspired a major area of research into pro-social and anti-social behaviour. The way in which she was murdered shocked and appalled New Yorkers. What also disturbed many people was that nobody responded to her screams for help as her murderer attacked her repeatedly.

The attack occurred late at night in the respectable borough of Queens in New York. Kitty was on her way home from her work as a barmaid. Her attacker struck and, initially, her screams and struggles drove him away. However, when he realised that nobody was coming to help her, he attacked again. Once more, she screamed for help and managed to escape. Again, nobody came to her aid. In the third attack, Kitty was stabbed eight more times and sexually molested.

Being late at night, most residents of the apartment block near the attack were at home and would have heard her repeated cries for help. About half an hour after the attack began, the police received a call from a witness who wanted to remain anonymous because he ‘did not want to get involved’. The next day, the police discovered that at least 12 people in the area had heard the victim’s cries for help. All of these people had time to do something to help her but failed to act. Some had telephones in their homes, but still did not call the police.

Although these people may be excused for not rushing to Kitty’s aid because they feared being attacked too, the question arose: why didn’t they call the police when they heard Kitty’s screams? This question prompted Bibb Latané and John Darley (1970) to seek the answer through research on bystander intervention and the bystander effect. Their research revealed that the lack of response by Kitty’s neighbours was typical of the bystander effect, where the presence of other people actually inhibits helping behaviour. This effect occurs in a range of situations, where each bystander experiences a diffusion of responsibility if there are other bystanders present.
Key studies in the bystander effect

In 1970, Latané and Darley conducted a study where participants (volunteer students) were each placed in individual cubicles connected by an intercom. Through the intercom, the students participated in discussion groups of three different sizes. Because the students were in separate cubicles, the researchers could observe how each individual behaved. At the start of the discussions, an accomplice of the researchers, posing as one of the students, said that he was prone to suffer from seizures. Later on during the discussion, he pretended to have a seizure and called for help. The researchers found that although most students tried to get help for him, the larger the group size, the less likely it was that group members would seek help.

![Graph showing percentage helping against seconds from start of seizure](image)

**FIGURE 13.7** Latané and Darley (1970) found that the number of bystanders present influenced (a) whether or not people attempted to help the victim of a seizure and (b) the time it took to provide help (based on Latané and Darley, 1970).

**INVESTIGATE 13.4**

1. Identify the dependent and independent variables in the 1970 study by Latané and Darley.
2. Identify any potential confounding variables.
3. Can the results of this study be generalised to the broader population? Explain your answer.
4. Identify any ethical issues that might arise from this study.

In another study, the researchers found that the bystander effect occurs even when a person’s own safety is at risk (Latané & Darley 1968). The researchers asked students to complete a questionnaire about the problems of city life. Not long after they had started to fill out the questionnaire, artificial smoke began to pour into the room. Where there was only one participant in the room, at least 50 per cent of the participants reported the smoke within four minutes. However, when there were
three participants in the room at one time, only one of the 24 participants reported the smoke within the first four minutes, and only three did so within six minutes. This study showed that people might fail to act even when their own safety is at risk.

LATANÉ AND DARLEY 1968

1. Identify the dependent and independent variables in the 1968 study by Latané and Darley.
2. Identify any potential confounding variables.
3. Can the results of this study be generalised to the broader population? Explain your answer.
4. Identify any ethical issues that might arise from this study.

Why does the bystander effect occur?
The bystander effect (or bystander apathy) occurs in a variety of situations, and a number of factors can be involved.

- **Diffusion of responsibility**: Sometimes when there are several bystanders, they look at each other to see how they are reacting to the emergency. If nobody in the group responds to the emergency, then it is possible each bystander has experienced a diffusion of responsibility. This is where the presence of others leads each bystander to feel less responsibility for helping the person in need. Each bystander believes that it is the responsibility of the other bystanders to take charge and provide help. Conversely, if you are by yourself, then the responsibility to take action is yours alone.

- **Audience inhibition**: The presence of other bystanders or onlookers can make a potential helper feel self-conscious and thus inhibit helping behaviour. This is also known as fear of social blunders, where people are afraid that others will judge them by their actions if they make an incorrect move.

- **Social influence**: The reaction of other bystanders will influence the likelihood of help. If the other bystanders appear unconcerned, then potential helpers might not perceive the situation to be one that warrants assistance. On the other hand, if the crowd appears concerned, then it is likely that bystanders will provide help.
- **Proximity of the victim**: The proximity of the victim to the bystander influences the action of a potential helper. The greater the distance between the victim and the bystander, the less responsible the bystander will feel (Latané 1981).

- **Nature of the bystander**: The nature of the bystander can influence the potential to help. This includes a range of factors including an individual’s past experience of helping behaviour, awareness of norms, level of moral development, personality, similarity to the victim, relationship to the victim, and mood at the time of the incident.

**Cost–benefit analysis**

The **cost–benefit analysis model** by Piliavin and colleagues (1981) includes both cognitive and physiological processes. It suggests that when a bystander is confronted with an emergency, he or she weighs up the costs and benefits of providing help compared to those for not helping.

According to this model, bystanders work their way through three stages before they respond to an emergency:

1. **Physiological** arousal, for example increased heart and respiratory rate – this is triggered by witnessing a victim’s distress. The greater the arousal, the more likely it is that the bystander will help.

2. **Labelling** the arousal with a specific emotion – in an emergency, this might be either personal distress or empathic concern. Personal distress is a feeling of anxiety and tension when someone else is in distress. This is where bystanders take action to make themselves, rather than victims, feel better – helping the victim relieves personal distress.

3. **Evaluating the consequences** of helping – this involves working out whether the costs of helping outweigh the benefits to be gained through having one’s own personal distress reduced by helping. Costs usually involve time and/or effort; the greater these costs, the less likely it is that a bystander will help. A helper must weigh up the personal cost and the empathy cost of either helping or failing to help.

According to the cost–benefit analysis model:

- the more onlookers, the less likely it is that a bystander will help because there is a reduced personal cost for not helping (for example, in terms of public disapproval or self-blame)

- the greater the victim’s need for help, the greater the personal distress of not helping. For example, a child attacked by a dog is more likely to get help than a man in the street begging for money to buy cigarettes

- if the victim is a relative or friend, or is perceived to be similar to the bystanders, then the bystanders are likely to help because they will experience both greater physiological arousal and more empathy costs (such as guilt for not helping).

![FIGURE 13.9](image_url) The cost–benefit analysis model of helping (based on data from Piliavin et al. 1981).
Deindividuation

Deindividuation is where individuals are more likely to commit anti-social behaviour in a situation where they can’t be identified personally. Being in a crowd (for example in the case of rioting) gives a person anonymity because personal identity is concealed. It also removes feelings of guilt.

Crowd behaviour in public places, such as at sporting events, can be controlled to some extent by installing security cameras, because crowd members are deterred from behaving anti-socially when there is the potential for behaviour to be recorded and individuals identified.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Read the following extract of an account of anti-social behaviour. Using your knowledge of the causes of anti-social behaviour, provide a written account of what you understand to have been some factors that prompted the failure of others to assist Delmae Barton as she suffered.

Delmae Barton, aged 62, a prominent Indigenous Elder and an opera singer, lay for more than five hours on a bus stop seat near Griffith University’s Nathan Campus in July 2006, unable to reach out for help after vomiting from a suspected stroke or diabetes attack.

For five and a half hours, commuters, students and bus drivers ignored her plight until two young Japanese men asked if she needed water and help.

Her friend and the director of the Gumurri Centre at the university Boni Robertson, says it is a disgrace that Auntie Delmae’s plight was ignored by hundreds of commuters as buses came and went.

She said ‘Nobody would stop to help me. Is this all I’m worth?’ She believes people thought she was a drunk or a drug addict, and that the colour of skin encouraged them to walk on by.

The then Premier Peter Beattie told parliament he was ‘really disappointed’ by the incident and apologised on behalf of Queenslanders.

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR)
Aggression

Aggression is behaviour, directed towards another person or people, which is intended to cause harm. Gang fights, riots, child abuse, bullying, homicide, road rage, rape, domestic violence, ethnic cleansing and verbal abuse are all examples of aggression as anti-social behaviour. In legal terms, even an aggressive attitude can be called an assault.

Forms of aggression

Aggression can be the act of a single individual or a group of people. Aggression can be physical, involving behaviour such as pushing, shoving, hitting and rape. Aggression can also be non-physical, involving behaviour such as threatening speech, verbal insults and unpleasant facial expressions.

Generally, any form of aggression is anti-social behaviour. However, in some circumstances and in some communities, aggression can sometimes be seen to be pro-social and therefore valued, for example when fighting a common enemy, playing sport (where the aggression is controlled by strict rules) or in legitimate acts of self-defence.

There are two types of aggression:

1 Hostile aggression is emotional, impulsive and driven by pain or distress. It is intended to hurt another person, even if it results in damage to personal relationships or property (for example hurting family and friends). This aggression is usually a response to pain, perceived danger or threats, or an uncomfortable environment, such as extreme temperature.

2 Instrumental aggression is the result of deliberate planning, where the aggressor (for example an assassin, bank robber or embezzler) has no personal feeling towards the person or people they are hurting. These two types of aggression have different causes and require different types of prevention.

FIGURE 13.11 Some forms of aggression. Which of these examples could be viewed as pro-social and which as anti-social?

1 What are the moral differences between hostile and instrumental aggression?
2 The images in Figure 13.11 present various forms of aggression. Describe and provide an appropriate label for each one.
Explanations of aggression

Trying to understand why people can behave in such unpleasant ways towards each other has long been a topic for research. As with explanations for pro-social behaviour and anti-social behaviour, explanations for aggression include nature, nurture, and an interaction of these factors.

**BIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS (NATURE)**

Biological explanations suggest that aggression is a human instinct and that it is genetically predetermined in all people. Biological explanations emphasise the positive, functional aspects of aggression, but this aggression needs to have specific stimuli in the environment, such as the need to survive, to trigger specific acts of aggression. According to the biological explanation, aggression is:

- goal-directed (for example, attack)
- beneficial to the individual and the species
- adapted to the environment
- common to all members of the species
- developed in a set way as the individual matures
- unlearned.

The article ‘Taming baby rage: why are some kids so angry?’, below, is an example of research into the biological explanation of aggression.

**Psychodynamic explanations**

The psychodynamic theory is a drive theory proposed by Freud (1930) and it suggests that aggression stems from built-up bodily tensions that must be released. According to Freud, aggression is an innate personality characteristic common to all humans and aggressive behaviour is motivated by sexual drives. To prevent aggression being directed at ourselves, we direct it at others. Freud used the *Oedipus complex* (for boys) and the *Electra complex* (for girls) to explain aggression in children, as you will see in Chapter 20.

According to Freud, aggression in children is instinctive and should be resolved by adulthood. After the child has rejected the opposite-sex parent, they will enter a period of latency where they commonly reject all members of the opposite sex. Once puberty is reached, their attention shifts to the genital region as an area of pleasure, and a search for a member of the opposite sex with whom to fulfil sexual urges. In adults, where the Oedipal and Electra complexes have been resolved, aggression diminishes.

Freud also suggested that the innate death instinct, *Thanatos*, is in opposition to the life instinct, *Eros*. Some of the negative energy of Thanatos builds up as a result of the conflict. This needs to be released in a form of aggression that is directed towards others, so that the self-destruction of the individual can be prevented.

Freud’s original theory was later revised by neo-Freudians who suggested that aggression was innate and that people simply looked for a healthy release for the primitive survival instincts that are characteristic of the human species.
Ethological explanations

This drive theory considers the evolutionary purpose of aggression, and compares human aggression and instincts with those of animals. Konrad Lorenz (1966), a proponent of the ethological perspective, combined Freud’s theory of aggression with Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection. In Lorenz’s interpretation, aggression is beneficial and allows for species survival because the strongest animals eliminate weaker ones resulting in over the course of evolution, a stronger, healthier population. According to this view, humans have an innate aggression so that the survival of genes is ensured. For example, aggression allows mothers to protect children from danger, and being aggressive also facilitates access to scarce resources such as food and shelter, or social and economic advantage.

![Konrad Lorenz](image)

**FIGURE 13.12** Konrad Lorenz

It is not the cartoons that make your kids smack playmates or violently grab their toys but, rather, a lack of social skills, according to new research.

‘It’s a natural behaviour and it’s surprising that the idea that children and adolescents learn aggression from the media is still relevant,’ says Richard Tremblay, a professor of pediatrics, psychiatry and psychology at the University of Montreal, who has spent more than two decades tracking 35,000 Canadian children (from age five months through their 20s) in search of the roots of physical aggression. ‘Clearly youth were violent before television appeared.’

Tremblay’s previous results have suggested that children on average reach a peak of violent behaviour (biting, scratching, screaming, hitting) around 18 months of age. The level of aggression begins to taper between the ages of two and five as they begin to learn other, more sophisticated ways of communicating their needs and wants.

Tremblay on Wednesday is set to present preliminary study results showing a genetic signature consistent with chronic violent behaviour at a meeting of the Royal Society, the UK’s academy of science, in London.

‘We’re looking at to what extent the chronically aggressive individuals show differences in terms of gene expressions compared to those on the normal trajectory,’ he told ScientificAmerican.com. ‘The individuals that are chronically aggressive have more genes that are not expressed.’ The fact that a gene can be silenced or the level of protein it encodes reduced, he added, ‘is an indication that the problem is at a very basic level.’

When children first begin to poke, prod and even slap, parents, teachers and siblings often react by indicating that those behaviours are inappropriate. But, citing studies done in animals, Tremblay notes that an unfit environment beginning in the womb may affect a child’s ability to learn this lesson in the
first place. And he plans to extend his genetic studies to include expectant mothers to determine if their behaviour during pregnancy is linked to the down tuning of genes that may be associated with chronic aggression.

‘In the long studies we’ve been doing, we’ve measured a number of characteristics during pregnancy and after birth that are good predictors of chronic aggression in children,’ Tremblay notes. Possible factors that might influence neurobiological development of the fetus, he says, include smoking, drinking, poor nutrition and excessive stress.

Tremblay speculates that genes play a significant role: for instance damaged genes may make it hard for children to acquire language, frustrating them and making them prone to violence, among other means of making themselves heard. ‘When you don’t master language,’ Tremblay says, ‘it’s hard to get people to understand what you want.’

Kate Keenan, an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Chicago, views this new genetic analysis as the logical next step in Tremblay’s long-term exploration into childhood aggression. She believes Tremblay’s work may help uncover genetic profiles distinct to chronically aggressive children that may allow researchers to answer questions like, ‘Can we differentiate [between these kids] even earlier?’ (and) ‘How early can you intervene?’

Nikhil Swaminathan, Scientific American, 16 October 2007

Create a table to compare the different biological explanations of aggression. Make sure that you include the name of the researcher and examples of their research.

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY TO EXPLAIN PRO- AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (NURTURE)

Social learning theory suggests that both pro-social and anti-social behaviour can be learned through vicarious experience, where one person learns a behaviour by watching another person’s behaviour and seeing the consequences of that behaviour (Bandura 1977). This process involves modelling, where a person learns through the observation of other people (models), which leads to imitation if the behaviour is likely to result in desirable consequences (rewards). For example, if a child (the learner) sees pro-social or anti-social behaviour by an adult (the model), and the adult is rewarded for the behaviour, then the child might learn to imitate the adult’s behaviour.

The following elements are important in social learning theory:

- For the behaviour to be copied, the model must be seen to be rewarded for the pro-social or anti-social behaviour. Models who are seen to be rewarded for their behaviour are more likely to be copied than models who are seen to be punished or where there is no follow-up.
- The model must be appropriate for the learner (appropriate models for a child might be parents, siblings or peers)
- The learning can occur in real life, or through behaviour modelled in film or on television.

This is why, for society, it is important to be aware of the potential influence of role models, especially on children; and it is important that role models who behave in anti-social ways are seen to receive negative consequences.

Bandura’s research on social learning and aggression has had a major influence on the study of aggression. If violence is learned, then exposure to people behaving aggressively may lead others to imitate the aggression. Being aggressive can also become an established way of behaving within families and social groups. However, on a positive note, if violent behaviour can be learned, then it can also be controlled, reduced or managed through appropriate social learning which is aimed to reduce aggression.

**ALBERT BANDURA AND THE SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY**

In the 1960s, psychologist Albert Bandura and his colleagues conducted a series of experiments on learning by children who watched the behaviour of others. The results of these studies led him to develop social learning theory (Bandura 1977). These experiments have become classic studies and are known as the ‘Bobo doll experiments’ because they involved a large, inflatable plastic doll named ‘Bobo’ that was about 1.5 metres high and designed to spring back upright when knocked over.

In the experiments, the children were shown an adult (model) behaving aggressively to a Bobo doll – hitting it, throwing it, sitting on it, etc. The children were then placed in a room alone with a Bobo doll and their behaviour was observed. There was evidence that learning had occurred when the children behaved aggressively to the Bobo dolls just as they had observed the models doing previously.

Bandura filmed some of his experiments. You can find some of these films on the internet.

**FIGURE 13.14** The Bobo doll is an inflatable toy about 1.5 metres tall, designed to spring back upright when knocked over.

**BANDURA ET AL. (1965)**

Bandura and colleagues (1965) conducted several experiments on learning by children who watch the behaviour of others. One of these experiments showed different consequences for the model’s aggressive behaviour:

- Children in Group 1 saw the model being rewarded for aggressive behaviour
- Children in Group 2 saw the model being punished for aggressive behaviour
- Children in Group 3 saw no consequence at all for the model’s aggressive behaviour.

The children who had seen the aggressive role model being punished were less likely to imitate the model’s aggressive behaviour than the children who saw aggression being rewarded or receiving no consequences. However,
what was new in this study was that all the children imitated the model’s aggressive behaviour if they themselves were offered rewards for copying the model.

This experiment showed that the children who had seen the model punished had learned the aggressive behaviour, but were reluctant to imitate it for fear of being punished, just like the model. Yet, once they perceived it to be acceptable to behave badly and were offered lollies to do so, these children were just as capable of imitating the aggressive behaviour as the children in the other two groups.

FIGURE 13.15 Children exposed to an aggressive role model are more likely to show aggressive behaviour.

1. Identify the dependent and independent variables in Bandura and his colleagues’ 1965 research, in the Key Study.
2. Identify any potential confounding variables.
3. Can the results of this study be generalised to the broader population? Explain.
4. Identify any ethical issues with this study.
5. From the findings of this study, what is necessary for children to learn aggressive behaviour?

MEDIA AND AGGRESSION

1. Since Bandura’s studies, there has been considerable research on the influence of media violence on aggression in the community. Locate and present a summary of some recent research on this topic.
2. Select one real-life example of violence and investigate how the media might have influenced an individual or group to behave aggressively, for example:
   → the television program Underbelly.
   → the Cronulla riots
   → the video game Grand Theft Auto.
3. In your report, comment on whether there should be restrictions placed on the programming of violent material in the media. Provide reasons for your answer that are based upon what you have learnt about the causes of aggression.
REVIEW

1. What is social learning?
2. What are the elements of social learning theory?
3. According to social learning theory, what must occur for pro-social or anti-social learning to take place?
4. The research by Bandura and his colleagues helped to shed light on how pro-social and anti-social behaviours can be acquired by young people. Comment on how the results of this study might be applicable to explaining aggression.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN NATURE AND NURTURE

Although research suggests that genes contribute to aggression, how a person’s genes interact with the environment influences whether a person grows up to demonstrate aggressive behaviour. In addition, facets of an individual’s personality – such as impulsivity, level of empathy and the need to dominate others – also have an influence.

In most humans, the basic biochemistry of aggression is similar, but the individual’s unique personality and the situation can interact to trigger the aggressive acts. This is why aggression can vary between individuals, communities and cultures.

RAINE (2002)

In a study by Raine (2002) of boys who had birth parents with criminal records but who were adopted and raised by non-criminal parents, only around 7 per cent grew up to participate in criminal behaviour. On the other hand, of the boys who were adopted and raised by parents who had criminal tendencies, approximately 40 per cent grew up to participate in criminal activity. This study demonstrated the interaction between nature and nurture in the development of anti-social behaviour, and how the environment can contribute to either its reduction or escalation.

SUPPORTING UNDERSTANDING

Factors that can influence aggression

No theory can provide a complete explanation for aggression, and it is important to remember there are many variables that might prompt humans to behave in such an anti-social way, such as:

- **Personal factors:** these include characteristics of the individual (for example age, gender, culture, experiences, self-esteem, frustration tolerance, mood and personality) and emotional triggers (for example grief, provocation and the effects of alcohol or illicit drugs).

- **Circumstances of the aggressor,** such as discomfort: the physical environment can influence the tendency to aggression in humans; riots, for example, are more likely to occur when the temperature is hotter than normal (Anderson 1989). Crowding and invasion of personal space, for example in night clubs and sports
venues, can lead to brawls, and traffic jams can precipitate ‘road rage’ (see the article ‘Traffic congestion fuelling aggression on our roads’).

- **Perceived disadvantage**, where people compare their socio-economic circumstances with others who are perceived to be better off than themselves: this can lead to the ‘disadvantaged’ person acting aggressively to improve their position through, for example, vandalism, assault, burglary or group riots. This is especially the case where an improvement in circumstances cannot be achieved legitimately.

- **Deindividuation**, in cases where a person is not identified as an individual, for example when wearing a uniform, in disguise or when surrounded by a crowd: when aggressors are deindividuated, they have greater opportunity to behave badly because there is less chance of their being ‘identified’. When victims are deindividuated, there is less chance of their individual rights being respected by the aggressor.

- **Conformity to norms**, where people behave in ways that society expects and accepts: some communities accept and permit aggression more than others. Therefore, when individuals or groups engage in acts of aggression, they might simply be conforming to the culture of their community, even if their behaviour is abhorrent to people from other communities. For example, the violence and anti-social behaviour within gangs is an accepted norm within the gang but is not acceptable to members of society as a whole.

### Reducing aggression

Given the personal and social costs of aggression, looking for ways to reduce levels of aggression is an important area for research.

In looking at the causes of aggression – biological, environmental, and the interaction between the two – it is evident that controlling the biological cause of aggression might be very difficult to achieve. There are many aspects of the environment that are also difficult to change and, therefore, programs aimed at reducing aggression have tended to apply social learning theory.

Parents, teachers, community workers and the media can all contribute to the development of pro-social behaviour and the reduction or prevention of aggressive behaviour. This can be done through:

- teaching people self-control through social skills training, modelling non-aggressive behaviours, anger management and assertiveness training
- rewarding or praising pro-social behaviours, and not rewarding (without punishing) anti-social behaviour.

Effective methods for reducing aggression include:

- observing non-aggressive models – suitable models display alternative non-aggressive ways of responding when confronted with a situation that could trigger aggression
- displaying unpredictable responses – defusing an inflammatory situation with an unexpected response such as humour and empathy
- teaching use of cognitive strategies – teaching people to ‘stop and think’ before acting aggressively; this includes developing an awareness of other people.

The use of cognitive behaviour therapy has been found to be effective in teaching children and adults to control the anger and frustration that is often the cause of individual acts of aggression.
Drivers agree that aggression is high on Australian roads and indications are that traffic congestion may be fuelling it, according to new research from leading car and home insurer AAMI.

‘AAMI has been researching the issue of driver aggression for more than a decade and the issue just isn’t going away, so we need to look for answers,’ said Geoff Hughes, AAMI Public Affairs Manager.

‘Seven in ten drivers (70 per cent) think traffic congestion is a major cause of road aggression and it’s not surprising that drivers in Sydney are most likely to agree of all capital cities (74 per cent).’

‘While most drivers (60 per cent) admit that if they are in a hurry, they are more likely to lose their temper with other drivers and 85 per cent believe drivers are becoming more aggressive, only one in six (18 per cent) describe themselves as impatient drivers,’ said Mr Hughes.

In 2003–2004 alone, the passenger vehicle fleet on Australia’s roads increased by 3 per cent, or around 260,000 extra vehicles nationally.

‘Traffic incidents, such as crashes, on an already stressed road network increase driver frustration and aggression,’ said Professor David Hensher, Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies.

‘Much of the commuter traffic on our roads occurs at times when people need to get somewhere quickly but are often held up because of congestion,’ said Professor Hensher.

‘Unfortunately, crashes and aggression on the road are a vicious cycle – aggression leads to dangerous driving and more crashes, which in turn leads to more aggression from other drivers who are delayed,’ said AAMI’s Geoff Hughes.

The findings are published in the eleventh annual AAMI Crash Index, which provides a snapshot of Australians’ attitudes, driving behaviours and crash trends. It is based on an in-depth analysis of AAMI’s claims data and an independent survey of 2400 Australian drivers.

Is aggression ever justified? Drivers say ‘yes’.

In a disturbing development that suggests antisocial driving behaviour (or ‘road rage’) is becoming socially acceptable, many drivers believe their ‘road rage’ is justified.

Four in ten drivers (44 per cent) admit they have gestured rudely or yelled at another motorist when they have done something they thought was dangerous or rude. Of those, 82 per cent believe that given what the other driver did, their response was justified. One in seven people (14 per cent) admit they have become angry at a driver and tailgated them, and 55 per cent of these people believe this response was justified.

AAMI national media release, 2005
REDUCING AGGRESSION

1. There are many government and non-government organisations that have been established with the aim of reducing various forms of aggression in the community. Identify a form of aggression in your community, research it and report on the measures taken that are aimed at reducing aggression by a government or non-government organisation. In your report, demonstrate your knowledge of some of the causes of aggression, and the psychological theory that underpins the organisation’s attempt to reduce it.

2. Find out about the anti-bullying program at your school.

3. Write an essay to describe the explanations for aggression among humans.

4. Imagine that you have been given the task of reducing aggressive behaviour in a specific situation for one of the following:
   → a group of children
   → a particular individual
   → yourself.

5. What would you do to achieve this? Describe the specific situation and how you would manage it.

FIGURE 13.19 Students taking part in a classroom program aimed at reducing aggression and bullying

1. Find examples of images (from newspapers, magazines or the internet) that demonstrate deindividuation. Identify which images depict victim deindividuation and which images depict aggressor deindividuation, and label the images appropriately.

2. Construct a table to summarise ways that might prevent or reduce aggression in individuals, and also in the broader community.
Pro-social behaviour refers to acts that are favourably viewed by society, including altruistic behaviour, and acts that are intended to help other people. Altruism is behaviour that is driven by a desire to help others without any expectation of reward. Social norms and the personal characteristics of an individual are variables that influence the chances of the person behaving in pro-social ways.

Explanations of pro-social behaviour include biological (nature), environmental (nurture), and the interaction between biological and environmental factors (nature and nurture).

Factors that influence pro-social behaviour include the situation: emergency and non-emergency. The situation is likely to impact upon whether a bystander will help. This is known as bystander intervention.

The decision-stage model of helping suggests that potential helpers go through up to five stages in a decision-making process about whether to provide help.

The development and maintenance of pro-social behaviour is influenced by social norms, including the reciprocity principle and the social responsibility norm.
→ Pro-social behaviour is influenced by personal factors such as empathy, mood, personal competence and altruism.

→ Anti-social behaviour is behaviour that is harmful to society and individuals. Two examples of anti-social behaviour are aggression and prejudice.

→ According to Bandura’s social learning theory, both pro-social and anti-social behaviour can be learned through modelling.

→ Anti-social behaviour is influenced by the situation.

→ The situation is likely to influence the bystander effect. The bystander effect refers to scenarios where the presence of others diffuses responsibility and inhibits the likelihood of pro-social behaviour. It was highlighted by the Kitty Genovese murder in New York.

→ The bystander effect is influenced by factors such as the situation, number of bystanders, social influence, audience inhibition, proximity, the characteristics of the victim, and the personal characteristics of the bystander.

→ An individual is likely to combine thoughts (cognitive) and physiological arousal levels in a cost–benefit analysis of whether to engage in pro-social behaviour.

→ Aggression is the deliberate or intentional hurting of another. It has two main explanations: biological and social. Biological explanations place emphasis on genetically set behaviour patterns, whereas social explanations emphasise the influence of society and the environment on aggressive behaviour.

→ Aggression may be hostile or instrumental.

→ Aggression can be influenced by personal factors, the physical environment (situation) and norms.

→ A group of people can become an aggressive mob when deindividuation occurs, and behave in ways that they might not if they were alone or in a small group.

→ Aggression can be reduced and controlled through the application of social learning theory and cognitive behaviour therapy.
TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. Helping behaviour and altruism are two examples of:
   a. bystander effect
   b. reciprocity
   c. pro-social behaviour
   d. anti-social behaviour.

2. A person who demonstrates pro-social behaviour is likely to:
   a. avoid group-think
   b. use outrageous behaviours to get attention
   c. have an individual personality
   d. come to the aid of strangers.

3. Which of the following plays a role in the development of pro-social behaviour?
   a. classical conditioning
   b. operant conditioning
   c. social learning
   d. all of the above.

4. People often give generously to victims of natural disasters and have no expectation of personal gain for their generosity. This is explained by:
   a. the bystander effect
   b. social responsibility norm
   c. compliance
   d. all of the above.

5. Which three processes help to explain the bystander effect?
   a. diffusion of responsibility, audience inhibition, social influence
   b. empathy, arousal, social influence
   c. apathy, audience inhibition, diffusion of responsibility
   d. audience inhibition, arousal, social influence.

6. When a group of people witness a person in distress, the bystander effect is likely to occur if:
   a. the group is small
   b. the group is large
   c. the witnesses are male
   d. the victim is a child.

7. An explanation for the bystander effect is:
   a. compliance
   b. social facilitation
   c. diffusion of responsibility
   d. all of the above.

8. There is a greater likelihood that a bystander will help in an emergency if:
   a. the bystander is similar to the victim
   b. the bystander is in a good mood
   c. the bystander knows how to help the victim
   d. all of the above.

9. According to the cost–benefit analysis model, when bystanders perceive someone in need of help, they work through stages before they respond. These stages are:
   a. evaluation, responsibility, action
   b. labelling emotion, evaluation, action
   c. physiological arousal, labelling of emotion
   d. evaluation of the consequences of helping.

10. The tendency to remove the individual characteristics of a victim of aggression is called:
    a. bystander intervention
    b. bystander effect
    c. deindividuation
    d. social categorisation.

11. If aggression is caused by one person wanting something that another person has, it is called
    a. deindividuated
    b. reciprocal
    c. hostile
    d. instrumental.

12. The loss of the sense of personal identity which leads to aggressive behaviour is referred to as:
    a. conformity
    b. reactance
    c. diffusion of responsibility
    d. deindividuation.
13 When a person is aggressive due to emotional factors or pain, this is called _____________ aggression.
   a  hostile  
   b  stereotypical  
   c  instrumental  
   d  reactance.

14 The theory that watching violence in the media will lead to increased levels of aggression and violent behaviour is:
   a  instrumental aggression theory  
   b  social learning theory  
   c  diffusion of responsibility theory  
   d  hostile aggression theory.

**SHORT ANSWER**

15 Explain what happens in the decision-stage model of helping.
   2 marks

16 According to _____________, watching a model receive positive or negative consequences for helping behaviour is important.
   1 mark

17 _____________ is the norm that we ought to help those who help us, whereas the _____________ is the norm that prescribes that everyone ought to help those in need.
   2 marks

18 Describe one way in which parents can teach their children pro-social behaviour.
   1 mark

19 How do social norms influence pro-social behaviour?
   1 mark

20 Although ‘altruism’ is helping without expectation of personal gain, why do some psychologists argue that it might also be motivated by self-interest?
   2 marks

21 Describe two environmental factors that can lead to aggression.
   2 marks

22 People in a hurry are less likely to help someone than people who are not in hurry. Using the cost-benefit analysis, explain why people in a hurry are unlikely to help in an emergency.
   4 marks

23 Explain two ways in which deindividuation can influence aggressive behaviour.
   2 marks

24 Describe one of the biological theories of the cause of aggression.
   1 mark

25 Briefly describe how the interaction of nature and nurture helps to explain aggressive behaviour of some people.
   3 marks

26 Pro-social, helping behaviour depends on several groups of factors. Give an example of:
   a  situation factors
   b  personal factors.

27 Some factors can cause people to be less likely to come to the assistance of a person in need. Explain what is meant by:
   a  cost–benefit analysis
   b  audience inhibition.

28 Deindividuation allows people to perform actions that they would be unlikely to perform if they were on their own and could be individually identified. Give an example from real life where people have shown socially unacceptable behaviour as a result of deindividuation.
   4 marks