



Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Paragraph

### Aggression

- 1▶ Aggressive behavior is any behavior that is intended to cause injury, pain, suffering, damage, or destruction. While aggressive behavior is often thought of as purely physical, verbal attacks such as screaming and shouting or belittling and humiliating comments aimed at causing harm and suffering can also be a type of aggression. What is key to the definition of aggression is that whenever physical or verbal harm is inflicted, it is intentional.
- 2▶ Aggression was likely an early survival mechanism for humans, much in the same way it was for animals. Despite this, it is generally thought that aggressive behavior was not named as such before the seventeenth century, when the term was used to refer to an unprovoked physical attack. The term expanded beyond the description of purely physical aggression to include a psychological dimension in the early twentieth century, as psychiatrists put more emphasis on aggressive behavior and its potential motives.
- 3▶ Questions about the causes of aggression have long been of concern to both social and biological scientists. Theories about the causes of aggression cover a broad spectrum, ranging from those with biological or instinctive emphases to those that portray aggression as a learned behavior.
- 4▶ Numerous theories are based on the idea that aggression is an inherent and natural human instinct. **9A** Aggression has been explained as an instinct that is directed externally toward others in a process called displacement, and it has been noted that aggressive impulses that are not channeled toward a specific person or group may be expressed indirectly through socially acceptable activities such as sports and competition in a process called catharsis. **9B** Biological, or instinctive, theories of aggression have also been put forth by ethologists, who study the behavior of animals in their natural environments. **9C** A number of ethologists have, based upon their observations of animals, supported the view that aggression is an innate instinct common to humans. **9D**
- 5▶ Two different schools of thought exist among those who view aggression as instinct. One group holds the view that aggression can build up spontaneously, with or without outside provocation, and violent behavior will thus result, perhaps as a result of little or no provocation. Another suggests that aggression is indeed an instinctive response but that, rather than occurring spontaneously and without provocation, it is a direct response to provocation from an outside source.
- 6▶ In contrast to instinct theories, social learning theories view aggression as a learned behavior. This approach focuses on the effect that role models and reinforcement of behavior have on the acquisition of aggressive behavior. Research has shown that aggressive behavior can be learned through a combination of modeling and positive reinforcement of the aggressive behavior and that children are influenced by the combined forces of observing aggressive behavior in parents, peers, or fictional role models and of noting either positive reinforcement for the aggressive behavior or, minimally, a lack of negative reinforcement for the behavior. While research has provided evidence that the behavior of a live model is more influential than that of a fictional model, fictional models such as those seen in movies and on television, do still have an impact on behavior. **19A** On-screen deaths or acts of violent behavior in certain television programs or movies can be counted in the tens, or hundreds, or even thousands; while some have argued that this sort of fictional violence does not in and of itself cause violence and may even have a beneficial cathartic<sup>1</sup> effect, studies have shown correlations between viewing of violence and incidences of aggressive behavior in both childhood and adolescence. **19B** Studies have also shown that it is not just the modeling of aggressive behavior in either its real-life or fictional form that correlates with increased acts of violence in youths; a critical factor in increasing aggressive behaviors is the reinforcement of the behavior. **19C** If the aggressive role model is rewarded rather than punished for violent behavior, that behavior is more likely to be seen as positive and is thus more likely to be imitated. **19D**

### GLOSSARY

1. *cathartic*—providing emotional release; therapeutic