children imitate aggression only if they believe that aggression is appropriate and will not meet with censure or punishment.

II. Acts of Aggression

Murders result from little ol’ arguments over nothing at all. Tempers flare. A fight starts, and somebody gets stabbed or shot. I’ve worked on cases where the principals had been arguing over a 10 cent record on a juke box, or over a one dollar gambling debt from a dice game. (Dallas homicide detective, cited in Mulvihill, Tumin, & Curtis, 1969, p. 230)

Acts of aggression usually arise in response to provocation. Spouses argue when one suspects the other of being unfaithful, drivers become irate when another vehicle refuses to allow them to change lanes, and schoolchildren tussle when one accuses the other of cheating at kickball. In these cases, something happens to incite a person and an ensuing chain of events leads to aggressive behavior. This section details how these acts of aggression unfold and describes personality variables and situational factors that influence the course of aggression.

A. Provocation

Figure 13.4 shows that an aggressive episode begins with some sort of provocation. Typically, this involves (1) a physical assault on a person’s body or property; (2) a psychological affront, as when one person threatens another person’s dignity or reputation; or (3) some experience that produces frustration. Frustration is a psychological state that arises when we are prevented from attaining an expected goal or reward. Its role as an instigator of aggression was highlighted in a classic program of research known as the frustration–aggression hypothesis (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, &