

## Psychology (essay)

**Describe and evaluate one social psychological theory of aggression.**

One of the most influential approaches to aggression is the social learning theory approach, put forward by Albert Bandura. According to this approach, most behaviour including aggressive behaviour is learned.

Albert Bandura believed that aggression is learned through a process called behaviour modelling. He argued that individuals, especially children learn aggressive responses from observing others, either personally or through the media and environment. He stated that many individuals believed that aggression will produce reinforcements.

These reinforcements can formulate into reduction of tension, gaining financial rewards, or gaining the praise of others.

Bandura carried out a study on aggressive behaviour towards the Bobo doll.

In the first stage of the study, children who had observed an adult model attack a Bobo doll were divided into three groups.

Group 1 went straight into the playroom,

Group 2 saw the model being rewarded for their aggression against the doll, while group 3 saw the adult model punished.

In the second stage of the study, after the children had played with the doll, all the children were offered rewards to behave as the adult model had done.

The results showed, in the first stage of the, group 3 children showed significantly less aggressive behaviour towards the dolls than group 1 and 2. In the second stage of the study, there was no difference between the groups in the mean number of imitated aggressive actions.

It can be concluded, observation of a model is sufficient for aggressive behaviour to be learned, but the consequences of the behaviour, both for the model and the observer, influence whether the behaviour is reproduced.

Bandura believed if aggression was diagnosed early in children, then this would reframe them from being adult criminals. He argued that aggression in children is influenced by the reinforcement of family members, the media, and the environment. He believed aggression reinforced by family members was the most prominent source of behaviour modelling. He stated that children use the same aggressive tactics that their parents illustrated when dealing with others. Children learn to act aggressive when they model their behaviour after violent acts of adults, especially family members. For example, a boy who witnesses his father repeatedly strike his mother will more than likely become an abusive parent and husband.

Albert Bandura believed that aggression must explain three aspects: First, how aggressive patterns of behaviour are developed; second, what provokes people to behave aggressively, and third, what determines whether they are going to continue to resort to an aggressive behaviour pattern on future occasions.

He believed environmental experiences also had an influence on the social learning of violence in children. He reported that individuals that lived in high crime rate areas were more likely to act violently than those who lived in low crime areas. He also believed television was a source of behaviour modelling. Today films and television shows illustrate violence graphically. Violence is often expressed as an acceptable behaviour. Since aggression is a prominent feature of many shows, children who have a high amount of exposure to the media may show a high degree of hostility themselves in imitation of the aggression they have witnessed.

Bandura's social learning approach is an important one. Much aggressive behaviour is learned, and observational learning or modelling is often involved. It has been found that children who watch violent programmes on television are more likely to behave in an aggressive way.

In spite of the successes of social learning theory, there are reasons for arguing that Bandura exaggerated the extent to which children imitate the behaviour of models. Children are very likely to imitate aggressive behaviour towards a doll, but they are much less likely to imitate aggressive behaviour towards another child.

Bandura consistently failed to distinguish between real aggression and play fighting, and it is likely that much of the aggressive behaviour observed by Bandura was only play fighting.

This social learning theory can also account for the lack of consistency in people's aggressive behaviour. If someone is assertive and domineering at home but gentle and submissive at work, it means they are reinforced differently in the two situations. They have learned to behave differently in the two situations because assertiveness brings rewards in one context but not in the other.

Also if violence is learned, then exposure to successfully aggressive models may lead people to imitate them. Aggression can therefore, be passed across generations, as each new generation observes and imitates what it perceives to be appropriate and successful behaviours of the preceding generation.

Bandura's approach is limited in area. Aggressive behaviour does not depend only on observational learning. People's internal emotional state, their interpretation of the current situation, and their personality are other important factors that need to be taken into account.