

Q: Describe and evaluate two social psychological theories into aggression.

A: Aggression is an emotive term that is very much part of our everyday difficult word to define precisely because of the various ways the word is used in everyday language.

Berkowitz (1989) and Bandura (1965) said that aggressive behaviour of nonhuman animals can be explained in terms of instinctual drives, aggression in humans is the product of learning.

Banduras social learning theory said that that we learnt through direct experience (classical conditioning + operant conditioning) this predicted the likelihood of someone behaving aggressively in a particular situation by their previous experience of aggressive behaviour (their own + others), how successful their aggressive behaviour was in the past and the current likelihood of their behaviour being rewarded or punished.

Bandura et al. (1963) did an experiment into children learning aggression. He divided up 66 nursery school children into three groups. All three groups watched a film where an adult model kicked and punched a Bobo doll. In condition 1 the children saw the adult model being rewarded by a second adult, in condition 2 children saw a second adult telling off the adult model for the aggressive behaviour and in condition 3 the adult model was neither rewarded nor punished. The children were then allowed to play in the room with the Bobo doll whilst experimenters watched through a one-way mirror.

Results showed that children in condition 1 behaved most aggressively which backs up Banduras social learning theory as it says we learn through indirect experience, imitation and through observation so the adults showed approval for aggressive behaviour.. In condition 2 the children behaved least aggressively so this also gives Bandura positive results for his theory, as the children did not act violently towards the Bobo Doll as they observed the adult getting told off for hitting it so they have learnt through indirect experience. Even so we must make an important distinction between learning and performance as all the children learnt how to behave aggressively, but those in condition 2 did not perform as many aggressive acts until later, when they were offered rewards to do so. When this happened they quickly showed that they had learned as many aggressive techniques as the children in condition 1.

This theory we can tell is reliable, as it has alot of experimental evidence to support it. The testing was also fair as all the children were put in the same room and this account for the lack of consistency too. This shows us television is a powerful source of imitative learning, Huesman (1988) suggests that children may use television models as a source of scripts that act as a guide for their own behaviour. Even so the theory has its problems; the children participating may not have been the same age, Their backgrounds were not taken into account which makes the test unfair as some of the children may be from rough areas where fighting is common and some may be from good areas where violence is seen to be used as a last resort so the social norms may be different in the child's back grounds so there for they will behave differently. The Bobo doll is also not a

living person so the children may react more violently as they know they are not inflicting any pain.

Social learning theories of aggression rely heavily on experimental evidence and field studies of observational learning. There are, however, some methodological problems in the experiments as I have explained above in the Bandura et al experiment. Social learning explanations also account for the lack of consistency in people's aggressive behaviour, if someone is assertive at home and are submissive at work this means they are reinforced differently in the two situations. They have learned to behave differently in the two situations because assertiveness brings rewards in some context but not in another.

Biological explanations of aggression have stressed factors quite unrelated to social learning. Higher levels of testosterone and premenstrual syndrome have been cited as primary causal agent in aggressive behaviour so therefore this casts doubt on aggression being a purely learnt behaviour.

Deindividuation is the process whereby people lose their sense of socialized individual identity and engage in unsocialized often-antisocial behaviours.

People normally refrain from acting in an aggressive and selfish manner in part because they are easily identifiable in societies that have strong norms against such behaviour. In certain situations such as in crowds, these restraints may become relaxed and we may engage in an aggressive, selfish and anti social behaviour.

Zimbardo (1969) distinguished between individual behaviour and deindividuated behaviour, which is based on primitive, urges and does not conform to society's norms. Zimbardo said that being part of a crowd can diminish awareness of individuality and in a large crowd each person is faceless and anonymous. There is diminished fear of retribution and a diluted sense of guilt.

Malamuth and Check (1981) questioned students at an American university and found that almost one third admitted that there was a chance they would rape if there was no chance of them getting caught. This backs up Zimbardo's theory of deindividuation as the students would rape if they were never caught meaning their guilt is diluted, as no one would know.

Mann (1981) analyzed 21 incidents of suicides reported in American newspapers in the 1960s and 1970s. He found that in 10 of the 21 cases where a crowd had gathered to watch, bating had occurred. These incidents tended to occur at night when the crowd was large and when the crowd was some distance from the person being taunted so again Zimbardo's theory is backed up as the only reason people in the crowd were shouting was because they felt de-individuated.

Although early evidence into deindividuation was supportive the concept still has its own problems, as in some studies deindividuation may produce increases in prosocial behaviour so it does not always have a negative effect on people. Researchers have often failed to distinguish between the effects of anonymity of those aggressed against.

Manstead et al argued that anonymity among the in-group does not really reflect the reality of most crowd situations. Marsh et al (1978) did a study on football hooliganism and he found that what might appear to be an undisciplined mob on match days can

actually consist of several different groups, each with their status. By serving an apprenticeship aggression over a period of time young supporters can be promoted into a higher group and can thus continue a career in football violence. Marsh discovered in most cases this is highly ritualized so there is more verbal abuse than physical. Even though deindividuation has its good points and bad points a lot of it comes down to people's personalities and the way they have been brought up as you cannot assume the behaviour is all the same of people who watch football matches so it varies from person to person but still deindividuation has some very good points that are well backed up by good supporting evidence.