Discuss one psychological explanation for aggression.

Social Learning Theory

In this essay I will evaluate and explain the Social Learning Theory (SLT), which explains aggressiveness from a behaviourism point of view. The opposite point of view is the biological point of view; they believe that aggressiveness stems from genetic mak e-up.

Together these two views can be seen as the nature and nurture debate; according to social psychologists aggression is learnt (nurture), from the view of the biological psychologists they believe aggression is innate (nature).

Bandura and Walters' s believed that aggression is learnt through indirect and direct reinforcement; however they did not dismiss the biological views on aggression and said that the behaviourist approach looks at how and when we aggress.

The social learning theory has many r esearch study's, the most popular being Bandura's study with the bobo doll. Bandura has children observing a model who interacted with the bobo doll, either aggressively or non -aggressively. The children were then 'frustrated' by taken to another room fill ed with toys, but they were told it was an error and had to leave. The children were then left alone with the doll whilst Bandura observed their behaviour. Bandura found that children who had observed the aggressive model would be aggressive towards the doll, and the children who watched the non -aggressive model either played with the doll in a non -aggressive manner or left it alon

Bandura's furthered the study by rewarding the model for bad behaviour; he found that children will copy behaviour when rewa rded, this is known as vicarious reinforcement, thus making the children repeat the behaviour due to the rewards they obtain, however if the imitation is not reinforced, the behaviour is less likely to repeated in the future. If a child is rewarded for beh aviour throughout their lives i.e. a child who bullies other children successfully will lead the bully to put value on aggression this is called maintenance through direct experience

On of the criticism of Bandura's study is that it is not associated wi th adults and can only be applied to children, however Phillips who looked at homicide rates after a major boxing match in the USA, found and increase in homicides. This could be a type of imitation. As boxing is seen as a mainly male sport it can only be generalised to American Males, also due to the study being a correlation we can't determine cause and affect.

One of the strengths of SLT is that it can explain aggression in absence of direct reinforcement and can also explain individual differences and context dependant learning

It is possible to assume in Bandura's study, the children were aware what was expected of them, (demand characteristics) Noble, reports that one child arriving at the experiment said to his mother "look Mummy, there's the do ll we have to hit". Bandura's study also looks at a doll rather than a person (who would tend to hit back). However Bandura responded to this criticism by conducting another experiment where women hit a toy clown whilst children observed, the children were then let into a room with a real clown, they proceeded to hit him and punch him. Due to the clown not being aggressive back towards the children, this can also be seen as criticism.

The SLT can be applied to explain cultural difference within aggression, however within the practices of the !Kung San or the Kalahari desert, aggression is completely rare, this is due to the way the children are brought up, the parents separate the children who are aggressive towards one another, neither punish or reward the m for the behaviour the children use, nor do they use physical abuse towards the children thus making direct reinforcement and aggressive models absent within their upbringing

Due to the theory being part of the nature/nurture debate it is viewed as hig hly deterministic. However this deterministic interpretation is mistaken; evolutionary psychologists, for example, suggest that genes predispose us to behave in certain ways, but this does not dictate what individuals choose to do. Other factors also deter mine behaviour, such as culture we live in, and ultimately our personal experiences and decisions. The SLT can only be seen an aspect as why people behave aggressively and we cannot dismiss other explanations

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Outline and evaluate explanations of institutional aggression. (25 marks)

Instituational aggression is aggressive behaviour displayed within an institutional situation such as a school or prison. Most research into institutional aggression has been conducted in prisons.

One explanation of institutionalised aggression is the importation model- dispsotional factors. This model suggests that prisoners bring (import) their own social histories and traits with them to the prison environment and these influence their subsequent behavious (Irwin and Cressey, 1962). Most of the aggressive behaviour studied in the prisson situation is not specific to that situation- the same behaviour was carried out in wider society by the same individuals. Such people bring with them into a prison a "ready-made" way of behaving which they just use in their new institutional setting (Cheeseman, 2003).

Irwin and Cressey realised the importance of different prisoner subcultures and identified three. Firstly; the criminal or theif subculture, the prisoner follow the norms and values that are present in the professional thief or criminal "careers", such as not betraying one another and being trustworthy. Secondly; the convict subculture, the subject has been raised in the prison system. they seek positions of power and influence and are therefore most likley to turn to aggression or another maladaptive form of coping. and the conventional or straight subculture tend to be one-time offenders and were not part of a criminal or theif subculture before entering prison. They reject the other two subcultures and identify more with the prison staff. this group is leats likley to be aggressive.

The three subcultures are better at explaining offenders who do not reoffend then some other explanations of institutional aggression. It suggests we have some degree of free will and explains that some offenders will not re-offend. This is good because most explanations are deterministic.

These studies lack cross-cultural validity because they were conducted in the western society and therefor cannot be used to explain the reasons for institutional aggression within other societies and cultures. Also the studies are gender biased because they were done within male prisons and therefore are not reliable in explaining institutional aggression within females. The model is reductionist as it does not take into account other subject areas of psychology such as neuroanotomical and genetic factors.

Bloomberg and Lucken (2000) support the notion of the "convict subculture" and suggest that these inmates are influenced by deprivation prior to imprisonment. They bring these values into the prison from the outside world and so whenever they feel relativley deprived within the prison setting, they aim to reduce this deprivation; often through aggression. (The deprivation model).

This is explanation is deterministic, it suggest offenders will act violently when feeling deprived and that they don't have free will over the situation ie, they may act in a calm way when feeling deprived. This study is recent and so has strong temporal validity which makes it relevant to now. As with most studies into institutional aggression the study lacks cross-culutral validity and is gender biased as it was conducted on a western world male prison.

Other explanations include hormonal influences. Since the 1980's many cases have been brought to the courts using influence of homrones as a defence on grounds of diminished

responsibility. Nelson (1995) conducted a meta review into research considering the effect of hormones on aggression. A positive correlation between androgens and aggressive behaviour (in both males and females) was found). However because the levels of androgends were not measured at the exact same time an aggresive act happened, it is impossible to rule out the influence of other variable, such as environmental, on aggression.
This research is unusual in it involves both men and woman which is an advantage.
Because it is a correlational study we can not draw a conclusion from the results. The results seem to suggest higher levels of androgens cause aggresive acts, but what it does not state cause and effect- it could be high levels of aggressive behaviour causes levels of androgens to increase.
There are many explanations of institutional aggression, including behaviourism, cognitive and biological we need to consider all of these views to draw rounded conclusions for explanations of aggression.

section 2: experimental methods

Laboratory experiment

- This is probably the typical idea you may have of an experiment, with the participant sitting on a chair in a cold room with white walls, being tested over and over again usually with computer equipment.
- The laboratory experimenter is able to **manipulate** the independent variables to cause a change in the dependent variable.

Realism

- Because of the high levels of control that the experimenter has on the laboratory environment, the laboratory situation is likely to be very different from real-life situations. The realism of the experiment is a measure of how much it reflects reality. This involves both the realism of the **environment** and the **tasks** used. For example, imagine a participant is sitting in front of a computer screen (computers are often used in laboratory research) and a scenario is presented to them in which they offered drugs while at a party. The task **lacks realism** in the sense that, at a party they may already be under the influence of alcohol, all of their friends will be there and the person offering the drugs may be someone they are attracted to. Additionally the environment lacks realism because it doesn't include the noise, shouting, encouragement and music from a party. If the task in the laboratory study doesn't take these real-life influences into consideration, it could be said to lack realism.
- **Ecological validity** relates to whether the results of a study can be generalized to other settings. If a laboratory study lacks realism then it is unlikely that the findings can be generalized to real-life settings, which therefore indicates a lack of ecological validity.

Demand characteristics

- This is when the participants try to guess what the study is for and then **change their behaviour** in reaction to their beliefs concerning what the study is about.
- The highly controlled nature of the laboratory experiment makes it easier for the participant to determine which variables are being manipulated. Therefore their behaviour is more likely to change. For example, if it is obvious that a laboratory experiment is about how outgoing the participant is in certain situations, they may realise this and become louder and chattier as a result. This would be a change of behaviour which doesn't reflect the situations of the experiment, but instead reflects how the participant thinks they should behave.

Control

- The laboratory environment can be easily changed by the researcher to ensure that there are **no potentially confounding** variables. This high level of control allows a more secure determination of the cause-and-effect

relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Replicability

- Because of the simplicity of the laboratory environment, if it is well designed and clearly reported, then a lab experiment can be easily repeated by other researchers. This replication by other researchers is to determine if similar results are obtained, which can be used to indicate the **reliability** of the experiment.

Ethics

- If the experimenter feels that demand characteristics are likely, the may choose to use **deception.**
- It is important that a debriefing is held afterwards, so the researcher can discuss what the actual purpose of the study was and to help the participant if they feel uncomfortable because of the deception used.

Field experiment

- This is an experiment carried out in the **natural environment** of the participants e.g. in school or in a prison.
- As with the laboratory experiment, the researcher in a field experiment **manipulates** an independent variable to produce a change in the dependent variable.

Realism

- The natural environment is a real-life setting, which overcomes the lack of realism that laboratory environments have.
- This makes it easier to generalize the findings of the field experiment to real-life settings, also indicating that they have suitable ecological validity.

Demand characteristics

- Due to the use of the natural environment, participants are **less likely to be aware** that are taking part in a study. This is an effective aspect of field experiments as it reduces the possibility of demand characteristics.

Control

- It is more **difficult to establish control** in a field experiment because the natural environment is used. This makes it more difficult to manipulate the independent variable, measure the dependent variable and to control extraneous variables. For example, let's say an experimenter was studying a class of students. Then, outside a teacher starts having a nervous breakdown, so he starts skipping around naked, then he laughs hysterically at a tree before diving head first into a bin. This would be fairly distracting to the students near the window and may affect their performance in the experiment.

Replicability

- Because it is more difficult to establish control for a field experiment, this is also brings issues concerning the replicability of a study.
- For example, it is likely that if a study of a class is replicated, that the classroom in the new study may be slightly different and such differences may influence the results.

Ethics

- As field experiments take place in real-life settings, the organizations and participants must be protected.
- Anonymity should be guaranteed concerning the descriptions of the participants and the organization. For example, the researcher couldn't write 'it's a school in Ohio with a world famous show choir'.

Natural experiment

- As with the field experiment, the natural experiment uses the natural environment of the participants.
- However, in a natural experiment, the independent variable is **not manipulated** by the researcher. Instead, the independent variable changes naturally. For example, for an experiment concerning how safe people feel in London, a researcher could compare how safe people felt before the London riots compared to after the riots. Here the independent variable was the riots (which you may assume the researchers didn't start).

Realism

- As the effects are naturally occurring and involve the natural environment, the level of realism is **extremely high** for a natural experiment.

Demand characteristics

- Participants probably won't realise they are participating in an experiment, so it is **unlikely** that demand characteristics will arise.

Control

- The level of control is significantly **less** compared with a laboratory or field experiment. This is because the researcher doesn't control the independent variable, nor do they assign participants to their conditions.
- The lack of control means that **confounding variables** are more likely to occur. Therefore the experimenter is less confident that the change in dependent variable is due to the independent variable. This makes it difficult

for them to determine a cause-and-effect relationship.

Replicability

- It is difficult for the study to be replicated as the situation being researched is not likely to occur more than **once**.

Ethics

- Protecting the participants from harm is important for natural experiments, especially if the experiment involves questioning participants' views about traumatic experiences, which could cause them anxiety.

section 3: non-experimental methods

Non-experimental methods
These are research methods in which the independent variable isn't manipulated by the experimenter.
Correlational analysis

- A correlation is a measure of the relationship between two variables (You could say it's like co-relation, but with an extra 'r').
- Positive correlation: this is where high values on one variable are associated with high values on another variable. For example, time spent studying is positively correlated with exam mark.
- Negative correlation: high values on one variable are associated with low variables on another variable. For example, time spent watching TV is negatively correlated with exam mark.
- Correlation coefficient: this is a measure of the strength of a correlation. +1 is the strongest positive correlation and -1 is the strongest negative correlation. A correlation coefficient of 0 typically indicates that there is no relationship between two variables.
- Research using correlational analysis attempts to investigate the relationship between two variables that are thought to be related. It can be effectively used in early stages of research to isolate relationships between particular variables from a large number of interacting variables.

Non-linear relationships

- Sometimes correlational research may state that there is no meaningful correlation between variables, even though there may be one, just that it is non-linear. The positive and negative correlations are both linear.

Discuss one psychological explanation for aggression.

Social Learning Theory

- However, this may be a problem. For example, a study on stress and performance would have a meaningful non-linear relationship. If relaxed, a person is unlikely to do well, but if too stressed they will also perform less effectively. Therefore there is a gradual relationship between stress and performance, raising to a middle point and then falling as stress increases too high. This non-linear relationship is meaningful, but this isn't shown by a correlation coefficient.

Causal relationship

- Research using correlational analysis only determines the relationship between different variables, therefore it is not possible to establish a cause-and-effect relationship (causation).
- The difference between correlation and causation is extremely important in science. It may seem repetitive, but the following 3 examples will highlight the difference between correlation and causation.
- Say a person has a headache, so they say a prayer in which they ask to be healed. A few hours later their headache is gone. They may conclude that their prayer caused the relief from the headache. They assume the praying caused the healing, when of course it was the few hours that passed which actually caused the healing. They made the mistake of assuming a causal relationship when the action of praying was only related to the consequence of feeling better.
- Somebody could say that going to a bad school causes them to have crap exam results. This is only a correlation, where there are other variables which may be more important and have more powerful effects, such as levels of self-motivation, independence and natural intelligence.

- Statistics show that there is an increase in the number of ice creams sold as well as an increase in the temperature of a country. Though there is a positive correlation between the two, it'd be an obvious mistake to say that selling ice cream increases the temperature of a country. This is an error concerning the direction of causation, where it is the increase in temperature which causes the increase in ice cream sales.

The news is definitely a good source of correlations being mistaken as causation:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/2826933.stm

Ethics

- Correlational findings should be used cautiously, especially if it is research that may have important and sensitive social implications.
- For example, if there was a study concerning a correlation between the number of years a person spends in prison and the number of detentions they received in school, caution would have to be taken to reduce the social controversy that may result.

Observational research

- In observational research behaviour is observed and recorded.
- It involves how people behave in certain situations, but the researcher doesn't try to influence their behaviour.

Naturalistic observation

- This is an observation carried out in the natural setting of the participants, for example a classroom or a home.
- It is especially useful if it might be difficult to bring out the behaviour in a laboratory.

Laboratory observation

- Labs can be suitable for certain animal research in which the animals adapt well to the setting e.g. guinea pigs.
- The laboratory can also be redesigned to seem like a room e.g. a children's play area.
- This allows the children to easily adapt to the environment and feel at ease to behave more naturally.

Participant or non-participant observation

- Participant observation is when the researcher becomes a part of the group being studied.
- Non-participant observation is when a researcher remains separate from the group.
- They may also be disclosed if they inform the people they are observing, that they are observing them. Or they remain undisclosed and not tell them.
- If a researcher is observing people without their knowledge, then they should be sensitive to the privacy of those they are observing.

Observational structure

- A researcher may provide verbal descriptions of what they are observing. This is a bit like those animal documentaries with the narrator saying "the lion slowly awakes from its sleep, ready to hunt". Except that they write it down.
- Alternatively, more structure could be imposed on their observations by using a coding system. Behavioural categories would be used to count the number of times a particular behaviour occurred. For example, observing a dinner date, to measure how well it is going, categories could include numbers of 'awkward silences', 'smiles' and 'laughter'.

Realism

- Naturalistic observation can allow a researcher to determine if experimental findings apply outside the laboratory conditions.
- Realism can be ensured for the observation if the researcher remains undetected.

Discuss one psychological explanation for aggression.
Social Learning Theory

Demand characteristics

- If the researcher is undisclosed and hidden, this also allows the participants to behave more naturally, as they may not feel a need to behave differently if they don't they think are being observed.
- If the observer is disclosed (they tell people they are watching them) it is likely that the behaviour of those being observed will change.
- Participant observers have to particularly cautious as they are involving themselves in the study and their experiences may bias what they record.

Control

- The researcher has no control over the potentially confounding variables that may influence their observational study. Therefore a cause-and-effect relationship can't be determined.

Replication

- The differences between natural settings make it difficult for the observations to be replicated.

Ethics

- Privacy is extremely important concerning observations. Unless the participants give consent to being observed, the observations should only be conducted in settings where those being observed would assume they were seen anyway e.g. a supermarket.
- If the researcher is undisclosed (hidden) in a non-public place, they have to inform the participants that they were being watched after the observations are complete.

section 4: self-report techniques

Self-report techniques
These enable participants to provide information about topics relating to themselves.
Questionnaires

- This type of self-report technique involves a printed series of questions for gathering information typically aboutattitudes, intentions and behaviours.
- Surveys often use questionnaires, in which data is gathered from large numbers of people by mailing the questionnaires to them. Most surveys are carried out on representative groups. The researcher then generalizes the findings to the target population from which the representative group came.
- Questionnaires have to be developed carefully to avoid leading questions e.g. 'Have you seenthe crocodile recently?' compared to the more appropriate 'Have you seen a crocodile recently?'.
- Questionnaires allow easy comparison of answers from different people and the quantitative data is easy to analyse.
- Unfortunately, response rates tend to be low for questionnaires. Therefore those from the sample who do reply are unlikely to be representative.
- Demand characteristics are also a problem for questionnaires. If questions are embarrassing the respondent may want to appear socially desirable. Therefore they could answer differently from what they actually think, so that they appear as a better person.

Ethics

- Risk of harm is important for questionnaires as they often involve asking questions of a personal nature.
- This means that the researcher has to ensure the participant is aware that they can choose not to answer any questions they feel uncomfortable answering.

Interviews
Structured interviews

- These produce quantitative data.

- They include questions that are decided before the interview, in aim of structuring and categorising the interviewee's responses.
- The structure allows the focus to be maintained on the topic of the interview.
- Additionally less training is required by the interviewer and the interviewer is more likely to beobjective due to the structure they have to follow. This makes it easier to analyse the results.
- However, the narrow focus and following of the planned structure means that the interviewer can't prompt the interviewee to expand on any answers they provide.

Unstructured interviews

- These do not follow a planned rigid structure.
- The focus isn't narrow. A few questions are used to initiate the interview, but then the interview expands based on the answers the interviewee provides.
- The qualitative data (long descriptive material) gathered is more difficult to analyse than quantitative data.
- However, due to the lack of structure for the interview, there is the benefit that the interviewee will feel that they can express themselves more freely.

Semi-structured interview

- This is typically a mix between the structure and unstructured interviews.
- There is some planning involved beforehand concerning the questions to be used.
- The interview still holds a lot of freedom over the direction it goes, with the interviewer encouraging the interviewee to expand on their answers.

General evaluation for interviews

- Interviews are a suitable way of researchers to discuss topics that are private or personal to the participant e.g. sexual problems. Such topics would be more difficult to analyse using other research methods.
- However, the data (what the interviewee says) is difficult to interpret. It is possible that the researcher may misinterpret what the interviewee says based on their own expectations and biases. For example, if a student says 'I didn't go to the library'. The researcher may think that they were too lazy to go to the library and then bother to ask them to expand on that point. However, it may just be that the library was closed that day.
- It is also very time consuming to analyse large amounts of qualitative data, such as pages and pages of what was said in an interview.
- If the interview is face-to-face, the interviewee may be influenced by the personality and appearance of the interviewer, which may affect the way they respond.

Ethics

- The interviewer should be especially careful concerning the risk of harm while conducting the interview. If they are discussing sensitive topics, then the interviewee may feel uncomfortable. The interviewer should ensure that the interviewee is aware that they don't have to respond if they won't want to.

Case studies

- This involves studying an individual or small group, usually over a long period of time and within a real-life setting.
- It mainly involves qualitative data from interviews and observations. Unique circumstances are often studied in case studies. For example, an interesting case study could be done for Elisabeth Fritzl, who was held captive in Josef Fritzl's basement for 24 years.

Discuss one psychological explanation for aggression.

Social Learning Theory

Evaluation

- Due to the in-depth nature of a case study, they are capable of providing interesting and rich data about individuals.
- Unfortunately, the focus only a few people means that it is difficult to generalize the findings. They therefore lack reliability.
- The case study involves the researcher spending a lot of time with the participants, during which a relationship may develop. This means that they should be extra careful concerning privacy, where they should recognise when they are being too intrusive. Researchers often use the initials of the participant being studied in a case study as a measure of improving confidentiality.
- It is difficult for the researcher to separate themselves from what they are studying, meaning that their interpretation of the participant's behaviour is subjective. This is even more important and problematic due to the large amount of data that is often collected from a case study.
- The case study involves a lot of retrospective data, in which the participant has to remember events from their past. Memory errors may therefore influence what they say to the researcher.

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