

The main factors affecting personality



Ever found yourself fuming with anger and/or hatred about something or someone? When an individual is behaving in such a manner, one is displaying signs of aggression. “ Aggression is a behavior intended to harm another individual who is motivated to avoid that harm” (Bushman & Anderson 2001). Many consider aggression to be violent, however it can be carried out in violent and non-violent forms. For example, pushing a child off the chair is an act of aggression, but not an act of violence. How does one acquire an aggressive nature? It is said that aggressive responses in any individual is triggered or acquired in the same way they acquire other complex forms of social behavior – either by direct experience or by observing others otherwise known as the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1983). Children are more susceptible to this form of behaviour as they have an innate tendency to imitate whomever they observe (Hurley and Chatter, 2004). One notable experiment that helped to shed light on children being more susceptible to imitation is the Bobo Doll experiment in the 1960s. The experiment revealed that children more readily imitated behaviour exhibited by an adult ‘ model’ on the presence of a model (Bandura& Huston, 1961). The experiment helped bring forth Bandura’s idea of modeling. In the later parts of the essay, we will attempt to identify and analyse the factors that affects aggression in children mainly by adopting the Social Learning theory.

In today’s day and age where mass media plays an influential role in our society, aggressive behaviours have become more rampant. Nearly all of us are routinely exposed to murder, beatings, and sexual assault the moment we turn on our televisions. The easy accessibility to such materials will cause significant increase in a child’s aggressiveness through the brief exposures

to violent television or movie scenes (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001).

According to Bandura (1983), children learn behaviour by observing others, both directly in real life and vicariously through the media. The most effective way to teach a child a certain behaviour is to demonstrate the behaviour and get the child to model it – exactly what television does.

Bushman and Huesmann conducted an experiment in 2001 to analyse the short-term and long-term effects for aggressive behaviour on adults and children. Participants were exposed to violent media such as television, movies, video games, music and comic books. The results were measured according to their aggressive behaviour, aggressive thoughts, angry feeling and physiological arousal. Their hypothesis was to test if the short-term effects would be greater for adults and long-term effects would be greater for children. As expected, the short-term effects of violent media were greater for adults than for children whereas the long-term effects were greater for children than for adults. This experiment allows for one to draw the conclusion that children observe and learn from what they see on television and with the violence depicted in mass media, children soon start to form their own beliefs that aggression is appropriate and continue to imitate and behave aggressively. What exactly is at play that causes a child to model what they see on television? It is the cognitive processes (i. e. attention and retention) that are in play in observational learning and this modifies a child's interpretation of a model's behaviour and affects how the information is stored and retained in the child (Strasburger, 2004). The more they are exposed to violent forms of media, the greater at risk they are of acquiring and adopting aggressive behaviour.

Another factor that will affect aggression in children is the exposure to violence on the streets, in their homes or from their peers. The environment, including surroundings and the people around plays an important role in shaping a child. Having a conducive growing and learning environment is important in the personality development of a child. Children are most likely to display signs of aggression if they come from broken families with abusive or violent parents. With constant exposure to an abusive or violent family environment, a child adopts the mentality that being aggressive is the norm and will be carried through their life. Hoffman (1960) studied parental discipline techniques and found that unqualified power affirmation or a high degree of external coercive pressure by parents produced a need on children to be assertive toward others. It was discovered during the study that using of highly coercive approaches produces frustration, tension and fear in the child, which leads to the child having a misperception of the effectiveness of power. As we examined earlier, children tend to imitate what they see and hear. If they are able to imitate what they see in the mass media, will there a greater chance that children will imitate in the footsteps of their parents. Eron studied in 1972 that a child's preference for televised violence at age of eight led to aggressive behavior at age 13. Since actual exposure to parental violence may be a more powerful influence than television, its effects are more directly learned at a faster rate and will be developed further in their adolescent years. This clearly explains how acts of aggression are carried through from one generation to another due to modeling in the footsteps of their parents' behaviour. A family environment and the upbringing of a child contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development.

The main point that the essay attempts to put across through the two factors that was identified and analysed is that aggressive behaviour can be adopted most easily through modeling. Constant exposure to an aggressive stimulus (e. g. violent films, abusive parents, etc.) will increase the risk of a child being aggressive in the long run. Children are unable or still in the process of learning to make meaning the world based on their everyday experiences. The most natural way of learning for them is through the simple act of imitation. In order to avoid undesirable consequences (e. g. hate crimes, bullying, etc.) in the long run, children require the upmost protection from the exposure to violence. Whose role is it then to ensure that a child is protected from such harmful stimulus? Parents and teachers who come in contact with the child the most should take on the responsibility. It is important that a child is educated that his or her perception of imitating violence is skewed. An act of violence seen in a television show or as depicted in a video game is not realistic, justified or rewarding. The child needs to be informed that by imitating in the footsteps, there are undesirable consequences that will arise. It is about the beliefs and attitudes that a child forms that parents and educators who come in close contact with the child need to be most aware of. As further emphasised by Strasburger (2004), “ the changes in how the child perceives the world from viewing violence and the beliefs about aggression that the child acquires from viewing violence are likely to influence the child’s behavior in the long-term”. The first step can be taken by schools to not shun away small signs of aggression in a child. The child should seek counselling or treatment to help deal or cope with their aggressive nature before it is too late. The school can be an outlet to the necessary agencies that can help a child deal with

aggression before it is too late. Aggression is not an incurable disease as it is more often learnt from external stimulus and carried through the life of an individual.