

Critically evaluate two theories of aggression



There are three types of aggression. Hostile aggression is to do something aggressive and get some sort of satisfaction from it, such as, planning someone's murder or robbing a bank. You get some sort of emotional reward from it. Instrumental aggression is basically to act in an aggressive way but without aiming to hurt the target, such as, fighting for survival in a war. Relational aggression is behaviour that is intended to damage another person's peer relationships, such as spreading rumours.

The two theories of aggression, I have been focusing on, have both been subject to controversy since they were carried out; the ethics, relevance and reliability of the studies have been questioned.

The first study I am going to evaluate is the Frustration-Aggression theory (Dollard, Miller and Doob et al 1939). This theory is based on the opinion that all aggression comes from frustration and that all frustration leads to aggression. For this hypothesis to be plausible, the definition of the word 'frustration' needs to be very broad.

An example of the Frustration-Aggression theory would be, if your boss have mistreated you at work and told you that you're not pulling your weight at the company (when you believe you are), and there was nothing you could do because they're the boss, and you're the employee. Later, you meet your friend for lunch, and your friend talks about how good their day has been so far, and you suddenly stand up off your chair, it falls back, and you start yelling at your friend about how selfish, and full of themselves they are.

This shows that you have been frustrated from the situation at work with your boss, and then you become even more frustrated when you find out

that your friend is having a far better day than you and you can't keep it in any longer so you release aggression in the form of shouting in a loud voice.

To a certain extent this theory is relatively acceptable as it is easy to understand how it was come up with as we've all been frustrated and tried to release the tension/feelings that are caused by it in whichever way you choose to express it, whether it's verbally- such as yelling) or physically- such as punching a wall.

However, the theory implies that all aggression is caused by frustration, whereas I know in certain cases this is not the case. For example, if a family member or close friend dies, you are obviously very upset and you may need to release your feelings in an aggressive way such as shouting, to ultimately calm you down. If you think about that situation closely, you could say that the depression has actually come from being frustrated that you cannot see a person you love again, which has ended up in you using aggression to cure the frustration that has developed inside you.

A weak link in the Frustration-Aggression theory is that the fact that the theory doesn't take into the consideration that everyone is different. It states that ALL frustration leads to aggression, no matter what kind of person you are. It is true that I have come across people in my life who do need to release some sort of aggression when they become frustrated and I understand where Dollard, Miller and Doob were coming from when they published this theory, but I for one do not become aggressive every time that I become frustrated. I can think of a couple of occasions where I have been frustrated and not had to scream at the top my voice or know down a

brick wall with my fists, such as missing the last bus home and having to call a taxi instead, costing me 10 times the price I would have paid if I had gotten to the bus station 30 seconds earlier than I did! Another example could be the time I pulled my hamstring in the warm up before the first game of the 2002/2003 football season, I ended up missing the first 11 games of a 29 game season. There are two examples I have been frustrated and not acted in an aggressive way afterwards.

Maybe those two examples aren't times when I have felt frustrated... What if they are just times when I have felt the feeling of annoyance...

' the feeling that accompanies an experience of being thwarted in attaining your goals'

Frustration [Define. com]

' the psychological state of being irritated or annoyed'

Annoyance [Define. com]

The definitions show that there is a very fine line between feeling frustrated and feeling annoyed which makes it very difficult to make out if you can be feel one or the other or that they come hand in hand with one another. If you are able to feel frustrated without being annoyed, then I would believe that frustration is a step further than being annoyed, in which case it would be very difficult to tell when you are suffering from the feeling of frustration and when you have the feeling of annoyance. If this is the case than the theory is a lot more valid and actually makes me wonder whether I have yet to suffer from frustration, and if that were to be the case, it is understandable why I

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have not been very aggressive in my life. On the other hand, if frustration and annoyance come hand in hand with one another, the theory starts to lose its validity as I have felt the feeling of annoyance and not acted aggressively afterwards.

The main problem with this theory is the fact that there are no experiments that prove it. The closest study was one which involved members of the public standing in line waiting to enter a room and a man was instructed to cut in front different people at different points in the que. The findings from the study were that people that were further forward in the line showed greater signs of aggression than those further back. The validity of this in terms of relation to the theory is very low and the fact that this is the closest study that relates to the theory means that the reliability should be questioned. Another problem is determining what frustration actually consists of.

The second theory that I am going to look at is the Social Learning Theory, Bandura 1973. This theory was brought about due to people questioning how people learn to be aggressive in the first place.

“ Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.”

Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory, 1977

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An example that would fit into Bandura's theory would be; a young child aged 7, lives in an environment where he often hears a couple shout and hit one another. The next day he goes to his football match and yells at another young boy and pushes him over in the mud.

This shows that children don't just only learn how to talk and walk through imitation of adults, but they also learn aggressive motions too.

There had been a lot on controversy in a study, in 1961, which Bandura carried out whilst developing this theory, such as, was it ethically acceptable to allow such young children to be subject to witnessing violent behaviour, whether or not a bobo doll was a valid substitution for another human being and of course whether the reasoning for hitting the doll was just because it looked fun!

Bandura had 2 young adults (models) show aggressive behaviour towards a bobo doll. The aggressive actions were seen by 72 young children, 36 of each gender. Once they had witnessed the event, the adults left the room and the children were then left to play. In the play room, of course, were several observers with clipboards and pens in, a brand new bobo doll, a few little hammers and as well as other less attractive toys. Most of the children imitated the adults without rewards.

Bandura ended up doing many variations on the study such as;

Models were rewarded or punished in a variety of ways.

Kids were rewarded for their imitations.

Models were changed to be less attractive or less prestigious, and so on.

Responding to criticism that bobo dolls were supposed to be hit

He even did a film of a model hitting a real clown. When the children went into another room, there was another live clown... They proceeded to punch him, kick him, hit him with little hammers, and so on.

All these variations allowed Bandura to establish that in order for effective modelling to take place the following conditions must occur:

Attention - various factors increase or decrease the amount of attention paid. Includes distinctiveness, affective valence, prevalence, complexity, functional value. One's characteristics (e. g. sensory capacities, arousal level, perceptual set, past reinforcement) affect attention.

Retention - remembering what you paid attention to. Includes symbolic coding, mental images, cognitive organization, symbolic rehearsal, motor rehearsal

Reproduction - reproducing the image. Including physical capabilities, and self-observation of reproduction.

Motivation - having a good reason to imitate. Includes motives such as past (i. e. traditional behaviourism), promised (imagined incentives) and vicarious (seeing and recalling the reinforced model)

[[http://www. learning-theories. com/social-learning-theory-bandura. html](http://www.learning-theories.com/social-learning-theory-bandura.html)]

However, it is hard to know whether without children hearing/seeing aggressive behaviour, if they are still able to show aggression as I am unable to know whether or not a child has been subject to aggressive content. If we presume a child has not been involved in hearing/seeing any aggressive behaviour, would the outcome of this situation still occur..?

Two young children are at playschool and one is playing with a toy that the other wants to play with, so the other child snatches the toy but the other child tries to keep it by pulling it back towards him/her making the other child fall over...

In my opinion I still believe this would happen if the child had not witnessed any aggressive activity in their life, which leads me to question whether or not the Social Learning Theory is 100% accurate.

The theory itself, in many people's opinion is that it is one of the most important in recent history. This is because the theory actually makes a lot of sense because we all know that young children copy their adults to learn skills such as walking, talking and eating- so why not aggression? This makes the theory highly viable.

To conclude, I believe that the Social Learning Theory is the theory that most successfully explains behaviour. The Frustration, Aggression Theory is an interesting angle to take too, but ultimately, I feel because I believe that there are other ways of becoming aggressive other than frustration, such as depression and annoyance; Bandura's theory is more accepted. I also feel that it is possible to be aggressive when you are just angry, it is a normal

human emotion that you can show without feeling frustrated and should be looked upon that way.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory is, in my opinion, very valid and reliable, due to the fact that children can imitate many things from learning to ride a bike, to leaving the vegetables on the side of their plates if an elder sibling does the same- so why not aggression. This was proved during the bobo doll experiment, and even though the study does have its flaws, I believe it still gives a good impression on how prone children are to copying their elders to learn the many behaviours there are in human life.