

# Outline and evaluate two social psychological theories of aggression

[Experience](#), [Anger](#)



## OUTLINE AND EVALUATE TWO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF

**AGGRESSION** The first psychological theory of aggression is the social learning theory. This uses the principles of Bandura's Bobo Dolls experiment which involved children observing aggressive and non-aggressive adults and then acting themselves. Those in the aggressive condition displayed aggression whilst the other children showed virtually no aggression. The four conditions which have been found to be effective for social learning are: attention; retention; reproduction; and motivation. For social learning observation is inevitably a key aspect, but Bandura suggests that children learn only by observing models with whom they identify and if the model is in a position of power. Bandura also said that social learning requires children to have mental representations of events in their social environment. A term synonymous with social learning theory is vicarious, or indirect, reinforcement. This is used to describe how a child learns the consequences of aggressive behaviour by observing others being reinforced or punished; through which a child learns what is considered appropriate and effective conduct and whether or not behaviours are worth repeating. There are two conditions on which the production of behaviour depends. First is maintenance through direct experience because a child is more likely to repeat behaviour if they have been rewarded for it previously. Second is self-efficacy expectancy because alongside learning aggressive outcomes children learn the confidence to be aggressive and a child who has failed at aggression in the past is less likely to use aggression. Therefore to be aggressive a child needs a high sense of self-efficacy since having self belief to do something means a larger chance of it being done. Strengths of the

social learning theory include the role of vicarious learning since, unlike operant conditioning, social learning theory can explain aggression in the absence of direct reinforcement since at no point were children directly rewarded for any action in Bandura's Bobo Doll study. The second strength is that social learning theory can explain individual differences and context-dependent learning. Additionally, social learning has face validity since we can see evidence for the theory. Also, social learning theory has the strength of application since it can explain other antisocial behaviours. Furthermore, social learning theory has many implications since it focused society's attention on the power of the media. Moreover, social learning is supported by cultural differences since there is little aggression among! Kung San of the Kalahan Desert where there is an absence of aggressive models. There is also research support for social learning theory, firstly for the role of punishment since it was found that learning takes place regardless of outcome but production is linked only to reinforcement. Second is applicability to adults since Phillips found that SLT applies to adults too as after a major boxing match daily homicide rates in the US almost always increase. Weaknesses of the social learning theory include the imposed ethic since Bandura's Bobo Doll study used a Western researcher in a Western country which limits the extent to which its findings can be generalised to other cultures. The second weakness is determinism since social learning theory presents learning to be a passive absorption of behaviour. Another weakness is that social learning theory ignores biological factors. The final weakness is that there is the issue of demand characteristics in Bandura's Bobo Doll study since a young girl was heard saying on her way to

participate in Bandura's research "look mum, there is the doll we have to hit". This suggests that Bandura's findings may have been affected by factors other than the independent variable, thus having implications for the strength of Bandura's findings. The second psychological theory of aggression is deindividuation. Deindividuation theory is based on the classic crowd theory of Gustave Le Bon that in a crowd the combination of anonymity, suggestibility and contagion means that a collective mind takes possession of the individual causing loss of self-control and the individual becomes capable of acting against personal or social norms. Deindividuation itself is therefore a psychological state characterised by lowered self-evaluation or concerns about evaluation by others which leads to behaviour which would normally be inhibited by norms. Deindividuation occurs in groups and contributing factors include anonymity and altered consciousness. The same conditions can increase prosocial behaviours, for example religious gatherings, but the focus of deindividuation theory has been on antisocial behaviour. Research on deindividuation includes research on anonymity. For example, in one study females gave electric shocks to aid learning and in the deindividuated condition (hoods and no names given) the participants shocked the learners for twice as long as the individuated condition showing that anonymity increases aggression. Also, in a game of handball the players in uniform played more consistently and more aggressively than those in everyday clothes showing that a uniform that gives anonymity increases aggression. Research also focuses on the faceless crowd since it has been found that the bigger the mob, the more savage the killing and also that when a crowd watching a potential suicide jump is

deindividuated baiting is more likely to occur. An alternate theory is that reduced self-awareness and not anonymity leads to deindividuation because if an individual submerges themselves in a group they may lose focus becoming less privately self-aware and therefore less able to regulate their own behaviour. Commentary on deindividuation includes the importance of local group norms since rather than deindividuation automatically increasing the incidence of aggression, any behaviour produced could be a product of local group norms. For example, when Zimbardo's prison experiment was repeated but the participants were made anonymous, those dressed as Ku Klux Klansmen felt that aggressive behaviour was more appropriate than those dressed as nurses. Second is the lack of support for deindividuation since a study found that disinhibition and antisocial behaviour aren't more common in large groups and anonymous settings. Neither was there much evidence that deindividuation is associated with reduced self-awareness, or that reduced self-awareness increases disinhibition of aggressive behaviour. The third piece of commentary is on prosocial consequences of deindividuation since it was found that deindividuation can lead to anti or prosocial behaviour depending on situational factors. When prosocial environment cues were present, deindividuated participants were more altruistic and less antisocial than the control group. Deindividuation's desirable effects can be found through seeking help with mental health problems under deindividuated chatrooms compared to individuated appointments with health professionals. Another piece of commentary is gender differences since males are more likely to be aggressive when deindividuated. The final piece of commentary is the existence of cultural

differences since it has been found that cultures that change their appearance, for example through the use of war paints, are more brutal in war. ( Word count 1101 )