15.3 Social Psychological Explanations of Aggression

AQA 7182 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Name one study/researcher linked to de-individuation and state its relevance.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Outline the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard et al., 1939).

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

3 Outline Social Learning Theory as an explanation for human aggression.

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

4 Evaluate the frustration-aggression hypothesis with three developed points.

(Total for Question 4 is 6 marks)

5 Evaluate de-individuation research with two developed points.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Discuss social psychological explanations of aggression, comparing frustration-aggression, SLT and de-individuation.

(Total for Question 6 is 16 marks)

7 Explain vicarious reinforcement and self-efficacy in SLT and their effects on aggression.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Explain anonymity and reduced self-awareness mechanisms in de-individuation.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

9 Apply frustration-aggression, SLT and de-individuation to Callum's behaviour at a football match.

(Total for Question 9 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · 15.3 Social Psychological Explanations of Aggression

Question 1

identifies Zimbardo (e.g. the Stanford Prison Experiment) or a classic de-individuation study oe	**B1**
states its relevance briefly, e.g. used as an example of how taking on roles or being in a group can reduce personal restraint and increase aggressive or abusive behaviour oe	**B1**

Answer: Zimbardo is commonly cited; his work is used to illustrate how role taking and group contexts can reduce personal restraint and increase aggressive or abusive behaviour.

Question 2

states that frustration occurs when a goal is blocked or thwarted oe	**B1**
states that frustration creates a drive or readiness to behave aggressively oe	**B1**
links frustration to an increased likelihood of aggressive behaviour, not necessarily directed at the original source oe	**B1**

Answer: Frustration occurs when a goal is blocked; this creates a readiness to behave aggressively, so frustration increases the likelihood of aggressive behaviour.

Question 3

states that aggression is learned through observation of others oe	**B1**
identifies imitation and modelling as key processes oe	**B1**
mentions vicarious reinforcement, where observing others being rewarded increases the likelihood of copying aggressive behaviour oe	**B1**

Answer: SLT says aggression is learned by observing and imitating others; people are more likely to copy aggressive models, especially if the model is seen to be rewarded, a process known as vicarious reinforcement.

Question 4

identifies limitation: aggression sometimes occurs without clear prior frustration oe	**M1**
explains why this is a problem for the theory, e.g. spontaneous or premeditated aggression that lacks an antecedent blocked goal is not accounted for by the hypothesis oe	**A1**
identifies limitation: the original hypothesis is too simple and requires moderating variables such as the intensity of frustration, the presence of cues, or individual differences oe	**M1**
explains development, e.g. later researchers added role of environmental cues and cognitive appraisal, showing the hypothesis alone does not fully predict when aggression will occur oe	**A1**
offers supporting empirical counter-evidence or qualification, e.g. research showing frustration does not always produce aggression and other factors mediate the response oe	**M1**
explains impact, e.g. the mixed empirical support reduces the explanatory power of the frustration-aggression hypothesis as a sole explanation for aggressive behaviour oe	**A1**

Answer: The hypothesis is limited because aggression can and does happen without prior frustration, and the original account needed additional variables such as cues, appraisal and individual differences to explain when frustration leads to aggression; empirical research offers mixed support, weakening its claim as a comprehensive explanation.

Question 5

identifies methodological limitation: many studies use artificial lab settings or contrived tasks that limit ecological validity oe	**M1**
explains why this matters, e.g. behaviour in simulated anonymity may not match behaviour in real crowd settings with social norms and consequences oe	**A1**
identifies ethical limitation: experiments that induce strong aggressive behaviour or distress pose ethical concerns about protection of participants oe	**M1**
explains consequence, e.g. ethical constraints limit the intensity of aggression researchers can study, so results may underrepresent real aggressive outcomes or rely on proxy measures oe	**A1**

Answer: De-individuation research often relies on artificial tasks that reduce ecological validity, and ethical constraints limit the extent to which real aggression can be induced or observed, both of which weaken causal claims that anonymity alone causes aggression.

Question 6

Level 4 Knowledge of the social psychological explanations is accurate and detailed. The answer shows thorough, well-developed evaluation, interacting evidence, methodological and ethical critique, and clear comparison between explanations. Application to scenarios or theoretical integration is well developed. The response is well structured and uses specialist terminology precisely.	**13-16**

Level 3 Knowledge is clear and mostly accurate. Discussion includes evaluation and some interaction between theory and evidence, with attention to methodology and ethics. Comparison between explanations is present but may be uneven. Application and judgement are present but not fully developed. Specialist terminology is used appropriately.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge is present but limited or partially inaccurate. Evaluation is superficial or one sided, and comparisons between explanations are minimal. Some relevant evidence or methodological points may be missing. The answer lacks depth and organisation, and specialist terminology is used inconsistently.	**5-8**
Level 1 Very limited knowledge and understanding. Little or no evaluation. Comparisons are absent. The response may be fragmentary, poorly organised, and show little use of appropriate terminology.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Frustration-aggression hypothesis: blocked goals create frustration which produces an aggressive impulse; later revisions include displacement and the role of environmental cues in triggering aggression.
- AO1: Social Learning Theory (Bandura): aggression is learned through observation, modelling and imitation, particularly when observers see models rewarded (vicarious reinforcement); cognitive mediators such as self-efficacy determine whether observed behaviour is enacted.
- AO1: De-individuation: in crowds or groups people may lose individual identity, show reduced private and public self-awareness and feel anonymous, lowering restraint and increasing the likelihood of aggressive acts.
- AO2: Apply theories to examples: frustration may explain displaced aggression when direct retaliation is blocked; SLT explains how observed aggressive behaviour in peers or media can be imitated, especially with vicarious reinforcement and increased self-efficacy; de-individuation explains how anonymity and crowd dynamics remove inhibitions.
- AO3: Strengths and evidence: Bandura's laboratory work provides controlled evidence for modelling and vicarious reinforcement; frustration-aggression has face validity and plausible mechanisms such as displacement and cue-triggering; de-individuation links well to observational accounts of crowd violence.
- AO3: Limitations and mixed evidence: frustration is neither necessary nor sufficient for aggression, because aggression can occur without prior frustration and not all frustration leads to aggression; empirical support for SLT is mixed between lab and field studies, with ecological validity issues and potential confounds in natural settings; de-individuation studies often use artificial tasks and face ethical limits, and alternative explanations such as emergent group norms or social identity processes may better explain crowd aggression.
- AO3: Methodological and ethical critiques: lab studies may lack ecological validity, field studies struggle with causality, and ethical constraints limit realistic investigation of severe aggression. Measures used as proxies for aggression may not generalise to serious violent behaviour.
- AO3: Integration and nuance: social psychological explanations capture situational and social learning influences and can be complementary rather than mutually exclusive, for example frustration creating arousal that is then shaped by observed models and by crowd anonymity. Individual differences and cognitive appraisal mediate outcomes.
- AO3: Conclusion: an informed judgement might argue that social psychological explanations explain many forms of everyday aggressive behaviour and escalation in crowds, but they are incomplete as sole explanations of all aggression; best account comes from integrating frustration, learning mechanisms and situational group processes while recognising methodological limits and the role of dispositional and biological factors outside the scope of this question.

Question 7

defines vicarious reinforcement: learning to perform a behaviour after observing a model being rewarded for it oe **M1**

explains that vicarious reinforcement increases the likelihood of imitating aggressive behaviour because observers see benefits or lack of punishment for the model oe **A1**

defines self-efficacy: a persons belief in their ability to perform a behaviour or control outcomes oe **M1**

explains that high self-efficacy in aggression means a person feels capable of using aggression successfully, making them more likely to act aggressively after observing a model oe **A1**

Answer: Vicarious reinforcement is learning from seeing a model rewarded, which makes imitation of aggressive acts more likely; self-efficacy is the observers belief in their ability to carry out behaviours, so greater self-efficacy for aggression makes imitation more likely because the observer believes they can succeed.

Question 8

explains anonymity: when individuals feel anonymous they expect lower likelihood of personal negative consequences, reducing inhibitions against aggression oe **M1**

develops why this matters, e.g. anonymity weakens social controls and fear of disapproval, so aggressive impulses are more likely to be acted on oe **A1**

explains reduced self-awareness: attention shifts away from internal standards and personal values, so behaviour is guided more by immediate situational cues oe **M1**

develops the point, e.g. less self-evaluation means less guilt or shame about aggressive acts, increasing the probability of aggression in the moment oe **A1**

Answer: Anonymity reduces concern about personal consequences and social censure, lowering inhibitions and making aggression more likely; reduced self-awareness shifts attention away from personal standards so people act on situational cues without self-monitoring, increasing aggressive acts.

Question 9

applies frustration-aggression: Callum was blocked from retaliating against the rival fan, creating frustration which was displaced onto the available target (hoarding) oe **M1**

develops application, mentioning that barriers and stewards prevented direct attack, so aggression was redirected to the hoarding as a safe outlet oe **A1**

applies SLT: the crowd cheering and any observed aggressive acts by others could serve as models, and if aggressive acts appear rewarded or condoned, Callum is more likely to imitate or escalate aggression oe **M1**

develops application, e.g. seeing others act aggressively or receive no sanction could act as vicarious reinforcement, increasing Callum's likelihood of aggressive behaviour oe **A1**

applies de-individuation: scarves obscuring faces and crowd cheering increase anonymity and reduce self-awareness, lowering restraint and making violent action more likely oe **M1**

develops application, linking anonymity and reduced self-awareness to the crowd context which permits Callum to act without feeling personally accountable oe **A1**

Answer: Frustration-aggression: Callum was prevented from confronting the rival fan, so frustration was displaced onto the hoarding. SLT: the crowd environment and visible aggressive acts serve as models and possible vicarious reinforcement, encouraging imitation or escalation. De-individuation: obscured faces and cheering create anonymity and reduced self-awareness, lowering restraint so Callum felt able to act aggressively.