

EVALUATING RESEARCH INTO AGGRESSION IN SPORT

Ethics

Research involving aggression is likely to have ethical problems. Both the Bandura and the Berkowitz and Le Page studies can be considered to be unethical as they provide the opportunity for participants to display aggression. In the Bandura study the participants were young children and there is no mention of parental consent being given. The children were exposed to an aggressive adult, which may have been distressing, they were aroused by having toys taken away from them and were then given the opportunity to imitate the aggression. The possibility of long-term harm to these children is a cause for concern in this study.

In the Berkowitz and Le Page study the participants were angered by being given electric shocks and were then allowed to vent their anger on another person.

Ecological Validity

Both the Bandura and the Berkowitz and LePage studies are laboratory experiments which typically have low ecological validity. In both studies the situations that the participants were put into were highly artificial and bear little relation to everyday life. As such it is questionable whether these studies actually tell us anything about real life aggression.

Nature – Nurture Debate

The Bandura study provides some evidence that aggression can be learned through observation and imitation, suggesting a nurture explanation. However the Daniels and Thornton study provides some support for an alternative explanation. The Instinct Approach suggests that we are naturally aggressive and that this aggression builds up inside us and requires some outlet. A legitimate outlet can be provided by sport, and so participation in sport should reduce aggression, as seen in the Daniels and Thornton study.

Usefulness /Practical Applications

As much sport includes aggression, research which tells us more about the causes of aggression, the conditions under which it is most likely to occur and how it can be controlled or reduced is likely to be useful. The Bandura study suggests that aggression can be learned through observation and imitation. This has particular relevance for sport as it provides many role models, particularly for children. The Berkowitz and LePage study suggests that aggression is most likely to occur when aggressive cues are present such as a hostile crowd or a rival player. The Daniels and Thornton study tells us that aggression can be reduced in a controlled way through participation in the martial arts.