Theories of Aggressive Behaviour 1: Social Learning

This activity will help you to:
- ❑ *Understand and describe the social learning theory of aggression*
- ❑ *Understand and recall research studies of aggressive behaviour*
- ❑ *Comment on whether research findings support or challenge theories*
- ❑ *Read complex psychological information*

The Social Learning Theory of Aggression

Social learning theory (SLT) states that aggressive behaviours are learned from the social environment. SLT uses a number of specialist terms, whose meaning you need to understand. These terms are:

- ❑ Environment
- ❑ Observation
- ❑ Model
- ❑ Mental representation of behaviour
- ❑ Imitation
- ❑ Observed consequences
- ❑ Vicarious reinforcement
- ❑ Vicarious punishment

Using a suitable source, find out and note down the meanings of each of these terms. Then, write an explanation of SLT that uses ach of these terms in context. Your explanation should include information about:

- ❑ How a person acquires aggressive behaviours
- ❑ What determines whether a person reproduces the aggressive behaviours they have acquired.

Research Studies of SLT and Aggression

A great number of research studies have been carried out looking at whether SLT is a good explanation of aggressive behaviour. Some important ones are:

- ❑ Bandura (1965) – laboratory study of observation and aggression
- ❑ Mead (1965) – anthropological study of aggression in three different societies
- ❑ Patterson et al (1989) – naturalistic study of aggression in children

Using a suitable source, find and read about the results of each of these studies. Then, produce a set of notes about research into SLT and aggression. Your notes **must**:

- ❑ Give a brief outline of the procedures, results and conclusions of each study
- ❑ State whether the findings support or challenge SLT

They **should**:

- ❑ Explain *why* the finding supports or challenges SLT

Evaluating the Social Learning Theory of Aggression (Extension Activity)

Below is a list of criticisms of some of the research you have been looking at. Read each criticism, and then write a short paragraph explaining the extent to which it limits the validity of the relevant study and hence the support for SLT.

Bandura's research was laboratory based, and may have been affected by demand characteristics.

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Mead has been accused of observer bias in her work.

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Goldstein (1994) conducted a twin study of aggressive behaviour in children. Correlations between aggression scores in MZ and DZ twins were assessed. Goldstein found a correlation of .4 for MZ and .04 for DZ twins.

1. What do Goldstein's results suggest about the causes of aggressive behaviour?
2. What implications does this have for the social learning theory of aggression?

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