Social Learning Theory And Aggression In Different Aged Athletes

Introduction

Social Learning Theory (SLT) which was theorized by Albert Bandura (1977), suggested that individuals learn from observing, imitating or modelling other people. SLT can be seen in many situations and contexts. However, this essay will highlight the SLT amongst athletes of different ages and their aggression levels.

Aggression can be defined as physical or verbal behaviour towards another person, potentially causing psychological or physical harm (Cambridge, n.d.). In sport, aggression is a trait that has both negative and positive effects on an athlete's performance (Morris,2013). There are two types of aggression which are most commonly present in athletes. Firstly, hostile aggression, which is the violent actions associated with anger and the need to dominate in a situation or over others (Morris, 2013). Secondly, instrumental aggression would be the violent behaviour to achieve a certain goal (Morris, 2013).

It is not only by the constant drills of a certain move, or increasing their physical abilities that athletes base their improvement on (Lee,2019). Watching other athletes in action, allows an individual to learn that specific skill and apply it to their own play (Lee, 2019). This ties back in conjunction with SLT. Do athlete besides learning strategies and fanciful moves from others also learn traits such as aggression in their sports?

Comparison of aggression levels between adolescence and adult athletes

Research was done to adolescent male athletes from different sporting backgrounds. Ziaee, Loftian, Amini, Mansournia and Memari (2012) found that aggression in contact sport athletes, such as judo, had as much aggression as non-athletes. They assessed these individuals by using the Adolescent Anger Rating Scale (AARS) questionnaire. Demographic data was also collected, such as the amount of trainings a week and the number of years they have played the sport (Ziaee et al, 2012). Findings show that non-contact sport athletes had the lowest aggression scores. This suggests that there could be no correlation between the kind of sports one plays and the aggression levels of each athlete. Hence, possibly ruling out the idea that contact sports makes one individual more aggressive than the other.

Similarly, another study conducted by Mashhoodi, Mokhtari and Tajik (2013) compared the aggression levels of adolescence and adult athletes. Both young and adult athletes were being assessed with the sport aggression questionnaire (Mashhoodi et al, 2013). There was some notable difference in the results acquired. Young athletes were appearing to be more aggressive compared to adult athletes (Mashhoodi, 2013). The mean scores for aggression were 27.3 and 32.3 for adults and adolescence respectively. With SLT in perspective, aggressive behaviour exhibited by adults is followed by the younger individuals as their role model (Mashhoodi, 2013). This is similar to athletes attempting to imitate their idols when they

play (Lee, 2019).

However, it is unsure whether younger athletes are aggressive due to learning these traits from someone older that they admire, or that they are affected by emotions and have less skills to control these emotions (Mashoodi, 2013). It is also seen by Liu et al (2012), that aggression is seemed to increase during the adolescent stages of life. Reason being that aggressive behaviour could be a way to show high social status in school, and adolescence would want to demonstrate their power or control over others out of fear of isolation or being unfavourable to peers (Liu, 2012).

This ties in back to SLT, where individuals start to imitate others. Athletes as they become more experienced in their chosen field, will learn to imitate these professional players. Skills and values wise. Another limitation affecting both studies would be that they did not take into consideration other cultural and social perspectives which could have an effect on the aggression of each individual (Ziaee et al, 2012).

The validity to compare both studies could be questioned. Both studies used different questionnaires which could be aimed at a different type of aggression. Hence, it is not possible to have one conclusion for both studies.

Aggression levels in adolescence athletes

Oproiu (2013), conducted a research on the relationship between sports and aggression amongst athletes, and concluded that aggressiveness is learned through learning. The study was evaluated based on the State Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI-2) questionnaire (Oproiu, 2013). This questionnaire is aimed to capture how anger is felt, expressed and controlled. Learned aggression in humans are based on imitating and modelling others at any age (Oproiu, 2013). This statement was also supported by Liu et al (2012), which concluded that aggressive behaviour could be learned and manifested across one’s lifespan. Results show that as adolescence extends their professional practice, the mean value of their aggression scale increases (Oproiu, 20213). This suggests that as one gets older and has more experience and opportunities learning in their chosen field, they would also start to assimilate aggressive behaviours from idols and models (Oproiu, 2013).

In a similar research design, Reza (2012) demonstrated that the type of sports done by student athletes did not have any difference on one’s aggression levels. Reza (2012), adopted a questionnaire approach to collect data and information. A demographic characteristic questionnaire and an Eysenck aggression questionnaire. The findings omit the idea that the athlete’s choice of sports affects one’s aggression levels. It was also discussed that the cause of aggression in these athletes could be because of their own instinct of aggression or the learning of aggressiveness (Reza, 2012). Children as young as the age of 6, would be able to start mimicking behaviours from their role models (Liu et al, 2012). Hence, young athletes would be able to start imitating violent behaviours from players they look up to, or from better players.

However, it is possible to question the validity of both research designs as this does not give a general representation of aggression in all athletes. To further explain, this research was done on national athletes, whom are more likely to feel pressurized to win for their country. Hence, they could be more aggressive due to the nature that they are being placed in. Another

limitation for both researches could be that it was only researched on males. Results could have differed if females were tested for their aggression levels as well (Reza, 2012).

Aggression levels in adult athletes

Rui Sofia and Jose Fernando A. Cruz (2017) conducted a study on unveiling anger and aggression in adult athletes. A Competitive Anger and Aggressiveness Scale (CAAS) was used to examined the anger and aggression levels of the athletes (Sofia & Cruz, 2017). According to the CAAS, juveniles had a higher mean compared to the adult athletes.. Hence, possibly indicating that adult athletes has lower levels of aggression compared to juveniles. This could be the result, as a more advanced and experienced athlete would be better at controlling their aggression and anger levels (Sofia & Cruz, 2017). This is also in accordance to SLT, whereby athletes can learn how to control their anger by learning from others who are able to do so.

In a similar fashion, the study conducted by Ahmadi, Besharat, Azizi and Larijani (2011) also showed homogenous results. A Tehran Multidimensional Anger Scale (TMAS) and Competitive Aggression Questionnaire (CAQ) was used to measure the anger and aggression of the athletes. The findings from these results were similar to Sofia and Cruz (2017) study whereby juvenile athletes were seen to be more aggressive compared to their older counterparts.

However, results obtained by Sofia and Cruz (2017) might not be reliable due to the fact that they relied heavily and solely on self-reports. This could leave space for biasness or exaggeration of the study. The lack of understanding emotional experiences each athlete has also affected the validity of the study (Sofia & Cruz, 2017). There was also a lack of gender bias samples within Besharat et al (2011) study. Hence, affecting the validity of both studies' conclusions.

Observations

It can be observed that majority of the studies being presented in this paper, has shown that younger athletes are more aggressive compared to the seniors. Factors such as affirmation and the lack of emotional control has been highlighted in the claims made above. However, it is to be believed that SLT does play into account for a juvenile's aggression. This claim was highlighted above as well.

It is further observed that the data gathered in these researches was done based on questionnaires which athletes had to answer. Aggression is relative to an individual, hence the reliability of such data could be questionable. What might seem to be aggressive to one player, could be deemed as passive play to another player. Hence, a more thorough research is warranted, and possibly giving strict guidelines and specific examples in these questionnaires so that athletes can answer accurately, making the results more reliable

Secondly, many of these research designs were similar as they only tested the aggression levels in various aged men, and not women. Athletes encompasses all gender identities, and hence women should be taken into consideration when conducting research about aggression in athletes. Thus, it is unfair to state that younger athletes are more aggressive than the older ones, as it is only the younger male athletes which were being probed at to make the above conclusion. If the juvenile males were certainly more aggressive compared to the females, then

there would be a new avenue formed for reasons why male adolescents are acting in such a way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social learning theory does have an effect on different aged athletes. Younger athletes are deemed to be more aggressive compared to older athletes. This could possibly be due to juveniles trying to imitate their seniors' aggression and play styles, while applying it to their own respective game. However, the validity of this conclusion can be questionable. Younger athletes lack the skills and experience to control their aggression and anger during games. They could also be encouraged or complimented by their coaches and teammates when playing aggressively. This is due to the fact that aggressive play could be seen as good performance. Younger athletes are always wanting to be seen as someone with potential and would want the approval of the people around them. On the other hand, adults who have more experienced in controlling their own anger, are less likely to show aggressive play. Many adult athletes would have had ample opportunities to learn and watch others play strategically rather than physically. This could potentially lead to less aggressive behaviours from the older individuals. Future research could be implemented by possibly considering the social and cultural factors around the athletes. How they were brought up and how their trainings are conducted. A more gender bias sample and less self-reported studies could also help benefit future studies. Different types of questionnaires were presented in the studies above and allowed a more thorough examination of aggression levels amongst different aged athletes.