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| **Theory …**Aggression is adaptive and promotes survivalAggression has a survival value to animals to help distribute individuals within a group to maximise efficiency (intraspecies aggression)Aggression occurs when a very specific stimulus (a sign stimulus) triggers an innate releasing mechanism. This in turn ‘releases’ a fixed action pattern, which is an innate stereotyped behaviour produced by every member of a species. | **Research support****Tinbergen (1951) *-*** male sticklebacks who will produce a fixed sequence of aggressive actions when another male enters its territory but the sign stimulus is not the male but rather the sight of its red underbelly. If this is covered up, there’s no attack. | **Strengths**Implications and applications for the research in the real world. E.g. legal age ratings on violent games and films.Access to computer games can have practical applications to child-rearing. For example, parents can be encouraged to limit the amount of time children are playing video games, especially for the young. | **Weaknesses** If instinctive inhibitions prevent the killing of own species according to ethologists, then it should only happen due to accident; however male lions and male chimpanzees kill more systematically (lions – cubs of other males; chimpanzees – members of another group) thus casting doubt on the claim that aggression may be ritualistic rather than real. |
| **….. further detail**The energy needed for this is called the action specific energy. This needs time to build up again after each ‘release’. An FAP can also be released if there is no sign stimulus, but the ASE is high enough.Some aggressive behaviour is ritualised in the form of threat displays. This makes actual aggression less likely.  | **Research support****Lorenz (1952) -**species who have evolved fearsome weapons (e.g. wolves’ teeth and jaws) must have instinctive inhibitions not to use these against their own species. A fighting wolf will expose its neck on submission and the fight stops so this must be instinctive inhibition. | **Strengths**Supported by cross-cultural examples. E.g. The Yanomamo of South America use chest pounding and club fighting to settle conflicts and eskimos use song duels to settle grudges and disputes. This suggests that even in aggressive cultures rituals may be used to prevent injury or death | **Weaknesses**FAPs not innate and can be modified by environmental factors. E.g. SLT. There are also individual differences in levels of aggressive response to the same stimuli, suggesting the behaviour is not universal as the theory suggests.Difficult to generalise findings from animals, as different genetics and not representative of humans. |
| **Theory ….**In the EEA aggressive behaviour allowed individuals to acquire and protect resources (food, water) that increased their likelihood of survival, and thus the likelihood of passing on their genes (natural selection). Aggression also conferred high status, which made males more attractive due to the resources they had access to (sexual selection) | **Research support****Miller (1980) –** Conducted a meta-analysis of studies into battered women. Found that 55% women cited jealousy as the main cause of the aggression they experienced towards them from their spouses.**Daly & Wilson (1985)** – Looked at homicide rates in marriage between in Canada. 58 / 214 cases of murder motivated by sexual jealousy. Also found significantly higher rates of infanticide by step parent vs. genetic parent of offspring. | **Strengths**Does account for why men are more aggressive than women – but then so do other theories (genetics, testosterone etc.) | **Weaknesses**Reductionist – ignores significant empirical support for role of social factors such as SLT. Therefore falls too heavily on ‘nature’ side of debate, as ignores the role of ‘nurture’.Applications of explanations/findings to relationship therapy and to an understanding of contemporary relationships. |
| **….. further detail**Daley and Wilson (1988) also suggest men want to avoid ‘cuckoldry’. Aggression could therefore be a very useful male mate-retention strategy (deter females from having sex with anyone else and deter potential male rivals) in response to imagined or actual sexual infidelity. | **Research support****Buss et al (1992)** - cross-cultural questionnaire investigating a hypothetical situation where a partner cheated. Found gender differences in attitudes to infidelity, with males being far more upset by sexual infidelity and females by emotional infidelity. **Chagnon (1988)** – Successful male warriors in traditional societies tend to have more sexual partners and children. | **Strengths**Practical applications – In relationship counselling, teaching people who respond aggressively to jealousy that it is a naturally occurring phenomena and that they can implement strategies to control and overcome it, is often effective. | **Weaknesses**Doesn’t explain individual differences in aggression. E.g. Doesn’t explain why all men are not violent towards partners, nor why in some cases of warfare there are exceptional levels of unnecessary cruelty. Might be explained simultaneously through the process of deindividuation. Explanation is post-hoc: and, hard to test empirically as can’t go back to EEA, so lack scientific validity. |