

Discuss one or more evolutionary explanations of group display in humans. (8 and 16 marks)



Evolutionists argue that aggressive group displays emerged among our distant ancestors due to the fact that they increased their fitness in some way. Nowadays, similar situations trigger the same response even though the original function of the behaviour may no longer be relevant.

One example of group displays which occurs during sports is Xenophobia. This is the fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners. Natural selection would have seemed to favour those genes that caused humans to form 'in-groups' and be intolerant to outsiders as this would have protected them from attack.

A further example is warfare. Battle would have been adaptive as men compete for mates and those who do well in war would have been rewarded with access to females. Males who showed aggression in battle would have been more likely to share the benefits associated with status, which would increase reproductive fitness. Additionally, group membership in warfare would give the individual greater chances of surviving.

Research has found support for Xenophobia. Foldesi found there to be an intolerance towards outsiders in a study of Hungarian crowds, with violent incidents based on xenophobic attitudes being displayed. This clearly shows supporting evidence, however the study did only use Hungarian crowds and so its generalisability must be questioned, which could affect the extent to which the evidence supports all displays of xenophobia worldwide.

Nevertheless, research into xenophobia has had practical real-life applications as it has led to many football clubs taking steps to minimise its influence.

As for warfare, it has been found that military men had greater sex appeal but only if they had been observed showing bravery in combat. They also tended to have more sexual partners and more children, suggesting a reproductive benefit. These results show that men in warfare nowadays still possess the reproductive advantage that battle held to our ancestors and shows that men in warfare are desired as they possess higher status and can provide more resources.

However, explanations of warfare can be criticised for being gender biased. This is because it does not adequately reflect the behaviour of women since women would have less to gain from warfare and would have a lot to lose (e.g. loss of their reproductive capacity). Women's reproductive fitness is therefore not increased by warfare so the evolutionary approach cannot be generalised as it does.

As for the evolutionary explanation of group display as a whole, it cannot explain why crowds are not always aggressive, for example the Mela Hindu Festival which is a peaceful rally. The approach thus cannot provide a complete view into group displays and can be criticised as being reductionist.

Similarly, it cannot explain cultural differences. For example, the !Kung San tribe is a non-aggressive culture who view aggression in a negative light and so aggression is rare. This suggests that aggression may be learnt rather than an evolutionary response as the tribe demonstrates how, in the absence of any opportunity to learn aggression, it becomes rare.

Lastly, explanations based on mating success fail to explain the extreme cruelty that is found in many human conflicts that is absent among non-human species. For example, it cannot explain why humans torture their opponents even when they no longer pose a threat. Therefore aggression

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in warfare may be explained by other extraneous variables (such as deindividuation) which are unaccounted for by the evolutionary explanation, making research into it low in internal validity.