

Bandura et al (1961)

Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models

Background

Bandura proposed the Social Learning Theory which suggested that we learn through experiences in our environment, and they directly influence our behaviour. His theory focused on the roles of observation, imitation, modelling and vicarious reinforcement.

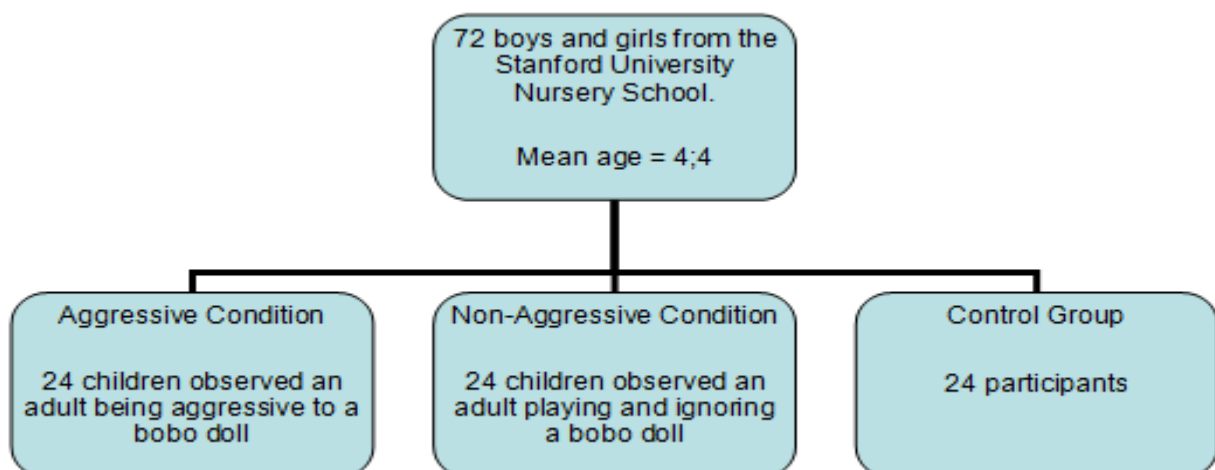
Aim

The aim of Bandura's experiment was to demonstrate that if children were witnesses to an aggressive display by an adult they would imitate this aggressive behaviour when given the opportunity.

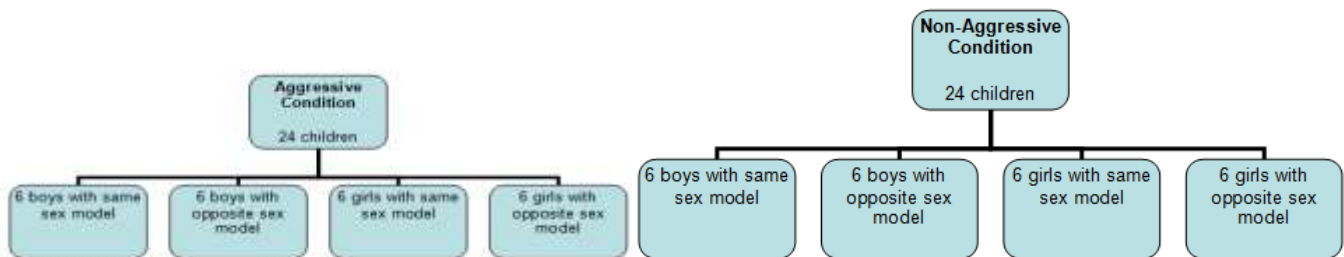
Sample

Bandura tested 36 boys and 36 girls aged between 37 to 69 months (mean = 4 years and 4 months). They were selected from Stanford University Nursery. The role models were one male adult and one female adult. The children were matched on the basis of their pre-existing aggressiveness. They did this by observing the children in the nursery and judged their aggressive behaviour on four 5-point rating scales. It was then possible to match the children in each group so that they had similar levels of aggression in their everyday behaviour. The experiment is therefore an example of a matched pairs design.

There were three main conditions – the aggressive condition, non-aggressive condition and the control group. The two conditions testing aggression are the experimental conditions and they are compared against the control group.



The children in the aggressive and non-aggressive condition were further subdivided by sex and the sex of the role model they were exposed to.



This complicated design therefore has three independent variables. The condition the children were exposed to (aggressive/ non-aggressive), the sex of the role model (male/ female) and the sex of the child (male/ female). The children were each tested individually.

Phase 1

In stage one of the experiment children were brought to the experimental room by the experimenter. The room was set out for play and the activities were chosen because they had been noted to have high interest for nursery school children. One corner was arranged as the child's play area, where there was a small table and chair, potato prints and picture stickers. After settling the child in its corner the adult model was escorted to the opposite corner of the room where there was a small table, chair, tinkertoy set, a mallet and a five foot inflatable Bobo doll. After the model was seated the experimenter left the experimental room.

- In the non-aggressive condition, the model ignored Bobo and assembled the tinkertoys in a quiet, gentle manner.
- In the aggressive condition the model began by assembling the tinkertoys, but after one minute turned to Bobo and was aggressive to the doll in a very stylised and distinctive way.

After ten minutes the experimenter entered and took the child to a new room which the child was told was another games room.

Phase 2

In stage two the child was subjected to 'mild aggression arousal'. The child was taken to a room with relatively attractive toys. As soon as the child started to play with the toys the experimenter told the child that these were the experimenter's very best toys and she had decided to reserve them for the other children.

Phase 3

The child was taken to the next room for stage three of the study where the child was told it could play with any of the toys in there. In this room there was a variety of both non-aggressive and aggressive toys. The child was kept in this room for 20 minutes during which time their behaviour was observed by judges through a one-way mirror. Observations were made at 5-second intervals therefore giving 240 response units for each child.

Three measures of imitation were obtained. The observers looked for responses from the child that were very similar to the display by the adult model. These were:

1. Imitation of physical aggression (for example, punching the doll in the nose)
2. Imitative verbal aggression (for example, repeating the phrases "Pow!" or "Sock him in the nose".
3. Imitative non-aggressive verbal responses (for example child repeats "He keeps coming back for more")

They also recorded other types of physical and verbal aggressive behaviours that were not complete imitations of the adult model:

The results enabled the researchers to consider

- (a) Which children imitate the models,
- (b) Which models the children imitate
- (c) Whether the children showed a general increase in aggressive behaviour or a specific imitation of the adult behaviours.

Results/ Findings

The main findings were.

1. The children in the aggressive model condition made more aggressive responses than the children in the non-aggressive model condition.
2. Boys made more aggressive responses than girls.
3. The boys in the aggressive model conditions showed more aggressive responses if the model was male than if the model was female.
4. The girls in the aggressive model conditions also showed more physical aggressive responses if the model was male but more verbal aggressive responses if the model was female; (However, the exception to this general pattern was the observation of how often they punched Bobo, and in this case the effects of gender were reversed).

The findings support Bandura's Social Learning Theory. That is, children learn social behaviour such as aggression through the process of observation learning - through watching the behaviour of another person.

Evaluation Points

- Generalisation of the sample
- Ethnocentrism
- Reliability
- Internal Validity
- Ecological Validity
- Ethics
- Applications to real life

