



Bandura et al (1961) ~ Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models

Extended Answer Exam Questions

1. The Learning Approach suggests that social learning helps to explain changes in behaviour; describe what Bandura (1961) was studying in his investigation.

(4 marks)

Bandura wanted to see if children would imitate the behaviour of role models they observe, particularly if they are acting aggressively. He selected a sample of 72 children from Stanford University Nursery (36 girls and 36 boys) who had an average age of 4.4 years. Each child was allocated into a condition either aggressive, non-aggressive or control group. They were matched on pre-existing levels of aggression which were rated by an observer from the experiment and their nursery school teacher to ensure that it was a fair enough test. In stage one; children were invited to observe a role model playing in a playroom which was filled with an array of different toys including a large inflatable Bobo doll, a mallet and some tinker toys. They simply watched the behaviour of the corresponding role model (aggressive male, non-aggressive male, aggressive female, non-aggressive female or nothing) for 10 minutes before moving to stage two. Here they were asked to wait without playing with any of the toys (as they were for the 'good' boys and girls). This was the mild aggressive arousal stage before the children were moved into the final stage where they were observed playing independently in the playroom. After 20 minutes here the experiment was over. The results were analysed to see if behaviour was different in any condition and whether the model had any effect on the child's subsequent behaviour.

2. In the Learning Approach researchers can test the effect of external influences in our environment and how these impact on real life behaviour. Outline the variables that were manipulated in Bandura's study to show this.

(8 marks)

In Bandura's study the external influences were the actions of the role model observed in the playroom and whether or not they had an effect on the behaviour of the children. These influences were either aggressive or non-aggressive as it was believed that children would be more likely to imitate the behaviour of an aggressive role model.

Bandura was able to manipulate a series of variables in his experiment in order to record imitative physical and verbal aggression in the children. The first variable was the action of the role model; if this was aggressive the model was instructed to play aggressively with the mallet and Bobo doll after a minute of entering the playroom. They were given standardised actions and verbal statements so that exact imitative behaviour could be measured. In the non-aggressive condition the model was asked to sit and play quietly with some tinker toys in the corner. If children were placed in the control condition, they did not see a role model, just an empty playroom. Another variable was the sex of the role model, here Bandura wanted to see the influence of male and female role models on children's behaviour. The final variable was the sex of the children themselves; would there be a difference in the behaviour of boys and girls. This was manipulated by splitting the children into individual conditions; 6 boys watched the male model in the aggressive condition, 6 girls watched the male model in the aggressive condition, 6 boys watched the female model in the aggressive condition and 6 girls watched the female model in the aggressive condition. This was the same split in the non-aggressive condition. In the control group there was no role model so the children did not need to be split into sub-groups. All three variables allowed Bandura to see the effect of imitation on children's subsequent behaviour.

