

Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961) 'Transmission of Aggression Through Imitation of Aggressive Models' Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology Vol 63

Aim: To demonstrate that children will imitate aggressive behaviour that they have witnessed in an adult.

Method: Laboratory Experiment

Participants: 72 children, 36 boys and 36 girls, aged between 37-69 months. One male adult and one female adult acted as the models.

Design: The experiment had 3 main conditions: a control group, an aggressive model condition and a non-aggressive model condition. In the aggressive and non-aggressive model conditions the children observed an adult playing with a set of children's toys. These groups were further sub-divided by the gender of the children and the gender of the adult model. Hence, the groups included were as follows:

- Control group (n=24)
- Aggressive model condition (n=24)
 - Boys with same-sex model (n=6)
 - Boys with opposite-sex model (n=6)
 - Girls with same-sex model (n=6)
 - Girls with opposite-sex model (n=6)
- Non-aggressive model condition (n=24)
 - Boys with same-sex model (n=6)
 - Boys with opposite-sex model (n=6)
 - Girls with same-sex model (n=6)
 - Girls with opposite-sex model (n=6)

Procedure: The children were all pre-tested and assessed for aggressiveness so that all groups could be matched in terms of how aggressive the children were. The children were all tested individually. The experiment consisted of three stages:

Stage 1: The child was put in the corner of a room with a set of interesting activities to complete. The adult model went to the opposite corner of the room and began playing with a set of children's toys including a mallet and a 5-foot Bobo doll. In the non-aggressive condition the adult played in a quiet, subdued manner, ignoring the Bobo, whilst in the aggressive condition, the adult played in a distinctively aggressive manner with the doll.

Stage 2: The child was subjected to 'mild aggression arousal' by being taken to a room with attractive toys, but after starting to play with them, being told that they were the experimenter's best toys that he was reserving for other children.

Stage 3: The child was taken to a room which contained a variety of both aggressive and non-aggressive toys including a 3-foot Bobo doll and a mallet.

The child was observed playing with the toys for 20 minutes through a one-way mirror. The observers recorded three measures of imitation including:

- Imitations of physical aggression
- Imitations of verbal aggression
- Imitations of non-aggressive verbal responses

Results:

- The children in the aggressive conditions performed more aggressive acts than those in the non-aggressive conditions.
- Boys performed more aggressive acts than girls.
- Boys in the aggressive conditions showed more aggression if the model was male.
- Girls in the aggressive conditions showed more physical aggression if the model was male but more verbal aggression if the model was female.

Further research

In a later experiment using the same format (Bandura 1965), the children in the aggressive conditions were divided into three groups following Stage 2 of the experiment. One went straight into the playroom, a second group saw the model being rewarded for their aggressiveness while a third group saw the model being punished. The results of this study showed that the children who saw the model being punished for aggression displayed significantly less aggression themselves than those who saw the model being rewarded or those who saw no consequences.