

SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH

Topic 1: The individual and the group.

Content: Social cognitive theory.

Key Idea: Social and cultural contexts influence individual and group behaviour.

KEY STUDY: *Bandura, Ross & Ross (1961). Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models.*

Links to

- **Development:** Influences on cognitive and social development – role of peers and play.

Background

Experiment that demonstrated that children observing aggressive acts committed by adults in one setting would reproduce those acts in another setting, through play, when the adult role model was absent. This was especially likely if the adult role model was the same sex as the child.

Aim

To investigate the extent to which children will imitate the aggressive behaviour of adult role models observed in one setting and then imitate that behaviour in another setting.

Participants

72 children (mean age four years), 36 males and 36 females, who attended Stanford University day nursery in the state of California, USA. Prior to the procedure nursery staff had rated the children as to their level of aggression by nursery staff to produce a 'matched triads' design. This design ensured that there were equal numbers of same-level aggressive children represented across the three conditions.

Procedure

The procedure consisted of three distinct phases:

- **Phase 1:** each child was taken to an experimental room where they observed either an aggressive, non-aggressive or no model (see conditions below). Each session lasted around 10 minutes. The aggressive condition involved the model performing distinctive aggressive behaviours towards a Bobo doll (a large doll that swings on a weighted base) repeated 3 times (to measure direct imitation) e.g. punching, kicking etc.
- **Phase 2:** the child was then taken to a room full of attractive toys. They were then told shortly after this that the toys were meant for another child and that they had to leave the room.
- **Phase 3:** The child was then taken to a third room filled with aggressive and non-aggressive toys, including a Bobo doll where they were left to play for 20 minutes while the researchers observed them from behind a one-way mirror. Measures were taken of physical and verbal aggression that was a direct imitation seen in the aggressive condition and also more generalised non-imitative aggressive behaviour.

PSYCHOLOGY SORTED: KEY RESEARCH TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

There were 3 conditions to the experiment:

1. **Aggressive model** – The model behaved aggressively towards the bobo doll. 6 female participants 6 male participants.
2. **Non-aggressive model** – The model behaved in a non-aggressive way. 6 female participants 6 male participants.
3. **Control group** - No model was present. 12 female participants, 12 male participants

There was an equal number of times in which a same sex model or opposite sex model was used per condition.

Results

Children in the aggressive condition produced more directly imitative acts of aggression towards the Bobo doll which was not seen in the non-aggressive or control conditions. There was more same-sex imitation of aggressive behaviour and boys overall showed more physical aggression than girls.

Conclusion

Aggression can be learned via a single exposure to the aggressive act and then imitated in another setting.

Evaluation of Bandura, Ross & Ross (1961)

Strengths

- ✓ The use of a 'matched triad' design means that this was a well-designed experiment that controlled for the confounding variable of individual differences in aggression.
- ✓ The findings of this study prompted a fierce debate (and a slew of other studies) on the role of TV violence and its effect on children, which has led to certain strictures being placed on what children should be exposed to via media channels.

Limitations

- X The findings are subject to some issues of validity: children tend to learn aggressive behaviour across time, from role models they are familiar with e.g. parents rather than in artificial settings observing strangers. It is also possible that the children experienced demand characteristics and that they only attacked the Bobo doll because that is what they thought was required of them.
- X The sample is too small and specific as to its demographic to be able to generalise from with any confidence.

Reference

Bandura, A., Ross, D., & Ross, S. A. (1961). Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63(3), pp. 575-582.