

Responding to Bandura's 'bobo doll' experiment

An EUGANGS case study

In the psychology module of the EUGANGS programme, students considered external influences on an individual's behaviour. Online resources, including publically available video footage, made accessing research and evidence in the field relatively easy. This case study illustrates how a video of Albert Bandura's 'bobo doll' experiment¹ was used to encourage students to consider the influence adult behaviour has on the developing brain of the child. The responses are those posted by students taking the online course.

Student task

Does watching violence make an individual violent? Albert Bandura carried out research in the 1960s to answer this question. He had some nursery age children watch an adult hit a 'bobo doll', while a control group of other children did not see the attacks. He then put the children alone in a room with the bobo doll to see how they behaved. Do you think there would have been a difference depending on whether the children had seen an adult hit the doll or not? Watch this to find out more, and note down what conclusions you draw from the research. What would you say are the limitations of the research?



Student responses

Student A

'Observing violence can de-sensitise a person's psyche for violence. However despite the mass media's continuous projection of violent images/movies/videos/games, not all of society's citizens are going into public arenas with high powered weapons and indiscriminately murdering everything in sight. Within this context, it is clearly evident that merely observing violence will not be the primary factor that will determine whether the individual replicates what s/he has seen. This is not a limitation of the research, however, it

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjTxQy_U3ac



could be argued that the research could have expanded its scope to collate findings on why some individuals/social groups have a greater propensity to express violence.'

Student B

'As children our parents are our role models and we will mimic their behaviour in adult life. By watching a parent behave in a violent manner towards another adult, for example father either verbally or physically abusing mum, then a child may think this is acceptable in adult life. In this study the children see the adult hit the doll but it is not an adult they know, so maybe the children saw the behaviour displayed as fun rather than experiencing violent behaviour within the home.'

Student C

'Children can be easily influenced by examples from adults. What the research doesn't stipulate is whether as children grow and learn for themselves, and form their own opinions, they become more passive than aggressive. Why do some children who are exposed to the above factors still turn out to be well behaved non aggressive children? As we all grow in adulthood we form our own set of standards and morals. Some people's morals are less scrupulous than others. Just because someone's father was a habitual criminal for example doesn't mean the child of that individual will also become a criminal.'

Developing student learning

Consider how well each student responds to the task question. To what extent do their responses reflect interaction with the evidence presented in the video, and to what extent their own experience / beliefs? How well does each student critically evaluate the validity of the experiment? What would your feedback to each student be?

What further evidence would you introduce to help students extend their understanding? How would you support students make connections between the evidence in the video and their own experiences / work with young people?

Find out more about the EUGANGS project at: www.eugangs.eu

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