

Bandura and Bobo

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In 1961, children in APS Fellow **Albert Bandura's** laboratory witnessed an adult beating up an inflatable clown. The doll, called Bobo, was the opposite of menacing with its wide, ecstatic grin and goofy clown outfit.

But when it was their own turn to play with Bobo, children who witnessed an adult pummeling the doll were likely to show aggression too. Similar to their adult models, the children kicked the doll, hit it with a mallet, and threw it in the air. They even came up with new ways to hurt Bobo, such as throwing darts or aiming a toy gun at him. Children who were exposed to a non-aggressive adult or no model at all had far less aggression toward Bobo.

Bandura's findings challenged the widely accepted behaviorist view that rewards and punishments are essential to learning. He suggested that people could learn by observing and imitating others' behavior.



“In many respects, this research helped create the shift in psychology from a behavioristic to a social-cognitive approach to learning,” says **Cathy Faye**, Assistant Director of the Center for the History of Psychology at The University of Akron. Since Bandura donated his original Bobo doll in May 2010, it has been one of the Center's most popular exhibits.

Faye notes that the Bobo doll experiments were also influential outside of the scientific community. “Bandura's findings were particularly important in 1960s America, when lawmakers, broadcasters, and

the general public were engaged in serious debate regarding the effects of television violence on the behavior of children,” she says.

Today, questions about violent media and video games linger, so Bandura’s research on aggression remains relevant. His Bobo-inspired social learning theory also contributed to the development of cognitive-behavioral therapy. Bandura is a member of an elite group who received both APS lifetime achievement awards: the William James and James McKeen Cattell Fellow Awards. He was also named among the top five most eminent 20th century psychologists by the *Review of General Psychology*. It’s an impressive legacy for a project that began with a little creativity and an inflatable clown.