

# Albert bandura's social-cognitive theory related to gender roles during early chi...

[Life, Childhood](#)



## Abstract

This paper explains Albert Bandura's (Bandura) Social-Cognitive Theory and its relation to gender development during early childhood which is ages two through six. The main staple of Albert Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory is the premise that children observe things in their environment and if they can remember, they will imitate the observed behaviors during childhood. As children the imitated behaviors that coincide with the normal gender and social stereotypes are positively reinforced and encouraged, while atypical behavior usually brings about reticence.

## Albert Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory Related to

### Gender Roles during Early Childhood

Albert Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory encompasses a relationship of factors that aims to understand and predict childhood development. The Social-Cognitive Theory's main premise is the triangular interaction between personal factors, environmental factors, and behavior. The interaction between the child and the environment involve the beliefs and values that are repressed or encouraged by social influences, which can determine the gender development of a child. This theory also emphasizes the impact that observational learning has on children.

In plain terms this means that a child learns from observation and imitation, as long as the child pays attention, is able to remember, and is motivated to physically imitate the behavior. Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory corresponds well with early childhood development and the gender

stereotyping relationship. During this time children imitate and are encouraged by their parents and peers to take part in activities that coincide with their own gender, children are more likely to imitate someone of the same gender, and these environmental factors influence the gender development that encourages fulfillment of gender stereotypes.

#### INFLUENCE ON GENDER DEVELOPMENT FROM PARENTS AND PEERS

Early childhood (age two through six) is a crucial time period in which the child's physical, cognitive, and social abilities are developing. According to Bandura children learn from observing someone perform certain actions, and being reinforced or punished based on their reactions. A child observes their peers, parents, and teachers which will influence the evolving sense of their gender. They will begin to show preference for sex-stereotyped toys and begin displaying stereotypical behavior. During early childhood, children are faced with pressure from all areas of their lives (environmental factors), which consequently influences their gender development. A parent pressures the gender development of a child because they “reinforce sex-typed activities in children as young as 18 months, not only by buying different kinds of toys for boys and girls, but also by responding more positively when their sons play with blocks or trucks or when their daughters play with dolls. Such differential reinforcement is particularly clear with boys, especially from fathers.” (Boyd & Bee, 2012).

This type of behavior and method of influence follows Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory because boys imitate the men and girls imitate the women

in their lives, and are positively reinforced for doing so. Masculine toys such as trucks and army men are usually bought for boys to promote the stereotypical masculine qualities such as being “ competent, skillful and assertive” (Boyd & Bee, 2012). Young girls are usually given dolls and given costumes for dress up. This provides encouragement to imitate the women in their lives by becoming “ gentle, appreciative, and soft-hearted.” (Boyd & Bee, 2012). Fathers and mothers both affect the development of a child, but by age three the child will begin to show preference for same-sex relationships until the middle elementary school age (Boyd & Bee, 2012).

#### SAME SEX INFLUENCE

Men and women both influence a person in the early childhood category, but a child is more influenced by a person of the same sex, particularly boys influenced by men. A young boy may be more likely to hold open a door if he sees his father holding a door, rather than seeing his mother doing the same thing. Bandura's Bobo Doll Experiment showed significant results that proved these findings. In this experiment both boys and girls (one at a time, during separate trials) were shown aggression towards a Bobo Doll from either a man or a woman. The child was then left to imitate the behavior. “ Imitation was found to be differentially influenced by the sex of the model with boys showing more aggression than girls following exposure to the male model, the difference being particularly marked on highly masculine-typed behavior.

Subjects who observed the nonaggressive models, especially the subdued male model, were generally less aggressive than their controls” (Bandura,

Ross, & Ross, 1963). Bandura's experiment revolved around aggression, but the propensity for same-sex interactions can be seen through the observation of children in a social atmosphere. Around age three boys tend to make stronger relationships with males of their own age, and females tend to make stronger relationships with females of their own age. These same sex interactions, especially when they are with an older person usually influence young boys to display masculinity and females to display femininity (Boyd & Bee, 2012).

#### PROBLEMS CREATED BY GENDER STEREOTYPES RELATED TO BANDURA'S SOCIAL-COGNITIVE THEORY

A child will learn from observing both men and women, but if they are not around either a man or a woman they may not learn what is culturally acceptable or how to fulfill the correct gender stereotype. Behavior that does not fulfill a gender stereotype may be negatively viewed. A child can exhibit cross-gendered behavior (behavior that is atypical for their sex), and this can cause ridicule from other children, and even adults especially for boys. For example, a girl who enjoys playing football is much more tolerated by adults and peers, while a boy who plays with dolls may be harassed by peers, and the father may even disapprove (Bullough, Bullough, & Elias, 1997).

Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory would support the idea that if a boy is raised without any men to imitate and observe, he would be much more likely to be ridiculed as a child for any lack of masculine behavior. The same treatment might occur for a young girl without a female role model. While

this seems like an issue it cannot be assumed to be a major lasting problem that is influenced by adults or peers. According to Boyd and Bee the sex-typed behaviors appear too soon to be the result of environmental factors and this behavior should be considered a part of the normal, yet complex, process of identity development.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the gender development of an early childhood classified person is highly influenced by observations that can be remembered and imitated. The Social-Cognitive Theory developed by Albert Bandura supports the ideology that the observable actions and behavior seen in an environment provides a child with the actions and behavior that should be imitated to reach social norms. During development these environmental factors highly affect a child's understanding of the cultural norms and gender roles supported within a society.

## REFERENCES

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