

Albert Bandura

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Albert Bandura (born December 4, 1925 Mundare, Canada - Present, Professor Emeritus at Stanford University in Stanford, California) is a social cognitive theorist who is described as the “greatest psychologist alive today” (Clay, 2016). He is ranked in a 2002 survey as one of the most prominent figures in the discipline of psychology, only behind Sigmund Freud, B.F. Skinner, and Jean Piaget. In 2015, at the age of 90 he received the National Medal of Science, the nation’s highest honor for achievement and leadership in advancing science, from President Barack Obama.

Bandura was the youngest and only boy of six children born to parents, of Eastern European descent, that immigrated to Canada as teenagers. Bandura’s parents did not receive a formal education but understood its value. His father sold a portion of their farmland to buy a business in town closer to the school. Albert Bandura attended the only school in Mundare. It was both the elementary school and the high school and had only two teachers. The children were more self-guided than taught due to limited resources. Ironically, the disparaging structure of the school did not stifle Bandura’s initiative and motivation to learn. He discovered the importance of taking initiative and relying on personal strengths and abilities. Growing up he used self-direction in his learning and found that self-regulatory skills were imperative in his life.

After graduating high school, his parents explained the choices he had. He could either continue working the land or he could continue his education. He chose to commute to Vancouver and enrolled at the University of British Columbia. By happenstance he elected to

take an introductory psychology course. In doing so, he discovered his passion and what would become his future profession. He graduated in 1949, in just three years, and received the Bolocan Award for exemplary student achievement in psychology. Bandura sought guidance from his undergraduate advisor to determine what university was deemed the greatest authority on psychology. His advisor told him it was the University of Iowa. Bandura set his course to Iowa and graduated in 1951 with his M.S. and in 1952 with his doctorate. The following year he accepted a teaching position at Stanford University.

His early research at Stanford University centered on social modeling in change and self-development. He decided to conduct a large-scale study with, Richard Walters, his first doctoral student on this topic. Their project involved looking at family influence of hyperaggressive styles in boys who lived in advantaged areas. Their findings implied that the boys modeled the aggressive orientations from the family. Bandura believed that behavior could be learned from individuals, not just through classical and operant conditioning. He was interested in analyzing how to treat aggressive children by finding the source of the violence in their lives. At the same time, he was looking into social modeling, there was public worry about the effects of televised violence on children through observation. Bandura spoke to the congressional committees and the Federal Trade Commission about his findings on social modeling and self-development, but his findings were not accepted or liked by the television industry. The Bobo doll experiments in 1961 and 1963 were intended to clarify the process of observational learning more clearly.

During the Bobo doll experiments an adult aggressively acts (hits, punches, and kicks) toward a Bobo doll, while a child is watching. Then the child is put in a room with a Bobo doll and observed. The children, through observational learning, modeled the aggressive adult's behavior. The results also showed that same-sex modeling for boys was prominent, but for the

females wasn't as drastic. Overall, Bandura found males tend to be more aggressive than females. He also found that children exposed to the aggressive models were more verbally aggressive than the children exposed to non-aggressive models. These experiments were testing Bandura's social learning theory. This theory relates that individuals learn from observing, modeling, and imitating other's behaviors. This theory helped change the course of study of psychology from pure behaviorism to cognitive psychology.

Social learning theory expanded to social cognitive theory where Bandura related that individuals are proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulating. He also found that self-efficacy beliefs played a large role in behavioral change. This research began when he was investigating modeling used with snake phobias. He later found that these self-efficacy beliefs could also be used with individuals with PTSD. If the individual can gain a sense of perceived control over the trauma then they could overcome their fears and move in a healthier direction. Bandura also applied self-efficacy and self-regulation to the field of education. If a student has faith in themselves that they can achieve, they will, along with setting goals, self-monitoring, and perseverance.

Reference

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