Social Learning Theory

- Gender identity is an individual’s private understanding of fitting into the gender category, which is not necessarily the same as the sex they were given at birth; whether it is male, female, a blend of both or neither, it is the way in which one perceives themselves to be.
- This theory proposes that gender identity and gender consistency in children’s behaviour is a result of the environment from observational learning and powerful reinforcers which are, for example, parents or the media.

After his studies, Bandura determined 3 models of observational learning, which included:

a. A Live Model, which is an actual person performing a particular behaviour.
b. A Verbal Instruction Model, which involves someone explaining and describing a particular behaviour.
c. A Symbolic Model, which includes either a real or fictional character demonstrating the behaviour in a movie, in a book, or on television.

Strengths of this theory

- This theory was illustrated during the famous Bobo Doll Experiment (Bandura, 1961).
- Bandura et al. (1963) observed the behaviour of children after some had watched their parents being aggressive, others had watched filmed human aggression and another group had watched a cartoon behaving aggressively. Results showed that children learned aggressive behaviour through observation and the imitation of relevant role models.
- Large sample size, which meant any anomalies, would not have had a huge effect on the results. As well as this, many variables in the study were controlled allowing replicability.
- Phillips (1986) found that daily homicide rates in the US almost always increased in the week following a major boxing match. This suggests that viewers were imitating behaviour they watched and so social learning is evident in adults as well as children, which supports the SLT.

Weaknesses of this theory

- The behaviour of the children was recorded almost immediately after they had observed the aggressive behaviour, which means that we cannot know for certain if this exposure actually had any long-term effects.
- Sex of subjects did have an effect on the level of aggression shown. Boys compared to girls showed more aggression overall, even if the reinforcer demonstrating aggression on the doll was female, which suggests that perhaps there is more than just an explanation which goes beyond that of social influences.