Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov
Series VII: Social Sciences • Law • Vol. 16(65) No. 1 – 2023
https://doi.org/10.31926/but.ssl.2023.16.65.1.3

SOCIAL LEARNING REFLECTED IN YOUNGER GENERATIONS' LIVES. CASE STUDY: THE BOBO CLOWN EXPERIMENT AND THE FAMOUS YOUTUBER OG MCSKILLET

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Abstract: *This paper aims to discuss and thoroughly analyze, aided using content analysis and make use of certain theoretical support available regarding primary social learning, approximately how many and what certain events in a child's life can affect his or her behavior. We discuss how Albert Bandura's experiment involving the Bobo Clown doll revealed some troubling aspects no matter their age or even intellectual capacities. All these behaviors can, unfortunately, irreversibly affect a child's harmonious development, both psychologically as well as emotionally. Virtual liberty also poses as a threat in this case. This article proposes to take a deeper look into this phenomenon, constructing a base that starts early historically.*

Keywords: *social learning, virtual worlds, violent behavior, online media*

1. Introduction

It is relevant to familiarize ourselves with the role of videogames in digital culture. Videogames are series of interactive applications specialized in electronic gaming on a computer, mobile phone, television through Playstation or any other type of device programmed and capable of running games. Also, videogames accurately control graphics to reproduce as faithfully as possible and in the most attractive and interactive way the experience in which the player chooses to participate.

The idea of using digital technology for games originated in the late 1950s, when an engineer, Will Higginbotham, developed a tennis game that runs on an oscilloscope. This happened at Brookhaven National Laboratory. The first digital game, however, was Spacewar, which appeared in the early 60s and ran on the DEC-PDP-1 machine at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. The term "videogame" appeared in the early 1970s, with the first commercial arcade video game being Computer Space, developed by no other than Nutting Associates, which was introduced officially in the year 1971.

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Video games are divided into several types, for example casual games provide an interface and experience that is easy to navigate and accessible with easy-to-understand rules and controls for the user. The more complex (serious or difficult) games have the role of transmitting a lesson to players to teach them or to attribute a moralizing character to the game, either through certain characters or certain actions or scenes/dialogues. Educational games put the users' mind to the test, their goal is to enhance mental development, they contain exercises, lessons and tests.

Games have never been treated as an expressive genre like poetry, theater, or folk songs. But their symbolic, social, and evolutionary value has been recognized in psychological, anthropological, and sociological studies. We learn that "the human being sitting at the computer, interacting with the virtual world, is a player" (Bartle, 2005 p. 9).

It is interesting, however, how videogames do impact our lives, and especially children's lives, who find amusement and relaxation in games, many other negative aspects, unknowingly, can and will affect a child depending on the certain context of the situation. Some experiments were conducted in the early 70s by Albert Bandura, the founder of social learning theory, who tried to demonstrate that even classical aspects of rudimentary games (such as the Bobo doll or various other toys) can affect a child's behavior drastically and irreversibly. In the following paragraphs we will take a deeper look into this intriguing yet relevant up until this day phenomenon.

2. Methodology

Content analysis, allows us to further analyze some of these aspects regarding either behavioral acquisitions made by children based on something they witness or take part in, or even verbal borrowings that can ultimately become parts of their existence, in the sense that they will use it on a daily basis, even instinctually. For many, virtual worlds are an "authentic and living reality" (Anstadt, 2013, p. 161). As a side-effect of this freedom in the virtual worlds, it is imperative to mention that "the freedom and anonymity of Internet offers can be used to hurt others through spreading hateful or violent messages, images and/or videos" (Kimpe, 2019, p. 2].

And so, the virtual world becomes a realm of the *good,* the *bad and* the *ugly*. As a notable reference, we turn our attention to Albert Bandura, the well-known Canadian-American psychologist, who has fundamentally shown and asserted that a child borrows certain behaviors from adults when witnessing various behaviors conducted by them. Jean Piaget also talked about how children start copying their parents and start roleplaying, especially based on one of the parents' professions, for example pretending to be a doctor and taking care of patients such as teddy bears, dolls, etc., pretending to be a clerk, a waiter, a receptionist, or a teacher etc. There wouldn't be any negative connotation or outcome regarding Piaget's assessment, unless the children's parents conduct erratic behavior and don't respect the minimal deontology that their job demands for.

It is said that "social relationships are a central aspect of our lives" (Nangle, 2010, p. 51). This compliments what Bandura and Piaget are expressing through their theories, as certain actions (such as witnessing an abusive behavior) can disrupt and misplace this

central aspect of a future adult's life. Albert Bandura is known "as the father of cognitive theory" (Tadayon Nabavi, 2012, p.3).

Moreover, the objective is to determine if factors affect, in examples such as witnessing negative behavior in real life within the family or in the online universe, younger generations.

The main hypotheses of this study are the following:

Hypothesis 1: Children acquire various behaviors witnessed in adults, identically;

Hypothesis 2: The virtual realm poses a huge risk to users, especially younger users;

Hypothesis 3: Children who become future adults can easily transmit any agressive behavior, verbally or behaviorally.

3. Results

With the development of games, two big dangers have appeared that can lead to particularly serious situations. The first danger is that most video games are addictive, and thus social problems such as isolation, the breakdown of social relationships and the encapsulation of the user in a closed, contactless universe arise. In addition, health problems arise due to the abuse of games, such as weakening of vision, lack of oxygen to the brain, sedentary lifestyle, adopting an unhealthy lifestyle, skipping important meals of the day and even death.

A second danger to consider is, like programs broadcast on television, especially movies, violence in games. Some games have graphic content that can negatively affect children's behaviors and mentality. Although most games of this genre, especially shooters or horror games, contain warnings about the content, these warnings are rarely followed. For example, in a game full of blood, drugs, violence, sexuality and vulgar language, all kinds of images and ideas are imprinted on the child's mind, which unfortunately make him apply them in real life sooner or later. With the thinking still in the development stage, the child will consider violence as a good thing and will treat it as such, therefore it is always recommended and ultimately necessary for a parent to supervise his child, especially in such situations.

A theory of aggression by Albert Bandura illustrates that when violence is applied to video games, social learning theory shows that exposure to video game violence evokes behavioral mimicry, reinforces already existing aggressive habits, and increases internal willpower. In short, internal will can be interpreted as anger, which increases the chance of aggression.

Video games have developed so much that they have acquired a status of culture, it has even become a lifestyle for some people, through which they earn money. Games have appeared in which you can get married, raise children, start a family, and make many virtual friends, help your neighbors and get a virtual job, these are the so-called simulators, the best example of this kind being The Sims series.

On various games, especially MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games), guilds and factions appeared: World of Warcraft, RuneScape, Ever Quest, etc.

Currently, the games that make the most money organizing world championships are Counter Strike: Global Offensive, Dota 2, FIFA 22 (soon 23) and League of Legends. In

this case, depending on the type of championship and its popularity, prizes can reach several tens of thousands of dollars and/or cars plus sponsorships from different technological companies, such as Razer, Asus (Republic of Gamers) or Steelseries. New terms have also appeared in the online language, the most well-known, especially in online games, being the term *noob*, which means beginner, inexperienced, novice. There is also a term called *glass-cannon*, which translates to a very strong attack force in-game, which has incredibly low or insignificant defense.

Video games have taken shape over time, evolved, gained popularity, developed, and become what they are today due to the evolution of technology and new means of playing and enhancing. From a simple moving beam of light on an oscilloscope to the complexity and detail of the environments, textures, details, and fluidity of today's games has taken a lot of work, effort, and research over the decades.

If we turn our attention towards the Bobo Clown experiment that took place in 1961, three groups of children were presented the same situation but with different manifestations. The first group were told that they will witness a positive behavior towards the toy (Bobo clown), the second one was a control or check group and lastly, the third group was shown aggressive behavior towards the clown doll, in the sense that it was hit, beaten, threatened, punched, hit with a hammer, and even pinned down with a pistol against its head. Children were told that if they imitate the same behavior, they will receive a sweet prize, consisting in a handful of chocolate candy. Surprisingly and shockingly, children adopted bad, aggressive behavior, punched, kicked, hit and threatened with the pistol the doll. See the self-explanatory image below:

Fig. 1. *Bobo Clown experiment results*

Note: *In the image above we can see on the first row horizontally the adult manifesting violent behaviors towards the doll and the children (boy and girl), below the adult, manifested the exact same behavior, if not even more violent, starting to use hammers and even pistols to threaten the doll.* Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/2/21/Bandura_Bobo_doll_experiments_video_stills.jpg, accessed on 10.09.2022, 14:32.

These children could be the aggressors of the future because such experiences made a deep mark on their existence. We tend to "learn to conceptualize knowledge" Graham & Arshad-Ayaz (2016, p. 3). As seen in the Bobo clown experiment, children got mentally (and of course, behaviorally) stimulated by a reward, in this case, candy. It happens the same nowadays but at a different level and in different contexts, which can be far more dangerous than what happened before, when internet wasn't yet popular.

At least parent aggressive behavior can be controlled or eliminated eventually, but what usually happens in the virtual realm is far more difficult to manage. We note that "there is growing concern that online opportunities are accompanied by an equally diverse array of risks" (Livingstone, 2013, p. 15).

Table 1

Popular videogame genres and their specific impact on users

Shooter games	***Strategy games***	***Puzzle games***	***Simulator games***	***Horror games***	***Adventure games***	***IMPACT***
Developing attention and alert-ness, the sense of presence, dexterity and reaction times	Leadership abilities, decision making, building and developing plans/stratagems	Develops cognitive abilities, attention, and perspicacity	Gives a realistic impression of real-life situations, enhances learning	Dynamic setting, develops courage, carefulness, and mindful-ness, develops a sense of patience and alertness	Sense of independence, freedom, builds courage, stimulates exploration	**POSITIVE**
Extreme violence and gore, foul language, bullying	Danger of losing everything, risk of bullying (virtual attacks on purpose)	Boredom, cheating, frustration, anger buildup, doing tasks wrongly and getting upset, even hitting the table or computer/phone	Risk of perturbing natural courses of life, destroying or doing things you are not supposed to	A sense of permanent fear/dread may appear, could cause psychological and emotional problems (panic attacks, seizures, heart attacks, crying)	Risk of violence (mostly fighting), slaying enemies, which can nurture violent tendencies	**NEGATIVE**

Note: *Impact of various famous videogame genres, exposed based on personal experience as well as common conceptions about these genres.*

In contemporaneity, new and diverse technologies have proven to affect the human brain irreversibly and so seriously in some cases, that it could lead to unlawful actions, such as stealing, harming, abusing substances and/or people and eventually, sadly, committing suicide or killing other innocent, unaware people. For reference and giving quite a recent, eloquent example, we have the case of a very famous Youtuber named Trevor Heitmann, better known, commercially as well as socially *McSkillet*. He was an American Youtuber that became incredibly popular for playing a famous game called *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* professionally as well as managing specific websites for item (in-game virtual objects/contents) trading and raffling (where he gained an exorbitant amount of money), which placed him high in the popularity and wealth lists.

Trevor, unfortunately passed away on the 23rd August of 2018 after recklessly and aimlessly racing his 2015 super car McLaren 650S at over 100 MpH (160 KMpH) on the wrong side of the highway. The connection with technology, games and internet in general is that Trevor supposedly, sources say, seriously thought that he can without a doubt in mind clip through any objects and any other cars along the way, just like in a videogame. Clipping represents two overlapping geometries, based on the relation hit-collide, and while clipping is certainly possible and very common in videogames, where some players simply have fun by going through walls, parkouring, surprising other players or speed-running (completing a game in record time), it obviously can not happen in real life. Yet, Trevor thought otherwise.

If it is a clipping bug (abnormality in a videogame or even certain software), then the two distinct geometries unnaturally go through each other. This is also a feature some games include for players to explore the geometry of artifacts or simply enable them to have fun or do speed-runs mentioned earlier. But again, it is to be emphasized that these happen in games and not in real life, as Trevor thought. The horrific accident that had Trevor as author unfortunately took the life of two innocent people, mother and daughter along with Trevor Heitmann, during the tragic incident, resulting in three fatal casualties. There was no stopping Trevor and he had a mission, but that mission is still up for disclosure and people have more questions than answers. His followers noticed some discrepancies in his behaviors before he did the unspeakable, showing that there were big red flags regarding Trevor's future actions. Virtual worlds offer the user a "sense of presence" (Girvan, 2018, p. 7). It is not yet certain, but it was debated that Trevor had taken some sort of drugs before the incident (not known exactly which, some say opioids), that made him hallucinate and snap out of reality. Unfortunately, Trevor Heitmann is not an isolated case, as more and more unfortunate incidents occur nowadays, in which deranged users start going down dark paths of no return and it is interesting to acknowledge and see if these paths are determined by the use of Internet and what it has to offer. For a better, clearer understanding, see the image below.

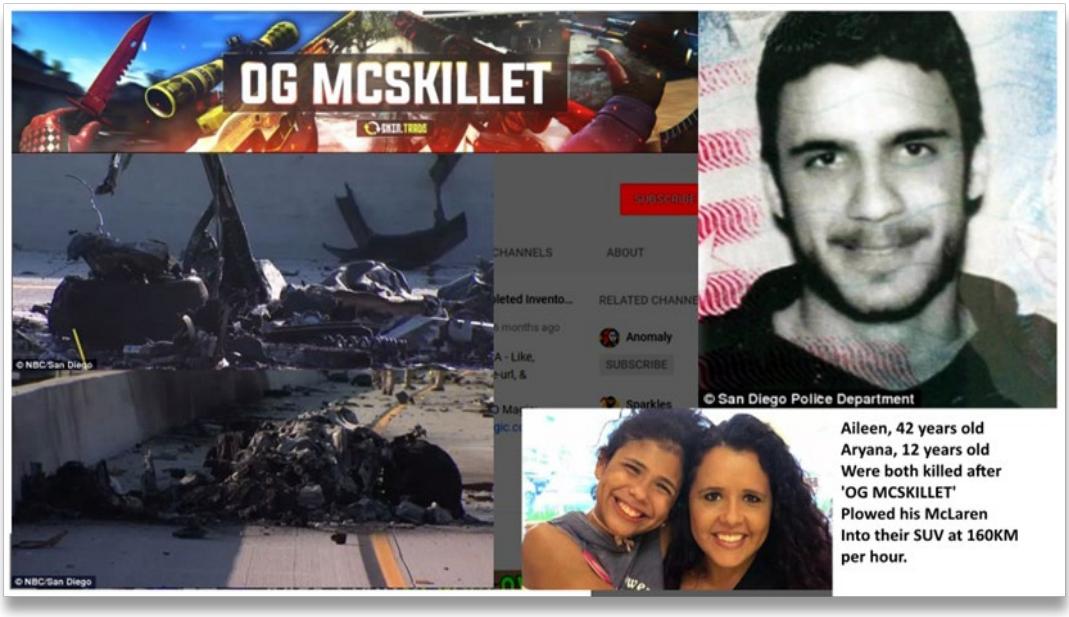

Fig. 2. *Youtuber OG McSkillet appears in prime-time news regarding the tragic event*

Note: Images from the tragic event that occurred on the highway (fragments of McSkillet's car can be seen in the lower left-side of the picture,
source*:* https://i0.wp.com/bunnygaming.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/OG.jpg?fit=1920%2C10*80&ssl=1,* accessed on 10.09.2022, 14:31.

4. Discussion

Although researchers have indeed been focusing on these aspects for quite a while now, rarely this potential danger has been addressed accordingly. When mentioning limitations, we must mention the complex virtual way of expressing taught. There are quite some aspects that are not yet well known or known at all, in this regard. There is also a problem involving the "deep dark web", which, users say, it is a place where *you never want to go or find yourself in*. Mentioning the comparative aspect between what was in the 1960s and what happens today, it is imperative to point out the rather firm grasp parents could have on their children back in the day and while many of them still do have it today, it is very difficult to control the safety of a child, when there are so many free sources of information with easy access.

The relevance of this research is to create awareness with regard to internet usage in general but most importantly, the choices of games or internet communities you choose to take part in. For instance, even behavior acquisitons can always occur, especially when the child is in the learning step, as they are exactly like a sponge that pulls everything from everywhere and later use it for themselves, as it might be constructive for them, they acknowledge. The main problem is in the moment where they don't know exacty how to make the difference between good or bad, but if that certain action

is made by one of the parents, as an example for the children, then it must be positive. After all, what they see, they will eventually do, and this always poses as a double edged sword. The main question resides as to why and how are the Bobo Clown experiment and OG McSkillet linked in any way? The answer is simple, just like children that can borrow certain behaviors from their elders (as seen in Bobo Clown experiment), the same goes for other Internet users and social media consumers that follow internet personalities/opinion leaders (OG McSkillet). They can and some will borrow positive or negative behaviors from their idols and favorites. How can we be so sure that nobody thought that clipping could be actually done in real life after witnessing the McSkillet case? Some people might go even as far as saying that McSkillet didn't do it correctly (note: clipping), and it must be done in a different way, at a different speed or with a different car. These all pose great threats to followers, especially younger ones, who show trust easily.

5. Conclusion

Firstly, the main conclusion to be exposed is that as time went by, the digital literacy of children and young adults has gained more and more complexity to the point that many young generations understand each other through this virtual language, that is formed from signs and symbols and, of course, certain slang words. It is certain that new generations are born with internet usage skills and they are digital natives.

Secondly, new technologies certainly aid them to learn better, faster, more diversely and easily since technology is available wherever, whenever, especially with a rather stable internet connection. Interestingly, artificial intelligence, has an aspect where it analyzes „if the mind is a computer" or not (Woolley, 1993, p. 96). This is interesting because the mind works like a computer plus the emotional intelligence, which artificial computers, created by man, lack. There is a debate whether the physical aggression that Albert Bandura shows has been substituted with cyberbullying or cyberaggresion or it has been actually completed, in the sense that cyberbullying is some sort of a new version of classical bullying, more like a negative upgrade, you may. The advantage, probably, between real life and virtual world is that the virtual world offers a barrier that cannot be surpassed physically, yet information and harmful connections can be made so much easier in the online world, since Internet is quite cheap, accessible and spread across the world.

Unfortunately, it appears that those many filters supposedly existing in order for computer users or smartphone users to be protected are quite ineffective. YouTube has parental control, indeed, parents could setup passwords to lock devices but the others are quite meaningless. Many videogames have a chat filter that filters out offensive words and uses symbols instead of hiding these words but the problem is that the game contains a setting that can disable this feature, which makes it quite useless to say the least. The same goes for websites that ask if you are above 18 years old and all you have to do is check two or three boxes and you are good to go. This means that filters exist but they do not have any real, useful purpose.

Children are much more intelligent than we can imagine, especially when it comes to using a computer and Internet in general, with ways of surfing the internet not known even to us adults, let alone a well-rested, creative and young mind of a child or teenager. The main problem is that as much as we want to protect ourselves against the liberty that the internet has to offer, it seems and feels like we are only digging ourselves into a deeper hole that we can not exit which can do irremediable damage. Albert Bandura stated that ,,any account of the determinants of human action must include self-generated influences as a contributing factor" (Bandura, 1986, p. 39). In short, any future action that a child as a future adult enquires, has a background of self-gathered influences, which he or she witnessed that consequently shaped the adult which he or she will eventually become. This adult could be, of course, either a victim or an aggressor. In some cases, the future adult can experience both, and it usually starts with them being a victim that transforms into an aggressor to bully others and release negative energy accumulated while they found themselves being a victim. All-in-all, people would think that being an aggressor is less serious and/or harmful than being a victim of the aggressor. Truthfully, they are equal in harm and danger because an aggressor can easily make his victim do indescribable things, such as self-harming, doing actions they are not supposed to, stealing, accepting humiliation and so on and so forth.

Acknowledgements

The present article was, we strongly believe, written and fulfilled to the best of capacities with the help of various bibliographic and webography resources that helped conduct and give shape to this analysis. While writing this article, we would like to cordially thank everybody who responded to various questions regarding this phenomenon with their own logical way of thinking. This alone, we argue, helped the research by gathering more useful information based on ideas regarding the subject.

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