

## LEARNED VIOLENCE: BANDURA'S SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY IN EDWARD BOND'S THE CHILDREN

### ÖĞRENİLMİŞ ŞİDDET: EDWARD BOND'UN THE CHILDREN ADLI OYUNUNUNDA BANDURA'NIN SOSYAL ÖĞRENME KURAMI

*"Boys who are beaten by their mothers  
turn into husbands who beat their wives."*  
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#### ABSTRACT

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This study focuses on Bandura's social learning theory by examining the theme of learned violence in Edward Bond's *The Children*. Albert Bandura, a significant Canadian-born American psychologist, studied behaviourist questions about individuals and developed what is now known as social learning theory. In response to the outdated belief that violent behaviour is the result of innate aggressive tendencies, he introduced the theory which is concerned with the interaction of the learner's mind and its surroundings. Bandura's theory posits that people learn new behaviour, attitudes, and emotional responses by observing, modelling, and imitating the actions of others in their social environment. Edward Bond, on the other hand, has been one of the most controversial and prolific writers in contemporary British theatre. His twelve-scene short play *The Children*, which premiered in 2000, is considered as one of his later works. By using young characters in his work, the playwright reflects on the effects of social environment on teenagers. The play is about Joe, a teenager who lives with his abusive mother. When compared to his mother, Joe becomes more violent over time because he burns down a building in which a child dies. Thus, Bond's play demonstrates how violence is learned in parallel with Bandura's theory.

#### ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Bandura'nın sosyal öğrenme kuramına odaklanarak Edward Bond'un *The Children* oyunundaki öğrenilmiş şiddet temasını incelemektedir. Kanada doğumlu Amerikalı bir psikolog olan Albert Bandura, bireyler hakkında davranışçı soruları inceleyerek sosyal öğrenme kuramını geliştirir. Bandura kuramında, şiddet davranışının doğuştan gelen saldırgan eğilimlerin sonucu olduğuna dair zaman aşımına uğramış yaygın inanca yanıt olarak, öğrenenin zihninin ve çevresinin davranışını etkilediğini öne sürer. Bu kuram, bir sosyal çevrede başkalarının davranış, tutum ve duygusal tepkilerini gözlemlemeyi, modellemeyi ve taklit etmeyi öne çıkarır. Edward Bond ise çağdaş İngiliz tiyatrosunun en iddialı ve üretken yazarlarından biridir. 2000 yılında ilk gösterimi yapılan ve on iki sahneden oluşan kısa oyunu *The Children* (Çocuklar), yazarın son dönem eserlerinden biri olarak kabul edilir. Bond oyununda genç karakterleri kullanarak, sosyal çevrenin gençler üzerindeki etkilerini vurgulamayı amaçlar. Oyun, istismarcı ve şiddet uygulayan annesiyle yaşayan ergen Joe'nun etrafında gelişir. Annesiyle karşılaştırıldığında Joe zamanla daha fazla şiddet uygulayan bir kişiye dönüşür çünkü içinde bir çocuğun ölmesine neden olan binayı annesinin isteğiyle yakmıştır. Böylece Bond'un oyunu, Bandura'nın kuramına paralel olarak şiddetin öğrenilmiş bir davranış olduğuna dikkat çeker.

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## Introduction: On Violence and Bandura's Theory

The *Longman Dictionary* (2004:1840) defines violence as a “behaviour that is intended to hurt other people physically”. According to sociologist Nieburg (1963:43), violence is described as any action, either direct or indirect, that proposes to cause injury or harm to individuals or damage to property. Indeed, violence has been a part of human history for as long as we have records, and it is likely that it will continue to be a part of society in the future. However, it is also possible that humanity will eventually find ways to reduce and prevent violence, and create a more peaceful world. It is unfeasible to predict the future with certainty, but it is up to us to strive for a better future and work towards creating a world where violence is less prevalent. Actually, violence is a crucial field of academic studies because of being in every aspect of daily life. There have been instances in history where violence has been used as a means to achieve a particular social or political change. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that violence is not always the best or most effective means of attaining a goal. In many cases, violence can lead to unintended consequences and can cause more harm than good in the long run. Nonviolent methods of conflict resolution, such as negotiation and diplomacy, can often be more effective in achieving desired outcomes without causing misuse or destruction. Thus, it is generally better trying to find peaceful and nonviolent ways to dissolve conflicts and obtain targets whenever possible. Overall, when any of the people feel defeated, they may begin to use force that is contentious, harmful, or even destructive. In this framework, the conflict of human strengths and weaknesses is some source of violence in personal nature and social life.

There is ongoing debate among sociologists and psychologists about whether violence is inherent in human nature or a learned behaviour. Arendt (1970:15) famously explored the idea of an unpredictable environment in which it is difficult to forecast what will happen next. Woodrow (2001:130) suggests that people “operate on and can manipulate their environments”, and that reinforced behaviour is more likely to “be repeated in similar circumstances” in the future. In this sense, if a violent person's act is tolerated, they may be more expected to engage in violent act again. However, it is meaningful to indicate that there is no single theory that can fully explain the causes of violence, and various factors may contribute to violent behaviour in different situations. Some research suggests that violence may be linked to evolutionary processes and may serve certain adaptive functions in specific contexts. Ultimately, there is still much we do not understand about the underlying causes of violence.

It is important to note that violence can take many forms and can occur in a variety of settings. For instance, psychological violence, also known as emotional abuse or psychological abuse, refers to behaviour that is intended to harm the mental or emotional well-being of an individual. It can cover acts such as verbal abuse, threats, manipulation, or controlling behaviour. Psychological violence can have serious and long-lasting effects on the victim, along with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulty trusting others. Moreover, it may occur in any relationship, including romantic relationships, familial relationships, and friendships. Socio-economic conditions like unemployment, poverty, inadequate housing, racial discrimination, and exclusion from family and community can lead to feelings of frustration, anger, and hopelessness, which can in turn contribute to the likelihood of violent behaviour. When violence is examined in a social dimension, aggression appears to play a significant role in the development of personal character. As Mavili (2014:15) asserts, the family, which meets the basic needs of people such as care, and a sense of trust, is sometimes the area where violence is matured and applied. Exposure to or witness of violence suggests that it can be learned both directly and indirectly, highlighting the significance of Bandura's social learning theory.

Albert Bandura (1925-2021), “the doyen of the psychology profession” (Zsolnai, 2016:426), studied behaviourist questions about individuals and developed what we now understand as social learning theory. According to Anderson and Kras (2007:102), Bandura created the social learning theory in reaction to the outdated belief that violent behaviour is the result of innate aggressive tendencies. Social learning theory has been influential in a wide spectrum of fields, including psychology, and education which has helped to shed light on the ways how people learn and adopt new behaviours. This theory claims how people adopt new behaviours and attitudes by observing and imitating others which can take place through direct or indirect experiences. For example, if a person sees someone else being rewarded for a particular action, they may be more likely to imitate that behaviour in order to receive similar rewards. On the other hand, if a person perceives someone else being

punished for a particular manner, they may be less likely to imitate that behaviour in order to avoid similar punishments. In this regard, social learning theory deals with the interaction between the learner's mind and its environment. Overall, Bandura's theory integrates and complements behavioural and cognitive principles, as well as environmental characteristics.

Bandura started to develop his theory in the 1960s and over the years he observed how individual aspects, both behavioural and cognitive, interact with environmental elements. Between 1961 and 1963, Bandura and his team tried to demonstrate the importance of learning violence by observation in children. Specifically, his team intended to highlight how the imitation of a model influenced the behaviour of children. Following a landmark study known as the Bobo doll experiment, one of the most famous studies in the area of psychology, Bandura went on to establish the theory of social learning. Bandura described a number of important methods, including the Bobo doll experiments, in which “children would become more violent when they were exposed to adults being violent” (Allan, 2017:13). The Bobo doll studies were largely regarded as innovative in terms of social learning theory and set the standard for aggressiveness research.

Bandura's Bobo doll experiment is a classic study that was conducted in the 1960s in which children of both sexes between the ages of three and six were investigated. The research was designed to explore the role of observation and imitation in learning new behaviours. In the experiment, children were shown an act or video of an adult model behaving offensive to a Bobo doll, which is a large, inflatable toy (Bandura and Walters, 1963). The children were then let to pass time with the Bobo doll themselves, and the researchers observed their behaviour. They found that the children who had watched the adult model behaving aggressively towards the Bobo doll were more likely to imitate that behaviour themselves, while those who had not seen the action were less likely to do so. The results of the Bobo doll experiment helped to support Bandura's social learning theory, which proposes that people learn new behaviours and attitudes by observing and imitating others. The study has had a significant impact on our understanding of the role of observation and imitation in learning and has contributed to the development of numerous theories in psychology and other fields.

Bandura concluded that the model (whether positive or negative) plays a leading part in the learning of a behaviour. In fact, he has long emphasized the role of cognitive factors in learning and viewed children as active participants in the processing and evaluation of information, including the potential consequences of their actions. However, it would be incorrect to assume that everyone imitates what they see, or that all children will act aggressively just because they have witnessed violent scenes. Bandura's studies have expanded the knowledge on learning processes, emphasizing how learning does not occur only through direct contact with the elements that influence behaviour.

Social learning theory also evolved as a reaction to operant conditioning to reflect upon thought processes and other psychological functions that were not observed. According to Bandura (1977:12), some complicated behaviours can only be achieved with the help of modelling. Thus, modelling can be an effective way for people to learn complicated behaviours because it allows them to observe and understand the steps involved in performing the behaviour, as well as to receive feedback on their own performance. By observing and imitating others, people can learn the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the behaviour, even if it is complex or difficult. For example, if someone wants to learn how to play a musical instrument, they may observe and imitate a more experienced musician to learn the proper techniques and skills. Over time, with practice and repetition, the learner may be able to master the behaviour and perform it independently. Namely, in the social learning theory, the manner is affected by the consequences of the attitude. Moreover, the situational process of individuals determines their perception of thoughts, needs, and motives.

To sum up, Bandura's social learning theory maintains the priority of “observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviours” (McLeod, 2016), attitudes, and emotional responses of others in a social circle. Furthermore, according to Bandura (1977:22), learning might be incredibly hard, if people were forced to depend totally on the results of their whole actions to instruct them. Thus, as Bandura clarifies, most human behaviour is learned through observation and modelling: by analysing someone else, one can learn how to perform new behaviours, and these formatted details can then be used as a basis for future actions. With the contribution of social learning, people avoid making unnecessary mistakes because they may learn how to behave from examples, at least in an approximate form, before engaging in any behaviour.

### Edward Bond's *The Children*

Edward Bond (1934-) has been one of the most controversial and prolific writers of the contemporary British theatre. His plays often address social and political issues, and his work is known for its experimental nature and its use of unconventional staging and performance techniques. Bond's work continues to be relevant and influential in contemporary British theatre and is regularly produced and studied by drama practitioners and scholars. Ada and Parlak (2022:95) state that his plays have been staged in over sixty countries and translated into several languages, including "Turkish, French, Spanish, and German". In this respect, Billingham (2014:1) mentions that in the twentieth and twenty-first century, Bond has been probably one of the most challenging voices both in his country and in Germany, France, Italy, and Canada as well. As Özata and Biçer (2021:229) indicate, Bond has pioneered rational theatre, penned over fifty works, and expressed violence with great effort, which he considers as the most serious problem confronting modern societies. Khatoon (2021:37) gives the information that Bond's drama is frequently compared to the works of modern writers who use violence in their plays, such as "Harold Pinter, Howard Brenton, John Osborne, and John Arden". According to Eagleton (1984:127), Bond is the most important British writer today because of dealing with nuclear destruction and human violence.

Bond (1997:99) considers his plays to be postmodern because they are a reaction to the world's all new problems. Since his first play *The Pope's Wedding*, staged in 1962, Bond has cemented his reputation and popularity. Bond is mainly interested in the matters that encompass the inhumane violent impacts of a class-based reformist society. Furthermore, the writer deals with the isolation of the ordinary person under the capitalist social structure, and the catastrophic conflicts of socioeconomic issues. Besides, Bond refers to examining the motivations and behaviour of his characters and the ways in which they are shaped by their environment and experiences. He frequently addresses issues of social class and economic inequality in his plays, demonstrating the ways in which these factors shape people's lives and opportunities.

Because of witnessing the brutal results of the Second World War, Bond has developed his life philosophy against violence in most of his plays. As Davis (2005:12) underlines, it is necessary for Bond to deal with violence in his works since the playwright believes that violence and inequality dominate the world. According to Billingham (2014:6), Bond has repeatedly highlighted the existence, causes, and purpose of violence in society throughout his writing career, where violence is a result and a presence of exploitation-based social systems. Edward Bond (1978:3) discusses how violence has shaped our civilization, and why humanity will have no future if they do not abandon using it. In addition to addressing violence as a social issue, Bond also uses it as a dramatic device in his plays. He often employs violence as a way to create tension and conflict, and to illustrate the consequences of certain actions and behaviours. By depicting violence and its effects on his characters and the world around them, Bond aims to shed light on the complexities and consequences of violence and to prompt his audience to think critically about its causes and effects. He also claims that it is immoral not to write about violence. According to Jones (1980:517), Bond presents the vision that a good society produces good men, that the current social order is a model of violence in itself, and "that man can change his society".

As Bay and Kaya (2020:52) affirm, one of the most essential qualities which distinguishes a theatre play is its ability to be fictionalized via the features of its characters. In this sense, Bond is a writer who skilfully conveys all aspects of his characters to the audience in his plays. *The Children* is the story of society struggling with its own violence that originates at home between a son and his mother, which then spreads to the whole world. For the famous theatre critic Michael Billington (2008), despite the fact that the playwright and his wife Elisabeth do not have children, Bond's imagination is clearly largely driven by writing for children, in whom he invests his hopes for the future. The playwright believes that the individuals starting from the family are raised for purposes which are not suitable for their nature in unsuitable conditions. As Takkaç (2001:86) remarks, in Bond's opinion of the modern world, everyone should be aware of where they are, under what conditions they live, and what potential facilities they achieve, thus, this critical process includes not only adults, but also children. As a result, the playwright's interest is particularly focused on the relationship between society and its rules. He believes that society and family destroy children's life by behaving them in the wrong way. In a meeting with Ulrich Köppen, Bond (1997) indicates the importance of children in his works as the following:

Children have always played significant roles in my plays. In order to understand their special situation, I have to try to pursue the mind to its origins. I want to find out why human beings behave in a certain way, why they are capable of great humanity and also of great inhumanity. I want to explain why creativity also implies the possibility of destruction, and why one thing happens and another does not. Destruction disguises itself as creativity, just as capitalism disguises itself as democracy. (Bond, 1997:105).

With the considerations above, Bond has written *The Children* to message the public, change the conditions, and create a more beautiful and liveable world by focusing on children and teenagers. The play depicts the complexities of family and personal relationships and the ways in which they can be affected by external factors. Overall, *The Children* is a powerful and thought-provoking exploration of the human experience in the face of crisis and adversity, and a poignant reflection on the ways in which violence and aggression can shape and define our lives. For Nicholson (2003:19), the play depicts a dramatic climate in which “social structures are only partially formed”, forcing teenagers to modify ways of being in alarming situations. Staged in 2000, Bond’s short play *The Children*, consisting of twelve scenes, is regarded as one of his later works. As Billingham (2014:103) points out, the play was authorised as part of a larger project to examine “critical social and ethical issues” affecting teenagers from handicapped families. *The Children* was premiered for the first time by Classworks Theatre Company “on 11 February 2000 at Manor Community College” (Billingham, 2014:103) in Cambridge. The roles of the teenagers were interpreted by the pupils of the college. As Bond clarifies (2000:3-4), this first production was presented on tour in seventeen different places. The roles of mother and man were played throughout the tour by the same actors, but each new location brought with it a new cast for the roles of sixteen young people.

The play is based on the events that centres around two adults and a group of children between the ages of ten and fourteen. Joe, a young teenager, lives alone with his mother because the father abandoned them long time ago. One day, on Joe’s return from school, the mother demands him to go and burn down a neighbourhood building but she refuses to give him the slightest explanation for this request. When Joe wants to understand the reason, the mother does not explain but gets angry and threatens him. Joe then re-joins his friends and informs them about his mother's demand to set the house on fire. The children swear to support Joe and keep his story as a secret. The following night, when Joe returns home, he tells his mother that he has set fire to the house. However, she denies having asked him to do so. During this fire incident, a child in the house is burned to death. The news drives the mother into an even more violent denial. Joe, in charge of the fire, decides to escape from his hometown with a group of friends. This is the start of a horrific journey that the young boy undertakes because of desperation and powerlessness.

Joe and his friends experience misfortune, destruction, and compassion during the escape. On their way, the children find a wounded stranger, but they do not know that he is the father of the boy who died among the flames. However, the children take the stranger with them for a variety of possible reasons, including out of a sense of compassion, a desire for companionship, or a need for protection. Alternatively, the children's actions may be driven by more complex and nuanced motivations that are not immediately apparent. Indeed, without more information, it is impossible to accurately determine why the children take the stranger with them. But on the journey, they look after the stranger “like a child” (Allen, 2007:125), feed him, and nurse him back to health. Unfortunately, the elderly and wounded stranger kills all teenagers step by step until the end of the play because of anger and to avenge his killed child. Nevertheless, Joe has to face the truth that his mother wanted revenge on her lover-the stranger, and forced him to set his house on fire. At the end of the play Joe finds himself alone, but he knows he must look for someone and recreate himself by expressing “I've got everything. I'm the last person in the world. I must find someone” (Scene 12, Bond, 2000:52). It is understood from Joe's words that from now on he has to cope with the future alone. Although Joe states he has everything, he actually has nothing. He has to live as a lonely person who does not know what to do without a family and friends.

Through Joe and his mother, Bond tries to emphasize that individual problems may destroy the family and social institutions. The character of the mother in Bond’s play is similar to the ancient figure of Euripides’ Medea, a rejected and deceived woman. In Euripides’ *Medea*, the titular character is driven to seek revenge against her ex-husband, who has betrayed and abandoned her for another woman. She ultimately takes vengeance by killing her own children, whom she sees as a symbol of her former life with her husband. Also,

the mother in *The Children* wanted to destroy her lover's life because of preferring to live with his wife instead of her. The mother wanted to hurt her lover by burning his house because she was jealous of the other woman just like Medea. In this framework, Bond in his play notes that setting fire to someone's home is a serious and dangerous act that can have severe consequences, both for the person committing the act and for those affected by it.

Apparently, Bond reflects the impact of society on children by taking adults and children to the same stage in *The Children*. Allen (2007:125) emphasises that the children appear to mature more than the adults during the play. Indeed, the play widens the reflection to the choices of younger people in which the world confronts them. Most importantly, Bond demonstrates that violence is transmitted from generation to generation which is a danger for the future of the world. In *The Children* the playwright proves that violent behaviour does not emerge suddenly, but it is often the result of a combination of factors that have been building up over time. As Bond displays, one of these factors is the exposure to violence in the home. Overall, the playwright suggests that the roots of violent behaviour can often be traced back to early childhood experiences and that intervening with children at an early age can help to prevent violence in the future.

### **Violence as Social Learning in *The Children***

Bond's play begins in the evening near a railway in an abandoned place. According to Billingham this setting, in a lonely urban area, "evokes the tragic train journeys" that Jews took to their "mass deaths in Nazi concentration camps" (2014:120). Joe is with his stuffed puppet which is dressed like a school-boy. In this scene, the playwright aims to display the source of the happiness, distress, and sadness of the main character by creating the conversation between Joe and his puppet as if it were between an adult and his child. In this relationship, Bond reveals how Joe is treated by an adult by giving him the parental role. As stated by Bandura, children continue the behaviours which they learned from adults. The best example of this is observed in the conversation between Joe and his puppet:

**Joe** ...Don't cry. Shouldn't have brought you with me today. Brought you because you cried. Now you're crying even more. Are you afraid? You don't like the dark. You'll be all right for one night. Are you hungry? I'll bring you some sweets in the morning. What sweets shall I bring you? (Scene 1, Bond, 2000:5).

As seen above, Joe gets along with his puppet just as his mother behaves him, which supports Bandura's social learning theory. It is something like that Joe has taken on the parent role and approaches his toy with love, and asks for its physical needs. At first, there appears an impression of a good relationship between Joe and his mother. Bandura underlines (1995:13) that the child learns many things by observing his family which is his closest social environment. The information learned from the social environment is the basis of many human thoughts and behaviours. Individual and environmental factors are not independent variables since they affect each other constantly. People create, develop and even destroy their environment, and naturally the environment affects the human formation. Thus, environmental conditions significantly affect the life and future of the children. Many acts and knowledge of an individual are products of the social environment. In this sense, the individual learns how behaviour is conducted while observing others. These learnings then guide the creation of the character which are especially dominant in the behaviour of children.

While the play proceeds, a fact develops which puzzles the minds of the readers and the audience. Since Joe is a broken family child, Bond draws attention to parentage relationships in this context, reflecting the importance of the family in the spiritual and psychological development of the child. Jo, who had just loved his toy, suddenly turns into a violent person. His behaviour may display broken family children in the community who are more prone to violence. Because his mother ordered Joe to get rid of the toy, he begins to behave brutally towards it with that he has been together for many years:

I'll have to kill you.  
*He goes out. He comes back with a brick.*

You won't feel it. Cheerio. (*He drops the brick on the puppet's head.*)

Shut your eyes. Be dead.

*He goes out. He comes back with a brick. He stops, wanders a few steps.* (Scene 1, Bond, 2000:6).

Parallel to Bandura's theory, the playwright tries to represent above how the parent's behaviour affects the child. While Joe hits the puppet with a brick over the head for several times, he tells it about his tough life with his mother. It is apparent that Joe is having conflict with his mother at home and is worried about his upcoming school exams (Bond, 2000:5-6). In the conversations between Joe and his puppet, it is noticed that the child has uncertainty in reality because of his family. Actually, Bond reflects the anger that the environment and the family provide to the child. As observed, Joe's main intention is to punish the puppet, that is to kill it. The words of a teenager about killing indicate how the concept of violence in society goes down to children. Soon after, Joe confesses that he is abused by his mother:

Anything goes wrong in our house Mum hits me. Don't know why. Am I supposed to change the world? (He goes to the puppet. Looks at it.) Got dirty green on your face. Off the brick. If I had a torch there'd be blood where I walk between you and the bricks. (Scene 1, Bond, 2000:6).

Billingham (2014:120) also clarifies that "Joe is subject to the complex strategies of emotional blackmail and psychological manipulation from his dysfunctional mother." The conversation between Joe and his mother illustrates this direction:

**Joe** You'll get us into trouble!

**Mother** No more! Enough! Go and swallow your meal if you can!

**Joe** goes out into, the other room.

**Mother** (calls) From now on this'll be a house of silence. I'll talk to you: 'Shut the door - don't be late - wash your hands.' But it's the last time I'll tell you anything that matters to me. A stone'd say more than I will. You won't like that. (Scene 2, Bond, 2000:13).

As noticed in the dialogue above, the relationship between Joe and his mother is quite tense. Obviously, Joe is trying to fit in because he is afraid of his mother and has to fulfil her every wish. In the house where Joe lives with his mother, pleasant times are limited and there is no intimate relationship and communication between the two. Bond draws attention to the role of the mother in Joe's mental health, emphasizing that the contact between mother and son is the basis for the child's psychological development. The mother, who always compares her son to his father because of Joe's behaviour, actually applies psychological violence on him:

**Mother** Go and switch the micro on. Have your meal. You make me weary. I shouldn't have asked. Might've known what the answer would be. You're turning out just like your father. (Scene 2, Bond, 2000:9).

In a normal relationship, the mother is expected to meet the physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs of her child. However, Joe's mother's attitude seems overly authoritarian, inconsistent and protective. In the play, Joe, has to spend almost all of his time with his mother because his father is absent. From the conversations between the mother and Joe, we can understand that the mother treated her child crudely and even violently. However, the woman sometimes turns into a loving and caring mother as the following:

**Mother** O you poor kid you're hungry. I forget you're still a child. Put your arms round me. Give me a hug. I feel as if I've forced you. What I'm asking isn't for myself - it's for us.

**Joe** *puts his arms round her.*

**Joe** Don't cry Mum. Please. (Scene 2, Bond, 2000:10).

Bandura also highlights that the socio-cultural environment has an important impact on individual development. For him, psycho-social factors take a significant aspect in the progress of the person and providing different characteristics (Ayaz Arda and Yıldız, 2019:229). In particular, peer groups have a very important function in gaining effective thinking and various behavioural styles on the individual. Therefore, Bandura suggests that peer groups are more effective than adults in the behaviour of the child. Edward Bond also explains this idea with Joe's communication with his friends:

**Joe** My mum's in trouble.

**Friends** Wow! - tell us!

'What trouble?

**Joe** It's serious. You mustn't tell. I only know a bit of it. She wants me to burn a house.

**Friends** Burn it?

Burn it down?

Whose house?

**Joe** New estate.

**Friends** She serious?

He's having you on! - or she is!

What for? (Scene 3, Bond, 2000:14).

When Joe declares his peers about his mother's demand, they encourage him to burn the house. His friends suggest to commit the crime with the help of rubbish and petrol (Scene 3, Bond, 2000:15). Soon after, Joe follows his friends' ideas and sets a fire on the building. Actually, Joe's mother has given the similar advice before his friends. Bond demonstrates that the way the children are directed has a significant impact on their future lives by showing the mother's misdirection of Joe:

**Mother** Go in daylight hours. Make sure you know the house. Go back in the dark. Set it on fire. Burn it down. Your father left his old cans in the shed - done some good for a change. Carry the petrol in that. The workmen leave wood and stuff lying round. It's all flammable. They're so lazy they probably left the petrol for the machines. Borrow that. (Scene 2, Bond, 2000:11).

Joe's learning is reinforced by the suggestions made by his friends to burn the house, which are similar to those of his mother (Bond, 2000:15). This aligns with Bandura's theory of learning faster in a social environment, as it suggests that learning through observation involves not only imitating others' behaviours, but also gaining knowledge through cognitive processing of events. In the play, Joe is not only observing his friends and mother, but also learning about their ideas and making connections with his own. This demonstrates that Joe is both imitating behaviours and following ideas around him.

The mother's behaviour, which involves encouraging Joe to commit a violent act, constitutes oppression for him. The pressure she puts on her child to carry out such an action, as well as her inconsistent speech after the event, suggest that the mother may be struggling with poor mental health. Bond's portrayal of this character highlights the idea that unhealthy people may not be capable of effectively raising children:

**Joe** Mum you told me to do - !

**Mother** Stop it! Stop it! Don't ever say that! I'll wash your mouth out in disinfectant! Told you to burn a house? What mother would tell her child to do that. She'd be a monster! No one would believe you!

**Joe** It doesn't matter.

**Mother** Doesn't matter? You burn a house - then make a wicked accusation - and say it doesn't matter? What's the world coming to? Where did we go wrong with the young? I should take you to



the police! Now! Let you suffer the consequence of your actions! I'm a fool to protect you...(Scene 4, Bond, 2000:22).

As observed above, it is revealed that the mother pressured her son to burn the house down, but now denies any involvement. This inconsistent behaviour causes Joe great sorrow. Additionally, the mother threatens to report Joe to the police. With statements such as “You don't have to be my whole life, you know! I've got a life on the other side of that door!” (Scene 2, Bond, 2000:13) and “I'm not your Mum” (Scene 4, Bond, 2000:22), it is suggested that the mother may have intentionally led Joe to commit a crime in order to get rid of him. After their tense conversation, Joe decides to flee in order to avoid being imprisoned. Bond highlights the idea that parents may not always be trustworthy or truthful, and suggests that it is important for individuals to be self-aware in a dangerous world.

Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, the man's child dies during the fire. Bond does not provide any information about the deceased child, such as their age. The death of an innocent child is particularly tragic, as it represents the loss of potential and missed opportunities. Namely, burning to death is a particularly painful way to die. Abt (2017:266) notes that “violent death at any age is brutal and tragic”, but it is especially so for children, whose innocence and powerlessness make them more vulnerable and heighten our sense of grief. At the end of *The Children*, the stranger man explains the events in more detail, revealing all of the mysteries of the play:

**Man** My son's dead! (*Turns to Joe and suddenly shrinks into petty, seething rage.*) Your mother was a whore. She worked for me. I kept the money. Bought the house. She wanted to move in with me. No! I moved in with my wife! Your mother wanted revenge! She burnt the house! (*Gestures.*) They only *knew*- the ones I killed. You did it! (*Shudders as he takes the brick from his pocket.*) You killed my son! (Scene 12, Bond, 2000:51).

Bandura (1973:11) claims that despite the fact that aggression dominates our lives, few coherent attempts have been devoted to validate its causes or implement constructive ways to reduce sociological violence. Man's technical capability for total devastation has now progressed to the point where he would no longer resolve disputes through violent means. Thus, Bond in *The Children* reflects examples of Bandura's social learning theory by processing Joe's behaviour. Obviously, in the play, the young Joe is just like his mother's copy who behaves his puppet both warm-hearted and violently. What Bond wishes to dramatize is that a person who has been subjected to violence will resort to violence again in the future. If we consider Bandura's theory, violence in Bond's play is a learned act in a social circle. In this context, the playwright emphasizes that violence breeds violence in *The Children*. Bond proves through Joe that violence can cause not only physical but also psychological wounds in human life. Although Joe is sometimes loved by his mother, he is an individual beaten and subjected to physical violence as well. Moreover, his mother inflicts psychological violence by humiliating, judging, suppressing, and threatening him.

Consequently, *The Children* demonstrates violence in line with Bandura's social learning theory. In Bond's play, violence is a method which Joe's mother applies to dominate their relationship at home. Besides, violence is a tactic that is used to take revenge in the play. Joe performs violence by learning about it from his mother and friends in his social circle. In fact, Joe's violence performance is more intensive when compared with his mother's act. Thus, Bond emphasizes how learned violence is transmitted from generation to generation in a more brutal and oppressive way. Teenagers and children are the individuals who are most exposed to violence in Bond's play.

Apparently, Bond attempts to display that every living soul should have the right to live, and the right to defend their own feelings and thoughts. When violence is committed in the presence of a child, they will adopt it in their mind as if it were normal. As a result, a chain of violence that is difficult to break will emerge forever. Drawing attention to the fact that psychological violence from family or environment is very effective in children's tendency to violence, Bond implies that this type of abuse inflicts more severe damage on children's souls than beatings. For this reason, it would be wiser to get down to the sources of the problems and find radical solutions in order to prevent violence that goes down to young ages. In *The Children*, Bond shadows out how the problem of violence is growing in the society, and serious injuries occur in the mental structure of the

person who is subjected to violence. For this reason, the child who has been exposed to violence can become a violent individual over time.

### Conclusion

Albert Bandura, a prominent figure in the field of psychology, developed the social learning theory, which emphasizes the influence of observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses of others in a social group. In his play *The Children*, British playwright Edward Bond explores the impact of the social environment on teenagers through the use of young characters. Bond illustrates how violence can be learned in accordance with Bandura's theory. Violence has long been a pervasive social problem, and it is difficult to completely prevent it. Like other behaviours, Bandura's theory suggests that violence can be learned through observation and imitation. In Bond's play, it is evident that individuals are capable of learning violence from the social environment in which they live, just as they learn other beliefs and habits. When people witness violence, they may begin to view it as a normal behaviour and act upon it themselves. In the play, Joe, a young boy, lives with his single mother, who subjects him to physical and psychological abuse. In line with Bandura's theory, Joe, as a victim, observes his mother as a model and then imitates her violent behaviour in a more extreme way, eventually becoming a murderer himself. Bond delves into the root of violence and highlights that it is often learned in the family, which is an individual's closest social environment. The message of Bond's play is clear: we must prevent violence in the family environment in order to prevent its transmission to future generations. Otherwise, as demonstrated by Joe's story, learned violence can escalate and become more and more severe.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Bandura'nın sosyal öğrenme kuramını temel alarak, Edward Bond'un *The Children* (Çocuklar) oyununda işlenen öğrenilmiş şiddet temasını incelemektedir. *Longman Sözlüğü*'ne göre, şiddet, “diğer insanlara fiziksel olarak zarar vermeyi hedefleyen bir davranış”tır. Bu anlamda, şiddet insanlık tarihinin başlangıcından beri var olmuş ve olmaya da devam edecektir. Gerçekte, şiddet günlük yaşamın çeşitli alanlarında var olduğu için, akademik çalışmaların önemli bir inceleme konusudur. İnsanlar doğdukları andan itibaren hayatta kalmayı amaçlayarak, kendi ya da başkalarına karşı şiddet uygulayarak daha iyi sonuçlar elde etmeye çalışırlar. Dahası, insanlar kaybetmiş veya olumsuz bir durumda olduğunu hissettiğinde, çekişmeli, zararlı ve hatta yıkıcı güçler kullanmaya başlayabilirler. Bu çerçevede, insanın güçlü ve zayıf yönlerinin çatışması sonucu, toplumsal yaşamda şiddet meydana gelir.

Albert Bandura, 20. yüzyılda önemli psikoloji çalışmaları yaparak adını duyuran bir bilim adamıdır. O, geleneksel inancın aksine şiddet davranışının doğuştan gelen saldırganlık eğilimlerinden değil, sosyal öğrenme yoluyla edinildiğine inanır. Bu bağlamda, Bandura'nın sosyal öğrenme kuramı öğrenenin zihni ve çevresi arasındaki etkileşimi inceler. İlgili kuram ayrıca davranışsal ve bilişsel ilkeleri de kapsar ve tamamlar. Bandura, 1960'larda kuramını geliştirmeye başlamış ve çocukların çevresel unsurları nasıl taklit ettiğini incelemiştir. Özellikle, 1961 ve 1963 yılları arasında yaptığı Bobo doll (Bobo oyuncuğu) deneyi, sosyal öğrenme kuramının temelini oluşturmuştur. Bu deney ile çocukların başka insanların şiddet içeren davranışlarını taklit ettikleri ispatlanmıştır. Bütün bunların yanı sıra, sosyal öğrenme kuramı, bir sosyal çevrede başkalarının davranışlarını gözleme, modelleme ve taklit etme gibi unsurları içerir. Bandura'ya göre, insanlar çoğu davranışlarını bu yollarla öğrenirler.

Edward Bond (1934-) ise çağdaş İngiliz tiyatrosunun en beğenilen ve üretken yazarlarından biridir. Yazarın oyunları birçok ülkede sahnelenmiş ve birçok dile çevrilmiştir. Akılcı tiyatrosunun öncülüğünü yapmış olan Bond, oyunlarında şiddeti büyük bir titizlikle dile getirmeye çalışır. Yazara göre şiddet, modern toplumların karşı karşıya olduğu en ciddi sorundur. Bond, oyunlarında şiddetin nedenlerini göstererek, şiddet davranışının gelecek nesillere aktarılmasını önlemeye çalışmaktadır. Yazarın bu amaç doğrultusunda yazdığı eserlerden biri de 2000 yılında sahnelenen *The Children* oyunudur.

Oyun, iki yetişkin ve 10-14 yaş arasında bir grup çocuğun etrafında geçen olayları konu almaktadır. Ergen Joe, babası tarafından terk edildiği için annesiyle yalnız yaşamaktadır. Bir gün, Joe okuldan döndüğünde, annesi onun mahalledeki bir binayı yakmasını ister, ancak nedenini açıklamaz. Joe nedeni merak edince annesi hiçbir şey anlatmaz, hatta öfkelenir ve oğlunu çeşitli şekillerde tehdit eder. Joe, arkadaşlarına giderek onlara annesinin isteğini anlatır ve arkadaşları da ona binayı yakma konusunda yardım etmeye ve bunu sır olarak saklamaya yemin ederler. Ertesi gece, Joe eve döndüğünde annesine evi ateşe verdiğini söyler. Ancak, annesi (oyunda ismi verilmemiştir) Joe'dan bunu yapmasını istediğini inkâr eder. Bu yangın sırasında, evdeki bir çocuk yanarak ölmüştür. Yangının sorumlusu olarak görülen Joe, hapse girmemek için memleketinden kaçmaya karar verir, bu da genç çocuğun çaresizlik ve güçsüzlük nedeniyle giriştiği korkunç yolculuğun başlangıcıdır. Joe ve arkadaşları kaçarken, talihsizliklerle karşılaşır ve yolda buldukları yaralı bir yabancıyı da yanlarında götürürler. Ancak bu yabancıyı ölen çocuğun babası olduğunu bilmezler. Yangında ölen oğlunun intikamını almak isteyen yaşlı ve yaralı adam oyunun sonuna kadar tüm gençleri teker teker öldürür. Joe, bu adamın annesinin evli sevgilisi olduğunu ve annesinin terkedildiği için evi ateşe verdirdiğini anlar. Oyunun sonunda, Joe yapayalnız kalır ancak gelecek için büyük bir umut taşır.

Bond'un oyunu akşam vakti terk edilmiş bir bölgedeki demiryolu yakınında başlar. Joe, okul çocuğu gibi giyinmiş oyuncak kuklasıyla birlikte. Bu sahnede oyun yazarı, Joe ile kuklası arasındaki konuşmayı bir yetişkin ile çocuğu arasındaymış gibi oluşturarak ana karakterin mutluluğunun, sıkıntısının ve üzüntüsünün kaynağını ortaya koymayı amaçlar. Bu ilişkide Bond, Joe'ya ebeveyn rolü vererek ona bir yetişkin tarafından nasıl davranıldığını gösterir. Bandura'nın belirttiği gibi, çocuklar yetişkinlerden öğrendikleri davranışları devam ettirirler. Bunun en güzel örneği Joe ile kuklası arasında geçen konuşmada görülmektedir. Joe kuklasına önce sevgiyle yaklaşır, onun ihtiyaçlarını sorar, ancak daha sonra oyuncuğunun kafasını tuğla ile parçalar. Yani Joe, annesinin uyguladığı davranışları daha şiddetli bir şekilde gerçekleştirir. Bandura'nın kuramına paralel olarak oyun yazarı, ebeveynin davranışının çocuğu nasıl etkilediğini göstermeye çalışır. Bond da Bandura gibi çocuğun en yakın sosyal çevresi olan ailesini gözlemleyerek birçok şeyi öğrendiğini gösterir. Sosyal çevreden öğrenilen bilgiler, birçok insan düşünce ve davranışının temelini oluşturmaktadır. Bandura'ya göre bireysel ve çevresel faktörler birbirini sürekli

etkilediđi için bađımsız deđiřkenler deđildirler. İnsanlar çevrelerini yaratır, geliştirir ve hatta yok ederler. Dolayısıyla çevre kořulları çocukların yaşamını ve geleceđini önemli ölçüde etkilemektedir. Bu nedenle, bireyin birçok davranıřı ve bilgisi sosyal çevrenin ürünüdür. Bu anlamda birey, başkalarını gözlemlerken davranıřın nasıl yapıldıđını öğrenir. Bu öğrenmeler daha sonra özellikle çocukların davranıřlarında baskın olan karakterin yaratılmasına rehberlik eder. Bond'un oyununda da Bandura'nın kuramına paralel olarak řiddetin öğrenilmiş bir davranıř olduđuna vurgu yapılır. Bu çerçevede, Bond'un oyununda, bireylerin diđer davranıř kalıpları gibi řiddeti içinde yaşadıkları toplumsal yapıdan öğrenme özelliđine sahip oldukları gözlemlenir. Yani insanlar inançlarını ve alışkanlıklarını öğrendikleri gibi řiddeti de öğrenirler. Yazara göre insanlar řiddeti gördükleri zaman, sanki normal bir davranıřmış gibi tekrar uygulamaktadırlar. Bond'un oyunundaki Joe, annesi tarafından fiziksel ve psikolojik řiddete uğrayan bir gençtir. Bandura'nın kuramında olduđu gibi, Joe annesini model alarak gözlemler ardından da annesinin řiddet davranıřlarını daha güçlü bir şekilde taklit eder ve hatta katil olur. Böylece Bond, řiddetin kökenine inerek onun bireyin en yakın sosyal çevresi olan ailede öğrenildiđini vurgular. Bu nedenle Bond'un oyunundaki mesaj açıktır: řiddeti gelecek nesillere aktarmamak için önce aile ortamındaki řiddeti engellemeliyiz. Aksi takdirde, Joe'nun örneđinde olduđu gibi, öğrenilmiş řiddetin boyutu giderek artacak ve insanlar üzerindeki yansıması kaçınılmaz olarak daha ciddi boyutlarda cisimleřecektir.