The modeling of aggression was illustrated in one of social psychology’s best-known experiments. Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961) had young children (approximately 4.5 years of age) watch as an adult played with a toy known as a Bobo doll. This inflatable doll bounces back up when held to the floor or punched. Three experimental conditions were created. One-third of the children saw an adult play with the doll very aggressively. For example, the adult punched the doll, sat on it, and hit it on the head with a mallet, shouting “Sock him in the nose . . .,” “Hit him down . . .,” and “Throw him in the air.” Another group of children saw an adult play nonaggressively with a different toy, and in a control condition no adult was present. Later, after the experimenter had led the children to experience frustration, the children were allowed to play with the Bobo doll. Consistent with the notion that children learn by imitation, the children who had seen the adult play aggressively with the doll behaved much more aggressively toward the doll than did children in the other two conditions. Moreover, this tendency extended to other toys in the room, suggesting that the children had learned a more general behavior pattern (see also Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963).

So do children always imitate aggression? Fortunately, the answer is no. It depends on whether they believe that aggression will go unpunished. In a replication of the Bobo doll study, Rosekrans and Hartup (1967) had young children watch an adult model play aggressively with the toy. The experimenter verbally approved of the adult’s behavior in one condition (e.g., “Good for you! I guess you really fixed him that time!”) but disapproved of the adult’s behavior in another condition (“Don’t do that, or I won’t let you play anymore”). The experimenter showed inconsistent reinforcement in a third condition, praising the model half of the time for playing aggressively and criticizing the model half of the time. Finally, a fourth group of children never saw the adult play with the doll at all.

Figure 13.3 shows how aggressively the children played with the doll when they were later given the chance. It is clear that children did not imitate aggression when it met with consistent punishment and were only moderately aggressive when the model received both reinforcement and punishment. These findings suggest that

**FIGURE 13.3**

*The Influence of Rewards and Punishment on the Modeling of Aggressive Behavior*

Children imitated an aggressive model only if the model received at least some reinforcement for being aggressive. These data suggest that children imitate aggression only if they believe they will not be punished for doing so.

*Source: Rosekrans and Hartup (1967).*