Social learning theory (psycology) assignment

Sociology

Introduction There are several different theories that attempt to explain why people behave the way that they do. Many theories contend that the reason people act certain ways is because that is the way they have learned to act. One of these theories is Albert Bandura’s social learning theory. This theory states that the way people behave is dependent on what they observe others doing and the outcomes of others’ actions.

I felt like this would be a good topic to choose because I am very interested in the different types of learning. I find the different theories associated with learning very interesting and also very applicable to everyday life. In this paper, I will discuss the other theories of learning, go into further detail about social learning theory, discuss Bandura’s Bobo Doll Experiment, discuss criticisms of Bandura’s social learning theory, and explain my own personal connection to the social learning theory. Theories of Learning

There is much to discuss about the theories that contend learning is the source of behaviors; however, because they are not the main focus of my paper, I will discuss them briefly. I merely want to give base information in order to compare against social learning theory. The two other main views on learning contend that people are conditioned to act certain ways. “ Classical conditioning is the basic learning process that involves repeatedly pairing a neutral stimulus with a response-producing stimulus until the neutral stimulus elicits the same response,” (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2010, p. 186).

Basically, this means that if an action that elicits a natural reaction is paired with an action that does not cause a natural reaction for a long enough

period of time, then the action that doesn’t cause a natural reaction will, in fact, cause the same natural reaction. The example of Ivan Pavlov and his dog will explain this theory with much more clarity. When a dog has food in his mouth, it salivates naturally. When a dog hears a bell ringing, it does not naturally salivate. In an experimental setting, Pavlov gave his dog food and every time he would do so, he would ring a bell. He did this for an extended period of time.

Eventually, the sound of the bell alone would trigger salivation in the dog. Although it is not natural for the sound of a ringing bell to make a dog salivate, through this experiment the dog had learned to salivate upon the ringing of a bell. This is because the dog had learned to associate the sound of the bell with food. The other main theory of learning is called operant conditioning. “ Operant Conditioning is the basic learning process that involves changing the probability that a response will be repeated by manipulating the consequences of that response,” (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2010, p. 01). According to B. F. Skinner ??? the man who discovered operant conditioning ??? there are two broad consequences to a behavior: reinforcement and punishment. Reinforcement causes a behavior to continue while punishment increases the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. Either consequence can occur in a number of ways; however, no matter the form of the consequence, operant conditioning contends that behaviors are learned through the consequences of past actions and experiences. Social Learning Theory

The two theories of learning that I have just discussed emphasize direct experiences in learning and behaviors; however, these theories do not

mention an extremely important cause of behaviors. Hockenbury & Hockenbury (2010) states that many behaviors are caused by observing the behaviors of others and then imitating those behaviors. In social learning (also called observational learning), learning takes place through observing the actions of others. Through research that has been done, it is clear that human brains are wired for imitation. Newborn infants have even shown signs of being able to imitate actions such as opening their mouth.

If this is not enough evidence to believe it is natural for humans to imitate each other, evidence has been found that certain neurons in the brain activate both when an action is performed and when the same action is merely thought about. These are called mirror neurons for obvious reasons. It is the common belief among those that agree with social learning that actions are not just mechanical copying but that they are a result of cognitive processes that are actively judging the actions of others and deciding whether or not the action should be imitated.

To further explain the cognitive process of social learning, Bandura suggested that there are four cognitive steps involved in this process. The first step is attention. It seems fairly obvious that in order to learn anything, a person must be paying attention to whatever is being learned. Anything that decreases attention will also decrease any type of learning including social learning. The second step is retention. In order for a person to repeat an action that he or she has seen, that person must be able to remember that action.

Paying attention to a certain action does no good if the person paying attention is not able to remember what he or she saw. The third step to imitation is being able to transform these mental representations into actions that are possible to reproduce. It is vital that the person attempting to repeat a behavior is physically able to repeat that behavior. No matter how many times I watch professional basketball games and no matter how close I pay attention, I will never be able to dunk a basketball. These three steps are absolutely necessary for learning to take place through observation.

However, there is one more cognitive step in imitating an action: motivation. Unless a person has a reason to carry out the action, that person has no real need to imitate it. According to Boeree (2006), motivation to carry out an action can include reinforcement and punishment. An example of reinforcement would be if I were promised a certain incentive for carrying out an action. As I discussed earlier, in operant conditioning, these factors are said to cause learning. However, in social learning, these factors don’t so much cause learning as they cause a person to demonstrate what he or she has already learned.

Bobo Doll Experiment To prove his opinions, Bandura carried out an experiment that he is famous for. In this experiment, four-year-old children separately watched a movie showing an adult playing aggressively with a Bobo clown doll. Children saw one of three versions of the movie. Each of the films were primarily similar; however, they each had different endings. In one ending, the adult was reinforced with soft drinks, candy, and snacks. In

another ending, the adult was punished for the actions with a scolding and a spanking by another adult.

In the final version of the film, the adult experienced no consequences for the aggressive behavior. After watching one version of the film, each child was allowed to play alone with the Bobo doll and each child’s behavior was observed through a one-way mirror. Children who saw the adult getting punished for the aggressive actions were far less likely to repeat similarly aggressive behavior than the children who watched either of the other two versions of the film. Bandura also added on to the experiment to help prove his views on motivation.

Each child was asked to show the experimenter what he or she saw the adult do to the Bobo doll. For every action the imitated correctly, the child received snacks. No matter what version of the film the children saw, virtually all of them repeated the aggressive behaviors they had seen in the film (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2010, p. 220). Criticisms of Social Learning Theory Although social learning theory makes many very valid points, there are still some criticisms of it. Social learning theory states that people learn by observing the actions of others, the environment, and the mass media.

Biological psychologists argue, though, that social learning theory completely ignores biological state. Isom (1998) states that social learning theory rejects the differences of people due to genetic, brain, and learning differences. Also, in the Bobo doll experiment, many people argue that the experiment itself was unethical because the children were trained to and coerced into being aggressive. Personal Connection I am able to apply Albert

Bandura’s social learning to my everyday life very easily. It is not hard to believe that most of the individuals who learn actions from observing others are children.

I have a four and a half month old son and it is no different with him. It is amazing to see the new things he learns every day. It is amazing to be able to witness the wheels in my son’s head turn, so to speak. I can see the transition from him observing an action of mine or my boyfriend’s and eventually imitating that action. For example, a few days ago my boyfriend taught my son how to stick his tongue out. My boyfriend kept sticking his tongue out of his mouth and making wet raspberry noises. My son enjoyed this sight and sound.

Eventually my son tried it and he received a very warm welcome from both my boyfriend and me for this action. He now does this all the time. This is just one example, but through similar events in my life, it is clear to me that individuals do learn certain actions through observing others. Conclusion While there are several views of learning and even more views on the causes of behavior, Albert Bandura’s theory of social learning is very popular. It contends that people learn to behave certain ways by viewing actions being erformed by others and then imitating them if they can follow the important steps to imitating. The steps that are necessary to learn an action are attention, retention, and reproduction. These steps, though, will not reproduce a learned action unless there is some motivation. There is quite a bit of proof to Bandura’s thoughts in Bobo doll experiment which took place in the 1960s. While I do not believe that Bandura’s social learning theory

explains everything associated with the way that individuals learn and act, it is very applicable and relevant to events in my life. ?