Bandura’s experiments

In the early 1960s Bandura and other researchers conducted a classic set of experiments that demonstrated the power of observational learning. In one experiment, a preschool child worked on a drawing while a television set showed an adult behaving aggressively toward a large inflated Bobo doll (a clown doll that bounces back up when knocked down). The adult pummeled the doll with a mallet, kicked it, flung it in the air, sat on it, and beat it in the face, while yelling such remarks as " Sock him in the nose … Kick him … Pow! " The child was then left in another room filled with interesting toys, including a Bobo doll.

The experimenters observed the child through one-way glass. Compared with children who witnessed a nonviolent adult model and those not exposed to any model, children who witnessed the aggressive display were much more likely to show aggressive behaviors toward the Bobo doll, and they often imitated the model's exact behaviors and hostile words. In a variant of the original experiment, Bandura and colleagues examined the effect of observed consequences on learning. They showed four-year-old children one of three films of an adult acting violently toward a Bobo doll.

In one version of the film, the adult was praised for his or her aggressive behavior and given soda and candies. In another version, the adult was scolded, pked, and warned not to behave that way again. In a third version, the adult was neither rewarded nor punished. After viewing the film, each child was left alone in a room that contained a Bobo doll and other toys. Many children imitated the adult’s violent behaviors, but children who saw the adult punished imitated the behaviors less often than children who saw the other films.

However, when the researchers promised the children a reward if they could copy the adult’s behavior, all three groups of children showed large and equal amounts of violent behavior toward the Bobo doll. Bandura concluded that even those children who did not see the adult model receive a reward had learned throughobservation, but these children (especially those who saw the model being punished) would not display what they had learned until they expected a reward for doing so.

The term latent learning describes cases in which an individual learns a new behavior but does not perform this behavior until there is the possibility of obtaining a reward. BBandura’s Theoryof Imitation According to Bandura’s influential theory of imitation, also called social learning theory, four factors are necessary for a person to learn through observation and then imitate a behavior: attention, retention, reproduction, andmotivation. First, the learner must pay attention to the crucial details of the model’s behavior.

A young girl watching her father bake a cake will not be able to imitate this behavior successfully unless she pays attention to many important details—ingredients, quantities, oven temperature, baking time, and so on. The second factor is retention—the learner must be able to retain all of this information in memory until it is time to use it. If the person forgets important details, he or she will not be able to successfully imitate the behavior. Third, the learner must have the physical skills and coordination needed for reproduction of the behavior.

The young girl must have enough strength and dexterity to mix the ingredients, pour the batter, and so on, in order to bake a cake on her own. Finally, the learner must have the motivation to imitate the model. That is,

learners are more likely to imitate a behavior if they expect it to lead to some type of reward or reinforcement. If learners expect that imitating the behavior will not lead to reward or might lead to punishment, they are less likely to imitate the behavior.

C Theory of Generalized Imitation An alternative to Bandura’s theory is the theory of generalized imitation. This theory states that people will imitate the behaviors of others if the situation is similar to cases in which their imitation was reinforced in the past. For example, when a young child imitates the behavior of a parent or an older sibling, this imitation is often reinforced with smiles, praise, or other forms of approval.

Similarly, when children imitate the behaviors of friends, sports stars, or celebrities, this imitation may be reinforced—by the approval of their peers, if not their parents. Through the process of generalization, the child will start to imitate these models in other situations. Whereas Bandura’s theory emphasizes the imitator’s thought processes and motivation, the theory of generalized imitation relies on two basic principles of operant conditioning—reinforcement and generalization. D Factors Affecting Imitation Many factors determine whether or not a person will imitate a model.

As already shown, children are more likely to imitate a model when the model’s behavior has been reinforced than when it has been punished. More important, however, are the expected consequences to the learner. A person will imitate a punished behavior if he or she thinks that imitation will produce some type of reinforcement. The characteristics of the model also influence the likelihood of imitation. Studies have shown that children are more likely

to imitate adults who are pleasant and attentive to them than those who are not.

In addition, children more often imitate adults who have substantial influence over their lives, such as parents and teachers, and those who seem admired and successful, such as celebrities and athletes. Both children and adults are more likely to imitate models who are similar to them in sex, age, and background. For this reason, when behavior therapists use modeling to teach new behaviors or skills, they try to use models who are similar to the learners. Microsoft® Encarta® Reference Library 2003. © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.