

CHAPTER 10

THE SOCIAL COGNITIVE LEARNING APPROACH

part 2

Dr Hermann Swart

hswart@sun.ac.za

The Dynamics of the Personality: SCLT View of Learning

- All behaviour is acquired through learning
- Important differences between social cognitive views of learning and those of standard behaviourism (Skinner):
 - **Skinner:** *Individuals learn passively on the basis of environmental reinforcement/punishment* / **SCLT:** Individuals are active participants who influence their own learning process (via self-regulation)
 - **Skinner:** *Conditioning is the only form of learning* / **SCLT:** Learning takes place via direct experience, observation, self-regulation
 - **Skinner:** *Learning is always linked to reinforcement by an external agent* / **SCLT:** Learning is linked to direct, vicarious, and self-reinforcement

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- **Direct reinforcement/punishment:** individual receives reward/punishment for their behaviour from an external agent
- **Vicarious reinforcement/punishment:** individual observes another being rewarded/punished for a particular behaviour
- **Self-reinforcement/punishment:** an individual rewards/punishes themselves for engaging in a particular behaviour
- An individual's subjective acceptance of reward and punishment is the most important element in learning

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- **Learning through direct experience**
 - Behaviour changes as a result of performing a behaviour (i.e.. as a result of being rewarded or punished by someone else for performing the behaviour)
 - Skinner: occurs via operant conditioning or respondent condition
 - SCLT: Observational learning through self-regulation is more important than learning through direct experience

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- Cognitive processes play an important role in learning through direct experience (Skinner would not agree with this)
 - ❖ People do not simply produce behaviour – they consciously perceive and evaluate the consequences of the behaviour
 - ❖ Self-reinforcement is as important (if not more important) than direct (environmental) reinforcement

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• **Observational Learning**

- This is the most important form of learning
- People only learn a few behaviours from direct experience alone
- **Social Learning** – all learning phenomena in which social and cognitive factors play a role
- **The Model**: the person, book, film character etc whose behaviour is being observed
- **The Observer**: the person observing the model's behaviour
- **The Reinforcement Agent**: the person who rewards or punishes the model's behaviour

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- The behaviour of the observer changes as a result of observing the behaviour of the model
- **Vicarious reinforcement**: when the model's behaviour is reinforced and this is observed by the observer, resulting in the observing acquiring the model's behaviour
- **Modelling**: the model's behaviour
- **Imitation**: when the observer copies the model's behaviour
- **Counter-imitation**: when the observer engages in the opposite behaviour to that which they observed the model performing

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- For observational learning to take place:
 - ❖ Observer must pay **attention** to the model's behaviour
 - ❖ The observer must **retain** (remember) the model's behaviour (**retention**) – depends on the observer's attention
 - ❖ The observer must **reproduce** the model's behaviour at some point in the future (**reproduction**)

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• Factors influencing Observational Learning

▪ The nature of the modelled behaviour

- ❖ The nature of the behaviour influences attention, retention, and reproduction of behaviour
- ❖ New, unknown, active, captivating behaviour attracts attention of observers and such behaviour is more easily acquired

▪ The characteristics of the model

- ❖ The behaviour of a high status model, or a model that is perceived as similar to the observer, is more likely to be reproduced by the observer than that of a low-status or dissimilar model

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▪ The characteristics of the observer

- ❖ Motivation, interests, values, self-confidence, opinions, intelligence, and perceptions
- ❖ Personality influences the choice of models, which behaviour will hold the observer's attention, which behaviours will be retained and which behaviours will be reproduced
- ❖ Expectations about the outcome of behaviour strongly influence the reproduction of behaviour

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▪ The results of the model's behaviour

- ❖ **Vicarious outcomes** (reinforcement or punishment of model's behaviour)
- ❖ Vicarious rewards usually leads to behaviour imitation
- ❖ Vicarious punishment usually leads to counter-imitation

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❖ Vicarious consequences

- highlight factors the observer needs to take into account in planning their behaviour
- influence the observer's motivation
- influence observer's emotional reaction and values (in response to the reaction of the model)
- influence the observer's perceptions of the model and the reinforcing agent

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- ❖ Vicarious punishment and reward have a similar effect on the acquisition of new behaviour – vicarious reward leads to reproduction of behaviour more often than vicarious punishment
- ❖ Vicarious punishment and reward both lead to the acquisition of new behaviour more than when there are no consequences for the model
- ❖ The observer judges the outcome of model's behaviour to previous experience – this 'relative outcome' of the model's behaviour is an important determinant of whether the observer will reproduce a model's behaviour
- ❖ Observers can imitate a model's behaviour indirectly via similar behaviours

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▪ Self-efficacy

- ❖ Observational learning is influenced by the degree to which an individual has confidence in their ability to reproduce the behaviour

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- **Learning through Self-regulation** (an individual's ability to regulate their own behaviour, specifically their learning processes)
 - Includes self-reinforcement and self-punishment
 - Two types of self-regulation:
 - ❖ **Internal Self-regulation:** Subjective evaluation of own behaviour
 - ❖ **External Self-regulation:** arranging a situation and the outcome of behaviour so that the individual is able to reward or punish themselves in a concrete way
 - Regarded as the most important form of learning
 - ❖ The effect of rewards or punishment from external agents depends on the individual's interpretation

The Development of the Personality

- Development, via the learning of new behaviour (and the modification of existing behaviour), occurs across the entire lifespan
- Development is an ongoing process of change resulting from the interaction between genetic and environmental factors

The Optimal Development of the Personality

- Optimal development is characterized by:
 - the ability to recognize factors that are relevant to effective functioning in a given situation
 - the ability to succeed in producing behaviour that meets the individual's standards
- 'Optimal' development is dependent upon the individual's cultural context

Views on Psychopathology

- Pathological behaviour is learnt via observational learning
- Do not need to look for underlying dynamic causes of psychopathological behaviour
- A lack of self-efficacy is important for the development of undesirable pathological behaviour

Implications and Applications: Interpretation and handling of Aggression

- **9.1, 9.2, & 9.3 for self-study**
- Aggressive behaviours form part of each individual's behaviour repertoire and are more likely to be repeated if they lead to rewarding consequences
- New aggressive behaviours can be learnt through observing aggressive models
- The likelihood of acquired aggressive responses being reproduced depend on factors such as outcome expectancies, self-efficacy perceptions, individual interpretation, self-regulating strategies and values

Implications and Applications: Interpretation and handling of Aggression

- Aggressive responses can be provoked by unpleasant stimuli and by the expectations of rewarding outcomes
- Persistence in aggressive behaviour is regulated by its results
- The regulation of aggressive behaviour is a function of the interaction between the individual, the situation, and behaviour (reciprocal determinism)

Evaluation of the Theory

- SCLT is a very popular personality theory
- Large volumes of research that support its assumptions
- Criticism: New terms are regularly developed for existing phenomena, making it difficult to develop a simple, logical structure to the theory