Social Cognitive Theory

General

Social cognitive theory, firstly known as social learning theory, was formed during 1960s by a Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura and can short be described in his own words: "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, **most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling**: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action."

What is social cognitive theory?

Basic principles of social cognitive theory were set in eralier works of Julian Rotter[1], Neal Miller and John Dollard [2]. Bandura's social learning theory starts from evolved assumption that we can learn by observing others. **Key processes** during this type of learning are **observation, imitation, and modeling** which as such involve **attention, memory, and motivation**. People **learn through observing others' behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors**.

This theory therefore outgrows behaviorism and forms its connection to cognitivism as it claims **people don't just respond to stimuli**, but **interpret them as well**. They are formed by the outside world and at the same time they form the outside world themselves ("**reciprocal determinism**") instead of just being machines modeled by environment. Bandura's theory is therefore often considered a **bridge between behaviorist and cognitivist learning perspectives**.

As described in Bandura's works, behavior is most likely to be adopted if it's **result is observed as valuable**. In case it is then **modeled, organized, rehearsed and reproduced overtly**, the **learning will be successful**.

What is the practical meaning of classical conditioning?

Social learning theory has been applied extensively to the **understanding of aggression** and other **behavior modifications**, especially through **media effects**. Bandura also warned that violent TV contents could be leading into a violent reality that is worth fearing.

Keywords and most important names

- **Social learning**, **observational learning**, **reciprocal determinism**, **observing**, **modeling**
- Albert Bandura, Julian Rotter

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TIP: Theories. Index of Learning Theories and Models.

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Read more

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