
UNIT 2 SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY OF PERSONALITY (BANDURA)

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

A number of theories have been proposed to explain human personality. These theories differ in the conception of human nature they adopt and what they regard to be basic causes and mechanism of human motivation and behaviour. In the present unit we will attempt to understand human personality from social cognitive perspective. First we will briefly discuss the main features of social cognitive theory. After that we will try to explain the social cognitive theory of Bandura in detail. While explaining Bandura's theory emphasis will be placed on his concepts of reciprocal determinism, self system, and process of observational learning.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Define social cognitive approach to personality;
- Describe the characteristic features of social learning theory of Bandura;
- Explain the concept of reciprocal determinism;
- Analyse the development of self system;
- Explain the principle of observational learning;
- Elucidate the sources of self-efficacy; and
- Describe Bandura's concept of vicarious learning.

2.2 SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

Social cognitive theory is basically a social leaning theory based on the ideas that people learn by watching what others do and that human thought processes

are central to understanding personality. While social cognitive theorists agree that there is a fair amount of influence on development generated by learned behaviour as a result of interaction with the environment in which one grows up, they believe that the individual person (and therefore cognition) is just as important as environment in determining moral development.

Social cognitive theory explains behaviour in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants. It emphasises that people learn by observing others. People's interaction with the environment, behaviour of others, and one's own cognition etc. act as chief factors in influencing the development of personality of an individual. These three factors are not static or independent; rather, they are all reciprocal. For example, each behaviour witnessed can change a person's way of thinking (cognition). Similarly, the environment in which one is raised may influence later behaviours, just as a father's mindset (also cognition) will determine the environment in which his children are raised.

2.2.1 Main Tenets of Social Cognitive Theory

Expert opinions differ on exactly what separates social cognitive theory from the more general social learning theory. In general, however, the following principles can be used to define social cognitive theory

People learn by observing others, a process known as vicarious learning. Although learning can modify behaviour, people do not always apply what they have learned. Individual's choice is based on perceived or actual consequences of the concerned behaviour.

People are more likely to follow the behaviours modeled by someone with whom they can identify. The more perceived commonalities and/or emotional attachments between the observer and the model, the more likely the observer will learn from the model.

Also, the degree of self-efficacy that a learner possesses directly affects his or her ability to learn. Self-efficacy is a fundamental belief in one's ability to achieve a goal. If a person believes that he or she can learn new behaviours, that would make the person much more successful in doing so.

2.3 ALBERT BANDURA'S SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Albert Bandura was born on December 4, 1925, in the small town of Mundare in Northern Alberta, Canada. He received his bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of British Columbia in 1949. He went on to the University of Iowa, where he received his Ph.D. in 1952. After graduating, he took a postdoctoral position at the Wichita Guidance Center in Wichita, Kansas. In 1953, he started teaching at Stanford University. Bandura was president of the APA in 1973, and received the APA's Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions in 1980.

Bandura has presented his theory in a series of books. With Richard Walters as junior author, Bandura (1959) wrote *Adolescent Aggression* in which social learning principles were used to describe the personality development. This was followed by another book *Social Learning and Personality Development* (1963)

in which Bandura and Walters presented the social learning principles they had developed.

In 1969 Bandura published *Principles of Behaviour Modification*, in which he explained application of behavioural techniques based on learning principles to the modification of behaviour, and in 1973 he wrote *Aggression: A social Learning Analysis*, in which he attempted to provide a unified theoretical framework for analysing human thought and behaviour.

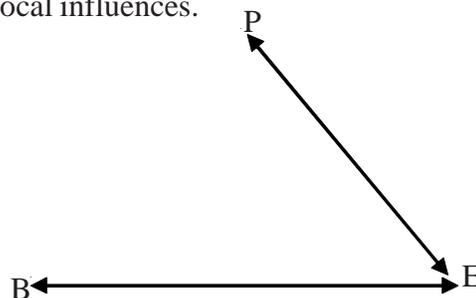
Bandura's Social Learning Theory of Personality is based on the premise that human behaviour is largely acquired and that the principles of learning are sufficient to account for the development and maintenance of behaviour. But the earlier learning theorists were unable to pay sufficient attention about the social context in which behaviour is taking place. Bandura has done a great deal of work on social learning throughout his career and is famous for his "Social Learning Theory" which he has recently renamed, "Social Cognitive Theory". Bandura is seen by many as a cognitive psychologist because of his focus on motivational factors and self-regulatory mechanisms that contribute to a person's behaviour, rather than just environmental factors. This focus on cognition is what differentiates social cognitive theory from Skinner's purely behaviouristic viewpoint.

Bandura theory of social learning can be explained under the following three headings:

- 1) Reciprocal determinism
- 2) Self-system
- 3) Principles of observational learning

2.3.1 Reciprocal Determinism

Human behaviour has often been explained in terms of one-sided determinism. In such modes of unidirectional causation, behaviour is depicted as being shaped and controlled either by environmental influences or by internal dispositions. Social cognitive theory favours a model of causation involving triadic reciprocal determinism. In this model of reciprocal causation, behaviour, cognition and other personal factors, and other environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally. Reciprocal causation does not mean that the different sources of influence are of equal strength. Some may be stronger than others. Nor do that the reciprocal influences all occur simultaneously. It takes time for a causal factor to exert its influence and activate reciprocal influences.



Social Cognitive Theory: B represents behaviour, P represents personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events, and E represents the external environment.

Source: Bandura (1986)

Let us consider briefly the major interactional links between the different subsystems of influence. The P?B of reciprocal causation reflects the interaction between thought, affect and action. Expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals and intentions give shape and direction to behaviour. What people think, believe, and feel, affects how they behave (Bandura, 1986). The E?P segment of reciprocal causation is concerned with the interactive relation between personal characteristics and environmental influences. Human expectations, beliefs, emotional beliefs and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social influences. The B?E segment of reciprocal causation in the triadic system represents the two-way influence between behaviour and the environment. In the transactions of everyday life, behaviour alters environmental conditions and is, in turn, altered by the very conditions it creates. Because of the bidirectionality of influence between behaviour and environmental circumstances, people are both products and producers of their environment. They affect the nature of their experienced environment through selection and creation of situations.

Thus a complete analysis of behaviour from reciprocal determinism requires consideration of all three sets of behaviour – cognitive, behavioural, and environmental – influence one another. Bandura discusses the personal determinants of behaviour in terms of the self-system and the individual's self efficacy. Now we turn to consideration of these concepts.

2.3.2 Self-System

It is evident from the reciprocal determinism that all the three segments are mutually interactive. Now the question arises that do they have some starting point? Bandura answered in yes and that point is self system. "In social learning theory, a self-system is not a psychic agent that controls behaviour. Rather it refers to cognitive structures that provide reference mechanisms to set of functions for perception, evaluation and regulation of behaviour". An understanding of self-generated influences subsumed in the self-system is necessary for the explanation and prediction of human behaviour. According to Bandura the three component processes involved in self regulation of behaviour through the activation of self-prescribed contingencies. The three components involved in self-system are self-observation, judgmental processes and self-response.

- 1) *Self-observation*: We look at ourselves, our behaviour, and keep tabs on it.
- 2) *Judgment*: We compare what we see with a standard. For example, we can compare our performance with traditional standards, such as "rules of etiquette." Or we can create arbitrary ones, like "I'll read a book a week." Or we can compete with others, or with ourselves.
- 3) *Self-response*: If you did well in comparison with your standard, you give yourself rewarding self-responses. If you did poorly, you give yourself punishing self-responses. These self-responses can range from the obvious (treating yourself to a sundae or working late) to the more covert (feelings of pride or shame).
- 4) *Self efficacy*: A very important concept in psychology that can be understood well with self-regulation is self-efficacy. If, over the years, you find yourself meeting your standards and life loaded with self-praise and self-reward, you will have a strong sense of self-efficacy. If, on the other hand, you find

yourself forever failing to meet your standards and punishing yourself, you will have a poor sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy plays an important role in the Bandura's theory of self-system.

According to Bandura self-efficacy is "the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (1995). In other words, self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation. Bandura described these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel (1994). Since Bandura published his seminal paper, "*Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioural Change*," the subject has become one of the most studied topics in psychology. Why has self-efficacy become such an important topic among psychologists and educators? As Bandura and other researchers have demonstrated, self-efficacy can have an impact on everything from psychological states to behaviour to motivation.

The Role of Self-Efficacy

Virtually all people can identify goals they want to accomplish, things they would like to change, and things they would like to achieve. However, most people also realise that putting these plans into action is not quite so simple. Bandura and others have found that an individual's self-efficacy plays a major role in how goals, tasks, and challenges are approached.

People with a strong sense of self-efficacy have the following characteristics:

- They view challenging problems as tasks to be mastered.
- They develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate.
- They form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities.
- They recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments.

On the other hand, people with a weak sense of self-efficacy show the following characteristics:

- They avoid challenging tasks.
- They believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities.
- They focus on personal failings and negative outcomes.
- They quickly lose confidence in personal abilities (Bandura, 1994).

Sources of Self-Efficacy

How does self-efficacy develop? These beliefs begin to form in early childhood as children deal with a wide variety of experiences, tasks, and situations. However, the growth of self-efficacy does not end during youth, but continues to evolve throughout life as people acquire new skills, experiences, and understanding (Bandura, 1992).

According to Bandura, there are four major sources of self-efficacy.

- i) *Mastery Experiences*: The most effective way of developing a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences. (Bandura 1994). Performing a task successfully strengthens our sense of self-efficacy. However, failing to adequately deal with a task or challenge can undermine and weaken self-efficacy.

- ii) *Social Modeling*: Witnessing other people successfully completing a task is another important source of self-efficacy. According to Bandura, when a person sees another person or persons similar to oneself succeeding by one's sustained efforts, makes the person raise the belief that they too possess the capabilities that could help them master comparable activities and succeed.
- iii) *Social Persuasion*: Bandura also asserted that people could be persuaded to believe that they have the skills and capabilities to succeed. Consider a time when someone said something positive and encouraging that helped you achieve a goal. Getting verbal encouragement from others helps people overcome self-doubt and instead focus on giving their best effort to the task at hand.
- iv) *Psychological Responses*: Our own responses and emotional reactions to situations also play an important role in self-efficacy. Moods, emotional states, physical reactions, and stress levels can all impact how a person feels about their personal abilities in a particular situation. A person who becomes extremely nervous before speaking in public may develop a weak sense of self-efficacy in these situations.

2.3.3 Principles of Observational Learning

Bandura's social cognitive theory emphasises the social origins of behaviour in addition to the cognitive thought processes that influence human behaviour and functioning. Bandura's social-cognitive approach represents a break from traditional theories by proposing that cognitive factors are central to human functioning and that learning can occur in the absence of direct reinforcement. That is, learning can occur simply through observation of models and in the absence of reinforcement.

Bandura argued that some of the traditional principles of learning such as the laws of reinforcement and punishment are more relevant to performance than to acquisition. According to Bandura, learning can occur outside the boundaries of pleasure and pain. Thus, people learn a great deal simply by watching or observing others, by reading about what people do, and by making general observations of the world. This learning may or may not be demonstrated in the form of behaviour.

To illustrate that people learn from watching others, Albert Bandura constructed an experiment entitled "*Bobo Doll Behaviour: A Study of Aggression*." In this experiment Bandura exposed a group of children to a video, featuring violent and aggressive actions. For the experiment Bandura made of film of one of his students, a young woman, essentially beating up a bobo doll. Bobo doll is an inflatable, egg-shaped balloon creature with a weight in the bottom that makes it bob back up when you knock him down.

The woman punched the clown, shouting "sockeroo!" She kicked it, sat on it, hit with a little hammer, and so on, shouting various aggressive phrases. Bandura showed this film to groups of kindergartners who, as you might predict, liked it a lot. They then were let out to play. In the play room, of course, were several observers with pens and clipboards in hand, a brand new bobo doll, and a few little hammers.

The observers recorded that a lot of little kids beat the daylights out of the bobo doll. They punched it and shouted “sockeroo,” kicked it, sat on it, hit it with the little hammers, and so on. In other words, they imitated the young lady in the film, and quite precisely at that.

This might seem like a real nothing of an experiment at first, but consider: These children changed their behaviour without first being rewarded for approximations to that behaviour! And while that may not seem extraordinary to the average parent, teacher, or casual observer of children, it didn’t fit so well with standard behaviouristic learning theory. Bandura called this phenomenon as observational learning or modeling, and this theory is usually called social learning theory.

Bandura did a large number of variations on the study: The model was rewarded or punished in a variety of ways, the kids were rewarded for their imitations, the model was changed to be less attractive or less prestigious, and so on. Responding to criticism that bobo dolls were supposed to be hit, he even did a film of the young woman beating up a live clown. When the children went into the other room, what should they find there but — the live clown! They proceeded to punch him, kick him, hit him with little hammers, and so on.

All these variations allowed Bandura to establish that there were certain steps involved in the modeling process:

- 1) *Attentional Processes*: In order to learn, you need to be paying attention. Anything that detracts your attention is going to have a negative effect on observational learning. If the model is interesting or there is a novel aspect to the situation, you are far more likely to dedicate your full attention to learning. Thus if you are going to learn anything, you have to be paying attention. Likewise, anything that puts a damper on attention is going to decrease learning, including observational learning. If, for example, you are sleepy, groggy, drugged, sick, nervous, or “hyper,” you will learn less well.

Some of the things that influence attention involve characteristics of the model. If the model is colorful and dramatic, for example, we pay more attention. If the model is attractive, or prestigious, or appears to be particularly competent, we will pay more attention. And if the model seems more like ourselves, we will pay more attention. These kinds of variables directed Bandura towards an examination of television and its effects on kids.

- 2) *Retentional Processes*: The ability to store information is also an important part of the learning process. Retention can be affected by a number of factors, but the ability to pull up information later and act on it is vital to observational learning. Thus you must be able to retain and remember what you have paid attention to. This is where imagery and language come in. We store what we have seen the model doing in the form of mental images or verbal descriptions. When so stored, we can later “bring up” the image or description, so that we can reproduce it with our own behaviour.
- 3) *Reproduction Processes*: Once you have paid attention to the model and retained the information, it is time to actually perform the behaviour you observed. Further practice of the learned behaviour leads to improvement

and skill advancement. Through the reproduction processes you have to translate the images or descriptions into actual behaviour. So you have to have the ability to reproduce the behaviour in the first place. Another important tidbit about reproduction is that our ability to imitate improves with practice at the behaviours involved. And also it has been noted that our abilities improve even when we just imagine ourselves performing! Many athletes, for example, imagine their performance in their mind's eye prior to actually performing.

- 4) *Motivational Processes*: And yet, with all this, you're still not going to do anything unless you are motivated to imitate that is, until you have some reason for doing it. Hence in order for observational learning to occur and be successful, you have to be motivated to imitate the behaviour that has been modeled. Reinforcement and punishment play an important role in motivation. While experiencing these motivators can be highly effective, one can also observe other experiences such as some type of reinforcement or punishment that others are being subjected to. For example, if you see another student rewarded with extra credit for coming to class on time, you might start to show up a few minutes early each day.

In the theory of observational learning Bandura mentions a number of motives, which are:

- a) *past reinforcement*, ala traditional behaviourism.
- b) *promised reinforcements* (incentives) that we can imagine.
- c) *vicarious reinforcement* — seeing and recalling the model being reinforced.

All the above three are, traditionally, considered to be the things that “cause” learning. Bandura states that they do not so much cause learning as they cause us to demonstrate what we have learned. That is, Bandura sees them as motives. Of course, the negative motivations are there as well, giving you reasons not to imitate someone. These are listed below:

- d) *past punishment*.
- e) *promised punishment (threats)*.
- f) *vicarious punishment*.

Like most traditional behaviourists, Bandura says that punishment in whatever form does not work as well as reinforcement and, in fact, has a tendency to “backfire” on us.

2.3.4 Vicarious Learning

Closely related to observational learning is vicarious learning, another distinctive feature of Bandura's social cognitive theory. Vicarious learning, or the process of learning from other people's behaviour, is a central idea of Social Cognitive Theory. This idea asserts that individuals can witness observed behaviours of others and then reproduce the same actions. As a result of this, individuals refrain from making mistakes and can perform behaviours better if they see individuals complete them successfully.

Psychological theories have traditionally emphasised learning through the effects of one's actions. If knowledge and skills could be acquired only by direct experience, the process of cognitive and social development would be greatly retarded. The abbreviation of the acquisition process is vital for survival as well as for human development because natural endowment provides few inborn skills. Humans have evolved an advanced capacity for observational learning that enables them to expand their knowledge and skills on the basis of information conveyed by modeling influences. Indeed, virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experience can occur vicariously by observing people's behaviour and its consequences for them (Bandura, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978).

Much of social learning occurs either deliberately or inadvertently by observing the actual behaviour of others and the consequences for them. However, a great deal of information about behaviour patterns and the effects they have on the environment is gained from models portrayed symbolically through verbal or pictorial means.

A major significance of symbolic modeling lies in its tremendous multiplicative power. Unlike learning by doing, which requires altering the actions of each individual through repeated trial-and-error experiences, in observational learning a single model can transmit new ways of thinking and behaving simultaneously to many people in widely dispersed locales.

There is another aspect of symbolic modeling that magnifies its psychological and social effects. During the course of their daily lives, people have direct contact with only a small sector of the environment. Consequently, their conceptions of social reality are greatly influenced by vicarious experiences—by what they see and hear—without direct experiential correctives.

2.3.5 Evaluation of Bandura's Theory

The theory of Bandura has been demonstrated to make powerful predictions and has generated useful applications in a large number of areas of human behaviour.

Bandura's theory is well grounded in research. Its terms are very tightly and clearly defined and so they lend themselves well to empirical research.

Probably the most significant contribution of social cognitive theory is its applied value.

However in spite of the above merits Bandura's theory has some limitations. These limitations are given below:

Behaviour has been found to be more consistent than is argued by Bandura's theory which focuses a great deal on the situation. Some researchers have argued that the theory lacks attention to biological or hormonal processes.

Probably of most significance is the criticism that the theory is not unified. Concepts and processes such as observational learning and self-efficacy have been highly researched but there has been little explanation about the relationship among the concepts.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

Social cognitive theory of Bandura is based on the idea that people learn by watching what others do and that human thought processes are central to understanding personality. Social cognitive theory approaches the explanation of behaviour in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants. It identifies human behaviour as an interaction of personal factors, behaviour, and the environment. These three segments are mutually interactive. Now the question arises that do they have some starting point? Bandura answered in yes and that point is self-system. "In social learning theory, a self-system is not a psychic agent that controls behaviour. Rather it refers to cognitive structures that provide reference mechanisms to set of functions for perception, evaluation and regulation of behaviour". The three components involved in self-system are self-observation, judgment and self-response. Self-efficacy is another important concept in Bandura's theory. Self-efficacy is "the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations". There are four major sources of self-efficacy. These sources are mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and psychological responses.

Bandura's social-cognitive approach represents a break from traditional theories by proposing that cognitive factors are central to human functioning and that learning can occur in the absence of direct reinforcement. That is, learning can occur simply through observation of models and in the absence of reinforcement. Through a series of investigations, Bandura and Walters demonstrated that modeling is not merely a process of behavioural mimicry. Rather, through modeling people learn the value of particular behaviour with regard to goal achievement or outcomes.

Bandura proposed a four step conceptual scheme of the process involved in observational learning: The first step incorporates the attentional processes that are involved including certain model characteristics which may increase the likelihood of the behaviour being attended to. It also includes observer characteristics such as; sensory capacities, motivation and arousal levels, perceptual set and past reinforcement.

The second step refers to retention processes including the observer's ability to encode, to remember and to make sense of what has been observed.

The third step refers to motor reproduction processes including the capabilities that the observer has to perform the behaviour being observed. Specific factors include; physical capabilities, and availability of responses.

The final step refers to motivational processes including external reinforcement, vicarious reinforcement, and self-reinforcement. If the behaviour is to be imitated, an observer must be motivated to perform that behaviour. Vicarious learning, or the process of learning from other people's behaviour, is a central idea of social cognitive theory. This idea asserts that individuals can witness observed behaviours of others and then reproduce the same actions. As a result of this, individuals refrain from making mistakes and can perform behaviours better if they see individuals complete them successfully. Vicarious learning is a part of social modeling which is one of the four means to increase self-efficacy. Social

modeling refers not just observing behaviour but also receiving instruction and guidance of how to complete a behaviour

2.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss main features of social cognitive theory of personality.
- 2) What do understand by reciprocal determinism? Discuss its importance in the light of Bandura's theory.
- 3) Critically evaluate the development of self-system as proposed by Bandura.
- 4) Write an essay on self-efficacy (500 words).
- 5) What is observational learning? Discuss the main processes involved in observational learning.
- 6) What do you mean by vicarious learning. What role does it play in Bandura's social learning?

2.6 GLOSSARY

- Reciprocal determinism** : In social learning theory reciprocal determinism is used to indicate that personal influences, environmental forces, and behaviour function as interdependent rather than autonomous determinants.
- Self-efficacy** : The person's confidence in performing a particular behaviour; Approach behavioural change in small steps to ensure success.
- Observational learning** : Behavioural acquisition that occurs by watching the actions and outcomes of others' behaviour; Include credible role models of the targeted behaviour.
- Reinforcements** : Responses to a person's behaviour that increase or decrease the likelihood of reoccurrence; Promote self-initiated rewards and incentives
- Self-efficacy** : The person's confidence in performing a particular behaviour; Approach behavioural change in small steps to ensure success.
- Vicarious leaning** : Vicarious learning is the process of learning from observing other people's behaviour

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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