An Overview of Social Learning Theory (SLT)

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Social Learning Theory - Goals

- Present a historical review of SLT & identify key terms
- Examine how SLT has been applied to the study of aggression & sexual aggression
- Review a study that applies SLT to rape prevention education
- Conclusions & Recommendations
Social Learning Theory (SLT) has a rich historical background dating back to the late 1800’s
I. Social Learning Theory - Review

- Research leading to development of SLT:
  - William James (1890)
    - Laid foundation for the study of person & environment interactions - “the social self”
  - Alfred Adler (early 1900’s)
    - Behavior is purposeful and motivated by pursuit of goals
    - Individual perception and attitude towards social environment significant influences on behavior
    - A person’s thoughts, feelings, & behaviors are transactions with one’s physical and social environments.
I. Social Learning Theory - Review

- E.C. Tolman (1930’s)
  - Promoted the idea that cognitions are driving force behind behavior

- Miller & Dollard (1941)
  - Social Learning Theory officially launched with the publication of *Social Learning and Imitation*
    - Humans model observed behaviors which are either reinforced or extinguished through environmental reinforcement
    - Human behavior motivated by internal drives
I. Social Learning Theory - Review

- (1941+) Many SLT theories expanded Miller & Dollard’s work

- All versions of SLT share 3 basic themes
  - People learn by experience & observation
    - Vicarious learning
  - People model behavior based on identification
    - Similarity and emotional attachment
  - Consequences influence whether a person will repeat a behavior
    - Reward vs. punishment contingencies
I. Social Learning Theory - Review

- Major SLT Theorists
  - Julian Rotter
    - Internal vs. external control, internal/external change influence,
    - Health outcomes / Personal Control
  - Robert Sears
    - Socialization processes
    - How children internalize values attitudes and behaviors of a culture
I. Social Learning Theory - Review

– Walter Mischel
  • Cognitive social learning
  • How new experiences affect the individual

– Ronald Akers
  • Social behavior shaped by
    – Differential association (relative influence)
    – Differential reinforcement (punishment)
    – Cognitive definitions (self schema)
I. Social Learning Theory - Review

– Albert Bandura
– How cognitions influence behavior & development
– First to study modeling (vicarious learning) as a form of social learning
– Introduced the idea that there can be a significant time lapse between cause and effect
II. Social Learning & Aggression

- SLT has been applied to the study of deviant, criminal, & aggressive behaviors

- Aggression (and sexual aggression) is learned through the frequency, relative importance, duration, & intensity of:

  - Social interactions (learning by association)
  - Observations (behaviors & consequences)
  - Vicarious learning (ex. media influence)
  - Modeling (imitation)
  - Reinforcement (negative & positive)
II. Social Learning & Sexual Aggression

- SLT does not view sexual aggression as inevitable, instead aggression is:
  - Learned
  - Shaped by consequences
  - Continues if reinforced
II. Social Learning & Sexual Aggression

- According to SLT male violence against women endures because:
  - It is modeled at the individual & societal levels
  - It often achieves its purpose by cutting off arguments
  - It is deemed to have positive results (for perpetrator)
    - Relieves tension
    - Leaves the perpetrator feeling better
  - It is rarely associated with serious punishment to the perpetrator
II. Social Learning & Sexual Aggression

- One way social learning occurs is through social information processing
- Decode – Decide/Respond – Judge effect

- Violent men may be deficient in skill needed to decode messages from women
III. Social Learning Theory & Rape Prevention Education


- Used modeling with theatrical production to enhance rape prevention awareness with high and low rape tolerant students

- 436 college students responded to a College Date Rape Attitude Survey before & after watching “Scruples”
IV. Social Learning Theory & Rape Prevention Education

*Script* scenes:
- Addressed role of alcohol in date rape situations
- Importance of communication in relationships
- Addressed rape myths
- Portrayed men’s "limitation-testing" behaviors
- Presented interaction between survivor of sexual assault & social need for supporting her legal decisions
- Depicted men as positive role models for each other
IV. Social Learning Theory & Rape Prevention Education

Results:

- students with highest rape-tolerant attitude lowered their tolerance after viewing the play but were still higher on average than other students

- Limitation
  - Posttest was administered immediately after the play
V. Conclusions

- SLT has implications for interventions at individual and societal levels

- SLT may be particularly effective with interventions aimed at youth.

- SLT /Peer Influence models

- Need to develop creative approaches beyond classroom interventions
Conclusions

- Rape continues because there are no real consequences to perpetrators/must work to change societal response to rape.

- Important to develop realistic expectations about any intervention and to address both short and long term outcomes.