18.3: 18.2-Reciprocal Determinism

One of the most important aspects of Bandura's view on how personality is learned is that each one of us is an agent of change, fully participating in our surroundings and influencing the environmental contingencies that behaviorists believe affect our behavior. These interactions can be viewed three different ways. The first is to consider behavior as a function of the person and the environment. In this view, personal dispositions (or traits) and the consequences of our actions (reinforcement or punishment) combine to cause our behavior. This perspective is closest to the radical behaviorism of Skinner. The second view considers that personal dispositions and the environment interact, and the result of the interaction causes our behavior, a view somewhat closer to that of Dollard and Miller. In each of these perspectives, behavior is caused, or determined, by dispositional and environmental factors, the behavior itself is not a factor in how that behavior comes about. However, according to Bandura, social learning theory emphasizes that behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors are all equal, interlocking determinants of each other. This concept is referred to as reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1973, 1977).

Figure \(\PageIndex{1}\) Early theories considered behavior to be a function of the person and their environment, or a function of the interaction between the person and their environment. Bandura believed that behavior itself influences
both the person and the environment, each of which in turn affects behavior and each other. The result is a complex interplay of factors known as reciprocal determinism.

Reciprocal determinism can be seen in everyday observations, such as those made by Bandura and others during their studies of aggression. For example, approximately 75 percent of the time, hostile behavior results in unfriendly responses, whereas friendly acts seldom result in such consequences. With little effort, it becomes easy to recognize individuals who create negative social climates (Bandura, 1973). Thus, while it may still be true that changing environmental contingencies changes behavior, it is also true that changing behavior alters the environmental contingencies. This results in a unique perspective on freedom vs. determinism. Usually we think of determinism as something that eliminates or restricts our freedom. However, Bandura believed that individuals can intentionally act as agents of change within their environment, thus altering the factors that determine their behavior. In other words, we have the freedom to influence that which determines our behavior:

…Given the same environmental constraints, individuals who have many behavioral options and are adept at regulating their own behavior will experience greater freedom than will individuals whose personal resources are limited. (pg. 203; Bandura, 1977)

Discussion question \(\PageIndex{1}\)

According to the theory of reciprocal determinism, our behavior interacts with our environment and our personality variables to influence our life. Can you think of situations in which your actions caused a noticeable change in the people or situations around you? Remember that these changes can be either good or bad.

**Observational Learning and Aggression**

Social learning is also commonly referred to as **observational learning**, because it comes about as a result of observing **models**. Bandura became interested in social aspects of learning at the beginning of his career. Trained as a clinical psychologist, he began working with juvenile delinquents, a somewhat outdated term that is essentially a socio-legal description of adolescents who engage in antisocial behavior. In the 1950s there was already research on the relationships between aggressive boys and their parents, as well as some theoretical perspectives regarding the effects of different child-rearing practices on the behavior and attitudes of adolescent boys (Bandura & Walters, 1959). Much of the research focused, however, on sociological issues involved in the environment of delinquent boys. Choosing a different approach, Bandura decided to study boys who had no obvious sociological disadvantages (such as poverty, language difficulties due to recent immigration, low IQ, etc.). Bandura and Walters restricted their sample to boys of average or above average intelligence, from intact homes, with steadily employed parents, whose families had been settled in America for at least three generations. No children from minority groups were included either. In other words, the boys were from apparently typical, White, middle-class American families. And yet, half of the boys studied were identified through the county probation service or their school guidance center as demonstrating serious, repetitive, antisocial, aggressive behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1959).

Citing the work of Dollard and Miller, as well as others who paved the way for social learning theory, Bandura and Walters began their study on adolescent aggression by examining how the parents of delinquents train their children to
be socialized. Working from a general learning perspective, emphasizing cues and consequences, they found significant problems in the development of socialization among the delinquent boys. These boys developed dependency, a necessary step toward socialization, but they were not taught to conform their behavior to the expectations of society. Consequently, they began to demand immediate and unconditional gratification from their surroundings, something that seldom happens. Of course, this failure to learn proper socialization does not necessarily lead to aggression, since it can also lead to lifestyles such as the hobo, the bohemian, or the “beatnik” (Bandura & Walters, 1959). Why then do some boys become so aggressive? To briefly summarize their study, Bandura and Walters found that parents of delinquent boys were more likely to model aggressive behavior and to use coercive punishment (as opposed to reasoning with their children to help them conform to social norms). Although parental modeling of aggressive behavior teaches such behavior to children, these parents tend to be effective at suppressing their children’s aggressive behavior at home. In contrast, however, they provide subtle encouragement for aggression outside the home. As a result, these poorly socialized boys are likely to displace the aggressive impulses that develop in the home, and they are well trained in doing so. If they happen to associate with a delinquent group (such as a gang), they are provided with an opportunity to learn new and more effective ways to engage in antisocial behavior, and they are directly rewarded for engaging in such behaviors (Bandura & Walters, 1959; also see Bandura, 1973).

Having found evidence that parents of aggressive, delinquent boys had modeled aggressive behavior, Bandura and his colleagues embarked on a series of studies on the modeling of aggression (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961, 1963a,b). Initially, children were given the opportunity to play in a room containing a variety of toys, including the 5-foot tall, inflated Bobo doll (a toy clown). As part of the experiment, an adult (the model) was also invited into the room to join in the game. When the model exhibited clear aggressive behavior toward the Bobo doll, and then the children were allowed to play on their own, they children demonstrated aggressive behavior as well. The children who observed a model who was not aggressive seldom demonstrated aggressive behavior, thus confirming that the aggression in the experimental group resulted from observational learning. In the second study, children who observed the behavior of aggressive models on film also demonstrated a significant increase in aggressive behavior, suggesting that the physical presence of the model is not necessary (providing an important implication for violent aggression on TV and in movies; see “Personality in Theory in Real Life” at the end of the chapter). In addition to confirming the role of observation or social learning in the development of aggressive behavior, these studies also provided a starting point for examining what it is that makes a model influential.

One of the significant findings in this line of research on aggression is the influence of models on behavioral restraint. When children are exposed to models who are not aggressive and who inhibit their own behavior, the children also tend to inhibit their own aggressive responses and to restrict their range of behavior in general (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). Thus, children can learn from others, in particular their parents, how to regulate their behavior in socially appropriate ways. When the inappropriate behavior of others is punished, the children observing are also vicariously punished, and likely to experience anxiety, if not outright fear, when they consider engaging in similar inappropriate behavior. However, when models behave aggressively and their behavior is rewarded, or even just tolerated, the child’s own tendency to restrict aggressive impulses may be weakened. This weakening of restraint, which can then lead to acting out aggressive impulses, is known as disinhibition:

Modeling may produce disinhibitory effects in several ways. When people respond approvingly or even indifferently to the actions of assailants, they convey the impression that aggression is not only acceptable but expected in similar situations. By thus legitimizing aggressive conduct, observers anticipate less risk of reprimand or loss of self-respect for
such action. (pg. 129; Bandura, 1973)

discussion question \(\PageIndex{2}\)

The concept of disinhibition is based on the belief that we all have aggressive tendencies, and our self-control is diminished when we see models rewarded for aggressive behavior. Have you ever found yourself in situations where someone was rewarded for acting aggressively? Did you then adopt an aggressive attitude, or act out on your aggression?

Characteristics of the Modeling Situation

When one person matches the behavior of another, there are several perspectives on why that matching behavior occurs. Theorists who suggest that matching behavior results from simple imitation don’t allow for any significant psychological changes. Dollard and Miller discussed imitation in their attempts to combine traditional learning theory with a psychodynamic perspective, but they did not advance the theory very far. A more traditional psychodynamic approach describes matching behavior as the result of identification, the concept that an observer connects with a model in some psychological way. However, identification means different things to different theorists, and the term remains somewhat vague. In social learning, as it has been advanced by Bandura, modeling is the term that best describes and, therefore, is used to characterize the psychological processes that underlie matching behavior (Bandura, 1986).

Observational learning through modeling is not merely an alternative to Pavlovian or operant conditioning:

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. (pg. 22; Bandura, 1977)

Individuals differ in the degree to which they can be influenced by models, and not all models are equally effective. According to Bandura, three factors are most influential in terms of the effectiveness of modeling situations: the characteristics of the model, the attributes of the observers, and the consequences of the model’s actions. The most relevant characteristics of an influential model are high status, competence, and power. When observers are unsure about a situation, they rely on cues to indicate what they perceive as evidence of past success by the model. Such cues include general appearance, symbols of socioeconomic success (e.g., a fancy sports car), and signs of expertise (e.g., a doctor’s lab coat). Since those models appear to have been successful themselves, it seems logical that observers might want to imitate their behavior. Individuals who are low in self-esteem, dependent, and who lack confidence are not necessarily more likely to be influenced by models. Bandura proposed that when modeling is used to explicitly develop new competencies, the ones who will benefit most from the situation are those who are more talented and more venturesome (Bandura, 1977).

Despite the potential influence of models, the entire process of observational learning in a social learning environment would probably not be successful if not for four important component processes: attentional processes, retention processes, production (or reproduction), and motivational processes (Bandura, 1977, 1986). The fact that an observer must pay attention to a model might seem obvious, but some models are more likely to attract attention.
Individuals are more likely to pay attention to models with whom they associate, even if the association is more cognitive than personal. It is also well-known that people who are admired, such as those who are physically attractive or popular athletes, make for attention-getting models. There are also certain types of media that are very good at getting people’s attention, such as television advertisements (Bandura, 1977, 1986). It is a curious cultural phenomenon that the television advertisements presented during the National Football League’s Super Bowl have become almost as much of the excitement as the game itself (and even more exciting for those who are not football fans)!

The retention processes involve primarily an observer's memory for the modeled behavior. The most important memory processes, according to Bandura, are visual imagery and verbal coding, with visual imagery being particularly important early in development when verbal skills are limited. Once modeled behavior has been transformed into visual and/or verbal codes, these memories can serve to guide the performance of the behavior at appropriate times. When the modeled behavior is produced by the observer, the so-called production process, the re-enactment can be broken down into the cognitive organization of the responses, their initiation, subsequent monitoring, and finally the refinement of the behavior based on informative feedback. Producing complex modeled behaviors is not always an easy task:

…A common problem in learning complex skills, such as golf or swimming, is that performers cannot fully observe their responses, and must therefore rely upon vague kinesthetic cues or verbal reports of onlookers. It is difficult to guide actions that are only partially observable or to identify the corrections needed to achieve a close match between representation and performance. (pg. 28; Bandura, 1977)

Finally, motivational processes determine whether the observer is inclined to match the modeled behavior in the first place. Individuals are most likely to model behaviors that result in an outcome they value, and if the behavior seems to be effective for the models who demonstrated the behavior. Given the complexity of the relationships between models, observers, the perceived effectiveness of modeled behavior, and the subjective value of rewards, even using prominent models does not guarantee that they will be able to create similar behavior in observers (Bandura, 1977, 1986).
Producing complex behaviors that cannot be readily observed by the performer can prove quite difficult. John cut behind the defender to drive the ball with his knee over the goalie’s head and into the goal (above). Samuel scores a round kick in a Taekwondo tournament (right).

A common misconception regarding modeling is that it only leads to learning the behaviors that have been modeled. However, modeling can lead to innovative behavior patterns. Observers typically see a given behavior performed by multiple models; even in early childhood one often gets to see both parents model a given behavior. When the behavior is then matched, the observer will typically select elements from the different models, relying on only certain aspects of the behavior performed by each, and then create a unique pattern that accomplishes the final behavior. Thus, partial departures from the originally modeled behavior can be a source of new directions, especially in creative endeavors (such as composing music or creating a sculpture). In contrast, however, when simple routines prove useful, modeling can actually stifle innovation. So, the most innovative individuals appear to be those who have been exposed to innovative models, provided that the models are not so innovative as to create an unreasonably difficult challenge in modeling their creativity and innovation (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963b).

Discussion question

Two of the components necessary for modeling to be effective, according to Bandura, are attention and retention. What aspects of commercial advertisements are most likely to catch your attention? What do you tend to remember about advertisements? Can you think of situations in which the way an advertiser gets your attention also helps you to remember the product?

Connections Across Cultures: Global Marketing and Advertising

Although we are constantly surrounded by modeling situations, the most obvious and intentional use of models and modeling is in advertising. As our world becomes increasingly global, the use of advertisements that work well in one place may be entirely inappropriate in a different culture. Marieke de Mooij, the president of a cross-cultural communications consulting firm in the Netherlands, and a visiting professor at universities in the Netherlands, Spain, Finland, and Germany, has undertaken the challenging task of studying how culture affects consumer behavior and the consequences of those effects for marketing and advertising in different societies around the world (de Mooij, 2000, 2004a,b, 2005).

To some, increasing globalization suggests that markets around the world will become more similar to one another. De Mooij (2000), however, contends that as different cultures become more similar in economic terms, their more personal cultural differences will actually become more significant! Thus, it is essential for global businesses to understand those cultural differences, so that marketing and advertising can be appropriately adjusted. The challenge is in recognizing and dealing with the “global-local paradox.” People in business are taught to think global, but act local. This is because most people throughout the world tend to prefer things that are familiar. They may adopt and enjoy global products, but they remain true to their own culture (de Mooij, 2005). Thus, it is important to understand local culture and consumer

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behavior in general before beginning an advertising campaign in a foreign country.

In her studies on culture and consumer behavior, de Mooij (2004b, 2005) addresses a wide variety of topics, including several that are covered in this chapter. In terms of the characteristics of models, many countries do not emphasize physical attractiveness and/or fashionable clothes the way we do in America. However, the overall aesthetic appeal of advertising can be more important in many Asian markets, focusing on preferences for values such as nature and harmony. Given that America is generally an individualistic culture and most Asian cultures are collectivistic, it should be no surprise that Americans tend to focus on the appeal of the model whereas Asians tend to focus on the appeal of the overall scene and relationships amongst the various aspects depicted within it. In a similar way, cultures differ in terms of their general perspective on locus of control. In cultures that tend to believe that their lives are determined by external forces, the moral authorities (such as the church and the press) are typically trusted. People in such cultures might not be responsiveness to advertisements that call for individual restraint, such as efforts to reduce cigarette smoking for better health, since they rely on their doctors (external agents) to take care of their health.

There are also significant differences in how people in different cultures think and process information, and cognitive processes underlie all aspects of social learning. Involvement theory suggests differences in how individuals and cultures differ in their approach to purchasing, and how advertising must take those differences into account. For example, amongst American consumers considering a “high involvement” product (such as a car), those who are likely to buy something respond to advertising in which they learn something, develop a favorable attitude toward the product, and then buy it (learn-feel-do). For everyday products, which are considered “low involvement,” consumers respond to advertising in which they learn something, then buy the product, and perhaps afterward they tend to prefer that brand (learn-do-feel). There is now evidence that in typically more collectivist cultures such as Japan, China, and Korea, it is important to first establish a relationship between the company and the consumer. Only then does the consumer purchase the particular product, and then they become more familiar with it (feel-do-learn). Thus, the very purpose of advertising changes from culture to culture (de Mooij, 2004b). Naturally, a number of other approaches to advertising exist, based on concepts such as: persuasion, awareness, emotions, and likeability (de Mooij, 2005). Each of these techniques relies on a different psychological approach, taking into account the observers that the advertiser hopes to influence (the so-called target demographic).

One of the most important aspects of advertising, when it is being carried from one culture to another, is the translation of verbal and written information. Different languages have different symbolic references. They rely on different myths, history, humor, and art, and failing to tap into such differences is likely to result in bland advertising that does not appeal to the local audience (de Mooij, 2004a). Other languages are simply structured differently as well, perhaps requiring meaning in a name, and this sometimes makes direct translation impossible. Thus, an international advertiser must choose a different name for their product. For example, Coca-Cola is marketed in China as the homonym kekou kele, which means “tasty and happy” (de Mooij, 2004a). Visual references also have cultural meanings. A Nokia ad, shown in Finland, used a squirrel in a forest to represent good reception and free movement in a deep forest. A Chinese group, however, understood it as depicting an animal that lives far away from people. They simply did not understand the intent of the commercial. Research on interpersonal verbal communication styles suggests that certain countries can be grouped into preferred styles. Based on a comparison of multiple dimensions of preferred verbal style, some of the countries that share similar styles are: 1) the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark; 2) Austria, Finland, and Germany; 3) India, China, and Singapore; and 4) Italy, Spain, Belgium, France, Argentina, Brazil, and the Arab world (de Mooij, 2004a).
As challenging as it might seem to address these issues (and the many more we have not covered), it is essential for individuals involved in global marketing and advertising:

The cultural variety of countries worldwide as well as in Europe implies that success in one country does not automatically mean success in other countries…finding the most relevant cultural values is difficult, especially because many researchers are based in Western societies that are individualistic and have universalistic values. Western marketers, advertisers, and researchers are inclined to search for similarities, whereas understanding the differences will be more profitable…There are global products and global brands, but there are no global buying motives for such brands because people are not global. Understanding people across cultures is the first and most important step in international marketing. (pg. 314; de Mooij, 2004b)

Finally, none of these approaches to international marketing and advertising is going to be successful if business relationships are not established in the first place. In The Cultural Dimension of International Business, Ferraro (2006b) offers a comprehensive guide to understanding cultural differences. In addition to the importance of being aware of such factors, which the very existence of the books and articles in this section belies, Ferraro emphasizes cultural differences in communication. For individuals working in a foreign country where English is not the first language, good communication becomes a matter of intent:

Because communication is so vitally important for conducting business at home, it should come as no surprise that it is equally important for successful business abroad. The single best way to become an effective communicator as an expatriate is to learn the local language…Besides knowing how to speak another language, expatriate candidates should demonstrate a willingness to use it. For a variety of reasons, some people lack the motivation, confidence, or willingness to throw themselves into conversational situations. [Authors note: see the section on self-efficacy] …Thus, communication skills must be assessed in terms of language competency, motivation to learn another language, and willingness to use it in professional and personal situations. (pg. 170; Ferraro, 2006b)