Learning outcome: Explain Social Learning Theory, making reference to two relevant studies

**Command term, ‘Explain’ -** Give a detailed account including reasons or causes.

What is Social Learning theory?

Social learning theory (SLT), focuses on observable behaviour and the process of learning. It is an extension of existing learning theories (classical/operant)

Social learning refers to behaviour that is **acquired in the presence of others** **(models)** rather than alone.

**Albert Bandura 1977 (proposed SLT)**

Bandura’s principle contribution was the idea of **observational learning**. One main form of observational learning is **imitation**, where an individual learns a new behaviour by observing the actions of another-the model. This is supported by Bandura et al 1961, 1963. “Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models”.

Sometimes the model is trying to have a direct influence on the learner. Example: Teacher holding a door open for students

But often models indirectly influence the learner. Example: Copying violence on TV

**Factors affecting observational learning**

**Availability:** the learner must be able to see the model exhibiting the behaviour, either directly or through the media.

**Attention:** the learner must pay attention to the model and what the model is doing. Attention will be greater if the model is distinctive, powerful, similar to the learner and has high status.

**Retention:** learner must understand and remember the behaviour of the model.

**Motor reproduction:** the learner must have the motor skills to reproduce the observed behaviour. Bandura distinguished between **acquisition** of a behaviour and **performance** of a behaviour. Some behaviours may be learned but not exhibited for some time. Bandura called this **latent learning**.

**Motivation:** learning is affected by the motivation of the learner. Reinforcement may play a role here.

There are several factors that may influence whether or not the observer decides to imitate and learn.

Use p112 of the Course Companion to help you complete the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Influencing Factor | Explanation and example |
| Consistency |  |
| Identification with the model |  |
| Reinforcement (rewards/punishment) | Bandura (1965) In a repeat of the main study, one group was shown an aggressive model being rewarded, one saw the aggressive model being punished and another saw no specific consequences. Results saw a decrease in aggressive behavior from the group who saw the model punished. Bandura and Rosenthal (1966) found that people learn a negative emotional reaction to a stimulus if they saw someone else receiving an electric shock when that stimulus was presented. |
| Liking the model |  |

**Evaluation:**

**(+)** Explains how new behaviours are learned within a family or culture.

**(+)** Children can acquire some behaviours without trial and error learning.

**(+)** It can be tested in laboratory situations. Supported by Bandura et al 1961, 1963. “Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models”.

**(+)** Findings have important implications for exposure to media violence.





**(-)** The learned behavior may not be exhibited for some time so it is difficult to establish that the behavior is 100% the result of observing the model.

**(-)** The theory does not explain why some behavior that is modeled is never learned.

**(-)** Laboratory findings lack ecological validity.

**(-)** It is reductionist in that it ignores **biological factors** that may lead to aggression. It has little to say about personality, or the development of personality.

**(-)** Although the emphasis is now on cognitive processes, critics say that it has little to contribute to theories of cognitive development (Grusec). Bandura tends to see the processes of observational learning as being the same for all age groups.