Albert Bandura Essay, Research Paper

Albert Bandura was born on December 4, 1925 in the small farming community of Mundare, Canada. He was educated in a small school with minimal resources, yet a remarkable success rate. He received his bachelor?s degree in Psychology from the University of British Colombia in 1949. Bandura went on to the University of Iowa, where he received his Ph.D. in 1952. It was there that he came under the influence of the behaviorist tradition and learning theory. He has since developed his social learning or cognitive theory and his ideas of observational learning and modeling, for which he made a place for himself in the history of Psychology. Yet his theory is still related to behaviorism because it addresses the element of learning (attention, memory, drive) that are included in both behavioral and social theories.

?Behaviorism is the view that only observable, overt activities that can be measured scientifically should be studied by Psychology. Behaviorists believe that internal events, such as thoughts, images, feelings, and intentions are immeasurable, and so should not be part of Psychology? (Baron, 1998, p.7). The scientific or experimental methods are ways in which we are able to measure such observable activities. The scientific method involves the construction of theories for explaining various events or processes. The theories contain predictions, or hypotheses that are then tested by further research and observation. The theory is then accepted only if the new observations are consistent with the theory. The experimental method is a research method in which one or more variables are manipulated (called the independent variable) in order to see the effects it has on another variable (the dependent variable). In summary, it says that one?s environment causes one?s behavior.

Bandura found this theory to be true, but also added that behavior causes environment as well.

In the argument over whether the person or the situation is most responsible for the behavior, Bandura argues for reciprocal determinism, in which a person?s behavior is based on an evaluation of the situation. That behavior changes the situation, requiring a new evaluation and a new behavior decision, and so on. The points of this analysis are first, that we cannot easily separate the effects on behavior of person and situation, and second, that the individual?s own behavior is a contributor to the situation, which in turn affects his or her behavior. This theory is, of course, more interest in how the person affects behavior. Bandura argues that we can best conceive personality as a set of internal evaluating and interpretation processes (social learning person variables) that mediate our interaction with the outside world, and indeed with our own inner thoughts and feelings. Such variables include competency and self-efficacy, self-regulatory systems and plans, subjective values, encoding strategies and personal constructs, and expectancies. It is important to understand that they are interdependent processes: Changes in any one may have effects on the others. (Bandura and Mischel)

Behaviorism was important to Bandura in that its weaknesses became his research

foundation. Bandura believed that behaviorism limited the possibilities in a laboratory setting because such settings deal with direct learning, where a learner responds to the observer. Bandura proposed that complex behaviors are affected by behavior, the environment, and internal events that influence perceptions and actions. ?Since the late 1960?s, behaviorism has given the way to the ?cognitive revolution,? of which Bandura is considered a part. Cognitive psychology retains the experimentally-oriented flavor of behaviorism, without artificially restraining the researcher to external behaviors, when the mental life if clients and subjects is so obviously important? (Boeree, 1998, p.6).

As Bandura began to look at personality as an interaction among the environment, behavior, and the person?s psychological (cognitive) processes, he adds imagery and language in order to theorize more effectively about two things that many people would consider the ?strong suit? of the human species: observational learning (modeling) and self-regulation.

Of the hundreds of studies Bandura has conducted, one group stands out well above the others-the bobo doll studies. The bobo doll was an inflatable balloon creature (depicted as a clown) with a weight in the bottom that makes it pop back up when you knock him down. Bandura made a film in which a model would aggressively punch the doll screaming, ?sockeroo!? The model kicked it, sat on it, hit it with a small hammer, and so on, shouting different aggressive phrases. Bandura showed his film to a group of kindergarteners. Afterward, they were let out to play in a room with a brand new bobo doll and some small hammers.

As predicted, as many as 88% of the kindergarteners beat the living daylights out of the bobo doll (Bury p. 1). They punched it and shouted ?sockeroo,? kicked it, sat on it, hit it with the little hammers, and so on. In other words, the children imitated the model in the film quite precisely. It doesn?t sound so extraordinary to the average parent, teacher, or any observer that the children behaved in such a way, but it didn?t fit so well with the standard behavioristic learning theory. The children changd their behavior without first being rewarded for approximations to that behavior. Bandura called this phenomenon ?observational learning? or ?modeling.?

Bandura continued to do variations of the same 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 the criticism that bobo dolls were supposed to be hit, he even did a film of a model beating up a live clown. When the children went to play, they found a live clown in which they proceeded to punch him, kick him, hit him with the little hammers, and so on.

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

1.Attention. 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.

2.Retention. You must be able to remember what you have paid attention to. We store what we have seen the model doing in the form of mental images or verbal descriptions. When so stored, you can later ?bring up? the image or description, so that you can reproduce it with your own behavior.

3.Reproduction. You have to translate the images or descriptions into actual behavior. Our ability to imitate improves with practice at the behaviors involved. In addition, our abilities improve even when we just imagine ourselves performing the behavior.

4.Motivation. Yet with all this, you?re still not going to do anything unless you are motivated to imitate or until you have some reason for doing it. Bandura mentions a number of motives: past reinforcement (traditional behaviorism), promised reiforcement (incentives we can imagine), and vicarious reinforcement (seeing and recalling the model being reinforced). In addition there are negative motives such as past punishment, promised punishment, and vicarious punishment, that give reasons to not imitate someone. (Boeree, 1998, p.2-3)

In addition, Bandura created modeling therapy. The theory is that, if you can get

someone with a psychological disorder to observe someone dealing with the same issues in a more productive fashion, the first person will learn by modeling the second.

His original research on this involved herpephobics-people with a neurotic fear of snakes. The client would be lead to a window looking in on a lab room. In that room is nothing but a chair, a table, a cage on the table with a locked latch, and a snake clearly visible in the cage. The client then watches another person, (an actor) go through a slow and painful approach to the snake. He acts terrified at first, but shakes himself out of it, tells himself to relax and breathe normally and takes one step at a time towards the snake. He may stop in the middle, retreat in panic, and start all over. Ultimately, he gets to the point where he opens the cage, removes the snake, sits down in the chair, and drapes it over his neck, all the while giving himself calming instructions.

After the client has seen all this, he is invited to try it himself. He is told before hand that the person was only an actor, so there is no deception involved, only modeling. And yet, many clients are able to do the entire routine the first time around, even after one viewing of the actor.

Bandura also introduced a self system that allows individuals to have a large amount of

control over their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. It also allows them to symbolize, learn from others, plan alternate strategies, regulate one?s own behavior and engage in self-reflection. Individuals can then alter their environments and themselves as they see fit. He suggests that knowledge, skill, and prior attainments are often poor indicators of current attainments because people?s beliefs in their abilities and about how they will perform strongly influence the way they will behave. How people interpret the results of their performance accomplishments informs and alters their environment and self-beliefs and in turn, will change the performances that follow. Bandura sees self-reflection as the most unique human capability.

Bandura suggests these three steps to controlling our own behavior:

1.Self-observation. We look at ourselves, our behavior, 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 next week.? Or we can compete with others or 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.

?If, over the years, you find yourself meeting your standards and life loaded with self-praise and self-reward, you will have a pleasant self-concept (high self-esteem). If, on the other hand, you find yourself forever failing to meet your standards and punishing yourself, you will have a poor self-concept (low self-esteem). (Boeree, 1998, p. 4)

In these self-evaluations, Bandura includes self-efficacy because it influences people greatly and decides what people will do. If a person is comfortable with a given activity, the person is more likely to take part in it. On the other hand, people will tend to stay away from activities that make them feel uncomfortable. This could in turn, create a person who is very confident or one that is intimidated easily. According to our text, ?the higher a person?s feelings of self-efficacy, the better that person tends to do at a wide range of tasks. And such success, of course, can ultimately lead to more generalized positive feelings about oneself-changes in the self-concept and in evaluations of it? (Baron, 1998, p.489).

It is obvious that Albert Bandura has made a large impact on modern psychology, for he has contributed a lot of brilliant, new ideas to the field. His straight-forward, behaviorist-like style makes good sense to most people. His action-oriented, problem-solving approach likewise appeals to those who want to get things done, rather than philosophize about ids, archetypes, actualization, freedom, and all the many other mentalistic contructs other psychologists tend to dwell on. Bandura?s great skill became more noticed when he became president of the APA (American Psychological Association) in 1973. His great contributions in the field of psychology were also recognized when he received the APA?s Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions in 1980. In 1953, he began teaching at Stanford University, and to this day he continues to work there.

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