

What are “real-life” examples of learned helplessness (and perhaps their cause)?

Political process: People are becoming discouraged with the political process and not turning out to vote because nothing gets done.

Weight loss programs: There are so many weight loss programs (including those that use hypnosis—Chapter 4) that are ineffective that they discourage people.

Studying for class: Students with poor study skills or are using ineffective strategies start to give up on their classes and resign themselves to poor grades.

Stopping Attacks on American Troops: American troops are under constant attack by Iraqis. Killing Saddam Huessin’s sons (Uday and Kusay) will probably lead to learned helplessness because it fails to understand why our troops are not seen as liberators.

What are common examples where learned helplessness can occur?

Dating

“War on Terrorism”

Dealing with problems of CEOs and CFOs “cooking the books”

Getting a job

- Not having the job skills or connections
- Rules not being applied equally or fairly
- Rules created to bias a particular group based on criteria irrelevant to the job.

What can be done to reduce the perception of learned helplessness?

If you don't look at the underlying problem or address the underlying problem, learned helplessness can occur.

This is especially a problem in politics when we know so little about a topic, we rely on heuristics for information and get misled into believing that there are simple certain fixes for problems and causal factors.

Example of observational learning

Newton is very aggressive and greedy when it comes to food. Another one of our dogs, Tuffy is a very good and obedient dog (of course he is mine). My sister taught Tuffy to give us a hug. He understood this as a gesture of love and friendship (if the word applies to dogs). One day, Newton saw Tuffy give a hug and received a treat. Newton quickly learned this trick because food was involved. However, it was unclear that he learned that that this was a gesture of love and friendship. Newton imitated the behavior, but didn't understand the reasons for this behavior.

Likewise, Kris's German shepherd (Xena, Warrior Princess) learned how to open doors by moving her paws up and down next to the doorknob. I joke that we need to quarantine his dog or else she will teach other dogs how to open doors by watching her.

Four cognitive processes interact to determine whether imitation of behavior will occur:

Paying attention to another's behavior.

Remembering the behavior to be imitated.

Transforming the mental representation of the observed behavior into actions you can reproduce.

Motivation to imitate the behavior. (see Table 5.6 to see factors that affect the motivation to imitate behavior)

Observational learning

Learning that occurs through observing the actions of others.

What is the evidence?—Albert Bandura and the Bobo doll.

Group 1: Children observed adults reinforced for their aggressive behavior with the Bobo doll.

Group 2: Children observed adults punished for their aggressive behavior with the Bobo doll.

Group 3: Children observed adults' their aggressive behavior with no consequences.

After watching the adult interact with the Bobo doll, the children were allowed to play with the Bobo doll,

Did all of the children imitate the adults and display aggressive behavior?

Did all of the children learn the aggressive behavior?

Why would a behaviorist (Watson and Skinner) make a different prediction of whether the child would learn aggressive behavior?

What are examples of observational learning in the “real-world”?

When learning how to perform surgery or other medical procedures, you learn by watching others perform it (and then practice it yourself).

If we see someone being censured or fired for disagreeing with the boss, we learn by observation what the acceptable behavior is, and self-censor ourselves.

- If we observe Whistle-blowers such as Colleen Rowley, Sherron Watkins and Cynthia Cooper reinforced for their behavior...
- If we observe Whistle-blowers such as Colleen Rowley, Sherron Watkins and Cynthia Cooper are punished for their behavior...
 - Which of the two occurred?
 - What if the consequences (good or bad) are not made public?

If we observe Kenneth Lay or Jeffrey Skilling and other CEOs reinforced for their behavior...

If we observe Kenneth Lay and other CEOs punished for their behavior...

- Which of the two occurred?

If we are worried that people will learn aggressive behavior by watching others on television, what about other behaviors learned through advertising (eg. driving your SUV “recklessly” or irresponsible drinking)

After watching Mel Gibson in Lethal Weapon 2 remove a crossbow bolt from his leg, some people incorrectly learn that this is the way to treat a puncture wound while waiting for medical treatment.

If you observe your parents, friends or coworker lie, what factors influence whether or not you are going to imitate their behavior?

Table 5.6: Factors that increase the likelihood of imitation

1. People who are rewarded for their behavior.
 2. Warm, nurturing people.
 3. People who have control over you or have the power to influence your life (such as supervisors and parents).
 4. People who are similar to you in terms of age, gender, and interests.
 5. People you perceive as having higher social status.
 6. When the task to be imitated is not extremely difficult or easy.
 7. If you lack the confidence in your own abilities in a particular situation.
 8. If the situation is ambiguous or unfamiliar.
 9. If you've been reinforced for imitating the same behavior in the past.
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Psychology of Learning

Classical conditioning
Operant conditioning
Observational learning

How can all of these principles of learning explain phobias—an intense fear that is triggered by a specific object or situation (Chapter 14: Psychological Disorders, p. 559).

Classical conditioning: Phobias may be learned by a traumatic event that could range from surviving an airplane crash to being bitten by a German shepherd when you were young. You may generalize the experience from being bitten by one German shepherd to all dogs (stimulus generalization).

Operant conditioning: The avoidant behavior characterized by phobic behavior may have been negatively reinforced. If you are afraid of dogs, you avoid them to reduce anxiety. This makes it much more likely you will avoid them in the future (_____).

Observational learning: By seeing a fearful reaction of someone else, (such as a child seeing a parent panic at the sight of a spider) may imitate that behavior in the future.