Social Cognitive Theory: Self-Efficacy

Concepts in Social Cognitive Theory:

- Observational Learning
- Reciprocal Determinism
- Personal Control
  - Delay of Gratification
  - Self-Efficacy
  - Locus of Control
Learned Helplessness

Seligman wanted to classically conditioned dogs to associate a tone to the pain of an electric shock. In order to do this, the dogs were harnessed and could not avoid electric shocks. It was expected that the dogs would be undergoing operant conditioning (negative reinforcement) to avoid the electric shocks.

However, when the harnesses were removed, the dogs did nothing to escape the electric shocks. Another group of dogs that were never harnessed learned to avoid electric shocks by jumping over a barrier.

The dog’s reacted by being passive and not escaping the electric shocks when unharnessed. Martin Seligman described this behavior as learned helplessness.

Learned helplessness: A phenomenon in which repeated exposure to inescapable, uncomfortable, or uncontrollable aversive events produce passive behavior.
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 many weight loss programs (including those that use hypnosis—Chapter 4) that are ineffective that they discourage people.
- **Cell phones and driving:** The reason why driving while talking on cell phones is due to divided attention. This problem is still present with hands free phones and may reduce a small portion of the problem, but not a majority of the problems.
- **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”
- Banking crisis of 2008
- 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?
Self-Efficacy

Self-Efficacy: The belief that one can master a situation and produce positive outcomes.

People with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to
- Solve problems successfully
- Become more sociable
- Initiate a diet or exercise program and maintain it
- Quit smoking
- Try healthy habits
- Expend more effort when coping with stress
- Persist longer in the face of obstacles
- Experience less stress
- Initiate psychotherapy to deal with their problems and more likely to be successful with psychotherapy
- Have higher levels of job performance
Adjustment Strategies
For Increasing Self-Efficacy

1. Select something you expect to be able to do, not something you fail at accomplishing. Success breeds the belief that you can succeed. As you develop self-efficacy, you can tackle more daunting projects.

2. Distinguish between past performance and your present project. You might come to expect from past failures that you cannot do certain things. However, remind yourself that your past failures are in the past and that you now have a new sense of confidence and accomplishment.

3. Pay close attention to your successes. Some individuals have a tendency to remember their failures, but not their successes.

4. Keep written records so that you will be concretely aware of your successes. A student who sticks to a study schedule for four days then fails to stick to it on the fifth day should not think, “I’m a failure. I can’t do this.” This statement ignores the fact that the student was successful 80% of the time (keeping to his schedule four out of the five days).

5. List the specific kinds of situations in which you expect to have the most difficulty and the least difficulty. Begin with the easier task and cope with the harder ones after you have experienced some success.
Application: Turning Your Goals into Reality

Self-efficacy—the degree to which you are convinced of your ability to meet the demands of a particular situation.

Self-Efficacy: Optimistic beliefs about your capabilities

If you have an optimistic sense of self-efficacy, you will approach a difficult task as a challenge to be mastered. However, this sense of self-efficacy needs to be realistic.

To strengthen your sense of self-efficacy, you need to experience success as moderately challenging tasks. In these tasks, you should

- Strive for progressive (gradual) improvement rather than perfection on the first attempt
- Understand that setbacks serve a useful purpose in teaching us that success requires sustained effort (because we tend to hear about a person’s “success” story, but not the failures, we overestimate the likelihood of success-- ______ heuristic)
- If you only experience easy successes, you are more likely to become discouraged and abandon efforts when you experience failures.
Application: Turning Your Goals into Reality

Implementation Intention: Turning Goals into Actions

Step 1: Form a goal intention—Describe a behavior

- Express your goal intention as something you will do, not something you will not do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good goal intention</th>
<th>Bad goal intention</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will wake up at 6:00 am for class</td>
<td>I won’t sleep through my 8:00 am class.</td>
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- Express your general intention into a specific, concrete and binding goal that can be assessed “I intend to achieve ________”

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<th>Good goal intention</th>
<th>Bad goal intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will study 2 hours a day</td>
<td>I will study more</td>
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- Set challenging, but realistic goals
- Set short-term as well as long-term goals
- Set a definite time span for achievement

Step 2: Create implementation intention—how will you accomplish your behavior?

Make a specific plan for turning your goals into reality. Specify where, when and how you will carry out the intended behavior.

- I will wake up at 6:00 am on TuTh and take a shower at 6:05
- I will study 2 hours a day between 6:00 and 8:00 pm at the library while taking notes and outlining the chapter
Your task:
1. Identify a behavior you wish to change
2. Describe a GOOD specific goal intention or behavior (what do you want?)
3. Describe a GOOD implementation intention or plan (how are you going to get it?)
4. Describe a BAD goal intention
5. Describe a BAD implementation intention
1. I wish to have a healthier lifestyle

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal Intention</strong></td>
<td>I want to walk 30 minutes a day</td>
<td>I want to exercise more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I will eat more fruits and vegetables</td>
<td>I want to avoid fast food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation Intention</strong></td>
<td>I want to walk 30 minutes a day on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday after dinner</td>
<td>I want to exercise more during the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I will buy a sprig of broccoli, bananas and carrots when I go to the store to eat for dinner</td>
<td>I will eat healthier food</td>
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