Social-Cognitive Theory and Smoking

Jenna Leah Smith

The University of Texas at Brownsville
Synopsis

The intention of this article critique is to provide an overview of the Social Cognitive Theory and relate it to an article which was published in 2011 by Matt Cunningham who is an author and contributor to Discovery Health Online. The article is titled “10 Reasons Why People Start Smoking”.

Theory and Analysis

Albert Bandura is the psychologist who founded the Social-Cognitive Theory. This theory places emphasis on believing that people learn by observing others, and the imitation and modeling of what they observe. Bandura is most famous for the experimentation and research involving children and the “Bobo Doll.” In this experiment, a select group of children reviewed a video which captured woman interacting with a doll. In the video, the woman repeatedly verbally abused (by yelling) and physically assaulted (by hitting) the doll. After the children reviewed the video, they were placed in a room which contained the same type of doll. The children’s behaviors were observed and recorded. It was discovered that the children reacted to the doll in the same manner in which they observed the woman interacting with the doll (with verbal and physical aggression.) The conclusion to this experiment is the basis for Albert Bandura’s Social-Cognitive Theory which stresses that people learn by observing others and they imitate and model them behaviors after what they witness whether the behaviors are socially correct or not.
This is theory is very much at work in the ways that people elect to smart smoking. In the article that is referenced, the author lists ten reasons why people start the detrimental habit. The list that was created by the author of this article is below:

1. Peer Pressure
2. Social Rewards
3. Risk-taking Behavior
4. Parental Influence
5. Misinformation
6. Genetic Predisposition
7. Advertising
8. Self-medication
9. Media Influence
10. Stress Relief

(Cunningham, 2011.)

The truth is that the reasons why some people start smoking can very because everyone can have their own reason. When I analyzing this list, I notice that several of the reasons are interconnected. For example, the reason of feeling peer pressure and the reason of receiving social rewards are one in the same to me. If a person defaults to the peer pressures of smoking, it could be because (just as in the Social-Cognitive Theory,) they are observing others partake in the action and imitating the behavior to feel like they are part of the group and group activity. Another reason mentioned on the
list is a person may start smoking due to parental influence. This is a classic case for the Social-Cognitive Theory. A child may be influenced to become a smoker later on in life because they witnessed their parent smoke. This is similar to the study that Albert Bandura conducted with the “Bobo Doll”. The children in the experiment witnessed a woman who could potentially be a mother figure inappropriately interacting with the doll and therefore the reactions of the children were the same. It is possible these children believed their actions were appropriate since they observed an adult (who was potentially a mother figure) conduct herself in the same manner. The same is true for children who grow up with parents who smoke. Because these children witness their parent smoke, they observe and learn that this behavior is acceptable. The final example that I will describe from the list are the similarities in the reasons of advertising and media influence. Once again, to me these two reasons are one in the same. If a person sees smoking in a movie or on a billboard, they are still observing the action of smoking. This may lead them to believe that it is acceptable for them to imitate the behavior because a particular famous person is portraying smoking as glamorous.

Evaluation

In conclusion, as mentioned before, there are a variety of reasons why a person may start smoking. If we analyze and apply the Social-Cognitive Theory to the reasons, we find that the underlining reasons and conclusions are overall right in line with the basis of the theory. It would be my hope that the recent push for educating the public of the
dangerous and detrimental health risks of smoking would also have the Social-Cognitive Theory effect as the reason why people start smoking in the first place.
References
