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**INTRODUCTION**

People are much like sponges; they soak up experiences that they encounter daily. This process, or what psychologists say, learning, allows them to be able to communicate and interact with others.

# **What is Learning?**

Learning is a broad and complicated process that changes one’s behaviour permanently. In the 20th Century, John B. Watson’s school of thought known as behaviourism rose to popularity. It suggests that all behaviours are a result of a learning process, and explains the three major methods of learning: classical conditioning, operant conditioning and observational learning (Cherry, 2020).

**See Diagram 1 - Illustration of the Three Methods of Behavioural Learning (JrBee, Verywell, 2020)**

In this report, we will delve into Social Learning Theory (SLT) which uses the method of observational learning to delve into the psychology of personality.

# **What is Social Learning Theory (SLT)?**

SLT is a cognitive process that occurs in social settings and influences behaviour. This theory suggests that the learning process of a new social behaviour can be acquired by observation, imitation and modelling (Bandura, 1971). This cognitive process uses the observational learning method to imitate observed behaviour.

This theory was proven when psychologist Albert Bandura conducted a controlled experiment study amongst 72 children back in 1961.

1. **Julian B. Rotter’s SLT**

Personality represents the interaction of an individual with their environment. The method combined behaviourism and the study of personality, without relying on psychological instincts as a motivation.

It proposes that one’s behaviour is not an automatic response to an objective set of environmental stimuli. To understand such behaviour, we must take both the individual (i.e., his or her life history of learning and experiences) and the environment (i.e., those stimuli that the person into account. In his theory, personality is deemed as a relatively stable set of potentials for responding to situations.

Rotter saw personality, and therefore behaviour, as always mutable - If we experience a change in environment, our behaviour will change. He did not believe that there will be a time in one’s life when their personality is immutable. However, the more beliefs one has, the more effort and intervention is required for change to occur.

There are four main components to Rotter’s SLT in predicting one’s personality: behaviour potential, expectancy, reinforcement value and the psychological situation.

**Behaviour Potential (BP)**: The likelihood of one engaging in a particular behaviour in a situation. There are multiple behaviours they can engage in and for each of them, there is a behaviour potential. Hence, one will exhibit the behaviour that has the highest potential.

**Expectancy (E):** The subjective probability that a given behaviour will lead to a particular reinforcement. A high expectancy is achieved when one believes that they can enact the behaviour effectively which will result in reinforcement. Such expectancies are formed based on past experiences. One does not have to experience it to know that a certain behaviour that they exude will earn them reinforcement while other behaviours will punish them. However, one can either over or underestimate this likelihood, leading to expectancies being purely subjective

**Reinforcement Value (RV):** The outcome of one’s behaviour and thus, our desire for it to occur. If one has a high reinforcement value, they wish for it to happen compared to one who has a low reinforcement value. However, if the likelihood of achieving the reinforcement is the same, one will exhibit behaviour that will get the most preferred outcome.

SLT suggests that the environment is the primary importance in shaping one’s behaviour. Hence, social outcomes are powerful influencers of one’s behaviour. Like expectancy, reinforcement value is subjective and it solely depends on one’s life experience. Therefore, even a trivial event can have a strong reinforcement value if one sees it leading to other strongly valued reinforcers.

**The Psychological Situation (Unique Experiences):** Rotter believed it to be important to understand that everyone interprets the same situation differently as everyone has different expectancies and reinforcement values. Thus, it is the people’s subjective interpretation of the environment that is meaningful instead of an objective array of stimuli that determines one’s behaviour.

The likelihood of one exhibiting a potential behaviour is the result of the probability that the behaviour will be given the desired outcome. Thus, Rotter’s overall idea on SLT can be derived from this formula that shows that BP is proportionate to E & RV.

**BP = *f*(E & RV)**

If both the expectancy and reinforcement values are high, the behaviour potential will also be high and vice versa if both are low.

Thus, we will refer to Rotter’s theory that one’s personality can be shaped by SLT. However, it does not wholly shape one’s personality as there are other factors affecting the outcome of one’s behaviour.

# **The Bobo Doll Experiment**

This experiment was conducted to test if aggression can be acquired through imitation and observation-observational learning. Before the actual experiment, the researchers including Bandura pretested the children’s levels of aggression. This test was made by two observers and compared to get a fair average rating of the children’s aggressive behaviour.

They were then divided into 3 groups. One group observed a model acting aggressively towards the Bobo Doll, the other group observed a model acting non-aggressively towards the Bobo Doll while the other group was not given a model to watch.

**See Diagram 2 - Division of Groups for Bobo Doll Experiment (McLeod, 2014)**

After they were tasked to observe the video, they were then made to spend 20 minutes with the Bobo Doll while being observed and taped. The results of this experiment state that the children who saw the model acting aggressively towards the Bobo Doll made more imitative gestures than the other groups.

Hence, this experiment demonstrates that social learning is learned through the observational learning method.

# **How does the Observational Learning Method work?**

Although the experiment above had a clear result, Bandura stressed that the observer may or may not imitate the model even after observing it. This is because in observing and modelling behaviour, one must go through four conditions before acquiring the new behaviour. This is to make sure the behaviour is retained and practised.

The four conditions are:

**Attention**: A behaviour must grab one’s attention before it can be imitated, thus the first step is when one notices the behaviour.

**Retention**: Behaviour that piques one’s interest cannot be performed if it cannot be recalled. Unless a memory was formed on the noticed behaviour, the observer will not be able to perform it.

**Reproduction**: The ability to replicate the behaviour. After noticing and remembering the behaviour, the person will try to replicate the behaviour. This is limited by their physical and mental capacity to do so.

**Motivation**: The last step is referred to as vicarious reinforcement. This step describes the will to emulate the produced behaviour and it involves learning through observing the consequences of actions made by other people. SLT can only be practised when the individual has the motivation to practise the behaviour being portrayed by the model.

# **What are the Models that are used in SLT?**

Psychological models for observational learning are used to identify what attracts the individual's attention. It also needs to allow one to analyse it for imitation and observation. Hence, Bandura came up with three basic models that are used in SLT.

**Live Model:** This model involves an actual individual demonstrating or acting out behaviour to the observer.

**Symbolic Model:** This model involves real or fictional characters displaying behaviours in books, films, television programs, or online media.

**Verbal Instructional Model:** A verbal instructional model, which involves descriptions and explanations of behaviour.

These models do not restrict observational learning to happen anywhere and anytime. Hence, his theory also goes beyond behavioural theories suggesting that all behaviours are learnt through conditioning and cognitive theories.

# **How Does Behaviour Develop Into Personality?**

When the observer perceives similar behaviour being demonstrated by different models, the observer will select certain aspects from the perceived behaviour. This creates a unique pattern that accomplishes the final behaviour learned. Hence, one’s personality is not only made up of one behaviour learnt through observation, but a multitude of models and behaviours.

# **What is Personality?**

There is no agreed definition of what personality is, however it encompasses all thoughts, behaviour patterns and social behaviours. This impacts how one views themselves, what they believe about others and the world around them (Cherry, 2018). This includes their genetics, upbringing and life experiences.

Understanding the concept of personality allows psychologists to predict one’s reactions to certain situations. In this case, how one will react to behavioural models and how the learned behaviour will influence their personality. Several theories emerged to explain the aspects of personality. However, in this report, we will be discussing the most popular and widely accepted theory named the “Big Five” theory.

**The “Big Five” Theory**

The big five personality traits are a psychological model to measure personality and help predict behaviour as well as personality. The first principle theory which was developed by psychologist Donald Winslow Fiske emerged in 1949 and was later developed by other researchers. It consists of:

**Openness:** a characteristic that includes imagination and insight. People who score high are often easygoing, enthusiastic and adventurous

**Conscientiousness:** a trait that includes thoughtfulness, good impulse control, and goal-directed behaviours. Individuals who have a high rating tend to be organised and structured individuals.

**Extraversion / Extroversion**: relates to sociability, people with this trait are described as someone who gets energised and outgoing. They might come across as talkative, assertive and emotionally expressive.

**Agreeableness:** a characteristic that shows signs of trust, altruism, kindness, and affection. People who have this trait are more prone to helping others and are more empathetic towards others.

**Neuroticism:** a physical and emotional reaction to stress. Its traits are characterised by sadness, moodiness, and emotional instability. People with high levels of neuroticism tend to experience mood swings, anxiety and irritability.

These traits are interchangeable. One might have a high level of extraversion and openness during their childhood and when they get older, they have higher levels of neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness. This happens when personalities are exposed to the age-old nature-genetics versus nurture-upbringing.

# **How Does One Change Their Personality?**

Personality traits can change when one is exposed to persistent intervention and major life events (Nikos-Rose and Davis, 2020). Personalities are hard to change even if one wants to. It takes a life outcome to change it permanently.

Thus, instead of looking at SLT and personality as two separate features, we are going to find the correlation between both of them using Julian B. Rotter’s SLT.

# **Case Studies**

**Experiment 1: “Peers affect personality development   
*(Xiaoyue and Ulf Zölitz, 2022)”***

To strengthen our theory, we refer to a case study that aims to measure how much social learning among peers could affect personality. The field experiment by Xiaoyue and Shan Ulf Zölitz from the IZA Institute of labour economics studied 543 undergraduate students between the ages of 19 to 22 across 3 academic years (AY18/19, AY19/20, AY20/21). The students were randomly assigned within each broad enrollment program with the same curriculum into small study groups of 4 students. In these groups, students have study sessions, prepare for tutorials, discuss with lecturers and meet for social events. These interactions took place during the first few months of university when the students were adapting to the new environment of the school.

From there, 3 stages of assessment were carried out:

**Baseline** (before they were assigned to their study groups), **Endline** (just before their final exam), and **review** (one to three years after the end of the experiment)

In each of the 3 stages of assessment the Big Five personality traits, together with an additional 6th known as competitiveness, are measured on a scale of 1-7 using the 15-item Big Five Inventory (BFI-S). The 6 personality traits are used as they are a good indicator of an individual’s personality, life trajectory and relationships.

The first 2 assessment results were run through a series of complicated equations, controlled variables, graphs and charts. From there, it can be concluded that in 3 of the 6 personality traits, being assigned to peers with a higher standard deviation (SD) value will cause an increase in the SD value in the student themselves. These influences on personality traits are known as trait spillovers. To put it differently, students with more competitive peers become more competitive, students with more open-minded peers become more open-minded, and students with more conscientious peers become more conscientious. However, there were no significant effects of peers’ extraversion, agreeableness, or neuroticism recorded in the experiments.

In the 3rd stage of assessment, the review shows that conscientious and competitive traits of the 3 significantly affected trait spillovers stay with the students for a long time after the experiment has ended. For the remaining trait spillover of openness, the effect mostly disappeared as observed in the review assessment.

To sum up, this field study is a clear indication that in the context of higher education, social learning between peers plays a part in shaping some of the personalities assessed. Students' competitiveness and conscientiousness had long-term trait spillovers.

**Experiment 2: Personality and Behavioural Intention in Student Teams**

**(Forrester, Tashchian and Shore, 2016)**

We then look at another experiment to strengthen our theory. A group of 219 students in a southeastern university participated in a research study by the American Journal. This study investigated the applicability of the Big Five and FIRO-B frameworks as predictors of group process outcomes in the context of student teams. The results measure the students’ behavioural orientations with the FIRO-B instrument developed by Schutz. The scales were anchored by 1=Never to 6=Usually. ‘Wanted’ aspects are measured using scales anchored by 1=Nobody to 6=Most People.

**See Diagram 3: Table showing Neo-FFI Reliability Indicator**

**See Diagram 4: Table showing FIRO Dimension Reliability Indicator**

# **See Diagram 5: Table showing Correlations between Neo-FFI and FIRO-B Measures**

Results show that students high in agreeableness are active in including others in their activities, that they proactively express affection and form close relationships, and that they avoid outright control and domineering behaviours.

Consistent with the image of extroverts as persons who enjoy interacting with others, results suggest that extraversion is linked to the formation of close relationships and involvement in the activities of others and the inclusion of others in one’s activities.

The correlations suggest that students high in conscientiousness also value close relationships but that they are capable of assuming leadership roles when necessary to ensure high-performance standards.

Students high in neuroticism were averse to including others in their activities, were hesitant in forming close relationships, and were disinclined to leadership roles in group interactions. No relationship was found between openness and behavioural orientations.

The significant relationships established in this research can be used to improve the performance of students through insight into their interpersonal needs and behaviours as well as their levels of satisfaction from interpersonal dynamics.

These results can help in predicting who will work well together as well as identifying possible areas of incompatibility.

For example, the results suggest that those students who show a positive relationship between expressed inclusion and extraversion are energetic individuals who are active and enthusiastic networkers. Similar relationships among affection and personality variables can be used to identify individuals who value closeness, are loyal, and are good in one-to-one relationships. By recognizing differences in personality and interpersonal needs and behaviour, educators are better able to train students in how to recognize and adapt to the personalities and behavioural inclinations of others.

# **Literature Review on Case Studies Presented**

In the first case study, there was no clear proof observed within each interaction that students were learning and affecting each other's personalities. Matrices and graphs comparing the Big Five personalities and the 6th, competitiveness, show that in 3 of the 6 personalities assessed, students' personalities do change by some significance. Since the fixed trigger across the groups of students was the accumulated interactions with the independent variable of the students' personalities, it is logical to say that the interactions caused the students to learn about each other's personalities.

In the second case study, students were able to observe the model or situation being inclusive and extraverted, they then retained the behaviour of the model or situation. After the students focused and retained the behaviour, the next step was to replicate the motion of being inclusive and extraverted within their capacity.

Students may have received some sort of motivation from the model, the model receiving a reward, or from self-satisfaction. Hence, giving them the drive to continue with the behaviour. With time, the students continued the behaviour, and it gradually had an impact on their personality (Cherry, 2019)

In both case studies, the behaviour that the students imitate gradually affects their personality through observational learning from their model. This is supported by how all the BFI-S frameworks of measurement point to a similar trend: retained changes in their personality are lasting.

In summary, the concept of SLT shows that when individuals successfully replicate a sustained set of behaviours, the behaviours would gradually shape their personality with the help of motivation.

# **Daily examples where SLT can positively impact personality**

If a child observes their parents going to work every day, volunteering at a local community centre and helping their significant other with tasks around the home, the child is likely to mimic those behaviours. If rewarded, these behaviours become reinforced and will most likely be repeated by the child. (Online MSW Programs, 2020)

The majority of research investigating role models in education can be summed up in two streams:

1. Identifying key aspects of role models that make influences effective or ineffective   
   (see Betz & Sekaquaptewa, 2012; Hurd, Zimmerman, & Xue, 2009; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002; Ahn, Hu and Vega, 2019)
2. Examining the most favourable outcomes associated with imitating the model. (Ahn, Hu and Vega, 2019)

McIntyre, Paulson, and Lord (2003) demonstrated that women performed significantly better on a quantitative Graduate Record Exam (GRE) when they first read biographical essays of women who succeeded in various professions (Ahn, Hu and Vega, 2019)

For example, effort relative to inborn talent, is perceived as more controllable in the sense that it is more subject to “volitional control” (e.g., Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Weiner, 1979, 1985) (Ahn, Hu and Vega, 2019)

Research has shown that girls performed as well as boys on a difficult maths task when exposed to a hardworking role model whose success was attributed to effort versus innate talent. Conversely, girls' performance worsened, compared to boys, when exposed to a role model whose success was attributed to innate talent versus effort (Bàges, Verniers, & Martinot, 2016).

In summary, positive personality traits are a key aspect of effective role models. This thus leads to positive impacts of SLT. Most outcomes associated with role modelling are favourable, thus encouraging the imitation of the model.

# **Daily examples where SLT can negatively impact personality**

Social media shows a variety of SLT examples, where people imitate each other, regardless of whether it’s recreating a scene from a movie or copying dance moves. This behaviour is caused by the desire to be socially accepted as well. (CORP-MSW1 (OMSWP), n.d.) This results in adolescents' social learning abilities being manipulated by the media (CLASSROOM, 2008) since there are many different role models that adolescents can access and learn from.

With many role model examples available, it is easy for adolescents to learn about social standards and expectations, such as the unrealistic standards of appearances. (Wankhade, Sc and Phd, n.d.)

In the case of adolescents who are in the phase of understanding and shaping their identity, social media can be detrimental as it can cause self-consciousness and confusion about who they are. (Wankhade, Sc and Phd, n.d.) When the feeling of self-consciousness within an individual becomes excessive, this can lead to personality issues such as low-self esteem and depression. (Healthline, 2014)

# **Analysis of the Real-Life Example**

**Successes of the Real Life Example**

In the pursuit to become a better person with favourable qualities, an individual will look for role models who possess personality traits that are considered admirable to them. Referring to Experiment 1**,** students who are surrounded by positive role models start to express positive traits themselves, such as being open-minded. Social media can also help demonstrate what traits are socially expected such as being empathetic when others are experiencing hardships.

**Failures of the Real Life Example**

Despite the positive role models surrounding an individual, an individual may start to revert to their “old self” without the newly learnt personality trait due to multiple reasons. Different morals due to the way an individual is raised will affect what they deem as “appropriate”, and affect those whom they consider as “role models''. Despite social media showing what is an admirable quality to have and what is not, the ultimate opinion lies in the individual who sees a possible role model.

For example, in the context of ISIS terrorism, supportive individuals may view such activities as necessary, and that it is something that they must engage in. In Singapore, 2021, a 16-year-old was self-radicalised and planned to attack Muslims in 2 mosques (CNA, n.d.). Despite most of the world knowing that terrorism brings many devastating consequences and therefore is looked down upon, the 16-year-old still deemed that violence was fascinating and he was “ influenced” by Brenton Tarrant, a follower of ISIS responsible for the Christchurch bombings in 2019. From this example, we can deduce that what might be considered “socially acceptable” will not always result in the individual learning positive behaviours due to their choice of role models.

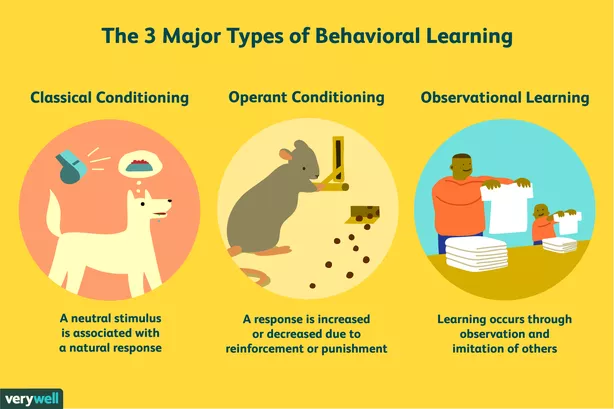
# **Takeaway and Recommendations**

In conclusion, SLT has a role in shaping one’s personality. Our research suggests that all aspects of personality can be shaped, reinforced, and encouraged through the use of role models and social media. Changes in personalities are mostly gradual and unnoticeable. This is where the different stages of SLT are applied, where role models and peer pressure are key examples. Nonetheless, the final decision still lies within the individual to decide what qualities a suitable role model embodies.

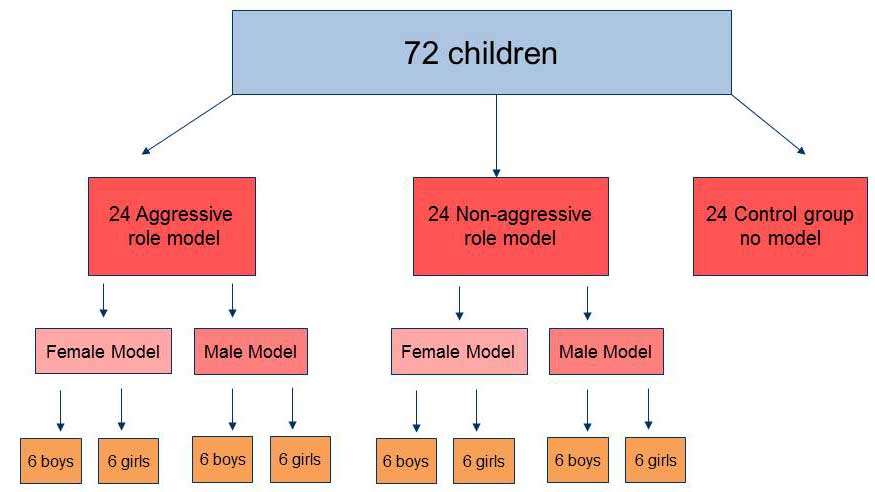
Within one’s capacity, the recommendation is to be aware of their choice of friends and to be in full control of their decision-making. Although SLT is correlated to social environments, research has also presented clear evidence that personality is affected by external factors and internalised decisions.

By understanding the intentions and impacts of role models, one can best determine which role models and what behaviour would benefit their quality and way of life. They can actively hand-pick our social circle and interactions, allowing them to benefit from the positive impacts of Social Learning Theory.

# **Diagrams**



**Diagram 1 - Illustration of the Three Methods of Behavioural Learning (JrBee, Verywell, 2020)**



**Diagram 2 - Division of Groups for Bobo Doll Experiment (McLeod, 2014)**

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**Diagram 3: Table showing Neo-FFI Reliability Indicator**

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**Diagram 4: Table showing FIRO Dimension Reliability Indicator**

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# **Diagram 5: Table showing Correlations between Neo-FFI and FIRO-B Measures**

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