Theories of Social Development

Psychology of Childhood
Theories of Social Development

Various theories attempt to account for aspects of development such as:
- Emotion
- Personality and Identity
- Attachment and Family Relationships
- Peer relationships
- Morality
Modern Theories of Social Development

- Learning theories
- Bioecological theories
- Evolutionary theories
Learning Theories

- Emphasize the role of the environment in shaping personality and social behavior.
- Learning theories attempt to account for social development in terms of 3 basic mechanisms:
  - classical conditioning
  - operant conditioning
  - observational learning
Classical Conditioning

- John Watson popularized the idea that classical conditioning could explain everything important about children’s social development
“Give me a dozen healthy infants, well formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in, and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select - doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief - regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors.”
Watson attempted to show that seemingly instinctual feelings are really the result of classical conditioning. Repeated associations between aversive stimuli (such as filth) and neutral stimuli (such as rats) produce aversion to neutral stimuli.
Conditioning

- The case of “Little Albert” seemed to support Watson’s argument.
Before Training
After Training
Generalization
Observational Learning

- Is direct experience necessary?
- Bandura showed that the environment can elicit behaviors *without* reinforcers or punishers.
- In observational learning, children learn by observing consequences for a model.
Observational Learning
Observational Learning

- Results showed that observing the model being punished or rewarded had large effect on children’s aggressive behavior.
- Results also showed that boys were much more aggressive than girls.
Gender

- **Why are girls and boys so different?**
- **John Money**
  - Ph.D. at Harvard
  - Believed that girls and boys are no different at birth, but become different from each other due to differences in how the environment treats them
  - In evidence, he offered the case of “Brenda”, a boy who was raised to believe he was a girl and who had an identical twin brother (who was treated normally)
- What happened?
- http://www.infocirc.org/rollston.htm