Social Learning Theory Self-analysis

Childhood

As a young child, my parent's instilled expectations of acceptable and appropriate behavior. My parents believed strongly in raising me with Christian values and therefore, my behavior was expected to model that of a Christian young lady. These modeling of behaviors included respecting my parents and others by presenting myself as courteous, kind, and compassionate. I was expected to excel in school, and maintain a wholesome reputation by not engaging in any activity that would bring public shame or embarrassment to them. This included no drinking, no swearing, no rebellious behavior or outbursts, and abstinence from sexual immorality (Miller, 2016). I was taught my reputation was dependent on if I was perceived by others within our community to exhibit promiscuous behaviors. To avoid negative consequences, I adapted to this imposed environment by responding with behavior based off of performance in order to meet and maintain my parent's expectations (Miller, 2016). When I behaved in a manor that was perceived to be acceptable by my parents my behavior was encouraged through positive and negative reinforcement (receiving an allowance, receiving an extension on curfew, being taken shopping). However, when my behavior was perceived to be inacceptable by my parents my behavior was discouraged through consequences of positive and negative punishment (spanking, additional chores, being grounded from friends and activities) (Miller, 2016). Consequences from failed expectations also resulted in lack of parental affection, being verbally reminded of my adoption by being told I was not "their daughter" or threatened to be "disowned". From a young age, I became operantly conditioned to model acceptable behaviors in order to receive their approval and praise (Miller, 2016).

Adolescence

A critical dynamic that influenced my behavior occurred in my adolescent years towards the end of my eighth-grade year. I was raped by a male classmate, losing my virginity. Following the rape, the young man went to school boasting to peers of his sexual conquering of my virginity. Living in a small community, my parents were quickly notified by members within the community of the news of my alleged escapades. Upon receiving the news, my parents believed that I had brought public disgrace to our family resulting in my father telling me "I was no longer their daughter" and would not be acknowledged. This included refusal in speaking to me, making eye contact with me, and hugging me. Now being labeled by my parents as a "Jezebel", church leaders convinced my parents action needed to be taken to "redeem me from my sinful ways". As a result, through negative punishment my parents withdrew me from public school and enrolled me in a private school to attempt to modify my behavior to that of a Godly Christian girl by emptying me of any sexual temptations (Miller, 2016). This deepened my shame and reinforced that I had done something wrong and deserved to be raped. As a result of classical conditioning, I conformed to my parent's expectations by mechanistically projecting the moral behaviors expected while suppressing the events of my rape and internalizing feelings of self-blame and self-doubt.

Adulthood

The traumatic experience of being raped, my parent's disapproval of me, and attending private school as negative punishment molded how I would cognitively process and emotionally respond to future intimate relationships through-out my adolescent years and into adulthood. Through negative classical conditioning, I developed associations between my self-worth, self-acceptance, my relationships with men, and my relationship with my father (Miller, 2016). These associations created narratives "I was not loveable, unworthy, unvalued, unwanted, defective, a failure, and deserved to be abused" (Miller, 2016). These narratives resulted in a low self-efficacy of low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation, and the belief that I did not possess the ability to succeed in life (Bandura, 1977). My low self-efficacy resulted in emotional and pathological conditioned responses that often were reflected to mistrust, and fear of abandonment developed with relationships with men. For example, an event or perceived event occurred such as being betrayed or lied to resulted in my thought processing the event as "you lied to me, I can't trust you" (cognitive mediator), the feeling "I worthless, I'm unloved, I'm unwanted (stimulus), the action I'm angry, I feel anxious, I want to withdraw, I blame myself (associated response). These responses in turn would only elicit more fear and anxiety.

I believe that being raped and not having my parent's approval conditioned me to develop a mistrust in men and set the stage for repeated cycles of abuse.

References

1. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological review, 84, 191-215.
2. Miller, P.H. (2016). Theories of developmental psychology (6th edition). New York: Worth Publishers.