

Evidence for SLT and gender

This activity will help you to...

- Understand research into the social learning of gender
- Consider the implications of this research for social learning theory
- Analyse this research in terms of the methodology used

Fagot & Leinbach (1989)

In a longitudinal study of gender development focusing on families, these researchers found a tendency for parents to directly teach gendered behaviour to their children. Gender appropriate behaviour tended to be encouraged and inappropriate behaviour discouraged for example, girls were reinforced for playing with dolls but not for climbing trees. This tendency was strongest amongst parents who held strongly gender-stereotyped attitudes.

Fagot (1985); Dweck et al (1978)

In an observational study of gender influences in a pre-school environment, Fagot recorded the reactions of playgroup teachers to different types of behaviour. She found a tendency for the teachers to respond more positively to 'female preferred' activities. She also found that boys would make fun of other boys who played with a doll and that girls showed disapproval if another girl played with boys. Dweck and colleagues used student observers to record how positive and negative feedback was given to ten year olds in a classroom. Girls were most likely to be praised for neatness and boys for intellectual achievement. The reverse was true of criticism.

Williams (1986)

Williams carried out a natural experiment in an isolated community where TV was about to be introduced for the first time ('Notel'). Measures of attitudes and behaviour were taken before and after the introduction of TV. Two other towns were used for comparison purposes. He found that, in the two years following the introduction of TV, the children of Notel became much more stereotyped in the gender attitudes. There was no corresponding change in the comparison towns.

Questions to help you evaluate social learning theory

- What implications do these findings have for the social learning theory of gender?
- Using your textbooks, find at least one study that contradicts these findings.

Questions to focus you on the research methods used to study gender

- Which study do you think has the highest internal validity? Why?
- Which study do you think has the highest external validity? Why?
- Which study raises the most and which the least ethical issues? Why?

A question to do both

- Do cross-cultural studies of gender tend to support or challenge the social learning theory? Use at least one example to support your view.