

The case of Susan Smith

Name

Institution Affiliation

Date

Social cognitive theory is well associated with the communication of health. Dealing with health communication means that the theory involves emotional, cognitive and behavioral changes. Ideally, the approach can explain different behavioral shifts in the health department. Social cognitive theory gives a picture of how individuals assimilate into new behaviors and how various patterns are developed (Victorino, 2011). By doing so, the theory provides plans on how such issues can be approached. Different theories have been developed to explain the behavioral change in people's lives over the years. The difference comes up regarding how they approach the changes, the different motivations and the behaviors shown by individuals. In theory, it is assumed that development of a human is a life-long experience. According to Glanz et al (2002), the social cognitive theory involves the observation of sociological changes in a person's adult life as well as their childhood life. One element of the social cognitive theory is the idea that when a person experiences different social practices, they show different behavior in response. It further shows that there are behaviors that are cultivated while others come naturally and may be suppressed. A proverbial assumption of the social cognitive theory is that people learn by observing.

The social cognitive theory applies in the case of Susan Smith. Firstly, the environment in which Susan grew up contributed highly to her behavioral outcome. Cervone and Pervin (2016) explain that the physical factors that surround a person contribute to the behavioral changes that may be observed in the individual. The way a person perceives their environment will determine how their life will turn out. Ideally, having the knowledge and the technical abilities to deal with situations conforms a person to a specific way of life, whether the knowledge was acquired through observation or learning. In Susan Smith's situation, the environment that she grew up in affected the person that she became as an adult. Susan grew up

in a family where violence prevailed. The environment that Susan grew in was toxic and detrimental, especially for a child. She grew up understanding that violence was acceptable and that suicidal attempts were a normal thing. The environment shaped her into the insensitive person that she grew up to be. The lack of love between her parents triggered the lack of remorse and sensitivity that could be seen in Susan as an adult.

Secondly, the expectations that Susan had as a child molded her into the adult that she became. Glanz et al (2002) explain that the amount of importance that a person maintains on a situation presents itself as a behavior. If an individual values a situation because they believe it is the order, then their thoughts cannot change about the same issue. In Susan's case, she grew up believing that divorce and lack of commitment to one person may be inevitable. Therefore, Susan remained close to her father and valued their relationship, making it easy for her to adapt her father's tendencies. Susan also valued material possessions when she was growing up, thanks to her mother. It can be concluded that Susan grew up to a selfish person, who valued riches too much to become a killer. It is possible that Susan sacrificed her children because she wanted to find the comfort of a rich man. She constantly battles with the urge to escape her lonely life, which was filled with disappointments and uncertainties. She killed her children because she believed that they were in her way of her finding true love and happiness from Tom Findlay.

Lastly, Susan lacked the ability to regulate her personal, goal-influenced behaviors. In turn, Susan became an observational learner and acquired most of her survival strategies from making observations. Victorino (2011) claims that an individual bears the ability to slowly become confident in carrying out certain activities boldly. Susan was faced with several situations that triggered a defensive mechanism in her. For instance, the constant molestation that

Susan faced from her stepfather may have resulted to Susan developing a Self-efficacy mechanism in her defense. Additionally, the constant disappointments from her boyfriends affected her negatively, allowing her to develop emotional coping responses. Susan faced devastating situations that affected her emotionally. She became stressed when her first boyfriend left her, and could not bear with the rejection she faced from Tom Findlay. Susan's responsibilities became overwhelming at some point, making it an issue of contention in her marriage. She slowly turned to her mother and became emotionally needy and dependent. The fact that she could not be with Tom Findlay drove her to murder her children.

Behavior is not simply the result of the environment and the person, just as the environment is not simply the result of the person and behavior (Glanz et al., 2002). Even though Susan faced terrifying situations in her childhood life, it is possible that she may have outlived them if she got proper counseling. It is possible that Susan's environment may not have caused behavior change. People have the ability to become anything they wish in life. Different situations presented to the people play a role in determining behavior change, but it is not definite. The way Susan turned out may not be as a result of her general external environment.

References

Cervone, D., & Pervin, L. A. (2016). *Personality: Theory and research*.

Glanz, K., Rimer, B.K. & Lewis, F.M. (2002). *Health Behavior and Health Education. Theory, Research and Practice*. San Francisco: Wiley & Sons.

Victorino, T. J. (2011). *Albert Bandura: Psychologist, social cognitive theory, personality, psychology, social learning theory, Bobo doll experiment*. Place of publication not identified: Log Press.