

This Week's Citation Classic

Witkin H A, Dyk R B, Faterson H F, Goodenough D R & Karp S A. *Psychological differentiation: studies of development*. Potomac, MD: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1974. 418 p. (Originally published: New York: Wiley, 1962.)
[Dept. Psychiat., State Univ. New York, Coll. Med., New York. NY]

The theory which guided this research conceives of the development of differentiation as an organism-wide process, and proposes, accordingly, that greater or lesser differentiation is likely to characterize an individual's psychological functioning in diverse domains. This expectation of self-consistency in behavior across domains was substantially confirmed in studies which examined people's perceptual, intellectual, and personality functioning. [The *Science Citation Index*[®] (SCI[®]) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*[™] (SSCI[™]) indicate that this book has been cited over 1,045 times since 1962.]

Herman A. Witkin*
Division of Psychological Studies
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, NJ 08541

March 3, 1978

"This book was the second major installment in the story of a program of research which began in the early 1940s. The first major installment appeared in 1954.¹ Additional pieces of the story have been told in a number of journal articles published between the inception of the program and now. While its specific content inevitably changed as the program unfolded, it has remained a constant objective of our work to arrive at a more holistic conception of the individual's psychological life.

"Perhaps the main reason for the frequent citation of *Psychological Differentiation* is its relevance to the concerns of many of the specialties in psychology. The theoretical framework it proposed sought to bring together a variety of psychological domains, often considered in isolation from each other; accordingly, it contains constructs which have broad applicability. The lead construct, differentiation, is a large piece of the psychological pie and it is salient in the conception of psychological development as well. The search for self-consistency in behavior, prompted by the holistic emphasis of the theoretical framework, led to the identification of pervasive dimensions of psychological functioning. Among these, the

field-independent and field-dependent cognitive styles (which are tendencies toward greater or lesser autonomy of external referents in information processing) have shown themselves, in a particularly impressive way, not to respect the boundaries into which the psyche has traditionally been divided.

"A second possible reason for the use made of our work by others is that it has produced a variety of standardized tests of cognitive styles. Measures from these tests provide objective 'tracer' indicators of the more general differentiation dimension of which cognitive styles are a part. The availability of these tests has considerably facilitated research on differentiation.

"The constructs, dimensions, and methodology which emerged from our work have contributed to its use by others in areas as diverse as interpersonal behavior, learning and memory, defense mechanisms, socialization practices, cultural differences in development, dreaming, psychopathology, and cerebral lateralization. The demonstration, in some of these investigations, that our theoretical formulations and the dimensions of individual functioning we identified are useful in conceptualizing behavior in real-life situations has given impetus to research on practical applications. Represented in that research has been work on the role of psychological differentiation in academic and vocational choices, alcohol addiction, driving safety, patients' progress in psychotherapy, teacher effectiveness, and learning disabilities.

"The program of research is still going on. As has been true throughout its life, its guiding theory is continuing to undergo change and its empirical underpinning to expand, thanks in no small measure to the labors of the many who have taken up this line of work. It has been a recurrent observation on this long march that an experience we made at an earlier time acquired a fresh meaning in the light of an alteration in the theoretical perspective. We have not infrequently felt, as T.S. Eliot put it in his *Four Quartets*, that 'the aim of all exploring is to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.'²

1. Witkin H A, Lewis H B, Hertzman M, Manchover K, Meissner P B & Wapner S. *Personality through perception*. New York: Harper, 1954. 571 p.
2. Elliot T S. *Four quartets*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1943. 39 p. *We regret to report Dr. Witkin's untimely death on July 8, 1979. (See NY Times 11 July 1979, p. B12.)