

# This Week's Citation Classic

Weiner B & Kukla A. An attributional analysis of achievement motivation. *J. Personal. Soc. Psychol.* 15:1-20, 1970. [University of California, Los Angeles, CA]

**The determinants of achievement evaluation were examined. Effort expenditure, as well as outcome, are most influential in determining the performance evaluation of others. Low ability-high effort-success leads to most reward, while high ability-low effort-failure begets most punishment. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI™) indicates that this paper has been cited over 210 times since 1970.]**

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"I feel somewhat embarrassed (and delighted) about replying to this request, for I do not consider this paper either an empirical or a theoretical 'landmark' for the field of psychology. It did, however, contribute to some later advances in attribution theory as well as provide a foundation for my personal theoretical developments. The reasons for its popularity are that some of the first investigations applying attribution theory to the achievement domain are reported, and attribution theory subsequently gained ascendancy in psychology. In addition, the contents are relevant to a wide variety of issues both in psychology and education.

"My research collaborator at the University of California, Los Angeles, was Andy Kukla, a graduate student who contributed to all phases of the research. The investigations were undertaken at a time when the concept of locus of control was beginning to sweep psychology. People were classified as 'internal' or 'external' in locus of control, and placement on this personality dimension of perceived self versus environmental causation was related to all kinds of psychological indexes. But I was concerned

about the lack of differentiation among the possible perceived causes of success and failure.

"A study conducted by Schmitt provided a necessary insight.<sup>1</sup> In that investigation punishments were allocated when an individual committed an immoral act either because the person was unable (he did not have the money to repay a debt) or because he was unwilling to pay. I remember having the simple and obvious insight (previously attained by many others) that the internal factors of ability and effort must be distinguished in the achievement domain. This certainly does not sound profound, but had far-reaching consequences for the development of an attributional theory of achievement strivings.

"The research in the article primarily examined allocation of rewards and punishments in achievement situations where the outcomes were ascribed to various levels of ability and effort. The major findings were that effort, as well as outcome, are the most influential in determining evaluation of others. Further, a low ability-high effort-successful person is especially rewarded (consider the handicapped person completing a marathon race), while a high ability-low effort-failing individual is particularly punished (think of your reaction toward a bright student failing because of a lack of effort). Three additional experiments examined other issues related to the antecedents and the consequences of the allocation of causality.

"The six experiments presented in the paper were not reported in the order in which they were conducted. The work made more sense after it was completed than during the process. As I recall, the manuscript was rejected (or provisionally accepted) on one or two occasions and extensive revisions were required. The editor at that time generally wrote comments that were somewhat longer than the submitted papers. By the time I had read and digested his comments, another study was completed and inserted into the manuscript."

1. Schmitt D R. The invocation of moral obligation. *Sociometry* 27:299-310, 1964.