

This Week's Citation Classic

Bandura A & Walters R H. Social learning and personality development. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963. 329 p. [Stanford Univ., Stanford, CA and Univ. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada]

In this volume the explanatory principles of social learning are applied to major domains of social development. This conceptual scheme explains human behavior in terms of complex interactions of social, vicarious, and self-generated influences. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®) indicates that this book has been cited over 985 times since 1966.]

Albert Bandura
Department of Psychology
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305

July 6, 1981

"It is sometimes said that writing a book takes possession of the author. Walters and I found ourselves so completely possessed by this one that it would have astounded even the most devout exorcist. During a summer of self-imposed confinement we labored from dawn into the late hours of the night for days on end without a break. Three weary months later we emerged into the real world from this marathon writing session with the completed manuscript in hand. Even the mere thought of proofreading and revising what we had written under this taxing schedule was enough to send us to the Excedrin cabinet.

"At the time this book was written, theories about social development were undergoing major change. The conceptual system that had been in vogue for years was an amalgam of tenets of psychoanalytic and Hullian learning theory. Human behavior was viewed from this perspective as mainly the product of internal drives, often operating below the level of consciousness. The research that we and others were conducting at the time underscored the paramount role played by social, vicarious, and self-regulatory influences in human behavior. This work formed a solid basis for a

reconceptualization of social development.

"Psychological theorizing and research on how behavior patterns are acquired had been essentially confined to learning through response consequences. As a result, the rudimentary form of learning by direct experience was exhaustively studied, but the more pervasive and powerful mode of learning through modeling was largely ignored. Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention perilous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their actions to inform them what to do. We rectified this prolonged neglect by giving observational learning the prominence it fully deserved.

"The same limited perspective was also reflected in behavioral theories about what regulates human behavior. Much of the empirical research was concerned with how actions are shaped and controlled by their external consequences. But external outcomes, influential as they often are, are not the sole determinants of human action.

"Theories that depicted behavior as the product of external rewards and punishments presented a truncated image of human functioning because people partly regulate their actions through self-evaluative consequences. Therefore, the development of self-reactive functions, which gives humans the capacity for self-direction, also figured prominently in our book. The various aspects of personality development—dependency, independence, aggression, sex, achievement, anxiety, empathy, morality, and psychopathy, to mention just a few —were explained in terms of complex interactions of external, vicarious, and self influences.

"I suppose one reason this book has been widely cited over the years is that it offered principles of broad explanatory power that are readily applicable to diverse psychological phenomena. A subsequent book provides a more detailed discussion of the major determinants and mechanisms of social learning and its pervasive impact on human functioning."¹

1. Bandura A. Social learning theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977. 247 p.