

This Week's Citation Classic

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Bowers K S. Situationism in psychology: an analysis and a critique.
Psychol. Rev. 80:307-36, 1973.
[University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada]

The methodological and epistemological assumptions of behaviorism are highly problematic when applied to a study of personality. The virtues of an alternative approach to personality are stressed, whereby the environment and the person are seen as reciprocally interactive with each other. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited over 280 times since 1973.]

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"I began to write this paper on my sabbatical at Stanford University in 1970-1971, but the issues had been steeping in my mind since graduate school. I wanted very much to redress what I considered a misguided application of behavioral psychology to personality—a trend that I considered both wrongheaded and philosophically naive.

"The fact that the paper was actually begun at Stanford is ironic, since the position that I was criticizing was for the most part a Stanford creation. I recall with mixed feelings my reluctance to discuss my ideas with people there. Partly, I did not wish to feel any personal responsibility or loyalty to people whose position I was attempting to dismantle, and partly, it was due to a resentment that the full realization of my ideas might be adversely affected by premature exposure of them. I think I made the right decision, but I regret the missed opportunity to thrash out some of the fundamental issues of personality and behavior with people who were highly influential in the field. Ironically, the paper was recom-

mended for publication in *Psychological Review* (with considerable revision) by one of my unconsulted Stanford adversaries—after being rejected by more sympathetic referees from *Psychological Bulletin*.

"I derived great pleasure in formulating my arguments in as convincing prose as I could muster, and I would often spend hours trying to express a single idea in a manner that appealed to my aesthetic sense. To illustrate, I recall trying to communicate the essence of interactionism in a way that would strike the right balance between accuracy and memorability. Just as I was about to give up for the evening, the sentence came to me with a rush of excitement that I can still recapture: '*Situations are as much a function of the person as the person's behavior is a function of the situation.*' The phrasing looks pretty simple once written, but it was a damn elusive idea to express the first time. I have been gratified that it is one of the most frequently quoted sentences from the paper.

"I am less enthusiastic about being cited for showing that the variance due to the environment by person interaction exceeds the sum of the main effects variance across 11 studies employing an anova design. In fact, my chief regret about the paper is that I did not see clearly at the time that the only similarity between statistical and psychological interaction was the word 'interaction.' I have since corrected myself,¹ and other contributors to this same anthology have also advanced a more psychological notion of interaction (see, for example, Magnusson²). Another regret is that my thinking was not at the time informed by the seminal work of Jack Block, whose 1971 book, *Lives through Time*,³ is a genuine masterpiece of empirical and conceptual investigation in the field of personality. Perhaps students of personality will someday fully appreciate and assimilate this extraordinarily prescient work.

"Despite these regrets, I remain pleased with the paper, and if it helps to liberate the study of personality from the bondage of methodological behaviorism, I will have succeeded in my goal."

1. Bowers K S. There's more to Iago than meets the eye: a clinical account of personal consistency. (Magnusson D & Endler N S, eds.) *Personality at the crossroads: current issues in interactional psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977. p. 65-81.
2. Magnusson D. *Toward a psychology of situations: an interactional perspective*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1981. 488 p.
3. Block J & Haan N. *Lives through time*. Berkeley, CA: Bancroft, 1971. 313 p.