

Social Cognitive Theory

General

Social cognitive theory, firstly known as social learning theory, was formed during 1960s by a Canadian psychologist [Albert Bandura](#) and can short be described in his own words: "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, **most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling**: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action."

What is social cognitive theory?

Basic principles of social cognitive theory were set in earlier works of Julian Rotter¹⁾, Neal Miller and John Dollard²⁾. Bandura's social learning theory starts from evolved assumption that we can learn by observing others. **Key processes** during this type of learning are **observation, imitation, and modeling** which as such involve **attention, memory, and motivation**. People **learn through observing others' behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors**.

This theory therefore outgrows [behaviorism](#) and forms its connection to [cognitivism](#) as it claims **people don't just respond to stimuli**, but **interpret them as well**. They are formed by the outside world and at the same time they form the outside world themselves ("reciprocal determinism") instead of just being machines modeled by environment. Bandura's theory is therefore often considered a **bridge between behaviorist and cognitivist learning perspectives**.

As described in Bandura's works, behavior is most likely to be adopted if it's **result is observed as valuable**. In case it is then **modeled, organized, rehearsed and reproduced overtly**, the **learning will be successful**.

What is the practical meaning of classical conditioning?

Social learning theory has been applied extensively to the **understanding of aggression** and other **behavior modifications**, especially through **media effects**. Bandura also warned that violent TV contents could be leading into a violent reality that is worth fearing.

Keywords and most important names

- **Social learning, observational learning, reciprocal determinism, observing, modeling**
- [Albert Bandura](#)

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TIP: Theories. Index of Learning Theories and Models.

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Read more

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