

# 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 eralier works of Julian Rotter<sup>1)</sup>, Neal Miller and John Dollard<sup>2)</sup>. 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](#), [Julian Rotter](#)

## Bibliography

Bandura, Albert. Social learning theory. Prentice Hall, 1977.

[TIP: Theories. Index of Learning Theories and Models.](#)

[Griffin, E. Social learning theory of Albert Bandura. Chapter 31: A first look at communication theory \(pp. 367-377\). McGraw-Hill, 2006.](#)

## Read more

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<sup>1)</sup>

Rotter, Julian B. Social learning and clinical psychology. Prentice-Hall, 1954.

<sup>2)</sup>

Miller, N. E. and Dollard, J. Social Learning and Imitation. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941

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