

A stylized landscape illustration on the left side of the slide. It features rolling hills in various shades of olive green and yellow, a winding path or river in a light beige color, and a large, pale yellow sun or moon in the upper left background.

Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura's journey began with a chance encounter on a golf course—a boring reading assignment led to a delayed tee time, which led to meeting his future wife in a sand trap. This fortuitous event shaped his understanding that life's path is often altered by unexpected meetings and unplanned happenings.

Chapter Overview

Core Assumptions of Social Cognitive Theory

Human Plasticity

Humans have flexibility to learn diverse behaviors through direct and vicarious experience, with emphasis on observational learning.

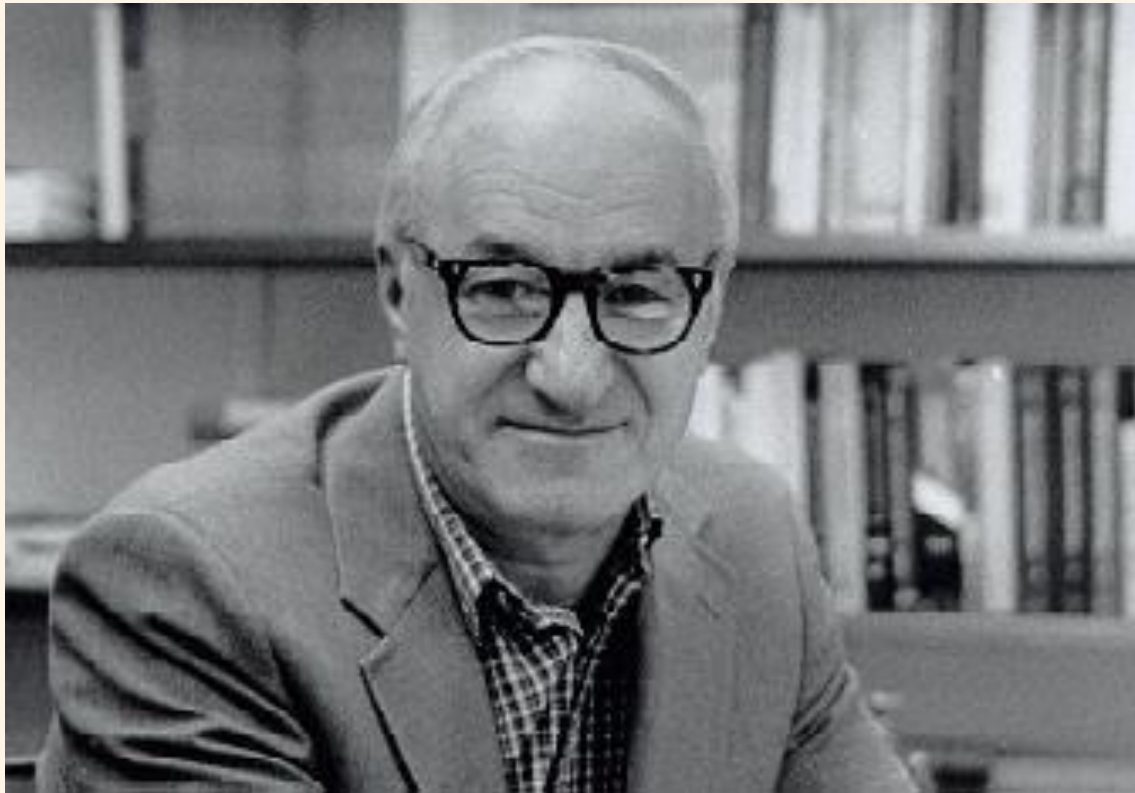
Triadic Reciprocal Causation

Behavior, environment, and personal factors interact reciprocally, allowing people to regulate their lives and transform experiences.

Agentic Perspective

Humans exercise control over their lives through self-efficacy, proxy agency, and collective efficacy.

The Man Behind the Theory



Albert Bandura (1925–2021)

Born in Mundare, Alberta, Bandura's path to psychology was itself fortuitous—he enrolled in an early morning psychology class to fill time while carpooling with premed students.

After earning his PhD from University of Iowa in 1952, he joined Stanford University where he has remained throughout his distinguished career.

- *APA President (1974)*
- *Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award (1980)*
- *David Starr Jordan Professorship at Stanford*



Observational Learning

Bandura believes observation allows people to learn without performing behavior. If knowledge could only be acquired through direct experience, cognitive and social development would be greatly retarded and exceedingly tedious.

"If knowledge could be acquired only through the effects of one's own actions, the process of cognitive and social development would be greatly retarded, not to mention exceedingly tedious."

The Power of Modeling

01

Attention

We must attend to the model. Frequent association, attractiveness, and perceived importance increase attention.

02

Representation

Patterns must be symbolically represented in memory through imagery or verbal coding for later recall.

03

Behavioral Production

We convert cognitive representations into actions, monitoring and evaluating our performance.

04

Motivation

We must be motivated to perform the modeled behavior for learning to translate into action.

Factors Influencing Modeling

Model Characteristics

- *High status vs. low status*
- *Competent vs. incompetent*
- *Powerful vs. impotent*

Observer Characteristics

- *Lack of status, skill, or power*
- *Children more than adults*
- *Novices more than experts*

Behavioral Consequences

- *Value placed on behavior*
- *Observed rewards or punishments*
- *Perceived importance*

Enactive Learning



Response

Every action is followed by consequences



Evaluation

We think about and evaluate consequences



Learning

Complex behaviors learned through direct experience

Response consequences serve three functions: they inform us of effects, motivate anticipatory behavior, and reinforce actions. Unlike Skinner, Bandura emphasizes that learning occurs more efficiently when learners cognitively understand which behaviors precede successful responses.

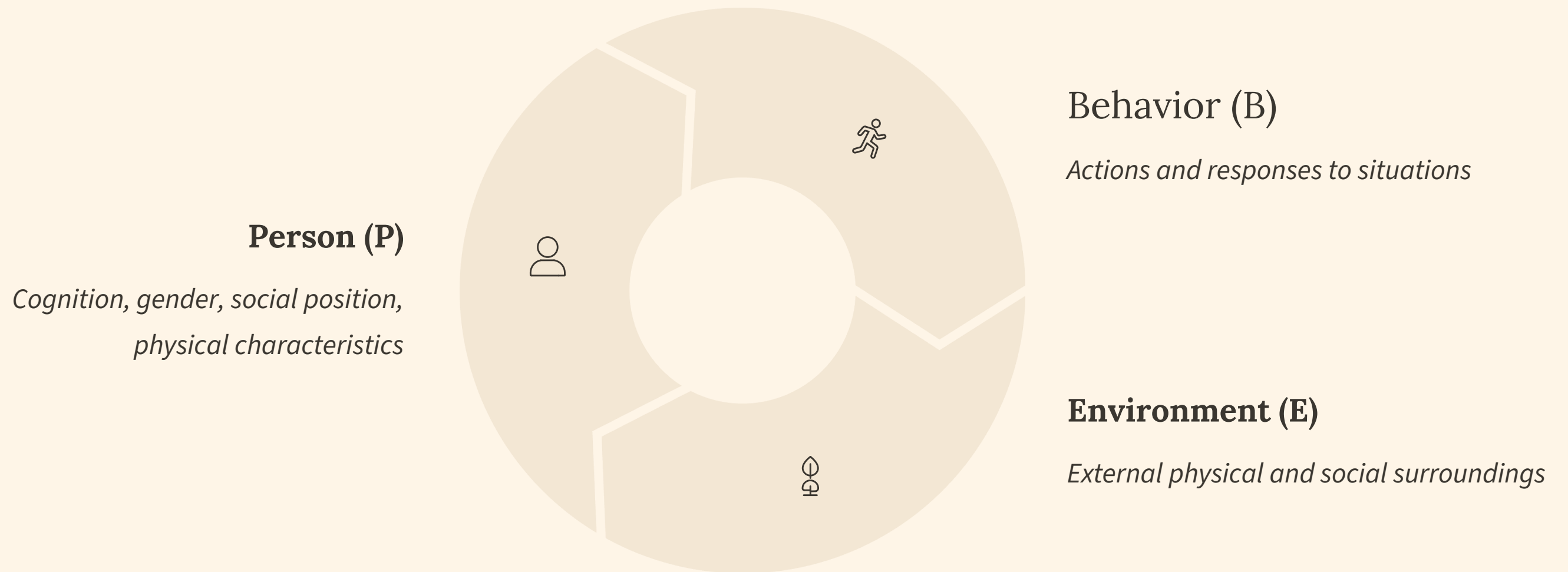


Triadic Reciprocal Causation

Bandura's model explains psychological functioning through interaction of three variables: behavior (B), environment (E), and person (P)—especially cognitive factors like memory, anticipation, planning, and judging.

The three factors don't need equal strength. Their relative potency varies with individual and situation, though cognition is usually the strongest contributor to performance.

How Triadic Causation Works



- ❏ Example: A father deciding whether to give his child a second brownie demonstrates all six reciprocal interactions: $E \rightarrow B$, $E \rightarrow P$, $B \rightarrow E$, $B \rightarrow P$, $P \rightarrow B$, and $P \rightarrow E$.

Chance Encounters & Fortuitous Events



Bandura is the only personality theorist to seriously consider chance encounters and fortuitous events in shaping lives.

Chance encounter: *An unintended meeting of unfamiliar persons*

Fortuitous event: *An unexpected, unintended environmental experience*

Examples: Maslow's cousin's sister pushing him to kiss Bertha; Eysenck enrolling in psychology after preparing for the wrong entrance exam.

An illustration on the left side of the slide depicts a person in silhouette, wearing a green long-sleeved shirt and pants, climbing a dark green mountain peak. The person is positioned on the left, reaching up with their right hand to touch the peak. The background consists of stylized, layered mountain ranges in shades of orange, yellow, and light green, creating a sense of depth and a warm, sunset-like atmosphere.

Human Agency

Social cognitive theory takes an agentic view: humans have capacity to exercise control over their own lives. Human agency is the essence of humanness.

Agency is not a thing but an active process of exploring, manipulating, and influencing the environment to attain desired outcomes. People are self-regulating, proactive, self-reflective, and self-organizing.

Four Core Features of Human Agency



Intentionality

Acts performed intentionally with planning and proactive commitment to bringing them about.



Forethought

Setting goals, anticipating outcomes, selecting behaviors to produce desired results.



Self-Reactiveness

Motivating and regulating actions, monitoring progress toward goals.



Self-Reflectiveness

Examining one's functioning, evaluating motivations, values, and thinking adequacy.

An illustration on the left side of the slide. It depicts a person in silhouette, standing on a dark, rolling hill. The person is wearing a long-sleeved shirt with horizontal stripes in shades of olive green and brown, and dark trousers. They are looking out towards a large, stylized sun or moon that is composed of concentric, semi-transparent circles in warm tones of orange, yellow, and light brown. The background consists of more rolling hills in similar warm tones, creating a serene and contemplative atmosphere.

Self-Efficacy: The Foundation

"People's beliefs in their personal efficacy influence what courses of action they choose to pursue, how much effort they will invest, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles, and their resiliency following setbacks."

Self-efficacy is people's beliefs in their capability to exercise control over their functioning and environmental events. It's the foundation of human agency.

Self-Efficacy vs. Outcome Expectations

Efficacy Expectation

Confidence in ability to perform certain behaviors

Example: "I can perform well in this job interview"

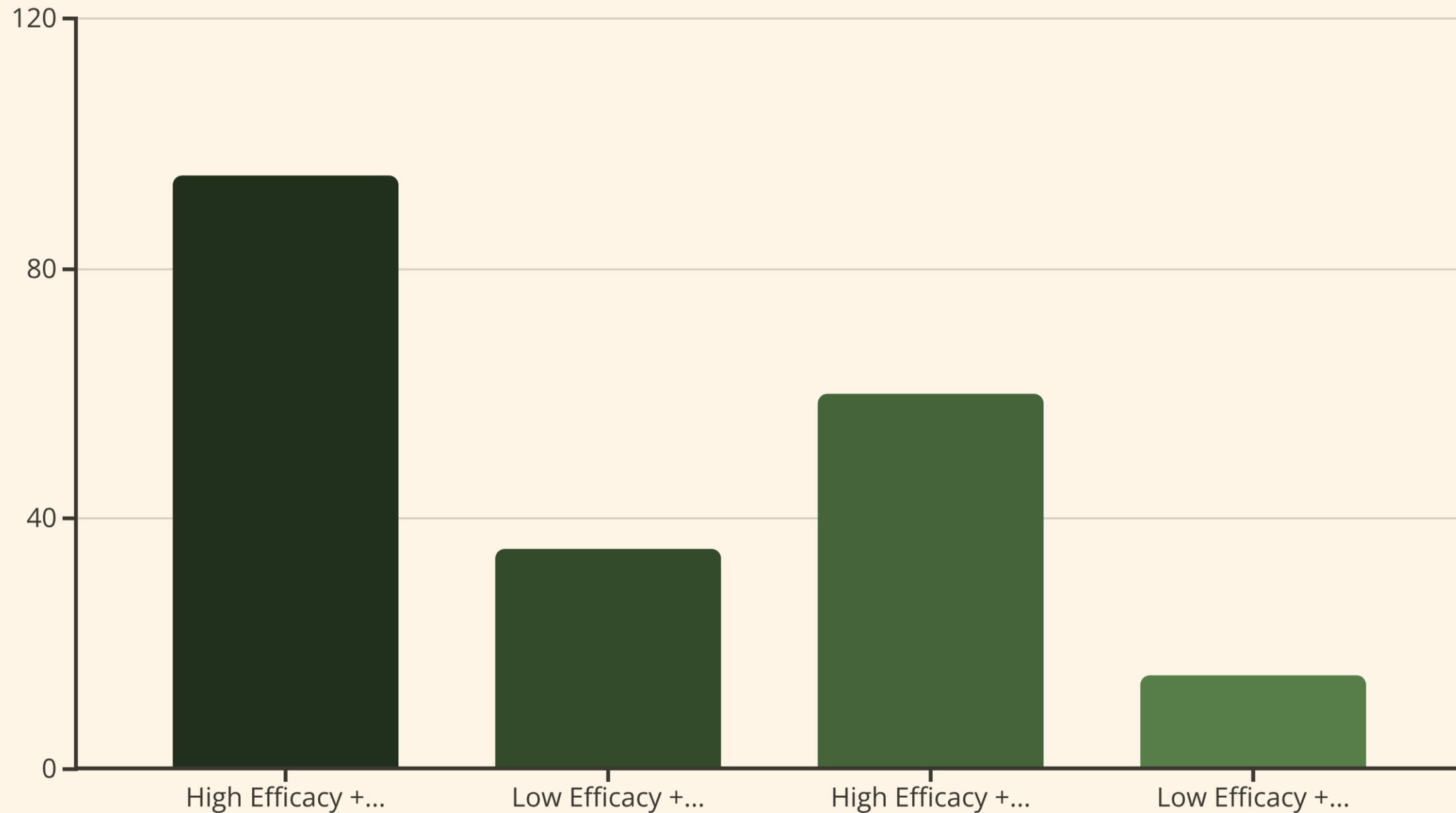
Outcome Expectation

Prediction of likely consequences of that behavior

Example: "But I probably won't get the job due to high unemployment"

Self-efficacy is not global—it varies situation to situation based on required competencies, presence of others, predisposition to attend to failure, and physiological states.

Four Predictions: Efficacy × Environment



*When high efficacy meets responsive environment, success is most likely.
Low efficacy with unresponsive environment produces apathy, resignation, and helplessness.*

Four Sources of Self-Efficacy



Mastery Experiences

Most influential source. Past performances—successful performance raises efficacy, failure lowers it. Effect depends on task difficulty, independence, effort, emotional state, and timing.



Social Persuasion

Verbal encouragement from credible sources. Most effective when combined with successful performance and activity is within one's repertoire.



Social Modeling

Vicarious experiences from observing others. Efficacy raised by watching similar peers succeed, lowered by watching them fail.



Physical & Emotional States

Physiological arousal affects performance. Strong emotion ordinarily lowers efficacy; moderate arousal may enhance it for some tasks.

Beyond Personal Agency

Proxy Agency



Indirect control over social conditions through others. People rely on mechanics, lawyers, mentors, and representatives to accomplish goals.

Downside: Over-reliance can weaken personal and collective efficacy.

Collective Efficacy



People's shared beliefs in their collective power to produce desired results. Confidence in combined efforts for group accomplishments.

Cultural variation: Individualistic cultures (US) favor personal efficacy; collectivist cultures (China) favor group-oriented systems.

Threats to Collective Efficacy

Transnational World

Global events (Amazon deforestation, trade policies, ozone depletion) affect everyone, creating helplessness.

Complex Technology

People neither understand nor control modern technology (e.g., computerized car controls), losing both personal and collective efficacy.

Bureaucratic Structures

Layers of bureaucracy prevent social change. Long delays between action and results discourage people from pursuing change.

Magnitude of Problems

Wars, famine, overpopulation, crime, and natural disasters can leave people feeling powerless despite their scope.

Self-Regulation Through Agency

People regulate conduct through external factors (physical and social environments) and internal factors (self-observation, judgmental process, self-reaction).

In morally ambiguous situations, people regulate behavior through moral agency: redefining behavior, disregarding consequences, dehumanizing victims, or displacing responsibility.

Goals must be specific, achievable, and not too distant to effectively guide self-regulation.



Key Takeaways



Humans learn through observation and direct experience

Modeling is more efficient than trial-and-error, allowing people to learn without performing every behavior.



Self-efficacy is the foundation of human agency

Beliefs in personal capability influence actions, effort, perseverance, and resilience across all life domains.



Triadic reciprocal causation explains behavior

Person, behavior, and environment interact dynamically, with cognition usually the strongest factor.



Chance encounters can alter life trajectories

Fortuitous events matter, but how we react to them—shaped by our agency—matters more.



Self-Regulation and Human Agency

When people possess high self-efficacy, confidence in proxies, and solid collective efficacy, they gain considerable capacity to regulate their own behavior through both reactive and proactive strategies.

The Dual Nature of Self-Regulation

Reactive Strategies

People attempt to reduce discrepancies between their accomplishments and their goals, adjusting behavior to meet standards.

Proactive Strategies

After closing discrepancies, people set newer and higher goals, creating disequilibrium that motivates continued growth and achievement.

People motivate and guide their actions through proactive control by setting valued goals that create disequilibrium, then mobilizing abilities based on anticipatory estimation of requirements.

External Factors in Self-Regulation

Standards for Evaluation

Environmental factors shape individual standards through precept, direct experience, and observing others. Parents and teachers provide values, experiences teach preferences, and observation creates multitudes of performance standards.

Means for Reinforcement

External factors provide incentives beyond intrinsic rewards. Artists may need monetary support or encouragement alongside self-satisfaction. Small environmental rewards for completing subgoals help sustain lengthy projects.



Three Internal Requirements

01

Self-Observation

Monitoring our own performance selectively, attending to aspects based on interests and preexisting self-conceptions.

02

Judgmental Processes

Evaluating performance through cognitive mediation based on personal standards, referential performances, activity valuation, and performance attribution.

03

Self-Reaction

Responding positively or negatively to behaviors based on how they measure up to personal standards through self-reinforcement or self-punishment.

The Judgmental Process

Personal Standards

Evaluating performance without comparing to others—a handicapped child tying shoelaces values the accomplishment regardless of age norms.

Referential Performances

Comparing to classmates' test scores, other players' skills, or our own previous accomplishments to gauge improvement.

Activity Valuation

Spending effort based on how much we value an activity—minor value on dishwashing versus high value on career advancement.

Performance Attribution

Taking pride when success stems from our efforts; less satisfaction when attributing performance to external factors.

An illustration of a person with dark hair, wearing a white shirt and a green vest, sitting at a desk and writing in a notebook with a pencil. The background is a warm, olive-green arch. The person's face is stylized with a split color effect, half light orange and half dark red.

Self-Reaction and Cognitive Mediation

People create incentives through self-reinforcement or self-punishment. Self-reinforcement relies on cognitive ability to mediate behavioral consequences—people set standards that, when met, regulate behavior through self-produced rewards like pride and self-satisfaction.

This concept contrasts sharply with Skinner's notion that behavioral consequences are environmentally determined. Even tangible rewards like the Nobel Prize carry greater value through self-mediated intangible incentives like accomplishment.

Moral Agency

Two Aspects

1. *Doing no harm to people*
2. *Proactively helping people*

Self-regulative mechanisms don't affect others until we act on them—no automatic internal controlling agent invariably directs behavior toward morally consistent values.



Selective Activation and Disengagement

1

Selective Activation

Moral precepts predict behavior only when converted to action—self-regulatory influences operate only if activated.

2

Moral Justification

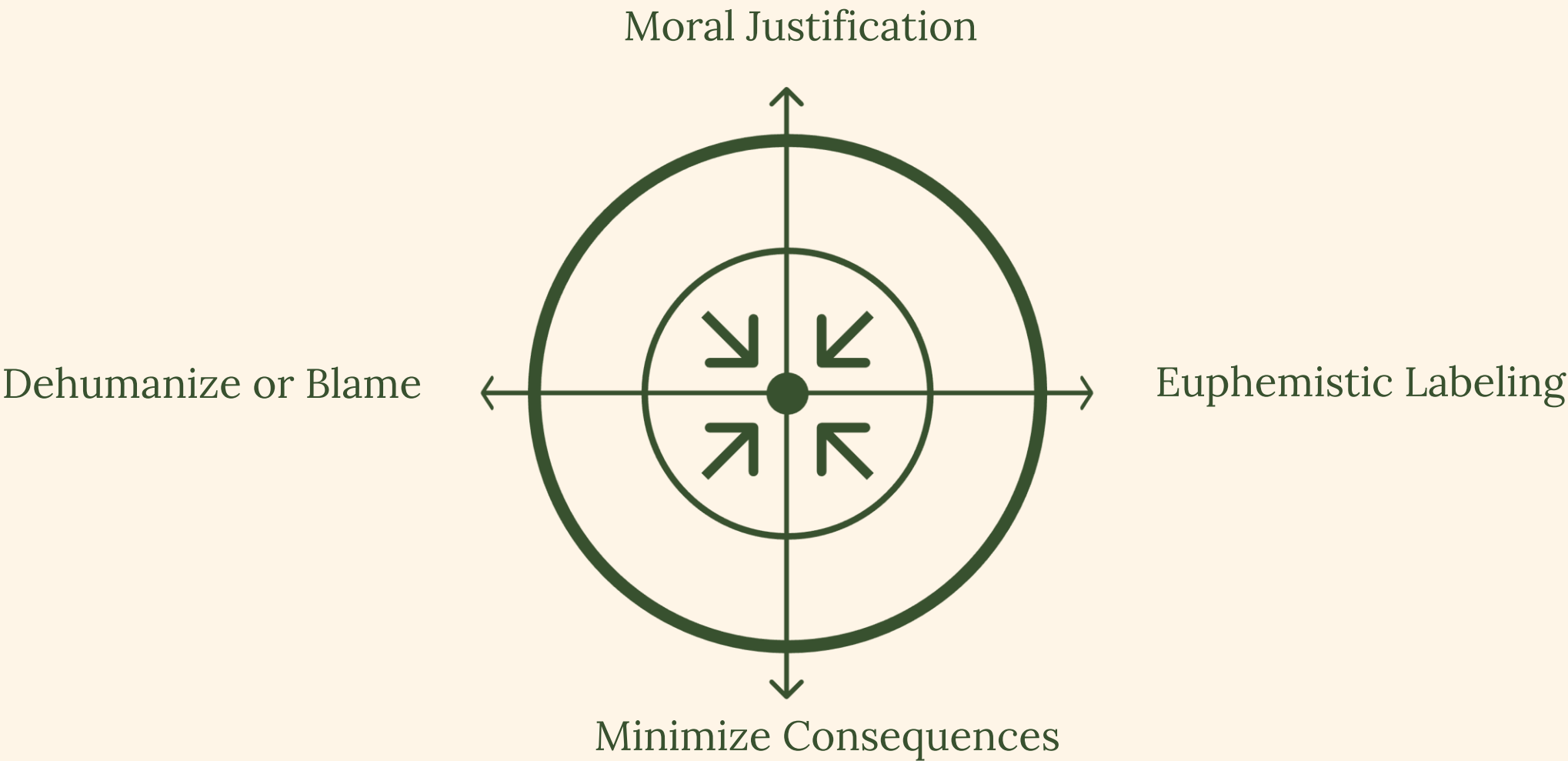
People don't engage in reprehensible conduct until they've justified the morality of their actions to themselves.

3

Internal Disengagement

Separating oneself from behavioral consequences allows inhumane behaviors while retaining moral standards.

Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement



These mechanisms allow people with identical moral standards to behave differently, and permit the same person to behave differently across situations.

Redefining Behavior



Moral Justification

Making culpable behavior seem defensible or noble. Sergeant Alvin York redefined killing as morally justified after biblical consultation, becoming a war hero.



Advantageous Comparisons

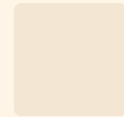
Comparing wrongful behavior to greater atrocities—a child vandalizing justifies actions because others broke more windows.



Euphemistic Labeling

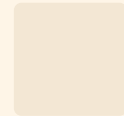
Using sanitized language—politicians speak of "revenue enhancement" instead of taxes; Nazis called genocide "the final solution."

Distorting Consequences



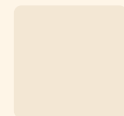
Minimizing Consequences

A driver strikes a pedestrian and insists "She's not really hurt badly" despite visible injuries.



Disregarding Impact

Not seeing firsthand harmful effects—wartime leaders rarely view total destruction from their decisions.



Misconstruing Effects

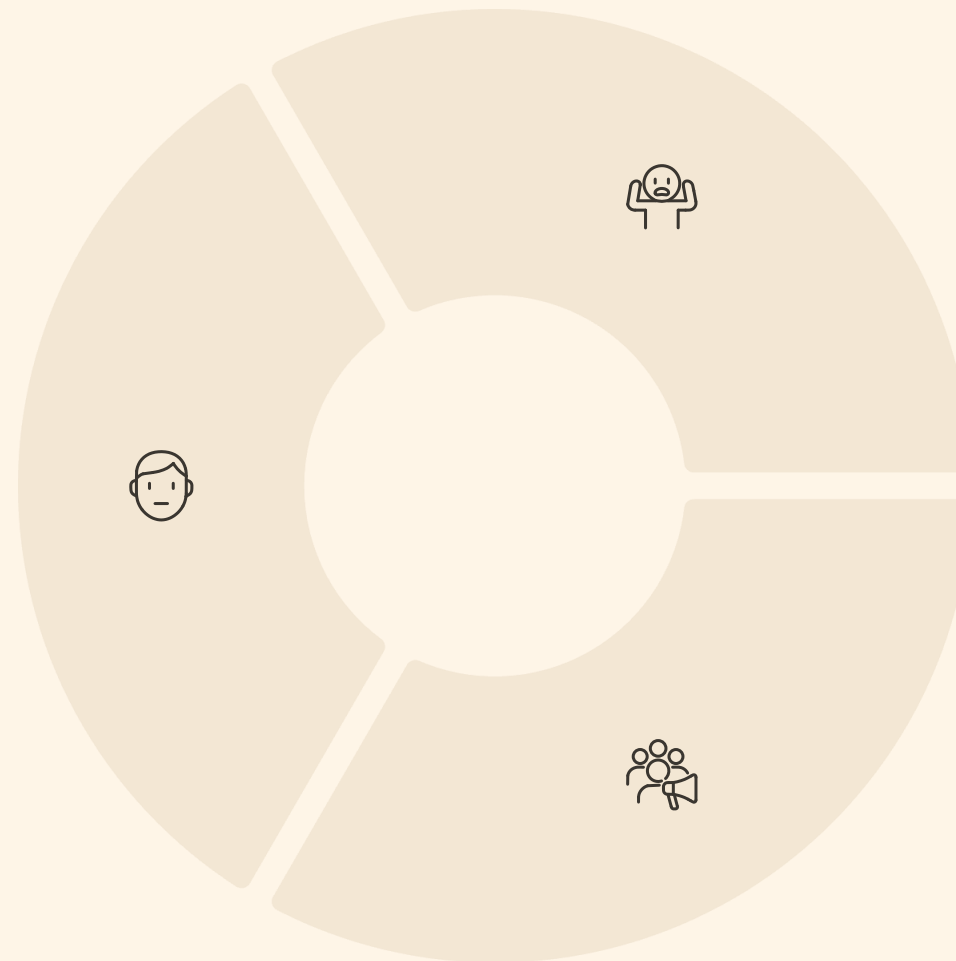
A parent beats a child causing serious bruises but explains discipline is necessary for proper maturation.

Dysfunctional Behavior

Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation assumes behavior is learned through mutual interaction of person (cognition and neurophysiology), environment (interpersonal relations and socioeconomic conditions), and behavioral factors (previous reinforcement experiences).

Depression

High standards leading to failure, chronic misery, worthlessness, and pervasive depression.



Phobias

Debilitating fears learned through direct contact, inappropriate generalization, and observational experiences.

Aggression

Acquired through observation, direct reinforcement experiences, training, or bizarre beliefs.

Depression and Self-Regulation



Faulty Self-Observation

Depressed people misjudge performance, exaggerate past mistakes, and minimize prior accomplishments.



Unrealistic Judgments

Setting standards unrealistically high so any accomplishment is judged as failure, even when achieving success in others' eyes.



Harsh Self-Reactions

Judging themselves harshly and treating themselves badly for shortcomings, withholding rewards for inadequate performance.

Depression is especially likely when people set goals much higher than their perceived efficacy to attain them.

The Bobo Doll Study

Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) divided nursery school children into three experimental groups and one control group. Experimental groups observed aggressive models (live, filmed, or fantasy) attacking a Bobo doll.

After mild frustration, children entered a room with aggressive and nonaggressive toys. Those exposed to aggressive models displayed twice as much aggressive behavior as controls, closely imitating the modeled actions.



- ❏ *This groundbreaking study offered early experimental evidence that TV violence produces additional aggressive behaviors rather than having a cathartic effect.*

Therapeutic Approaches

Induce Change

Extinguish specific fears—acrophobic person climbs 20-foot ladder without fear.

1

2

3

Maintain Behaviors

Prevent relapse and sustain newly acquired functional behaviors long-term.

Generalize Changes

Apply learning to new situations—person rides airplanes and looks out tall building windows.

The ultimate goal of social cognitive therapy is self-regulation through strategies that induce behavioral changes, generalize them to other situations, and maintain them.

Treatment Modalities

1

Overt/Vicarious Modeling

Observing live or filmed models performing threatening activities reduces fear and anxiety.

2

Covert/Cognitive Modeling

Therapist trains patients to visualize models performing fearsome behaviors.

3

Enactive Mastery

Patients perform previously fear-producing behaviors, often after observing models or systematic desensitization.

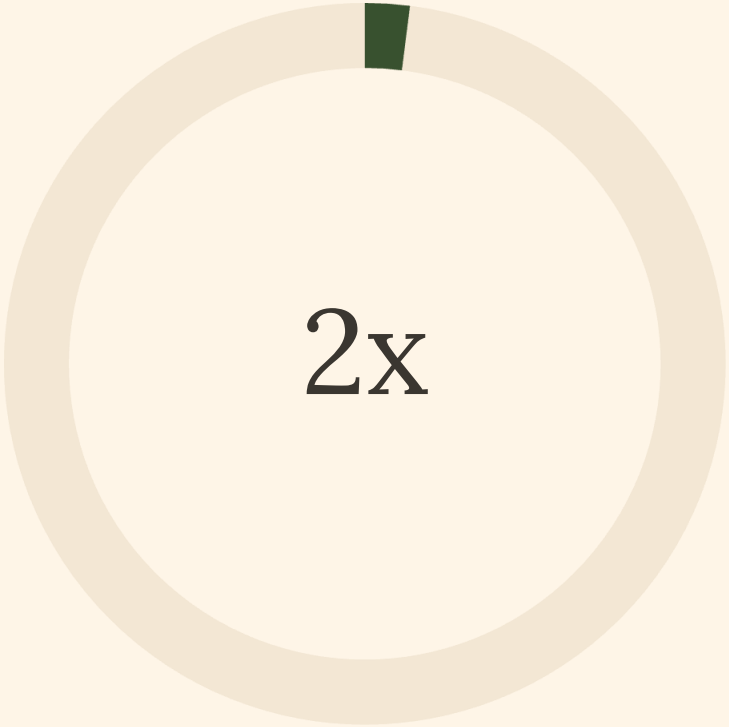
4

Systematic Desensitization

Extinction of anxiety through relaxation while gradually moving through hierarchy from least to most threatening behaviors.



Self-Efficacy and Diabetes Management



Depression Prevalence

Depression among diabetes patients is double that of general population.



Self-Efficacy Impact

Higher self-efficacy directly linked to lower depression and better disease management.

Sacco et al. (2007) found higher self-efficacy related to lower depression, increased adherence to treatment, lower BMI, and fewer diabetes symptoms. Self-efficacy mediated relationships between BMI and depression, and between adherence and depression.

Moral Disengagement and Bullying

Gini, Pozzoli, and Hymel (2014) meta-analyzed 27 studies on moral disengagement and bullying in school-aged children. Higher Moral Disengagement Scale scores strongly predicted more abusive behaviors.

Both individual and collective moral disengagement uniquely predicted aggressive behavior. Bullying increases when students individually justify victim treatment and believe classmates share these justifications.



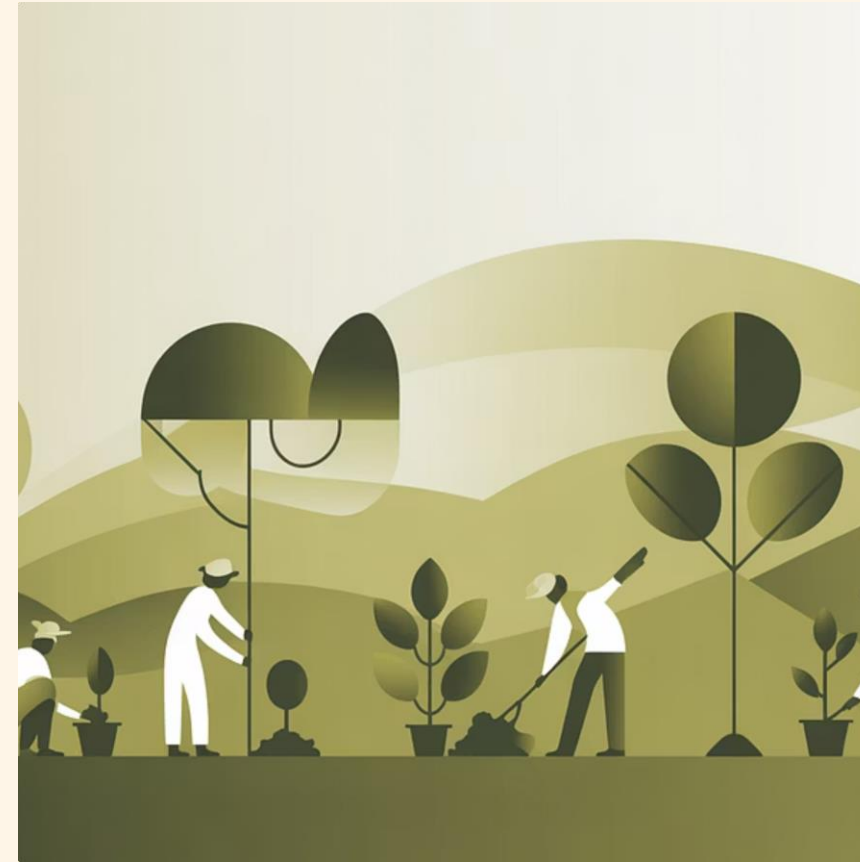
Defenders of victims resist collective pressure and feel personal responsibility when others remain passive—victim-defending is more frequent in classrooms with lower shared moral disengagement.

Global Applications



Population Control

Serial dramas in Africa, Asia, and Latin America encourage family planning, increase contraceptive use, and promote women's status.



Environmental Preservation

Mass media productions improve viewers' perceived efficacy to protect the environment through observational learning.

"Our global applications increase the scale and scope of social cognitive theory in promoting personal and social changes. May the efficacy force be with you!"

—Albert Bandura, 2009

Theory Evaluation

6/6

Criteria Met

Generates research, offers falsification, organizes knowledge, provides practical guidance, maintains internal consistency, and demonstrates parsimony.

Bandura's social cognitive theory emphasizes human plasticity and flexibility as the essence of humanity's basic nature. People are goal-directed, purposive animals who can view the future and bestow it with meaning by being aware of possible consequences.

1000s

Research Studies

Theory has generated several thousand research studies across multiple domains of psychology.

