

Theory Building

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Theorists do not create a complete theory of human behavior at the outset given the plurality of determinants and the intricate and dynamic interaction between them. Rather, theory building is a long haul in which essential components are added incrementally. Each successive theoretical extension and refinement brings us closer to understanding the determinants of human behavior and the mechanisms through which they alter psychosocial behavior at both the individual and collective level.

For convenience of communication, theories need to be given summary labels that reflect their underlying conceptual nature. *Social Learning Theory* was the initial label for the theory I was developing. It was ill-fitting in several ways. It was being misread as concerned mainly with learning. The labeling problem was further compounded because several theories with dissimilar postulates—Dollard and Miller's Hullian drive theory, Rotter's expectancy theory, and Patterson's conditioning theory—used the same label. Label commonality for diverse theories created untold confusion on whose theory was being addressed. In its theoretical evolution, *Social Cognitive Theory* was expanded in scope, generality and applicability (1986). Different programs of research were core features of an agentic theory of human behavior (2007). Social Learning Theory was the starting point for Social Cognitive Theory.