

Bandura A. Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change.
Psychol. Rev. 84:191-215, 1977.
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This review analyzes a series of experimental studies demonstrating that the effects of different modes of social influence are mediated through changes in perceived self-efficacy—people's beliefs in their capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over environmental demands. In addition to summarizing the results of empirical tests, the review includes a conceptual scheme regarding the nature and sources of self-efficacy beliefs and a microanalytic methodology for investigating the impact of self-efficacy beliefs on different aspects of psychosocial functioning. [The SSCJ® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 1,395 publications.]

Exercise of Control Through Self-Belief

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The research on perceived self-efficacy was an unintended outgrowth of another line of investigation. Conventional modes of treatment have relied heavily on the interview as the principal vehicle of personality change. I had been pursuing an alternative theory premised on the view that human psychosocial functioning can be altered more fundamentally by empowering people with the coping competencies needed to gain mastery over their problems.

We had evolved a powerful mastery modeling treatment that eliminated phobic dysfunctions of long-standing in all participants within a matter of a few hours.¹ The treatment not only enduringly eradicated phobic behavior, it also eliminated anxiety arousal, biochemical stress reactions, aversive ruminative thinking, and recurrent nightmares. We extended this line of research to test the notion that human resilience to the negative effects of phobic stressors can be enhanced through structured self-directed mastery experience after coping capabilities have been fully restored. Repeated independent verification of coping capabilities would weaken or neutralize the aversive impact of future stressors.

It was in the context of this research that participants were exhibiting striking changes in other domains of functioning quite unrelated to the treated

phobic dysfunction. Neither the scope nor the pattern of the collateral changes seemed to be explainable in terms of transfer effects along physical or semantic generalization gradients. Having rapidly mastered the phobic nemesis that had impaired their lives for years, the participants reported a heightened sense of efficacy that they could surmount other problems. They were acting on their new self-percepts of efficacy and experiencing self-directed successes. The mastery modeling treatment was instilling and strengthening people's sense of personal efficacy.

I redirected my research program to gain a better understanding of the sources of self-efficacy beliefs and the processes through which they affect human thought, affect, motivation, and action. Initially, we greatly underestimated the scope of the self-efficacy mechanism. The publication of this article prompted surprisingly widespread applications of self-efficacy theory to diverse areas of biopsychosocial functioning. This substantial body of literature is reviewed in some detail in a recent volume devoted to basic self-regulatory mechanisms.²

There may be several reasons this article has been widely cited. It provided a unified conceptual scheme for testable predictions concerning the diverse sources and effects of perceived self-efficacy. The article furnished methodological guidelines for how to measure the level, strength, and generality of self-percepts of efficacy.

Self-referent phenomena lie at the very heart of causal processes. Convergent evidence from diverse lines of research attested to the centrality of the efficacy mechanism in the exercise of personal agency. The studies include different methods for instilling and strengthening self-beliefs of efficacy, heterogeneous domains of psychosocial functioning, varied subject populations, and both intergroup and intra-subject experimental designs using different types of mediational analyses. Because self-efficacy scales are tailored to domains of functioning, the obtained relations are not peculiar to a particular assessment device. The demonstrated explanatory and predictive power of self-efficacy theory has undoubtedly contributed to the sustained interest in this article.

The value of a psychological theory is also judged by its operative power to improve human functioning. Self-efficacy theory provides explicit guidelines on how to equip people with competencies, self-regulatory capabilities, and a resilient sense of efficacy that enables them to enhance their well-being and accomplishments. The prescriptive specificity may be another reason this article was well received.

1. Bandura A, Blanchard E B & Ritter B. Relative efficacy of desensitization and modeling approaches for inducing behavioral, affective, and attitudinal changes. *J. Personal. Soc. Psychol.* 13:173-99, 1969. (Cited 250 times.)
2. Bandura A. *Social foundations of thought and action: a social cognitive theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986. 617 p. (Cited 125 times.)