

1999

Covert Modeling

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Recommended Citation

Bufford, Rodger K., "Covert Modeling" (1999). *Faculty Publications - Grad School of Clinical Psychology*. 300.
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Covert Modeling. A cognitive process in which individuals change response patterns through imagining themselves engaging in the desired responses rather than by observing another person model the responses. Since these new responses are weak, even at the imaginal level, it is essential that they be reinforced in order to strengthen and maintain them. This reinforcement normally is self-administered. Covert modeling thus involves a combination of modeling and self-control procedures, all conducted internally in the form of thought and fantasy.

Although covert modeling is a fairly new concept, it has been used in assertiveness training, development of athletic skills, and enhancement of reading comprehension. Research on its effectiveness has been encouraging, although the number of well-controlled studies is quite small.

A basic limitation with covert modeling is that it requires prior exposure to the desired behaviors in some manner, such as by instructions or by observing a live model. Thus covert modeling is effective in releasing responses already available to the individual, such as assertive responses that are inhibited by unrealistic expectations of social responses to them, but it is not effective for teaching new responses. A second limitation is that the performance must ultimately come under reinforcement control of events mediated by the environment, much as with other self-control procedures. Finally, it seems a bit strained to term this process modeling, since it does not involve observing another's behavior.

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See MODELING; SELF-CONTROL; COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOR THERAPY.