

# The study of human behavior psychology essay



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The study of human behavior is diverse and many studies have been done trying to find more about human behavior. Many researchers have concluded that human behavior is complex and sometimes unpredictable. The environment is one of the major factors in the development of human behavior. The unpredictability of human behavior tries to show that people are unique and operate on different ideas and backgrounds. In addition, the brain of a human being is independent to that of another person, therefore, this creates a diversity of how people think, act and make decisions. The study of human behavior requires a deep and thorough research on people in different places and environments. B. F. Skinner, a renowned researcher and psychologist, is one of the persons who engaged all his life studying human behavior and personality. He came up with various theories that help in understanding human behavior and determine their thinking and actions.

Human beings are unique in most of their operations. This is what makes the study of human is complex. This forces the researchers to have a thorough observation and deep study in their actions. This context will discuss the life of B. F. Skinner and his theories on human behavior. It will mainly focus on the contributions that Skinner has made in the field of psychology. In addition, it will explain some of the theories that Skinner discovered.

Burrhus Frederic (B. F.) Skinner was born on 20 March of the year 1904 in Pennsylvania, on a small town called Susquehanna. His parents were William and Grace Skinner. His father, William Skinner, was a lawyer. B. F. Skinner turned to be an atheist when a Christian teacher tried to convince him about hell, which he feared very much from the description given to him by his grandmother. Skinner had a brother named Edward Skinner, who died aged

sixteen years due to cerebral hemorrhage. B. F. Skinner described his life in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania as stable and warm. He died in August 1990, suffering from Cerebral Cancer. In his childhood, he could be seen to enjoying constructing and inventing things in his childhood. This was a good base for his profession for applying in psychological experiments.

B. F. Skinner went to Hamilton College in New York, where he obtained a bachelor in Administration in English literature in 1926. Skinner linked to the Lambda Chi Alpha while still in Hamilton College. He was involved in writing school papers. Due to his atheist nature, he was desperate of the school he attended, which was religious. After college, he spent his time struggling to write about fictional ideas. Later, he became disappointed by his writing skills and made a conclusion that he possessed little experience of the world and hence he had no strong impression on what to write. After this conclusion, he discovered the writings by Pavlov and John Watson. These writings made him to develop a good basis of his research and opened a new way of understanding the natural things and behaviorism. John Watson, a writer, influenced Skinner with his writings about behaviorism.

The inspiration by John Watson made Skinner to have the desire to advance his study in psychology. This was followed by his enrollment in Harvard University for a graduate program in Psychology at the age of twenty-four. In Harvard, he met William Crozier, a researcher in the physiology department. Crozier was an advocate for animal study and measures in behavior. Using the functional and behaviorist background from William, Skinner started to his studies on behaviorism. He combined theories and methods from physiology and psychology where he developed various ways of data

recording and analyzing. This was facilitated by the diversity of working across two interrelated disciplines. He used rats as his specimen for experiments. Using his new methods, he noticed that his observations were affected influenced by the preceding and subsequent responses. He focused on what prevailed after a particular behavior, which made him note that the effects of an action can influence the e learning of an organism.

Skinner realized that the behavioral approaches that were used at that time depended on the Watson and Pavlov's works. These two behavioral works were focused on the paradigm of Stimulus- response and their method of conditioning aimed at finding out the response and effect of those stimuli on learning of organisms. Therefore, he decided to focus on another method of approaching behavioral response and their effect learning.

Skinner received his PHD of psychology in Harvard in 1931 and continued with his study until 1936. In the same year, he married Yvonne Blue. Later, he taught in Minnesota University and University of Indiana. In Indiana University, he acted as a chairperson of the psychology department from 1946 to 1947. His service as a chairperson gave him the opportunity to advance his knowledge in human behaviorism. Working as the head of a whole department, provides a wide range of experience such as management skills and learn how to deal with humans. It is in this service at the university where he published his first book titled Verbal Behavior. In his book, he tried to explain the development of language in human beings. The element of language was a factor that affected human behavior, hence his book. In 1958, he returned to Harvard University as a permanent Professor and remained there for the remaining part of his life.

In his theories, Skinner was dedicated in developing his particular brand called Radical behaviorism. He defined Radical behaviorism as the philosophy of science of behavior, which strives to realize behavior as dependent on environmental histories for consequence reinforcement.

Skinner started working on the issues of human behavior. He believed that it was a waste of time trying to study the hidden and unconscious aspects of humans. This belief made him to reject various theories, which were prominent in the psychological discipline (Kuhlman, 2005). He believes that the core of behaviorism lies on learning and reinforcement of human and animal behavior.

Skinner focused his time in studying observable kinds of human behaviors. He spent much of his career trying to refine the theories of reinforcement. He always said that personality is an element that develops in human beings and the behavior responds depending on the external events. He defined personality as an aspect that consists of the collection of human behaviors in a certain environment. He proposed that the differences in learning experiences are the major reasons behind the difference in human behavior. Therefore, learning differences affects human personality. This means that people are the way they are because they are rewarded to be that way. Skinner stated that this belief disregards thoughts, emotions and choice of human freedom (Kuhlman, 2005).

He continued to say that it is natural for human beings to behave in certain ways so that one can get favorable rewards. This means that if a person wants to experience reinforcement, the person develops personality traits, which are positive. Some of the traits acquired are included in category of

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agreeableness of the Big Five, which include understanding, empathetic, compassionate and positive thinker. He added that for a person to change his/her negative traits, the environment must be changed before any other element. This behaviorist viewpoint is strict and it tries to oppose the beliefs of other psychologists. This viewpoint requires that a person must change the inner self before change can be fully experienced. The inner self is the person's personality traits.

According to Skinner, he says that the change of behavior of humans aims at improving or worsening their situation. The behavior change brought about by environment affects the body condition, which results in some rewards (Kuhlman, 2005). As Skinner puts it; behavior is learnt depending on the available conditions. A person may develop behaviors due to the certain surrounding, which affects their personality (Kuhlman, 2005). It was Skinner's believe that it was a waste of time trying to study the hidden and unconscious aspects of humans. This belief made him to reject various theories, which were prominent in the psychological discipline. Skinner's believes were his inspirations, which made him remain strong regardless of the critics and opposition.

Until today, Skinner is famous for his theory of human behaviorist. Other psychologists believed that human psychology is a complex system due to its varied influences, but Skinner had believe that human psyche is not really varied to the cognitive processes of other animals. He stood on the opposition of human psychology in his life career where he denied the aspect of humans possessing freedom and dignity. Skinners study and theories were based on self-observation. This made him to be a supporter for

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behaviorism, where he stood onto his beliefs. According to Skinner's theory of Radical Behaviorism, it observes reinforcement as a central concept of behaviorism and as a central tool for controlling and shaping of behavior. A major misconception about this theory is that negative reinforcement is identical to punishment. Both positive and negative reinforcement promotes or enhances the probability of a certain behavior reoccurring. Through his study and research, Skinner found that the theory of behaviorism could be applied in natural selection in the broadest context of organism behavior.

In his work, Skinner designed some tools and equipment to use in his experiments and study. Some of the equipment includes cumulative recorder, teaching machine and the verbal summator. The cumulative recorder and teaching machine were used mainly in the process of conditioning. Conditioning process is the method that Skinner used to control the behavior of an organism by managing the rewards and punishments in the surrounding. Cumulative recorder was used to record behavior automatically and graphically. On the other hand, the teaching machine was deployed to administer the course of programmed instructions. Skinner used these own inventions in his study of behavior and human psychology. Other Skinner's inventions include the operant conditioning chamber, air crib and the pigeon-guided missile. The US navy used the pigeon-guided missile in controlling missile in their battle against the Germans. This battle invention depended on human's behavior of ignorance. This is because no human could detect in time the pigeon as guiding a missile.

By considering the process of conditioning, Skinner used two types of conditioning, which includes classical and operant conditioning. Classical

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conditioning involves pairing a neutral stimulus with an unconditioned stimulus so that it is capable of bringing a previously unconditioned response, which is called the conditioned response. On the other hand, operant conditioning involves use reinforcement to enhance the probability that a certain behavior will be repeated. Skinner used the teaching machine and the cumulative recorder devices to implement the operant conditioning process.

As seen in this context, Skinner has shown to various contributions to the discipline of psychology. He participated in publishing more than two hundred articles and over twenty books in psychology. Due to his authorship, he was largely praised as the most instrumental and influential psychologist in the 20th century. The work he performed in operant conditioning remains crucial in teaching in the present day. This is because professionals in mental health use the operant conditioning while dealing with clients. In addition, teachers use punishment and reinforcement to shape behavior in class setting. Furthermore, animal trainers use Skinner's techniques to train dogs and other animals. From these contributions of Skinner, he scooped various awards such as the National Medal of Science, Human of the Year Award, Gold Medal of the American Psychological Foundation and Citation for Outstanding Lifetime Contribution to Psychology. Some of his Psychological publications include Superstition in the Pigeon, Two Types of Conditioned Reflex and Pseudo Type and The Origins of Cognitive Thought.

From this context, it can be seen that B. F. Skinner is a major contributor in the development and growth of psychology. His theories have been used in various fields, which involve dealing with human- beings. In this world, many

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fields involves dealing with humans, therefore, Skinner's theories and inventions are used in most fields such as health, scientific research and security. From Skinner's beliefs, people can learn that behaviorism is an aspect, which affects the human personality depending on the environment one is living. One can also learn that change of human behavior can only happen by changing the environment. Much can be learnt from Skinner's psychological career. His ideologies are based on deep study and research through experiments, which used own inventions for the best results. Skinner's inventions and theories will live to be remembered for many years.