

The history of behaviorism psychology essay



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Today the most commonly studied field of psychology is behaviorism.

Behaviorism is the school of psychology where the goal is the prediction and control of behavior. Behaviorism today is a result of its philosophical roots and the work of major theorists. Three major theorists who contributed to behaviorism are John B. Watson, Edward Chace Tolman, and B. F. Skinner.

Prior to behaviorism, objective psychology was the main area of study in the field. Development in this field took place mainly in Russia by Ivan M.

Sechenov. Objective psychology was psychology that insisted on studying only those things that are directly measurable. The most important concept that Sechenov emphasized was inhibition which he describes in his work *Reflexes of the Brain*. Inhibition is the reduction or cessation of activity caused by stimulation. This led him to conclude that all human behavior could be explained in terms of brain physiology, and can be reflexive. He also stated the only valid approach to the study of psychology involves the objective method of physiology.

Before the discovery of behaviorism, there were contributors that influenced behavioristic ideas. Vladimir M. Bechterev was a Russian psychologist who founded reflexology, and later claimed to be another founder of objective psychology. Reflexology is the study of human behavior that seeks to understand the relationship between environmental influences and overt behavior. His main goal was concentrated between environmental stimulus and behavior. Edward Thorndike, an American psychologist, also contributed to behaviorism's revolutionary ideas. His famous works on the learning theory lead to the development of operant conditioning within behaviorism. Thorndike developed the learning theory through studying animals which led

to his $\frac{1}{2}$ law of effect $\frac{1}{2}$. His $\frac{1}{2}$ law of effect $\frac{1}{2}$ concluded that any behavior followed by pleasant consequences is likely to be continued, and any behavior followed by unpleasant consequences is likely to discontinue.

Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov also made major contributions to the field of behaviorism. He was most famous for his work in a type of learning called classical conditioning. He conducted his famous experiment with dogs and their digestive system. He developed terms from the experiment.

Conditioned stimulus was a biologically neutral response, while a conditioned response was a neutral stimulus that elicits a fraction of the unconditioned response. Unconditioned reflex is innate and is triggered by the unconditioned stimulus. For example, in the dog study, the food powder in the dog's mouth will increase the saliva flow. Therefore the increase in salivation would be the unconditioned response. He concluded that conditioned reflexes, like natural reflexes could be explained in terms of physiology of the brain.

John B. Watson is founder of Behaviorism. Before this field of psychology was discovered, Watson discovered Russian Objective Psychology. Watson found that his ideas had a lot in common with those of the Russian psychologists. Both thought consciousness can cause behavior, rejected the idea of introspection and the explanation of behavior based on mentalism. However, unlike the Russian psychologists, Watson became less interested in the physiology of the brain and more on associating stimuli with responses. After studying these Russian psychologists, he viewed the goal of psychology as the prediction and control of behavior.

Watson developed many ideas during his research. He explained there are four types of learning. There is explicit learned behavior which consisted of speaking, writing, or playing baseball and explicit unlearned behavior, for example grasping, blinking, and sneezing. Implicit learned behavior for example, increased heart rate due to a particular fear, and implicit unlearned behavior such as glandular secretions or circulatory changes. Watson also felt that there are four methods of conducting research. The first method is observation which is naturalistic or experimentally controlled. The second method is the conditioned-reflex method, which came from Pavlov and Bechterev's works. The third method is testing, which emphasized taking behavior samples. The fourth method consists of verbal reports such as surveys or questionnaire's. He explained that all of these methods of studying research were effective.

Watson was very opinionated on particular issues. He emphasized that all humans inherit the emotions of fear, rage, and love. The main characteristics of emotions that adults develop are hate, pride, and jealousy. However, all of these characteristics are derived from fear, rage, and love. The mind-body relationship also remained important to Watson. He developed four different views on the mind-body relationship. The first view was the interactionist relationship, which simplified is the mind and body influencing each other. The second view was psychophysical parallelism. This meant that mental and bodily events are parallel with no interaction between the two. The third view was epiphenomenalism which explained that mental events are by-products of bodily events but do not cause behavior. Finally, the fourth was

physical monism which completely rejected the existence of any mental events.

John B. Watson's work was a lasting influence in the field of psychology. He changed the whole goal of psychology. Psychology began strictly as an explanation of a state consciousness and shifted more toward predictions and controls of behavior. Therefore, he made overt behavior the main topic and concern in psychology. Two types of behaviorism have developed since Watson. Radical behaviorism is the belief that the explanation of behavior cannot be explained in terms of unobserved internal events, and if these events exist, then they should be ignored. The second type of behaviorism is methodological behaviorism. Methodological behaviorism accepts that overt behavior should be the main topic of psychology, but it should also consider internal causes of behavior including physiological and mental states.

Edward Chace Tolman was a major theorist who contributed to behaviorism. Tolman focused on another division of behaviorism which emphasized purposive behavior. Purposive behavior is directed toward a goal that terminates when the goal is attained. An example of purposive behavior is a rat running through a maze. He later translated purposive behavior into molar behavior, in order to contrast it with molecular behavior. Molecular behavior is a small section of behavior that is isolated for study. Tolman emphasized molar over molecular behavior.

During Tolman's experiments, he used intervening variables. Intervening variables occur between environmental and behavioral events. His use of intervening variables explained how the environment influenced behavior.

An example of an intervening variable would be Tolman's cognitive map. A cognitive map is a mental representation of the environment. The cognitive map is a way of associating one landmark to another, which is useful when reading directions.

One of Tolman's most renowned experiments involved latent learning. Latent learning is learning that has occurred but is not translated into behavior. A scenario of latent learning would be if someone does not know something but wants to learn it. They eventually try it, and later on learn and know it. In this experiment, Tolman used rats as subject in order to see if reinforcement plays a role in the way that rats learn. The result of this experiment supported Tolman's hypothesis which was that learning remained latent until the organism had a reason to use it. Tolman also conducted experiments involving latent extinction. Latent extinction was the discovery that animals that have experienced a goal in the past, no longer need to obtain reinforcement to terminate a previously learned response to that goal much faster than animals without experience. For example, if someone used to live in a particular location but moved and came back to their location a year later, they will still be familiar with that location from memory, compared to someone who is new to that location.

B. F. Skinner was another significant behaviorist theorist. Skinner was a radical behaviorist and refused to acknowledge any part of mental events in human behavior. Functional analysis is a study focused on the relationship between reinforcements and response rate or probability. Skinner used this approach when describing environmental and behavioral events.

Skinner studied Thorndike's experiments, and he interpreted them into his own ideas which led to his theory of operant behavior. Operant behavior is produced by an organism instead of being caused by a known stimulus. For example, there is a "cry out" method in which a parent does not respond to a crying child. As a result, the child learns that their crying does not elicit a parent's response and is insignificant. Reinforcement and punishment are also significant to operant behavior. To Skinner, reinforcement is anything that increases the rate or probability of a response. Change in an organism's behavior is identified through the use of reinforcement. He discovered that punishment does not weaken behavior, but strengthens behavior.

Skinnerian principles were developed due to differences that Skinner approached in comparison to other behaviorists. He applied one general rule, that if reinforcement contingencies are changed, then behavior will change. Behavior therapy was another Skinnerian principle that uses learning to treat emotional and behavioral disorders such as drug addiction, mental retardation or speech disorders. Token economies were also developed through the Skinnerian principles. Desirable behavior is strengthened by using valuable tokens as reinforcement. An example of these tokens can include candy, cigarettes, or coffee. Skinner's principles played a huge role in the development of behavior modification procedures which helped improve the quality of life for many people.

Psychologists today refer to behaviorism as part of cognitive psychology. Cognitive psychology is a branch of psychology that studies mental processes such as how people think, perceive, remember, and learn, but <https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-behaviorism-psychology-essay/>

modern cognitive psychologist continue to use behavior indexes. Cognitive psychology is associated with all aspects of behaviorism, except for Tolman's views. Psychologists continue to base psychology on overt behavior. Many psychologists who categorize themselves as experimental psychologists are behaviorists.

Behaviorism remains the basis of all fields of psychology. Like other fields in psychology, behaviorism has its roots in philosophy, and continues to develop from the original theorists, to the new developments of today. The three main theorists John B. Watson, Edward Chace Tolman, and B. F. Skinner are vital not only to behaviorism, but psychology as a whole. The study of behaviorism will continue to progress as research and technology continues to develop. Without behaviorism, psychology would not be where it is today.