

Behaviourism



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The aim of this essay is to discuss why behaviourists explain the maladaptive behaviours in terms of the learning principles that sustain and maintain it. We will attempt to show why the behaviourist approach is in stark contrast to the psychoanalytical approach. We will try looking at the different theories and concepts, from Pavlov through to Skinner, Watson and Bandura's theories. What applications are there to this approach, are there any ethical considerations we must take into account?

We are required to make a comparison between the approach of the behaviourists and the psychoanalytic by demonstrating both approaches and positions of the theories. APPROACH The behaviourist's approach in which learning and experience determine what a person would become, in other words the environment influences the development of the individual. Behaviourists didn't concern themselves with the internal mechanisms which occur inside the organism.

In 1913, John Watson (of Little Albert experiment) founded the behaviourist approach by setting out its main assumptions on an article in the journal *The Psychological Review*. John Watson stated in the review " " Psychology as the Behaviourist views it is a purely objective experimental branch Of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and Control of behaviour. Introspection forms no essential part of Its methods... " (Watson, 1913) So only observable events, and not mental states, are the substance of psychology.

Providing; in the process, the current behaviouristic flavour that characterises psychology today. Watson believed that consciousness could no longer be the substance of psychology, and introspection was an

unreliable method, they both required mentality languages construction. For Watson, differences in ability and talent originate from early experiences in contrast to being innately determined. In other words, all behaviour can be derived from the observation of outward behaviour.

Behaviourism is then primarily based on observation of behaviours as opposed to internal events like thinking and emotion. As Watson proclaimed himself a “behaviourist” and promised that the new tendency in psychology will deliver a “purely objective experimental branch of natural science”, dedicated to the “control and prediction of behaviour”, consciousness, thoughts and feelings will no longer be studied (He proclaimed), just the behaviour of animals, including humans.

Watson presented psychology as a discipline that could be applied to various human problems created by industrialization and rapid social changes of the time. Behaviourism could in effect; according to Watson, help businesses by helping mould individuals by forcing them to learn new habits to fit the environment, and offered families the chance to help children be fearless, and learn any trade or profession. These methods would be based on Pavlovian theories of conditioning, and the extinction of existing responses that were maladaptive or not assisting adaptation.

Watson proposed that Classical conditioning (based on Pavlov’s observations, as above) was able to explain all aspects of human psychology. All aspects from speech to emotional responses were simply patterns of stimulus and response. The existence of mind and consciousness was completely denied by Watson. According to Watson all differences in individual behaviour were due to different experiences in learning. He said:

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Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select - doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and the race of his ancestors". (Watson, 1924, p. 104) The theory of classical conditioning involves learning a new behaviour through the process of association. In other words, two stimuli are linked together to produce a new learned response in an animal or human.

There are three stages, in which the stimuli and responses are given, scientific term: Stage 1: Before Conditioning: The unconditioned stimulus (UCS) produces an unconditioned response (UCR) in an organism. No new behaviour has been learned, as the response has been unconditioned to an unconditioned stimulus. A natural behaviour which hasn't been learned is a natural response. Another characteristic present in this stage is the Neutral Stimulus (NS), this stimulus has no effect on a person, it could be an object, a person, a place, etc.

The NS in classical conditioning does not produce a response until is paired with the unconditioned response. Stage 2: During Conditioning: During this stage, a stimulus that produces no response (Neutral Stimulus) is associated with an unconditioned stimulus at which point it becomes the conditioned stimulus (CS). Often during this stage an association of the UCS has to be made with the CS on a number of occasions; or trials, for learning to take place. A trial learning may occur without an association strengthening the

experience, over time, like being sick after food poisoning or drinking too much alcohol.

An example of this stage is: A stomach virus (UCS) might be associated with eating certain foods; like chocolate (CS), or Perfume associated (UCS) with a specific person. Stage 3: After Conditioning: This is where the conditioned Stimulus (CS) is associated with an unconditioned stimulus (UCS) to create a new conditioned response (CR). As an example: A person, who has been associated with nice perfume (UCS), is now found attractive (CR). Also, chocolate (CS) which was eaten before a person was sick with a virus (UCS) now produces a response of nausea (CR).

Classical conditioning can be applied to humans as applied to animals? In 1920 Watson and Rayner demonstrated that it could through an ethically dubious experiment. They carried out an experiment on a child call little Albert. A 9 month child who was tested on his reaction to various stimuli, he was shown a white rat, a rabbit, a monkey and various masks. He showed no fear of any of these stimuli. What startled him was the noise of a hammer hitting a steel bar behind his head which made him afraid and would cause him to burst into tears.

When “ little Albert” was 11 months old, the white rat was presented to him and seconds later the steel bar was struck with the hammer. This was done seven times over the next seven weeks, and each time little Albert would burst into tears. By now, Little Albert would have just to see the rat, and he would show every sign of fear. He would cry whether the hammer was struck against the steel bar or not, and would attempt to crawl away. Watson and

Rayner had shown that classical conditioning could be used to create a phobia.

A phobia is an irrational fear, i. e. a fear that is out of proportion to the danger. Over the next few weeks and months " Little Albert" was observed and 10 days after conditioning his fear of the rat was much less marked. This dying out of a learned response is called extinction. However even after a full month it was still evident. By 1920, Watson has left the world of psychology and moved onto advertising. Other behaviourists come up with different ideas that proposed different ways of learning other than classical conditioning.

One of this was B. F Skinner. He proposed less radical ideas, believing that the mind exist but that it was simple more productive to observe behaviour than to study internal mental matters. B. F Skinner looked at the causes of the action and its consequences in order to understand behaviour, he called this Operant Conditioning. As a behaviourist Skinner rejected the idea of unobservable psychological phenomena; behaviourism believing that the organism (humans and animals), respond to external stimuli creating or learning a behaviour.

Skinner maintained that learning occurred by the organism responding to stimuli or operating in its environment. The rewards and punishments that influence the responses to the stimuli, and the changes in behaviour brought about by manipulating the patterns rewards and punishment, this is what Skinner studied most. He conditioned rats, to press a bar (Skinner box), in return for a reward of food. He was able to measure learning by accurately

under closely controlled conditions varying the amount of reward (reinforcement), and sometimes applying irrelevant stimuli.

Skinner worked towards a theory of conditioning which could include humans. The behaviourists approach has been influential in psychotherapy, with its emphasis on the manipulation of behaviour through patterns of reinforcement and punishment. In order to explain the maladaptive behaviour in terms of the learning principles, and after briefly looking at Watson and Skinner, in my humble opinion I can say that for the behaviourists the only thing that matter was that, behaviours. Although it seems obvious; behaviourist believed, and still believe, that all behaviour is learned through experience.

Maladaptive behaviour is no different from normal behaviour. The classical and operant conditioning principles (from the behaviourist perspective) help us to explain all behaviour, including the concepts of association and reinforcement. The mind is an unnecessary concept, it is sufficient to explain behaviours in terms of what can be observed. There are no such as things as mental illnesses, to a behaviourist; the mind is an unnecessary concept. In the 1950's a Psychologist named Albert Bandura; at Iowa University, sought to investigate psychological phenomena through repeatable, experimental testing.

His inclusion of mental phenomena as imagery and representation, and his concept of reciprocal determination, marked a radical departure from the behaviourism of the time. Reciprocal determinism is the idea that behaviour is controlled or determined by the individual, through cognitive processes, and by the environment, through external social stimulus events. The basis

of reciprocal determinism should transform individual behaviour by allowing subjective thought processes transparency when contrasted with cognitive, environmental, and external social stimulus events.

An important theory at the time called Social Learning theory, which states that people learn within a social context. It is facilitated through concepts such as modelling and observational learning. People; specially children, learn from their environment and seek acceptance by modelling their behaviour on influential models (people around them). In other words social learning theory is a perspective that states that social behaviour (any type of behaviour we display socially) is learned primarily by observing and imitating the actions of others. This behaviours are also influenced by reward or punishment received for these actions.

This theory was derived by Robert Sears and other scholars, whom attempted to merge psychoanalytical and stimulus-response learning theory into an inclusive explanation of human behaviour. Albert Bandura, abandoned the psychoanalytic and drive of the approach, He emphasised his approach on cognitive and information processing capabilities that facilitate social behaviour. Although both theories provided a general context for the understanding of human behaviour, Bandura's had a stronger theoretical beginning. What Bandura proposed in the social learning theory, was that learning can occur in relation to three models?