

Behaviorism: a psychological approach

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



Behaviorism is an approach of psychology that we are shaped by our experiences and our environment (Moore-Josephs, 2017). Behaviorists believe that personality is nothing more than the sum total of an individual's response repertoire (Nevid & Rathus, 2016). A response repertoire is the range of a person's behaviors, which are developed on the basis of environmental influences, such as rewards and punishments (Nevid & Rathus, 2016). There is classical conditioning, which is learning by association. And there is also operant conditioning, which is learning by consequences. Classical conditioning involves repeatedly pairing stimuli and as a result creating the same response for both. For example, if someone got really sick after eating a certain food, and then just the sight of that food made them queasy. Operant conditioning includes reinforcing actions by providing consequences. A reinforcement is a change in the environment (that is, a stimulus), that increases the frequency of the behavior that precedes it (Nevid & Rathus, 2016). There are positive and negative reinforcers that are used to either increase or decrease an action. On the other hand, there are punishments. Punishments are unpleasant or undesirable consequences or painful or aversive stimuli that suppress or decrease the frequency of the behavior they follow (Nevid & Rathus, 2016). An example of positive reinforcement would be giving a child money whenever they make good grades, so in turn they make good grades more often. A negative reinforcement example would be taking away a child's gaming system so that they do their homework. A positive punishment would be grounding a child when they come home after curfew, and a negative

punishment would be taking away a child's phone when they come home after curfew.

In scenario one, Abdul is very “high strung” according to his friends and family. He always has his desk arranged in the same exact manner and he can tell if anything has been touched or moved (Moore-Josephs, 2017). He has specific rituals that he follows every morning and gets very grumpy and has a hard time continuing with his day in the rare situation that he is unable to complete his rituals (Moore-Josephs, 2017). A psychologist from the behavioral perspective might explain these issues by reasoning that Abdul might associate some specific situations with fear. He has learned to avoid the things he fears by performing the rituals that he has and it helps reduce his fear. In terms of operant conditioning, whenever Abdul has a good day, he may say it is because he completed all of his rituals. He reinforces his rituals by observing that he has a good day whenever he does all of them. This differs from psychodynamic theorists, who may suggest that Abdul completes his rituals as an attempt to deal with his underlying impulses that are unacceptable and make him feel guilty. It also differs from humanistic approach, which sees Abdul as an active cognitively aware being. It uses philosophy, existentialism, and the belief that humans are motivated toward fulfilling certain growth potential (Plante, 2011, p. 58). In simpler terms, Abdul's behavior is a result of trying to understand the meaning of life, or reach self-actualization.

In scenario two, Maria is 35 years old and has never had a serious relationship. Maria feels very lonely and would like to have a partner and a romantic relationship but when men get too close, she pushes them away

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(Moore-Josephs, 2017). Maria has only one close friend whom she has known since she was a child (Moore-Josephs, 2017). From a behaviorist perspective, one would say that Maria may have had a bad experiences with people that attempted get close with her , or vice versa, and it always made her feel unpleasant. She has unconsciously learned that if she does not allow someone to get too close to her, she will not feel the same way as she did in her past experiences, which could be an example of classical conditioning. Though it is a strange way to approach it, this type of learning can be applied in this scenario. Maria is repeatedly exposed to people close to her (unconditioned stimulus) leaving or letting her down(conditioned stimulus). She in turn feels unpleasant as a conditioned response. This can also be explained in terms of operant conditioning. Maria’s behavior is an attempt to avoid feeling the way she did before. This defense mechanism of pushing people away is an example of positive reinforcement.

In scenario three, Erin is a 19 year old college student (Moore-Josephs, 2017). Erin also skips class because she gets very nervous around peers (Moore-Josephs, 2017). Whenever Erin finds out that she has to do an oral presentation for her class, she drops the class and finds a section where no oral presentation is required (Moore-Josephs, 2017) . The last time she had to present in class, she began sweating and could not speak to her peers (Moore-Josephs, 2017) . Erin has an extreme fear that her peers will not accept her and she worries about being made fun of or not fitting in (Moore-Josephs, 2017). This is an example of the conditioning of fears, a process that occurs through classical conditioning. Erin more than likely gets nervous around her peers and does not like oral presentations because she had

experiences before where she was laughed at or made fun of. This can cause her to fear her peers and fear their judgement of her.

The behaviorist perspective is different from humanistic and psychodynamic in a few ways. Behaviorism emphasizes the importance of the scientific process and assumes that individuals are shaped by their environment (McLeod, 2013), while humanism rejects the scientific methods used by behaviorism and assumes that individuals are shaped by an innate drive to make themselves and the world a better place (McLeod, 2013) . This is also different than the psychodynamic approach, which argues that personality is shaped, not by our environment and our experiences, but by our unconscious impulses. It suggests also that individual behavior is predetermined, and early childhood basically shapes our personality.

Behaviorism seems more appropriate than other psychological theories because it is concerned with the observable and measurable aspects of human behavior (Bustamante, Howe-Tennant, & Ramo, 1996). Behaviorists assume that the only things that are real (or at least worth studying) are the things we can see and observe (Bustamante, Howe-Tennant, & Ramo, 1996).