

# Behavioral and social cognitive approaches to forming habits

[Psychology](#), [Psychotherapy](#)



Habit as defined in Webster's as a: a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition or physiologic exposure that shows itself in regularity or increased facility of performance b : an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2011). Behavior is the manner of conducting oneself or anything that an organism does involving action and response to stimulation. In everyday life habits are formed and intertwined with ones behavior. People are often associated with the way they behave based on the environment they come from and the habits they develop from that environment.

Behavioral Theorists believe learning experiences as the development of our personality. During these developmental years the environment has the greatest influence on the personality. This influence is reinforced by positive or negative rewards. Classic conditioning explains many behavioral reaction patterns. When a person receives positive reinforcement of a behavior (reward), they develop this behavior as part of their own. A person will continue to perform a certain action because of the reward at the end of the action. An Actor receives a Grammy for outstanding performance.

That actor will try to perform this action again in the next movie they are in. On the other hand, negative reinforcement (punishment) will elicit a response to not perform that behavior again. (Friedman & Schustack, 2009). If you put your finger in an electric socket the electric shock will influence you not to perform this habit again. John B. Watson was instrumental in the development of the behavioral learning approach. Watson believed in the experimental method and if psychology were to be a science, then only the

observable behavior was a reasonable matter of science (Friedman & Schustack, 2009).

He looked at obvious behaviors that could be learned and controlled by the therapist. During his experiments Watson used animals and not human subjects. He believed he could get the same results from animals that others did using humans. Traditional behaviorism identifies two basic types of conditioning. Classic conditioning is defined by the repeated exposure of an unconditioned stimulus that elicits an unconditioned response and a neutral stimulus. The developed neutral stimulus can develop the same response as the unconditioned stimulus. B. F. Skinner developed the more radical approach of Operant conditioning.

Operant conditioning results when a behavior is followed by reinforcement or punishment (Burger, 2010). Social cognitive personality development has some similarity as behaviorism. Behavioral and Social learning theories consists of four characteristic: Behaviorism, Basic Principles of Conditioning, Social Learning theory, and Social-Cognitive Theory. Behavioral is regarded as " attitude change, language acquisition, psychotherapy, student-teacherinteraction, problem solving, gender roles, and job satisfaction. " Social learning is regarded as " thoughts, morals, expectancies, and individual insights" (Burger, 2010).

Social-Cognitive theory as described by Albert Bandura engages in thinking and symbolic learning from observation. Behaviorism holds that people are conditioned, or trained, to respond in certain ways by rewards and

punishments. Bandura suggested that there must be a way that people can learn simply by watching others, thereby removing the need to learn everything by monotonous trial-and-error (Krapp, 2005). People learn by observing others, with the environment, behavior, and cognition all as the chief factors in influencing development. These three factors are not stagnant or self-sufficient; rather, they are all shared.

According to social learning theory, modeling influences learning primarily through its informative functions. As the observers in our environment we retain a portion of the modeled behavior, which then serves as a blueprint for the behavior. This type of learning incorporates four components: attention, retention, motor, and motivational processes that help to understand why individuals imitate socially desirable behavior (Krapp, 2005). Habits are developed from childhood into adulthood. Good and bad habits are formed during this time based on behavior and social influences.

In today's society our bad habits are more noticeable than our good ones. We are always trying to correct someone from doing something we would not do or say, yet we do not understand why they behave the way they do. Some families develop household habits that last a lifetime and can be passed from child to child. These childhood habits are hard to break and require years of reconditioning. Some become part of your way of life. In my family one of the many habits I developed or inherited, was to eat eggs with jelly all over them. Yes that is right!! You mix the jelly in with the eggs and that is how they are eaten.

My father ate his eggs that way, his father ate eggs the same way and so did my Great Grandfather. I have yet to break this habit. My father reinforced this habit by providing praise and allowing me to try different jellies on my eggs. The more he paid attention to this behavior the more I performed the act. He had no idea he was conditioning me to perform a certain action based on his praise/reward. Until I studied behaviorism I had no idea this was a form of conditioning. This was not something he taught me, this was a behavior I observed as part of my family environment.

Once I tried the eggs with jelly, I like the taste and this became part of my habits when eating scrambled eggs. For my children I allow them to have free will and eat what they like and how they like it. My six year old likes ketchup on her broccoli. This is not learned from observation, this is just her. of his is a good example of behavior of the family that influenced one of my habits. While serving in the Military, I developed a social habit that is wide spread in the Army. Using acronyms is a large part of the military language. We use this as part of our socialcommunication.

If you do not know or understand the terminology you are not "Hooah" enough. Some may say that situation is FUBAR (Fouled up Beyond All Recognition). I contribute my behavior more to the social cognitive theories of observation. My behavior has been shaped from observing others around me and taking bits and pieces from each of them and incorporating those behaviors into my personality. To this day I am an observer of others behavior. Good or bad, I have the free will to make a determination on what

parts I will use to become part of my personality. This is why I disagree with the behaviorism theorist.

I have not received reward or punishment for my behavior. Good, bad, or indifferent, my personality has not been affected by treating me like a lab rat and performing behavior changing experiments on me. I believe some personalities do need operant conditioning, mine is just not one of them. For those personalities developed from socially unacceptable environments, some form of conditioning is necessary to develop a socially acceptable behavior. The first course of action is to take them out of the environment and allow them to see a more positive behavior.

The saying goes you can take the child out of the country, but you cannot take the country out of the child (country can be substituted with any negative environment). I have worked hard to eat eggs the way it is socially accepted. In public I will eat the way it is expected for you to eat, but this differs from environment to environment. In Germany, boiled eggs are more served than scrambled. Thereby I adjust to the environment I am exposed to. At home I can eat the way I want to and enjoy my eggs and jelly. Some habits you just do not want to change. I enjoy the taste of a finely cooked, scrambled egg and grape jelly.