

Analytical comparison and contrast of behaviorism and humanism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Behaviorism is widely discussed in psychology classes among America. Children are introduced to the works of Watson, Skinner and even Pavlov at an early age. Although they may not understand it, it is taught. Behaviorist John Watson, who has been acclaimed as the father of behaviorism, set out to change the narrow focus of psychology. He was not keen on the idea that environment shaped the human conscious and thought the idea of introspection was ridiculous. What he wanted to focus on instead was behavior. Watson believed that our behavior developed over time and that by nurture, humans grew into the people that they were. While no school of thought is perfect, we can definitely be thankful for Watson's persistence. Many of the terms which are studied today, such as operant conditioning, classical conditioning, stimulus and reinforcement can be credited to the early foundation of this man.

A less known theory would be humanistic psychology. Perhaps the fact that it is not actually a school of thought is the reason that it is not talked about as much. However, it has influenced psychology today greatly. While most students may not be aware of what humanistic psychology is, it can be guaranteed that they have heard of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Humanistic psychology focuses on human potential and self-actualization. They also focus on basic human needs such as empathy (Rachman, 1981), which is needed throughout the individuals entire life. While humanists worked hard to make their field of psychology known, it seemed as though they were only criticized. We can appreciate their studies though because they influence us and our development through ways that we do not understand.

For many years after the foundation of psychology, discovered by Wilhelm Wundt, the fundamentalist perspective seemed to hold the interest of many who were studying this scientific field. With the increased concentration of the way that the mind adapts to the environment, Comparative Psychology was developed. It seemed like this school of thought was accepted and rarely questioned. However, this all changed in 1913 when John B. Watson wrote the article, " Psychology as the Behaviorist View It." Watson's paper was critical of the functionalist's use of introspection and psychology as a whole. Watson even states, " If you can't observe 3-9 states of clearness in attention, your introspection is poor." It seems as though he is making a mockery out of past psychologists who used this as an " excuse" for their studies not getting the result that they expected. He hoped to reduce the use of terms such as consciousness, mental states, mind and imagery and replace it with terms such as habit formation, stimulus and response (Watson, 1994). His paper was like a map for the foundation of psychology and he hypothesized what caused certain behaviors to occur. Overall, Watson set out to change the mind set of psychologists, hoping to shift the focus from the unconscious mind to instead looking at observable behavior. He had a grown interest in conditioning and whether an emotional response could be conditioned to exist. In his most famous study, with Little Albert, Watson would look at the stimulus and response that the child had in regards to the emotion of fear.

Even more, Watson thought that psychology itself should focus on nurture instead of nature. He believed that it was more important to look at the way that we were raised and nurtured mattered more than how our environment

shaped us individually. Watson even wrote a book entitled “ Psychological Care of the Infant and Child” in which he criticized the child-rearing practices of his time (Schultz & Schultz, 303). In this, he said that parents should not show affection to their children because it weakened them. He himself rarely, if ever, embraced his children in a hug. He did not tell his children that he loved them. While Watson thought that this strengthened his children, one later committed suicide and the other struggled to fight off his own suicidal thoughts (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). Whether or not Watson’s personal theories were correct, his development of behaviorism influenced several great psychologists, including B. F. Skinner and Ivan Pavlov. With the forces of classical conditioning, operant conditioning and reinforcements, human behavior could be shaped and formed just like an animal. Behaviorism is still a great standing force in the development of modern psychology. Many studies are still being done that focus on the effects of an added stimulus and whether or not rewarding a behavior can make it occur again. More importantly, behaviorism also influenced other great psychological fields of study such as that of humanism.

Developing in the late 1950’s, humanistic psychology set out to be a third force in psychology. Unhappy with the ideals of psychoanalysts and behaviorism, humanist psychologists were looking to change the focus from observable behavior to the whole self. Both Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow were critical of the idea that human behavior was being reduced to machines and animals. Watson’s work tried to generalize the behavior of one individual to the entire society, which humanist psychologists were against. There were many individuals that influenced humanistic psychology as well,

<https://assignbuster.com/analytical-comparison-and-contrast-of-behaviorism-and-humanism/>

including Adler and Horney. Both of whom disagreed with Freud's notion that our lives are governed by unconscious forces (Schultz & Schultz, 472).

Existentialism was influential to the humanist movement; in fact many of the ideals that you see, including free will and personal responsibility are key points to humanists. Humanistic psychologists ultimately believed that individuals were all unique and that through themselves they could overcome the obstacles in their lives. They also believed that it wasn't just behavior that influenced the way an individual developed, but also the emotions. A lot of their work would later be influential to the positivist psychology, which in terms, it was.

Both Rogers and Maslow are significant in the development and success of humanistic psychology. Maslow, who may be best known for his work with his hierarchy of needs, developed the term "self actualization." Later, it would be a prominent role in the Rogers himself developed person-centered therapy, which focused on the individual using their own strengths to overcome the hurdle they are facing. Prior to this, it seemed as though the therapist was supposed to be responsible for "fixing" their clients. According to the textbook, "A History of Modern Psychology," Rogers believed that "personality is shaped by the present and how we consciously perceive it." This was a definite difference from Watson who believed our childhood experiences shaped the person that we become. Today, humanistic psychology extends much further than just the scientific field and almost everyone is introduced to the ideas of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, or the term "self-actualization." Despite the good intentions of humanistic psychology, it failed to gain the respect of the psychology world. It is not

considered to be a school of thought and is said to have been a good idea, but ineffective (Schultz & Schultz, 482).

While history is an important aspect in understanding these two very different ideals, the research that they developed may be even more important. While there are several behaviorists who did research, the most well known studies may be those of Watson and Pavlov. Likewise with humanism, it is important to broaden out the studies of Rogers and Maslow as they have been a great influence to psychology. A major difference in the level of research that was done by these five psychologists does not lie within the area of interest. Instead, it relies on the fact that most of the humanist's who did studies were clinicians. Their research used samples from individuals who were selected and fit the " self-actualizing" mold created by the researcher. Behaviorists on the other hand used actual laboratory settings in order to collect their data and they were able to generalize their results past their lab. The differences can definitely be seen after breaking their studies down.

One of the most well known and debatable studies was probably done by Watson himself. While many psychologists had used animals to study conditioning and other tests, Watson was the first to use a child in such a questionable way. The Little Albert study was done in 1920 with the help of Rosalie Rayner, one of his students. Initially little Albert was chosen because he was noted to be an unemotional child who rarely cried (Beck, 2009). Beck also said that both Watson and Rayner reasoned that such a stolid child would experience relatively little harm. To serve as a baseline, Watson measured the responses that Little Albert made to objects including blocks, a <https://assignbuster.com/analytical-comparison-and-contrast-of-behaviorism-and-humanism/>

monkey, a dog, a rabbit, fire, a marble and a white laboratory rat. The child responded inquisitively, but not fearfully to these stimuli's (Beck, et al. 2009). The study itself occurred two months after this initial baseline. Using a metal rod, Watson set out to find if he could produce a conditioned emotional response from the young child. Presented with the lab rat again, Little Albert did not appear to be fearful until Watson struck the rod with a hammer. The child was startled from the loud noise. After only seven times of the presentation of the rat and hitting the metal rod, Albert responded in a fearful way by just the presence of the rat. Albert's fear response extended from just the rat to white furry things in general (Schultz & Schultz, 296). While this was a great result for Watson's conditioning theory, the real mystery lies within the whereabouts of Little Albert today. He left before Watson or Rayner could reverse the effects of this study and many wondered if his fearful conditioned extended out into adulthood. With the burning of Watson's publications before his death, the identity of Little Albert seemed impossible to find. In 2009, however, Beck, Levinson and Irons set out to find the identity of this child. Through careful research, they believe that Douglas Merritte, who shares many physical traits depicted in Watson's videos, is Little Albert. While they did not go on to say whether or not this man had any long term effects from the study, it is interesting to know the real identity behind the child who so greatly influenced psychology.

Another brilliant and influential study was done by B. F. Skinner. Skinner was noted as a " radical behaviorist," and turned his focus to pragmatism (Moore, 2010). His work with " Skinner boxes" would later be important to operant conditioning. Operant conditioning was different from that of classical

conditioning in that there was no stimulus placed in the experiment. The way that the idea of operant conditioning was used through the Skinner boxes were in their design. A food deprived rat was placed inside these boxes and allowed to wander around. Eventually, they stumbled upon a metal bar which could be pressed. This bar would drop a piece of food into a tray, serving as the reinforcer. He wanted to find how long it took the rat to correspond pressing the bar with receiving the food. Skinner generalized these terms to the rest of the world, stating that “ the strength of an operant behavior increases when it is followed by the presentation of a reinforcing stimulus (Schultz & Schultz, 344).” However, it is apparent that this study cannot be comparable to human behavior. We are not given a consistent reward every time we do something that is good. Skinner also wrote the book, *Walden Two*, which was written about a society that was shaped by positive reinforcement. The society described in the book, may be considered the perfect society. It focused on individualism, self-fulfillment, emphasized happiness and ultimately serves as a precursor for the humanistic approach (Kraner, 1978). Kraner also states that the book can be looked at negatively as well. He says that it serves as a symbol of the behavior that behaviorists want to impose on our lives and want us to develop for ourselves as well. While Skinner’s work was not meant to set out to create another form of psychology, it may have greatly influenced what was to come.

Abraham Maslow can be credited as the father of humanistic psychology. While his ideas were viewed as ridiculous in the 1960’s, today they are highly regarded and important across so many different areas. Maslow’s

interest was within self-actualization, which he described as, "...the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially (Koltko-Rivera, 2006)." While self-actualization only occurred when the individual "peaked," Maslow created five motivational levels reach this. First of all, physiological needs were at the bottom. It meant that the individual had the basic survival needs such as food, clothing and water. Next, safety needs, which according to Koltko-Rivera, the individual was to seek security through order of the law. Third, belongingness and love needs. These were set so that the individual had a sense of belonging. Fourth, Maslow believed that esteem needs had to be met. This meant that the individual was being rewarded for the efforts that they were putting in. By reaching these four stages, the individual could reach the final stage of self-actualization. However, Koltko-Rivera states that there is a sixth motivational level that was left out. He says that Maslow intended this stage to be self-transcendence; this "seeks to further a cause beyond the self and to experience a communion beyond the boundaries of the self through peak experience (Koltko-Rivera, 2006)." Whether or not a sixth level exists, Maslow's hierarchy of needs was criticized because of the research setup. His subject size was considered to be too small for the generalizations that he made. It is also believed that he used subjects who fit the criteria that he created, rather inconsistently (Schultz & Schultz, 477). Today his hierarchy is still being researched and tested. In 1981, Goebel and Brown (1981) did a study in order to see whether or not Maslow's hierarchy was set up correctly and whether or not different age groups were motivated differently. They found that Maslow's hierarchy could not be used as a developmental sequence. It was also noted that love and esteem needs should be switched as far as child development goes (Goebel & Brown, <https://assignbuster.com/analytical-comparison-and-contrast-of-behaviorism-and-humanism/>)

1981). Whether or not this hierarchy is perfect, it is influential today in our own individual development.

Carl Rogers was greatly impacted by the work of Maslow. He too followed in the self-actualization model and eventually developed person-centered model of therapy. Most of his research lies within child development, taking note of such things as positive regard and the emerging self. According to DeRobertis (2006), Rogers believed that humans had an innate tendency to develop biological and psychological functions so that it could enhance itself. Moreover, Rogers believed that nurturing was important in developing the genuine self. Children developed in a positive way when parents loved them unconditionally. Whether or not they had to discipline them, it was important for the child to know that their parents were acting in response because they cared. Rogers gave many characteristics of an actualizing self, including: mature and responsible, accepts others as unique individual different from oneself, trusts oneself, and open to experience without feeling threatened (DeRobertis, 2006). If a child was raised in a home where parents spoke negatively to the child or treated them badly, Rogers believed that the child would not reach self-actualization. Rogers's development of person-centered therapy was widely accepted. It shifted the responsibility of the client's problem from the therapist back to the client. He believed that the individual could take responsibility in order to solve, or cope, with their problem and in the end become stronger. Initially, he tested this theory on students who were coming to counseling centers (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). Today, this therapy is still being used by counselors. Rogers's theory of self-actualization

is still applicable too. He has been a great influence to the world of psychology.

While the major differences between these two psychological theories have been noted previously in this paper, they are also similar in many ways. According to Krasner (1978), a major similarity was the desire to create a better world. While it is obvious that individualism is an extremely important characteristic in terms of humanism, behaviorists also focused on the performance of the individual in doing their research. Both humanists and behaviorists wanted the focus of psychology to be on the person instead of the unconscious mind. They were advocating an open society in which human behavior was a function of what the individual human being did, felt and believed in the moment (Kasner, 1978). He also noted that both of these psychological theories broke away from the norm. It seemed that in the case of Little Albert as well as both Maslow and Rogers's studies, they seemed to focus on individual case studies instead of multiple test runs.

Both behaviorism and humanistic psychology are very unique in their studies. Behaviorism focuses on the individual's behavior and believes that our childhood shapes the way that we act in adulthood. Humanistic psychology changed the focus yet again to the self in general. They relied on the individual to correct themselves and brought about a psychology of empowerment, self-actualization and free will. Through the course of psychological history, names such as Watson, Skinner, Maslow and Rogers will always be noted with the upmost importance. Although these psychological theories differ in so many ways, they will always be linked to one another.

<https://assignbuster.com/analytical-comparison-and-contrast-of-behaviorism-and-humanism/>