

Study on past and present behaviorism psychology essay



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Behaviorism began with Descartes and is considered to be the oldest theory of personality. Descartes saw humans as a machine of sorts, whereas behaviorists view humans as some conduit between the environment and behavior. Behaviorism arose from the coincidence of a number of significant events in psychology and related disciplines at a time when western culture had turned resolutely toward science in scholarly study, and away from religious faith or edict. John B. Watson originated modern behaviorism, asserting that the mentalist perspective was irrelevant and psychology should be concerned solely with behavior. This was based on Ivan Pavlov's classical conditioning experiment with salivating dogs. B. F. Skinner then moved behaviorism into the Operant realm of creation and control of desired actions. This school of thought has since given way to cognitive-behavioral theories, which combine the best of both worlds and have proven effective in the treatment of phobias. Behaviorism: Then and Now

The evolving process of psychology as the study of the mind has been a long and winding road. Those that have traveled this road, in active pursuit of truth, intelligence, and understanding came to an unexpected and abrupt halt with the introduction of behaviorism. This segued into a strong pivotal reaction from previous zeitgeists. The evolution of behaviorism was not readily accepted, but the consistent and aggressive proclamations by Watson began to open the closed doors and minds of introspective psychologists. Watson was abrasive and offensive in his delivery of the theories of behavior, which completely invalidated everything done up to that point in time as frivolous and not a true science. The collective goal of previous fields of psychology had differed in minor aspects, yet had a central

consensus of wanting and needing to be taken as scientific and a serious area of study. The forefathers prior to Watson, Pavlov, and Skinner were of one mind in their pursuit of psychology. Their collective goal was to do whatever it took for the men in this field of study to be heard, to be scholarly, to make a difference, and to leave a legacy of value for the future betterment of mankind. The contributions made by these notorious students of psychology have paved the journey, present and future, for the field of psychology. Their work propelled this school of thought one step closer to becoming an accepted and respected science.

Watsonian Behaviourism

Behaviorism originated with the work of John B. Watson and he was very popular with people. His theory negated all thoughts, feelings, desires, intentions, mental processes, and especially introspection or anything that could not be observed publicly. Those things did not determine what people did or did not do and as such proclaimed that psychology was not concerned with the mind or with human consciousness. Instead, psychology would be concerned only with behavior. He believed that one's environment could have a direct effect on the one's future. Watson based his theories on the work of Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (Goodwin, 2009).

Classic Conditioning

Pavlov, while conducting experiments about digestion on his dog in the 1890s, began to see his dogs salivate upon hearing sounds that seemed to be associated with food, even when food was not present. Pavlov decided to determine if he could cause the dog to salivate by associating a neutral stimulus with the food. This experiment led to what is known as classical <https://assignbuster.com/study-on-past-and-present-behaviorism-psychology-essay/>

conditioning. This became a basic form of learning where a stimulus that elicits a particular response is paired repeatedly with a neutral stimulus. Over time, the neutral stimulus was capable of eliciting the same response when presented alone (DuBrin, 2000, p. 33).

Pavlov's experiments led to temporal association for learning. This would occur when two unrelated events occur repeatedly and forms a response that forms in the mind by becoming meshed and results in the same response (Comer, 2004). That means learning occurs when a natural reflex responds to a stimulus. Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning is considered a major cornerstone of behaviorist theories of learning. In current studies, this has evolved into understanding a response happens when one physically does a certain response or behavior and also by watching someone else do the response or behavior. This is referred to as mirror reflex

Behavior that could be observed, measured, and studied for the goal of shaping, modifying and controlling was the primary focus of behaviorist. This data was considered useful and reliable knowledge that was termed good knowledge because its conception was one of science. The publication of "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It" by Watson in 1913 was often referred to as the "the behaviorist manifesto," and experienced a world that did not question this approach or to psychology being a science. Watson opened his paper with his proclamation of what psychology was and will be. His strong overpowering assumptions eradicated all research and publications that came before as insignificant and surely not science. Watson was emphatic and succinct in his vocalization of the theoretical goal of behaviorist as being one of prediction and control.

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The twentieth century found behaviorism increasing in both popular appeal and rate of criticism. Following on the heels of psychologist that were concerned with testing, labeling and classification of individuals; Watson gave hope to the general public and reinforced the American dream. One's environment could be shaped and modified by behavior and behavior could be shaped by the environment. This translated into everyone had a chance to become anything they were willing to work for. Possible reasons for rejection of Watsonian Behaviorism in the 1930s were the frequent and redundant use of offensive words, or terminology that created distance between followers and this led to trouble in and of itself. Followed by behavioral approaches that made of point to invalidate mankind's worth or value in a demeaning and aggressive. The audacity and overall superior inference of their higher intellect over common people was very estranging for previous advocates. Behaviorism had a tremendous impact on American psychology, but was not so in Europe. Simultaneously, research in a variety of cognitive areas was actively being conducted.

Operant Conditioning

In the 1950's, Harvard psychologist B. F. Skinner took behaviorism to the next level. Whereas Pavlov had sought to produce a desired response by stimulation, Skinner was seeking to control and shape it through a system of rewards and punishments. Operant behavior is controlled by the environment and can be shaped and maintained through reinforcement on a schedule or at random intervals. The mentalist psychologist took offense with Skinner's approach to learning, stating that it did not take into account

or any cognitive or mental capabilities such as: judgment, reflection, perception, free will, or one's ability to process information.

Skinner is considered the best-known behaviorist to use reinforcement techniques and is responsible for much of the sophistication of modern training and teaching. The theory of B. F. Skinner is based upon the idea that learning is a function of change in overt behavior. Changes in behavior are the result of an individual's response to events (stimuli) that occur in the environment. According to Skinner, voluntary or automatic behavior is either strengthened or weakened by the immediate presence of a reward or punishment (Skinner: 1968).

Mirror Neurons

In current studies, this has evolved into understanding an individual's response to the environment happens when one physically does a certain response or behavior and also by watching someone else do the response or behavior (Glasser, 2005). This is referred to as mirror reflex, which are a set of brain cells, found on each side of our brain. It has also been claimed that damages in these cerebral structures can be responsible for mental deficits such as autism. This can be considered one of the most important findings of neuroscience in the last decade.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

Holds that behavioral conditioning was useful in teaching basic tasks and beginner-level skills, however a more cognitive approach is needed to allow the person to progress into more complex and advanced areas. Cognitive

theories view learning as involving the acquisition or reorganization of the cognitive structures through which human process and store information.

Behaviorism and cognitivism both support the practice of analyzing a task and breaking it down into manageable chunks, establishing objectives, and measuring performance based on those objectives. These theories include, for example, modification of behavioral theories, improvement upon gestalt theories, and integration of gestalt and behavioral theories. Most of the more recent research in psychology is carried out in such a manner that they transcend the confines of a single theory and embodies unique and changing theories mixed together.

This theory became the basis of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, which has also proven effective in the treatment of phobias (Fritscher, 2009). First behavior modification is used to overcome the symptoms of the phobia, then cognitive therapy is used to arrive at an understanding of its root cause. Behaviorists focus on eliminating maladaptive, conditional reflexes, and developing more adaptive ones, often working with people suffering from irrational fears or phobias (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). None of the various schools of psychology or theories of behavior are better than the others and no one theory can be the most appropriate under all the circumstances, but each contributes to understanding behavior and cognitive functions.

Conclusion

From the renaissance through the age of enlightenment, reasoned decision increasingly acquired primacy over decision by faith or edict in scholarly study and matters of human affairs. Acceptance of psychology as a science

has been a hard won battle at best and a continuous process of kaizen before any longevity of acceptance is a reality for current scholars of psychology. American Psychologist John B. Watson used Pavlov's work on classical conditioning to pioneer a natural science of psychology called behaviorism in the early 19th century. Watson asserted that psychology should not focus on subjective and non-measurable mental experiences, like consciousness, but should be a study of objective behavior, like reflex. Behaviorism apparently did not meet the psychological communities' criteria for being a comprehensive theory. Overall the general consensus from both sides was and still is; that behaviorism and its ideas have validity in certain areas and can be a useful tool to learn about specific behaviors. It has replaced the mechanical concept of the stimulus-response relationship with a functional approach. Behavior therapy has become one of the most scientifically validated approaches as a result of its emphasis on measurable and observable behavior (Willis & Giles, 1975). It has introduced powerful behavioral research procedures and methodology for studying individuals with applicability in various psychological situations.