MT1: History, Goals, and Methods of Psychology

Amy Robles

Lindsay High School

Mrs. McEmoyl

Period 2

**Introduction**

Have you wondered what psychologists really do while in therapy? Do you think they just sit there with a glass of wine, listening to a person’s problems and writing them down? Well you are wrong, there is a lot more than just jotting down notes. There are many modern psychological theories that are in action these days; many psychologists use them in their clinics, because they are known for being helpful to the patients. From the psychoanalytic theory to sociocultural psychology, all of these modern ways of handling psychological needs, are useful in their own unique way. Behaviorism is a modern type of psychology, started by three well-known psychologists, Ivan Pavlov, John B. Watson, and B.F. Skinner. The Behavioristic theory proves that to change a bad behavior or a habit, one needs to relate it to a reinforcement, which is either a positive or negative reward. This theory has both good and bad effects to the patient, but it can also have many benefits, for example, by learning good behavior and proper manners they can help your future be more successful, and your opportunities for jobs be easier. Behavioral psychologists use several techniques to conduct their treatments toward their patients. Their methods include aversive conditioning, counter conditioning, and many other techniques. The way the psychologists approach the patients and his needs, do cause an effect on the patient, so the psychologists need to be sure that what they are performing is benefiting the patient in a better way and never in a negative way that could hurt the patient in the long run. The behavioristic theory has its effects on patients, they have been known to be good effects that create a change in the way a individual behaves. Many believe in the behavioristic theory and are sure that the effects, benefits, methods, and treatments are real.

**What is the Behavioristic Theory?**

 The theory of the behaviorists is based off of observation and the aspects of human behavior, “Therefore when behaviors become unacceptable, they can be unlearned,” (Bustamante, Howe-Tennant, & Ramo, 1996), which means that the behavioristic theory is pretty much based off of learning what is good behavior and what is not, and changing those behaviors that maybe are not the best. “Behaviorists assume that the only things that are real (or at least worth studying) are the things we can see and observe. We cannot see the mind, the id, or the unconscious, but we can see how people act, react and behave. From behavior we may be able to make inferences about the minds and the brain, but they are not the primary focus of the investigation. What people do, not what they think or feel, is the object of the study? Likewise the behaviorist does not look to the mind or the brain to understand the causes of abnormal behavior.” (Bustamante, Howe-Tennant, & Ramo, 1996). Ivan Pavlov was a Russian psychologist during the 1890’s. “Pavlov encountered a methodological problem that was ultimately to prove more important and more interesting than his physiological research. Ivan Pavlov had discovered "conditioning," which later was known as the Pavlovian conditioning. (Bustamante, Howe-Tennant, & Ramo, 1996).

Pavlovian conditioning began with the observation of his own dog; Pavlov noticed that whenever he would enter the room, with food or with no food the dog would salivate. “Dogs don’t learn to salivate whenever they see food,” observed Pavlov, so that created an even bigger question, he wondered if he could train the dog to salivate with the sound of a tuning fork “Pavlov famously rang a bell every time he fed his dogs. At first the food caused the dogs to salivate, but after a spell of pairing the bell with dinner, the dogs would eventually salivate at just the sound of the bell. That’s called a conditioned response.” (Crow, 2015). However, when Pavlov discovered that “any object or event which the dogs learnt to associate with food (such as the lab assistant) would trigger the same response, he realized that he had made an important scientific discovery…This must have been learned, because at one point the dogs did not do it, and there came a point where they started, so their behavior had changed. A change in behavior of this type must be the result of learning. In behaviorist terms, the lab assistant was originally a neutral stimulus. It is called neutral because it produces no response. (McLeod, 2013).

B.F. Skinner, another important psychologists involved in behaviorism, “looked for a more objective and measured way to study behavior.,” He developed what he called an “operant conditioning” apparatus to do this, which became better known as the Skinner box. This device allowed him to study an animal interacting in its environment. B.F. Skinner “first studied rats in his experiments, seeing how the rodents discovered and used to a level in the box, which dispensed food at varying intervals. Later, Skinner examined what behavior patterns developed in pigeons using the box. The pigeons pecked at a disc to gain access to food. From these studies, Skinner came to the conclusion that some form of reinforcement was crucial in learning new behaviors.” Skinner was much like Pavlov but Skinners theory “involved learned responses to an environment rather than involuntary responses to stimuli.” ("B.F.Skinner.") A professor from John’s Hopkins, John B. Watson was fascinated with the experiments of Pavlov on conditioned stimulus. Watson wanted to see if he could get a conditioned response from a baby, so he developed the Little Albert experiments, which traumatized babies to hate dogs, and pretty much anything that was fuzzy. To prove this he took a “9-month old Albert B., AKA Little Albert. At the beginning of the experiment, Albert was presented with a white rat, a dog, a white rabbit, and a mask of Santa Claus among other things. The lad was unafraid of everything and was, in fact, really taken with the rat. Then every time the baby touched the animals, scientists struck a metal bar behind him, creating a startlingly loud bang. The sound freaked out the child and soon, like Pavlov’s dogs, Little Albert grew terrified of the rat and the mask of Santa and even a fur coat. The particularly messed up thing about the experiment was that Watson didn’t even both to reverse the psychological trauma he inflicted.”(Crow. 2015). Nobody knows what actually happened to the baby, but they know that he either had a lifelong trauma to dogs, or to anything that he was tested with. Each of these psychologists had their own ideas that contributed to development of the behavioristic theory, which made it be more accurate and easier to help those patients that were struggling with behavior.

**What are the techniques that behaviorists use to help their patients today?**

Behavioristic psychologists use many techniques to help their patients. They have discovered many ways to help people with the controlling of their behaviors. Classical conditioning and operant conditioning are examples of ways that behaviorists teach their patients how to improve their behavior. Classical conditioning is “a learning process that happens when two stimuli are repeatedly paired; a response that is at first elicited by the second stimulus is eventually elicited by the first stimulus alone.” (Google Search) “A principal of classical conditioning is that if a behavior occurs repeatedly across time but is not reinforced, the strength of both the cue for the behavior and the behavior itself will diminish and the behavior will extinguish. This principal has been the foundation of behavioral treatments known as "cue exposure"” (Wakefield, 2007) Operant conditioning “is a form of learning. In it, an individual changes its behavior because of the consequences (results) of the behavior. The person or animal learns its behavior has a consequence. That consequence may be. Reinforcement: a positive or rewarding event.”(Operant Conditioning) For behavioristic treatment “Therapy is generally short-term (which, in our field, means anywhere from 3-9 months, or roughly 10-35 sessions).” (Crow, 2015). “By its very design, most behavioral therapy is brief. The aim is not to remake personality, but rather to help the client address specific, identifiable problems in such a way that the client is able to apply the basic techniques and skills learned in therapy to the real world, without the assistance of the therapist. Behavioral therapy focuses more on identifying and changing observable, measurable behaviors than other therapeutic approaches and hence lends itself to brief work. Treatment is linked to altering the behavior, and success is the change, elimination, or enhancement of particular behaviors.”(Wakefield, 2007) Each patient is different, so psychologists are the ones that need to figure out what type of method they will be using for the specific person, for example “such a therapist would not use the same exact techniques to help someone who is suffering from a fear of heights than someone who is suffering from depression.” (Crow, 2015).

 Another way of treating patients is through “Visual imagery can also be used in a technique called covert sensitization. In this procedure, the client is asked to imagine as vividly as possible a sequence of events that begin by seeing his favorite bar; this is typically accompanied by increased craving. As the person proceeds further in imagining entering the bar, sitting down, ordering a drink, and so on, the initial sense of craving shifts to mild discomfort. As he visualizes beginning to take a drink and tastes the alcohol, he is then asked to imagine becoming violently sick and vomiting.” (Wakefield, 2007) Many therapists “discussions about coping mechanisms, role playing, breathing and relaxation methods, positive reinforcement, activities to promote focus, journal writing, social skills training, and modifications in responses to anger, fear, and pain,” to help their patients change their certain behavior.

**How does the way the behaviorists give counsel or approach the issues they are assigned, cause an effect on the person?**

The way behavioristic psychologists approach the patient does have an effect on the patient itself. Psychologists need to be careful what techniques they use, and with what patients they perform that technique. Every patient is different so they need to know how to approach every individual. “The goal of behavioral therapy is to limit self-harm. The risks for this treatment are minimal. Some patients consider the emotional aspects of the sessions risky. Exploring feelings and anxieties can cause bursts of crying and anger. The emotional aftermath of therapy can be physically exhausting and painful. A therapist will help to improve coping mechanisms and to minimize any side effects from therapy.” (Cherney, 2013)

Usually “behaviorists did not pay much attention to people's thoughts, perceptions, evaluations or expectations and instead focused solely on their external and directly observable and measurable behavior. They did this not because they weren't aware of these internal feelings and thoughts, but because they thought them relatively irrelevant to the process of influencing behavior, and too difficult to measure with any accuracy. It turns out that this position was too extreme. More recently, research has shown that internal events such as perceptions, expectations, values, attitudes, personal evaluations of self and others, fears, desires, etc. do affect behavior, and are important to take into account when doing therapy. As a result, old-fashioned "strict" behavioral approaches to treating depression are not as popular today as they used to be.” (Nemade, Reiss, & Dombeck, 2007)

**What are the benefits of behaviorism treatment on patients today?**

The benefits of behaviorist treatment on patients today are many. Today there are many issues involving kids and their behaviors, at schools and also at home. “Behavioral approaches may be quite useful in treatment of anxiety and have occasionally been helpful in the management of more severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia.” (Bustamante, Howe-Tennant, & Ramo, 1996) Behaviorism in general increases the potential of an individual; it helps a person become better in character as well as in behaviors, and manners. Some of the benefits can include “reduced incidents of self-harm, improved social skills, better functioning in unfamiliar situations, improved emotional expressions, less outbursts, better pain management, and ability to recognize the need for medical help” (Cherney, 2013) Due to recent studies suggesting its effectiveness, there has also been a rapid increase in behavior-based therapies for children with diagnoses of autism and other developmental disabilities (Wakefield, 2007).

Behavioral therapy is not exactly a cure for any condition. “It is a teaching method to help cope with everyday life. Depending on individual needs, a person may only need it on a short-term basis. The exact length of a treatment plan depends on individual goals and progress made. During treatment it is important to continue taking any medications as prescribed by a doctor. Some research shows that learned techniques in therapy may gradually reduce the need for medicine. However, each case is different. Speak with a doctor if treatment doesn’t seem to be working.” (Cherney, 2013)

**Conclusion**

Behaviorism is a popular type of modern psychology that is being used in today’s day. Thanks to the help of Ivan Pavlov, B.F. Skinner, and John B. Watson now we can help many kids with ADHD, autism, or other behavior issues. As you can tell, there are many different methods to perform this therapy, from just talking it out to getting medical help with it. They use classical conditioning and operant conditioning to help their patients succeed in their behaviors. Each method helps patient improve with different techniques, for example operant is based off of a reinforcement; either good or bad. There are many more methods that psychologists use to deal with behavior. Behaviorism helps people that are going through phobias, eating disorders, personality disorders, or substance abuse. In this theory “each individual is approached as a unique case, although one to which broad principles can be applied.”(Wakefield, 2007) We can conclude that behavioristic theory overall is amazing, the methods used are somewhat crazy to understand but in the end they do help the patients succeed. Some people say it is like that of the placebo effect, and it can be true, because sometimes just by talking something out your behavior towards that can change, and your views can be more clear.

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