Behavioral & Cognitive Therapy

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≔ WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss two more approaches to psychotherapy, the names of which you're again likely familiar with from previous lessons. While the two approaches may at first seem opposed to one another, you will understand how they go together by the end of this lesson.

The specific areas of focus include:

1. Behavioral Therapy
   a. Classical Conditioning
   b. Operant Conditioning
2. Cognitive Therapy
   a. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

1. Behavioral Therapy

Behavioral therapy uses learning principles to attempt to change different types of behaviors. The idea is that human beings learn unhealthy or maladaptive behaviors over time, and the cure is to unlearn those types of behaviors.

This is very much an action-based approach to therapy. Instead of trying to gain insights into the conscious or unconscious mind, the **behavioral approach** attempts to change by doing.

There are two mechanisms at work in behavioral psychotherapy, as well as two specific applications for each of those.

🗎 TERM TO KNOW

Behavioral Approach
Using conditioning methods, seeks to change behavior only. Internal mental processes are not taken into consideration

1a. Classical Conditioning

The first mechanism is called classical conditioning, more details of which will be discussed later on in the course. For now, what you need to know is that classical conditioning describes the way people come to associate certain positive or negative feelings or sensations with certain types of behaviors.
People are thus more likely to perform behaviors that they associate positive feelings with, and less likely to take part in behaviors that they associate with negative feelings.

This concept can be used in several different ways. In aversion therapy, people learn to associate certain negative feelings with something that's undesirable or that they want to get rid of, such as a certain habit or behavior.

⤳ EXAMPLE If you wanted to stop drinking, you might use a drug which induces nausea in a person. You would come to associate that feeling of sickness with drinking, and thus become less likely to engage in that habit.

Another way that people might reduce the likelihood of or the feelings towards something is desensitization, which involves reducing negative feelings over time.

These could be feelings of fear, anxiety, or aversion towards things at the center of unwelcome phobias or uncharacteristic levels of fear.

⤳ EXAMPLE If you were afraid of snakes, you would be able to desensitize yourself to that fear over time by gradually exposing yourself to snakes in different ways. At first, you might be exposed to them vicariously, meaning by looking at a picture a snake. Or, you might watch a person holding a snake. You're seeing the snakes, but you're not interacting with them yourself. Then, over time, you might hold or touch a snake, or be in the same room as a snake. The hope is that you would become desensitized to and ultimately lose your fear of snakes.

1b. Operant Conditioning

Another mechanism under behavioral therapy is operant conditioning, which is a little bit different. Again, we'll go over more about this function later on, but the important thing to remember is that behaviors are more likely to recur if they're rewarded in some kind of way.

⤳ EXAMPLE As a child, if you were given a reward for studying well, you were probably more likely to study well over time.

Aside from reinforcement, another way to apply this idea is through extinction, which means identifying certain rewards in somebody's life for behaviors that he or she wants to get rid of, and then taking away those rewards.

These are things that you might not have recognized as being rewards initially, but in taking them away, the behavior is less likely to occur, and eventually goes extinct, or stops occurring because the person doesn't want to perform those actions anymore.

⤳ EXAMPLE This can be applied to attention-seeking behavior in children. They might do something negative because they like the attention that they're feeling. If you stop giving them the attention--meaning you stop reacting to the negative behaviors--the children are less likely to act out.

As we've discussed before, the other way of applying this idea is to actually reward behaviors that you want to increase.

> ### IN CONTEXT
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> This can be done on a simple level, such as giving candy to a child, but it's also applied in token economies. When somebody in a particular setting does something that they're supposed to or performs some target behavior that you want to reward, they're immediately given a token.
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> These tokens, just like money, can be used to buy different types of things at a later date. This is something that's often used in schools but has also been used in therapeutic settings as well, such as hospitals. It's come to be very effective as a treatment for certain kinds of unwanted behaviors.

2. Cognitive Therapy

The second theoretical approach we'll discuss is cognitive psychotherapy, which takes a look at people's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. In other words, the **cognitive approach** really focuses on people's internal mental processes, and how those can be affected to, in turn, impact people's mental health.

The idea behind cognitive therapy is that how you perceive an event in your mind is just as important as the event itself. The goal with this approach is to help clients change the thinking patterns that lead to their troublesome emotions, feelings, or behaviors.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Cognitive Approach
Focuses on mental activity; changing thoughts will change feelings, which then changes behavior.

2a. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy is one application of this approach. Cognitive behavioral therapy combines both aspects, behavioral and cognitive, to help people understand how thoughts and feelings influence their behaviors and vice versa.
The cognitive behavioral approach is used to treat phobias, addictions, depression, anxiety, and a broad range of other issues that people have in their daily lives.

The idea is to help people reach an awareness that will allow them to change certain destructive patterns within their lives. These patterns are the sorts of things that we look at as cycles or feedback loops that negatively affect people.

If a certain kind of event occurs, that event may have triggered negative thoughts and feelings in a person, which then might also affect that person's behaviors.

⤷ **EXAMPLE** If somebody is anti-social, then he or she might see rejection from a peer in a negative way. As a result, that person is less likely to take part in group events, which again affects the person's lack of engagement in social situations. The person doesn't have friends, which affects his or her thoughts and feelings. As you can see, this is a type of circle, which can go the other way as well.

Cognitive Behavioral Approach

A combination of conditioning--making new associations and reinforcing preferred behaviors--with identifying and eliminating or changing troublesome thought patterns

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☑ **SUMMARY**

In this lesson, you learned about two more theoretical approaches to psychotherapy: **behavioral therapy** and **cognitive therapy**. Behavioral therapy, which focuses on using learning principles to change human behaviors over time, has two main mechanisms: **classical conditioning** and **operant conditioning**, both of which will be discussed more in later lessons.

While cognitive therapy focuses on mental activity as the key to changing certain behaviors, one of its applications is in **cognitive behavioral therapy**. This type of therapy uses both approaches by combining conditioning with identifying and changing negative thought patterns.

Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Erick Taggart.

📄 **TERMS TO KNOW**

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Cognitive Approach
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Cognitive Behavioral Approach
A combination of conditioning - making new associations and reinforcing preferred behaviors - with identifying and eliminating or changing troublesome thought patterns.