

History of Cognitive Psychology

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss another important theory in the history of psychology, cognitive theory, as well as the work of a particular individual in regards to that theory.

In particular, we'll focus on:

1. Cognitive Theory
2. Work of Piaget
 - a. Theory of Cognitive Development
 - b. Theory of Cognitive Behaviors

1. Cognitive Theory

Cognitive was first used as a term in 1967 by Ulrich Neisser, who noted that there were certain mental states that occurred even in the absence of any outside stimulation.

These were things that happened on their own, not as responses to anything else. This means that **cognitive theory** is in opposition to behaviorism, which says that we only need to study external behaviors.

Neisser (and those after him) noted that instead, it's important to study internal mental processes. These are things like how we perceive, remember, think, and speak.

In cognitive theory, it's also important to remember the individuals themselves, and their different points of view. This is because those differences can influence the sorts of things that occur within the mind, as opposed to in behaviorism, where the things happening outside the body cause a specific kind of reaction.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** An example of this is attention. The way that we pay attention to occurrences outside of our bodies can influence the kinds of things that we remember. If you notice an object that's very brightly colored, you're more likely to remember that. Somebody who didn't notice that would remember other things from the environment.



TERM TO KNOW

Cognitive Theory

2. Work of Piaget

An important figure to remember in cognitive theory is Jean Piaget. Piaget helped form a lot of theories about how cognition develops, particularly in children.

Jean Piaget was a Swiss scientist from the 1920s on, and he used a variety of intelligence tests and interviews to collect data about his different subjects. He then used that data to form his specific theories.

One of his important contributions to cognitive theory was his discussion of how individuals construct the knowledge they acquire through their experiences. Instead of passively taking it in, people put knowledge together to make sense and meaning out of it. People put those experiences into specific categories, which Piaget referred to as a schema.

When they take in this new knowledge, the schema can either be assimilated, or rather grouped together in a certain category, or they can be accommodated for.

When they are accommodated for, the schema can be changed or augmented; new schema can even be created to fit the experiences into those ideas.

2a. Theory of Cognitive Development

Another important theory that came from Piaget was the theory of cognitive development, which you will learn more about in a later lesson.

The basic idea behind cognitive development is that children go through four general stages of mental growth, during which they develop different abilities to understand the world around them.

2b. Theory of Cognitive Behaviors

One last part of cognitive theory to know is the theory of cognitive behaviors. This theory essentially takes the best of both worlds (cognitive and behavioral) and puts them together to create a whole picture of the individual.

With **cognitive behaviorism**, you're able to take the external behaviors and the influence of the environment, as well as mental states, into account when determining the factors that influence an individual's behavior.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Suppose you're at work, and you see candy sitting on the desk. Because of the behaviorism side of it, you're more apt to take the candy because it's pleasurable. You take it, and you eat it. If you were to see the candy there over time, you would continue to reinforce that behavior. You would take the candy and eat it, even if it wasn't yours. On the cognition side of it, because it's repeatedly occurring over time, you're also coming to anticipate or expect it in some way. That mental state of expectation influences your behavior as well.

This theory is important because it has helped to develop a variety of treatments for mental disorders like depression.

In depression, there are also both sides of the story occurring--the negative behaviors that are reinforcing the actions, as well as the negative mindsets.

Both of those things occur to make it more likely that a depressed person will stay depressed. Thus, a lot of cognitive behavioral theories require addressing both problems in order to address the overall disorder.



TERM TO KNOW

Cognitive Behaviorism

A theory that combines both behavioral learning theories and cognitive theories



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **cognitive theory** as another important theory in the history of psychology. As opposed to behaviorism, which focuses only on external behavior, cognitive theory states that certain mental processes can occur even without any outside stimulation.

You now understand that the **work of Jean Piaget** was crucial in the development of cognitive theories, particularly his research that spawned the **theory of cognitive development** and the **theory of cognitive behaviors**, which combines elements of cognitive theory and behaviorism.

Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Erick Taggart.



TERMS TO KNOW

Cognitive Behaviorism

A theory that combines both behavioral learning theories and cognitive theories.

Cognitive Theory

The study of people's internal mental processes, like how they think, perceive, remember, and speak.