

History of Psychological Theories: Behaviorism and Gestalt

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss two important theories in psychology, the theory of Behaviorism and Gestalt psychology, as well as the individuals who were important to the evolution of both theories. You will explore how Behaviorism can improve your self and social awareness skill. You will also consider how Gestalt can help when it comes to your problem-solving skill.

1. Theory of Behaviorism

As you learned in the first lesson of this course, psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behavior. **Behaviorism** focuses specifically on behavior, or the scientific aspects of psychology, to find out what specifically is measurable and observable.

Behaviorism studies the observable behaviors of people to understand their mental processes.

Behaviorism also focuses on the environment and its effects on the individual to determine if the environment influences behavior or causes people to act or react in certain ways.



Self and Social Awareness: Skill Tip

Part of developing your self and social awareness at work is getting to know how your coworkers may react in certain situations. Behaviorism can help you build those skills.

In a lot of ways, Behaviorism itself is a reaction to some of the other theories that you'll study in this course. According to Behaviorists, many of the other theories are too philosophical and not scientific enough.

While other theories can be more introspective in that they involve what the psychologists “think” is occurring, Behaviorism involves very specifically observing and measuring what is occurring in individuals.



TERM TO KNOW

Behaviorism

2. Important Individuals in Behaviorism

There are three individual scientists and psychologists who are extremely important to the history of Behaviorism because of their theories and research:

- Ivan Pavlov
- John Watson
- B. F. Skinner

2a. Ivan Pavlov

Ivan Pavlov may be a familiar name because of his famous experiments with dogs, which involved ringing bells and then bringing food out to the dogs to see whether the dogs would begin salivating in response to the bell.

The important thing to remember about Ivan Pavlov concerning Behaviorism is that he studied the different reflexes and stimuli responses that different animals and, in turn, people had based on what was happening in the surrounding environment.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Ivan Pavlov

Developed the concept of Classical Conditioning.

2b. John Watson

John Watson actually coined the term "Behaviorism" in his 1913 paper, "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It." Watson was able to take the work of Pavlov and adapt it to psychology in an attempt to explain why people behaved in the manner that they did.

He adapted the ideas of stimulus-response, or a person's response to something that's going on in the environment, to human learning to explain that there are certain conditioned responses. These are responses that people "learn" due to experience over time with different stimuli in their environments. People can learn those behaviors, and eventually adapt and grow them into more complex behaviors.

John Watson's "Little Albert" experiments were some of his more famous experiments, and they involved conditioning a certain phobia in a child by showing him different white fluffy animals and then banging loud objects together behind him. The child grew afraid of those white objects because of the noise that he anticipated as a result of seeing them.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

John Watson

Founder of Behaviorism.

2c. B. F. Skinner

B. F. Skinner was a psychologist from the 1950s through the 1970s, who was able to take the work of his predecessors, Pavlov and Watson, one step further to explain human behavior.

You may recognize his name in regards to the “Skinner box,” which was a tool that he used in his animal experiments. He placed an animal inside of the box and gave it some reward or punishment to shape the way it behaved. These experiments led to his major contribution to Behaviorism, which was the idea of operant conditioning.

Operant conditioning states that rewards and punishments in response to positive and negative behavior are forces that can be used to influence the way that people behave. These rewards and punishments make a particular behavior more or less likely to occur.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

B. F. Skinner

Founder of Operant Conditioning.

3. Gestalt Psychology

Gestalt is a German word meaning “the whole form,” or the shape of something. It might make sense, then, that Gestalt psychology followed in the footsteps of Functionalism, which you read about in the last lesson.

As you learned previously, the theory of Functionalism states that mental processes cannot be broken down because they are a flow, or a stream, of consciousness. Gestalt psychology says something very similar to Functionalism. According to Gestalt psychology, we need to study thinking, learning, and perception as an entire unit, not as smaller parts.

Another term that you might hear with Gestalt psychology is “holistic,” which means you can take the whole of something. Gestalt psychology especially highlights the relationships between different things because the goal is to understand how separate parts relate to one another to create something bigger.



Problem Solving: Skill Tip

Making informed decisions is the goal of problem-solving. Learning how parts make up a whole—the focus of Gestalt psychology—can help develop your problem-solving skill.



TERM TO KNOW

Gestalt

Form, pattern, or whole. Thinking, learning, personality cannot be broken into parts—must be studied as a complete unit, must understand relationships.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **theory of Behaviorism**, which studies observable, measurable behavior, often in relation to the environment in which it occurs. Some of the most **important individuals in the history of Behaviorism** are **Ivan Pavlov**, **John Watson**, and **B. F. Skinner**.

You now understand that Skinner was a radical Behaviorist, and that **radical Behaviorism** considers

mental events and processes to be irrelevant to the study of behavior. You also have a better understanding of how your knowledge of this theory can help you improve your self and social awareness.

You went on to learn about **Gestalt psychology** as a theory of psychology, stating that thinking, learning, and perception need to be studied as an entire unit rather than as smaller parts. You explored how parts of this theory can help you when it comes to problem solving.

Good luck!

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY SOPHIA LEARNING. PLEASE SEE OUR [TERMS OF USE](#).



TERMS TO KNOW

Behaviorism

A theory in psychology that studies observable actions or behaviors rather than internal mental states.

Gestalt

Form, pattern, or whole. Thinking, learning, personality cannot be broken into parts—must be studied as a complete unit, must understand relationships.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

B. F. Skinner

Founder of Operant Conditioning.

Ivan Pavlov

Developed the concept of Classical Conditioning.

John Watson

Founder of Behaviorism.