

# History of Psychological Theories: Cognitive Psychology and Humanism

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss two more important theories in the history of psychology, Cognitive Theory and Humanism, as well as the work of individuals in regards to those theories. You will reflect on how these theories relate to your self and social skill. In particular, we'll focus on:

## 1. Cognitive Theory

**Cognitive theory** is in opposition to Behaviorism, which says that we only need to study external behaviors. The theory was first suggested by Ulrich Neisser, who noted that certain mental states occurred even in the absence of any outside stimulation. These were things that happened on their own, not as responses to anything else. As a result, Neisser studied internal mental processes. These are things like how we perceive, remember, think, and speak.

In cognitive theory, there is a focus on individualism. This is because differences in individuals can influence the sorts of things that occur within the mind, as opposed to 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**

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

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## 2. Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget is an important name in cognitive theory. Piaget helped form a lot of theories about how cognition develops, particularly in children. Piaget used a variety of intelligence tests and interviews to collect data about his 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 knowledge 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 grouped in a certain category, or the knowledge can be accommodated. When it is accommodated, the schema can be changed or a new schema can 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 what influences 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 to address the overall disorder.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Cognitive Behaviorism**

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

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## 3. Humanistic Theory

Humanistic theory is the most recently developed of the theories we’ve been discussing. As you can tell from the name, this theory is focused specifically on people and their experiences, as well as how those experiences can influence the way people think and behave.

**Humanism** developed out of opposition to the other major theories, such as behaviorism, which focuses on outside influences, and Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, which focuses on the unconscious. Both behaviorism and psychoanalytic theory highlight the things that are outside of a person’s control, whereas humanism talks about things that a person can directly control.

The major themes of humanism are free will, human creativity, and humans' ability to accomplish certain things. The decision-making aspect of the **problem solving skill** may also be related to humanism.

Humanism is a therapy-centered approach to psychology, as its main goal is to change people's behaviors and lives for the better. This is accomplished through a focus on concepts like self-esteem, belonging, and psychological needs, as well as how to fulfill all of those so that people can develop into better human beings. Self and social awareness have a large part to play in the humanism psychology practice.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Humanism

Believes in human potential, not drives; behavior is chosen, not determined—we have free will; seeks to understand how we perceive the world and our place in it.

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## 4. Carl Rogers

There are two main figures to know in the study of humanistic theory, the first of whom is Carl Rogers. Rogers studied and wrote about the different counseling practices occurring in the U.S. When Rogers opened his practice, he developed what he referred to as client-centered therapy.

Just like humanism, client-centered therapy focused on individuals and their reactions. What these individuals reported having thought, felt, and acted upon were considered just as important as what the therapist observed.

Through this study of the individual, Rogers formed the idea that a person develops their self-image based on a self-evaluation of their thoughts and actions. Rogers wanted to focus on how this happens so that he could better the lives of his patients.

➞ **EXAMPLE** When a person is told as a child that having feelings of anger towards their parents is a bad thing, that person then starts to develop a negative image of themselves. The person is evaluating themselves negatively as a result of those feelings.

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## 5. Abraham Maslow

Abraham Maslow recognized in his patients a need for a positive self-image, or a need to see themselves as being inherently good, worthwhile people. This led to his concept of self-actualization, which is the process of a person fully developing their potential. In other words, self-actualization means being the best that you can be.



#### Self and Social Awareness: Skill Reflect

What would your life look like if you were fully self-actualized, meaning you were living your best life?

Out of the concept of self-actualization came Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is a pyramid showing the overall needs of a person.

On the bottom are the basic, physiological needs such as food, water, and shelter. These basic needs also include feelings of safety and security. Just above those is the need for love and belonging, followed by the need for self-esteem. At the very top of the pyramid is Maslow's idea of self-actualization. The structure shows that people need to have the lower needs met before they can advance to meeting the higher needs. In other words, you need to have your physical needs met, and be able to feel safe and secure, before you can start worrying about whether you have positive self-esteem, or if you're loved by other people. At the same time, Maslow's idea was that people need the higher needs to be met to have fulfilling lives.



## 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.

In this lesson, you also learned that **humanistic theory** is a more recently developed psychological theory focusing on individuals and their experiences. According to humanism, these experiences influence the way people think and behave.

You now understand that there are two main figures important in the development of humanism: **Carl Rogers**, who created client-centered therapy, and **Abraham Maslow**, who created the concept of self-actualization and the Hierarchy of Needs. According to Maslow's Hierarchy, human beings must have their most basic, physiological needs met before they can focus on needs such as love, self-esteem, and ultimately self-actualization. The goal is for people to reach the stage of self-actualization so that they can be the best individuals they possibly can. You learned that this theory relates to your self and social awareness skill.

Good luck!

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### Cognitive Behaviorism

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### Cognitive Theory

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

### Humanism

Believes in human potential, not drives; behavior is chosen, not determined—we have free will; seeks to understand how we perceive the world and our place in it.

