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Behaviorism School in The Study of Personality in Psychology

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Abstract: This article explores the development of the behaviorism school of thought in psychology, its main ideas, and its role in the study of personality. Behaviorism emphasizes the need to study human behavior on a scientific and empirical basis, considering personality as a set of behavioral reactions shaped by external environmental influences. The article analyzes the stimulus-response (S-R) model, Thorndike's law of effect, and Tolman's S-I-R model. It also covers the development and significance of cognitive-behavioral psychology in modern psychology, highlighting the interconnection between human behavior, thoughts, and emotions. The article provides a comparative analysis of historical and contemporary approaches to personality studies in psychology.

Keywords: Psychology, personality, stimulus, response, consciousness, theory.

Introduction: Throughout the history of psychology, various theoretical approaches have emerged, one of which is behaviorism. This theory, developed in the early 20th century in the United States, sought to establish psychology as an exact and empirically based science. The founders of behaviorism asserted that the foundation of human psychological life is behavior. They focused not on internal processes such as consciousness, thinking, or sensation, but rather on externally observable behaviors as the main object of study.

The behaviorism school played a significant role in the study of personality in psychology. Although its core idea focused on analyzing behavior, some of its proponents held differing positions in addressing this issue. Behaviorism emerged as a new direction in psychology at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1913, American psychologist John Watson presented his famous lecture "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It," in which he outlined the main ideas of behaviorism. Watson proposed transforming psychology into the science of behavior. In his view, "the main task of psychology is to observe and control the behaviors of humans and animals." He sought to exclude internal processes such as consciousness and sensation from psychological studies.

According to behaviorists, personality consists of the total set of behavioral reactions specific to an individual. The stimulus-response (S–R) formula is fundamental in behaviorism. Thorndike's law of effect clarifies the connection between S and R, emphasizing that when reinforcement occurs, the response is likely to be repeated. This reinforcement can be positive, such as rewards or expected outcomes, or negative, such as pain, punishment, failure, or criticism. Human behavior often aims to achieve positive reinforcement or avoid negative outcomes. Thus, according to behaviorism, personality manifests through instinctive drives, socialized emotions, learned skills, adaptability to the environment, and abilities that aid in retaining these behaviors. This implies that personality is a system of organized and relatively stable learned behaviors. Stable behaviors are based on individuals' ability to adapt to new situations, leading to the acquisition of new skills.

Behaviorists view humans as programmable beings capable of learning specific behaviors and responses through changes in reinforcement. American psychologist Edward Tolman modified the traditional S–R model by introducing the S–I–R model, adding an intermediary factor—the individual's innate traits, physiological states, and prior experiences that influence their mental processes.

Later, other representatives of this school also advanced their theories. One of the most notable was American psychologist Burrhus Frederic Skinner, who made significant contributions to psychology with his theory of operant behaviorism. Skinner believed that human and animal behaviors are more influenced by external environmental factors than by conscious processes. According to Skinner, every behavior is reinforced or weakened depending on its consequences. His approach remains widely used today in education, therapy, and animal training.

Skinner's work, though stemming from classical theories, recognized the complexity of human behavior. He believed that the best way to understand behavior is to study its causes and consequences, coining the term "operant conditioning." Operant conditioning involves deliberate actions affecting the environment, known as operants. Skinner identified processes that increased or decreased the likelihood of certain behaviors based on reinforcement or punishment.

Skinner's theory of operant behavior was influenced by Thorndike's law of effect (1905), which he studied using the "puzzle box" experiment with animals. Skinner extended Thorndike's ideas by introducing the concept of reinforcement. Reinforced behaviors tend to be repeated, whereas unreinforced behaviors tend to diminish. He conducted experiments using the "Skinner box," similar to Thorndike's puzzle box, to study operant conditioning in animals.

Skinner identified three types of responses or operants:

1. Neutral operants – responses from the environment that neither increase nor decrease the likelihood of repeating behavior.
2. Reinforcers – responses that increase the likelihood of repeating behavior, which can be positive or negative.
3. Punishers – responses that decrease the likelihood of repeating behavior.

We all have experienced reinforcement and punishment in our lives. For example, as children, if we spoke during class and the teacher warned us to stop, this punishment reduced the likelihood of repeating that behavior. In adolescence, wearing a particular brand may elicit positive reinforcement through peer approval, increasing the chances of repeating such behavior.

Skinner demonstrated positive reinforcement by placing a hungry rat in the Skinner box. When the rat accidentally pressed a lever, a food pellet was released. After several repetitions, the rats learned to press the lever deliberately to receive food. This showed how positive reinforcement strengthened behaviors.

For instance, if a student receives a reward every time they complete homework, they are more likely to repeat this behavior in the future.

Negative reinforcement involves removing an unpleasant stimulus to strengthen a behavior. For example, taking aspirin to relieve a headache reinforces the behavior of taking medication in future headache situations. Skinner demonstrated this by placing rats in a Skinner box where they experienced an electric shock. When the rats accidentally pressed the lever, the shock stopped. Soon they learned to press the lever

intentionally to avoid the shock. This process teaches escape learning and avoidance learning.

Punishment, unlike reinforcement, aims to reduce or eliminate behaviors by introducing aversive outcomes. It may involve applying an unpleasant stimulus, such as an electric shock, or removing a positive stimulus, such as deducting salary for undesirable behavior. Distinguishing between punishment and negative reinforcement can sometimes be challenging.

Today, pure behaviorism is rarely applied in psychology, as it became clear that human mental activity cannot be fully explained by external behaviors alone. This led to the emergence of cognitive-behavioral psychology (Cognitive Behaviorism), which considers not only external stimuli and punishments but also internal thoughts, beliefs, and worldviews as influential factors in behavior:

Thoughts → Emotions → Behaviors

Cognitive-behavioral psychology studies and helps regulate both external behaviors and internal cognitive and emotional states. It is currently one of the most effective approaches in psychology and education, examining the interconnections between human thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. This approach is widely used in psychotherapy, education, healthcare, and business due to its clear, practical, and easily applicable methods.

J. Rotter, a representative of cognitive-behavioral psychology, expressed social behavior through the following concepts:

1. Behavior potential: Every person throughout their life acquires a certain set of actions and behaviors.
2. A person's behavior is influenced by their expectations and subjective probabilities—that is, their belief that in certain situations, specific behaviors will likely result in reinforcement.
3. A person's behavior is also influenced by reinforcements (external influences) and values that are significant for them.
4. A person's behavior is affected by their personality type and their locus of control.

According to J. Rotter, behavioral potential encompasses five main blocks of reactions that are "technically available":

1. Behavioral reactions aimed at achieving success, which serve to justify social recognition.
2. Behavioral reactions that ensure adaptation by complying with social norms and the expectations of others.
3. Defensive behavioral reactions used under the

influence of the current situation.

4. Behavioral reactions expressing escape techniques aimed at "leaving the stress zone," fleeing, or seeking rest.

5. Aggressive behavioral reactions—manifestations of physical aggression in response to others' criticism, sarcasm, mockery, or actions that contradict one's interests or desires.

Similar to J. Rotter, A. Bandura also presented his unique approaches to the problem of personality. A. Bandura introduced four intermediary processes into the traditional S–R (stimulus-response) behavioral scheme:

1. Attention to the model behavior for imitation: This involves factors such as clarity, distinctiveness, emotional appeal, and functional relevance of the model.
2. Memory: The ability to retain information about the model's behavior.
3. Motor reproduction: The sensory capabilities and motor skills necessary for perceiving and reproducing the behavior of the model.
4. Motivation: The individual's desire to reproduce the behavior of the model.

In the early stages of development, a child's personal successes depend on their readiness to act in accordance with others' expectations. The child starts performing actions that meet the expectations of parents and bring satisfaction, gradually beginning to act like others.

According to Bandura's social cognitive theory, external and social environments influence a person's behavior, which is seen as a product of their activity. Thus, a person changes their environment through their behavior and influences both their surroundings and their own behavior.

An individual can observe the consequences of their behavior, strive to avoid foreseeable risks, and form mental representations of future outcomes.

From these perspectives, it is evident that classical behaviorism and its modern followers—the representatives of social cognitive theory—differ from other personality theories through their methodological approaches and research methods in addressing the problem of personality.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion, behaviorism remains one of the foundational schools in psychology that introduced scientific and precise methods for studying personality. It interprets personality as a set of learned reactions shaped by environmental stimuli and explains behavior

through the S–R model. Although behaviorism initially focused only on external behaviors, later research highlighted the need to consider the complexity of human mental activity, including thoughts and emotions. Consequently, cognitive-behavioral psychology emerged, studying human thoughts, emotions, and behaviors as interconnected processes. Today, cognitive-behavioral psychology is widely applied in psychotherapy, education, healthcare, and other fields, contributing significantly to human well-being and development.

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