

## The Behaviourist Perspective

A perspective is a view that involves assumptions (beliefs) about human behaviour. Each perspective brings something different to our understanding of human behaviour. The behaviourist perspective assumes that all behaviour is learned through experiences and life events. Our environment and interaction with those around us shape our behaviour. Many external factors can have an influence on our behaviour.

Founded by John Watson, Behaviourism (behavioural perspective) also called the learning theory is based on the following principles:

- Psychology is a science.
- Objectivity is obtained by observable and measurable behaviour.
- Behaviour is the result of stimulus – response association.
- All behaviour is learned through the environment.

The behavioural perspective is based on the idea that when we are born our mind is a ‘tabula rasa’ (a blank slate) and all behaviour is acquired through conditioning. Conditioning occurs through interaction with the environment, with our behaviour being shaped by our responses to stimuli.

The two types of conditioning are called classical and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning is learning through association and operant conditioning is learning by consequence. There is also the influence from the Social Learning Theory which claims that we learn through observation, imitation and modelling.

### Classical Conditioning: Learning by Association

Discovered by Ivan Pavlov in his famous dogs experiment, classical conditioning is learning through association. That is, where an association is formed between stimuli creating a learned response.

Classical Conditioning has three phases or steps:

|                             |       |    |            |
|-----------------------------|-------|----|------------|
| <b>Before conditioning:</b> | Food  | -> | Salivation |
|                             | (UCS) |    | (UCR)      |

(Food is the unconditioned stimulus because it naturally produces a response. Salivation is the unconditioned response as it is naturally produced by the presence of food. No conditioning has taken place yet)

|                             |      |   |       |    |            |
|-----------------------------|------|---|-------|----|------------|
| <b>During conditioning:</b> | Bell | + | Food  | -> | Salivation |
|                             | (CS) |   | (UCS) |    | (UCR)      |

(The bell, which is the neutral stimulus, and food are paired together. Notice that the food is always presented last as no learning had taken place yet; the natural response of salivation is stimulated by the presence of food. This pairing of stimuli is presented repeatedly.)

|                            |      |    |            |
|----------------------------|------|----|------------|
| <b>After conditioning:</b> | Bell | -> | Salivation |
|                            | (CS) |    | (CR)       |

(Learning has taken place and the Bell now produces salivation. Salivation has become the conditioned response as it is not natural for a dog to salivate when a bell is rung).

## Operant Conditioning: Learning by Trial and Error/ Consequences

### Learning by consequences of behaviour

Skinner agreed with Pavlov that all behaviour is learned but he argued that behaviour is determined by its consequence.

He proposed three types of behavioural consequence:

- Positive reinforcement – strengthens behaviour by increasing the chance of the behaviour occurring again.
- Negative reinforcement – strengthens behaviour through the removal of an unpleasant stimuli
- Positive Punishment – weakens behaviour by giving an undesirable consequence
- Negative Punishment - weakens behaviour through the removal of desirable consequences.

## Social Learning Theory: Learning by Observation and Imitation

Albert Bandura's social learning theory states that people learn from each other through the simple process of observation and imitation (copying).

The four processes in social learning are:

**Attention** – in order to learn, you must be paying attention

**Retention** – you must be able to retain the information

**Reproduction** – performing the behaviour you have seen

**Motivation** – being motivated to imitate the behaviour through reinforcement or punishment.

Bandura also proposes that we can learn from observing how others are reinforced or punished. This is called **vicarious reinforcement**.

Bandura's famous Bobo doll experiment provides evidence for the social learning theory.

## **Evaluation**

### Strengths and weaknesses of the Behaviourist Perspective

The following table shows some strengths and weaknesses of the Behaviourist Perspective. Your task is to complete the table by writing a statement explaining how or why each point is a strength or weaknesses.

| STRENGTHS  | WEAKNESSES  |
|--|---|
| Falsifiable...   | Deterministic...  |
| Scientific...  | Does not account for other types of learning...                   |
| Effective in therapy in changing maladaptive behaviours... | Ignores mental processes such as moods, thoughts and feelings...  |
| Objective ....   | Classical and Operant conditioning is based on animal studies.... |

### Applying debates to the Behaviourist Perspective

Circle which of the following debates are relevant to the Behaviourist perspective and then write a supporting statement explaining why it is relevant.

Reductionism

vs

Holism

Freewill

vs

Determinism

Nature

vs

Nurture

Individual

vs

Situational

## How the Behaviourist Perspective is different from and similar to the Psychodynamic Perspective

The following is a comparison of the similarities and differences between the two perspectives. Complete the boxes with the opposing view and decide whether the perspectives share the view or whether they differ.

| Psychodynamic                                       | Behaviourist   | Similarity or Difference |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| Current behaviour is determined by past experiences |  |                          |
|   | Objective measurements   |                          |
|   | Deterministic assuming behaviour is beyond an individual's free will |                          |
| Concerned with internal events (mental processes)   |  | Difference               |
|   | Theory is based on animal research                                   |                          |
|   | Scientific   |                          |