

THE LEARNING APPROACH

ASSUMPTIONS

1. We all begin life as a blank slate. Experiences and interactions with the environment shape our behaviour and these changes are directly observable.
2. We learn through the processes of operant conditioning, classical conditioning and social learning. This can be understood using the stimulus-response model.

THE STIMULUS-RESPONSE MODEL

Stimulus: change in the environment that can be detected by one of our five senses. In behavioural psychology, a stimulus is something that elicits a behavioural response or reaction. Some responses are involuntary. These responses are called reflexes and they are often responses that are evolutionarily adaptive like flinching.

THREE THEORIES OF LEARNING

CLASSICAL CONDITIONING

Phobias can be learned through classical conditioning, a process where two stimuli become associated with each other [discovered by Ivan Pavlov in 1927; Pavlov's dog salivation experiment]. Fear can be conditioned, leading to the idea that if phobias can be learned then they can also be unlearned [Silverman & Saavedra, button phobia].

OPERANT CONDITIONING

Discovered by Skinner who observed that when organisms perform a behaviour, what happens right after the behaviour determines the likelihood of it occurring again. If the behaviour is rewarded/positively reinforced, it will become more likely, and if it is punished it will become less likely. He discovered that negative reinforcement can also act as a reward, making behaviour more likely. The term 'primary reinforcer' is used for rewards that meet a basic human need; secondary reinforcer is something that does not meet a need but is associated with something that does. S&S used positive reinforcement; Fagen et al. used operant conditioning to train animals to perform behaviours.

SOCIAL LEARNING

Bandura et al. examined how children learn aggressive behaviour by social learning; believed that behaviour is learned via observation and imitating people with whom we identify or admire. We pay attention to their behaviour & if we are able to reproduce it, and are motivated to do so, we may perform the same behaviour ourselves at some point in the future.

ISSUES & DEBATES

APPLICATIONS TO EVERYDAY LIFE

The learning approach's theories and studies have practical applications in clinical disorders treatment, captive animal management, and media influence on children's behavior.

INDIVIDUAL AND SITUATIONAL EXPLANATIONS

Individual differences are influenced by sociocultural environments. The approach can be linked to situational explanations, as exposure to conditioned stimuli, role models, reinforcement, or punishment can influence an individual's behaviour at any time.

NATURE VERSUS NURTURE

Focuses on the nurture's role but reflexes in classical conditioning also supports nature.

THE USE OF CHILDREN IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Bandura & S&S both worked with children. Consider the ethics they followed.

THE USE OF ANIMALS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Fagen et al. worked with elephants; in this study, you will have the opportunity to think about the issues presented by working with one of the planet's largest endangered species in a real-world setting, as opposed to the usual rats, cats and dogs studied in the laboratories.