

Breger L & McGaugh J L. Critique and reformulation of "learning-theory" approaches to psychotherapy and neurosis. *Psychol. Bull.* 63:338-58, 1965. [Univ. Oregon, Eugene, OR and Univ. California, Irvine, CA]

'Learning theory' explanations of neuroses and treatment techniques based on conditioning models were critically reviewed. The theories of learning used by behavior therapists were shown to be invalid and out of date. Their claims for the success of treatment were vitiated by a variety of uncontrolled and biasing factors. [The *Science Citation Index*<sup>2</sup> (SCI<sup>2</sup>) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>2</sup> (SSCI<sup>2</sup>) indicate that this paper has been cited over 185 times since 1965.]

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"In the early-1960s, my colleague James McGaugh and I were both teaching in the psychology department of the University of Oregon. Jim was trained in the Tolman tradition at the University of California, Berkeley; he was an experimental psychologist with a deep appreciation of the complexities of human learning and memory. I was a psychoanalytically oriented clinical psychologist, interested in psychological disturbance and psychotherapy. At that time, several of our colleagues began to espouse the virtues of the 'new' behavior therapy, both that stemming from Wolpe, Eysenck, and their ilk, and the Skinnerian operant conditioning approach. At first we found their enthusiasm hard to comprehend; they seemed to have rediscovered just those aspects of John B. Watson's behaviorism that had long been proven inadequate (by Karl Lashley in the 1930s for instance). Our discussions failed to persuade them and behavior therapy seemed to be growing, so we decided to do a thorough review of the area and detail our findings in an article.

"What we found in the literature was worse than we anticipated. What was called 'modern learning theory' consisted of an amalgam of outmoded classical conditioning models. Learning was equated with peripheral response acquisition and all the laboratory work that demonstrated the necessity of central mediators (schemas, plans, cognitive maps) was ignored. The behavior therapists were using a model of learning to explain complex human behavior that could not explain the behavior of rats in mazes. We presented all this and argued strongly for a cognitive or schema theory.

"In addition to the theoretical inadequacies, the behavior therapy movement was characterized by a curious contrast between claims to scientific status, on the one hand, and grossly unscientific procedures (loose and shifting use of concepts, poorly controlled studies), on the other. We pointed out that simply using words like 'objective,' 'experimental,' and 'controlled' did not make one's work scientific and we called on those in the field to live up to their own standards.

"As one might expect, our article aroused a good deal of controversy. There were rebuttals and counterrebuttals, the hardliners ignored it (or didn't understand the argument), and those already suspicious of behavior therapy welcomed it. And there were a number of people working within the behaviorist movement who were strongly influenced by our arguments. Theory has clearly moved toward a cognitive model and claims for success are more temperate.

"My own subsequent work has continued along two of the lines laid down in the article. I have used a cognitive or schema model—for instance in my paper on dream function in information processing terms<sup>1</sup>—a model which then expanded into a wider concern with symbolism, meaning, and the interpretation of human experience. And I continue to analyze theory from an outside or critical perspective, most recently in my book on Freud.<sup>2</sup>

1. Breger L. Function of dreams. *J. Abnormal Psychol.* 72:1-28, 1967.

2. -----, *Freud's unfinished journey: conventional and critical perspectives in psychoanalytic theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. 145 p.