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A Brief History of Radical Behaviourism and its Development

Speaker: Gillian Kearns, Early Childhood Educator & Co-founder of NeuroPride Ireland

What is Behaviourism?

- Behaviourism states that all behaviours arise from interacting with the environment through a process called 'conditioning'
- It is primarily concerned with observable behaviour that can be measured and controlled - it rejects introspection or trying to interpret people's thoughts and emotions as these can't be reliably measured and are prone to bias
- Claims to be thoroughly scientific
- Mind is 'tabula rosa', blank slate
- Most behaviourists believe there is little difference between the behaviour of humans and animals therefore studying rats and pigeons in very controlled environments formed the basis for much research
- Behaviourists believe that all behaviour comes down to a stimulus - response association

John b. Watson (1913): purpose of psychology

'To predict, given the stimulus, what reaction will take place; or, given the reaction, state what the situation or stimulus is that has caused the reaction.' (1930, p. 11). and "Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior."

- Radical behaviorism: Agrees that the goal should be to predict and control behaviour. Also rejected study of internal events but should be considered in analysis of behaviour. Viewed as a 'natural science'
Rejects idea of 'tabula rosa'

Beginnings of Behaviourism

- **John B. Watson** (1878-1958) “Psychology as the behaviorist views it” (1913)
 - Influenced by Pavlov (classical conditioning) and Thorndike (Law of Effect)
 - Rejected ideas of Freudian and Jungian theories which relied on interpretation
 - Little Albert Experiment

Beginnings of Radical Behaviourism

- **B. F. Skinner** (1904-1990)
 - viewed classical conditioning as too simplistic for complex behaviour
 - defined behaviour by function
 - Differed to Watson in view of mind, but felt it not productive to study
 - Cause & result of actions: operant conditioning
 - Reinforcement and Extinction (positive & negative)
 - 'Skinner Box'
 - Schedules of reinforcement (extinguishing)
 - Token Economy (primary & secondary reinforcers)
 - Behaviour Modification (shaping)
 - Fails to take into account genetic/inherited and cognitive factors involved in learning
 - Lead to behaviour analysis - said behaviourism is a philosophy of science whereas behavioural analysis is a science



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* will include some distressing content



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Ola Ivar Lovass & Applied Behavioural Analysis

- Built on work of Paul Fuller (1948); Charles D. Ferster & Marian K. DeMyer (1960) - first experiments on autistic children “Errorless Learning”
- Young Autism Programme (UCLA) “task of building a person where little had existed before” 19 children, began in 1970
- Beth, Billy & Chuck
- Extinction, Fading, reinforcers and aversives
- Discrete Trial Training
- Robert Koegel - Pivotal Response Treatment (ABA with Play)
- Feminine Boy Project - Richard Green (1974) - Kraig. George A. Rekers.
- “Screams, slaps and love” - Life magazine 1965

Ola Ivar Lovass Quotes

- You see, you start pretty much from scratch when you work with an autistic child. You have a person in the physical sense — they have hair, a nose and a mouth — but they are not people in the psychological sense. One way to look at the job of helping autistic kids is to see it as a matter of constructing a person. You have the raw materials, but I you have to build the person.
- I knew that she could inhibit it, and that she would inhibit it if she knew I would hit her. So I let her know that there was no question in my mind that I was going to kill her if she hit herself once more - (interview with Paul Chase 1974 Psychology Today)
- “Isolation or electric shock may seem harsh, but these are ‘acts of affection’ for children who have spent large parts of their lives hurting themselves.”
- “Since the emphasis of our treatment program is to make the child as neat and appropriate as possible, we attempt to suppress the more severe or grotesque form of self-stimulatory by the use of aversive stimuli....It is obviously embarrassing for people to be in the company of a child who jumps up and down or ritualistically slap his arms in front of his face” speech to National Society for Autistic Children (now Austim Society of America)



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