

Psychology: Contemporary Perspectives

One of the foundational discoveries of psychology is the conditioned response, which underlies all learning—the means by which we adapt to our environments. In studies that won him the Nobel Prize in 1904, Ivan Pavlov demonstrated that when a tone (and later other sounds and other stimuli) is sounded at the same time food is presented, a dog will eventually salivate at the sound alone, because the animal comes to associate the sound with the arrival of food. The studies are noteworthy to this day not just because they reveal a basic form of learning but also because they demonstrate how invisible mental processes can be studied and measured.

Since then, psychologists have shown that:

• Attachment to a caregiver in infancy and early childhood heavily influences an individual's ability to reach optimal cognitive, emotional, and social development as an adult.

• Intelligence is a general mental capacity that operates in many spheres of life.

• Decision-making and attitudes are subject to many biases. Chief among them is the tendency to overestimate how much we, rather than situations or environments, are responsible for the outcome of an event—the fundamental attribution error.

• Depression arises in large part because the brain has a built-in bias toward negative information, which registers faster, more strongly, and more enduringly than positive information. Prioritizing the speedy detection of danger, this so-called negativity bias likely developed to keep us out of harm's way, although it explains why a word of criticism has so much staying power and negative political advertising is effective.

• Learned helplessness is a sense of futility that develops after the failure of many efforts to escape a negative, uncontrollable situation. Even if the negative stimulus ends, people often retain the belief that nothing they do can make a difference, and they stop trying.

• Memory is not an indelible snapshot of events but a malleable recollection of events. Memories typically undergo revision every time we summon them up and recount them, then return them to storage.

• Stereotypes are important shortcuts in thinking but they have downsides—they also contribute to development of prejudice.

• Groupthink occurs when well intentioned people make horrible decisions as a group. Individuals stifle dissent in order to maintain group harmony or gain the approval of others. Groupthink is said to be responsible for the Vietnam War, the Challenger space-shuttle disaster, and media reporting during the 2016 election.

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â€¢ Stress, or challenge, is a necessary condition for growth and adaptation; chronic stress is a different matter, constricting people physically and emotionally, and requiring any of many strategies to nullify its harmful effects.

â€¢ Adolescence and young adulthood are prime times for psychological distress to manifest itself. Because humans can do well in a wide array of situations; children automatically make adaptations to their early rearing environment that may serve them less well as they move out into the wider world.

â€¢ Neuroplasticity, the capacity of brain/mind to reshape itself in response to experience, is a basic characteristic of the human nervous system, and it means that change is always possible.

Reference

[Handbook of Mindfulness: Theory, Research, and Practice](#)
[Affirming Methodologies](#)