

Behavioral Psychotherapy: Unlocking Change Through Action

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Behavioral psychotherapy is one of two streams of thought (the other being cognitive psychotherapy) that have come together to produce cognitive behavioral therapy.

Behavioral psychotherapy has a rich tradition in research and practice. From a purely behavioral perspective, behavior therapy has shown considerable success with clients from a variety of problems. Traditional behavior therapy draws from respondent conditioning and operant conditioning to solve client problems.

Current forms

Behavioral therapy based on operant and respondent principles has considerable evidence base to support its usage. This approach remains a vital area of clinical psychology and is often termed clinical behavior analysis. Behavioral psychotherapy has become increasingly contextual in recent years. Behavioral psychotherapy has developed greater interest in recent years in personality disorders as well as a greater focus on acceptance and complex case conceptualizations.

One current form of behavioral psychotherapy is functional analytic psychotherapy. Functional analytic psychotherapy is a longer duration behavior therapy. Functional analytic therapy focuses on in-session use of reinforcement and is primarily a relationally-based therapy. As with most of the behavioral psychotherapies, functional analytic psychotherapy is contextual in its origins and nature, and draws heavily on radical behaviorism and functional contextualism.

Functional analytic psychotherapy holds to a process model of research, which makes it unique compared to traditional behavior therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Functional analytic psychotherapy has a strong research support. Recent functional analytic psychotherapy research efforts are focusing on management of aggressive inpatients.

In rehabilitation

Currently, there is a greater call for behavioral psychologists to be involved in rehabilitation efforts.

Supervision

Recent efforts in behavioral psychotherapy have focused on the supervision process. A key point of behavioral models of supervision is that the supervisory process parallels the behavioral psychotherapy.

Professional organizations

The Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) has a special interest group for practitioner issues, behavioral counseling, and clinical behavior analysis ABA:I. ABAI has larger special interest groups for autism and behavioral medicine. ABAI serves as the core intellectual home for behavior analysts. ABAI sponsors two conferences/year - one in the U.S. and one international.

The Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) also has an interest group in behavior analysis, which focuses on clinical behavior analysis. In addition, the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies has a special interest group on addictions.

Doctoral-level behavior analysts who are psychologists belong to American Psychological Association's division 25 - Behavior analysis. APA offers a diplomate in behavioral psychology.

The World Association for Behavior Analysis offers a certification in behavior therapy.

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