Cognitive-Behavioral Theories

Chapter 16
Methodological Behaviorists

- Assume that all learning arises through classical and instrumental conditioning
- Unlike strict behaviorists, thoughts are phenomena that come about through learning and can be shaped by learning
- Thoughts are mental behaviors we can identify through self-report
Albert Ellis

- Developed a therapy technique known as **rational psychotherapy**
  - Emphasis placed on rational, rather than irrational thinking
- When criticized for ignoring emotions in his theory, changes the name of the theory to **rational emotive therapy (RET)**
- With the rise of behaviorism, Ellis renamed his psychotherapy **rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT)**
  - NOTE: rational psychotherapy/RET contained behavioral interventions **prior** to the rise of behaviorism
REBT

- Theoretically, REBT is related to Adler’s concept of inferiority feelings.
- Ellis emphasizes that absolutistic philosophical assumptions lead to dysfunctional behaviors and emotions → postmodern, constructivist, approach
  - I must... should... ought...
  - It is right... wrong...
  - Spirituality & religion (goals to be chosen with caution)
- Believes in innate human tendency for self-actualization (ala Maslow & Rogers)
  - BUT, also believes in an innate tendency to be self-defeating
  - Must use constructive, positive, human potential to oppose these inherent self-defeating tendencies
The Process of Self-Defeat

- Humans are thinking, emoting, moving, and perceiving animals
  - These functions are interactional and transactional
  - Fundamental overlap of thoughts and feelings
    - Thought BECOMES emotion
    - Often, dysfunction springs from caring too much about how others perceive us or think about us
    - People frequently feel they can only accept themselves if others accept them
The A-B-C Theory of Personality

1. When a highly charged emotional consequence (C-fear) follows a significant activating event (A-dog), A seems to cause C

In reality, however, A does NOT cause C
The A-B-C Theory of Personality (cont.)

2. In reality, emotional consequences (C) are largely formed through an individual’s belief system (B-dogs are dangerous).

The integration of the belief system explains how two people with the same experience can respond in vastly different ways.
The A-B-C Theory of Personality (cont.)

3. Once beliefs are effectively challenged, or disputed (D-not all dogs are dangerous), unpleasant emotional consequences (C) are eliminated or at least significantly lessened.

Thus, we see how dysfunction springs from the interaction of behavior, cognition, and emotion.
More on Dysfunctions

- Ellis held that individuals are more likely to experience dysfunctions when their beliefs are grounded in dogmatic, musturbatory beliefs systems, that take the form of absolute musts
  - I absolutely MUST receive an A in this class...
  - My living conditions absolutely MUST be comfortable...
  - I MUST have the approval of others...

- Dysfunction improves with modification of these beliefs
The Inherited Nature of Dysfunctions

- Ellis believed that our musturbatory beliefs are mostly inherited and biologically determined.
  - 80% biological, 20% environmental
  - “We inherit a tendency to raise cultural preferences into musts and social norms into absolute shoulds.”
Psychotherapy with REBT

- Directive...
- Learn to judge behavior in terms of what is right for the individual, not what others believe → identify TRUE value system
- Free individuals from irrational, dysfunctional, beliefs so that they might construct a confident image of their self-worth
  - Cognitive therapy (identify shoulds, musts)
  - Emotion evocative therapy (prepare clients for experience of emotions)
  - Behavior therapy (change maladaptive behaviors/thoughts—implosion)
Aaron Beck

- **Cognitive therapy**
  - Thoughts largely influence our behaviors
  - “Turned the client into a colleague who researches verifiable reality”
    - Collaborative
    - Rooted in empirical evidence
Piaget was probably the most influential theorist in the field of human development. He proposed that there were several early stages of cognitive development that built upon each other and that defined what abilities each of us had; mastering of some skill was the sign that we had passed into the successive stage.
Piaget also offered us the notion of schema which represented a cognitive representation and filter of information. In Piaget's schema theory information is filtered from the world and assimilated into the schema; however if the information is so disparate then the schema is altered or made to accommodate the new information.
Beck's Cognitive Theory

- Individuals form many self-concepts defined as "clusters of attitudes about the self... consisting of generalizations made on the basis of interactions with the environment"
- Concepts can be positive or negative in valence and they can be affected by additional environmental cues
- Beck observed that his patients had endorsed many negative self-concepts which he termed the "cognitive triad"
Beck's Cognitive Theory (cont.)

- These unrealistically negative and distorted attitudes influence the depressed patient's view of the self, world, and future
  - But what does this look like?
- Vulnerability to depression occurs when these negative views become incorporated into cognitive schemata
  - Organized, enduring (trait-like) representations of knowledge and experience, generally formed during childhood, that guide the processing of current situational information
  - Includes an individual’s fundamental core beliefs and assumptions about how the world operates
Beck's Specific Vulnerability

Hypothesis

- Difficulties in early life can lead to particular maladaptive schema that leave us vulnerable to depression when confronted with particular situations

- **Sociotropy**
  - Extreme interpersonal orientation and a vulnerability to depression in the face of interpersonal stressors

- **Autonomy**
  - Extreme achievement orientation and a vulnerability to depression in the face of interpersonal stressors
Automatic Thoughts

- Involuntary, unintentional thoughts
  - Difficult to stop/regulate
  - Self-monologues, inner voices criticizing or berating us
    - Woman engaging in self-deprecation (unattractive/worthless) might engage in promiscuous sexual activity → automatic thoughts lead her to believe she has nothing better/else to offer

- Similarly, systematic errors in reasoning are referred to as cognitive distortions
  - Stressful events trigger an unrealistic schema
# Cognitive Distortions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distortion</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arbitrary Inference</strong></td>
<td>Drawing a conclusion without evidence or in spite of contradictory evidence</td>
<td>After getting a C instead of an A on the first exam, a student concludes he/she will not pass the course</td>
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<td><strong>Selective Abstraction</strong></td>
<td>Conceptualizing a situation based on a detail taken out of context</td>
<td>A person fearful of getting in a car accident is sensitive to news about accidents on the radio</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overgeneralization</strong></td>
<td>Abstracting a rule from 1 or 2 isolated incidents/applying rule too broadly</td>
<td>Hearing about 1 robbery leads a person to believe everyone is being robbed</td>
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<td>Magnification and Minimization</td>
<td>Seeing an event as more/less significant than it really is</td>
<td>A high school girl believing that if she isn’t asked to the prom, he life is over</td>
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<td>Personalization</td>
<td>Attributing external events to oneself without evidence of connection</td>
<td>Parents assume they are to blame when their children misbehave</td>
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<td>Dichotomous Thinking or “Black and White”</td>
<td>Categorizing situations in extremes</td>
<td>A person views performance on a task as success or failure</td>
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Beck's Cognitive Therapy

- Therapist helps the client identify thoughts that are producing the depression or anxiety.
- Identifying these negative thoughts allows the client to challenge (dispute) them, and replace them with more realistic thoughts.
- Beck’s collaborative empiricism
  - The role of the therapist is to be the coach, cheerleader, and collaborator.
  - Not as a guru, healer, or master.
    - As is typically the role of the therapist in psychodynamic psychotherapy.
Reformulated Learned Helplessness

- Began as a diathesis-stress model of depression based on findings from animal research
  - Remember the shuttle-box dog
- Incorporated attribution theory
- Considered to be an individual's habitual way of assigning causes to events that occur in their lives
People who make internal, stable, and global attributions for bad events and external, unstable, and specific attributions for good events are said to possess a depressogenic explanatory style.

So, what does a depressogenic explanatory style look like?

Conversely, individuals who possess a non-depressogenic explanatory style (e.g., internal, stable & global for good events; external, unstable & specific for bad events) are considered to be buffered against depression.

This, of course, looks very different.
Measuring Explanatory Style

- Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ)

YOU HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR A JOB UNSUCCESSFULLY FOR SOME TIME.

Write down the one major cause

Is the cause of your unsuccessful job search due to something about you or something about other people or circumstances? (7-point Likert-type)

In the future when looking for a job, will this cause again be present? (7-point Likert-type)

Is the cause something that just influences looking for a job or does it also influence other areas of your life? (7-point Likert-type)
Optimism and Health (Peterson, 1988)

- 146 college students who possessed a pessimistic explanatory style experienced more days of illness in the following month and visited physicians more frequently in the following year than students who were optimistic.

- As compared with optimists, pessimists reported:
  - More unhealthy habits
  - Less sense of control over these habits
  - More stressful occurrences in their lives
Optimism and Health (Peterson & Barrett)

- In a sample of 175 college students, also demonstrated a relationship to pessimism and increased illness.
- The relationship may be mediated by variables such as:
  - Passivity
  - Social withdrawal
  - Depression
  - Health-related behaviors,
  - Problem solving skills
  - Physiological response to stress
Optimism and Longevity

- Peterson, Seligman and Vaillant (1988)
- Explanatory style stable over a 35 year span
- Explanatory style strongly related to health over the life span
- Optimists in the Harvard University Grant Study showed lower levels of illnesses than the pessimists
- More optimists were still living 35 years later
Optimism and U.S. Presidential Candidates

- Zullow and Seligman (1990)
  - More optimistic candidate wins elections
  - Difference in optimism scores correlated 0.80 with difference in popular vote

- Fresco & Seligman (1996)
  - Clinton more optimistic than Dole
  - Young Clinton more optimistic than Young Dole

- Fresco, Hambrick, & Seligman (2000)
  - Gore slightly more optimistic than Bush