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F25 PSY2012.0T1: GEN PSYC

"Unpacking Human Behavior: Theories in Action through Gage and Zimbardo"

December 7th

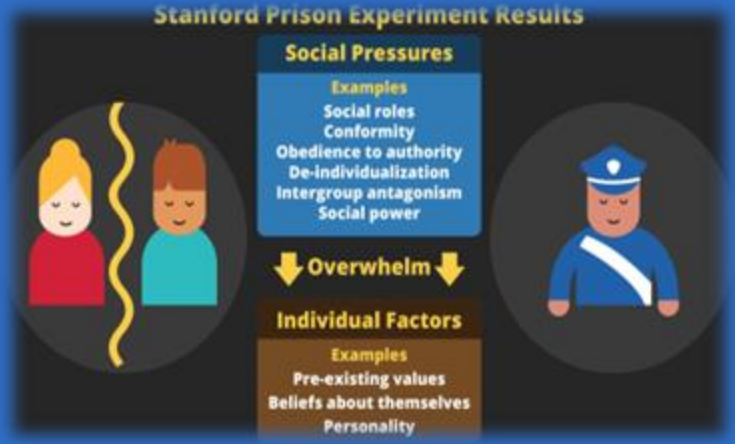
CASE STUDY #1 OVERVIEW STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT

The Stanford Prison Experiment was a 1971 social psychology study where students became either prisoners or guards. Intended primarily to measure the effect of role playing, labeling and social expectations on behavior over a period of two weeks.

This case is important because it illustrates how situational forces can influence human behavior. It shows that even 'good people' can be transformed into perpetrators or victims, depending on the roles they are given..

- Who: 24 male undergraduate students from Stanford University.
- How they were chosen: They volunteered for a study on prison life and were randomly assigned to one of two roles: prisoner or guard.
- The experiment's leader: Philip Zimbardo, a psychology professor at Stanford University.

CASE STUDY #1 OVERVIEW
STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT



This case caught my attention because it reveals how easily our behavior can be influenced by social roles and environments. it reveals how ordinary people can quickly adopt extreme behaviors when placed in certain social roles and environments. It raises unsettling questions about human nature, authority, and morality.

THEORY APPLICATION #1 (CASE #1)

- Behavioral Perspective

"the activity through which the organism adapts to its environment." (Biely, The behavioral perspective, page 15, 2022)

A psychological view that emphasizes how learned behaviors are shaped by environmental interactions, such as rewards and punishments. This approach, also known as behaviorism, focuses on observable actions and argues that personality is a result of these learned habits, rather than internal mental states.

How Behavioral Perspective can explain the behavior experienced in the Stanford experiment?

The behavioral perspective argues that behavior is shaped by environmental stimuli, rewards, and consequences, not by personality or inner traits. In the Stanford Prison Experiment, the abusive behavior of the guards and the submissive behavior of the prisoners can be understood as learned responses to the prison environment.

-The guards were given power and rewarded (through approval and authority) when they enforced control. Their harsh actions were not punished

-Prisoners were punished for resisting and rewarded for obedience. Eventually, they stopped trying to fight back because:

- Every attempt led to negative consequences
- Complying reduced punishment

THEORY APPLICATION #1 (CASE #1)

Prisoners quickly learned that **resistance led to negative consequences**, such as:

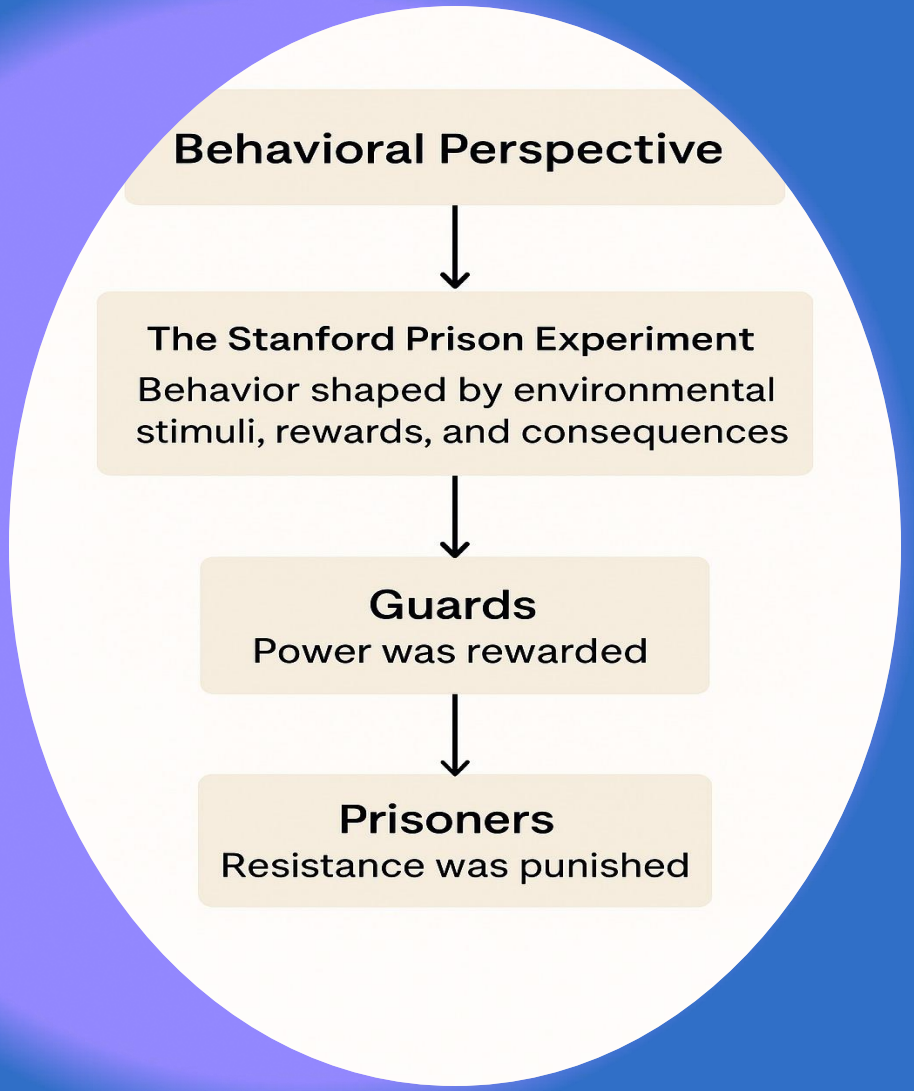
- Solitary confinement (The “Hole”)
- Loss of blankets or food
- Harsh public humiliation

Example: Prisoner #8612 tried to rebel, but guards responded with escalating punishments → he became distressed and gave up rebellion.

➞ They developed **learned helplessness**:
Obeying = less punishment
Resisting = more punishment

The first prisoner to leave the experiment was Douglas Korpi, prisoner 8612. After 36 hours, he had an apparent mental breakdown in which he yelled, "Jesus Christ, I'm burning up inside" and "I can't stand another night! I just can't take it anymore!" Upon seeing his suffering, research assistant Craig Haney released Korpi. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_prison_experiment?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

The behavioral perspective focuses on how environmental factors, rewards, and punishments shape behavior. This makes it especially valuable for explaining what happened in the Stanford Prison Experiment because the participants’ behavior changed dramatically as a direct result of the prison environment, not because of their personalities.



CASE STUDY #2 OVERVIEW

Phineas Gage—brain injury and personality change

In 1848, Phineas Gage had a workplace accident in which an iron tamping rod entered and exited his skull. He survived, but it is said that his personality changed as a result, leading to a greater understanding of the brain regions involved in personality, namely the frontal lobe.

Key takeaways:

- Phineas Gage survived a severe brain injury when a metal rod pierced his skull, damaging his frontal lobe.
- The accident changed Gage's personality and behavior, showing the frontal lobe's role in these areas.

(Front. Hum. Neurosci., 27 April 2022
Sec. Cognitive Neuroscience, by Stephan Scleim/ https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2022.734174/full)

(Phineas Gage: His Accident and Impact on Psychology. By Kendra Cherry, MSEd/2025/https://www.verywellmind.com/phineas-gage-2795244)

Why did this case interest me, and why might it interest you?

— Phineas Gage's case was an interesting case for me to study because it illustrates how a single instant can alter people's behavior and personalities and change people's perception of a person.

— His case also connects perfectly with health, medicine, and neuroscience, which is one of the main reasons people find it so interesting. It shows how a physical injury to the brain can completely change someone's behavior, emotions, and personality.

Phineas Gage's case is pivotal in psychology because
his surviving a severe frontal lobe injury, which dramatically altered his personality (becoming irritable, profane, impulsive), provided some of the first strong evidence for brain localization—the idea that specific brain areas control specific functions, especially personality, emotion, and social behavior, challenging the view of the brain as a single, undifferentiated organ.

CASE STUDY #2 OVERVIEW

Phineas Gage Analysis

Phineas Gage's incident had a tremendous influence on early neurology. The changes in his behavior pointed to emerging theories about the localization of brain function, or the idea that certain functions are associated with specific areas of the brain. Today, scientists understand the role that the frontal cortex has to play in important higher order functions such as reasoning, language, and social cognition. "What is so remarkable about Phineas Gage's injury is not only where the rod went in his head but where it did not go... missed a number of key areas..."(Fleischman 72). This shows how luck Phineas Gage was. After his recovery, people noticed changes in his personality. In the 1900s, neurology was in its infancy and Gage's extraordinary story served as one of the first sources of evidence that the frontal lobe was connected to one's personality.

Phineas Gage Timeline

By: Yusra Alam

September 13, 1848 — A metal rod is accidetally shot through twent-six year old Phineas Gage's head.

1848 — Dr.Harlow, Gage's doctor, takes care of Phineas. Ten weeks after recovery, Gage is announced fully recovered.

1848 — Gage leaves Cavendish to go to his hometown.

1849 — Phineas comes back to Cavenish and Dr.Harlow gives Gage a check-up.

1850 — Phineas goes to Boston, so doctors can take a look at Phineas Gage.

1850 — People realize that Phineas Gage's personality has changed after the surgery.

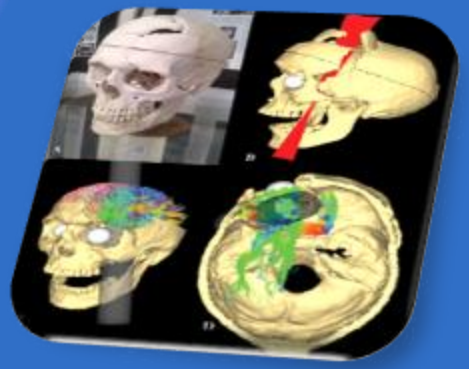
1852 — In Hanover, a man who asks Phineas to work as a stagecoach driver.

1852 — Phineas moves to Chile to work as a stagecoach driver.

1859 — Phineas comes back from Chile and moves in with his sister. He starts experiencing epileptic seizures.

May 21, 1860 — Phineas dies at his sister house. His immediate cause of death is probably hypothermia.

1998 — After 150 years after Phineas Gage's accident, Cavendish, Vermont holds a festival to honor Phineas Gage.



Who was involved: Phineas Gage and John Martyn Harlow (the physician who treated Gage after the accident.)
What changes in behavior and personality were observed after the injury?
Before the accident, Gage was described as a competent, reliable, and socially well-adjusted foreman — responsible, friendly, and well-liked by coworkers and employes phineas-gage-2795244
After he recovered physically from the initial trauma, observers reported major changes in his personality and behavior.

THEORY APPLICATION #2 (CASE #2)

Biological perspective

Biological psychology, often called biopsychology, behavioral neuroscience, or physiological psychology. This branch of psychology has grown tremendously in recent years and is linked to other areas of science, including biology, neurology, and genetics.

The biological perspective is a theory in psychology that explains behavior through the lens of biological and physiological factors, such as genetics, neurobiology, and brain structure. This approach suggests that our thoughts, feelings, and actions are deeply influenced by our physical and genetic makeup, including brain function, neurotransmitters, and evolutionary processes.

How can we link it with Phineas Gage's Case?

The Biological Perspective explains that:

- The frontal lobe is responsible for decision-making, impulse control, emotional regulation, and personality.
- Damage to the prefrontal cortex (which Gage experienced) often results in personality changes, poor judgment, and emotional outbursts.
- Gage's dramatic shift in behavior was not due to life experience or social influences, but to a physical injury to a specific brain area — a perfect example of biological structures shaping behavior.

"It is possible to speculate that the non-linear path of evolution and its violent history, may have led to the development of brains that favored protection and recovery from brain injuries. To name a few, human brains are protected by the cranium, underneath which are three core layers of protective membranes, in addition to being immersed in cerebrospinal fluid capable of absorbing impact" (Traumatic brain injuries: a neuropsychological review By Aldrich Chan. Volume-18, 2024/https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/behavioral-neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnbeh.2024.1326115/full?utm_source=chatgpt.com

The Biological Perspective helps explain Phineas Gage's case by showing that damage to specific brain regions, like the frontal lobe, can cause major changes in personality and behavior, proving that who we are is deeply connected to how our brain functions biologically.

THEORY APPLICATION #2(CASE#2)

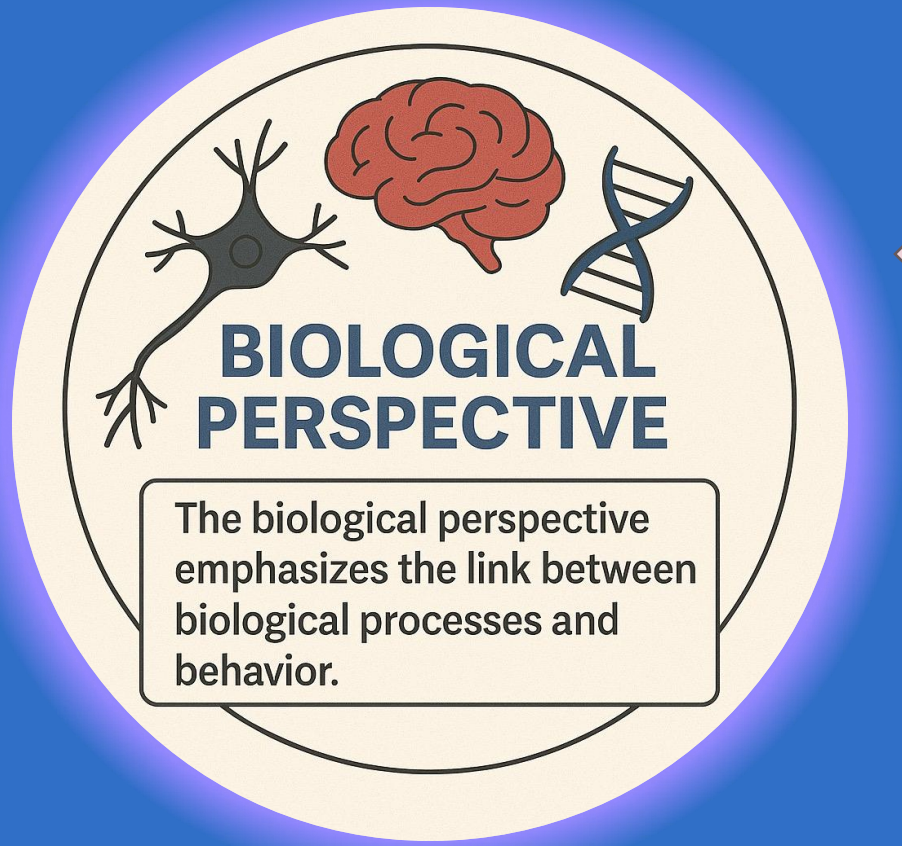
BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Case Connections – Phineas Gage

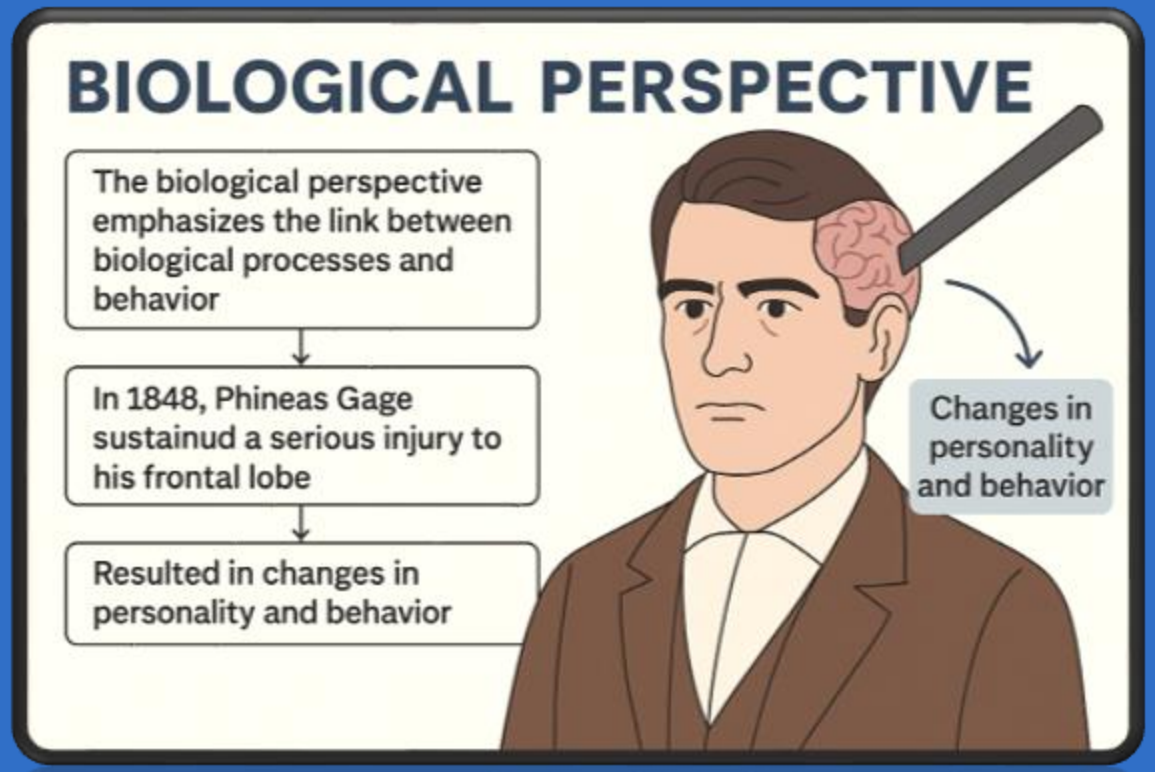
- Frontal Lobe Damage:
  - Gage's accident in 1848 caused an iron rod to pierce his frontal lobe, the area of the brain responsible for personality, decision-making, emotional control, and social behavior.
- Personality Shift:
  - Before the injury, Gage was reliable, respectful, and well-mannered. Afterward, he became impulsive, rude, and aggressive.
    - ➤ This aligns with the biological perspective's view that damage to specific brain areas causes specific behavioral changes.Scientific Evidence of Brain-Behavior Link:

•The case became foundational in neuroscience and psychology, demonstrating how biological changes in the brain can alter identity.

- The biological perspective helps explain Gage's behavioral changes by linking them directly to frontal lobe damage, providing strong evidence for brain-behavior connections (Siddiqui, 2022).
- "Biological psychology involves the study of the biological bases of behavior." (Psychology 2e, Chapter 1)



- The Biological Perspective is valuable for understanding the Phineas Gage case because it directly explains how physical changes in the brain can lead to psychological and behavioral changes.



Theory Comparison Slide

(case: The Stanford Prison Experiment)

THEORY #1 (BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE)

-FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENT: EXPLAINS HOW ENVIRONMENT SHAPES BEHAVIOR (E.G., PRISON SETTING, POWER ROLES).

RESPONSE TO THE EXPERIMENT: INTERPRETS *WHY* PARTICIPANTS ACTED THE WAY THEY DID.

OVERALL IMPACT:
HELPED EXPLAIN SITUATIONAL INFLUENCE ON HUMAN BEHAVIOR.

MAIN GOAL: TO EXPLAIN *WHY PEOPLE BEHAVE* AS THEY DO IN CERTAIN ENVIRONMENTS.

VIEW OF THE EXPERIMENT: SEES IT AS VALUABLE FOR UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR SHAPED BY ROLES AND REINFORCEMENT.

Similarities

differences

THEORY #2 (ETHICS IN RESEARCH)

-Focus on environment: Evaluates how the research environment affected participants' well-being.

Response to the experiment: Interprets *why* participants acted the way they did.

OVERALL IMPACT:

Led to stricter research guidelines

(e.g., IRB requirements).

Main goal: To explain *why people behave* as they do in certain environments.

View of the experiment: Sees it as *unethical*, due to harm, coercion, and lack of consent.

THEORY COMPARISON SLIDE
(CASE: THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT)

- To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the Stanford Prison Experiment, both the Behavioral Perspective and Ethics in Research must be used when studying its psychological and ethical implications. The Behavioral Perspective enables the examination of human behavior, including the manner in which a person's environment, role and authority can influence his/her actions. As an example, many may think that Guards were simply "bad" individuals; however, their behavior most likely resulted from situational leadership. Similarly, many may believe that prisoners were weak individuals; however, this assumption ignores the fact that the behaviors of prisoners also resulted from situational leadership. The Ethical Perspective enables us to judge the moral character of the experiment and to remember that just as we can learn from an experiment, we must ensure that we conduct research in a manner that protects the individuals who participate in it, minimizes the potential for harm to participants, and improves the way that we conduct future research. Using both The Behavioral Perspective and Ethics in Research to analyze the experiment, we can achieve an understanding of human behavior, and at the same time, ethical implications of studying human behavior. As we've seen, one perspective explains an action, while the other protects individuals. Ultimately, by using both perspectives to study human behavior, we can make better science and better ethical decisions.

Brief comparison: Behavioral Perspective explains **what happened and why**, while **Ethics in Research** questions **whether it should have happened at all**. Both are necessary to fully understand the impact and lessons of the experiment.

Reflection

The Stanford Prison Experiment and the Phineas Gage case demonstrate the way in which human behavior can be influenced by environmental and biological factors. Stanford's experiment revealed how the environment of an individual, as well as the pressure from those around them, can lead to significant shifts in behavior. An individual that is put into a role (i.e., guard) or put under social pressure may become aggressive or victimized, whereas Gage's case demonstrated how a single physical injury (i.e., brain injury) could change the way that the individual thinks, acts, and feels. These two studies together helped to demonstrate that there is no one single reason for human behavior. Human behavior results from a mixture of factors that exist within our external world as well as those of our brains and minds. This duality of the mind and environment illustrates how multi-layered and complex psychology is.

While reflecting on both cases, I noted a huge difference, Stanford Prison experiment, violated the psychology conduct of experiments involving human subjects. “Any experiment involving the participation of human subjects is governed by extensive, strict guidelines designed to ensure that the experiment does not result in harm.”
(*Spielman et al., 2014, Chapter 2.4*) The experiment exposing participants to extreme psychological harm without adequate protections.
My reflection of Phineas Gage's Case, came with the knowledge learned that his case was the one case that opened doors for a lot of studies and understanding in the neuroscience branch of psychology. It provided evidence of how the frontal lobe links to the brain and emotions. “One of the most famous case studies in neuroscience involved a man named Phineas Gage. His accident provided evidence that the frontal lobe is involved in personality, emotion, and impulse control.” (*Spielman et al., 2014, Chapter 3.1*)

Reflection

I have gained valuable insight into human behavior through the **Behavioral Perspective**. Through this perspective, I can see how much the environment affects our behavior by providing different roles, levels of authority, and consequences for our actions. The Stanford Prison Experiment is an example of how people's behavior changed dramatically just because they had been assigned a role or given a certain amount of power. Seeing this has led me to conclude that humans do not always act out of their personality, and that their behavior will also be affected by their situation. Through the Behavioral Perspective, I have also learned how susceptible humans can become from other people's influences. In addition, the Behavioral Perspective has allowed me to see how psychology applies to real-life issues, such as environmental impact, social pressure, and social justice.
A similar idea to this is learned helplessness. When prisoners first entered the experiment, they fought back at first (#8612). After being punished repeatedly, they learned to stop fighting back as a behaviorists would explain that people stop fighting back because punishment is something, they were always met with when they resisted. This made me think about how there are many people in the real world—the students, the workers and those who are involved in abusive situations, who change their behaviors because of feeling trapped by their results and/or controlling systems. The behavioral perspective also helped me understand the importance of contextual and conditioned influences on behaviour and has therefore caused me to think more critically about; authority, social pressures and how environments can influence people to behave in certain ways, even in their everyday experiences.

This project provided me with a much more comprehensive knowledge of psychology outside of pure theory, and showed me how it can be used to understand behavior in the real world - and often in a very uncomfortable manner. Through the examination of examples such as Phineas Gage and the Stanford Prison Experiment, I have gained a greater appreciation for the immense influence that both biological and environmental factors can exert over an individual's thoughts, behaviors and even existence. I have also become more aware of how delicate and malleable human behaviors can be, and how quickly they can change in response to environmental stressors or trauma. After completing this project, I now view psychology as being a means not only for gaining insight into others, but also for identifying recurring themes that occur in the course of everyday life - for example, the ways in which individuals respond to authority figures and the manner in which sustained brain injuries can be reflected in an individual's personality. The subject has, thus, taken on a much more tangible, applicable, and critical role in my life and my understanding of the world around me.

REFLECTION–LEARNING FROM THE CASES

Insights gained:

- By analyzing these two case studies, I was able to see how much the brain and environment have an effect on one's behavior. The case study of Phineas Gage revealed that the impact of a biological change from an injury to his frontal lobe could result in a complete change in his personality, emotional state, and judgment. This demonstrated that the "physical" changes to the brain could affect how a person behaves, even without them knowing it. The results of the Stanford Prison Experiment provided evidence of how one's social roles and environment may cause individuals to act in ways that are generally outside of their normal behavior. Although all participants were considered psychologically healthy at the time of the experiment, by being assigned either an authoritative or submissive role, each quickly adopted the characteristics and behaviors that came with that role. Consequently, it illustrated how external influences, the power dynamics created by their assigned roles, and learned responses could cause changes to one's behavior. Both case studies provided me with the understanding that a person's behavior is not just a result of their internal thoughts and feelings; it is the result of a combination of biological, experiential, and environmental factors. Therefore, by comparing these two case studies and demonstrating how psychology explains behaviors occurring in both extreme and common situations, I gained a overall better understanding of real-world behavior.

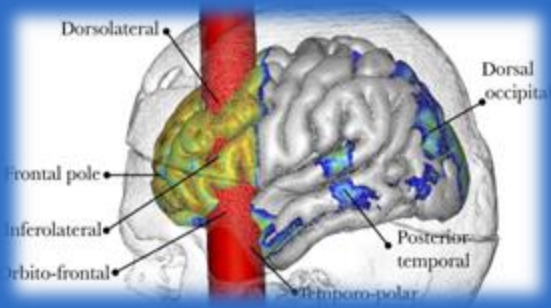
Effects on my understanding of psychological concepts:

- I think the behavioral perspective has been the clearest and most helpful to me personally. The behavioral perspective provides such a solid understanding of the way behavior is shaped by experience, taught, and then influenced by an individual's environment. The way in which an individual acts can be easily comprehended through this perspective as a result of the examples that demonstrate the positive and negative responses to rewards and punishments and authority. The behavioral perspective helped me to see the world through a new lens with a clearer understanding of human behavior. The Stanford Prison Experiment shows us that those individuals that were given power and little or no consequences would be prone to becoming "evil." Through this perspective, I have learned that individuals respond to their environment rather than necessarily acting from a place deep within them. The behavioral perspective has been a tremendous source of insight into both extreme situations and everyday life. Through the behavioral perspective, I have developed a clear understanding of many aspects of how humans act, including why people choose to follow rules, remain silent in groups, and yield to social pressure. I believe, based on the findings presented by the behavioral perspective, that human behavior can be predicted and understood more clearly.

REFLECTION-LEARNING FROM THE CASES
INTERESTING IMAGES THAT LEADS TO A REFLECTION:

Stanford Prison Experiment

Phineas Gage's Case



REFLECTION–MOST INSIGHTFUL THEORY

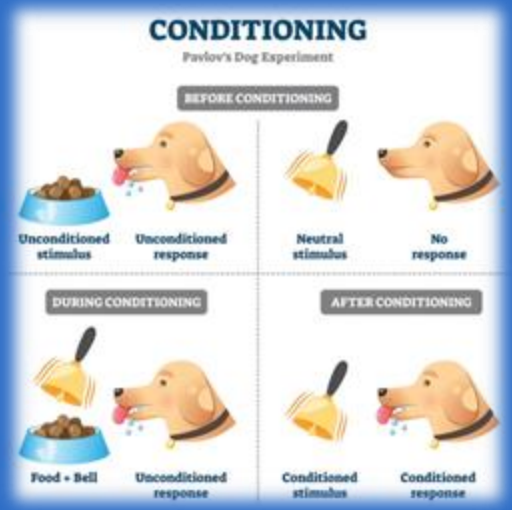
- I have learned the most about understanding other persons' behavior through behavioral perspective. This theory focuses on how an individual's environment, experiences, and the consequences of their actions create their experience of themselves and their surroundings as opposed to only being based on their biology or how they behave based upon who they think they are. Through the Stanford Prison Experiment, I was able to see how participants did not behave in ways of cruelty or submission because of who they were but rather because the circumstances surrounding them and the rules and roles defined the outcomes of their behavior. My understanding of this theory allowed me to see how we all have learned and unlearned behaviors and how they are greatly influenced by our surroundings. Also, I found many people adapt their behaviors depending on what is rewarded or punished, making the behavioral perspective extremely effective in understanding how to conduct ourselves throughout the day.

- As far as the behavioral perspective is concerned, it was the most complete and beneficial explanation of the reasons behind actions due to the fact that it identifies observable behaviors and highlights the environmental influences on such behaviours, thus providing a greater understanding of how they can be applied and to what extent. Rather than providing an explanation of action based upon internal thoughts and/or subconscious motives, the behavioral perspective also provided real-world examples of how these external influences (such as authority, punishment and reward) affect people's actions. For instance, when looking at the results of the Stanford Prison Experiment and how drastically individuals reacted in that study, it was obvious that the changes in behaviors did not happen by chance, as they occurred as a direct result of the behaviors and rules prescribed to the participants. As a result, the information provided from this theory helped me realize how everyday behaviors (e.g., social rule-following, or submission to peer pressure) also occur for similar reasons. The information provided by this theory has given me a better understanding of behaviors and how they can be determined by an individual's environment, rather than just reflecting the individual themselves, and therefore have helped me develop a clearer understanding of human behavior.

"An organism has two types of responses to its environment: (1) unconditioned (unlearned) responses, or reflexes, and (2) conditioned (learned) responses." (*Spielman et al., 2014, Chapter 6.2*)
—This quote directly supports the idea that human behavior can be **learned through environmental conditioning**, not just through biology or personality.

REFLECTION–MOST INSIGHTFUL THEORY

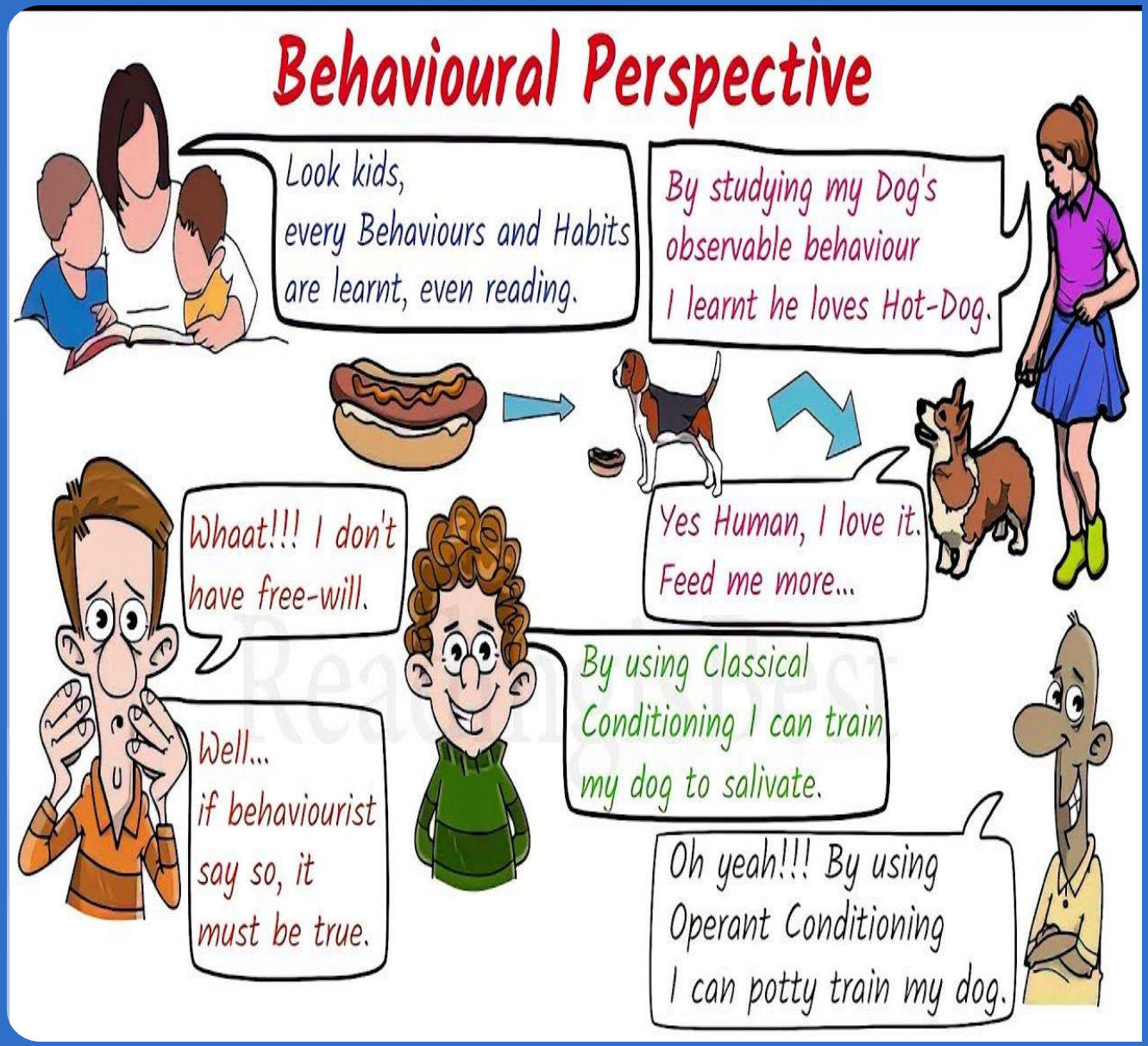
—IMAGES RELATED TO BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE THEORY—



"Learning is a relatively permanent change in behavior or knowledge that results from experience." (*Spielman et al., 2014, Chapter 6.1*)This quote embodies the basic belief about the Behavioral Perspective, where behavior is not something that is predetermined or that is part of our genetics from birth; rather, it is developed through our experiences, the results of those experiences and the way we respond to the things around us. The Stanford Prison Experiment exemplifies how people's behavior is influenced and changed by both their assigned role and the environment in which they function and how we develop everyday behaviors (such as habit formation, obedience and social behaviors) through reward and punishment systems.

REFLECTION–PERSONAL GROWTH & APPLICATION

- Doing this project has made me realize how much psychology relates to people's day-to-day lives and how it connects with the behaviors of people. Previously, I thought psychology was a very theoretical or clinical discipline, but after exploring real-life cases such as Phineas Gage and the Stanford Prison Experiment, I have discovered that psychology can explain many of the things we observe in our daily lives. For example, the reasons people obey authority figures, how trauma affects behavior and how people's social roles develop their sense of self. Additionally, I learned that behavior does not originate solely from an individual's behavioral state; there is also an influence from one's environment and/or biological make-up on one's behavior. As a whole, I view psychology as a practical and useful way to learn about individuals and to explain complex behaviors.
- The ideas I examined—mainly from the Behavioral Perspective and Biological Perspective—apply directly to real people's behaviors. From a behavioral perspective, the rule-following/role-playing/consequence reasoning that makes so many people's behaviors change (example: Stanford Prison Experiment). I see examples of this all around me, for example in school and in the workforce, or in social networking sites; people will alter their behavior to fit in, and conform to societal expectations, or to avoid negative consequences (punishment). From a biological perspective, the Phineas Gage case allowed me to understand the impact of brain injury and the impact of brain disease on personality and impulse control; therefore, in terms of healthcare, education, and law, individualized approaches are necessary. Overall, through my work in developing this project, I now have a full understanding of how and why psychology is not about just theories. Rather psychology is a way of understanding human behaviors that takes place in our everyday lives.



"Skinner believed that behavior is motivated by the consequences we receive for the behavior: the reinforcements and punishments. His idea... is based on the law of effect... behaviors followed by satisfying consequences are more likely to be repeated."
(*Spielman et al., 2014, Chapter 6.3*)

The statement illustrates how an individual's experiences create the foundation for future personal development. The evidence for this is seen through environmental factors that influence a person's behavior, such as receiving constructive criticism or praise. The feedback a person receives creates habits, both good and bad. By using praise, it can help one develop positive habits, whereas negative consequences may encourage change in a person. Also included in the statement is an example of how the individual in your project changed their behavior as a result of both positive and negative consequences. The statement demonstrates that by using the Behavioral Perspective to explain the individual, we can also gain insight into their growth, motivation, and learning styles.

—REFERENCE—

TEXTBOOK SOURCE

(Psychology 2e, Chapter 1)
“Any experiment involving the participation of human subjects is governed by extensive, strict guidelines designed to ensure that the experiment does not result in harm.”
(*Spielman et al., 2014, Chapter 2.4*) https://openstax.org/books/psychology/pages/2-4-ethics

“One of the most famous case studies in neuroscience involved a man named Phineas Gage. His accident provided evidence that the frontal lobe is involved in personality, emotion, and impulse control.”
(*Spielman et al., 2014, Chapter 3.1*) Spielman, R. M., Dumper, K., Jenkins, W., Lacombe, A., Lovett, M., & Perlmutter, M. (2014). *Psychology* (2e). OpenStax.
https://openstax.org/books/psychology/pages/3-1-biological-psychology

“An organism has two types of responses to its environment: (1) unconditioned (unlearned) responses, or reflexes, and (2) conditioned (learned) responses.”
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