

# CRITICISM OF COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

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## Criticism of Cognitive Psychology

The cognitive approach to psychology studies internal information processes such as perception, attention, language and memory. Cognitive psychologists study these internal processes and how they affect our emotions and behaviour. Whilst cognitive psychology has been very useful in developing new theories and finding out more about how the mind works. The main **criticism of cognitive psychology** is that it is not directly observable. Another criticism, like other psychological approaches, is that this approach ignores other reasons for behavior other than cognitive. For instance, a behavior could be due to cognitive and social reasons. There are some limitations to this approach.

- **Lacks ecological validity**

This means that researchers within cognitive psychology often conduct their studies within a 'false' setting, or one which does not represent the real world. For example a study researching memory might involve testing participants in a classroom environment where they may feel under more pressure to perform well, and their memory performance may therefore be worse than if it was measured in their own home. This lack of ecological validity makes results of the study less representative to everyday life, and could mean they are not applicable outside the study environment.

## ▪ Reductionist

Reductionism is a term simply used to describe theories that over simplify human behaviour. Many of the approaches in psychology fail to take into account all of the different influences that affect the human mind and our behaviour, and instead chose to focus on only one part of the explanation into how the mind works. In cognitive psychology individual differences are often ignored, and it is assumed all internal processing is the same in different people. This is reductionist as it fails to account for environmental, biological or genetic influences on cognitive function.

- **Inability to directly measure cognitive function**

Another big problem for cognitive psychologists is that it is difficult to measure internal processes such as attention and perception. Instead of measuring these processes directly, cognitive psychologists use tests that measure behaviours, or external features that they believe are related to the internal process'. In doing this, researchers have to infer that the internal process which they want to investigate is actually related to the recorded behaviour without having any evidence of this connection. This is another limitation of the cognitive approach that may lower the validity of research within the area.

- **Narrow focus on mental processes**

Cognitive psychology has a narrow focus on mental processes. For example, the use of the computer analogy means that information processing researchers focus mostly on the logical aspects of cognitive processing and less on the emotional, creative and social aspects that also affect thinking. Cognitive psychology has often relied on comparisons with how computers work as a possible way the mind might work. Is this really how the brain works? The brain is infinitely more powerful and flexible than the most advanced computer.

## ■ Mediation processes

Burrhus Frederic Skinner (B.F. Skinner) criticizes the cognitive approach as he believes that only external stimulus-response behavior should be studied as this can be scientifically measured. Therefore, mediation processes (between stimulus and response) do not exist as they cannot be seen and measured. Skinner continues to find problems with cognitive research methods, namely introspection (as used by Wilhelm Wundt) due to its subjective and unscientific nature.

Humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers believes that the use of laboratory experiments by cognitive psychology have low ecological validity and create an artificial environment due to the control over variables. Rogers emphasizes a more holistic approach to understanding behavior.

The information processing paradigm of cognitive psychology views that minds in terms of a computer when processing information. However, although there are similarities between the human mind and the operations of a computer (inputs and outputs, storage systems, the use of a central processor) the computer analogy has been criticized by many. Such machine reductionism (simplicity) ignores the influence of human emotion and motivation on the cognitive system and how this may affect our ability to process information.

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Behaviorism assumes that people are born a blank slate (tabula rasa) and are not born with cognitive functions like schemas, memory or perception. The cognitive approach does not always recognize physical (re: biological psychology) and environmental (re: Behaviorism) factors in determining behavior. Cognitive psychology has influenced and integrated with many other approaches and areas of study to produce, for example, social learning theory, cognitive neuropsychology and artificial intelligence (AI).



<https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive.html>



**Thank You**