

Explain human behaviour and mental processes psychology essay



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Psychologists use different approaches in Psychology using different assumptions and theories to study and explain human behaviour and mental processes; these are behavioural, biological and psychodynamic approaches. This essay will assess and look at key assumptions, theories, evidence and will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. The approaches will be used to apply criminal behaviour. The essay will also consider the nature versus nurture debate, nature is the behaviour we are born with and nurture is behaviour which develops due to our environment. Eysenck (2006) identified key assumptions of the behavioural approach that we all learn by association. The second assumption of behaviourist approach is that it's primarily concerned with observable behaviour thus ignoring internal mental processes. The third assumption is that there is very little difference in the learning that happens in humans and the learning that happens in animals. This means that behaviourists can generalise from non-human animals to human behaviour. The fourth fundamental assumption of this approach is that psychology should be studied as a science and should be investigated scientifically.

Pavlov 1902 cited in Eysenck ,(2009) investigated behaviour and discovered the theory of classical conditioning. The latter is associating a stimulus that brings about a specific response with a new stimulus, so that the new stimulus also brings about the same response. Pavlov used an experimental method with dogs. Before conditioning Pavlov offered food to the dog which acted as the unconditioned stimulus (UCS) and salivation increased, he referred to this as the unconditioned response (UCR). He also rang a bell which he called the neutral stimulus (NS) and the dog did not respond.

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During conditioning Pavlov used the NS together with the UCS and the dogs salivated (UCR). After conditioning Pavlov rang the bell (conditioned response) and now the dogs had learned a link between the bell and their reflex response (salivation) hence salivating (conditioned response).

This theory supports the assumption that learning in animals and humans is similar as fundamental form of learning and can be used in parenting to modify children's behaviour. A further advantage of this study is that the experimental scientific method used by Pavlov in his research ensured that the data obtained was objective and the findings replicable making it credible. It is also valuable because it allows us to anticipate events and change behaviour. One limitation of this study is that Bandura a neo behaviourist accepted that this view of ignoring internal mental processes was limited and have agreed that internal as well as external factors determine behaviour.

This study lacks external validity because it does not generalise the real world. A further limitation is that Pavlov used dogs in his research and since humans are complex beings, Watson and Raynor (1920) studied baby Albert and concluded that classical conditioning can produce a change of behaviour in humans'. In the nature versus nurture debate this approach fits in the nurture because behaviourists assumed that behaviour is determined by learning and environmental factors totally ignoring genetic factors therefore making it a weakness Eysenck (2009).

In contrast to behaviourism the psychodynamic approach is an interactionist approach because acknowledges both the nature and nurture. The Ego and

the Superego develops parents and environment and the Id we are born with it. Psychodynamic approach has assumptions that our feelings and behaviours in adulthood are strongly influenced by childhood experience. Another assumption is that relationships are of primary importance to our feelings and behaviour. The third core fundamental assumption to this approach is feelings and behaviours are powerfully affected by the drives and instincts of the unconscious; finally unlocking the unconscious is the key to understanding behaviour Hill (2002).

Freud, 1923 cited in Eysenck (2006) explains that Freud discovered a number of theories in psychodynamic approach, for example, the structural model of personality theory. In this theory Freud discovered that personality is divided into three parts, Id, Ego and Superego. The Id is the pleasure principle of personality that a person is born with. The Ego is the reality principle that is conscious and rational and develops around the age of two years. Finally, the Superego is the morality principle that develops around the age of five and is the ethical or moral part of personality.

These three different parts of personality are always in conflict and this can be demonstrated by considering the pleasure demands of the Id and the moral demands of the Superego. According to Jarvis (2000) Freud being able to use structural model in explaining an individual's torn feelings in decision making gives his work credibility. Freud suggested this conflict brought about by decision making brings about feelings of guilt, anxiety and unhappiness.

Jarvis (2000) describes Freud's key method of investigation use of case studies in investigating an individual's anxiety and unhappiness. Freud, 1895 Studied Anna O who on diagnosis was found to be suffering from hysteria in form of hallucinations, disturbances of speech, vision and partial paralysis. Anna O was actually Joseph Breuer's patient but Freud used his notes to investigate why Anna O developed hysteria. Freud and Breuer related the key assumption of the psychodynamic approach and suggested that Anna O's hysteria was caused by her caring for her sick father as a child. Psychoanalysis therapy of free association was introduced after Breuer treated Anna O.

An advantage of this method (structural model) is that it offers an explanation for the experience of being pulled in conflicting directions by the different parts of the personality when making decisions . This method has also contributed widely in to therapeutic practice because people can be able to explain how their childhood experiences had an impact on them by attending talking therapy like free association. There were flaws in the method of research because lack of any way in which to isolate, measure and study the id, ego and superego. Though case studies such as Anna O have provided specific information, generalising these findings is so limited. Jarvis (2000)

While the psychodynamic approach is an interactionist the biological approach largely ignores nurture and focusses on our behaviour being the result of our biology. The biological approach core assumptions is that psychology should be studied scientifically, in laboratory experiment and research. The other assumption is that behaviour can be explained in terms <https://assignbuster.com/explain-human-behaviour-and-mental-processes-psychology-essay/>

of biology physiological and genetic explanations. Physiological refers to body functions and genetic refers to inheritance of DNA therefore inheriting behavioural and physical characteristics. Another assumption is all that is psychological is first physiological. Finally, human genes have evolved to adapt biologically and behaviourally to the environment. (Eysenck 2009)

The theory of brain localisation is divided into two areas, the outer cortical and inner cortical areas. The outer cortical area is further divided into lobes. The frontal lobe functions are to plan and control movement, control emotions, stores memory and problem solving and judgement. The Parietal lobe helps in sensing and monitoring parts of the body. Occipital lobe helps in visual processing. Finally temporal lobe helps in hearing, memory processing and emotions. The inner cortical area consists of corpus callosum which allows for communication of more, sensory and cognitive information between hemispheres. The thalamus is responsible for motor control, receives auditory, somatosensory and visual sensory signals and controls sleep and awake states. The hippocampus helps in forming, organising and storing memories and also connecting emotions and senses such as smell and sound, to memories. Finally the amygdala process emotions such as fear, anger and pleasure and determines what memories are stored and where they are stored in the brain.

The case of Clive Wearing uses scientific investigation; CAT (computerised axial tomography) and MRI scans (magnetic resonance imaging) of his brain. Clive's left and right temporal lobes were damaged and left parts of right hippocampus destroyed making him unable to transfer memory from short term to long term. He had moment to moment consciousness because any

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new information that would hit the brain would fade away . Some of the left frontal lobe were also damaged and he could he could keep on repeating what has been said and having emotional outbursts. Wilson et al (1995)

An advantage of this study of this approach is that it has had many useful applications, for example, use of drugs that alleviate disorders such as bipolar. A further advantage is that it establishes psychology as a respectable science. In the nature versus debate twin studies have provided the best way to determine the role of genetic factors in influencing behaviour and are used by researchers using the biological approach. The reductionist nature of this approach makes harder to obtain a complete comprehension of human behaviour by only focussing on biological factors, for example, various psychological, social and cultural factors influence the development of mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, biological approach ignores these factors. This research focusses on rare conditions and has little impact on our everyday lives. it gives us no free will by the suggestion that our behaviour is determined by genes or physiology. Twin studies provide only an indirect way of assessing the essence of genetic factors in influencing behaviour because of difficulties in interpreting the findings from the research. (Eyesenck 2009)

These three approaches can also be applied to criminal behaviour. Sammons (2009) explains differential association theory and Sutherland (1939) suggests that there are two conditions in place before someone commits crime. They need to learn favourable attitudes of offending, and they need to learn specific behaviours of committing that crime . They learn all these from family and peer groups. Differential association theory has a prediction that <https://assignbuster.com/explain-human-behaviour-and-mental-processes-psychology-essay/>

offenders will have been socialised in families and groups with pro- criminal norms. Osborne and West (1982) in families where the father had a criminal conviction, 40% of sons also acquired one by the age of 18 in comparison with 13% of sons of non-criminal fathers. Researchers have shown that criminality is found in a small number of families.

This theory supports the behavioural assumption that we learn through association by emphasizing that the family and peer group is a potential source of criminal behaviour. One limitation of this theory is that it is not clear why not all people go on to committing crime even after coming in contact with ‘ criminogenic’ influences.

In contrast to differential association theory the psychodynamic theory of offending according to Freud’s structural model of personality the behaviour that is outside society’s norms and values, either abnormal or criminal is caused by abnormality in development of the psyche. The superego develops at the age of five and the roots of offending also develop at this time, especially between the growing child and its parents. Freud explains the possible causes for later criminal behaviour. The superego which is the morality principle strives for perfection and is learnt from same sex parents. It makes ego to suffer with anxiety when a person thinks of doing an immoral act and with guilt when the act is committed. Therefore, a weak superego that develops with socialisation of abnormal norms and values in the family, would result in minimal constrain against committing a crime. They would do things that will gratify the id which is the pleasure principle not caring about the social restrains of them.

A child may develop a normal superego but it may have deviant values. The superego will subject suffering to those behaviours that the parent may disagree with, it acts as a moral regulator. For example, a child whose father is a criminal may not engage in criminal activities of the father. A strong superego might make a person vulnerable to committing crime by making them anxious and guilty every time they gratified their id, however they would be punished by their superego. The consequences would be the person would commit crime so that they may be caught and punished to ease the guilt caused by their superego. Sammons (2009)

Psychodynamic researchers have shown the impact of childhood experiences and parent-child relationships as an influence on offending (Blackburn, 1993) and have identified significant of criminal behaviour in adolescence (Hollin, 1989). One limitation of this approach is that psychodynamic therapies that have tried to treat offending have not succeeded (Howitt, 2009) despite been exceedingly time consuming. Sammons (2009)

Raine et al (1997) brain localisation theory cited in Holah, (2008) aimed to investigate the functioning of both cortical and subcortical brain using PET scans in a group of murderers that had pleaded not guilty for insanity reasons (NGRI). They expected that the murderers would show evidence of brain dysfunction in their prefrontal cortex. They used laboratory experiment. The independent variable would show whether the person had committed murder or not, these were the results of the PET scans. All NGRIs and control groups were not given medication for two weeks before the scanning.

Raine et al concluded that their research supports the role of certain brain structures in violent behaviour. The difference activity in the amygdala supports theories of violence due to lack of fear and also the differences in the corpus callosum activity can be matched up to show people with severe corpus callosum show inability to grasp long term implications of a situation. Raine et al note that their findings cannot be generalised from NGRIs to other types of violent offenders and crime.

This theory use of PET scans has possible applications, for example drug treatment to alter functioning of the brain structure. Another advantage is that it is a well-controlled laboratory experiment that is the matching of the control group. This theory is a reductionist because the study tries to explain all behaviour as a result of brain functioning ignoring other reasons like social background and role models for why people may act violently.