

Theories of behaviour and development in psychology essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The behavioural approach to psychology says that all behaviour is learned. Behaviourists believe that we all enter the world with a 'blank slate' and the environment surrounding us influences us to become the people that we are, influencing our behaviour. There are three assumptions of the behaviour approach. These are that behaviour is all that matters (the thought process behind the behaviour are not important). ALL behaviour is learned and that the same laws of human learning apply to animals. Watson argued that approaches which relied on introspection were vague and subjective.

Learning can be accomplished through classical and operant conditioning and also social learning. In classical conditioning now new behaviours are learned, instead an association is made. An example of this could be of children lining up in the school yard when hearing the bell ring. At first they do not know what the bell stands for and would be confused. However they will learn to line up eventually after a few times of hearing it as they learn to associate the bell ringing with end of break and lining up.

Operant conditioning was first proposed by Edward Thorndike. He suggested that learning can take place through trial and error, rather than just association. Thorndike's law of effect states that positive effects (rewards) lead to an increase in behaviour and negative effects (punishments) leads to the stamping out of behaviour. A more personal example of this for us would be that we feel relieved and happy when we have completed and handed in an assignment on time, because of this we are increase the probability of repeating this behaviour again.

The psychodynamic approach is associated with the psychologist Freud. He developed the theory known as psychodynamic psychology and the treatment psychoanalysis. The main assumption of the psychodynamic approach is that all behaviour can be explained in terms of the inner conflicts of the mind. It emphasises the role of the unconscious mind, the structure of personality and the influence that childhood experiences have on later life. Freud believed that the unconscious mind was very powerful and determines most of our behaviour.

Freud proposed that the adult personality has three parts the id, ego and superego. The id is the part of the mind which is totally unconscious and which exists at birth. It operates according to the pleasure principle. This means it will seek pleasure and avoid pain. It is in our instinct. The ego has to decide between the demands of the id and the superego. It operates according to the reality principle. This means it controls the id's drive for immediate satisfaction until an appropriate outlet can be found.

The superego is the moral part of the personality. This is divided into two parts. The ego-ideal and the conscience. The ego-ideal is the standards of good behavior. The conscience is seen as an "inner voice" that tells us when we have done something wrong. According to Freud, the mind can be seen as being similar to an iceberg with only the very tip being exposed and the bulk of the ice berg being unseen. The id is completely in the unconscious (beneath the sea) and the ego and super ego operate at conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious levels.

Information that is painful, anxiety producing or threatening is pushed into and contained in the unconscious mind. Other information that can be brought to consciousness is contained in the pre-conscious level. Our consciousness is what is currently in our minds. Humanistic psychology looks at the human experience from the viewpoint of the individual. This focuses on the idea of free will and the belief that we are all capable of making choices. This perspective was mainly associated with two psychologists, these were Maslow and Rogers.

Maslow believed that we are all seeking to become the best that we can possibly be. This would be physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. He called this self actualisation. He constructed the theory known as the hierarchy of needs. To reach the top of this pyramid a person must meet each level before. This means that if they do not their physiological needs met then they will not be able to move on and further up the pyramid/hierarchy of needs and reach their full potential.

The social learning theory states that we learn within a social context and according to this theory role models are very important. We may learn behaviours from anyone that we come in contact with throughout our lives and the way we perceive the person strongly influences the behaviours we imitate. People that we perceive as our role models such as pop stars and sports personalities, we are more likely to imitate as we admire them. We have a powerful desire to belong and will go along with what others do and say in order not to stand out from the crowd.

Groups affect our behavior in this way as we are more likely to want to fit in with a group rather than be pushed out or maybe made fun of. Society and culture also influence our behavior according to this theory. The cognitive information processing theory seeks to explain human learning as the development of networked memory structures. The human brain is seen as a neural computer and a great deal of research has been devoted to understanding cognitive processes such as attention, memory, information processing, problem solving, thought, language and other aspects of cognition.

A Swiss psychologist who initially worked on measuring intelligence came to the conclusion that cognition develops through a series of stages, each new stage building on the previous. The biological perspective and the theory of maturation holds that the effects of the environment are minimal and that a child is set with a set of genetic instructions passed down from their parents, and their cognitive, physical and other developmental processes that unfold over time. This is quite a contrast to the learning theory or humanistic theory, where the effects of nature are paramount.

Arnold Gesell believed that development occurred according to a sequence of maturational processes. This theory also states that genes can affect behavior in many ways. Certain disorders can be inherited by our parents passing them down either with a single dominant gene or both parents having the gene for the disorder. Disorders that develop regardless of environmental influences are genetically determined disorders. This means

that the individual that develops the disorder has done so regardless of environmental factors.

The behavioural perspective is extremely important and useful in health and social care practice. It helps with explaining learned behaviours as we can look at a particular behavior and trace where it comes from, using the concepts of association, reinforcement or punishment. An example of this may be that an elderly woman may never leave her home and be isolated and depressed because her agoraphobia is so severe that it takes over her life. By helping her with classical conditioning and explaining the development of phobic behaviours it can help with changing such behaviours that are taking over her life.

A commonly used method of changing phobic behavior uses a method of treating acquired fears known as 'systematic desensitisation'. This would involve creating a hierarchy of fear. This would help achieve a state of very deep relaxation and the aim is to replace the anxiety and fear with a state of calm. The principles of classical conditioning are also used in treatment of alcoholism. The individuals are given a drug that when mixed with alcohol will lead to unpleasant physiological effects.

The person then learns to associate drinking alcohol with these horrible side effects and with an adverse rather than desired response. On the other hand, if this approach cannot treat the underlying causes of the behaviour, it is likely the behaviour will return after a period of time. Behavioural treatments such as Systematic Desensitisation and Token Economies are effective for

certain disorders, such as obsessive-compulsive disorders and phobias. However, they are not so effective for more serious disorders, such as schizophrenia.

The cognitive perspective is also very important to health and social care practice. When working in a health and social care environment it is most likely that you will come in contact with a person that has learning difficulties. These individuals can experience frustration in their daily lives and they seek to make sense of what can be confusing experiences. The cognitive approach can be used to help people who misread situations, by identifying irrational thoughts, the individual can be guided to change them, with consequent benefits for their emotions and behaviour.

This will help with raising their self-esteem and reduce their outbursts which can be triggered by lack of understanding. It can also help when working with individuals that have emotional problems, depression and supporting people that suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder. By identifying negative, irrational and distorted thinking it can lead to changes in behaviour. People that often suffer with depression feel they are worthless and not adequate. This then leads to them thinking that the world contains problems and difficulties that they will not be able to overcome.

Cognitive behaviour therapy aims to challenge these negative thoughts and encourage the patient or service user to develop alternative and more positive ways of seeing the world. However, this perspective can be seen as not centered to the individual and it also does not work for everybody. To

evaluate behaviourism we must look at the strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are that that it is the first attempt to turn psychology into a proper science, through observation and measurement of behaviour. It explains some aspects of behaviour and has been successful in treating some human conditions.

This perspective is also easy to test as it can be seen. An example of this that was previously mentioned was the one that children lining up in the school yard when hearing the bell ring. At first they do not know what the bell stands for and would be confused. However they will learn to line up eventually after a few times of hearing it as they learn to associate the bell ringing with end of break and lining up. It is used a lot in practice and so it proves it works, particularly in shaping a child's behaviour. However there are criticisms to follow. These are that the research is developed through work done with animals.

This research would now be considered unethical. It is also oversimplified, Humans are more complex and our learning is governed by complicated thought processes. The work could also be considered artificial and it was done in a lab. Its weakness is also that it does not do a lot to change their thoughts, only their behaviour. The cognitive perspective's strengths are that it actually helps people with the cognitive therapy, especially those with anorexia and depression and the fact is that that faulty thoughts do cause faulty behaviour and this perspective proves it.

The weaknesses are that it does not work for everybody and this model has been accused of being over simplistic, ignoring the huge complexity of human functioning compared to computer functioning and it has also been deemed as unrealistic and over hypothetical, ignoring the biological influences and grounding of mental processes. As an educational psychologist I would have to assess how perspectives could be used in health practice.

The social learning approach could be used in order to help with health campaigns as its theory is that others influence our behaviour and according to the social learning theory, role models are whom we learn our behaviour from the most as we admire them. People that are active and promote exercise or healthy eating, but are also very likeable role models and in the public eye would help with these health campaigns. An example of this is that subway are currently promoting their low fat subs with hopeful Olympic stars of 2012 and professional athletes.

These role models will promote their low fat subs and the health campaign that is on going in society today. Using celebrities such as Wayne Rooney or David Beckham on posters and other promotions and campaigns. These can be used around hospitals where people are usually sitting in waiting rooms and reading things on the walls whilst they wait. If they see positive influences promoting health campaigns they are more likely to learn this new behaviour and mimic the role model. The humanistic perspective could be used in health practice with person centered counseling.

This perspective will focus on the individuals experiences and their viewpoints. It will also focus on the idea of free will and the belief that we are all capable of making choices. Health practices can take this and use it to focus the counselling on the individuals experiences and make it all about them. The person centered counselling is believed to enable the client to develop and grow in their own way to strengthen and expand their own identity and to become the person that they ' really' are independently of the pressures of others to act or think in particular ways.

Nursing homes could use this as it would give the residents a sense of belonging if they felt their emotional needs are being met. The counselling would provide this as it enables them to grow and develop and strengthen their own identity. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs will work in social care, especially in care homes and working with helping with the children that you come in contact with as a social worker. According to Maslow, we need to progress through each stage or level before we can reach self-actualisation.

If a child does not have it's basic physical needs such as food, drink, warmth and sleep then they will never be able to move on to the next stage and progress, enabling them to be satisfied with their self, their life and the world around them. If we are stuck on this stage then they will focus all their energy on getting this need met and will not be able to move on. When working in social care it would be important to refer to this hierarchy of needs in order to see whether they are getting their basic needs and progressing through the hierarchy in order to reach self-actualisation in their life.

If they are not having their basic needs met or are stuck on a stage then something needs to be done in order for them to progress and so Maslow's hierarchy will work in social care. Behaviourism works in social care practice such as schools when it comes to enforcing rules and reinforcement.

According to this theory children learn through association, punishment and with positive and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement occurs when a required behaviour is rewarded with something pleasant as a result.

An example of this would be if a teacher responds to a misbehaved, attention-seeking child, the attention it is likely to reinforce the child's behavior. Negative reinforcement also strengthens behaviour but this time involves something unpleasant being removed until the required behaviour is shown. An example of this would be that if a child does not want to concentrate and do their work, sometimes it may be easier to not nag and keep on at the child as it can cause the child to act out, instead remove the unpleasant nagging and they may decide to do the work themselves when they realise it is for the best.