

A comparison between psychoanalysis and behaviorism



Psychology is a very old science and has existed from very ancient times of human history. Times to time new theories have emerged due to the dissatisfaction of the older definitions. As an outcome, each and every “system” of psychology has different motives and differing perspectives on what is fact or fiction. Therefore, the using of differing research methods, techniques and goals defines what each system views as the truth. This will be examined through the examples of Behaviorism and Psychoanalysis, two different systems of psychology.

Behaviorism and Psychoanalysis both evolved out of unique social and intellectual contexts. Psychoanalysis, arguably the most influential system of psychology was pioneered by Sigmund Freud in Vienna during the 19th century. During this time various social trends were in operation. These were the creation of the German School, anti-Semitism and the role of women in society. All of these aspects impacted Freud for instance, the German school provided the basis for his treatment situation and anti-Semitic policies forced him into the medical profession. Freud was also influenced by several significant individuals Josef Breuer, Jean-Martin Charcot and Rudolf Chrobak. All three of these intellectuals had radical views about the role of sex in neurotic disorders, for example Breuer once said that “neurotic disorders were always concerned with secrets of the marital bed”. These views influenced Freud as did Breuer’s former patient Anna O. Through his sessions with her he developed free association one of the main factor of psychoanalysis. Freud compared the human personality to an iceberg. The small part that shows above the surface of the water represents conscious experience; the much larger mass below the water level represents the

unconscious - a storehouse of impulses, passions, and inaccessible memories that affect our thoughts and behaviour. It is this portion of the mind that Freud sought to explore with the use of free association.

Freud also believed that personality was composed of three major systems: the id, the ego and the superego. Each system has its own functions but the three interact to govern behaviour.

(a) The id

The id is the most primitive part of the personality and the first to develop. It is present in the newborn infant. It is located in the unconscious and it is from the id that the ego and the superego later develop.

The id consists of the basic biological impulses (or drives): the need to eat, drink, eliminate wastes, avoid pain and gain sexual pleasure. Freud also believed that aggression was a basic biological drive.

The id seeks immediate gratification of these impulses. Like a young child, the id operates on the pleasure principle : it endeavours to avoid pain and obtain pleasure regardless of the external circumstances.

(b) The ego

As the child develops it learns that their impulses cannot always be immediately gratified. Some must be delayed (for example, hunger must wait until someone provides food) and some (for example, hitting someone) may be punished.

A new part of the personality, the ego, develops as the young child learns to consider the demands of reality. The ego constitutes our conscious self and obeys the reality principle : It is essentially the part of personality that decides what actions are appropriate and which id impulses will be satisfied in what manner. The ego mediates among the demands of the id, the realities of the world and the demands of the superego.

(c) The superego

The superego, is the internalised representation of the values and morals of society as taught to the child by the parents and others. It is essentially the individual's conscience. The superego decides whether an action is right or wrong. Initially, parents control a child's behaviour directly by reward and punishment. Through the incorporation of parental standards into the superego, behaviour is brought under self-control. The superego develops in response to parental rewards and punishments.

In summary, the id seeks pleasure, the ego tests reality and mediates, the superego constrains and strives for perfection. Not surprisingly, the three components of personality are in constant conflict: the ego postpones the gratification the id wants immediately and the superego battles with both because behaviour often falls short of the moral code it represents. In order to deal with this conflict, the ego develops a series of defence mechanisms which allow it to protect itself from the pressures of the id, the real world and the superego. Examples are:

Repression - burying a memory so thoroughly that it is not recalled at all - "it never happened".

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Projection - attributing own unwanted " bad" feelings or ideas to another person.

Rationalisation - making up a reasonable excuse for unacceptable behaviour and really believing it.

Suppression - forgetting a shocking event on purpose: (consciously in this case) putting it out of one's mind.

Denial - refusing to acknowledge something because it is so distressing.

Displacement - transferring feelings from one person or object to another.

Identification - imitating someone who is admired and modelling oneself on them.

Reaction-Formation - consciously substituting the opposite emotion for true feelings about someone/something.

Freud believed that conflict is inevitable and all behaviour is a compromise. Conflict is the primary cause of human anxiety and unhappiness. Defence mechanisms are one way we have of dealing with our inner conflict; neurotic symptoms and dreaming are the other major forms of compromise.

Freud believed that the individual, during the first five years of life, progresses through several developmental stages that affect personality. Applying a broad definition of sexuality, he called these periods psychosexual stages. During each stage, the pleasure-seeking impulses of

the id focus on, and derive pleasure from, a particular area of the body and on activities connected with that area.

Freud called the first year of life the oral stage of psychosexual development. During this period, infants derive pleasure from nursing and sucking; in fact, they will put anything they can reach into their mouth.

During the second year of life, the anal stage, as children have their first experience with imposed control in the form of their toilet training.

In the phallic stage, from about age 3 to age 6, children focus on their genitals. They observe the differences between males and females and may direct their awakening sexual impulses toward the parent of the opposite sex. It is at this stage that children have to resolve the Oedipus and Electra complexes.

A latency period follows the end of the phallic stage, during which children become less concerned with their bodies and turn their attention to the skills needed for coping with the environment.

The last stage, the genital stage, occurs during adolescence, during which young people begin to turn their sexual interests toward others and to love in a more mature way.

Freud felt that special problems at any stage could arrest (or fixate) development and have a lasting effect on the individual's personality. The libido would remain attached to the activities appropriate for that stage.

Thus a person who was weaned very early and did not have enough sucking pleasure might become fixated at the oral stage. As an adult, this person
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may be excessively dependent on others and overly fond of such oral pleasures as eating, drinking and smoking. Such a person is called an “oral” personality. The person fixated at the anal stage of psychosexual development may be abnormally concerned with cleanliness, orderliness, and saving.

Later psychoanalysts felt that Freud placed too much emphasis on the instinctive and biological aspects of personality and failed to recognise that people are products of the society in which they live. The neo-Freudians including Alfred Adler, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Carl Jung and Harry Stack Sullivan, considered personality to be shaped more by the people, society, and culture surrounding the individual than by biological needs. They placed less emphasis on the controlling power of the unconscious, believing that people are more rational in their planning and decisions than Freud thought. Although psychoanalysis has exerted a powerful influence on our thinking about human nature, it has been seriously questioned as a scientific theory.

Freud’s constructs are ambiguous and difficult to define. He does not specify, for example, what behaviours indicate that a child is fixated at the anal stage of psychosexual development and what behaviours indicate that he or she is not fixated. For anybody of theory to be accepted as a valid scientific perspective, its consequences must be stable. The hypothesis that fixation at the anal stage can lead to stinginess (or to the opposite, generosity) is evidently not refutable; whatever the outcome, the theory can account for it. To that extent the psychoanalytic approach fails to meet the criteria of a scientific theory.

Because some important aspects of psychoanalytic theory cannot be proven experimentally, some psychologists claim that it has no value either as psychology or as science. However, many others claim that experimental validity is an inappropriate yardstick for evaluating psychodynamic theory and that the theory is verified in practice in the analyst-patient interview.

Oppositely, Behaviorism was developed from a utilitarian school of thought and was designed to predict and control behavior. Behaviorism in essence is a revolt against the study of consciousness and an attempt to “ transform psychology into a science much like physics or biology”. Behaviorism was born in the U. S. where the English school of thought was dominant. The intellectual climate lead Watson to do specific goal orientated research, conducted in a lab and that predicted behavior. John B. Watson, one of the greatest behaviorists was dissatisfied with current theories and this was a factor in the development of behaviorism. In addition, he was also influenced by several of his contemporaries. Jacques Loeb a researcher who studied tropism showed that complicated behaviors were really Stimulus-Response behaviors. Stimulus-response theory, referred to as S-R theory, is a theoretical model of behavioral psychology that suggests humans and other animals can learn to associate a new stimulus - the conditioned stimulus (CS) - with a pre-existing stimulus - the unconditioned stimulus (US), and can think, feel or respond to the CS as if it were actually the US. Also, Robert Yerkes who wrote a book with Watson and at the time had the only animal research lab in the country. This stimulated Watson to look further into Stimulus-Response relationships and do research on animals and led to the creation of Behaviorism. The term behaviorism refers to the school of

psychology founded by John B. Watson based on the belief that behaviors can be measured, trained, and changed. Behaviorism was established with the publication of Watson's classic paper *Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It* (1913).

Behaviorism holds that only observable behaviors should be studied, as cognition and mood are too subjective. According to behaviorist theory, our responses to environmental stimuli shapes our behaviors. Important concepts such as classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and reinforcement have arisen from behaviorism.

Both Behaviorism and Psychoanalysis utilize different methods and research techniques and these can be tied to the aforesaid social and intellectual circumstances. Some of the techniques that Freud used were free association, dream analysis, transference, resistance and parapraxes. These research techniques stressed that behavior is "not what it seems on the surface, but a large part of the personality is below the level of awareness". Therefore, the focus of his research on an individual level was to offer treatment for suffering patients by delving into the psychological underpinnings of their evident behavior. In addition, through analytic work Freud believed it would be possible to define universals about personality.

On the other hand, Behaviorism employed methods to evaluate the Stimulus-Response relationship and its effects on behavior. Behaviorism was not concerned with the mental origins of behavior and even sought to "reduce mentalistic concepts into physical terms". Research in behaviorism focused on evident behavior and the effect of behavior. Behaviorists such as

Skinner did research with animals to show that behaviors that were rewarded would continue, while ones that were not would be extinguished. Behaviorist used lab studies to discover what behaviors were exhibits and by what causes. The bases of their research were to study the Stimulus-Response relationship and its goal was to predict the stimulus response to behavior.

Each system of psychology has its own concept of truth. For the psychoanalyst truth can only be revealed when looking at the unconscious, while for the behaviorist truth what is seen and can be reduced to the Stimulus-Response method. Psychoanalysis is defined by the Id, ego and superego and one underlying desires and repressed emotions. " All mental and Physical behavior is determined by prior causes". Therefore, truth for the psychoanalyst is not what has been presented at the present moment by what has become obvious before. Each behavior has an unconscious antecedent and only when the underlying cause of behavior is examined can the truth be revealed. On the contrary, the behaviorist only acts on the behavior that is obtained as a response to a situation. Introspection was not needed and the mind was seen as a " mystery box to be avoided as a determent of behavior". As illustrated the notion of truth varies depending on the system that is employed. For the psychoanalyst the only truth stems from the unconscious and is not indicative of evident behavior. While for the behaviorist evident behavior is the truth and the mind should not be used to assess what is true in regards to ones actions.

Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism are two systems of psychology that both developed under unique social contexts. These systems reflect their origins <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-between-psychoanalysis-and-behaviorism/>

by the ideologies and methodologies they use, as well as by the goals they try to achieve. Each system provides its elements with different ideas of truth and each employ different methods to reach their goal. Even though these systems differ in so many respects the ultimate goal of both were very similar, to discover truth.