

The five approaches to understanding human behaviour



This approach tries to explain how the brain works and how changes in structure and function can affect some ones behaviour.

The first factor is Neuroanatomy which studies the brain's anatomy and neural structures. Evidence by Raine et al (1997) included a study of 41 murderers and compared them with 41 control subjects by PET scans; this showed a lack of activity in the prefrontal cortex of the murderer's brains which controls emotions and reasoning (emergency brake). The strength of this type of study is that it is scientific, looking at cause and effect and can result in effective treatment. However, Porrino and Lyons (2000) did a study on the prefrontal cortex and showed there may be other causes for the person's lack of control. This could involve social and environmental issues or prolonged drug use such as cocaine. Neuroanatomy has given us a greater understanding of a living brain both into mental illness, and anti-social behaviour, but we cannot just rely on this form of science as it is only part of the jigsaw.

Another theory is brain Biochemistry ' Rivers of the mind' (Rita Carter1998); which looks at the effect that chemicals, such as hormones or neurotransmitters have on mood and behaviour. One of these neurotransmitters, Dopamine, is involved with behaviour and emotions. Wise and Stein (1973) studied schizophrenia in patients who had died leading to the ' Dopamine Hypothesis'; that schizophrenia is thought to be the result of overstimulation of Dopamine (D2) receptor in the mesolimbic and mesocortical systems. This suggested that schizophrenia can be treated by chemicals not taking into account any other approaches. However, the

individual is not helped to take responsibility for their own actions. This may also make the person feel alienated by a purely biological prognosis.

Biochemical research has made remarkable improvements in mental health and anti-social behaviour through drug treatment; but dependency can lead to problems. This can be countered by naturally increasing 'feel good' chemicals such as Serotonin through healthy eating and exercise rather than traditional drug therapy (M. Copson 2007).

Infection may also change someone's behaviour through its effect on the brain. A paper by S Barondes (1990) reported that in the 20 Century half the patients in psychiatric hospitals had a disorder called Dementia Paralytica. Henry (1941) investigated this and found a connection with a late manifestation of syphilis. Treatment came through penicillin and the disease and associated dementia was eradicated.

This case is a strong argument for the fact that one diagnosis does not mean a final solution. Further investigation by other approaches showed that what they thought was a mental illness was in fact the result of infection. This case would have been easy to solve if at the time we had technology such as PET scans like those researched by D. Geffen (University of California 2006) to identify that they didn't have dementia. There are not many clear links between infection and behaviour. This may be due to the fact that modern medicine quickly eradicates infection before it becomes a mental problem.

A further factor is Genetics; the study of hereditary traits and how they affect behaviour. Studies by E Viding et al (2005) on over 3600 twin pairs showed behaviour problems in psychopathic children was due to 80% genetic
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hereditary influence. Genetic diagnosis like this is very scientific and can be backed up by data and evidence from studies. The fact that we can study twins with the same DNA makes results look conclusive. However, Paul Bennett (2003) made the point that, if parents treated them exactly the same, they could be influenced by environmental factors and not solely by genes. This approach also does not account for free will, social influence and reinforcement, especially between very close identical twins.

Lastly, Evolution, also known as Neo Darwinism believes that we have dormant animal instincts in our sub-conscious mind, explaining some anti-social behaviours or phobias. Rita Carter (1998) writes how homo-sapiens became stronger than Neanderthals because they had developed greater awareness of their environment and better survival instincts such as the fear of spiders and heights. These factors may be why today certain people have the same fears and lose control when their sub-conscious mind takes over. However, some fears may have been learned by association and been influenced by the parent, creating a phobia in the mind by reinforcement of the fear. Many behaviours classed as anti-social, such as male promiscuity or racism were probably once of benefit and still exist in our brains (R. Carter 1998). Some may be down to social influence but there is a strong case for their evolutionary link.

Psychodynamic Approach:

The psychodynamic approach was mainly initiated by Sigmund Freud. His research proposed three theories.

His 'Theory of the Unconscious' described three levels; the conscious mind, being only the small amount we perceive to know at that moment in time. The pre-conscious would be something that we are aware of but not conscious of. The unconscious mind is what we are unaware of and out of the reach of the conscious mind. Freud believed that the unconscious mind controlled much of our behaviour and actions (R. Gross 2005).

This theory came about after the treatment of 'Anna O' by Freud and Breuer (1880). It showed a girl who suffered an illness for over two years which resulted in a series of physical and psychological disturbances; there were no signs of biological illness. Freud and Breuer treated Bertha with psychoanalytical techniques and cured her symptoms (S. Freud 1909). However, it may have been due to a biological reason such as epilepsy as described by Orr-Andrewes (1987).

Freud carried on with this research and came up with the 'Theory of Personality', which had three basic components, the Id, Ego and Superego. The Id is driven by basic instincts of aggression and sex; the 'pleasure principle'. The Superego on the other end of the scale is one of controlling desires. The Ego has the role of balancing the Id and Superego out. If there is an imbalance of these three personalities, there could be a situation of mental health problems. With the Id it could result in animal behaviour or sexual aggression and with the Superego this could lead to anxiety or neurosis.

This leads to our childhood development; Freud's 'Theory of Psychosexual Development' which has five stages. The first stage is known as oral, where

a child receives pleasure from the area of the mouth. At this point the child is in Id personality. The second anal stage has the child finding pleasure through anal means; here the child develops Ego. Further stages are phallic (3-5 years) which involves the Oedipus complex and develops the Superego. From 5-puberty is the latent stage moving onto the genital stage where the sexual Id returns in adolescence (P. Bennett 2003). Freud believed that if a child did not progress through these stages that they would develop behaviour problems. However, he was unable to predict behaviour from this theory and only used adult case studies, rather than looking at children (K. Cherry Psychological Guide 2010).

Freud's ideas had a great impact on Psychology and are still used today. Anna ' O' and Little Hans gave credible support to Freud's theories and his approach helped causes of mental disorder with no physical or biological symptoms. However, Freud's theories were not in a controlled environment and were open to bias and lacked scientific support. Freud was on cocaine at the time and his theories are too deterministic; not taking into account the ability of free will.

Behavioural Approach

This approach believes behaviour is learnt by our experiences, association or environmental influences.

Classical Conditioning is known as stimulus-response learning. Ivan Pavlov (1901) studied dogs' salivation. He noticed dogs started to salivate when food entered the room. He rang a bell when giving the dog food. He then took away the food on later visits and just rang the bell. The dog still

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produced saliva. This proved the dog had learnt that the bell represented feeding time; a conditioning reflex. The neutral stimulus (the bell) had become a conditioned stimulus (P. Bennett 2003). This at first seemed the solution to changing behaviour, but after time if no reward was given the behaviour returned back to pre-conditioned state.

In the case of Operant Conditioning Skinner (1953) designed a puzzle box for a rat or pigeon. Skinner's analysis of behaviour was the ABC of operant conditioning:

Antecedents: the stimulus conditions, such as a light going on when a lever is pressed.

Behaviours: operants, such as pressing the lever

Consequences: what happens as a result; reinforcement or punishment? (R. Gross 2005)

He showed that behaviour can be guided by reward or punishment; rewarded behaviour will increase in frequency, where as punished behaviour will not be repeated (P. Bennett 2003).

Finally, Social Learning is by association from other people or environment. This can be shown with individuals imitating their role models, such as the media influencing people's appearance through magazines with slim models getting paid lots of money and gaining high stature. This may have caused eating disorders in females, revolving around identity and body image (Gordon 2001 from R. Gross 2005). However, eating disorders can be a result

of a number of factors such as genetics in twin studies so it is not necessarily that simple (A J Holland 1984).

In conclusion, the behavioural approach has provided strong counter arguments to the nature side of the nature-nurture debate and behaviourists have produced many practical applications, some of which have been very effective. It can be argued that behaviourists ignore innate biases in learning due to evolution and inherited factors and that their research was all in scientific laboratories and had no environmental considerations.

Cognitive Approach:

Cognitive thinking involves conscious mental processes like a computer. The brain organises and manipulates information from daily life. This can be seen in the 'cognitive triad' (what we think about ourselves and the world affects how we feel about ourselves and the world, which affects the way we act).

Cognitive disorders can be caused by dysfunctional thought processes which can lead to depression, phobias, aggression and even anorexia. The information about how we think and behave can be altered by psychological therapy; correcting the thought processes of a person who over generalises and magnifies a particular problem. This therapy would also stop the person looking at life in a way where they question themselves; 'I should have done that', 'I should look this way'. These feelings can create a cognitive disorder in the brain leading to a feeling of worthlessness. Reilly (1998) demonstrated this through a case study on treating a suicidal patient and decreasing their hopelessness.

In a case like Clive Wearing (who has no long term memory after contracting a virus), cognitive psychologists were able to identify that it was his hippocampus that had been affected, which sends messages from short-term to long-term memory, but cognitive therapy would not have helped cure his case due to the permanent damage caused to his brain.

The strengths of the cognitive approach are that it is scientific and the theories can be tested, like in the case of Clive Wearing. It can also explain the irrational behaviour of a person through cognitive disorders by the process of therapy and identifying malfunctioning thought processes, giving treatment to create a positive outlook. This approach has given explanations to many aspects of human behaviour and it also takes into consideration many of the other approaches in psychology.

Its weaknesses are that it ignores social and cultural factors and the emotional effects of human life. It assumes that information processes apply to everyone. The rule is however, that the more complex the cognitive process is, the more likely there are to be individual differences (Parkin 2000).

The Social Approach:

The Social Approach has a great deal to do with the environment the person is in. The assumptions made about behaviour come down to the fact that; it occurs in a social context, even when nobody else is physically present and that people's behaviour, thought processes and emotions are influenced by other people and society (G. Hill 2009). This idea does not take into account

the fact that people bring with them individual differences (learnt or inherited) into social contexts and that this can affect their behaviour.

Zimbardo et al (1973)'s prison simulation experiment showed how dressing up as a prison guard with the power that went with it, altered the behaviour of normal thinking males to one of a controlling tyrannical person. According to Latane (1981) the readiness of someone to take on another role is down to the social impact theory; strength (or importance) of the influencer, the number of influencers and the immediacy of the influencers. This study used scientifically objective methods to support its theory and therefore gave a good understanding of behaviour. It was largely field based and therefore imitated real life. However, Zimbardo's subjects knew they were in a controlled experiment and could have 'played up' to their roles. They may also have been influenced by their own experiences of power stereotypes. The study could not account for these factors and like many field experiments lacked control, therefore its evidence is weakened.

Social Psychology considers the importance of conformity and obedience as a large factor in behaviour. From 1933 to 1945 soldiers followed orders blindly and millions of innocent people were slaughtered on command. This could have only been carried out by a large number of people obeying orders from one person. This shows obedience can overcome free will by the importance of the influencer and the coercive power which involves punishment for non-compliance. The social approach can give a good understanding of why such an atrocity can occur through the orders of one person and influence a whole nation. It can be argued, however, that it does not take into consideration past history and the ethos of conflicting beliefs.

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Despite its weaknesses, the social approach does provide many explanations for numerous phenomena and has many useful practical applications in the field of psychology.

Task 1 b): Compare and contrast the methods employed by the major approaches in psychology (436 words not including titles)

There are a number of similarities across the 5 approaches; some are compared below:

Biological and Cognitive approaches share a common view of the brain; neuroanatomy looks at the structure of the brain and behaviour, whilst the cognitive approach thinks of the brain as a computer. These links are clearly shown in the case of Clive Wearing, where an infection caused his memory loss.

The Psychodynamic approach links to the Biological, Social and Cognitive approaches. Its theory of personality shares a belief in the evolutionary animal instinct appearing as the Id, whilst the unconscious mind theory links closely to the Cognitive idea that our unknown brain processes control our behaviour. Freud's psychosexual development compares closely with the Social approach that believes our childhood social experiences shape our actions.

Finally, the Behavioural approach is very closely compared with the Social approach. Operant conditioning believes in learning by reinforcement, this is similarly shown through coercive control e. g. Hitler. Both these approaches

also believe that behaviour can be affected by the environment and people, even the media through social learning and influence.

Despite these similarities, there are lots of contrasting views on how specific approaches deal with abnormalities and gather their evidence. The treatment of anorexia nervosa is a good example as it has been studied in nearly all approaches.

The Biological approach studied identical twins (A J Holland et al 1984) and through scientific evidence gathering of identical twin pairs was able to draw a link to the illness and genetics. Freud's Psychodynamic approach on the other hand, gathers theoretical information by speaking to patients with the disease. Bruch (1991) applied his ideas to the theory of development arguing that the parents of anorexics tend to be domineering, and the disorder represents an attempt to gain a sense of control. The Behavioural approach associated the illness with the effects of social learning, especially by media. A scientific study by Nasser (1986) gathered evidence of Egyptian women who had moved to the west and since developed anorexia. Both theoretical and scientific studies are used by the Cognitive approach. This approach believes it is a cognitive disorder that causes dysfunctional thought processes, with patients having an over importance of body weight and shape (Beck et al 1979). Patients are talked to about their feelings and attitudes to gather information. Finally, the Social approach looks at anorexia in much the same way as the behavioural approach. Its Social Impact Theory would class the thin role models as strong influencers who demonstrate that being thin is the social norm. Evidence gathering could be via scientific field studies and questionnaires to gather attitudes.

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Task 2: Assess to what extent each approach can be seen in Mike's Aggression (760 words not including titles)

Without knowing all the facts all we can do is surmise how the five approaches may be seen in Mike's aggression.

The Biological Approach

Mike may have become increasingly aggressive from a conflict at work; this may also be the reason why he was late home. Mike's anxiety levels may be high, brought on by a possible chemical imbalance in the brain. For example, testosterone has been thought to be implicated in aggression (Simpson 2001) and it is more likely to have increased with anxiety. Mike may also have been having problems with sleeping due to any problems at work; Serotonin is produced from good sleep patterns and can be increased by exercise and eating a naturally carbohydrate rich diet (Mary Ann Copson 2007). If Mike's Serotonin levels are low due to lack of sleep or poor diet, this could have affected his mood and even brought on depression. Serotonin is known to be a feel good factor for the brain and can help reduce aggression brought on by testosterone (P. Bennett 2003), so a rise in testosterone and a lack of Serotonin could double the problem. Sapolsky (1997) however, suggest that it may actually be the other way around and aggression may actually increase testosterone.

The Psychodynamic Approach

Mike's aggression may possibly come from his unconscious mind. He may not be aware of his drives and instincts. Freud believed that the unconscious mind had two conflicting instincts; Eros (life) and Thanatos (death).

Thanatos was self destructive while Eros has to fight for life. This conflict between the two has to be released outwards towards others, before they cause self destruction.

Mike came from a family that had not controlled their violence and he witnessed much of this as a child. This period of childhood could have been when the Ego took control of his personality and should have been taught to him by his parents. This may not have happened and as a result the Ego could not control the Thanatos, while Eros may not have had the strength to balance the Id and Superego. Consequently, Mike may have become neurotic or even psychotic with his Ego being suppressed. The Id may have taken charge and then the Ego has to perform a defence mechanism called displacement and have aggressive outbursts on Mandy, instead of sublimation and releasing the destructive force through something like sport.

The Behaviour Approach

Mike's family are violent and aggressive; he witnessed this as a child and this may have shaped his thoughts of a family environment, believing violence was part of normal life. Mike may have learned this through a term called operant conditioning and believes that performing an aggressive act towards a person can be a way of avoiding negative consequences. There may be a likelihood of Mike's parents reinforcing his outbursts with praise whilst growing up. Bandura, Ross and Ross (1963) showed through experiments that children who watched adults hit a Bobo doll thought it was acceptable to be aggressive. Mike may also have learned to imitate his father in the role of head of the house by being violent and when he had his own family with Mandy, took on this role that he had once imitated.

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The Cognitive Approach

Mike's aggression could be down to the way his brain is processing information. Mike may be suffering depression or anxiety problems, perhaps because of problems at work. This may be making him magnify his problems and over generalise his life, making him feel he should be angry with himself and thinking negatively about his future.

When Mandy confronts him over his failure to call her, this may have made him feel rejected and reinforced his views of life and negativity; this may have had an effect on his physiological condition which made him act inappropriately and hit Mandy.

The Social Approach

Mike may have met up with some friends to watch a football match. He may have been wearing his favourite team's strip like his friends, which made him feel like part of a collective group with one identity. Mike may have been feeling after the game that he wasn't an individual with responsibilities and this loosened his inhibitions.

This was shown by Hogg and Vaughan (1998), where they showed how an individual can lose their identity and engage in anti-social behaviour. When Mandy confronted him for his actions and showed him disregard, he became aggressive and hit her for undermining his thought processes of being a strong male in a group. Whilst wearing his team top with pride he felt that his behaviour would be acceptable by the group and did not think as an individual.

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