

The origins of psychology and psychodynamic approach



Psychology emerged as a separate discipline from philosophy in the late 1800's. Philosophy is described as the study of nature of existence, of man, and man's relationship to existence and psychology is the study of the human mind and behaviour. Psychology dates back to the ancient Greeks and was a branch of philosophy until 1879, it then became a separate discipline. Other fields that psychology borders on are physiology, neuroscience, sociology and anthropology.

Wilhelm Wundt opened the first Laboratory dedicated to psychology in 1879 at the University of Leipzig. This is considered the official start to Psychology. Wundt perceived psychology as the study of human consciousness and applied experimental methods to studying internal mental processes. Although some of his work is unscientific and unreliable today, his early work helped for future experimental methods. One of Wundt's most famous students was Edward B. Titchener. He founded psychology's first major school of thought.

William James became one of the major American psychologists during the late 1800's and his text book, *The Principles of Psychology*, established him as the father of American psychology. His ideas became the basis for a new school of thought known as functionalism.

The Psychodynamic approach refers to the work of Freud and those who followed him. Freud wanted to investigate the unconscious mind. To do this he had to develop some methods to help him with his investigation into the unconscious, these were, free association, dream analysis and Freudian slips of the tongue.

The main aspects of the Psychodynamic theory were the psychosexual stages, the unconscious mind, and the talking cure. According to the theory, the most important years of our lives are our childhood years, and that we go through different stages when we are growing up, known as the psychosexual stages. The traumatic experiences people have when they are children end up in the unconscious and as a result the person will experience mental health problems when they are an adult. Freud also came up with the idea of dream analysis; he believed that the things buried in our unconscious come to the surface in our dreams. One of the therapies born from the psychodynamic theory is the talking cure. The talking cure helps bring some of the unconscious thoughts and memories to the surface where they can be dealt with. Erik Erikson was another theorist associated with psychoanalysis. He expanded Freud's theories and stressed the importance of growth throughout the lifespan. Erikson's psychosocial stage theory of personality is still influential in the understanding of human development.

The criticisms of the psychodynamic theory are that many of the theories within the psychodynamic theory are unscientific and subjective and they are impossible to scientifically test. Freud's theories have been criticised for over-emphasising the unconscious mind, aggression, sex and childhood experience.

Humanistic approach was seen as the third force to psychology. It emphasises the study of a person as a whole. Humanists believe that our behaviour is determined by conscious processes that are controllable and that given the right conditions we can achieve our full potential, this is called self-actualisation. This comes from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of <https://assignbuster.com/the-origins-of-psychology-and-psychodynamic-approach/>

needs, with physical needs at the bottom leading up to self actualisation at the top. Maslow said that we could only achieve meeting the higher needs when the lower needs had been met. We can just skip straight to the top.

Humanists believe that people are capable of telling someone what is on their mind, that thoughts and feeling are readily available and does not need deep excavation from the hidden depths of the unconscious. Humanism mainly uses qualitative research methods rather than scientific methodology, like experiments. For example they use, open ended-questions, diary accounts, unstructured interviews and observations.

Carl Rogers, working in the 1950's-60's, was a Humanist who believed that people were able to express their thoughts and feelings, through language, provided they were listened to in a non judgemental manner, by someone with empathy for their situation. He thought that self image was central to the personality and that therapy aims to improve self esteem. He believed that as self esteem improved, so did behaviour.

The strengths of the Humanistic approach is that it focuses on both the positive nature of humankind and the free will associated with change, unlike the psychodynamic approach which focuses on determinism or lack of power over ourselves. Another positive of this theory is the ease in which many of its aspects fit well with other approaches.

The biggest criticism of humanistic approach appears to centre on the lack of concrete treatment approaches aimed at specific issues. With the basic concept behind the theory being free will, it is difficult to both develop a treatment technique and study the effectiveness of this technique. Other <https://assignbuster.com/the-origins-of-psychology-and-psychodynamic-approach/>

criticisms of the Humanistic approach are that it is unscientific and cannot be measured. The humanistic approach doesn't take into account the unconscious mind.

The Behaviourist approach to psychology suggests that we are born our minds are 'tabula rasa' (a blank slate) and we learn our personality through experience. They believe that people do not have free will and that a person's environment determines their behaviour. They are primarily concerned with observable behaviour rather than internal events such as thinking and emotions. The first behaviourist was John Watson in 1913 when he wrote an article that set out the main principles and assumptions of the behaviourist approach. The main methods of investigation used by behaviourists are laboratory experiments usually conducted on animals such as rats or pigeons.

B. F. Skinner developed the theory of operant conditioning which is the process of behaviour modification in which specific behaviour is increased or decreased through positive or negative reinforcement. A well known experiment of Skinner's is the Skinner's Box experiment also known as operant conditioning chamber. Skinner wanted to study the way rats and similar animals learned. Inside the box were a few levers for the animal to press and a food tray where food would be delivered. In one experiment with the box Skinner put a starved rat into the box. When the rat pressed the correct lever a small pellet of food was dropped into the food tray. The rat soon learned that when he pressed the lever he would receive food. This is called reinforcement. The food for the rat was the reinforcer. Skinner applied his findings to human behaviour and he even developed teaching machines <https://assignbuster.com/the-origins-of-psychology-and-psychodynamic-approach/>

so students could learn bit by bit. Operant Conditioning has many uses, including behaviour modification.

Classical conditioning is a form of associative learning, it was originally developed by Pavlov in 1927. He found that when a neutral stimulus (e. g. bell) was paired with a response eliciting stimulus (e. g. Food – Saliva) eventually the neutral stimulus creates the response (Bell – Saliva. For example, the experiment with Little Albert shows how this works. Watson and Rayner carried out an experiment using a 9 month old baby called Albert. The baby was sat on a mattress on a table in the middle of the room. A rat was placed near Albert and the baby showed no fear, he even reached out to try and grab the rat. In later trials, Watson and Rayner made a loud noise behind Albert's back when the rat was presented to him. This made Albert cry in fear as he heard the noise. After many pairings of the two stimuli, Albert was once again presented with the rat, but no loud noise. He became very distressed as the rat appeared in the room. He cried and tried to move away from the rat. Albert now associated the rat (the original neutral stimulus, now conditioned stimulus) with the loud noise (unconditioned stimulus.)

The strengths of the Behaviourist approach is that it is scientific and includes experiments to back up the theories and they have been highly applicable to therapy. Another positive is that it has identified similarities between animals (Pavlov's dog) and humans (Watson & Rayner Little Albert.)

The weaknesses of this approach are that the experiments lack ecological validity and some may argue that you cannot compare animals to human beings.

The cognitive approach to psychology suggests that we are first and foremost thinking beings building mental maps of the world around us and then applying them to the everyday. Cognitive psychology is a broad area ranging from the language to logic and has been applied to psychotherapy. This approach is a fairly modern approach to human behaviour that focuses on how we think and what makes us tick. It became of great importance around the 1950s as people were dissatisfied with the behaviourist approach and its lack of emphasis on the internal processes. It became the dominant approach to psychology in the late 1970's. Piaget and Tolman gradually restored the interest in mental processes.

As computers became more popular around the same time psychologists were able to compare humans and computers in the way that we process things. For example, computers receive information in a variety of different ways, they are then able to analyse this information and produce a reaction. Like humans, computers do what they are told, process information and can recall information. The main areas of interest in the cognitive approach are memory and changing thinking patterns. Methods of investigation in cognitive psychology are laboratory experiments, interviews, case studies, observations and computer modelling.

The strengths of the cognitive approach are that it is scientific and there are many studies to support the theories. It is highly applicable and combines

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easily with other approaches, like behaviourism. Another strength of this approach is the useful contributions that have come from this approach, many modern types of therapy are based on the cognitive approach for example cognitive behavioural therapy.

Weaknesses of the cognitive approach are that the experiments lack ecological validity.

Another weakness of this approach is the validity of measuring cognitive processes. We don't know what other people are thinking and therefore the cognitive approach relies heavily on self report measures and observation

The physiological approach looks at how the body and mind interact. The physiological approach looks at areas such as gender and stress. It has been applied to psychotherapy.

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An experiment normally, but not always, takes place in a laboratory where the experimenter can control the environment and the conditions he wants. He looks at how two things are related by varying one of them and seeing how it affects the other. These things are known as variables. This can help find the cause of something. Experiments rely on controlled methods, random assignment and the manipulation of variables to test a hypothesis

The advantages of experiments are that you can compare the different results and measure them. Another positive is that experiments can easily be repeated, especially laboratory experiments. The disadvantages of

experiments are that they cost money and may not always be true to life, they may not be 100% accurate.

An example of an experiment is Milgrams experiment on obedience to authority figures. The participants in the Milgram experiment were 40 men recruited using newspaper ads. In exchange for their participation, each person was paid \$4. 50.

Milgram developed an intimidating shock generator, with shock levels starting at 30 volts and increasing in 15-volt increments all the way up to 450 volts. The many switches were labeled with terms including “ slight shock,” “ moderate shock” and “ danger: severe shock.” The final two switches were labeled simply with an ominous “ XXX.”

Each participant took the role of a “ teacher” who would then deliver a shock to the “ student” every time an incorrect answer was produced. While the participant believed that he was delivering real shocks to the student, the student was actually a confederate in the experiment who would pretend to be shocked.

As the experiment progressed, the participant would hear the learner plead to be released or even complain about a heart condition. Once the 300-volt level had been reached, the learner banged on the wall and demanded to be released. Beyond this point, the learner became completely silent and refused to answer any more questions. The experimenter then instructed the participant to treat this silence as an incorrect response and deliver a further shock.

There are three different types of observational studies; these are, controlled, naturalistic and participant. Naturalistic observations are when people are observed as near as possible in their natural environment. Their behaviour should be true to life, but the presence of the observer may affect this.

The disadvantages are that the presence of the observer may alter behaviour of the person being observed and this may affect the results. Also the beliefs of the observer could alter the results and they could be biased.

The strengths of this are that they are true to life as possible. It can provide the observer with a good detail of information about the person or persons being observed.

A correlation study is a study to determine whether a relationship between two variables exists, for example, whether people who commit violent crimes were victims of child abuse. There are three possible results, a positive correlation, a negative correlation or no correlation. Correlation studies can suggest that there is a relationship between two variables; they cannot prove if one variable causes change to the other.

A weakness of correlation studies is that they cannot tell us cause and effect.