

# Behaviourist perspective

Psychology



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Psychology is a human science, which aims to describe and understand behaviour, emotion and mental processes of the mind. Modern Psychology began in the laboratories of Wilhelm Wundt at the University of Leipzig Germany in 1879. (Lucy T Benjamin JR 2007). As the study of psychology grew, disagreements within the science arose leading to scholar's creating different theories to outline their understanding and explanation of behavior. The study of psychology now includes Behaviourism, which presupposes that behaviour is learnt externally, Psychodynamic accredits that the unconscious mind, personality, and childhood experiences has an effect on our lives. Cognitive theorist places emphasis on observation and examines the internal mental faculties and schemas of the mind. I. e. memory, problem solving and language.

The Humanistic theorists conceive individual behaviour is connected to his or her inner feelings and self-image; and Biopsychology seeks to understand behaviour in relation to the body and specifically the brain. The purpose of this essay is to compare and contrast Behavioural and Psychodynamic paradigms John B Watson (1913) is recognised as the father of Behaviourism ; and proposed that all behaviour is learnt through conditioning ; an interaction with the environment without any internal mental processes involved and can be observed and studied scientifically . There are two main types of conditioning, Operant and Classical. The first is based on the assumption that behaviour is learnt through reinforcement of either rewards or punishment of behaviour to stimulate a frequent response. Classical conditioning on the other hand is based on building a relationship between a

‘ neutral stimulus’ something from the environment and which does not elicit a response from an animal and an ‘ unconditioned stimulus’ that does.

In this case, the behaviour is now learned and the response towards the ‘ unconditioned stimulus’ is now transferred to the ‘ neutral stimulus’ as well. Therefore, behaviourists emphasise the role of environmental factors in influencing behaviour, to the near exclusion of innate or inherited factors whereas the psychodynamic approach would argue that it is indeed innate factors, namely the conscious and the unconscious that determines behaviour. Moreover, that people are not born with ‘ tablua rasa’ blank state but instead with instincts. Freud (1915), who was a therapist, is the most influential psychologist in the psychodynamic approach and is responsible for forming the basis for it, “ based largely on what his patients told him during therapy, together with reflections on his own life”( Jarvis, Russell & Collis 2008).

According to Freud the human mind is made up of three components which influence our behaviour, the Id which is unconscious, and needs must be satisfied i. e. a child throwing a temper tantrum because they can’t get their own way. The Ego is mostly conscious the second component in our personality and a mediates between the Id and the environment it will curb the ID desire for satisfaction i. e. a woman in debt may want splash out on new shoes the ego will mediate and remind her that she should wait to the end of the month when she gets paid. The third component is the superego which is the conscience it holds ideals and morals and judges the ego performance on making the right decision. Personality is developed during childhood, through a series of stages called psychosexual stages and driven

by the libido or sexual energy. There are five distinctive phases; Oral, anal, phallic, latent period, and the Genital Stage Freud conceived that if an individual does not pass successfully through each stage they may become fixated in that stage, therefore their behaviour is a result of the stage that they are stuck at.

For example Freud argues that a person who does not pass through the anal stage successfully i. e. the parent is too strict in potty training, may show signs of being very regimented as an adult thus have an anal-retentive personality. The behaviourist approach offer a more scientific answer through laboratory experiments, as it believes that psychology is a science and a hypothesis needed to be verified and be supported by empirical data. Therefore they observe behaviour through laboratory experiments, an example of this is Skinner; when conducting his study to support operant conditioning Skinner, developed a chamber known as the ‘ Skinner Box’ where he would place observed animals which ensured that there was no outside variables that would affect the behaviour of the animals and also allow ease and accuracy when recording results.

Skinner placed animals such as a rat and a pigeon in the box, where they had to manoeuvre levers to activate a positive or negative reinforcer. For example a negative reinforcer may have been an electric shock where a positive reinforcer was a pellet of food these were the stimulus. As the animal learns to associate pressing the lever which returns food it continued to press this lever therefore the response was reinforced, this “ was expressed by Skinner (1938) as ‘ behaviour is shaped and dominated by its consequences” (Jarvis, Russell & Collis 2008). An example of a negative

reinforcer used in schools is a class completes their homework on time due to the threat of detention (negative reinforcer). Gold stars are awarded for excellent work (positive reinforce).

Behaviourists have a vast range of experiments where they are able to control all variables such as Skinners therefore it increases the validity of the approach as the test is measuring what it claims to be. However, theorist from the psychodynamic approach would argue that these responses are only measured by frequency “ ignoring intensity, duration and quality”. They would also argue that using the results of experiments of animals and applying them to humans is not possible as these experiments fail to deal with the complexity of the human mind compared to a human “ what people think is among the important variables determining what they do and say”(Gross, McIlveen, Coolican, Clamp & Russell 2004). For example Ivan Pavlov and his experiment on the salivary response in dogs, when he taught or conditioned them to salivate to a previously neutral stimulus (Susan Nolen-Hoeksema (2009) has also generalised to humans.

To avoid these problems the psychodynamic approach uses qualitative methods such as case studies, psychoanalysis and dream analysis of humans to support their approach. For example Freud carried out a case study the of Little Hans who was a five year old boy with a phobia of horses, from the information that Freud was able to gain from the boy’s father, Freud concluded that the boy suffered from an Oedipus complex he was in love with the mother, he deduced that during the phallic stage (3-5) a boy will feel a sexual attraction to their mother and will feel threatened by the father who they would see as a rival.

Freud through the boy's father carried out his analysis had how to treat Hans. However, behaviourists would argue that Little Hans developed his phobia because he was living near a busy coach inn and seeing the horse's everyday making a lot of noise on the cobbled streets then seeing one of them collapse and die would have made him afraid of horses this would have been classical conditioning. They may also criticise the psychodynamic approach methodology as it is not scientific and therefore is unfalsifiable.

The behaviourist approach uses behavioural therapies, which aim to help people replace negative behaviours with new healthier behaviours, two examples of this of systematic desensitisation and aversion therapy. Systematic desensitisation is used to treat phobias and involves creating a calming atmosphere and presenting the client with a hierarchy of things, which scare the client until building up to the client's phobia itself. " Reciprocal inhibition prevents the client from feeling two opposite emotions at once" consequently the relaxed state remains and the client then learns to associate that feeling with their former phobia.

Aversion therapy could be considered the opposite of this and is where an undesirable behaviour such as smoking is learnt to be associated with an undesirable response such as an electric shock, leaving the undesirable behaviour one which the client wishes to avoid. This therapy is used using the elements of classical conditioning and has been successful with Duker and Seys (2000) in reducing self-injurious behaviour in children with learning difficulties.(Jarvis, Russel &Collis, 2008) As the behaviourist approach believes that behaviour is simply determined through learning, it can be described as a reductionist theory. This could also be argued for the

psychodynamic approach as it uses a concept of the set-up of the mind to explain behaviour and personality without taking into account other factors such as the environment and genetics.

However some may argue that as Freud took an idiographic approach to studying personality through studying each patient at a time; therefore he did not reduce the complexity of human behaviour and individuality. Where this may strengthen the psychodynamic approach, it can also be argued that it reduces generalisation as the results are inclusive as they are based on subjective experiences but because of these same reasons the results are by themselves, unreliable because they are based on subjective experiences or behaviours of a limited number of individuals, and may be invalid if we try to apply them to our understanding of people as a whole. (Abbott , 2001)

Behaviourism offers a good paradigm for understanding behaviour as it offers valuable evidence through its scientific experiments. However, it fails to take into account that the human mind has a conscience and instincts, which may also affect how we behave, the psychodynamic approach though it does not offer as reliable evidence takes into account these factors, however these are the only factors that it considers. Whereas other approaches argue that it is other factors that determine behaviour, such as the biological approach which argues that genetics are what shape psychological behaviour. In order to get the best understanding of psychological behaviour, it may be best to take a holism approach and take into account all theories.