

Functionalism behaviorism and evolutionary psychology



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Each school of thought within the psychology profession presents its own history and has developed within a specific social, political, intellectual, and religious context. Each school of thought has also had their own accomplishments, failures, demises, and has been modified by schools of thought that have followed them in time. In this paper, the context of development, rise and demise, as well as contributions to the specialization of developmental psychopathology of the functionalist, behaviorist, and evolutionary psychology schools of thought is analyzed.

Table of Contents

Functionalism 4

Behaviorism 5

Evolutionary Psychology 7

Conclusion 8

Functionalism, Behaviorism, and Evolutionary Psychology:

Rise, fall, and contributions to developmental psychopathology

The history of psychology is filled with the rise and fall of different schools of thought, from structuralism to humanistic psychology, each of which has contributed greatly to the development of the field of psychology. By contributing to the field these schools of thought have also contributed to the specialization of developmental psychopathology, a specialization that studies mental, behavioral, and emotional problems in children and adolescents, which are said to affect around 6 to 9 million individuals in the <https://assignbuster.com/functionality-behaviorism-and-evolutionary-psychology/>

United States (The National Alliance on Mental Illness NAMI of Greater Chicago, 2010). The functionalist, behaviorist, and evolutionary schools of thought have developed within specific social, political, intellectual, and/or religious contexts that have shaped their level of influence, the types of contributions they have made to the field of psychology, and their accomplishments, failures and demises.

Functionalism

Functionalism emerged in the 20th century as a reaction to structuralism, and was also greatly influenced by the work of Darwin. (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). Functionalism believed the subject matter of psychology should be mental activity and processes, and to look at the “ function” of mental activity (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

Evolutionary theory was an essential precursor of functionalist psychology as it created the appropriate focus in psychology for functionalism to develop. With his theory of evolution, Darwin “ changed the focus of the new psychology from the structure of its consciousness to its functions” (Schultz & Schultz, 2008, p. 143) which later became the essence of functional psychology: understanding the functions of mental processes in adapting to the world. Darwin’s work on evolution developed in a time where the intellectual, social, religious, and cultural changes such as the Industrial Revolution, a greater belief in science, and a diminished belief in what the Bible and religion said were just right for its development (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

In the United States, the precursor of functional psychology was William James. Although James was not seeking to create a new school of thought, but just rebel against the excessive restrictiveness of structuralism, he introduced the central premise of functionalist psychology: that the goal of psychology was to study people and their adaptations to their environment (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). James rebelled against the structuralist idea of dividing the mind into elements, and instead looked at the mind as a whole (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

The functionalist school of thought has influenced developmental psychopathology in many ways. The work of Darwinian and functionalists on animal intelligence has made it possible to apply animal models to research, which has allowed for the discovery of etiological sources and neurologic explanations of the symptomatic manifestations of certain disorders (Young, Pitkow, & Ferguson, 2002). Functionalism also made it possible to apply experimental research to the investigation of psychopathology (Schultz & Schultz, 2008), research without which we would know very little about childhood psychopathology. Looking at the function of behavior also created a different perspective when looking at childhood psychopathology by shifting the point of view from seeing abnormal behavior as pointless to purposeful and having a potential source that can be solved through treatments and therapies.

Behaviorism

The functionalist movement saw its downfall in the beginning of the behaviorist movement which rebelled against the ideas of the structuralist and the functionalist movements, which behaviorists thought to be too

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restrictive and subjective (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). Behaviorism developed in the 20th century as a movement that deliberately intended to change psychology's point of view from that of the older schools of thought which studied subjective elements of behavior, such as consciousness, to the study of objectively observable and measurable elements of behavior (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

John B. Watson, who is considered to be the father of behaviorism, suggested that only those behaviors that are observable and measurable should be studied and that psychology should become as objective as sciences such as physics (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). He indicated that the “theoretical goal [of behaviorism] is the prediction and control of behavior” (Watson, 1913, p. 2). Watson's work brought together the philosophical origins of psychology, the study of animal behavior, and the functional approach in such a way that he tapped into the previously existing and integrated ideas of the intellectual zeitgeist of the time (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

Behaviorism has contributed greatly to theories and treatment developmental psychopathology. Watson also believed that the main purpose of a science of the mind should be prediction and control of behavior (Hayes & Brownstein, 1986) and that emotional problems in adults were caused by conditioned responses that initiated in infancy, such that providing a child with a proper program of conditioning should avoid the development of psychopathology in adult life (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). The principles of operant conditioning, for example, have been effectively applied in classrooms (McAllister et al., 1969) and for the modification of

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maladaptive behaviors in developmental disorders such as autism (Wolf et al., 1967). Behavioral therapy techniques that are based on the principles of behaviorism, such as systematic desensibilization, aversion therapy, and exposure treatments, are used to treat depression, phobias, autism, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, substance abuse, and others. (Gehart & Tuttle, 2003; Feldman, 2006).

Although behaviorism became a widely accepted school of thought in psychology, the beginning days and the consolidation of the cognitive movement marked the end of behaviorism, as the cognitive movement brought consciousness back into the focal point of psychology (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). This change in focus of psychology can be attributed to the changing zeitgeist in the scientific world, where physicists suggested that scientific investigation should not focus on an objective observation with investigator detachment (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

Evolutionary Psychology

Evolutionary psychology, which is considered the most recent and possibly influential school of thought in psychology, can trace its beginning to the work of Charles Darwin and Edward O. Wilson (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

Evolutionary psychology (E. P.) focuses in the way that evolution has programmed individuals to behave in a specific way (Buss, 2008). The E. P. movement, as many others, can attribute its rise to its marked opposition to the behaviorist movement, as E. P. went completely against the behaviorist premise that all behavior is learned (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). Even though the E. P. theories are still criticized for explaining everything with “ just-so stories”, E. P. has been able to reject these criticisms by presenting scientific <https://assignbuster.com/functionalism-behaviorism-and-evolutionary-psychology/>

evidence supporting its theories (Buss, 2008). Since E. P. has been able to provide explanations for complex and simple behaviors that humans seek to understand, it is becoming integrated into popular culture, in such a way that it continues to influence the field of psychology and remains on the rise.

E. P. has been developing since the time of the appearance of Darwin's theory of evolution, which occurred at a time when the intellectual zeitgeist was ready for an explanation of human change and the continuity between human and animal behavior (Schultz & Schultz, 2008). E. P. has also developed more prominently recently, when psychology has been dedicated to finding a way to unite all the fragmented pieces of the field, something which E. P. offers to do (Buss, 2008). Wilson, who suggested that genetic influences would be more important in the individual's life than cultural influences, has been able to divert some of the criticism of E. P. by indicating that genes are the main influence in our life while admitting that social and cultural forces can influence development (Schultz & Schultz, 2008).

E. P. studies everything, including developmental psychopathology, in the context of survival of the fittest and adaptation. E. P. bases its explanation of psychopathology on the fact that an individual's adaptations to the environment do not occur in the individual's lifetime. E. P. suggests that there is a time lag between our adaptations and our world (Jensen, et al., 1997), in such a way that we are essentially cavemen living in a modern world (Buss, 2008). Mental disorders occur when one's mind functions in a world for which it was not designed for. E. P. investigates the biological and adaptive mechanisms that may lead to Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity

Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive disorder, autism, and other disorders (Bradshaw & Sheppard, 2000; Jensen, et al., 1997).

Conclusion

The social, political, intellectual and/or religious changes in the world contribute greatly to the shaping of the rise, fall, and the influences of different schools of thought upon the field of psychology. Contextual elements such as the Industrial Revolution, a greater belief in science, a decreased belief in religion, and rebellion against other schools of thought, have been factors that contributed differently to the development of the functionalist, behavioral, and evolutionary schools of thought. Change is constant in the field of psychology, with new movements emerging as reactions to others, new psychologists rebelling against old ones, and new ideas influencing the ways in which we apply psychology to specific specializations in the field.