

General psychology of sex and gender psychology essay



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The topics I have chosen for consideration of psychological research are language, and sex and gender. The approaches taken will be analysed the topic in general terms and not to focus on one particular aspect at detailed levels.

It points to the lack of a conclusive answer which is caused by Psychology as a discipline being relatively young and still in early stages with a lack of adequately strong theories that might assist to connect otherwise contrasting perspectives co existing.

The report concludes that different perspectives within psychology can coexist at times, though conflict is frequent throughout.

Sex and Gender

The Psychology of sex and gender is one the most topical, important and engaging subjects that psychology, it illustrates many of the difficult issues that psychological explanations must address, including the political implications of different perspectives and the challenging of integrating explanations.

It has been a controversial topic since the inception of psychology as a discipline and it powerful illustrates some of the diverse approaches with the field.

A deliberation of how psychology approaches the analysis of sex and gender discloses four psychological perspectives, these are:

Biological sex differences: Explaining the differences between male and female and biological correlates of behaviour. Investigations are conducted through scientific processes

Evolutionary psychology: Explaining the differences in the behaviour between the sexes in terms of behavioural selection for reproductive fitness. Tests are conducted empirically

Social constructionist theory: Gender differences between the sexes through the study of discourse in various historical, cultural and social contexts and so is hermeneutic.

Psychoanalytic psychology: Development and meaning of sexual differences. Studies are largely done through clinical observation.

Direct impressions of the four perspectives are objects of knowledge of each of the perspectives are all valid and useful in general psychology of sex and gender,. They pose somewhat different questions, have different objects of knowledge and use different notions of evidences. These perspectives may be complementary, conflicting however the scope for co-existence is not transparent.

Given that the perspectives do not share common objects of knowledge, however there can be an underlying hope for complementary theories in which together they all contribute to a broad understanding.

Sex refers to the biological basis of differences between the sexes, whereas gender refers to social constructed categories pertaining to these differences.

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Assigning a sex to humans can sometimes be a complex process, biological characteristics such as genetics and hormonal used to designate ' male or female, can be unreliable in small proportions of case, due to genetic abnormalities, such as, Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS) and Klinefelters's Syndrome ((XXY) (OU, p137)

The biological and evolutionary perspectives certainly seem complementary at theoretic level in which both consider biological sex as the foundation for gender and view conflicts between sexes as biological characteristics that have been cycled through during evolution.

Evolutionary psychologists argue that sexual selections and the different optimal reproductive styles of our male female ancestors have results in some differences in the behavioural predispositions of the two sexes. These are seen to particularly apparent in the area of sexual behaviours and attitudes. Buss (1992), found while both sexes reported experiencing jealousy at the thought of their partner being involved with another person, there were differences in the focus of their concerned. OU, p145)

In humans, unlike in other animals, clear differences in brain structures that correlate with differences in adult behaviour patterns have proven difficult to demonstrate. Nonetheless, imaging studies show some sex differences in brain functioning of Western adults. This is probably due, at least in part, to the brains plasticity.(Giedd et al, 1999))p140). While some sex differences are clearly established at birth for most individuals, bodies and brained may become gendered over lifetime of use. A explanations would appear to be consistent with research findings from cross-cultural differences in male and

female's sexual behaviours, which Allen and Gorski, 1990 study has backed (OU, p139)

Nevertheless, biological psychology sets out to explain differences with in male and female psychology in terms of chosen physiological features, e. g. dimorphism in brain structures (Hofman and Swaab, 1991, OU p. 139).

Additionally the evolutionary psychologists would primarily contend in favour of selected behavioural features such as differences between sexual attitudes between the sexes (Clark and Hatfield, 1989, OU p. 146).

Thus, in that respect a conflict is apprent at the level of analysis, hence it is ironic that evolutionary psychology must dependently coincide with biological psychology since, given the intelligible complusions on its capacity to carryout the types of empirical reserach that might could be hoped for (Herrnstein-Smith, 2000,, OU p. 141), it is dependent on a particulr amount of certification from the biological perspective, amongst others (OU, 2007, pp. 184). From a social constructionist point of view, they regard sex and gender as features that are declared only through discourse and action.

These are repercussion, of the individual's behaviour and experience within a cultural, social and historical context. The depth of the conflict is illustrated by a comparison of evolutionary studies that stress cross-cultural stability in particular sexual preferences (Buss and Schmitt, 1993, OU, p. 148,) and social constructionist ideas such as Sandra Bem, who developed the idea of the ' cultural lens of musicality and femininity. This lens is a way of perceiving the world that makes behaviour and experiences gendered, this is called the Gender Schema Theory (1994, Holloway et al, 2007, OU p. 153).

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According to the social constructionist perspectives, biological sex is not central to explaining what it is to be a man or a woman, rather it is a signpost to which a whole set of socially constructed gender differences are attached.

In this account, social constructionist created discourse about masculinity and femininity are used by individuals to create their own gendered subject positions.

Whereas the biological and evolutionary perspectives correspond that biological sex consists at the center of explaining gender, the social constructionist perspective categorically rejects that notion, primarily for political reasons. In relation to Sex and Gender, political differences are often exposed when conflicting accounts of differences occur. Gender and sexuality came to be seen, through Freud's work, as having far-reaching implications for the development of itself. It largely correlates the social constructionist, in conditions of its interpretive or hermeneutic methodology.

Therefore both the social constructionist and psychoanalytic perspectives dispute with the biological and evolutionary perspectives at the methodological level of understanding. Contrastingly however the psychoanalysis perspective acknowledges that both biological and cultural contributions to its hypothesis make up, though it is not without its share of difference however. Within the perspective, an important critical development in the psychoanalytic theory sex and gender includes Freud's notion for the symbolic significance of the penis (and penis envy) quickly came under scrutiny from feminist psychologists to scientific practices,

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through Freud' failure to consider the significant of women's genitals. (OU, Horney, 1926, , 2007, p. 164).

Language and Meaning

There are three main perspectives used to examine the complex area of language, these are:

Theory

Methods

Themes.

These perspectives focus on different aspects of language including evolutionary developments of languages, the processing of languages and the construction of meaning through interaction.

From the study of language and meaning, an evenly conniving combination of possible co-existence, complementary and conflicting aspects can be found when comparing the three principal perspectives.

The evolutionary perspective sets out to explore language to understand how are related structurally and historically, how they are used differently by various social and cultural groups and how languages is used to communicate and create meaning. Language is the main medium for communication between human's beings and where we express, explore and pursue those goals that mean most to us . It can be concvied to view the three perspectives as at to the lowest degree co-existent. Their objectives of

knowledge are different and one could anticipate their cumulative intentions to contribute to some sort of merged theory

Nevertheless, the possible conflict between the cognitive and social constructionist perspectives is disclosed in how they consider meaning as the object of knowledge. For the cognitive view it is something which is manufactured internally by the individual before transmission, and subsequently rebuilt by the whoever present viewing. For the social view it is negotiated as a consequence of discourse between individuals, in which meaning emerges as the result of a complex exchange of intentions, interpretations and power-relations. Therefore, there is cause for discrepancy, as to what “ meaning” is and where it comes from (Sperber and Wilson 1986, OU, p100). It therefore appropriate to rationalise a claim of conflict since the types of “ meaning” adopted by the two perspectives are themselves contrasting.

A major social constructionist disagreement with a formalist cognitive perspective is that cognitive processes cannot be transparently reported. The argument is one that cognitive psychologists have long noted. Talking about early research into the cognitive modelling of language Boden (1977, pp. 113ff, et passim) notes that a person’s comprehension of language in a given instance is dependent, not merely from their knowledge of the environment surrounding them, but importantly on their understanding of their relationship with who they communicate with.

Within the evolutionary perspective there is also an argument as to whether language evolved as an adaptation advantage and was the foundation for

other cognitive abilities. Pinker (1994) believes that languages may have evolved through natural selection, perhaps in conjunction with other cognitive abilities, (OU, p83) or as a reaction of selection for an ability to form our “ Metarepresentation” (Sperber, 2000, p. 86). These are contradictory and conflicting views..

The major differences between psychological methods based on natural science principles and those based those on hermeneutic principles means that preservatives based on these methods may have difficulty achieving more than uneasy coexistence.

Psychologists do not always abide on such significant basic principle. The questions they posture can often be hard to extract without abridging the prognostic ability of whatever solution, in comparion to physics or chemisty which can be measured through of year thousands of years evidence, psychology on the other hand as a recognisable discipline has been prentst of litte over a hundread years.

A inevitable conclusion is that psychology is characterised by perspectives that are present at more then one level on conflict, co-existenct or complementtory aspects, No perspective on its own can tell the whole story. The perspectives and levels of analysis and explanations cannot just be combined without an account of how they interact.