

# Different approaches to the study of psychology

Science



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This paper discusses different approaches to the study of psychology and shows their relevance to the understanding of offending behaviour. A generally acceptable definition of psychology is that it is the science of the behaviour of living organisms with an emphasis upon human beings. With roots in the Greek psyche (life or self) and logos (logic), psychology is the scientific study of observable behaviour that we can observe directly or measure with instruments (Baucum, 1999).

Therefore, in general, psychology means the study of behaviour, and it follows that if we learn to understand the way people SHOULD behave by a methodical, logical study, by the same manner we should gain some insight and understanding into why some deviants behave the way that they do.

Cognitive psychology is one of the major approaches within psychology and can be contrasted with the behavioral view (a focus on observable behavior), a psychoanalytic view (a focus on the unconscious), a humanistic view (a focus on personal growth and interpersonal relationships) and a social cognitive view (a focus on the social environment as it impacts personal qualities such as thinking and feeling. ) An important distinction between the behavioral and cognitive or humanistic views is the importance of feedback.

For behaviorists, the most important feedback comes in the form of the application of consequences from the environment. The cognitive, as well as humanistic, would focus on the importance of internal feedback. The social cognitive view considers both types. (Huitt, 2006) Of course the term offending behaviour does not relate just to criminal activities but to any type of behaviour which can be seen as deviant. There is no doubt that the use of

psychology can be very useful and effective in criminology, one of the most obvious examples of offending behaviour.

If this work is not done correctly, however, the effect can be frustrating and can slow down the entire procedure. It is therefore very important to do this kind of work systematically and effectively (Victoroff, 2005) According to David Lester in his book entitled " Theories of Personality" (1995), there are three major approaches to the explanation of human behaviour. He lists these as intrapsychic explanations, physiological theories and simple learning theories. He explains intrapsychic explanations in the following manner: They are explanations that use concepts based upon psychological processes and structures within the mind.

These processes may focus on the contents of the mind such as particular desires, emotions or thoughts (Lester, 1995). Loosely, psychologists employing this method to understand, perhaps, why pedophiles act in the way that they do, or what would cause a man to want to rape. It may also lead to the understanding of self image, and what would cause, for example, a person with a low self image (in his mind the fault of his mother) to want to take revenge upon all women. It typically defines and utilizes more complicated mechanisms such as defense mechanisms, complexes and system principles (Lester, 1995)

The second method listed by Lester also focuses on the individual but as opposed to using mental processes to explain human behaviour, it relies upon the physiology of the brain. This is the Physiological theories approach - William Sheldon and Hans Eysneck have proposed classic physiological theories of personality - and recent advances in biological psychiatry look as <https://assignbuster.com/different-approaches-to-the-study-of-psychology/>

if they may form the basis for modern, improved physiological theories of personality (Lester, 1995).

One can see that this type of approach may be very useful in the study of a variety of neurological disorders, including perhaps schizophrenia - it may allow heightened understanding of why the patient has split personalities - or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or even disorders which fall into the depression category such as Bipolar Disorder. The third approach given by Lister focuses upon the environment (or the situation) of the individual as the source of explanations for human behavior.

Social Learning Theory takes into account the fact that humans are more complex than lower animals, and introduces a limited number of intrapsychic processes (mainly cognitive elements) in order to provide a more complete understanding of the behaviour of human beings. (Lister, 1995). There definitely seems to be truth in this. Take for example a woman who is ordinarily of a sunny disposition. Her friends may notice that for a few months she has been moody, lethargic, withdrawn, and generally not interested in anything.

This is probably indicative of something being wrong, and further exploration may reveal to the friends that the reason for this offending behaviour is that she is under severe financial stress, for example. Lister also says that while all of the above pose a variety of answers to the understanding of human behaviour, the truest is probably a combination of all of the above (Lister, 1995). Take the example of a well known person who is known to have exhibited offending behaviour - Robert Thompson, who as a 10 yr old participated with Jon Venables in the killing of 3 yr old Jamie Bulger.

All of the approaches described above can be used in the analysis of the following information. Born of an abusive father and an alcoholic mother, he had five older brothers who assaulted him. His father left the family after viciously assaulting his mother. Reminiscent of William Golding's novel *The Lord of the Flies*, the older brothers bullied the younger into submission. Robert did try to be a good son and would help his mother in the kitchen and babysitting the younger ones, trying to provide support.

Robert was not aggressive as much as sly. He skipped school, but when he did attend he was not considered a troublemaker. Teachers thought he was shy and quiet, yet manipulative of others, and didn't expect much from him. Other kids avoided him. (Courtroom Television Network, 2005) Sometimes he talked tough, trying to act the role of a Thompson, but he was not considered violent or aggressive. He roamed the streets of Walton at 1 a. m. His mother Ann sometimes hid his shoes to keep him home.

Unfortunately, Robert's abuse at the hands of his older brothers began to repeat in his treatment of his younger brother. He intimidated his younger brother, but they shared a strange bond. At night, they would lie in bed together, sucking one another's thumb. (During the course of Robert's trial Ryan began exhibiting disturbing behavior. He wet his bed regularly, set fires in his room, and gained weight. He seemed jealous of the attention Robert received and his mother was fearful that he would do something equally horrible to get the same treatment.)

Using the approaches listed above we can begin to understand the mind of Robert Bulger, and use this information to prevent further like crimes from occurring. This paper has discussed different approaches to the study of <https://assignbuster.com/different-approaches-to-the-study-of-psychology/>

psychology and shown their relevance to the understanding of offending behaviour. We can see that using a combination of the different approaches to psychology is probably the best way to get at the truth.