

Psychological approaches to explain human behaviour

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Compare and contrast different approaches in psychology, in their effectiveness in explaining human behaviour. Many psychological approaches try to explain human behaviour and as to whether behaviour is innate, nature, or it's learnt through experiences from our environment, nurture. The behaviourist approach is a theory that all behaviours are learnt and that individuals are born with a tabula rasa, a blank slate. They claim that individual's behaviour is determined by the environment in which they live in; this has been called environmental determinism.

This social learning theory can be explained by the principles of conditioning, classical conditioning and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning is a form of learning in which simple responses are associated with new stimuli. For example Psychologist Pavlov's (1849-1936) research on dog's digestive system, he noticed that when he presented food to his dogs they would then salivated. The food is an unconditioned stimulus that brings forth a response automatically and the salivation to the food is the unconditioned response which is automatically produced.

He then sounded a bell, the conditioned stimulus, before he presented the dogs with food. Eventually every time he sounded the bell they would automatically produce saliva, this is a conditioned response. Therefore Pavlov's research supports the theory that behaviour can be taught and conditioned. Operant conditioning is a form of learning in which behaviour is controlled by giving a reward or reinforcement. The essence of operant conditioning can be seen in Skinner's (1938) experiment with his 'skinner boxes'. His theory arises from Thorndike's (1874-1949) theory in instrumental learning.

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Thorndike suggested that learning could take place through trial and error. Both Thorndike and Skinner (1938) concentrate on the effects of behaviour whilst Pavlov's study focuses on behaviours themselves. Conditioning theory is a fundamental part of psychological explanations. Learning theory may explain the behaviours of these animals however it may not be appropriate as it is reducing the complex human behaviours to stimulus response links. For example Skinner claims that children produce words and sentences that are rewarded or enforced, however Chomsky (1959) argues that learning a language cannot be accounted in such simple terms. Therefore this shows that behaviourist theory is a reductionist theory as they claim that it does not matter what goes on inside the "black box", the mind. The behaviourist theory de-emphasises the importance of internal factors such as motivation and knowledge. However strength of this approach is the successful applications derived from this approach such as behaviour therapy and programmed learning used in both schools and prisons.

This theory of learning has also been useful in developing therapies to undo undesirable learnt behaviours, such as aversion therapy, where behaviour is eliminated by associating it with severe punishment. The cognitive approach to understanding human behaviours is on the other side of the spectrum to behavioural theories. They disagree with the behavioural theory as they emphasise the external observational events whilst only the cognitive approach emphasise on the internal, mental processors to explain human behaviours.

The theory supports the nature approach that we are born the way we are.

The cognitive approach is based on three assumptions. The first assumption

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is that behaviour can be explained in terms of how the mind operates and humans are seen as information processors. Part of the mental processors is schemas these are packets of information organised and categorically stored in a long-term memory in order to generate future behaviour. The second assumption is that our mind works like a computer where it inputs, stores and retrieves data.

The multistore memory model was created by psychologists Atkinson and Striffrin, where in this theory the information enters the brain through the five senses and then it moves to the short memory then long term memory store. The third assumption is that behaviour should be measured scientifically as psychology is a science. Psychologist Wundt (1832-1920), claims that instead of just developing his own theories he devised experiments to try to find evidence to support his theory and to make observations that were not biased by personal interpretation.

On the other hand, the behaviourist theory is difficult to find objective and scientific data to support their ideas without the results being affected by researcher bias. However one difficulty with measuring results in cognitive studies is that a researcher cannot observe the inner workings of the brain. The irony is that cognitive psychology today is similar to behaviourism as it excludes certain other internal factors such as the influence of motivation and emotion; therefore the cognitive approach is seen as a reductionist theory similar to the behavioural approach. However recent developments are addressing this issue.

Another criticism of the cognitive approach is that the reliance on data from laboratory experiments means that some research lacks ecological validity. <https://assignbuster.com/psychological-approaches-to-explain-human-behaviour/>

The psychodynamic approach to explain human behaviour was introduced by psychologist Freud (1890). The term psychodynamic refers to the explanation that emphasises the forces that drive individuals to behave the way they behave. Freud's theory and method of therapy are both called psychoanalysis. This psychoanalytic perspective seeks to explain human development in terms of an interaction between innate drives and early experience.

He believed that childhood was extremely important in the formation of the adult personality. His theory was that we have an unconscious mind which collects repressed memories which motivates and influence our conscious thoughts and behaviour. Freud developed his theory through case studies, using other's recollections of childhood. Freud was highly criticised for being biased in his research as his findings were the result of his own interpretations and reasons. However his concepts were quite revolutionary for their time. He claims that an individual's personality is made up of 3 parts; the id, ego and superego.

According to Freud, they come about through the process of psychosexual development. There are 5 stages that all children go through. If a child gets too much or too little gratification at any stage, this can shape their personality in adulthood. For example, the first stage is the oral stage and if the child receives too much gratification, e. g. fed too much, they become optimistic or gullible as adults. One criticism of Freud's research was that for example his study on Hans in 1909, he did not collect the data himself as it was Hans father who carried the investigation.

His method of data collection was collected by second hand. Also the questions that he asked the in his investigation was leading questions and this can make the subject answer the question differently. However Freud assessed his sample in his studies in their natural environment therefore his case studies had a high ecological validity rather being assessed in artificial laboratory experiment. One problem with Freud's study in a natural environment is that he observed his sample therefore unlike cognitive experiments he did not received scientific data to support his theory.

Therefore, the theory of psychoanalysis lacks falsifiability, as is difficult to prove his theory wrong because his arguments can be made to fit any behaviour. In summary the behaviourist approach claim that behaviour is learnt by the environment that individuals are in whilst the cognitive approach believe that behaviour is innate and people are born the way they are. However in contrast the psychoanalytical approach supports both nature and nurture and that individual's personality is split into 3 parts but it is shaped by what the individual is exposed to.