

## Compare And Contrast Any Two Perspectives In Psychology

The word 'Psychology' is derived from the Greek words 'Psyche' meaning 'mind' or 'soul' and 'Logos', meaning 'study of'. The definition in the dictionary states that it is 'the study of human and animal behaviour'.

Atkinson et al (1991) defines psychology as 'the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes'. All definitions are correct in their own rights but as simple definitions can sometimes be misleading as through out history, Psychologists have not only disagreed about designation of psychology but what and how it should be studied. These approaches are often referred to as 'perspectives'. Each has a very different way of explaining human behaviour and makes different assumptions about the processes behind this behaviour.

There are 5 major perspectives in Psychology offering different explanations as to why humans behave in the way they do.

- Psychodynamics –An approach based on the idea that the unconscious is a source of drive or motivation.
- Behaviourism – The approach restricts its focus of study to observing and recording human behaviour. It offers a view of human behaviour as being infinitely malleable, crafted by the rewards offered by the environment around us.
- Humanistic – A holistic approach. It stresses the importance of an individuals unique potential to change in positive ways towards the goal of self - actualisation.
- Cognitive –A dominant approach in modern Psychology. Cognition is the act or process of knowing; it includes attention imaging and thinking. It studies cognition mainly from a viewpoint of how we process information.
- Biological – The study of biological bases of behaviour. It is based on neuroscientific research. Bio- psychologists believe we are the result of anatomical structures, programmed to develop and respond in particular ways from when we are born.

This essay is concentrating on the psychodynamic and the behaviourist perspectives, looking at their similarities and comparing how they differ from each other.

In 1900, Sigmund Freud published his psychoanalytical theory. Interested in the role of the unconscious mental processes in influencing people's behaviour, Freud believed our personalities to be divided into three distinctive parts. The **id**, the **ego** and the **super ego**, which often conflict with each other. The id operates on the pleasure principal - the search for immediate gratification. The ego dominates the conscious mind. The part of mind, that is in contact with the outside world. It carries out secondary process thinking. The super ego develops when we become aware of the rules and conventions of society, specifically focusing on our parents. Ego and super ego dwell largely in the conscious mind. A large part of the mind being our

unconscious is dominated by id, and our behaviour 'driven' by instincts housed herein. Expressions of these instincts are shaped by our early life experiences. Freud believed people have a continuous stream of psychic energy. The libido, reflecting that the sex drive is a primary life instinct (**Eros**) and the death drive (**Thanatos**), energy manifesting into aggression. He believed children developed through various stages -oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital, with energy being focused in different body parts.

Contemporaries of Freud, such as Carl Jung and Alfred Alder, emphasized different issues in human development. This wider theoretical framework is known as the psychodynamic approach.

**John B Watson** (1913) proposed psychologists should confine themselves to studying behaviour, since this was measurable by more than one person. Watson claimed the only way psychology could be taken seriously was to emulate the natural sciences and become objective. This is known as behaviourism. The behaviourist approach emphasizes the importance of environmental stimuli in the way we act, concentrating on the processes of learning - any lasting change in behaviour that occurs as a result of an experience. **Ivan Pavlov** (1927) discovered ' **classical conditioning**'. This is where a stimulus brings no response in a human or animal, until it is associated with another. He studied the digestion of dogs; finding they could be conditioned to salivate without food. **Thorndike** (1898) used a complicated puzzle box for cats, observing them attempting to escape. Eventually through trial and error, the animals escaped and were rewarded. Tests were repeated and apparently realising the inherent rewards, the cats became more skilled at achieving their goals. Thorndike called this **law of effect**. Thorndike reasoned that, positive outcomes were more likely to be repeated. This is known as **operant conditioning**, studied in more detail by **B.F Skinner** (1904-1990). Skinner focused on environment as a cause for human behaviour. A person would act positively, not for moral reasons, but for the rewards received. **Bandura** (1977) promoted the importance of the **social learning theory** claiming there doesn't have to be reinforcement to create a behaviour pattern. We simply learn by observation and imitation.

There are many issues that could be discussed in terms of comparison and contrast. Let us begin with their historical roots. Freud published his work in 1900. Just a few years later in America behaviourism was founded. This presented a major challenge and alternative to Psychodynamics. John Watson was seriously questioning the dominant non- biological approach with its roots in **introspection** (Wundt 1879). He believed the results of introspection could not be proved or disproved. Introspection is subjective and only the individual can observe his/her own thoughts and mental processes.

Both perspectives are deterministic. People are driven by forces beyond their control. Either an unconscious force from within (psychodynamics) or, reinforcements from without (behaviourism). Freud suggested there is no free will. Our adult personalities are determined by our childhood experiences. Behaviourists believe people have no free will, they just think they do. This approach links into the theory that people are actually carrying out actions that are influenced by past experiences due to environmental influences.

Behaviourism began with the study of animals. They were practical and ethically more convenient to test. Behaviourists believed that the laws of learning were crucial and that there was only a small difference between animals and humans. The most radical difference between behaviourism and psychodynamics is the work of Watson (1913) who was not interested in the mental processes. He saw no role for the mind and consciousness. The mind and its thought processes were abstract and unobservable and therefore unscientific. Behaviourism is a great challenge to psychodynamic theorists, who believe our behaviour is controlled and processed outside people's awareness.

Many critics of Freud say that his experimental research was un-testable. His research was merely descriptive. Psychodynamics try to seek conclusion from qualitative study rather than from scientific studies. Freud's case studies were limited. He mainly studied neurotic middle class Austrians. Which, it was argued is not representative of the general population. There have been many empirical studies of various aspects of Freud's theory. Fisher and Greenberg (1977) concluded that, "*it is a complex structure consisting of many parts, some of which should be accepted, others rejected and the rest at least partially reshaped*". The Behaviourist needs to test everything! We can confidently say that behaviourism clearly satisfies one of the criteria for a good scientific theory, in that its explanations are simple. There is no need to invent complex hidden processes to explain why behaviour happens. They believe that emotions are qualitative and not easily measurable. An implication of this Slife and Williams (1997) is that although stimuli, responses and reinforcements are essential in behaviourist explanations of behaviour, they are never observed directly. We can readily observe events in the environment, but we have no way of knowing if they act as the stimulus or reinforcement for a given response. It is doubtful that conditioning accounts for all human behaviour and emotions. Humans are far more complex.

There is a difference in approaches to gender development. Mainly in the use of identification and role of the parents. In the social learning theory the identification is purely in a social context, whilst in the psychodynamic approach the identification is biological. Psychodynamics view the gender role as being exclusive to the role of our parents. Social learning theorists believe children learn gender roles by imitation and reinforcement from their parents. For example playing with sex appropriate toys. Social learning theorists claim that gender role can be learned from anyone whom the child respects in order to gain reward and reinforcements (teacher, sibling etc). Freud devised a theory of acquisition of gender identity based on the idea surrounding infantile sexuality and the development of self in the first six years of life. When a child reaches the **phallic stage**, Oedipus and Electra complexes develop. This is when gender divisions occur, the child starts to realise whether it is male or female. With the Oedipus complex, the boys desire for his mother creates resentment towards the father but the boy fears his father may castrate him! The boy becomes torn between the love for his mother and fear of castration from his father, resolving it by masculine identity – his father being the role model. The Electra complex involves the girl suffering "penis envy". The penis is a symbol of power, believing that she has actually been castrated – blaming her mother. The girl begins to hate her mother, as she feels incomplete. She then substitutes the wish for a penis with the wish for a baby, wanting her father to provide for her. Eventually she goes back to loving her

mother and identifies herself as a woman with her mother being a role model. Freud treated many women with psychological problems. This is probably why his theories about female psychosexual development of penis envy are now universally rejected and simply see as reflecting the sex bias of the historical period in which Freud lived. A little girl's personality was almost definitely shaped by her awareness that she lacked social status and independence. I am sure you can imagine that this theory has been deeply criticised, particularly from feminist psychologists, I wonder why? Horney (1924) suggests that a woman's envy isn't the penis as such, but male's superior status (the penis only being a symbol for male privilege). Moreover, its men not women who equate lack of penis with inferiority!

Both perspectives are dominant in our society today. If the public were asked to name a famous psychologist, more than likely Freud would be first! Psychoanalysis is used to treat neurotic disorders. The aim is to transfer repressed memories into the conscious so the patient can face up to the unresolved conflict. Techniques used in this therapy are free association, the client says the first thing that comes into his or hers mind, or dream analysis, describing their dreams. This often gives clues to what the unresolved conflict is. These treatments are both time consuming and expensive. Psychotherapy is criticised, as it has to determine what the dream meant. The interpretation could be completely wrong, resulting in the therapy being unsuccessful. The social learning theory has made a major contribution to clinical psychology and personality theory. It has led us to see that human actions are related to the environment and the way our environment can be changed to modify our behaviour. In the health profession behaviourism plays a big part in treating phobias and anxieties, based on classical and operant conditioning. It is also widely used in our schools, helping us to understand children's behaviour. However, the social learning theory does not explain the acquisition of new behaviours that have not previously been observed. They have been criticised for over emphasizing the importance of situational influences on behaviour and in the process losing sight of the individual's personality.

Looking at the ethics of both perspectives does raise some issues. We could argue that the behaviourism perspective is quite controversial in that a lot of their research was carried out on animals. Behaviour therapy can be seen to be unacceptable, because it's manipulative and demeaning of human dignity. For example if we look at the study of little Albert, (1920), a nine month old boy. Albert, healthy from birth had no apparent fears. Watson conditioned him to show a fear response to rats. Watson used a hammer struck on a metal bar to make a loud noise. Albert showed a natural fear response to the noise. Unconditional response - the bar was struck when Albert petted the rat. Eventually, Albert associated the loud noise with the rat -conditional response. Watson's theory to emotional responses did seem correct, but poor Albert. The things we do in the name of science! As for the psychodynamic perspective we cannot complain about research on animals. However, therapists see themselves as "psychological midwives", present during the "birth" and helping the patient to express his or her true self. All therapists of whatever persuasion (if they are at all effective) influence their patients. Both approaches comprise a situation where one human being (therapist) tries to act in a way that enables another (patient) to act and feel differently.

There we have it two perspectives similar in some ways, yet clearly different in approach. There is no doubt that both perspectives have contributed to better understanding both human and animal behaviour. Psychology is a dynamic science. It needs to be studied from many perspectives and it would be naïve to dismiss any single approach out of hand. Technological advances have had a knock on effect to the way the modern psychologist operates. New theories, notions and experiments are conducted everyday. However, I believe the key to any approach is an open frame of mind. There may be no Holy Grail of psychology but as long as work is carried out and evaluated with an open-minded approach, we may yet discover the key to unlock the mysteries of the mind.