

'Compare and contrast the contribution that behaviourist and psychodynamic theories have made to our understanding of the psychology of human behaviour'.

This essay is going to discuss the behaviourist and psychodynamic theories that exist and the arguments for and against them. The behaviourist theory was first introduced by Watson (1913) in what was later to be known as the 'Methodological' form and then redefined by Skinner in the 'Radical' form. The psychodynamic theory was originally introduced by Freud (1900). The modern day psychodynamic approach is largely based on Freud's theories but do include the theories of people such as Jung, Adler and Erikson whose theories are based on Freud's but are not identical. The way I have decided to structure this essay is to describe each theory separately, starting off with a brief history followed by an account of their theories and how they have contributed to modern day psychology. I shall then make my comparisons between the two theories and finally conclude by mentioning some of the criticism aimed at these theories.

Behaviourism was born when the introspective theory (observing and analysing the structure of conscious mental processes) validity and usefulness was being seriously questioned. The main person doing this questioning was an American psychologist, John B. Watson.

Watson (1913) proposed that psychologists should only study behaviour because it is the only thing that is measurable and observable by more than one person.

Watson knew that for psychology to be accepted as scientific that it would have to imitate the natural sciences and adopt its own objective methods. Watson's own definition of psychology was:

'... that division of Natural Science which takes human behaviour – the doings and sayings, both learned and unlearned – as its subject matter'

(Watson, 1919 in Gross, R & McIlveen, R 1998).

Therefore the study of inaccessible, private and mental processes was to have no place in a truly scientific psychology.

Watson was waiting to totally transform the very subject matter of psychology from 'mind' to behaviour. This is often referred to as methodological behaviourism.

Skinner (1987) defined this as,

" 'Methodological' behaviourists often accept the existence of feelings and states of mind, but do not deal with them because they are not public and hence statements about them are not subject to confirmation by more than one person... '.

However, in contrast to this, Skinner (1987) asserts:

'... 'Radical' behaviourists... recognise the role of private events (accessible in varying degrees to self-observation and physiological research), but contend that so-called mental activities are metaphors or explanatory fictions and that behaviour attributed to them can be more effectively explained in other ways... '.

Skinner found that for him, these more effective explanations of behaviour come in the form of the principles of reinforcement derived from his experimental work with rats and pigeons.

Skinner used a type of puzzle box known as a Skinner box. The box has a lever (in the case of rats) or illuminated discs (in the case of pigeons), under which is a food tray, and the experimenter decides exactly what the relationship will be

between pressing the lever or pecking the disc and the delivery of a food pellet, giving the experimenter total control of the animal's environment.

Lever Pressing	→	Positive reinforcement	→	Food is presented.
Lever Pressing	→	Negative reinforcement	→	Electric shock is switched off, or avoided altogether.
Lever Pressing	→	Punishment	→	Electric shock is switched on.

Positive and negative reinforcement both strengthen behaviour (making it more probable), each works in a different way. Positive reinforcement involves presenting something pleasurable (such as food), whilst negative reinforcement involves the removal or avoidance of some 'aversive' state of affairs (such as electric shock). Punishment has the effect of weakening behaviour.

Some basic principles and assumptions made by the behaviourist approach are:

- The role of the environmental factors have the emphasis in influencing behaviour, almost to the exclusion of innate or inherited factors. This amounts essentially to a focus on learning. The key form of learning is either classical (which formed the basis of Watson's behaviourism), or operant (which is at the centre of Skinner's radical behaviourism).
- Watson's rejection of introspectionism was his belief that it invoked too many vague concepts that are difficult, if not impossible, to define and measure.
- The mechanisms proposed by a theory should be as simple as possible. Behaviourists stress the use of operational definitions (defining concepts in terms of observable, measurable events).
- The aim of science of behaviour is to predict and control behaviour. This raises both conceptual questions (about the nature of science, in particular the role of theory) and ethical questions (for example, about power and the role of psychologists as agents of change).

A massive contribution has been made to psychology by behaviourism, at least up to the 1950s. For example, imagery as a form of organisation in memory and as a memory aid is based on the principle of association. Language, moral and gender development have all been explained in terms of conditioning, and some influential theories of the formation and maintenance of relationships focus on the concept of reinforcement. The behaviourist approach also offers one of the major models of abnormal behaviour.

There has also been major practical contributions to psychology by the behaviourism. Methodological behaviourism for example with its emphasis on experimentation, operational definitions, the measurement of observable events has been a major influence on the practice of scientific psychology in general.

The term 'psychodynamic' denotes the active forces within the personality that motivate behaviour and the inner causes of behaviour.

Freud's was the original psychodynamic theory; the approach includes all those theories based on his ideas, such as those of Jung, Adler and Erikson. Freud's psychoanalytic theory is psychodynamic, but the psychodynamic theories of Jung and so on, are not psychoanalytic.

Freud's theory is split into two parts, the theory of the mind and the instincts. The theory of the mind consists of the conscious and the unconscious. The instincts are the life instinct and the death instinct.

In the unconscious is the ID where the instincts reside and it is concerned with self-gratification i.e. operating on the pleasure principle. In the conscious part of the mind are the superego and the ego. The superego develops via the Oedipus complex and is our social conscience that threatens punishment, it is formed by parental and other significant influences such as culture or family. The ego is concerned with social rules i.e. operates on the reality principle. It is modified by the real world and is the intermediary between the ID and the real world; it has reason and common sense.

The instincts are the life instinct and the death instinct. The death instinct (Thanatos) expresses itself as aggression. The life instinct i.e. sex drive (libido) can be split into two parts.

The first part is the conflict between gratification demanded by ID and conformity demanded by the superego, the ego tries to keep the balance between the two and the anxieties that are produced by this are dealt with by the defence mechanisms e.g. repression – involuntary exclusion of conflicting thought or awareness, the most common defence mechanism. Another defence mechanism is denial, which is a non-acceptance of the external world (e.g. my husband is not dead).

The second part of the life instinct is the psycho-sexual stages. They start at the oral phase (birth-15 months), then the anal phase (15 months-3 years) then the phallic stage (3-5 years) then the latency phase (5 years to puberty) and finally the genital phase (puberty onwards). The oral stage is when the infant gets sensual and sexual pleasure from sucking and when the child gets teeth the child gets the pleasure of biting. In the anal stage the child gets pleasure from retaining and releasing faeces.

The phallic stage is when the child discovers the pleasure of his/her own genitals and enjoys masturbation. The phallic stage ends with the Oedipal stage, this is when the boy becomes attached to his mother but is prevented from loving her because of his fear that his father will punish him by castration. He therefore identifies with his father and is able to form future relationships. The girl becomes attached to her father but thinks she has already been castrated by the mother and wants a penis of her own, the disappointment enables her to let go of her father and later form relationships.

The latency stage of psycho-sexual development is the stage at which the sexual energies are diverted and used for cognitive and social development. The final stage, the genital stage, is the onset of puberty and the awakening of genital awareness. This stage sees the exploration of sexual activity with partners and there may be a break from parental authority as individuals establish their own adult

relationships. The following through of these stages brings the optimum amount of gratification and psychological health. A fixation with any of these stages or a failure to resolve the Oedipal complex can lead to neurotic behaviour depending on the type of fixation. Fixation is shown as regressing to behaviour typical of that stage e.g. smoking – oral stage. These problems can be dealt with through psycho-analysis.

As with the previously mentioned behaviourist accounts of conditioning, many of Freud's ideas and concepts have become part of mainstream psychology's vocabulary.

Freud's contribution is extremely rich and diverse, offering theories of motivation, dreams and the relationship between sleep and dreams, forgetting, attachment and the effects of early experience.

Fancher (1996) also comments on the contribution Freud has had by pointing out:

'Most modern therapists use techniques that were developed either by Freud and his followers or by dissidents in explicit reaction against his theories. Freud remains a dominating figure, for or against whom virtually all therapists feel compelled to take a stand.'

Even the fiercest critics of Freud concede to his influence. In fact many people not associated with psychology know one or many of his theories.

In conclusion both theories can be criticised as well as applauded. Some of behaviourism's plus points are that it is scientific in approach therefore making it seem less based on ideas that may never be proved but more on the practical side which can easily be repeated on numerous occasions.

Skinner claimed that human behaviour can be predicted and controlled in the same way as the behaviour of non-humans. However possessing language allows us to communicate with each other and to think about things that have never been observed, including rules, laws and principles (Garrett, 1996 in Gross, R & McIlveen, R 1998).

One of Freud's most common criticism's is that his theories are unscientific and therefore are unfalsifiable (incapable of being disproved). Freud offers a way of understanding that is different from theories that are easily testable and which may actually be more appropriate for capturing the nature of human experience and action.

Freud can be best summed up by Fancher (1996),

' Although always controversial, Freud struck a responsive chord with his basic image of human beings as creatures in conflict, beset by irreconcilable and often unconscious demands from within as well as without. His ideas about repression, the importance of early experience and sexuality, and the inaccessibility of much of human nature to ordinary conscious introspection have become part of the standard Western intellectual currency'.