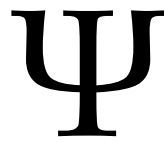


**COMPARE AND CONTRAST TWO  
PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**



Psychology Level 3  
Essay No.1

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The essay will begin with an introduction to each approach, giving main assumptions and supporting evidence. Following this, the two theories will be compared and contrasted, looking at strengths and weaknesses. In conclusion there will be a short explanation of the main areas of similarity, and differences.

Psychology and its many definitions has changed radically and frequently over time, as an independent area of study. There are many different theoretical views, some conflicting, regarding the most appropriate methods for investigating human nature. The approaches chosen to discuss in this essay are psychodynamic and behaviourist. The reason for this choice is simply that they hold both fascination and scepticism; they have been the cornerstones of psychology with many of their theories and therapies still in use today.

Behaviourism is the study of the relationship between a person's environment and their behaviour. Thorndike (1874), an American psychologist, was the first to develop this theory; he produced a study using a box and cats.

Reinforcement and punishment is the modern terminology for what Thorndike uncovered – he noted that pleasant events would 'stamp in' a response, making it more likely to be repeated and unpleasant events appeared to 'stamp out' a response, therefore, making it less likely to be repeated - operant conditioning "learning by trial and accidental success". This led to him formulating the 'Law of Effect' (1898).  
(www.muskingum.edu)

Following Thorndike was Ivan Pavlov, a Russian who trained dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell. He showed that through experience, an animal could learn to respond to a stimulus that had never caused this response before – known as classical conditioning. (Carlson 1990)

Behaviourism remained the dominant force in psychology – particularly in America, for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. John B. Watson, a behaviourist, believed psychology was a natural science, restricted to observable behaviour and regarded humans as complex animals with no inner processes or unconscious - only responses to stimulus. Behaviourists believed thoughts, feelings and motives had no influence over behaviour and personality; this was down to the power of environment alone. Watson developed the theory of classical conditioning - the stimulus > response theory (S > R). A simple example of S > R would be making a loud noise behind someone (stimulus), and them jump with fright (response). He believed normal behaviour came from acceptable conditioning, reinforcing and modelling etc, and bad behaviour was the result of defective conditioning etc. He believed people could be reconditioned. (Gross, R. Et al 2000)

After Watson came another key figure in behaviourism - B F Skinner. Skinner's approach was more radical than his predecessors. He developed an experiment using a box similar to Thorndike's.

In short, lights, noise from speakers and the electric shocks were used to reinforce behaviour, whether it be positive or negative reinforcement, or punishment – positive being reinforcement that strengthens behaviour, so more likely to repeat, negative being reinforcement that also strengthens behaviour, resulting in avoidance or escape, and punishment, to suppress behaviour. Skinner believed that operant behaviour was developed by positive, negative or punishment consequences, and thoughts, feelings and motives played no part. ([www.scottsdalecc.edu](http://www.scottsdalecc.edu))

Various therapies have derived from behaviourism, in the classical conditioning corner, implosion therapy, systematic desensitisation and aversion therapy to name a few – whilst in the operant corner, therapies collectively known as behaviour modification techniques, consist of behaviour shaping, and token economics. In both cases, success or failure of treatment is based on specific and observable changes in behaviour. (Gross, R. Et al 2000)

Behaviourism has made significant contributions to psychology, the therapies aforementioned continue to be useful tools; it played a major role in strengthening psychology's scientific status, however, it's not without weaknesses, many feel that it's too mechanistic and overly simplistic. Skinner's theory claimed human behaviour can be predicted and controlled the same way as non-humans - this is limited as humans possess language, so are able to communicate and think spontaneously, therefore what people think is an important variable in determining what they say and do - the opposite of Skinner's claims. (Carlson 1990)

The psychodynamic approach is largely based on internal and unconscious drives, early childhood development and making the unconscious, conscious. It studies the relationship between mind and personality, and the theory that behaviour is driven by emotions, mental aspects and subconscious forces. This was pretty much the life's work of Sigmund Freud, whose studies formed the basis of the psychodynamic approach. Psychoanalysis, which is both a theory and a therapy ignores science and instead focuses on getting 'inside the head' to make sense of relationships, experiences and how the world is viewed.

One of the most renowned theories was Freud's 'structure of personality' – he likened personality to an iceberg.

The tip of the iceberg, represents conscious mind, the larger part, hidden below the water, represents unconscious - where inaccessible memories, impulses and passions are stored.

Freud believed negative experiences were put to the back of the mind (repressed) into the unconscious, resulting in a detrimental effect on personality. The cure was to unlock the unconscious – for which Freud adopted and developed ‘free association’.  
(Gross, R. et al 2000)

Freud also theorised that personality was made up of 3 systems – ID, EGO and SUPEREGO, each with its own function, but together they govern behaviour.

ID, the most primitive of drives and, as it is present in a newborn, is first to develop. Ego and superego develop from the id.

Basically, id seeks pleasure, ego mediates and tests reality and superego strives for perfection and constrains. Not surprisingly, there is always conflict between id and superego. (Gross 2005, Gross, R. et al 2000)

Because of the continuous conflict, Freud theorised that the ego develops a series of defence mechanisms to protect itself - Repression, Projection, Rationalisation, Suppression, Denial, Displacement, Identification and Reaction-Formation.

Conflict is inevitable and if the primary cause of anxiety and unhappiness, these defence mechanisms are a way in which people can deal with inner conflict. (Gross 2005)

Another chapter in Freud’s theories was the psychosexual stages – that during the first five years of life a child goes through five stages of personality development. During each stage the impulses of id, focus on and derive pleasure from , an area of the body and activities connected with that area. It begins in the first year – the oral stage, during which the infant derives pleasure from sucking, nursing and putting anything they can into their mouth.

The anal stage follows, during this phase the child learns control in the form of toilet training.

The third stage, between the ages of three and six , is the phallic stage - the child focuses on their genitals and is aware of differences between the sexes. They may focus this awareness on the parent of the opposite sex - the Oedipus and Electra complexes need to be resolved at his stage. A latency period follows, during which the child is less focused on their bodies and instead turns attention to gaining skills for life.

The final genital stage occurs during adolescence - the young adult turns their sexual interest towards others in a more mature way.

Freud believed that if problems occurred during any stage, it could be detrimental to development e.g. if a baby was weaned too early - wasn't able to nurse for long enough, it may become fixated at the oral stage. As an adult they may be fixated with oral pleasures such as eating, drinking, perhaps smoking or nail biting.

Later psychoanalysts felt Freud emphasised too much on instinctive and biological aspects of personality and didn't recognise that society played a part. More recently it is viewed that society, environment and people in general have a greater impact on shaping personality than biological needs, considering people to be better decision makers and planners that Freud gave credit for. (allpsych.com, Gross 2005)

Some techniques that Freud developed are used today; free association and word association are still popular therapies. Interpretation of dreams is another technique, along with another indicator - the simple 'slip of the tongue' or 'Freudian slip'. A more modern approach to therapy would include physical cues such as, blushing, posture, change in voice and expressions of the unconscious.

Whilst Psychodynamic theories had a huge impact on psychology, they aren't without weaknesses. When Freud conducted studies into psychosexual development, it was at a time when sex was taboo and standards were strict, therefore many of his patient's conflicts, centred round sexual desire. In today's more permissive society, sexual conflicts are less frequent; so this may not be a contributory factor of personality disturbance. (Ornstein 1988)

There was criticism of the type of patients Freud helped, in that most had serious emotional problems and if observations were based purely on those patients, his theories may not be appropriate to a normal healthy personality.

His theories were sexist too, in a time when males enjoyed greater independence and social standing, his theory that female psychosexual development was shaped by 'penis envy' and that she may have felt unworthy due to her lack of equipment, is now viewed that she was more likely envious of his freedom and social standing than his genitals. (Gross, R. et al 2000)

When compared, psychodynamic and behaviourist approaches share many aspects, one of which is Darwin's evolutionary theory. Freud believed in the importance of biological instincts on behaviour, his theory of psychosexual motivation is clearly linked to the fact, sex and reproduction, are foundations of evolution. Behaviourists also believe that fundamental similarities between species allow for general rules of behaviour to be adapted from animals. Both greatly rely on the importance of environment as a dominant force for development of personality. (Gross 2005, Class notes 2007)

They share that each has contributed greatly to modern psychology - therapies like behaviour modification techniques are still evolving and many of Freud's 'on the couch' therapies are used today, albeit modified versions.

Current behaviour is determined by past experiences, a view common to psychoanalysts and behaviourists – psychoanalysts believe unpleasant experiences that occur in the past get locked away in the mind but remain influential on future behaviour, whilst the behaviourist view is that you act from past experiences, through conditional learning.

If the approaches are compared in terms of the nature – nurture debate, common ground is found, both believe an individual's personality develops as they grow, therefore, they are on the nurture side of the argument as opposed to nature, which suggests people are born with genetic dispositions and only possess innate, inherited personality. (Carlson 1990)

They are both deterministic - they consider that people are driven by forces out of their control, i.e. Freud with hidden, unconscious forces and Skinner his with external forces, neither having any association with the concept of free will.

They do not, however share experimental method; behaviourists used a scientific method with field studies and laboratories and tended to use animals to compare behaviour to humans, whereas Freud based his theories on live subjects with no scientific involvement.

The repetitive way in which behaviourists conducted research, made it scientific and more credible than the studies of psychoanalysts – large quantities of data were gathered, analysed and statistical information produced.

Freud was criticised for the limited number of studies he relied upon, making many of his claims unfalsifiable. Because he used techniques like free association and dream analysis, which are unobservable, his ideas were impossible to validate scientifically. (allpsych.com, Ornstein 1988)

Consider how both approaches might view the same psychological illness, e.g. obsessive compulsive disorder - the psychodynamic approach would view the compulsion as stemming from unresolved conflict which manifests then is displaced into unusual behaviour. The behaviourist, in contrast, wouldn't be able to explain why the individual became obsessed in the first place, although, treatment for this condition using the behaviourist approach has proven highly successful. Treatment would use 3 stages - modelling (convincing the patient the obsession is safe), flooding (encouraging them to put themselves in the situation) and response prevention (stopping the m from carrying out their compulsion), in particular, the last two techniques have been effective in dealing with anxiety disorders.

The psychoanalyst on the other hand, would treat the disorder by identifying underlying conflicts that have been displaced, using free association and persuading the patient to recognise the origin of the anxiety. Once the origin is confronted the disorder should disappear – the defence mechanism that was keeping it locked in the unconscious would be redundant. The problem with this therapy is that it can take years to root out the source and undo the repression. (Sue, Sue & Sue 2000)

In conclusion both have fundamental differences and share many attributes, behaviourists believe the unconscious has no bearing on behaviour, opposed to psychodynamic belief that unconscious drives are the reason we behave as we do, one is scientific, the other isn't and they both use very different therapies to treat patients. The similarities between the approaches begin as far back as evolution and Darwin's theory, they share determinism and both fall into the nurture side of the great debate.

However, it is fair to say, that even with their many differences and similarities, these approaches have made the biggest contribution to this 'science of the mind' and made history with different therapeutic techniques. Behaviourism gave psychology an empirical scientific status and continues to evolve and contribute to modern psychology but has largely been taken over by cognitivism. Sigmund Freud was undeniably genius and whether or not his theories are considered valid, has made the greatest contribution to how development of personality is viewed. His followers have revised his work but core components still remain - much of the psychodynamic psychology that Freud wrote about has made its way into today's language.

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