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Access Psychology
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Describe And Evaluate Two Approaches In Psychology.

In 1900, **Sigmund Freud**, a neurologist living in Vienna, first published his psychoanalytic theory of personality in which the unconscious mind played a crucial role. Freud combined the then current cognitive notions of consciousness, perception and memory with ideas of biologically based instincts, to make a bold new theory of ***psychodynamics***. Freud's theory, which forms the basis of the psychodynamic approach, represented a challenge and a major alternative to behaviourism.

Freud's theory of personality was based on the assumption that all our behaviour stems from the unconscious processes. He divided the personality into three different parts. The id, the ego and the superego, which are often in conflict. The id operates on the pleasure principle and seeks immediate gratification. The ego obeys the reality principle and plans for the future. The superego is conscious and makes us aware of moral standards.

Freud believed that people have a continuous stream of psychic energy. He called this constant psychic energy ***the libido***, reflecting that the sex drive was a primary life instinct (Eros). Freud later believed we were driven by the death drive (Thantos), which is energy manifest in aggression. If a forbidden act or impulse is repressed, the energy will seek an other outlet, such as in dreams or neurotic symptoms.

Freud believed we went through several personality developmental stages in the primary years. He called these stages the ***psychosexual stages***. During each stage the pleasure seeking impulses of the id focus on a particular area of the body. The first year of life, Freud called the ***oral stage***. Babies derive pleasure from sucking and nursing. The second stage was termed the ***anal stage***. Freud believed infants derived pleasure from withholding and expelling faeces. At the age of three the child derives pleasure from fondling his or her genitals. Freud called this the ***phallic stage***. During the phallic stage the child reaches a conflict called the ***Oedipal conflict.*** He describes this in the case of a boy whose sexual impulses are directed towards his mother. This leads him to perceive his father as a rival for affections. The boy fears the father will retaliate by castration. This anxiety is thought to be the basis of all later anxieties.

The Oedipal conflict resolves at the ***latency period***, which lasts from the age of seven to twelve. During this time children become less concerned with their bodies and turn their attention to life skills. Finally, adolescence and puberty bring about the ***genital stage***, the mature phase of adult sexuality.

Freud's theory of child development seems to put to much importance on body-parts and the sexual nature of child development. In particular he seems to have put to much importance on the Oedipus conflict. Freud conducted a case study in a five-year-old boy named Hans. Hans had a phobia of being bitten by a horse. Freud used his theory of the Oedipus conflict to interpret his phobia as an unconscious fear of being castrated by his

father. It is worth mentioning that Hans father was a follower and supporter of Freud's ideas. Furthermore, the boy's mother often used threats of violence or abandonment to curb the boy's behaviour. The mother of Hans once threatened to cut of his penis. It seems the mother was the aggressor not the father.

It seems difficult to take the case of little Hans as evidence of the Oedipus theory. There are a number of reasons for this. Freud had already published his theories of sexuality and had already made up his mind what was wrong with Hans. His father and not Freud conducted the psychoanalysis of Hans. Freud only saw the boy on one or two occasions. How could the father study the boy objectively when he was so emotionally involved? Surely the boy would be susceptible to his father's suggestions. Freud had an extreme patriarchal attitude and he could not conceive that a woman could be the main cause of fear. Freud refused to believe that a woman would abuse her child, as he did not want to criticise his own society. (Fromme 1970)

Freud was correct in saying that we are affected by instincts and past experiences and that we are not always aware of them. However it seems difficult to explain the id, ego, and superego scientifically as the concepts are far to abstract. His theory is good for explaining things retrospectively, however how can we use the theory for prediction?
Freud's theories are too ambiguous and can be used to explain most things depending on how you interpret them. For a theory to be taken seriously it needs to be scientifically tested, either to be proved or disproved. This cannot be done with Freud's personality theory.

A more serious criticism concerns the validity of Freud's observations in his psychoanalytic procedures. It is not clear if Freud's patients told him their past experiences spontaneously, or if Freud may have inadvertently planted experiences in their minds with leading questions. For example, Freud reported that many of his patient reported childhood sexual abuse. At first he believed them, but then later found them untrue. He regarded this as one of his more theoretical insights and attributed it to the Oedipus conflict. But one critic said that Freud's original assumption was probably true, especially in the recent light of child sexual abuse. (Mason 1984)

Freud's sample of people was much too small; he mainly studied neurotic middle class Victorian Austrian women. This is not representative of the general population. With hindsight, Freud's cultural biases are now obvious, particularly his theories about female psychosexual development. "Penis envy" is now universally rejected as reflecting the sex bias of the historical period in which Freud lived. A little girl's personality was almost surely shaped by her awareness that she lacked independence, power and social status.

At the same time as Freud's theories, in America, **John B Watson**, was seriously questioning the dominant non-biological cognitive approach with its roots in ***introspection*** (Wundt 1879), as 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.

Consequently, Watson proposed that psychologist should confine themselves to studying behaviour, since only this was measurable by more than one person. For Watson the only way psychology could be taken seriously was to emulate the natural sciences and become objective. Watson's form of psychology was known as ***behaviourism.***

In 1913, Watson was working in the field of animal psychology and thought that the term animals could include humans. Watson was not interested in the mental processes. He saw no role for the mind and consciousness. Watson thought behaviour was observable and therefore scientific. The mind and its thought processes were abstract and unobservable and therefore unscientific. Behaviourism was defined by Watson as the study of the association between a stimulus and a response.

Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) was a Russian physiologist studying the digestion of dogs, when he found that the laboratory dogs could be conditioned to salivate without food. This learnt behaviour was called ***classical conditioning.***

Behaviourism began with the study of animals and experiments were taking over from simply watching them in their natural environment.
Thorndike (1911) was interested in human behaviour although he used animals for his experiments for ethical reasons. Thorndike used a puzzle box with a complicated set of pegs and pulleys and watched as the animals attempted to escape. Eventually though trial and error, the animal would manage to open the door and it was rewarded with food. So escaping from the box had become desirable. The animal would then be placed in the box again and after several repetitions the animal preformed the necessary response to open the door more quickly. Thorndike argued that the animal had learnt how to escape because of the reward. Thorndike called this the ***law of effect***. If we like the consequences of our actions then the actions are likely to be repeated. This kind of learning was known as ***operant conditioning*** and was studied in more detail by ***B.F Skinner (1874-1949)***

Skinner reiterated Thorndike's law of effect in his experiments with rats. Skinner's approach to psychology was scientific. His view's came from Darwin's theories of evolution. Skinner focused on the environment as a cause for human behaviour. He did not think people acted for moral reasons; he thought they reacted in response to their environment. A person might do a good thing not for moral reasons, but for the rewards received for the act. For Skinner the mental process is irrelevant.

There is a key difference between ***classical conditioning*** and ***operant conditioning***. Classical conditioning involves involuntary or innate behaviour such as salivating and fear responses. They can be elicited, which means you can do something that produces an involuntary response. Operant conditioning involves voluntary behaviours. Voluntary behaviours are those behaviours that cannot be made to happen. This means that you cannot get these behaviours until someone carries them out.

Watson did a study in 1920 and it is a widely used example of how we learn. Albert was conditioned to show a fear response to rats that he initially liked and showed no fear.

Watson used a hammer struck on a metal bar to make a loud noise. Albert showed a natural fear response to the loud noise. (Unconditional response) The bar was struck while Albert petted the rat. Eventually, Albert associated the loud noise with the rat and showed the fear response upon seeing the rat. (Conditional response) Watson claimed that emotional responses are learnt through conditioning. He concluded that environment shapes our personality and genetics play no part in our behaviour characteristics.

There are ethical criticisms of the little Albert study, however the main criticism seem to be that when the data was examined it showed that it was quite difficult to condition Albert and the fear did not last long. They had to repeat the pairing often to strengthen the association between the loud noise and the rat. Although, the study suggests that it was easy to condition Albert, the data suggest that it was not that easy and not that clear cut.

Social learning theory assumes that personality differences result from differences in the learning experiences. This includes learning from observing others in addition to operant and classical conditioning. For example in language acquisition, a child learns to talk by imitating the adults. For social learning to occur, one individual must acquire a new behaviour from another individual (the model) with no reinforcement required. For example, monkeys in the wild are afraid of snakes and display this fear with screeching and jumping up and down. Captive monkeys reared in a laboratory do not have this fear. ***Mineka and Cook (1988)*** studied how rhesus monkeys can learn this response. When lab reared monkeys observed the agitated behaviour of wild monkeys in response to a snake, they modified their behaviour to match the model. The monkeys seem to have learnt to display fear by watching the behaviour of other individuals.

Bandura, Ross and Ross, (1961) set out to investigate whether children learnt, through observation to display aggression. Children aged between 3 and 6 years of age were split into two groups. One group were exposed to a non-aggressive adult model. The other group were exposed to an adult model behaving aggressively, both physically and verbally to a blow up Bobo doll. The model punched, kicked and hit the doll with a mallet while the children observed this behaviour.
The children were then taken to a room containing non-aggressive toys such as crayons, cars, a farm set and aggressive toys such as a dart gun a mallet and a Bobo doll. The children imitated the model with verbal and physical aggressive behaviour towards the Bobo doll. The findings demonstrated that observation and imitation could account for the learning of specific acts without reinforcement.

Classical conditioning can explain some of the aspects of human behaviour, especially natural fear responses. Taste aversion, phobias and Gulf War Syndrome can be explained this way. Classical conditioning has a wide range of applications in behaviour therapy and has been successful in treating phobias. However, it cannot explain the attainment of entirely new behaviours and it cannot explain all of human learning especially the diversity of human personality and characteristics. It does not take into account that humans are capable of insight learning and the results are achieved through reasoning, with no trial and error are present.

Operant Conditioning can explain how children learn the sounds of words from adults. Nevertheless, it does not explain how children correct grammar, as parents do not reinforce grammar (Slobin 1975)

Many early behaviour experiments were conducted with animals. One criticism of this is that there are brain differences in humans so you cannot generalise from animal to human responses.

Watson's work gathered quantitative data, and did not look at the emotional responses. Emotions are qualitative and not easy measurable. It is doubtful that conditioning accounts for all human behaviour and emotions. Humans are far more complex.

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. It has also been successful in changing many maladaptive behaviours.

Social learning can explain the acquirement of new behaviours such as aggression and it can explain why children appear to have spontaneously acquired a new behaviour.

However, it cannot explain the acquisition of new behaviours that have not been observed. Social learning has been criticised for overemphasising the importance of situational influences on behaviour and losing the individuals personality.

Although there are clear divisions in these two approaches. There is no doubt that the perspectives and the research have contributed a great deal to understanding both human and animal behaviours. However, it is worth remembering that psychology is a dynamic science. New theories, notions and experiments are conducted everyday. As technology advances so does the field of psychology. Psychology needs to be studied from all perspectives and an objective frame of mind is needed to attain a greater understanding of ourselves and the world we live in.

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