

This essay will attempt to explore three approaches in psychology which will be the psychoanalytical, behaviourist and the cognitive approach. The main features of these approaches will be highlighted and their strengths and weaknesses will be evaluated. Qualifications within certain branches of psychology will also be explained.

The psychoanalytical approach was founded in 1900 by both medical doctor and philosopher Sigmund Freud (1876-1939). The psychoanalytic approach aims to understand thoughts, feelings and behaviours by analysing unconscious mental processes formed by early childhood experiences. Freud was interested in charting how the human affected the body, particularly in forms of mental illnesses. Here the psychoanalytic explores psychotherapist explores the unconscious to help the patient understand him or herself. The psychoanalytic theory is concerned with the unconscious mind for this the mind can be described as being like an iceberg. Only the tip of the iceberg can be seen above the surface of the water, while the great remainder is hidden under the water. The tip of the iceberg represents the part of the mind which is conscious this part being the only part that humans are directly aware of. The part of the iceberg just below the water's surface is described as being our preconscious, this being our dream state and recent experiences which we are able to remember with little effort. The base of the iceberg represents our unconscious mind; this is the part we are not normally aware of. It contains our instincts (sex and aggression), traumas, fears, and passions. The unconscious is said to have more influence over our behaviour than our conscious mind. These unconscious thoughts and ideas can become conscious through the use of special techniques, such as free association, dream interpretation and transference, the cornerstone of psychoanalysis. Much of what is unconscious has been made so through repression, whereby threatening or unpleasant experiences are 'forgotten' they become inaccessible, locked away from conscious awareness. This is a major form of ego defence. The first, and perhaps the most familiar way of tapping into the unconscious is dream analysis, according to Freud dreams are full of symbolic fulfilments of wishes that can't be fulfilled because they have been repressed. These desires or wishes come out in our dreams as they are often forbidden in conscious mind.

▲According to Freud our personalities are made up of three different components which are; the ID, the Ego and the Super Ego

The ID is the unconscious part of the personality which is with us from birth. It operates on the pleasure principle which strives for pleasure and avoids pain. This part of the personality is very much influenced by our instincts.

The Ego emerges from about the ages of two or three and is a conscious part of our personality. It keeps a balance between the unrealistic ID and super ego, the ego allows us to live realistically without feeling too bad.

The super ego is the third part to our personality which emerges at around the age of six. It's as unrealistic as the ID in that it is very authoritarian like a built in watchdog, overall the super ego is our conscience. If we do something that we think is wrong the super ego punishes us with feelings of guilt.

Whatever route is taken to the unconscious mind, according to Freud almost everything that is found there is related to sex. He explains that all pleasure experienced is sexual pleasure even in the most fundamental acts such as a mother nursing an infant. Freud had a theory of adult personality development; this involved three psychosexual stages when young. Stage one is the oral stage, stage two is the anal stage, which takes place from the age of two where the child has pleasure with excretion. Stage three is the phallic stage where at around three and a half years old boys develop Oedipus complex and girls develop penis envy.

The oral stage happens at birth up until 12 months. This period is called the oral stage simply because the baby's mouth is the centre of its universe. If you watch a baby's behaviour you will no doubt find that the baby constantly puts things in its mouth, and seems to get much satisfaction from it. This is common behaviour among all young babies. Freud thought this happened because when we are born, a psychic energy known as libido is centred in our mouth. Libido fuels the ID. The act of babies sucking, biting and breast-feeding is seen as id-driven behaviours, this is the result of libido being centred in the mouth. The pleasure got by such oral activities is proof of oral gratification demanded by the libido.

▲According to Freud if a child becomes stuck in the oral stage through lack or excessive oral stimulation that child will grow into adulthood orally fixated. Those who smoke, nail bite, chew fingers or lip suck are seen to have an oral fixation.

Freud is probably the best known psychologist in history and is undoubtedly had the biggest impact on psychology with his theories. However it could be said that Freud's theories could be inaccurate, they cannot be tested properly because it is hard to measure things like 'instincts' and urges. Most of Freudian theory is based on the 'unconscious', however the unconscious is invisible therefore it is impossible to prove its existence.

The strengths of Freud's theory can be seen in findings such as identifying sexual abuse in children, his methods and techniques for understanding why we think, feel and behave as we do lives on today in applied psychoanalysis and related psychodynamic theory and therapies.

In 1915 psychology was dominated by Freud's ideas which focused strictly on the mind in terms of understanding human behaviour. In reaction to this the behaviourist approach was introduced.

Behaviourism was founded in the 1920's by John B Watson (1878-1958) it was he who claimed the psychology should be studied as a science like the natural sciences e.g. physics and chemistry. Behaviourism used the experimental method of research, mental processes were not considered in this approach. Behaviourists limited themselves to things that can be observed, and formulated laws concerning only those things.

Behaviourism believes that when we are born we are born with a blank slate (tabula rasa) everything we know in our mind is from learning in our environment. Behaviourists like Watson and Skinner explained all human behaviour in terms of stimulus response connection. This view postulates that the subject matter of human psychology is only the behaviour of the human being. Behaviourism claims that consciousness is neither a definite nor usable concept. Behaviourism focuses on the emphasis of learning. Behaviourists such as E.L Thorndire and B.F Skinner believe that behaviours are learned. The word learning in psychology means change in behaviour that occurs as a result of our experiences

There are two theories of particular importance which help to explain how we learn. The first theory was developed by Russian psychologist and Nobel Prize winner, Ivan Pavlov. It was Pavlov who first described learning by association. When studying the digestive system of dogs, Pavlov noticed that the dogs salivated readily even when no food was actually present. Careful observation by Pavlov revealed that certain important cues, such as the sight or smell of food, made the dogs behave as if food were present i.e. they produced saliva in their mouths.

Pavlov then carried out an experiment where a bell was sounded in the presence of the dogs. A few seconds later, food was presented so that the dogs salivated and ate. This procedure, linking bell and food, was repeated several times. Next the bell was sounded but no food was produced. It was found that the dogs salivated in response to the bell alone. The bell had become the stimulus for salivation to occur. (Stimulus response connection). After this, whenever the bell was sounded the dog salivated and continued to do so even though no food was given. The name given to these procedure used by Pavlov is classical conditioning.

The second theory of learning is operant conditioning. This theory was developed by American psychologist Burrhus Skinner (1904-1990). Operant conditioning proved to be very successful. This type of experiment involved the subject behaving in some way first and then the consequences would follow. If the consequences of the behaviour

were positively reinforced, the subject would continue with the same behaviour. On the other hand if the subject received some sort of punishment it was found that the behaviour would stop. This type of experiment was carried out on animals such as rats. The rat would be placed in a closed box (Skinner box) and was observed carefully

▲ Skinner box typically contains one or more leavers, a stimulus light and a food dispenser. Once the rat is placed in the box it runs around accidentally hitting leavers which then release food. ▲ After a while the rat knows that by pressing the leaver food is the result. It is also possible to deliver other reinforcements such as water or to deliver punishment like an electric shock through the floor of the chamber. If the rat is reinforced with something good it is more likely to continue with that behaviour, if it is reinforced with something bad the rat will avoid repeating the same behaviour. The purpose of the Skinner box was to prove that behaviour is learnt; it was successful in proving this and proved great importance to behaviourists

Skinner believed that humans should be treated in the same controlled conditions for their own good and for the good of civilisation. Skinner carried out this experiment with his own daughter, she was brought up in a Skinner box and at the age of twenty she committed suicide.

The advantages to the behaviourist approach are that it uses the experimental method rigorously in order to support its valuable conclusion. Behaviourism is still used in today's psychology in which conditioning is used to help people change their own difficult or distressing behaviours

However, the behaviourist approach is unable to explain all human or animal behaviour, not every behaviour is conditioned behaviour. Behaviourism can also be seen as being false; this is due to the fact that experiments carried out are in controlled laboratory settings.

The cognitive approach emerged in the 1950's in reaction to the behaviourist approach. The cognitive approach regards psychology to be the study of how humans take in information and make sense of it, therefore mental processes such as memory and thinking, of which influence our thoughts feelings and behaviours. Cognitive psychologists see the brain as a processor which stores and organises information

Cognitive psychologists see our mind as consisting of five main information processes which are perception, attention, language, memory and thinking, which we individually and collectively use to operate in, upon and through our environment. For humans the two most important senses are probably sight and sound. Cognitive psychology explores the ways in which individuals see things e.g. colour, distances and how we understand the things we hear. We use these processes in order to build up our knowledge of the world. The

cognitive approach asks questions such as how do we remember things, how do we recognise them and how do we interpret them. The cognitive approach is about how we actively process information; this approach argues that we are not passive receptors of stimuli.

The cognitive approach was introduced by behaviourist Edward Tolman. Tolman found that in his experiment of rats in the maze, the rats were using cognitive mapping to trace the location of the food. It was therefore apparent that the stimulus response explanation of learning was inadequate in terms of understanding human and animal behaviour.

Tolman concluded that once the rats had explored the maze they had become familiar with it (cognitive mapping). The rats used this to their advantage. They began to make their way to the food box quicker with fewer errors after the experiment had been repeated a few times.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a cognitive psychologist. Piaget made a great contribution to our understanding of how children have different thought processes from adults. The two important principles of how children think are called organisation and adaptation.

Organisation is the name given by Piaget, it is a baby's ability to order and classify new experiences. We are born with an innate ability to organise, which is common among all infants. According to Piaget, these experiences are organised into our schema. A schema is a kind of mental file which we access when faced with something new.

'Adaptation is the infant growing ability to understand its surroundings. Adaptation cannot occur unless there is a schema already established regarding the concept or aspect of our environment that we are trying to understand, act upon, or behave towards a schema, is an internal mental representation of stimuli in our world. Adaptation of the schema is a two stage process involving assimilation and accommodation' (Gerard Keegan (2002) Higher Psychology: Hodder and Stoughton).

The cognitive approach has contributed a great deal to psychology, it sheds light onto how we think, remember, perceive and solve problems etc. Cognitive psychology interprets human behaviour by looking at our mental processes.

The cognitive approach does have certain limitations such as it assumes that behaviour can be explained in terms of how the mind processes information. This approach also views psychology as a scientific study, of which most of the research is done under a controlled environment and carried out in a laboratory setting which can be seen as being artificial this may cause experiments to be inadequate.

Different branches of psychology can be applied to different fields in psychology. There are four fields which are: occupational psychology, educational psychology, clinical psychology and academic/ research psychology.

The occupational psychologist holds a post graduate qualification in occupational psychology. They work within the workplace such as organisations or industries. An occupational psychologists typical work activities include, developing systems for recruitment assessment and appraisal of staff, they design and administer psychometric tests, and they train staff in management skills, e.g. team building and time management, they also assess and place the unemployed and disabled in organisations. The work is interdisciplinary since an occupational psychologist works with medical workers, police etc. They provide counselling for those who face redundancy or redeployment for this, these psychologists draw on the humanistic approach to help staff cope with stress or to look at career options. Occupational psychologists do research in the area of Ergonomics and health and safety which involves working with engineers and physiologists to improve the design of the working environment and equipment for human users. They also investigate the effects of work environment on the work forces health; to do this they draw biological psychology. An educational psychologist holds a post graduate in Educational psychology and works within an educational setting e.g. a nursery, school or college. They work with young people aged up to 19 years who may have learning, behaviour, social and emotional problems, there clients are referred to them, usually in a education context. The work involves assessing young peoples learning and emotional needs, both by working directly with them and by consulting others close to them; some of the work is directly with the individual. This usually begins with an assessment of the child's problem. To do this, the psychologist observes the child, using psychological tests and meets with the child, parents, teachers and other professionals. Educational psychologists provide in service training for teachers and other professionals on issues such as behaviour management, bullying, stress management and assessment. They also advise on educational provisions and policies and carry out research. Educational psychologists draw on the cognitive approach in psychology and as well as being involved directly in influencing children's behaviour they are also involved in research which looks at how children develop cognitively and how they learn. A clinical psychologist has a post graduate qualification in clinical psychology they work with patients and clients in a health care setting to enable them to make positive changes to there life. Clinical psychologists are concerned with assessment, treatment and research in medical and physical illness, they offer therapy for difficulties relating to anxiety, depression, addiction social and interpersonal problems and challenging behaviour. This work involves applying therapies

based on different psychological approaches e.g. a behaviour therapy may be used to treat anxiety which draws on both behavioural and cognitive approaches or counselling for a depression may draw on the psychodynamic approach. The work is interdisciplinary as a clinical psychologist works closely with a wide range of other professionals including medical specialists, social workers etc.

▲ Applicant for teaching and research posts are usually judged mainly by formal qualifications, publications and experience. For university posts a good first degree in psychology, a higher degree and a record of research and publication are usually needed. Psychology teachers in schools and in further education colleges are generally required to hold recognised teaching qualifications.

This essay has explored three very different approaches. ▲ All three approaches take a different view on how human behaviour should be understood. It is obvious that there is no completely right or wrong answer on how to interpret human behaviour; these three approaches have proved this. However different these approaches seem to be they have offered a lot to psychology over the years and are still in good use.