

Psychology Assignment

TASK 1

What is Psychology?

Psychology can be defined as the scientific study of human behavior and how humans experience the world around them from a rational, scientific point of view rather than from a mythical or spiritual view. There are several areas of professional psychology activity, two of which are briefly described below.

Clinical Psychology

A Clinical Psychologist works with a variety of people with mental health issues, in a number of service settings such as mental health clinics, general and psychiatric hospitals, prisons and higher educational establishments.

Clinical Psychologist uses a broad approach to assessing human individual and interpersonal problems; this may involve interviews to assess the individuals development, behavior, personality, cognitive process, and emotional and social function. Once an assessment is made, the clinical psychologist uses a variety of treatments to develop and maintain therapeutic relationships with clients, this is because the whole purpose of intervention is to empower clients to make adaptive choices and to gain healthy control of their own lives.

Educational Psychology

An Educational Psychologist works with children, with special educational needs, learning difficulties, dyslexia, behavioral problems and sometimes gifted children. Various methods are used to assess the child's strengths and weaknesses in order to establish the important factors that are affecting the child's learning and behavior this involves working with the family to gain an insight into the child's background, and working with the school to find out what problems the child is having or other agencies involved in the child's welfare who may be able to help in getting an objective picture in order to provide a framework for discussing solutions to problems.

TASK 2

Psychodynamic Theory

The psychodynamic approach focuses mainly on individual motivation and past experiences gained in early childhood and its influence on adulthood. Pioneered by Sigmund Freud, (1856-1939)

he believed that the individual human personality contains three major structures; the id, ego and super ego. (Introductory Psychology p.11)

Id- is biologically determined i.e. inherited instinct drives that operate on the "pleasure principle"

Ego- is a developed personality i.e. satisfies the id's needs that operate on the "reality principle"

Super ego- individual moral values i.e. influenced by external factors, this gives us the sense of what is right and proper and a sense of what is wrong and unacceptable.

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Strengths

1. It has contributed to our understanding of the human personality
2. His focus on childhood influence on adult personality and accountability of individual difference in development has attracted a lot of research.
3. Psychodynamic theory is widely used to treat mental disorders such as neuroses.

Weaknesses

1. Some critics believe that even though there is a lot of research that supports evidence for psychoanalytic theory. There are other explanations for findings. According to Popper (1959) the theory lacks “falsifiability”.
2. Eysenck (1952) talked about problems in trying to assess the effectiveness of psychoanalysis as a theory as a lot of controversy surrounding what constitutes a “cure”, he concluded after reviewing 5 studies, that it achieved little that would not have occurred without therapy.
3. Freud’s insistence that the role of biological factors influenced personality development and that the goal of all behavior was to satisfy biological needs but psychodynamic theorist such as Jung, Adler and Erikson, even though they agreed that biological factors were important they also believed that the social nature of human beings contributed to personality development.

Cognitive Theory

The cognitive approach focuses mainly upon how the human mind processes information for perception, memory, language and problem solving and how it affects our behavior. These are often referred to as mediators the internal mental events that occur between stimulus and the behavior that results.

Jean Piaget was the most influential development psychologist along side Vygotsky and Bruner. His theory of cognitive approach focused on logical thinking, reasoning and problem solving rather than just perception and memory. His use of Clinical Interview where he studied children in an informal setting by asking them questions and setting them task highlighted this view.

Strengths

1. Practical insights have been offered as to how memory may be made more effective and ways to improve skills to solve problems.
2. Enhanced knowledge of merits and limitations of eyewitness testimonies in court.

Weaknesses

1. Cognitive approach lacks integration in that it does not have an identifiable framework, this is because the descriptions used vary in each area e.g., social cognition cognitive theory of emotion vary in definition
2. Fails to differentiate between computers and humans; defines humans as machines without acknowledging the fact that unlike “computers”, which are logical and unable to feel emotions, humans have emotions and can be irrational, and also that people forget while computers do not.

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3. Laboratory experiments findings are said to be artificial rather than dealing in the “real world”, they suggest that the environment and the experimenter’s behavior may influence people’s behavior.

Behaviorist Theory

The behaviorist approach focuses on the influence of the environment on the human behavior. Behaviorists believe that human beings are shaped through constant interactions with the environment. The pioneers behind this approach are associationists like Pavlov, Thorndike and also early behaviorist Watson and Hull.

Pavlov studied the conditioning reflex responses also known as Classical Conditioning- the process through which a reflex response becomes associated with a stimulus that does not naturally activate that behavior it concentrates on the relationship between stimulus and response because it is not always possible to determine which stimuli brought about which response.

Thorndike’s work focused on the condition of voluntary behavior also known as Operant Conditioning- the conditioning of voluntary behavior through the use of reinforcement and punishment. The most influential behaviorist approach to this was Skinner’s work on operant conditioning, by using animals; he focused on the stimuli that may produce particular responses and the rewards and punishment that may influence that change in behavior. This theory of operant conditioning could apply to humans as well as animals.

Strengths

1. It has contributed to our understanding of psychological functioning and has provided a number of techniques for changing unwanted behavior.
2. Its use of proven experimental methods has enhanced the credibility of psychology as a science.

Weaknesses

1. It fails to acknowledge the possibility of biological factors in human behavior by overlooking the conscious and subjective experience of individuals.
2. Individuals are seen as passive beings at the mercy of their environment.
3. Its basis on animal research including the use of rats has been questioned.
4. The theories on classical and operant conditioning cannot account for the production of spontaneous, novel or creative behavior.
5. The assumption commonly made by behaviorist is that the theory applies to any response in any species without taking into account biological limits of conditioning e.g.; that animals or humans might bring their own specified behavior to a learning situation and the possibility that this may affect the way in which they respond.
6. Clinical psychologists who use this theory have been criticized for treating the probable symptoms of mental disorders while often ignoring possibly underlying genetic and biological causes.

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Task 3

Eating Disorders

Eating disorder is an illness, which is brought on by a number of factors including physiological, emotional, psychology and general body dissatisfaction. There are three main types of eating disorder;

1. **Anorexia Nervosa**- is a life threatening eating disorder where the person may have an obsessive fear of being fat thereby starving themselves or eating small amounts of food, which results in extreme weight loss and some times even death.
2. **Bulimia Nervosa**- is a form of eating disorder whereby the person binges on large amounts of food followed by self-induced vomiting and or use of laxatives for purging to prevent weight again.
3. **Obesity**- is a form of compulsive over eating disorder where the person continuously eats, picks at food, or full-blown bingeing of large amounts of food even when full for no apparent reason usually in secrete this is normally accompanied by guilt and sometimes remorse.

Psychodynamic Perspective on eating orders- Psychoanalytic theorist suggests that people who suffer from anorexia or bulimia have underlying emotional issues, which may have developed from childhood. Family conflict and the need to regain control of their lives mainly during adolescence as well as having to deal with society's idea of the "perfect -image" may influence their eating habits. They may also equate food with sexual love; hence refusal of food is denial of sexuality. The need to retain a small body may be the desire to remain, a child this may lead to termination of periods and child like features. Freudians may suggest that people who suffer from obesity suffered from lack of being nursed as a baby may have developed into the need for "oral gratification". They also suggest that food is normally used as a replacement for love and affection this may stem from childhood where the child was given food as a substitute for affection this is also known as "comfort eating".

Cognitive Perspective on eating disorders-The cognitive approach to eating disorder in anorexics and bulimics was pioneered by Aaron Beck, according to the national center for eating disorders, his aim was to help sufferers identify and challenge their negative thoughts by being kinder to themselves and to examine their perceptions about the kind of individuals they are suppose to be; and the things that are most important in their lives. He also focused on problem solving methods by helping people identify their negative ideas about food and eating (e.g. seeing themselves as fat in the mirror) as this gives them a neurotic defence against giving up control and also about their own personal attributes. People who suffer from obesity have been known to have a lack of control over their desire to eat as they often have the uncontrollable urge to eat as much as possible without thinking about consequential weight gain. This seems to support the theory that people will eat more when attractive food is available this could also be due to lack of control in obese individuals. Stress or/and depression may also influence their eating habits with little or no regard to care of their appearance due to their negative thought processing.

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Conclusion

There is a lot of ongoing research, which suggest that people who suffer from eating disorders are no different from people who face the same situation in everyday life. For example, some people who suffer from stress may tend to loose weight or have little interest in food rather than “comfort eat” and gain weight, as in obese people or people who eat the same amount as obese people and yet do not put on any more weight than if they had a “normal” meal. It could also be argued that people who are obese could be due to genetic/biological factors rather than the amount they eat. This highlights the points that peoples’ individual metabolism efficiency varies and that people will gain weight on the same dietary intake as someone with a less efficient metabolism who may loose weight (Rodin et al., 1989, P.190) According to the National Centre for Eating Disorders, recent research suggest that body weight and size however are not totally under environmental control, for example genetic predisposition, resting metabolic rate and fat cell number, can all influence the degree to which body weight and shape can be altered. Research has also shown that people with eating disorders have very low self esteem- where this expresses itself in poor body image; it of course makes them vulnerable to pressures to diet.

Treatment of an eating disorder is a lengthy and often complex process and may involve various psychological approaches in therapy ranging from behavioral changes to the way patients deal with the social and psychological pressures of a society whose culture dictates how people in particularly women are expected to “change their shape to suit the fashion of the day”(National Centre for eating Disorders).