



Approaches and Perspectives

Learning outcomes

- Understand the following approaches:
 - physiological;
 - cognitive;
 - individual differences;
 - developmental;
 - social.
- Understand the following perspectives:
 - behaviourist;
 - psychodynamic.

Physiological approach

- The biological basis of human behaviour.
- This may involve discovering localised functions in the brain.
- Often focuses on the chemical basis for human behaviour, such as serotonin and depression.
- May also consider the genetic basis for behaviour.

Physiological approach (cont.)

- Methods used include working with brain damaged patients but more recently involves neuro-imaging techniques.
- Clinicians are now able to treat mental disorder with chemicals or by surgery.
- Can be regarded as reductionist and therefore does not take into account the whole person.
- Findings may not show cause and effect; e.g. are serotonin levels a cause or effect of depression?

Cognitive approach

- This regards mental processes to be important. They are internal not external events.
- What is studied are the processes that come between a stimulus and a response.
- Research is often experimental.
- Cognitive psychologists work in a wide range of fields, e.g. developmental, social and clinical.
- Research is often not ecologically valid.

Cognitive approach (cont.)

- Can be reductionist as it tries to turn complex processes into simple models.
- It is heavily influenced by computer analogies that provide logical models of the mind. But the mind may not be logical!

Individual differences approach

- Recognises that the human condition is extremely diverse.
- Questions the need to provide generalisations about human behaviour.
- Studies are often focused on gender, cultural diversity, personality and pathological behaviour.
- Research is carried out using a wide variety of methodologies.

Individual differences approach (cont.)

- Very useful with ready application to everyday life.
- It can highlight differences rather than celebrate diversity.

Developmental approach

- Understanding the human condition throughout the entire lifespan allows behaviours to be seen in context.
- Researchers use a wide range of methods and techniques.
- The focus is on how behaviours are initiated and then develop.
- There is a large and varied body of evidence that has provided interesting insights.

Developmental approach (cont.)

- Often focuses on the development of the child to the detriment of adolescents or adults.
- Wide ranging research can produce conflicting viewpoints.
- Typical areas of study include; learning to be social; emotional and moral development; how thinking develops and how children learn to communicate.
- Often dominated by very old ‘classic’ research.

Social approach

- Concerned with how the individual relates to others.
- A wide range of research methods and techniques are used to study social interactions.
- Typically this area focuses on how individuals behave in groups and how these may influence decision making.
- The research is often clearly related to real life situations.

Social approach (cont.)

- The context of social psychology research makes the findings interesting to many people.
- Dangerous to make wide ranging generalisations across all social groups.
- It can reduce the importance of the individual.
- Has been dominated by old ‘classic’ studies.

Behaviourist perspective

- This is limited to observable behaviour only.
- It proposes that all human behaviour is the result of interactions with the external world.
- Behaviours that obtain a reward will become more common and behaviours that receive negative feedback will be reduced.
- Evidence is based on rigorous scientific technique.
- Stimulus-response theory has been successfully applied to a wide range of behaviours.

Behaviourist perspective (cont.)

- Recent behavioural modification techniques have been very successful.
- Theory is too simplistic for complex human behaviour.
- Heavily reliant on animal-based research.
- The importance of the environment ignores the role of biology.
- Based on observable behaviour only and does not consider internal processes.

Psychodynamic perspective

- Considers that human behaviour is the result of unconscious processes
- These processes are developed during early childhood experiences and are responsible for forming ‘models of the mind’.
- Many of the theories are related to personality and emotional development.
- A very influential theoretical base that has had a huge effect on psychological thinking.

Psychodynamic perspective (cont.)

- Basic psychodynamic ideas are part of our everyday vocabulary (ego, defences, extravert).
- Theories are used to support many successful therapeutic interventions.
- Highly subjective and hard to prove scientifically.
- The research base is often very small, sometimes one or two individuals.
- Early theories reflect that period in time and may not be relevant now.