

Course Material (E-Content) of Psychology

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Behavioural Approach to Clinical Psychology

Behaviourists explain maladaptive behaviour in terms of the learning principles that sustain & maintain it. Discuss and a behaviourist's approach in contrast to a psychoanalytic one. Introduction In this essay I will be demonstrating a knowledge of the main behaviourist principles and approach, and how they can be related to maladaptive behaviour. I will then compare this approach with the psychoanalytical approach, evaluating the different approaches and considering the ethical issues. Maladaptive behaviour and the Behaviourist principles

Maladaptive behaviours refer to behaviours that inhibit a person's ability to adjust to particular situations. This behaviour is often used to reduce one's anxiety, but the result is dysfunctional and non-productive. For example, avoiding situations because you have unrealistic fears may initially reduce the anxiety, but is non-productive in alleviating the actual problem long term. Behaviourism is a school of thought in psychology based on the assumption that learning occurs through interactions with the environment.

Two other assumptions of this theory are that the environment shapes behaviour and that taking internal mental states such as thoughts, feelings and emotions into consideration is useless in explaining behaviour. Behaviourists are unique among psychologists in believing that it is unnecessary to speculate about internal mental processes. The behaviourist theory believes that cultural and sub – cultural conditioning moulds and shapes behaviour and subsequently the personality.

Behaviourists also believe that people are born with only a handful of innate reflexes and that all of a person's complex behaviours are the result of learning through interaction with the environment. They also assume that the processes of learning are common to all species and so humans learn in the same way as other animals. A human being, according to the behaviourist, has his life determined for him since he is the product of the culture that causes him to be as he is. The theory therefore, is very deterministic.

To the behaviourist, normal behaviour results from acceptable conditioning and abnormal behaviour results from defective conditioning. The behaviourist isn't concerned in what developmental processes may have influenced a person's behaviour. They believe that if the patient is taught to understand his environment and how he interacts with it, he will automatically understand himself and his behaviour. The behaviourist functions from the position that if a neurotic behaviour can be learned, then it can be unlearned.

In 1924, John Watson a behavioural psychologist, made the notorious claim in his book that ...'if you give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select'. This ideology, later to be called behaviourism, asserted that all psychology must be completely measurable, recordable and scientific. The fundamental principle underpinning this approach was that all behaviour, both 'normal' and abnormal, is learned through conditioning. In simpler terms, it proposed that human behaviour is learnt by humans interacting with the world around us as well as the environment operating on us.

The development of 'behaviourism' at this point in history has since been viewed as a reaction to the psychoanalytical models of human development presented by Freud and the Neo- Freudians which at the time challenged and confused many and appeared to lack scientific rigour.

The behavioural approach to therapy

The behavioural approach to therapy assumes that behaviour that is associated with psychological problems develops through the same processes of learning that affects the development of other behaviours. Therefore, behaviourists see personality problems in the way that personality was developed. They do not look at behaviour disorders as something a person has but that it reflects how learning has influenced certain people to behave in a certain way in certain situations.

Behaviour therapy is based upon the principles of classical conditioning developed by Ivan Pavlov and operant conditioning developed by B.F. Skinner. Classical conditioning happens when a neutral stimulus comes right before another stimulus that triggers a reflexive response. The idea is that if the neutral stimulus and whatever other stimulus that triggers a response is paired together often enough that the neutral stimulus will produce the reflexive response. Operant conditioning has to do with rewards and punishments and how they can either strengthen or weaken certain behaviours.

Behavioural Therapy works from the premise behaviour is not fixed. Maladaptive behaviour can be unlearned and adaptive behaviour can

be learned. 'BT is an 'outside in' approach; by changing the behaviour, the thinking about it will also change' (Smith, et al.,2012, p. 25). A person's distress can be reduced by changing how they behave which in turn will change their beliefs. Behavioural therapy includes techniques such as flooding, systematic desensitisation, aversion, modelling and extinction. With systematic desensitisation the client makes a list of avoidances in the order of least anxiety provoking to most anxiety provoking. They will face the least avoidance first and make their way up the list gradually using relaxation and imaginal techniques to reduce their anxiety and gradually change their beliefs about the stimulus.

Client-Counsellor Relationship

Behavioural counselling is a directive approach. The client and counsellor will collaborate to form a working alliance. The work will concentrate in the here and now. The counsellor will use the core conditions to build the relationship with the client but will not rely on the relationship alone to produce change. A behavioural counsellor is active, didactic and directive. The counsellor will help the client to identify aims and goals and will design a learning programme for the client.

Applications

The behavioural approach can be helpful for people who have phobias, panic attacks, PTSD and OCD. People who are suffering from deeper psychological problems such as personality disorder may need a longer and more in-depth form of psychotherapy.