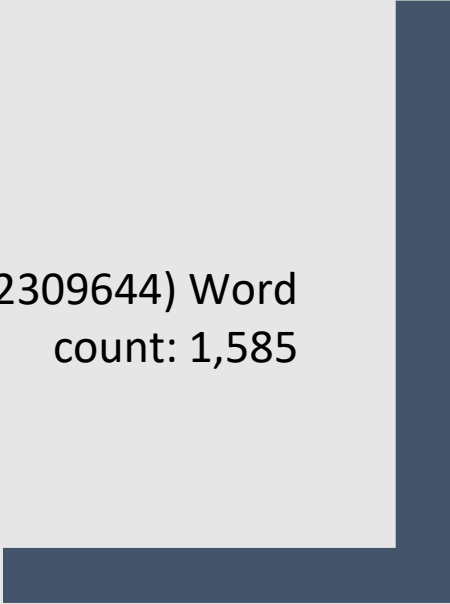




Psychological theories of human behaviour

Leah Thomas (2309644) Word
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This essay aims to explore psychological theories, particularly the cognitive, behaviourism, and Psychoanalytic theories. It will explore the implications for individuals who have undergone adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and how these theories may affect group dynamics. The objective is to identify, evaluate, and explore the connections between these psychological theories and the impact on individuals and group interactions in the context of ACEs.

Human behaviour is defined as actions individuals take to either make change or continue to make something happen. According to Mental Health Branch, (2022) human behaviour shows that the person is aware of their thoughts and the ability to make changes. In contrast, Coll *et al* (2014) stress that human behaviour consists of genetics and the environment an individual is born into suggesting that human behaviour is unique to every individual and not only the genetics that they receive from their parents but also the actions of the Individuals around them when they are born, and the quality of life given to them.

According to Wunsch, (1994) psychological theories are described as facts that explain aspects of human behaviour. These theories are established by a hypothesis which is supported by data. A psychological theory must explain human behaviour or forecast potential human behaviour in the future.

The psychological theory known as behaviourism is believed to have been founded in the early 20th century. According to Watson (1913), this theory is considered a branch of natural science, characterised by its objectivity and reliance on experimentation. Its primary objective was to anticipate and regulate human behaviour.

The behaviourism theory suggests that human behaviour can be manipulated using operant conditioning, this can be seen in an experiment undertaken by B.F Skinner. Skinner's experiment as explained by Ruan and Dai (2010) consisted of placing a rat in a box with controlled lighting and sound, the rat would be rewarded with food when it stood on a lever. At the beginning of the experiment, the rat ran and tried to climb the box; however, as time passed, and the rat accidentally stood on the lever, it began to realise that by pressing the lever often it was able to obtain the food which was the reward.

According to Waite and Ryan (2022) the results of Skinner's experiment suggest that individuals can be conditioned through rewards. This conditioning plays a significant role in shaping an individual's behaviour within a group setting. In some cases, individuals may be solely focused on receiving rewards, often without considering the potential negative consequences of their actions on others and themselves. This assumption is supported by the fact that 31% of youth aged between 10 and 17 tend to re-offend after being apprehended with little consideration for other factors or consequences (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2023).

Individuals in public service roles may find cases such as youth reoffending difficult to manage as these individuals have been conditioned to only think of the reward with no regards to the consequences. With one or two individuals that have suffered this conditioning being easy to manage, group of individuals with this type of reoffending are often unpredictable and hard to control.

However, the behaviourism theory is not only based on operant conditioning but also on classical conditioning. An example of classical conditioning can be found in Watson's (2013b) experiment, where he utilised associative learning to instil emotional responses.

In this experiment, a child known as 'Little Albert' was presented a white rat in the presence of loud, fear-inducing noises. Over repeated exposures to this stimulus pairing, Albert came to associate fear with the white rat, even when the loud noises were not present, causing him to display fear and cry when the rat was introduced. This illustrates how Albert's fear became linked to the white rat through the repeated association with the loud noises (Ginsburg and Robinson, 2022).

Whilst Watson's (2013b) experiment intentionally caused fear in Albert, his fear was temporary and only when presented with a white rat. However, Individuals who experience ACEs are exposed to anxiety-inducing stimuli such as violence daily which can cause more permanent emotional trauma and eventually lead the individual's brain to live in a state of flight or fight (Rooji *et al*, 2020). We can assume that individuals that live in this state are often dangerous as suggested by Barnum and Solomon (2019) who discovered a high correlation between feelings, fear and anxiety and the desire to commit assault.

According to Galanaki and Malafantis (2022), A psychological theory known as the cognitive theory was used in an experiment carried out by Albert Bandura in 1961 to test if behaviour can be taught through observational learning.

The experiment was carried out on 72 children aged between 3-6, some children were placed in a room with an adult who acted aggressively toward an inflatable bobo doll, other children were also later placed in the same room with the same adult however the adult did not act aggressively but did however ignore the bobo doll and play with toys.

The findings of this experiment shows that the children that saw the adult acting aggressively towards the bobo doll also imitated actions of violence towards the bobo doll later, and the children that saw the adult ignoring the doll and playing with the toys imitated the adults' actions of ignoring the toys and decided to play with the toys.

These findings suggest that behaviour can be taught through observational learning and that children will often demonstrate behaviours that they have seen throughout their childhood, this can be vital to individuals that have experienced ACEs such as domestic violence and child abuse as the likelihood of them being violence perpetrators later in life are significantly higher than individuals who have not experienced ACEs, (Gray *et al*, 2021). Abuse victims are likely to become abusers due to their unhealthy idea of love, defence mechanisms, mistrust and false justification. Individuals that have experienced ACEs may think that abusing is a normal way to behave as that's how they have been brought up.

To help us gain a better understanding on how real-life experiences from birth can shape emotional and mental health, a psychological theory known as the Psychoanalytic theory was introduced by Schmutz, (2021). This can be likened to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory which suggests that an individual's development is shaped by a network of interconnected environmental systems, spanning from their immediate surroundings like family to larger societal structures such as culture.

Freud (1905) however, would argue that human behaviour is driven by unconscious memories, thoughts, and urges. This theory suggests that the psyche consists of three components: the id, ego, and superego. The id is entirely unconscious, whilst the ego

functions in the conscious mind, and the superego operates in both the unconscious and conscious realms.

To gain further understanding, he expands on each of these separately. Firstly, he explains the Id which consists of an individual's sexual and aggressive urges, it is fundamentally the gratification of biology, unconscious drive, and instincts of an individual, we would see this stage in new-born babies and is identified as the oral stage.

Secondly, he describes the ego, known as the anal stage, whereby as they mature in childhood, become responsible for the decision-making of an individual, causing them to seek constant satisfaction. The ego helps to mediate interactions between real-life and the id, causing them to act in a rational way rather than irrationality caused by the id alone.

Lastly, he identifies the superego as the final development of an individual, this is the stage at which an individual gains morality and values. This development occurs later in an individual's childhood named as the phallic stage. Lantz and Ray (2022).

It could be argued that individuals who experience ACEs at the oral stage may only gain the satisfaction they need by drinking, eating, smoking, or nail biting leading to addiction and compulsive disorders later in life. We can assume that most of these individuals have high chances of becoming alcoholics and therefore at an elevated risk of imprisonment as highlighted by Hampton, (2023) who suggests that 40% of all violent crimes are individuals under the influence of alcohol.

Humans that experience ACEs in the anal stage often have no control over their urges and need immediate satisfaction, they often grow up to be unorganised and irresponsible, which can cause individuals to steal to fulfil their satisfaction in later life.

Lastly, it can be considered that individuals who experience ACEs in the phallic stages are more likely to develop pathologic behaviours such as violence as suggested by Traylor *et al* (2022).

In conclusion, the investigation of the behaviourism, psychoanalytic and cognitive theories in the context of ACEs demonstrates that there is an interplay between trauma caused in early childhood and an individual's emotional and health development.

Each of the theories discussed provide unique insights as to how ACEs can cause an anomaly in an individual's thinking processes, behavioural patterns, and well-being throughout their life. The cognitive theory illustrates how ACEs can disrupt healthy development and can cause an individual distorted perceptions of themselves, influencing low self-esteem and difficulty making personal connections with others.

The behaviourism theory, similar to the cognitive theory concludes that ACEs can cause an individual to operate in a survival-based strategy, influencing bad mental health and difficulty interacting socially.

Lastly the psychoanalytic theory, also concludes that individuals that experience ACEs can have unresolved traumas that often manifest themselves to psychological disorders and poor emotional wellbeing, influencing disorders such as anxiety and depression.

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