

Three Hallmark Theories of Psychology – Psychoanalysis, Behaviourism, and HTE

Introduction

Psychological theories are as many and as varied as the renowned psychologists of different times. Many different theorists have either added their own interpretations to existing theories or proposed new theories that completely alter the focus of a psychologist when treating a patient. In this paper, three hallmark theories of psychology – psychodynamic theory, behaviourism, and humanistic, transpersonal, and existential theories – have been extensively described. The history and development, rationale and relevance, and primary tenets of each of these theories have been described in great detail. The relevance and applications of these theories in the field of mental health and psychology has also been explained. Finally, the limitations of having several different theories and the need for a single unifying approach has been outlined.

Psychoanalysis / Psychodynamic Theory

History and Development

The concept of psychodynamics was first developed by Sigmund Freud who described psychological energies in the brain and their subsequent conversion into psychological processes. Other notable scholars who worked with Freud included Earnst von Brucke, Carl Jung, Melanie Klein, and Alfred Adler. The first description of the psychodynamic theory was given in the early 1900s, and by 1940s the applications of the theory had started gaining popularity. Psychologists such as Mardi Horowitz, Eric Berne, and James Allen further analysed and applied this theory to various psychological processes through their books, lectures, and radio shows (Fulmer, 2018).

Rationale for Relevance to Human Behaviours

According to Jacobs (2004), the psychodynamic perspective defines and describes the internal processes that motivate human behaviour. The conscious, subconscious, and unconscious aspects of the mind that have been extensively described by Freud play an important role in the experiences that occur during childhood. An individual's emotions during this time go on to define the personality of that individual, and the specific behaviours and/or reactions of these individuals arise from their childhood experiences and emotions (Jacobs, 2004).

Primary Tenets and Perspectives

Sigmund Freud initially took inspiration from Earnst Brucke and his concept of dynamic psychology. Using this as the foundation along with his personal experiences with his patients,

he proposed several laws that could be applied to human experiences. Eventually, he developed the psychodynamic theory which describes the transformation and exchange of psychological energies within a person's personality. According to this theory, the human system has a constant energy reservoir from which energies are derived by the id, ego, and superego for their functioning. If one of these requires more energy, the other two will receive lesser energy (Deal, 2007).

In the 1930s, Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud's daughter, started applying her father's principles to develop the theory of ego psychology and to describe the interplay of energies in a parent – child relationship. Another important follower of Freud's work was Carl Jung who, in collaboration with Freud, proposed several changes to the original Freudian theories. He developed the field of positive psychology where he stated that the conscious mind is always in harmony with its interacting components. This means that when a person is completely engrossed in an activity, nothing else matters, and the activity leads to immense fulfillment in the person. This theory was supported and further developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who applied these principles to satisfaction and contentment in the human mind (Meehan and Levy, 2009).

As Freud's psychodynamic theories evolved with time, several theorists began using these as the foundation for developing new theories related to personality. These theorists were known as neo-Freudians and included Alfred Adler, Erik Erikson, Carl Jung, and Karen Horney. These theorists focused on childhood experiences and the impacts of social and cultural aspects on personality. The neo-Freudians also rejected Freud's premise that sexuality determined a person's character; rather, they believed that a person's sexuality was the result of a person's character and personality (Burns, 1983).

Behaviourism

History and Development

Behaviourism was founded by the American, John B Watson, in 1913, and saw immense growth in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Other psychologists belonging to this period who supported behaviourism included Perry, E A Singer, Warren, and Jennings. Psychologists such as William McDougall and Walter Pillsbury proposed that the basic foundation of psychology should be changed from consciousness to behaviourism. They started defining the field of psychology as the science of behaviour, which eventually led to an alteration in the vocabulary of psychology and the establishment of behaviourism as a basis for psychological theories (Hatfield, 2003).

Rationale for Relevance to Human Behaviours

According to the theory of behaviourism, learning depends more on acquiring new experiences rather than training the mind. Theorists in support of the theory have argued that only by changing a person's behaviour can his/her learning outcome be truly measured. Learning is determined by changes in observable behaviours of a person and not on their mental activities, as learning is only truly valid if it is transformed into new behaviours (Faryadi, 2007).

Primary Tenets and Perspectives

Behaviourism has always been a controversial theory due to varied views surrounding the definition of behaviour as a foundational science of psychology. This theory, in its most simple form, states that a science of behaviour is possible. A concurrent field that has emerged from this concept is behaviour analysis, which is popular among several psychologists who are in favour of behaviourism. A person's behaviour provides a basis for understanding his/her most personal thoughts and emotions and behaviour is simply an outcome of these. After Watson, B F Skinner greatly promoted his views by attempting to provide a scientific explanation for the theories of behaviourism. He named his views 'radical behaviourism' and named the opposing views 'methodological behaviourism'. Despite this controversy, all behaviourists agreed with Watson that a science of behaviour could exist.

Many theorists argued that if behaviour was a science, then it should have the ability to be explained, predicted, and controlled. This view was known as determinism which stated that behaviour was pre-determined and negated the concept of a person's free will in choosing his/her behaviours. Gradually, after a lot of argument and contemplation, the concept of 'soft determinism' was proposed by Donald Hebb, which considered both the environment as well as a person's free will in determining the person's behaviour. Another theorist, Daniel Dennett, defined free will as deliberation, which is also a behaviour that could be determined by the environment. These views were accepted by the behaviourist community to a larger extent as compared to the concept of 'libertarian free will' where a person's choices in the present could be free of past experiences (Reimann, 2018).

Humanistic, Transpersonal, and Existential (HTE) Psychology

History and Development

Both the above described theories of psychodynamics and behaviourism have been heavily contradicted for being deterministic and negating the role of consciousness. Consequentially, the humanistic theory of psychology became popular among psychologists such as Clark Moustakas and Abraham Maslow in the 1960s. Another approach that is quite

similar to the humanistic approach is transpersonal psychology, and it was developed to overcome the limitations of the humanistic approach. Similarly, the existential approach is closely related to the previous two approaches and builds on them to overcome their limitations (Bland and DeRobertis, 2019).

Rationale for Relevance to Human Behaviours

According to the humanistic theory of psychology, the subjective experiences of a person determine his/her behaviour. It theorizes that all people have free will which imposes on them responsibility for their behaviour. Every patient is seen as a unique individual with a unique past and it theorizes that all people are inherently good by nature. Transpersonal theories, in addition to the humanistic approach, expand human experiences to include spiritual and transcendent experiences as well. It believes in a person's need to search for the divine and to develop higher-order feelings of compassion and unconditional love. In addition to all these theories, the existential approach acknowledges people's weaknesses and limitations. It therefore takes a positive approach to human behaviours recognizing that people are limited in their growth (Warmoth et al., 2001).

Primary Tenets and Perspectives

The humanistic approach to psychology considers people as a whole, a combination of their unique experiences that have shaped their past and present. For theorists, the objective of this approach was to develop techniques that can lead to a union between humanism and science. Transpersonal psychology is closely related to humanistic psychology and it differs in the aspect where it goes beyond the personal behaviours of people. It believes that there are several metaphysical aspects of human reality that go beyond mere human existence. This ideology was given leverage by Abraham Maslow and later supported by several theorists such as Carl Jung, Ken Wilber, Michael Washburn, Stanislav Grof, and Stanley Krippner (Lattuada, 2018).

The belief in the spiritual experiences of a person is difficult for those theorists to comprehend who do not believe in the spiritual being. As a result, comparatively, existentialists are open to this aspect of human existence. Although transpersonalists and existentialists both recognize a person's limitations in becoming united with the spiritual realm, transpersonalists are more open to believing that human behaviours are influenced by their spiritual experiences. Apart from belief in the possibility of spiritual experiences, existentialists also differ from transpersonalists in that they strive to strike a balance between potential and limitations of people. In contrast, the other two branches of HTE only focus on human potential whereas existentialism takes a realistic viewpoint by acknowledging the presence of limitations in people (Winston, 2015).

Synthesis of Psychodynamic, Behaviouristic and HTE Theories

The psychodynamic theory places human behaviour in the light of its needs, drivers, and emotions considering them the prime motivator of individual behaviours. Initially, it stressed the importance of the innate and unconscious aspects of the human mind; however, it later evolved to include individual capacities and interactions with the environment. Derivatives of this theory include ego psychology, self psychology, object relations, and relational-cultural approaches, all of which have heightened our understanding of the human behaviour by considering specific aspects of the conscious mind (McLeod and Kettner-Polley, 2004).

In contrast to the psychodynamic theory that states that the environment is the determinant of human behaviours, the behaviouristic theory suggests that individual behaviours are not constant and they are adaptable based on human experiences. Although there is a lot of controversy regarding the ways by which behaviours are acquired, all behaviourists believe that the science of behaviour is more valid in the field of psychology as compared to the psychodynamic theory (Bufford, 1997).

Both psychodynamics as well as behaviourism are deterministic theories, which eventually gave way to a humanistic approach to psychology. The HTE approach considers that human behaviours are shaped by a person's freedom of action or free will that is born out of never-ending choices. The definition of the humanistic approach was later expanded to include spiritual experiences of people that formed the basis of transpersonal psychology. This view believes that every person has an inherent desire to unite with the spiritual self and this has a major influence on a person's behaviour. The existential theory further acknowledges that a person has several limitations, and a balance between human potential and these limitations need to be achieved in order to understand human behaviour (Hayes, 2012).

Applications of Psychodynamic, Behaviouristic and HTE Theories

Most mental health theorists use one or the other of the three above-described theories for their practice when treating their patients. The psychodynamic theory focuses on the relationship that a person has with his/her external environment. Within this context, it is used to treat disorders such as depression, addiction, eating disorders, and social anxiety disorder, and help patients re-discover meaning in their lives. The goal of this therapy is to increase self-esteem and enhance the inherent capacity to make and maintain fulfilling relationships (Khantzian, 2012).

Initially, the behaviouristic theory began as a research science and later, it began to be applied to mental health therapeutics alongside psychodynamic theory. A behavioural psychologist typically uses learning theories to understand and modify human behaviour. According to this, dysfunctional behaviours such as depression and anxiety are learned, and so

they can also be unlearned. Behavioural therapists use positive reinforcement to encourage patients to snap out of their negative states and perform things that encourage and motivate them (Tasman et al., 2008).

Humanistic, transpersonal, and existential theories focus on understanding the human experiences rather than the symptomatic outcomes of these experiences. Therefore, psychologists who follow the HTE approach focus on the individual rather than his/her symptoms. For instance, for patients presenting with substance abuse disorders, HTE theorists consider the problem as the limited abilities of individuals to make meaningful and fulfilling choices regarding their lives. As a result, therapeutic interventions in such cases aim to enhance the self-awareness of the patients motivating them to make healthier choices for their life (Benjamin, 2011).

Future Directions

Human experiences and behaviours are complex aspects of their personality that cannot be justifiably summed up in a single theory or psychological approach. Among the three hallmark theories of psychology and their derivatives, most psychologists choose to practice those that most closely resonate with their own personal experiences and belief systems. This makes psychotherapy biased as the end result depends on the approach inculcated by the therapist. If another therapist who followed another psychological approach were presented with the same client, the outcome and/or the journey taken to arrive at that outcome might be very different.

Therefore, the next step in the domain of psychological theories is to have a unifying theory that is an amalgamation of all outstanding features of the previous theories and is also relevant to the current context. The new theory needs to be standardized to encompass all different belief systems and its tenets need to be suitable for all categories of people. This will ensure that psychology as a therapeutic science is the same globally and all patients can expect the same intervention and outcome without any mismatch between the beliefs of the therapist and the patient.

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