Comparing and Contrasting Two Theories: Freud vs Skinner

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Psy 410: Psychology of Personality

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April 29th, 2023

Abstract

Two well-known psychological theories—psychoanalysis and behaviorism—are compared and contrasted in this essay. The parallels and differences between Sigmund Freud's and B.F. Skinner's theories are analyzed in-depth. While Skinner's behaviorist theory focuses on the influences of environmental contingencies on behavior, Freud's psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the role of unconscious processes in influencing behavior. Despite their differences, both theories continue to be researched and discussed because they have had a significant influence on psychology. This essay provides a thorough review of these theories before considering how they can affect current and future psychological research and practice.

Keywords: psychological theories, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, Sigmund Freud, B.F. Skinner, comparison, contrast

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The psychoanalytic theory developed by Freud and the behaviorist theory developed by Skinner are contrasted and compared in this essay. Skinner concentrates on the consequences of external circumstances, while Freud stresses the influence of unconscious processes in determining behavior. This essay will offer a thorough evaluation of both theories and examine how they are used in contemporary psychology. To back up this analysis, a review of peer-reviewed journal publications over the previous ten years was done. The articles discuss a variety of subjects, such as the theoretical foundations of each theory and how it is applied in treatment and clinical practice.

One of the most well-known and significant ideas in psychology is the psychoanalytic hypothesis developed by Sigmund Freud. Many people know about Freud because his work has had a huge impact on our everyday thinking about psychology, and the psychodynamic approach is one of the most important approaches to psychological therapy (Roudinesco, 2003; Taylor, 2009). The core tenet of Freud's theory is that unconscious processes, particularly unconscious conflicts and childhood events, have a significant impact on human behavior. These ideas are essential to comprehending the three main parts of the id, ego, and superego, which Freud identified as the structure of the mind.

The id is a primal, instinctual aspect of the mind that is motivated by the need to satiate fundamental biological urges and guided by the pleasure principle. The ego, on the other hand, mediates between the needs of the id and the demands of the outside world. It is the logical and conscious aspect of the mind. The moral and ethical values of society are represented by the superego and were assimilated by the person during childhood. These three mental entities,

according to Freud, are constantly at opposition with one another, with the id and superego frequently at odds. More and more research demonstrates that a large part of everyday behavior is driven by processes that are outside our conscious awareness (Kihlstrom, 1987). This conflict can result in the formation of defensive mechanisms, which are unconscious tactics employed to insulate the individual from emotions of fear or guilt.

Another essential notion in Freud's theory is the psychosexual stages of development, which he believed played an important part in creating an individual's personality. “Freud advanced a theory of personality development that centered on the effects of the sexual pleasure drive on the individual psyche. At particular points in the developmental process, he claimed, a single body part is particularly sensitive to sexual, erotic stimulation” (Elkatawneh, 2013). The oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital phases are among them, and each has its own distinct set of conflicts and developmental requirements. During the first year of life, an infant goes through an oral phase during which their main focus is on oral gratification through activities like breastfeeding or sucking on objects. A child's attention switches to managing body processes and learning about cleanliness and orderliness during the anal period, which lasts from ages 1 to 3. The phallic period, which lasts from 3 to 6 years old, is when children start to become interested in their own and other people's genitalia and may also have Oedipal or Electra complexes. The latent period, which lasts from the age of six through puberty, is a time when children's sexual urges are dormant and they instead concentrate on socializing and learning. Last but not least, the genital phase starts around puberty and lasts until maturity, during which the person's sexual urges turn toward mature partnerships and sexual intimacy.

One of Freud's psychoanalytic theory's strengths is its focus on the significance of early events in molding personality. Freud was able to provide insights into the origins of

psychological difficulties and illnesses by understanding the influence of early events in influencing an individual's behavior. The hypothesis, however, has limits. Some critics argue that Freud overemphasized sexuality and childhood experiences, ignoring other important factors that shape personality and behavior."According to Horney, Freud's vision of humanity was one-sided, focusing exclusively on drives that were essentially physical and instinctual in origin" (Mark p. 4). Furthermore, the lack of empirical evidence supporting many of Freud's concepts has prompted some to question the theory's validity. Finally, some critics claim that the theory concentrates too much on internal mental processes, ignoring the significance of visible behaviors. Despite its limitations, Freud's psychoanalytic theory continues to have an impact on modern psychology, particularly in the fields of psychotherapy and personality psychology. As noted by Westen and Gabbard (2002), "the value of psychoanalysis lies in the power of its ideas to inspire new forms of research and clinical practice, even when its specific hypotheses have been discredited" (p. 4).

Skinner's Behaviorist Theory

Another well-known approach in psychology that focuses on the link between behavior and the environment is B.F. Skinner's behaviorist theory. This theory stresses the role of environmental determinism when assessing behavior, with the premise that behavior is mostly taught through reinforcement and punishment principles. Skinner believed that the consequences of one's actions decide whether or not it is likely to be repeated in the future.

One of Skinner's main principles in behaviorist theory is operant conditioning, which refers to the process of shaping behavior through reinforcement and punishment. Operant conditioning is a method of learning in which action is modified by the consequences that follow.

The theory is based on the premise that behaviors may be enhanced or lessened through reinforcement or punishment and was initially put out by psychologist B.F. Skinner. When an action is followed by a positive outcome, like obtaining a reward, this is known as reinforcement, and it enhances the probability that the activity will be repeated. When a conduct is followed by a negative outcome, such as a reprimand or the loss of a privilege, punishment occurs. This reduces the probability that the action will be repeated. In a number of contexts, including parenting, education, and the workplace, operant conditioning may be used to shape and alter behaviors by changing the consequences of an action. Punishment is a consequence that lowers the chance of a behavior being repeated, whereas reinforcement raises the likelihood of a behavior being repeated. According to Cooper, Heron, and Heward (2021), Skinner's approach to studying behavior was grounded in scientific principles and relied heavily on experimentation and observation. This emphasis on empirical research has led to a significant amount of data on the effects of reinforcement and punishment on behavior, as well as on the effectiveness of behavior modification techniques. Additionally, Skinner's behaviorist theory has been widely applied in various fields such as education, animal training, and clinical psychology, further demonstrating its practical value (Cooper et al., 2021).

One of Skinner's behaviorist theory's strengths is its reliance on empirical study. Skinner believed that through careful experimentation, researchers could identify the environmental factors that shape behavior and develop effective interventions to modify behavior. This approach has led to the development of numerous behavior modification techniques that have been shown to be effective in a variety of settings, such as schools and clinics (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2021). Another advantage of this theory is its applicability in behavior change. The concepts of operant conditioning have been applied to generate effective behavior modification

approaches in a range of situations, including therapeutic and educational settings. He contended that an observable response (for example, a behavior) will alter as a result of a consequence, such as the application of reinforcement or punishment. Thus, learning takes place when a behavior is either rewarded or punished, and an association is formed between the behavior and its associated consequences.

Lack of consideration for cognitive processes is one of Skinner's behaviorist theory's drawbacks."Critics of behaviorism argued that it ignored internal mental processes, such as perception, attention, and memory, and instead focused only on external stimuli and responses" (Freedheim & Weiner, 2012). This theory focuses on observable actions and contextual conditions without taking into account the importance of interior mental processes including thoughts, feelings, and motives. Another weakness of this theory is that it focuses solely on individual characteristics and personal experiences. Finally, there are ethical concerns about the use of behavior modification techniques, particularly when they are used to control or manipulate behavior without the individual's consent.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Skinner's behaviorist theory are two major viewpoints in psychology, yet their basic principles, strengths, and limits are fundamentally different. Freud's theory stresses the function of unconscious processes and the significance of early events in molding personality. Skinner's behaviorist theory, on the other hand, concentrates on the importance of environmental variables in molding behavior, notably through operant conditioning.

While both theories have advantages and disadvantages, their differences become more apparent. Freud's psychoanalytic theory, for example, has been hindered by an overemphasis on sexuality and early experiences, whereas Skinner's behaviorist theory has been critiqued for

disregarding cognitive processes and individual variations. In terms of strengths, Freud's theory acknowledges the unconscious mind's role in molding behavior, whereas Skinner's theory has practical implications in behavior modification. It is no secret that Skinner and Freud, both positivists emphasizing that research should be empirically driven, still developed into fairly wild speculators. Indeed, even in what the two researchers regarded as their most important works, Verbal Behavior (Skinner, 1957) and The Interpre-tation of Dreams(Freud, 1900/1950), there are very few data to support the far-reaching conclusions drawn (Overskeid, 2007).

Despite their differences, both theories emphasize the importance of early experiences and environmental factors in shaping behavior. Freud's psychoanalytic theory acknowledges the relevance of early events, especially in the formation of defensive mechanisms, whereas Skinner's behaviorist theory stresses the function of reward and punishment in molding behavior. Freud and Skinner both acknowledged the existence of two different systems that govern behavior. They both described how the one may interfere with the functioning of the other and how the system operating outside of awareness may have a powerful effect on a person’s think-ing, feelings, and behavior, without the person necessarily understanding how and why (Overskeid, 2007).

In conclusion, this paper has compared and contrasted two prominent theories in psychology, Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Skinner's behaviorist theory. The paper highlighted the key concepts, strengths, and limitations of each theory, and explored their similarities and differences in terms of emphasis on early experiences and environmental factors. The implications for understanding personality and behavior are significant, as both theories provide unique insights into the role of unconscious processes and environmental contingencies

in shaping human behavior. However, both theories also have limitations and challenges that must be addressed in future research.

Future study might look at how these ideas can be combined to produce a more comprehensive understanding of personality and behavior. Furthermore, research could concentrate on developing more effective therapeutic techniques that capitalize on the strengths of both theories. Both hypotheses, in my opinion, are intriguing and significant in their own right. While I appreciate Freud's theory's emphasis on unconscious processes, I also appreciate Skinner's empirical focus. Overall, the comparison and contrast of these two theories has emphasized the complexities of human behavior and the significance of examining many views in order to comprehend it.

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