

# APPROACHES

## Revision Notes

© 2025 Exam Papers Practice. All rights reserved.





# APPROACHES

## Specification

### APPROACHES

- **Origins of psychology: Wundt, introspection and the emergence of psychology as a science.**

#### **The basic assumptions of the following approaches:**

- **Learning approaches: the behaviourist approach, including classical conditioning and Pavlov's research, operant conditioning, types of reinforcement and Skinner's research; social learning theory including imitation, identification, modelling, vicarious reinforcement, the role of mediational processes and Bandura's research.**
- **The cognitive approach: the study of internal mental processes, the role of schema, the use of theoretical and computer models to explain and make inferences about mental processes. The emergence of cognitive neuroscience.**
- **The biological approach: the influence of genes, biological structures and neurochemistry on behaviour. Genotype and phenotype, genetic basis of behaviour, evolution and behaviour.**
- **The psychodynamic approach: the role of the unconscious, the structure of personality, that is ID, ego and superego, defence mechanisms including repression, denial and displacement, psychosexual stages.**
- **Humanistic psychology: free will, self-actualisation and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, focus on the self, congruence, the role of conditions of worth. The influence on counselling psychology.**
- **Comparison of approaches.**



# APPROACHES

## Origins of Psychology

### Wundt and Introspection

Wundt opened the first psychology lab in 1879 and marks the start of Psychology being considered a science. He aimed to use standardised methods to analyse human consciousness, known as **introspection**. He wanted to develop theories about mental processes and did this by presenting stimuli and asking participants to report their thoughts and sensations. To isolate the structure of consciousness is called **structuralism**.

### Evaluation of Wundt's Scientific Method

#### Scientific

Wundt used standardised procedures in a controlled lab setting. It led to more scientific approaches like Behaviourism.

#### Subjectivity

Self reported data from participants is interpreted subjectively and we do not know if they reported accurately.

### Emergence of Psychology as a Science

#### 1900's: Behaviourism

Watson criticised Wundt for using subjective methods and stated that only behaviour that can be observed and measured should be studied. Behaviourists used well controlled lab studies to do just this.

#### 1950's: Cognitive Approach

With the introduction of computers, psychology began to use theoretical models to explain the human mind, focusing on the processing, as well as what could be observed and measured.

#### 1980's Biological Approach

Technology such as brain scans and DNA testing has made Psychology even more scientific by producing empirical data.





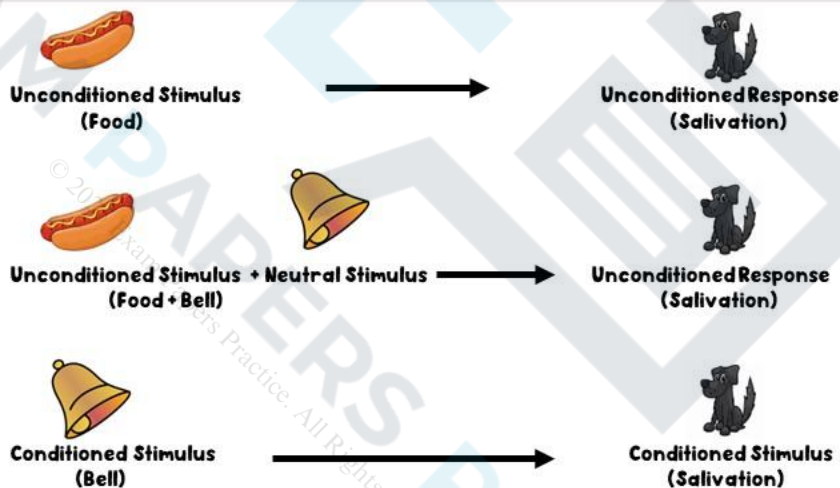
# APPROACHES

## Learning Approaches: Behaviourist Approach

### Assumptions

- Behaviourists believe that all behaviour is learnt.
- They only study behaviour that is observable and measurable.
- Most of the research is conducted in controlled scientific lab studies.
- Research conducted on animals is valid as they share the same principles of learning.
- We are born blank slates – there is no genetic influence on behaviour.

### Classical Conditioning – Pavlov's Dogs



### Operant Conditioning - Skinner

#### Positive Reinforcement

Anything which has the effect of increasing the likelihood of the behaviour being repeated by using consequences that are pleasant when they happen.

#### Negative Reinforcement

Anything which has the effect of increasing the likelihood of the behaviour being repeated by using consequences that are pleasant when they stop e.g. avoidance.

#### Punishment

Anything unpleasant which has the effect of decreasing the likelihood of any behaviour which is not the desired behaviour.



# APPROACHES

## Evaluation of the Behaviourist Approach

### Real World Application

Treatments based on its principles can be very successful; for example, systematic desensitisation is 75% effective when treating phobias (McGarth 1990), and also Token Economies in prisons. This suggests there is a strong behavioural element to behaviour.



### Deterministic

Skinner says free will is an illusion and that everything we do is the sum of our reinforcement history. It ignores the influence of our conscious decision making in our subsequent behaviour.

### Animal Research

A lot of research conducted by the behavioural approach is conducted on animals, Barnet (2000) suggests this is outdated and results can not be used to explain human behaviour. Humans are more cognitively advanced and social factors have an influence on behaviour.

### Scientific

The approach lends itself to scientific validation, research is generally conducted in laboratory settings with tight controls and research can be replicated, suggesting they have scientific credibility.



# APPROACHES

## Learning Approaches: Social Learning Theory

### Assumptions

- Based upon classical and operant conditioning
- Uses laboratory experiments in which behaviour is observed.
- A child learns **vicariously** by observing the actions and consequences of actions of **role models** and then goes on to **imitate** these role models.
- We are more likely to imitate prosocial behaviours and imitate those we **identify** with, e.g. same sex etc.

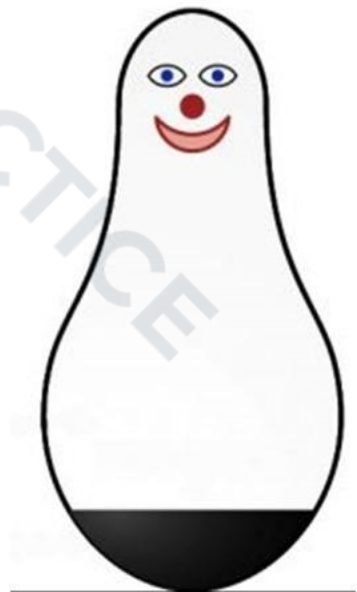
### Mediational Processes

Mediational factors determine whether we will imitate a behavior:

1. **Attention:** Pay attention to the role model.
2. **Retention:** Remember what they saw.
3. **Motor Reproduction:** Be physically capable of performing the behaviour.
4. **Motivation:** Be motivated to perform the behaviour.

### Bandura et al.'s (1961) Bobo Dolls

- Children saw an adult (a role model) behave aggressively, both verbally and physically, towards a large inflatable doll, called a Bobo doll.
- Found that children who saw an aggressive model played more aggressively than children who saw a non-aggressive model.
- Children showed significantly more imitation of a same-sex model, and boys performed more acts of aggression than girls.

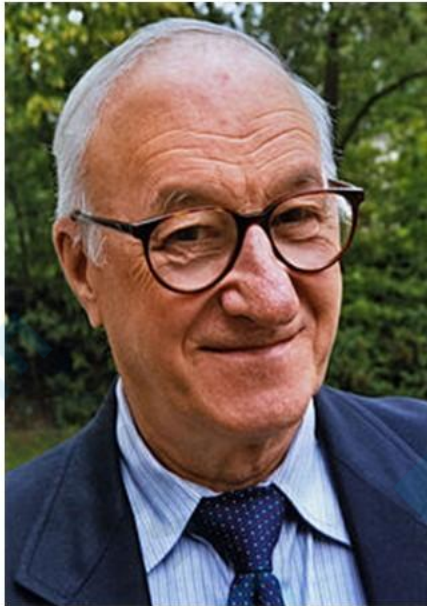






# APPROACHES

## Evaluation of Social Learning Theory



### Immediate Effects

**Studies into Social Learning Theory are mainly conducted on children and rarely investigate adult behaviour. They also only look at the immediate changes in children's behaviour, we do not know the long term effects.**

### Cognitive Factors

**Social Learning Theory is an improvement on Behaviourism as it acknowledges the role of cognitive factors and is therefore a fuller explanation of human behaviour.**

### Innate

**Despite acknowledging cognitive factors it still sees behaviour as environmentally determined whereas some behaviours may be innate and not learnt.**

### Biological Explanations

**It does not take any biological explanations of aggression into account. Lavine (1997) found increased levels of dopamine activity were associated with increased aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, Pillay (2000) found that levels of testosterone were positively correlated with levels of aggression.**



# APPROACHES

## Cognitive Approach

### Assumptions

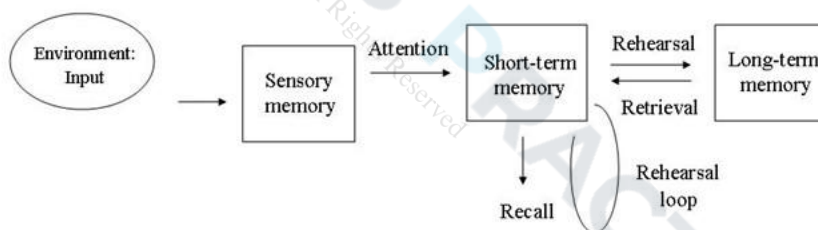
- Thought processes can and should be studied **scientifically**
- The mind works like a **computer**. It has input from the senses which it then **processes** to produce outputs such as language and specific behaviours.

### Schemas and Theoretical Models

**Schemas** are a cognitive representation of our ideas about a person or a situation and are formed through experiences. They allow us to **predict** what may happen or be expected of us. They mean we can process a lot of information quickly, but schemas can also lead to distortions in our perception.

Cognitive psychology uses **theoretical models**, such as the multi store model of memory, and look at behaviour in a series of distinct steps.

The information processing model is one way that psychologists apply the idea of computation to the human mind by comparing it to a **computer**.



### Emergence of Cognitive Neuroscience

This approach looks for a biological basis for thought processes combining cognitive and biological psychology. This emerged in the 1950s however George Miller first used the term cognitive neuroscience in 1971. MRI and PET scans have enabled scientists to systematically observe and describe neurological basis of mental processes.





# APPROACHES

## Evaluation of Cognitive Approach

### Over Simplified

**Theoretical models may oversimplify complex processes. For example, the role of emotion is sometimes overlooked and so a computer analogy is not a valid way of explaining mental processes.**

### Ecological Validity

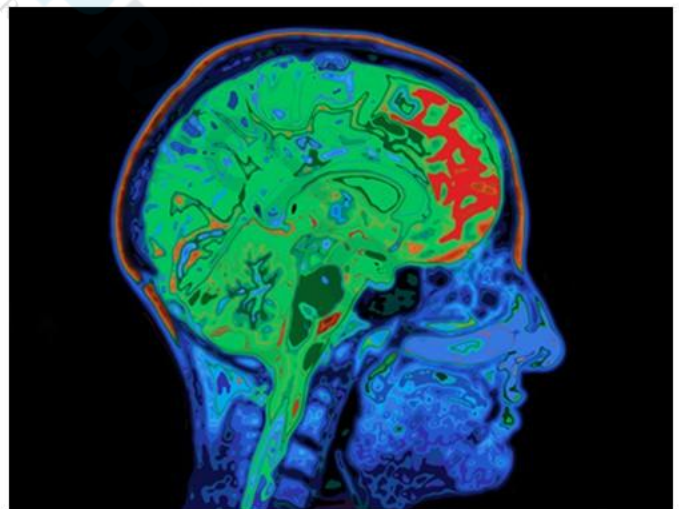
**Much of the research is conducted in labs and therefore may lack ecological validity as the thought processes measured could be argued to be artificial due to the context and tasks performed.**

### Abstract Concepts

**Schemas and theoretical models are abstract concepts which are difficult to scientifically evidence. Cognitive neuroscience, however, does begin to do this in a more scientific manner.**

### Practical Application

**The approach has led to the development of CBT which has been shown to be effective in treating different types of patients. For example, March et al. (2007) found CBT to be just as effective as antidepressants.**





# APPROACHES

## Biological Approach

### Assumptions

- Everything psychological is at first biological
- The approach investigates how biological structures and processes within the body impacts on behaviour.
- **Genes** affect behaviour and influence individual psychological differences between people.
- **Evolutionary** psychology considers genetic influences in common behaviours.
- Psychologists should study the brain, nervous system and other biological systems.

### Genotype and Phenotype

The actual set of genes an individual has, or is made up of, is a **genotype**. An individual's observed traits are their **phenotype** and come from an interaction of their genotype and the environment.

### Twin Studies

We can use twin studies to compare the concordance rate of monozygotic twins (MZ twins) to the concordance rate of dizygotic twins (DZ twins) to establish if a trait or characteristic is due to biological factors (MZ share 100% of their genes).

### Biochemistry

Biochemical imbalances can change behaviour. It is thought that overactive **dopamine** receptors play a role in Schizophrenia (Comer 2003). It has also been suggested that **serotonin** levels can have an impact on depressive disorders.

### Evolution

Darwin would argue that genes are inherited that aid survival: **natural selection**. This means that behaviours that are genetically determined through genes are passed on from generation to generation.

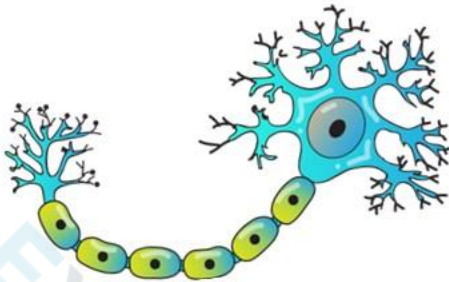






# APPROACHES

## Evaluation: Biological Approach



### Scientific

Scientific techniques have shown that there are biological components to behaviour. Brain scanning techniques such as fMRI and EEG has improved our ability to see this and creates objective data.

### Twin Studies

McGuffin studied twins where one of the pair already suffered from depression. He assessed the co-twin and found a 46% concordance rate for depression (MZ) 20% concordance rate for depression (DZ) supporting genetic explanations.

### Reductionist

The biological approach can be accused of being too simplistic and ignoring the role of the environment. For example, the diathesis-stress model would take a more interactionist approach to explaining behaviour.

### Real World Application

Drug treatments such as SSRIs for depression have proven to be successful in many cases, demonstrating there must be a biological cause to depression. However, drugs do not work for everyone and may only mask the symptoms and so there may be another explanation for depression that isn't biological.





# APPROACHES

## Psychodynamic Approach

### Assumptions

- **Unconscious processes**, of which we are unaware, determine our behaviour
- Personality has three parts: the **id**, **ego** and **superego**
- Early **childhood experiences** determine adult personality

### Tripartite Personality

<b>Id</b>	This is the primitive biological part of the mind and present from birth. It consists of basic biological impulses or drives such as hunger, thirst etc. Known as the <b>pleasure principle</b> .
<b>Ego</b>	The ego mediates between the Id and Superego. It develops around the age of 2. It tries to reduce conflict between the Id and Superego by using defence mechanisms. Known as the <b>reality principle</b> .
<b>Superego</b>	It judges whether actions are right or wrong. It is an internalised representation of the same sex parent. Known as the <b>morality principle</b> .

### Defence Mechanisms

#### Repression

Pushing bad experiences or negative emotions out of the conscious mind into the unconscious.

#### Denial

Refusing to accept that something has or will happen when in fact it will, usually a reaction to bad news.

#### Displacement

This is where you transfer your feelings onto something or someone else from the true source of distress.



# APPROACHES

## Psychodynamic Approach

Psychosexual Stages		
STAGE	DESCRIPTION	FIXATIONS
<b>Oral (0-1 years)</b>	Focus of pleasure is the mouth, mother's breast or bottle is desired.	Smoking, biting nails, sarcasm, critical.
<b>Anal (1-3 years)</b>	Focus of pleasure is the anus. Pleasure is gained from retaining or expelling faeces.	Anal retentive: obsessive and a perfectionist Anal expulsive: Messy and disordered.
<b>Phallic (3-6 years)</b>	Focus of pleasure is the genital area. Child experiences Oedipus or Electra complex.	Vain, narcissist, homosexual.
<b>Latency (6-12 years)</b>	No focus of please as social skills are focused on.	Expands social contacts.
<b>Genital (Puberty onwards)</b>	Focus of pleasure becomes genitals again and they begin to become sexually intimate.	Difficulty in forming normal heterosexual relationships.





# APPROACHES

## Evaluation: Psychodynamic Approach

### Case Studies

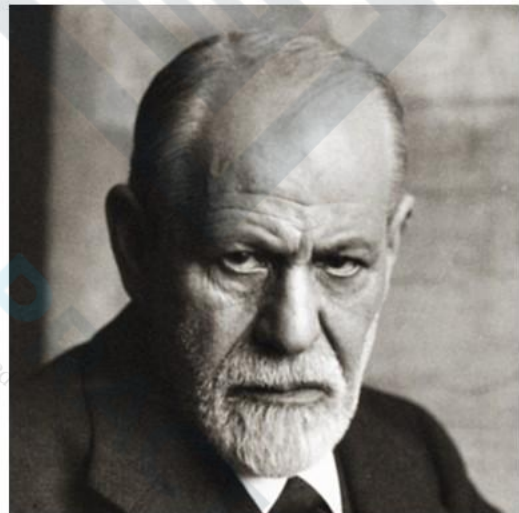
Freud supported his theory through case studies such as Little Hans who demonstrated the Oedipus Complex. However, as Freud conducted these they could be open to researcher bias and it is hard to generalise from one individual to the general population.

### Real World Application

Freud introduced a range of therapies to help us to access the unconscious mind such as dream analysis. Psychoanalysis help to deal with unresolved conflicts and have influenced the counselling psychology we have today.

### Abstract Concepts

We cannot operationalise or measure concepts such as displacement in a scientific way. This means his theories are non falsifiable and so lack scientific credibility.



### Psychic Determinism

Freud's theories suggest that our childhood experiences shape our adult personality and does not acknowledge how other factors in adult life could affect abnormality. He ignores the suggestion of free will.



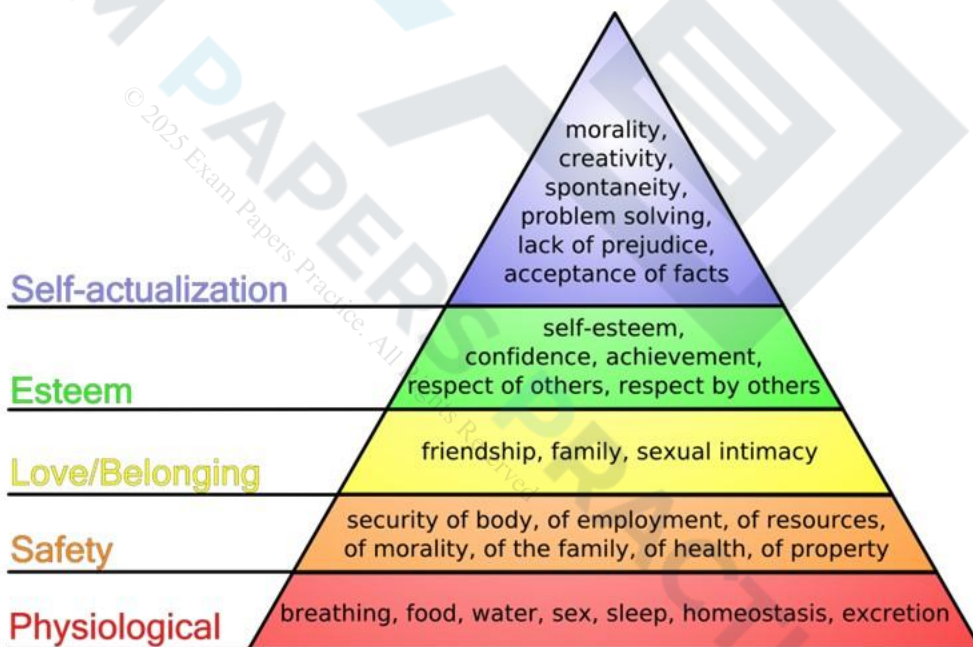
# APPROACHES

## Humanistic Approach

### Assumptions

- People have **free will**, they can make choices but are still affected by internal and external influences.
  - They act as interpreters of their own world.
- Humanistic psychologists try to understand behaviour from the '**actor**' themselves rather than relying on observations.
- They interpret **subjective** experiences rather than attempting to create general laws.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



The Hierarchy of needs motivates our behaviour, it is an extension of the Psychodynamic approach. You are only able to progress to the next level once you have met the needs of the one that you are currently on. Maslow characterised life as a series of peak moments of achievement when all the deficiency needs are met. He also identified people who are self-actualisers, people who were fulfilled in life and had used their abilities to their fullest.

# APPROACHES

## Humanistic Approach

### Roger's Self, Congruence and Conditions of Worth

Rogers believed that we have two basic needs; **positive regard** from other people and a sense feeling of **self worth**. When there is a similarity between a person's ideal self and how they perceive themselves to be in real life, a state of **congruence** exists. However if there is difference between the self and ideal self, a person is in a state of **incongruence**.

We can experience **conditional positive regard** and develop **conditions of worth** from our parents and others. These are conditions that they have to live up to.

### Influence of Counselling Psychology

Instead of acting in a directive way, humanistic therapists regard themselves as 'guides' to help people understand themselves and to find ways to enable their potential for self actualisation.

Through person centred counselling a therapist will try to provide **unconditional positive regard** for their client's feelings and attitudes by showing **genuineness** and **empathy**.

This allows the client to dissolve their **conditions of worth** and become a better functioning person.

It only focuses on the present issues and does not dwell on the past.







# APPROACHES

## Evaluation: Humanistic Approach

### Holistic

This approach is not as deterministic as other theories such as Biological approach, it takes a more holistic stance with the idea that subjective experience can be understood by considering the whole person. This may therefore mean the humanistic approach has more validity than the alternatives.



### Positive Approach

The approach has been praised for 'bringing the human back into psychology'. The Humanistic approach offers an alternative where people are regarded as having free will and able to take control of their own lives.

### Culture Bias

Elements of Humanism such as autonomy and self actualisation are more associated with Western cultures. Collectivist cultures focus more on the needs of the group and may not identify with these elements and so we cannot apply the approach universally.

### Unrealistic

The Humanist approach represents an idealised view of human nature. It fails to recognise that people can have a capacity for self destruction and that encouraging people to focus on their own self development, rather than on external factors, may not be realistic in our society or constructive to the client.





# APPROACHES

## Comparison of Approaches

	Free Will Vs Determinism	Reductionism Vs Holism	Nature Vs Nurture	Scientific	Treatments
<b>Biological</b>	Biological Determinism	Biological Reductionism	Nature	Yes e.g. brain scanning	Drug Therapy
<b>Behaviourism</b>	Environmental Determinism	Environmental Reductionism	Nurture	Yes e.g. lab studies	Systematic Desensitisation /Flooding
<b>Social Learning Theory</b>	Soft Determinism	A combination of Behaviourism & Cognitive approach	Nurture	Mostly e.g. observable behaviours	No treatment but can understand parenting better
<b>Cognitive</b>	Soft Determinism	Environmental Reductionism	Nature & Nurture	Mostly but can't observe internal processes	Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
<b>Psychodynamic</b>	Psychic Determinism	Reductionism & Holism	Mostly Nature	No we can't empirically test the concepts	Psychoanalysis
<b>Humanism</b>	Free Will	Holism	Mostly Nurture	No it rejects the scientific method	Person-centred counselling

### Eclecticism

Most psychologists/doctors will take an eclectic approach by combining more than one approach. This is particularly true in treating mental health conditions. Many accept **the Diathesis-Stress model** which suggests we have genetic predisposition for disorders but an environmental trigger is also required.