

# FACTFILE: GCE HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

## A2 6 UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BEHAVIOUR



### Psychological perspectives on behaviour and personality

#### Specification content

#### Students should be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the psychoanalytic perspective, in particular the key concepts in Freud's theory of personality development;
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the humanistic perspective in psychology, in particular the key concepts in Rogers' theory of personality development;
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the behaviourist perspective in psychology, in particular Pavlov's experiments with dogs and the key concepts of his theory of learning through classical conditioning, and Skinner's experiments with the Skinner box and the key concepts of his theory of learning through operant conditioning;
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the cognitive perspective in psychology, in particular the key concepts in Beck and Ellis's work on cognition;
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the social learning perspective in psychology, in particular the Bobo doll experiment and the key concepts in Bandura's theory; and
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the biological perspective on human behaviour, in particular the role of genetic, physiological and neurobiological processes in depression, aggression and stress.



### Course Content

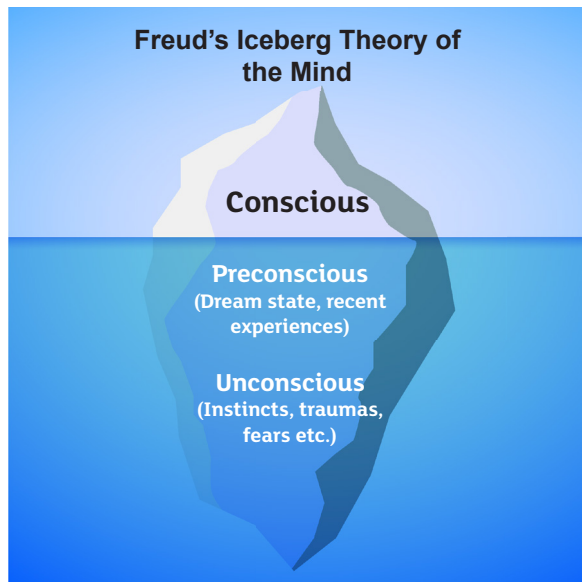
Through an understanding of the main perspectives in psychology or the ways of viewing human behaviour, practitioners explore how they contribute to an understanding of individuals and the strategies which may be employed in helping particular groups of individuals. Students will gain an insight to an explanation and understanding of various aspects of human behaviour. The application of the psychological perspectives in terms of therapy and treatment for individuals

experiencing a range of problems is also explored within the unit.

#### The psychoanalytic perspective

Sigmund Freud's stage theory of personality development is the key theory in this perspective, which regards personality as determined by **unconscious** processes and **early childhood experiences**. Freud proposed the '**iceberg theory**'

of the mind, with the conscious thoughts and feelings that people are aware of being much less significant than the huge, powerful unconscious, which determines the **personality** and behaviour of adults.



Freud believed people are born with two competing drives- the libido and the **death wish**. The **libido** concentrates its energy on different body parts or **erogenous zones** as a child develops - hence the **oral, anal and phallic** stages in the development of the young child up to the age of 6 years. There are three parts to the personality, with the **id** being present from birth, the **ego** developing in the anal stage as the child experiences potty training, and the **superego** developing in the phallic stage through the process of identification with the same sex parent, known as the Oedipus Complex for boys and the Electra Complex for girls. **Fixation** at any stage means some of the energy of the libido is left behind at that stage to deal with unresolved conflicts and this will affect the adult personality. For example, a child whose parents are too strict during the potty training stage will have an anal retentive personality as an adult, meaning he will be stubborn, stingy, obsessive and perfectionist.

### The humanistic perspective

Carl Rogers is a key theorist in this perspective. Like Freud's theory, Rogers' is a theory of the development of personality, but he views individuals as **unique** and **self-determining** rather than controlled by unconscious processes. Rogers believes people are driven to achieve **self-actualisation**, which means to achieve their full potential. In order to self-actualise, individuals must have **unconditional positive regard**, or love

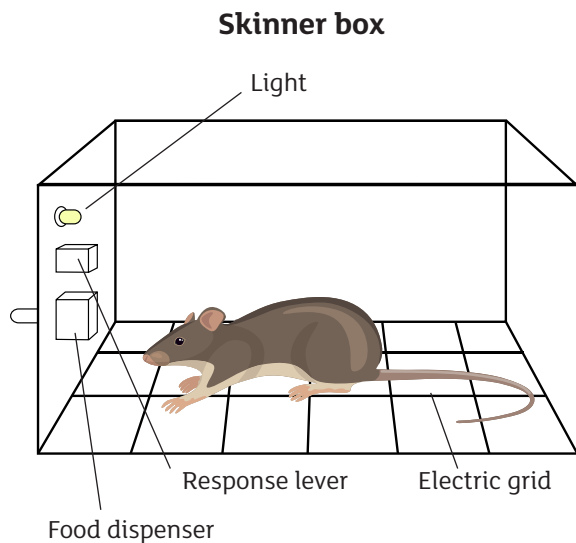
from others, usually their parents, which does not depend on acting in any particular way. People who have this can develop **positive self-regard** (Rogers calls this organismic valuing) and are also free to live their lives in a way that is self-actualising. Rogers claims that those who grow up with **conditional regard** are forced to behave in ways that please others, which he refers to as meeting other people's **conditions of worth**. This means it is not possible for them to self-actualise. Problems arise when individuals have a **self concept** that differs greatly from their **ideal self** - their behaviour does not fit with their view of themselves, which Rogers calls **incongruence**. In this situation, individuals use **denial** and **distortion** to protect the self, but overusing these defence mechanisms leads to **neurosis** and even **psychosis**, as the individuals' view of themselves becomes increasingly unrealistic.

### The behaviourist perspective

This perspective focuses on learning and regards human behaviour as a collection of learned responses to environmental stimuli, with the key learning process being conditioning.

**Pavlov's** theory of **classical conditioning** stemmed from his work on the digestive system of dogs, when he noticed that the dogs were salivating to the sound of his assistant's footsteps. Pavlov believed that the dogs were demonstrating a **learned association** between the sound (**a conditioned stimulus**) and food (**an unconditioned stimulus**). The food alone would have caused the salivation reflex to occur (**an unconditioned response**) without learning, but salivation to the sound of the footsteps was a learned behaviour (**a conditioned response**). Pavlov went on to conduct a series of experiments to show that the dogs could learn to respond to other sounds like bells and buzzers. Pavlov showed that this learning would be **generalised** in that the animals also responded to similar stimuli to the original e.g. bells and buzzers with different tones. They could also learn to **discriminate** between different stimuli i.e. to tell the difference between them.

**Skinner's** theory of **operant conditioning** was also a theory of learning, based on his work with animals.



Skinner developed the 'Skinner box', a piece of apparatus in which a hungry rat had to learn to press a lever to obtain a pellet of food. At first, the lever pressing occurred by chance. Every time the lever was pressed, food was delivered, so pressing the lever was **reinforced**. Any behaviour that is reinforced tends to be repeated, and so learning occurs. Later Skinner discovered that **partial reinforcement** is more effective for learning than this continuous type of reinforcement- only being rewarded for some of the responses leads to stronger learning, which is more **resistant to extinction** (i.e. doesn't disappear so quickly when reinforcement stops).

Reinforcement is anything that increases the chances of the preceding behaviour being repeated. Reinforcement may be:

- **Positive reinforcement** - the chance to gain something pleasurable (e.g. sweets, praise, money) increases the probability of a response/behaviour occurring (e.g. producing good homework).
- **Negative reinforcement** - the chance to escape or avoid something unpleasant (e.g. staying in after school) increases the probability of a response/behaviour occurring (e.g. working hard in class). Skinner showed that rats would learn to jump up into a compartment when a warning buzzer sounded in order to avoid electric shock in the Skinner box.

**Both positive and negative reinforcement aim to produce a desired behaviour. Punishment**, on the other hand, decreases the chances of the preceding behaviour being repeated- it aims to stop an unwanted behaviour being produced.

## The cognitive perspective

This perspective views humans as information processors, with individuals' behaviour influenced by how they perceive the world. From this perspective, **irrational thoughts and beliefs** cause abnormal behaviours.

**Aaron Beck** referred to the irrational and maladaptive thoughts that lead to mental disorders as cognitive errors. Beck claimed mental disorders like depression are rooted in the maladaptive ways people think about:

- themselves e.g. I can't succeed at anything;
- the world e.g. it's necessary to be successful to be a good person; and
- the future e.g. nothing will change.

He referred to this as a '**cognitive triad**' of negative, **automatic thoughts**. These **negative schemas** dominate thinking.

**Albert Ellis** also argued that irrational thoughts are the main cause of emotional distress and behaviour disorders as they lead to a **self defeating internal dialogue** of negative or **catastrophising self-statements**. He identified 11 basic irrational beliefs that are emotionally self-defeating and commonly associated with psychological problems e.g.:

- I must be loved and accepted by absolutely everybody; and
- I must be excellent in every respect and never make mistakes, otherwise I'm worthless.

Sometimes referred to as the '**ABC model**', Ellis claims disorders begin with an **activating event (A)** (e.g. a failed exam) leading to a **belief (B)**, which may be rational (e.g. I didn't work hard enough) or irrational (e.g. I'm too stupid to pass). The belief leads to **consequences (C)**, which can be **adaptive** (appropriate) for rational beliefs (e.g. I'll do more revision) or **maladaptive** (inappropriate) for irrational beliefs (e.g. getting depressed).

### The social learning perspective

This perspective focuses on the influence of other people on behaviour, with a key theory being Bandura's Social Learning Theory.



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**Albert Bandura claimed that children learn by imitating role models, or observational learning,** as well as by reinforcement. Bandura conducted several experiments to illustrate this. For example, he showed three groups of nursery school children a video of an adult attacking a plastic, inflatable 'Bobo' doll by hitting it with a mallet, throwing it, punching it, shouting at it etc. The three groups saw different endings in the film as shown in the table, and afterwards they were given the chance to play with the Bobo doll and their behaviour was recorded. The results are seen below:

Film ending	Children's behaviour after watching
Adult given sweets for good performance	Most aggressive group
Adult scolded and smacked for aggression	Least aggressive group
No reward or punishment (the control group)	In between

This showed children's behaviour is influenced by what they observe, as well as by reward and punishment. Following a series of experiments, Bandura concluded:

- An aggressive model teaches children new ways of being aggressive;
- The aggression is **generalised**, not just towards the Bobo doll;
- Some models are more likely to be imitated than others, including:
  - people who are **warm and loving** to children

- people who have **power, influence and competence**; and
- people who are **similar e.g. in terms of sex or age**.

Bandura also described the process of identification, which involves '**internalising**' the role i.e. the behaviour becomes part of the individual's personality, and is no longer simply being imitated.

### The biological perspective

This perspective regards human behaviours like depression, aggression and stress as determined by genetic, physiological and neurobiological processes. Examples are listed below:

#### Depression

- Evidence of increased risk of depression for first-degree biological relatives (parents, siblings, children) suggests there may be a genetic explanation or that genetics may be a predisposing factor.
- Depression is linked to the disturbance of brain chemistry e.g. serotonin is a monoamine neurotransmitter that is believed to play an important role in the regulation of mood, with low levels associated with depression.
- Hormones may be involved- sufferers have high levels of cortisol linked to over-activity of the hypothalamus.

#### Aggression

- Low serotonin levels in the brain have been linked to a reduced ability to control aggressive impulses.
- Extreme aggression may be linked to dysfunctions in certain parts of the brain e.g. hypothalamus, which regulates emotions.
- Highly aggressive people may have higher testosterone (male hormone) level.

#### Stress

Stress can be seen as a physiological reaction to external stimuli i.e. stressors in the environment. The **fight or flight response** is the reaction of the body which allows it to produce a great deal of energy at very short notice, allowing the individual to escape or to attack- a fundamental survival process that evolved in mammals. This involves-

- Changes to the body to get a blood supply to the muscles including the heart beating faster, blood pressure increasing.
- As a high blood sugar level is needed for energy, stored sugar is released into the bloodstream and sugars are digested very quickly while digestion of other kinds of foods is delayed- saliva changes to achieve this so mouth feels dry.
- Oxygen is also needed so breathing becomes deep and rapid.
- Other changes which form the alarm reaction include blood changing so clots form more quickly, pupils dilating and the pilomotor response which causes 'goose pimples'.

### Activity 1

Freud, in his psychoanalytic theory, argued that adults use **defence mechanisms** to protect the personality. Examples include **repression, regression, sublimation, denial and projection**. Carry out your own research and make notes on how each of these works to protect the personality

### Activity 2

From the biological perspective, **Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome** describes the long-term changes to the body resulting from continuous stress. Research Selye's theory and make brief notes to describe the three phases he described- **alarm, resistance and exhaustion**.

