

Psychology Paper

- i. To identify the psychological perspective that each statement maker is most closely allied to.
- ii. To give reasons for your decision.

The statements:

1) *Our personality and behaviour is determined at birth, if not before.*

The idea that a person's personality and behaviour is determined at birth, and perhaps even before, is based upon those that adhere to a *genetic/inherited* view of human personalities. The selective breeding experiments famous undertaken by Mendel in plants in the early Twentieth Century were subsequently transferred to animals where learning ability, emotionality and aggression have been bred for in rats (Ebert & Hyde, 1976).

Actual tests on humans in this manner would of course be unethical but tests on twins and on the IQs of children as compared to their parents suggest that many elements, from height to personality, are indeed inherited within human beings. It is also clear that the environment effects personality, so while a newly born baby may have certain characteristics within his personality set, they will be greatly influenced by the manner in which the baby is raised.

2) *Aggression is a human instinct. Society can control it to some extent, but we will never eliminate aggressive behaviour.*

This comment could be made by the proponents of a number of theories, but it is most applicable to *Freudian Instinct Theory*. Freud stated that all animals, including human beings, are born with potent aggressive instincts. These instincts create a drive to commit aggressive acts that must be fulfilled in one way or another.

This instinct, which Freud called the *id* can be alleviated to a certain extent through the *superego*, which represents that part of the human being that is developed through childhood and comes to fruition in adulthood. Society places controls on people's aggressive instincts, and the superego recognizes this and tames the desires of the *id* in order to preserve the person's freedom. One way that society allows for this instinct to be released, and thus not come to full fruition is the method of *catharsis*, in which nonviolent release of aggressive energy is allowed (Lahey, 2002).

3) *Your student may be under a lot of pressure from his parents, but that is no excuse for cheating. We are responsible for what we do.*

This might be an adapted social learning theorist, perhaps even Albert Bandura himself. Bandura states that while people are indeed affected by their social environment, they are also actively involved in determining their own actions. A

degree of self-determination vis-à-vis the outside environment occurs and the person's behavior effects the social environment (Bandura, 1989).

In this case the "social environment" of the student would be his parents, but the student would also have a degree of self-agency that would make them at least partially responsible for their actions. This view of the student might also fit in with various *stage theorists* as each of them sees a certain point at which a person gains full adult autonomy, which includes the development of a moral compass and sense of ethical standards. Thus Piaget identified the age of eleven onwards as that at which the child gains full adult logic, the so-called "operational stage".

By contrast, Kohlberg would identify the time at which moral maturity is gained later. According to him a child's moral view is based upon what others think of what he is doing, and the laws/conventions that exist at a conventional level. Within this context, cheating may actually fit in within the imperative to succeed that is being reinforced within the child. It is only when the child gains independence that the "principled level" arises.

4) There aren't any values inherent in human nature. Values are acquired in the same way as we learn to say "please" and "thank you".

This type of statement could come from a proponent of *social learning theory*. Thus the way that people act, think and feel, and thus those factors which go in to making their "values" are learned from other people within society rather than being inherent.

The essence of social learning theory is to be found within the work of Pavlov, Watson and Skinner. According to these theorists a child will only develop values if he/she is taught them: if she is exposed to good models and is reinforced for appropriate behavior then good “values” will appear. If exposed to poor models and good behavior is not reinforced, or worse, bad behavior is reinforced, then inadequate personality development will occur.

5) To change people's patterns of violence, we would have to change how people think about violence.

This type of approach to people's pattern of violence is that adopted by *behavior therapists*. Behavior therapy is based upon the social learning theory of personality that has already been discussed. Behaviorists argue that rather than being the result of unconscious, perhaps inherited instincts towards violence (as suggested by Freudians), behaviorists suggest that it comes from inappropriate experiences and classic conditioning.

Violent people can learn not to be violent in this type of behavioral therapy, and this learning involves changing the manner in which they think about violence. Thus role-playing and social skills training within support groups may show those who have been violent what effects their actions have had on victims. Husbands are shown the results of domestic violence on women, even rapists are taught in prison how their actions can ruin a person's life.

The actual efficacy of such programs has been brought into question, although it appears implicitly obvious that changing how someone thinks about violence is likely to have more effect upon their behavior than merely the fear of being caught or strict conditioning. Systematically sensitizing people to the effects of violence may enable a change in their behavior, especially if the change in attitude is genuine and deep rather than superficial and temporary.

Works Cited

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Ebert, PD. Hyde, JS. "Selection for agnostic behavior in wild female *Mus musculus*". *Behavior Genetics*, 6, 291-304.

Lahey, Benjamin. *Essentials of Psychology*. McGraw-Hill, New York: 2003.