

Holism and Reductionism

The concern with the level at which it is appropriate to explain human behaviour – whether to break it down or keep it whole.

Holism: theory which proposed that it makes sense to study and indivisible system not constituent parts.

Inappropriate to break it down – can only be understood by analysing the person or behaviour as a whole.

Gestalt: 'whole is greater than the sum of parts'.

View is shared by Humanistic Psychologists – seen with successful therapy of bringing together all aspects of the 'whole person'.

Reductionism: belief that human behaviour is better explained by breaking it into smaller parts.

Analyses behaviour by breaking it down into constituent parts – based on parsimony: explanation using the most basic/lowest level.
Simple, easy and economic.

Holism and Reductionism

Biological-reductionism:

We are biological organisms made up of physiological structures and processes.

So behaviour is somewhat biological – can be explained through neurochemical, neurophysiological, evolutionary and genetic influences.

Assumption of the biological approach – successful application in the effects of psychoactive drugs on the brain to neural processes. May be possible to explain mental disorders at a biochemical level such as OCD, depression and schizophrenia.

Environmental-reductionism:

Assumption of the behaviourist approach – studying observable behaviour only.

Breaking learning into stimulus–response that is measurable in a laboratory. Physical level is analysed.

Holism and Reductionism

Evaluation: Holism;

Strength:

Provides a complete/global understanding of behaviour.

Some aspects of social behaviour only occur within group context – cannot be understood by looking at individual group members.

e.g. Effects of conformity to social roles and de-individuation of the guards and prisoners in the Stanford Prison Experiment – could only be understood by looking at the interaction between people and the group behaviour.

Weakness:

No rigorous/scientific testing – can be vague/speculative when studying something complex.

e.g. Humanistic Psychology – criticised for lack of empirical evidence, loose concepts.

Higher level explanations combine different perspectives which becomes a dilemma as it is difficult to establish which is most influential when looking at treatment. This suggests lower level explanations may be more appropriate for real-world problems.

Culture Bias

Individualistic: stresses the needs of individuals before the needs of the group – independence – ‘dog eat dog’.

E.g. Germany, Ireland, USA, South Africa and Australia.

Collectivist: stresses the needs of the group before individuals – less likely to break social norms.

E.g. Japan, Brazil, India, Korea and China.

Globalisation: interconnectedness between countries – increased communication. (Growth in technology allows this to happen).

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
Page 34 of 41

Culture Bias

Takano and Osaka (1999):

Conducted a meta-analysis on 15 studies, comparing the USA and Japan. They saw that 14 studies showed no distinction between collectivism or individualism.

Suggesting that it is not always important to consider culture as **globalisation** means there is less difference between cultures (*USA is considered individualistic, Japan is considered a collectivist culture*).

Universal behaviours:

- ❖ Facial expressions,
- ❖ The fight or flight response,
- ❖ Interactional synchrony.

Ekman: Facial expressions:

– **Neonates** (newborns) show disgust in response to a bitter taste – they've had no chance to learn this response – suggesting it is innate and universal.

– **Neonates** show distress when exposed to painful stimuli – they've had no chance to learn this response – suggesting it is innate and universal.

– **People from Western and pre-linguistic African countries will identify the same faces as happy when shown photographs** (same for disgust) – suggesting that facial expressions are innate therefore universal – visually isolated.

– **Blind and sighted children show the same facial expressions for particular emotions** – the blind children are unable to see the expression and learn it suggesting that facial expressions are innate.

Gender Bias

Evaluation:

Sexism:

Lack of women appointed at senior research level – meaning female concerns are not reflected in research.

Male researchers are more likely to have work published.

Laboratory experiments further disadvantage women – female participants are often placed in inequitable relationships with a (male) researcher – labelled unreasonable, irrational and unable to complete tasks.

Psychology is guilty of supporting institutional sexism and creates bias in theory and research (Denmark et al (1988)).

Women's involvement in psychological research is disproportionate.

Sexism leads to biased results.

Women are not given the ability to fulfil their true potential (socially, economically, culturally).

preview from Notesale.co.uk
page 40 of 41