

Considerations on Bandura's Workframe in Relation to Freud's Psychoanalysis

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Theories of Personality
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Research method

The question of why I chose to compare Sigmund Freud's thesis with Albert Bandura's work is mainly motivated by my admiration for both researchers, an admiration which has quickly increased over my brief but intense study of Psychology. My serious study of Freud started with the module "Introducción a la Psicología" at the CEU Cardenal Herrera University, in which I gained an overview of his major concepts, such as those concerning the subconscious mind, which revolutionised our understanding of behaviour. This was something completely different from contemporary psychology. My first experience of Bandura came from the Comunicación Interpersonal lectures in the same university. Most of all, I was affected by the Self-Efficacy concept, as opposed to the pseudo-scientific re-adaptation of it promoted in books such as *The Secret* (Byrne), which have been detrimental to the original, formal theories.

What inspired me to compare these two authors was that I intuitively felt both have some relevance and utility in the field of psychology, as much as they are relevant in our daily life. In order to expand my knowledge, I began with brief research on the internet, where I gathered some raw material on the subject, gaining a global understanding of it. About.com (The New York Times Company) is a sourced website I discovered thanks to Google.com. It provided me with some information and quotes about Bandura's main ideas. Possibly the best website I used for writing this essay was EasyBib (ImagineEasy Solutions), which I discovered thanks to professor Liam Burke, of the Huston Film School (NUI Galway). EasyBib solves the problem of citation and allows one to maintain order in research projects; it also offers one of the more impressive features of any academic website I have experienced: a way in which to evaluate the credibility of the sources one is quoting.

In order to obtain all the books I needed, I began by researching in NUI Galway's James Hardiman library. Paying most attention to the primary sources of the module, as provided by professor Jonathan Egan, I chose *Beneath the Mask* (Sollod, Wilson, Monte), along with two more reference books concerning general psychology: *Introduction to Psychology* (Sarma) and *Foundations of Psychology* (Hayes). Due to my lack of basic knowledge in psychology, I found these publications could provide me with a theory base I could reference when in doubt, and also a huge, summarised, ordered and clear database through which I could easily interconnect. Due to the access limitations regarding the library copy of *Beneath the Mask*, I searched for another work with a similar content index. Thus, I discovered *Personality: Theory and Research* (Pervin, Cervone, John).

Unlike Bandura, there exists a large amount of works specially dedicated to Freud's psychoanalysis, whether praising, neutrally analysing, or criticising it. I chose *Sigmund Freud* by

Michael Jacobs (1992) as a reference book, which includes three particularly interesting chapters: “Freud’s Major Theoretical Contributions”, “Freud’s Major Practical Contributions” and “Criticism and Rebuttals”. These perfectly fit our present work. Two important books I also found by searching the library’s database are: *Freud and the Question of Pseudoscience* (Cioffi), which explores the issue of the psychoanalysis’ lack of scientific validity, and *Mind, Psychoanalysis and Science* (Clark, Wright), which examines the common problems of psychoanalysis, but also its contributions to contemporary psychology.

Defining the paths

Possibly Freud’s greatest achievement was to popularise the idea that “there had to be somewhere where what was unacceptable to the conscious mind was repressed and held, and from which the repressed emerged from time to time, in one form or another, back into consciousness” (Jacobs, 31). He described how these hidden processes were produced — as traumas —, stored — through repression — and enigmatically translated by the conscious mind — by the brain’s means of sublimation, dreams, verbal slips and jokes, etcetera (33-39). His psychological structure, based on the idea of a conscious ‘ego’, a socially modelled ‘super-ego’ and an hidden, dark ‘id’, affecting our behaviour from the deep background of the mind (57), provided his colleagues with a define system of tools that helped to understand human behaviour by interviewing the subject until the ego’s trust in the therapist — allied with verbal slips and suspicious gestures — allowed the ‘id’ to display itself.

Freud also exposed the idea that a sort of common places exists in every human life; this is proved by his personal nomenclature for the behavioural processes, which confuse the relationship between causes and effects, in relation to mythology. So, the question is not whether Oedipus is represented in some young males, but whether the whole of humanity created Oedipus as an unconscious way of representing the inner mind processes related with the rivalry between the father and the son. Despite the fact that “the concept of unconscious aspects of mental processes was not Freud’s discovery” (Jacobs, 31), the fact remains that during a period lasting more than forty years, he borrowed ideas from his colleagues (30) and combined them with his own, to build a kind of autonomous whole that was supposed to explain the mind processes of the individual. The main problem of this was not that Freud misidentified himself as the original single father of psychoanalysis, instead identifying it with a complete school of thinkers, but that the result of his work resulted in a complex combination of dialectics and ideas whose inception was not the same, but which were being presented together. Freud’s

work easily became an abstract mixture of self-adaptation assertions that, according to Karl Popper, did not accomplish the scientific method; yet, it was not possible to prove it false (Cioffi, 210). As Popper, himself, asserted:

“Psychoanalysis ... is an interesting psychological metaphysics (and no doubt there is some truth in it, and there is so often in metaphysical ideas), but it was never science ... What prevents their [also Adler's] theories from being scientific in the sense here described is very simply that they do not exclude any physically possible human behaviour. Whatever anybody may do is, in principle, explicable in Freudian or Adlerian terms ... the theory was compatible with everything that could happen — even with any special immunization treatment”(213-214).

The question of this excess of adaptability is opposed to the behavioural schools' research, which usually establishes control groups and focuses the attention on single items, instead achieving an understanding of the whole subject as a sort of personal exegesis.

On the other hand, the starting point of Bandura's social-cognitive perspective states the idea “that behavior is the result of an interaction between the person and the environment” (Pervin, Cervone, Oliver, 416), which shifts the initial perspective out of the subject's inner mind and underlines the importance of the initial context, instead constricting the whole analysis to his inner processes. As Hayes states, approaching G.H. Mead's and Bandura's ideas, “social behaviourism emphasized how human behaviour is directed towards social goals” (217), and so our acts are also moved by the roles that context applies to us, and therefore by the expectations society places on us; in the same vein, we try to keep our personal status within society. This is related to Freud's super ego, although here its significance and relevance for the person's motivations are much stronger than a light presence pushing the ego and the id to do all the work required for containing our passions. Moreover, these are also established by our environment and not only by a passive, inherited, inner motivation. In spite of this, we are not refusing Freud's theories here; this step forward emphasizes the importance of building the proper environment for the individual's mental health, instead awaiting the trauma yet to happen, and therefore trying to understand its mechanism. This is one of the biggest differences with Psychoanalysis. Cognitive schools do not just have a primary, academic function of understanding human mind but also the ethical aim of helping the patient overcome his problems through manifestly changing his outer items

When reading Freud's proposals, it is not difficult to conceive of the human mind as a result of happenings, a sort of a condemnation of our past, without having a way to avoid what it means for our present life, nor to separate our behaviour from it. For Bandura, our present will be able to shape our behaviour's "own personal development" (419); his proposal establishes that, despite our present decisions being affected by our past experiences, in some way, our free will influences how we perceive, understand and reacting through our choices. In this manner, the point of view is moved to a position in which therapy becomes a life-changing practice, not a form of artifice that aims to create an explanation of what we are, or rather, why we are as we are. In this case, the paradigm conceives the subject in his present time as someone who is able to walk his path as individual by deciding not what happened in the past, but how it is understood, and what is to follow.

The therapist here is not just an introspective observer, but also an analyst who must push patients to modify their responses to the relevant context. This is why, instead focusing our analysis on the figure of the trauma, the social-cognitive theory of personality prefers to discuss competences, a semantic change which allows us to manage the skills of the subject as a series of different factors which can be measured, improved or worsened, just as they can be influenced by the surrounding circumstances. We may recognise that this ignores the effort to understand the subject as an interconnected whole. We can also be assured that now it is possible to focus the attention on specific deficiencies and, instead, aim to explain the subject's entire behaviour, attempting to help in determined, specific, dysfunctional attitudes. Strengthening this last idea, this school refers to context specificity (424), or "to the fact that psychological structures that are relevant to some social situations, or contexts, may be irrelevant to others" (424). For example, a person skilled in logical mathematical thinking might not be very skilled in situations involving social relationships; but, from this paradigm, we do not aim to understand why this is; rather, we aim to understand how we can modify the items we have in order to achieve the subject's interest, pushing the exegesis factor to the background — but never resigning to its existence as a relevant factor after all.

One of the biggest contributions to psychology, from this school, is the self-efficacy concept proposed by Albert Bandura. This summarises the exposed ideas of environment, will, change and results, by "emphasizing that people's expectations about their own capabilities for performance are the key ingredient in human achievement and well-being" (426). The idea that our beliefs condition the results we obtain also involves the manner in which people understand the environment, why they opt for specific answers and choices, and which preconceptions affect the task, as well as how. This is a wide understanding perspective which moves the

therapist to focus his attention on items which are involved in a specific aspect of the patient's doings.

Also affected by the roles established within the subject during his childhood, conforming to the own-self concept (Hayes, 217), and performing a somewhat certain influence in the consequent life experience, I would define self-efficacy as a concept concerning how much we understand our skills in relation to our possibilities, which directly affects our results. Here, I cannot ignore the relationship with Weiss's locus of control, a dimension of the human psyche which succeeds in establishing whether we are manipulated by the environment or are ourselves responsible for surrounding events (407). Self-efficacy emphasises a slightly more internal locus, a feature that is probably shared with Freud's work, and establishes the subject as a controller of his own destiny, instead complaining of the adverse external factors that, according with Sigmund's thesis, may include our past, due our impossibility to change it, though it is constantly pushing the ego's acts. However, if it is true that Bandura does not ignore the environment, this concept determines that, despite adversity, the healthy subject has the final decision when it is about deciding whether to change or not.

In opposition, we could assert that the precepts of psychoanalysis established the personality as a result of a chain of events that moulds the subject's performance in the present. This reminds us of a displacement to an external locus, a place in which all we can do is merely accept ourselves as a result of our lives.

It is necessary to note that this may be an overly simplistic understanding of these theories, and so it is important to conceive of them as a grey scale, rather than merely polarising and limiting their implications. It is also important to state that psychoanalysis is here determined by an external level of the locus, but this does not mean that psychoanalysis' diagnostics are only constrained to it; for example, the well known Freudian neuroses can be filed as a total lack of external perspective in the subject, who irretrievably understands that the environment will be also a product of his own choices, which disturbs him. As to the matter of cognition, if Bandura's proposals seem to be more accurate — or at least more respectfully academic because of their terminology — the thing to note so far is that we have Freud's structure for understanding how the mind stores and represents our experiences, but we miss an analogous functional paradigm from Bandura. He apparently solved this knowledge gap in 1986, with *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory* (Pervin..., 435, 568), including the principle that called for reciprocal determinism, which “contends that personality, behaviour, and the environment must be understood as a system of forces that mutually influence one another across the course of time” (435), which describes, as Freud did,

behaviour as a result of a determined personality, and this as a result of a determined environment. Instead, reciprocal determinism establishes a triangle that emphasises the bilateral influence of every aspect with its two neighbours.

This solves the problem of free will, which is still present in Freud, by considering behaviour as something which is also related to an analytical process that considers an amount of possibilities before choosing a single, past-determined, specific action. Furthermore, this theory also overcomes the traditional paradigm that distinguishes between ambient and heritage items; due behaviour is a third way which can be inspired by these two, but contemplates a kind of combination of both, through the use of reasoning. Personality could be determined by genes, but it also includes the past experiences which affect the present cognition of the world, and the environment might be also motivated by reasons which relate both to culture and to evolutionary factors related to memetics (Dawkins, 222-240).

The last point I would like to discuss here is how both authors relate behaviour to an adaptive mechanism which allows the subject to shape his actions within a determined environment, with the aim of surviving and achieving a welfare status. For Freud, repression comes from inside, and tries to “avoid [the] unpleasure” (Jacobs, 37) that comes from misidentifying its own ideas with common ideas. Facing this, the social-cognitive school proposal states that “people can learn by merely observing the behaviours of others” (Pervin..., 440). This is called observational learning, or modelling, and is also related to vicarious conditioning processes. It is scientifically demonstrated (439-445), and makes us understand personal repressions as a way to breed the common sense of a society walking in the same direction, probably with the objective of collective survival, as an organism shaped by the addition of all its individuals, rather than struggling between the individual and his surroundings, without a common-interests perspective.

Conclusion

After exposing relevant points about both paradigms, and agreeing that there is a significant time gap in between them, I think that, as behaviour is psychoanalysis's subject of study, it becomes an object for personal change, a kind of tool, in Banduras' thesis. We can also establish that social-cognitive psychology refuses mythological terminology in order to achieve an academic status, that it tries to base its assertions in evidence and, as a revision of the traditional psychoanalysis, that it is demonstrated to be able to modify itself in order to explain reality in a wide way, instead looking for a personal exegesis in every patient as a kind of never-

ending refoundation. So, the therapeutic application of Banduras' paradigms is something we should take into account.

Thanks to the therapist's indications, the patient can understand that his chances to change his conditions do not just depend on his past, but also on his volition and predisposition, rather than Freud's point of view, which surreptitiously pushes the patient to accept himself as he is and the way he is living. This implies conformity, rather than attempt to overcome present situations in a way that allows us to really change the conditions. We should instead just learn to live while involved in them.

Psychoanalysis tries to explain, which can take a long time if we try to define every individual as a single, autonomous whole, shaped through decades, in a variety of ways, by countless factors. Bandura, on the other hand, tries to change specific territories of behaviour, personality or environment; in other words, his is an attempt to modify reality by the deep analysis of the relevant factors of a specific problem. However, it is necessary to establish that Bandura's thesis would not exist without Sigmund Freud's previous work, and, as its scientific utility can be questioned, we cannot ignore that he established the basis for the understanding of the mind, which is still having a relevant influence nowadays. Otherwise, I would not be discussing this now. Sigmund Freud's main concept that nothing is done or said simply for its own sake, that everything has a hidden motivation, or at least a reason, overcame both the structuralism and the conditioning perspectives which viewed the mind as simply a store of associations, rather than a complex interconnection of experiences and motivations which never stop evolving.

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