

# Psychology A: Fundamentals of Human Behaviour

## The Science of Psychology

### 1. The Nature of Psychology

- Psychology is the scientific study of mind and behaviour.
- Behaviour refers to actions and responses that we can directly observe
- Mind refers to internal states and processes like thoughts and feelings
- Clinical Psychology refers to a person that studies and treats those with mental disorders
- Cognitive psychology is the study of the mental processes (consciousness, attention, memory, decision making and problem solving)
- Personality psychology looks at the human personality – personality traits
- Social psychology examines peoples thoughts, feelings and behaviour pertaining to the social world
- Science is a process that involves systematically gathering and evaluating empirical evidence to answer the questions and test beliefs about the natural world.
- Empirical evidence is evidence gained through observation and experience.
- Sometimes however, observations can be misconstrued as a result of stereo types (mental shortcuts) etc. that perhaps don't represent the entire population
- The four central goals of psychology are description, control, application and explanation. Describe how people behave, think and feel. Explain why people behave, think and feel. Control by designing experiments to test whether the explanations are true and apply the psychological knowledge to enhance human's welfare.
- Basic Research: looking for knowledge for the sake of it
- Applied research: Solve specific problems

### 2. Perspectives on behaviour

- Psychology has roots in various disciplines – as a result we see a variety of different perspectives.
- Mind-body-dualism: The mind is a spiritual entity that is not subject to physical laws that govern the body.
- Monism: mind and body are one and not a separate spiritual entity. This set the ground for Psychology as it showed that the mind could be studied by measuring physical processes in the brain.
- The school of British empiricism: John Locke and other philosophers held the view that all ideas and knowledge are gained empirically, through the senses (this started the school of modern science and the roots of empirical observation)
- Charles Darwin's Theory of evolution: Was heavily discredited because it contradicted not only philosophical but religious views about human beings. Darwin's theory was that there was that the mind was not a spiritual entity but a product of biological continuity between species and humans. He believed that we could learn about humans by studying animals.
- Wilhelm Wundt: Established the first psychology lab in Germany! Wilhelm and his partner believed that the mind could be studied by breaking it down into its different elements. This view is known as structuralism. Wilhelm used the act of introspection or looking within.
- Functionalism: psychology should study the functions of consciousness rather than its elements. William James was a leader of the functionalist movement.
- Psychodynamic Perspective: looks for the cause of behaviour within the inner workings of personality, with an emphasis on unconsciousness. Sigmund Freud was the leader of this perspective and perhaps the most influential. Freud used a method

with patients called free association in which a patient would express any thought that came to mind. After while he noticed patients has begun to bring up painful and traumatic experiences, often sexual. Freud was convinced that an unconscious part of your mind influenced behaviour. From his work came the psychotherapy style; psychoanalysis (analysing internal and unconscious psychological forces). He believed humans had powerful sexual drives that produces behaviours of aggression when withheld. Which led to defence mechanisms such as repression that could be undone by psychoanalysis.

- The behavioural perspective: The human mind is a 'blank slate' and experiences are written upon it which in turn create certain behaviours and personalities. We can be taught behaviours by associating it with something else. For example, a dog learns to sit when it hears the food bag opening. It's a school of thought that emphasises the environmental control of behaviour through learning. This school believed not in the unconscious mind but the observable behaviours. Skinner was a behaviourist that believed that NO behaviour was determined by anything going on inside the brain - only external.

-Cognitive Behaviourism: Learning experiences and environments influence how we behave and our thought patterns

- Humanistic Perspective: emphasised free will, personal growth and the attempt to find meaning in one's existence. Abraham Maslow believed that we all had a force that pushed us towards self-actualisation, reaching of one's individual potential. If you are raised in a supportive environment, then you will be a positive energy. Vice versa. Humanism is not scientific. Similar to the positive-psychology movement that looks at studying human strengths, fulfilment and optimal living.

-Cognitive perspective: Nature of the Mind and how mental processes influence behaviours. Included Gestalt Psychology, how the brain organises elements of experience into a unified whole perception. Cognitive psychologists look at how people reason, make decisions, solve problems, form perceptions and produce and understand language.

-Cognitive Neuroscience: electrical recording of the brain and brain imaging to examine brain activity when people engage in cognitive tasks.

- Socio-Cultural perspective: social environment and cultural learning influence our behaviours, thoughts and feelings. Looking at the presence of other people and their influence on an individual. Cultural, by looking at the value, beliefs and traditions that are shared and passed from generation to the next. The social norms that specify what behaviour is acceptable and expected for members of that group (socialisation).

- Biological perspective: examines how the brain processes and other bodily functions regulate behaviour. Behavioural neuroscience looks at the brain processes and other physiological function to underlie out behaviour. A famous biology psychologist was Karl Lashay; who looked at rats and their learning and memory. His research led to the finding of neurotransmitters that are chemicals released by nerve cells that allow them to communicate with one another.

- Behaviour genetics: study of how behavioural tendencies are influenced by genetic factors. I.e. animals can be selectively bred not to have certain physical traits. A good example is zygotic twins (identical) that come from the same egg are more inclined to behave the same, dizygotic twins (non- identical) come from two different eggs and don't behave as similar.

- Evolutionary Psychology: Evolution shaped modern behaviours. Led by Charles Darwin. As a species learns to do more things, their bodies and minds begin to adapt more mental abilities and they become more likely to survive. This is called natural selection- the weak will perish and the strong will reproduce and continue the species.