

Psychology A: Fundamentals of human behaviour

Chapter 1:

Psychology is the scientific study of: – behaviour (observable actions and responses) – mind (unobservable thoughts and feelings)

- It relies on scientific methods to gain empirical evidence and achieve four central goals:
 - ✓ Describe how people behave, think and feel
 - ✓ Understand and explain why people act the way they do
 - ✓ Exert control by designing research to test whether explanations are accurate
 - ✓ Apply psychological knowledge to enhance human welfare and experience

Empirical evidence is evidence gained through experience and observation, including evidence obtained from manipulating with things and then observing what happens. These observations need to be systematic, i.e. conducted according to a system of rules or conditions so that they will be as unbiased and precise as possible.

Subfields of psychology:

1. **Biopsychology or behavioural neuroscience** – focuses on the biological influences on behaviour. It looks at how the brain processes information, and how genes and hormones influence our actions, thoughts and feelings.
2. **Development psychology** – focuses on human physical, psychological and social development across your lifetime.
3. **Experimental psychology** – focuses on basic processes like learning, sensory systems (e.g. hearing, vision), perception and motivational states (e.g. sexual motivation, hunger, thirst).
4. **Industrial-organisational (I/O) psychology** – looks at people's behaviour at the workplace.
5. **Personality psychology** – focuses on the study of human personality. Tries to determine core personality traits and the way different traits relate to one another and influence behaviour. 6. **Social psychology** – looks at people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour related to society, i.e. how people influence one another, how they behave in groups and form attitudes and impressions. It also involves studying social relationships like love and prejudice.

▪ **Types of Research in Psychology:**

1. **Basic** – 'basic research' examines how and why people behave, think and feel the way they do. Basic research can be carried out in labs or in real life settings, with human participants or other species.
2. **Applied** – 'Applied research' involves psychologists designing interventions using basic scientific knowledge. E.g. designing and implementing HIV/AIDs prevention programs based on research findings.

Levels-Of-Analysis Framework

1. **Mind-body interactions** – the relationship between mental processes in the brain and the functioning of other bodily systems. E.g. from a mental picture of a favourite food, you may trigger feelings of hunger.

2. **Nature and nurture** – just as our biological capacities (nature) influence how we behave and experience the world, our experiences (nurture) influence our biological capacities.

Mind-body dualism – the belief that the mind is a spiritual entity not subject to physical laws that govern the body.

Monism – the belief that mind and body are one and that the mind is not a separate spiritual entity. ☐
Psychophysics – the study of how psychologically experienced sensations depend on the characteristics of physical stimuli, e.g. how the perceived loudness of a sound changes as its physical intensity increases).

Structuralism – the analysis of the mind, in terms of its basic elements, i.e. studying the mind by breaking it down to its basic components. Structuralists used the method of introspection in their experiments, where participants were exposed to all sorts of sensory stimuli e.g. lights, sounds, tastes, and asked to describe their inner experiences.

Functionalism – analysis of the functions of consciousness rather than its elements.

- Consider your hands – a structuralist would try to explain their movement by studying how muscles, tendons and bones operate. Whereas, a functionalist would ask, ‘why do we have hands? How do they help us adapt to the environment?’ C

Cognitive psychology - studies mental processes.

Evolutionary psychology – emphasises the adaptiveness of behaviour.

Perspectives in Psychology:

1. **Psychodynamic perspective** – determines the causes of behaviour based on the inner workings of our personality (our unique pattern of traits, emotions and motives), emphasising the role of unconscious processes. Sigmund Freud developed the 1st and most influential psychodynamic theory. Freud was convinced that an unconscious part of the mind influences behaviour, thus developing the theory and a form of psychotherapy called:

Psychoanalysis – the analysis of internal and primarily unconscious psychological forces. Freud also claimed that humans have powerful inborn sexual and aggressive drives and that because these desires are punished in childhood, we learn to fear them and become anxious when we are aware of its presence, leading us to develop defence mechanisms.

Defence mechanisms – psychological techniques that help us cope with anxiety and the pain of traumatic experiences. Types of defence mechanisms include:

- a) *Repression* – a primary defence mechanism, protects us by keeping unwanted/unacceptable impulses, feelings and memories in the unconscious depths of our minds. The difference between Freud’s version of psychodynamics and modern day psychodynamic theories is that modern day theories downplay the role of hidden sexual and aggressive motives and focuses

more on how early relationships with family members and other caregivers shape the views that people form of themselves and others. Freud's experiment on psychoanalysis – Freud, a young doctor, had patients coming in with illnesses that did not appear to be caused by any obvious physiological causes. So he concluded that it might be from psychological causes. He concluded that the causes are hidden from awareness, thus unconscious. He treated his patients using a technique called 'free association' where the patients were asked to express any thoughts that came to mind. Patients eventually described painful and long-forgotten childhood experiences, and once they had relived these traumatic experiences, their symptoms often improved.

2. Behavioural perspective – focuses on the role of the external environment in influencing our actions. i.e. our behaviour is jointly determined by previous experiences and by stimuli in our immediate environment.

Researcher Pavlov claimed that learning occurs when events are associated with one another. He found that dogs automatically learned to salivate to the sound of a new stimulus such as a tone, if that stimulus was repeatedly paired with food. Researcher Thorndike claimed that organisms learn through the consequences of their actions. 'law of effect' – responses followed by satisfying consequences become more likely to reoccur, than those followed by unsatisfying consequences.

Behaviourism – a school of thought that emphasises environmental control of behaviour through learning. a) Watson, a behaviourist, proposed that the proper subject matter of psychology is observable behaviour, not unobservable inner consciousness. He said that humans are a product of their learning experiences. b) Skinner, another behaviourist, believed that the real causes of behaviour reside in the outer world – 'a person doesn't act upon the world, the world acts upon him.' He based his research on rats and pigeons, under controlled laboratory conditions, and examined how behaviour is influenced by the rewarding and punishing consequences that it produces. His approach is known as radical behaviourism. His research later inspired techniques known collectively as 'behaviour modification,' which aimed at decreasing problem behaviours and increasing positive behaviours by manipulating environmental factors. c) Cognitive behaviourism – claims that learning experiences and the environment influences our expectations and other thoughts and, in turn, that our thoughts influence how we behave.

3. Humanistic perspective (humanism) – emphasised free will, personal growth and the attempt to find meaning in one's existence. ☐ Humanistic theorist Maslow proposed that each of us has an inborn force towards 'self-actualisation' – the reaching of one's individual potential. Humanism emphasises the importance of personal choice, responsibility, personal growth and positive feelings of self-worth. It emphasises the human ability to overcome obstacles in the drive towards self-actualisation.

Belongingness- the basic human need for social acceptance and companionship. Humanist Rogers identified key aspects of psychotherapy that led to constructive changes in clients. Positive psychology movement – emphasises the study of human strengths, fulfilment and optimal living.

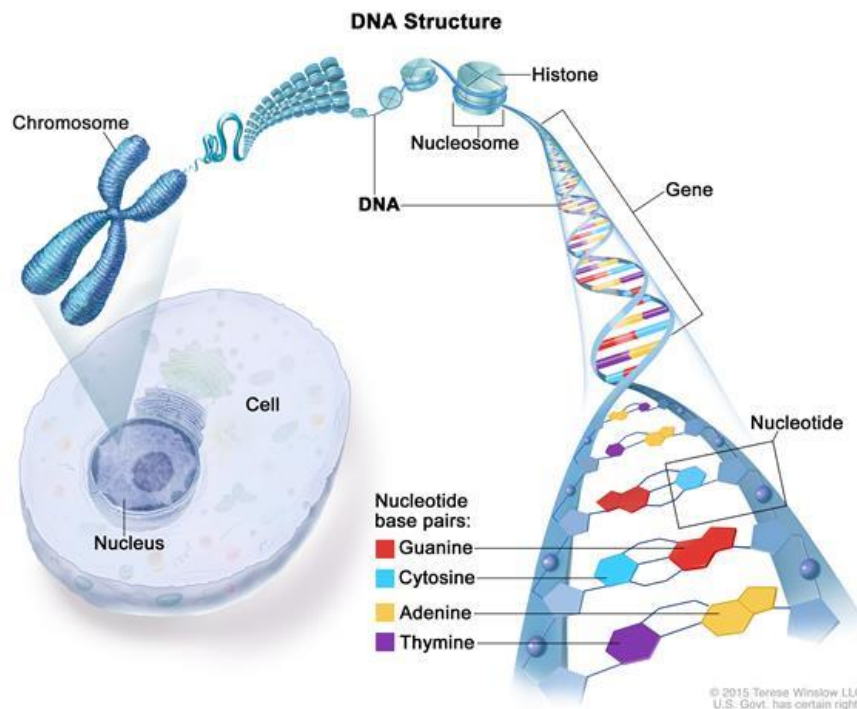
4. Cognitive perspective – examines the nature of the mind and how mental processes influence behaviour. In this view, humans are information processors whose actions are governed by thought. *Gesalt psychology* – examines how the mind organises elements of experience into a unified or 'whole' perception. It argues that perceptions are organised so that the 'whole is greater than the sum of its parts.' *Cognitive psychology* – focuses on the study of mental processes and embodies the cognitive perspective. Cognitive psychologists study how people reason, make decisions, solve problems, form

perceptions, and produce and understand language. Many also study memory and the factors that distort it. *Cognitive neuroscience* – uses sophisticated electrical recording and brainimaging techniques to examine brain activity while people engage in cognitive tasks.

5. **Sociocultural perspective** – examines how the social environment and cultural learning influences our behaviour, thoughts and feelings. *Social norms* – rules (often unwritten) that specify what behaviour is acceptable and expected for members of a certain cultural group. *Socialisation* – the process by which culture is transmitted to new members and internalised by them.

6. **Biological perspective** – examines how brain processes and other bodily functions regulate behaviour. *Behavioural neuroscience* (physiological psychology) – examines brain processes and other physiological functions that underlie our behaviour, sensory experiences, emotions and thoughts. *Behaviour genetics* – the study of how behavioural tendencies are influenced by genetic factors. *Natural selection* – if an inherited trait gives certain members an advantage over others, these members are more likely to survive and pass these characteristics to their offspring. *Evolutionary psychology* – seeks to explain how evolution shaped modern human behaviour.

Chapter 3:



Heritability – the extent to which genetic individual differences contribute to individual differences in observed behaviour (or phenotypic individual differences).