

## INTRODUCTION TO BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE

**OBJECTIVES :** (1) To introduce the student to the variety of principles influencing human behaviour.

(2) To take the student, step by step, through an understanding of each of these principles.

(3) To give the student a basic understanding of these principles so that he/she will have a better understanding of human behaviour.

(4) To give the student a basic understanding which will act as a foundation to further study in the area.

### MODULE ONE

**CONTENTS:**What do we mean by *BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE* ?

How do we study human behaviour ?

An brief examination of five different approaches to understanding human behaviour;

- (a) Biological perspective
- (b) Behavioural perspective
- (c) Psychoanalytic perspective
- (d) Cognitive Developmental perspective
- (e) Humanistic perspective

**Hours for reading:**Approximately 10/ 15

One essay of approximately 500 words for assessment (requiring about 3-5 hours preparation )

The essay will be assessed by your personal tutor. Feedback will be given within a week of tutor receiving the essay.

# INTRODUCTION TO BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE

## MODULE ONE

### SECTION A

#### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY *BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE* ?

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Hello student ! You are beginning a course of study whose main objective is to increase your understanding of human behaviour, or, more correctly, to give you insight into the multiplicity of factors (variables) which influence human

behaviour. You are choosing to study the subject by *distance* which means that you yourself are in control of how long it takes you to complete each module, and how much time you wish to give to your study of the material. Because of the fact that you are studying *at home and not in a classroom* it is important that you try to complete the exercises as you go along. When you submit the required essay at the end of the module you will receive direct feedback. This will assist you with further essays on later modules.

The study of human behaviour is challenging for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is difficult for us to study ourselves as human beings, which is what we will be attempting to do. How can we be objective about ourselves? Can we accept notions about ourselves which may be at odds with our religious beliefs, our cultural beliefs and so forth ?

Secondly, a large number of the factors which appear to affect behaviour are difficult to *see*, to *measure* and so forth. For example, how can I be sure that

what I *perceive* is also what my friend, my neighbour, my family, also perceive. I cannot see into anyone's' mind, other than my own ! I rely on what other people tell me about what is in their minds. Their thoughts are hidden, I can only *infer* them from their external behaviours or what they say and so on.

**Remember the old maxim *actions speak louder than words* !!**

Therefore, for example, if I am trying to decide whether a new product will sell or not, I need more than to have a number of people tell me they will buy the product. I need some way of assessing their behaviour when I put a limited number of the product onto the market (testing session) and so on.

Thirdly, even when a person feels that he/she fully understands their own behaviour, he/she could be incorrect as not everything about ourselves is *conscious* to us. For example, we cannot accept as *true* everything any of us might believe about ourselves.

Finally, there is *no one method of research* which will give full insight into a person's behaviour. Social scientists, therefore, use a variety of methods when researching a particular situation.

**EXERCISE 1 :**

**READ BACK ON THESE FOUR REASONS WHICH MAKE THE STUDY OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGING. WRITE THEM OUT IN YOUR OWN WORDS AND THEN TRY TO THINK UP AN EXAMPLE WHICH ILLUSTRATES EACH.**

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**(WHEN YOU ARE STUDYING AT HOME IT IS IMPORTANT TO ATTEMPT THESE SHORT EXERCISES. THEY WILL HELP YOU TO REMEMBER.)**

*What do we mean by the term Behavioural Science ?*

**‘Behavioural sciences is the collective term given to a number of disciplines which focus on the study of the behaviour of humans.’<sup>1</sup>**

**To understand this definition we need to examine what the author means by both ‘collective term’ , and ‘disciplines’.**

**By using the word ‘collective’ the author is drawing attention to the fact that ‘Behavioural Science’ is the study of human behaviour from a number of different subject (discipline) areas. It also highlights that one subject on its own will not give a good holistic understanding of behaviour. For example, if I attempt to explain a person’s behaviour from a geographical of view, that is, that in the 1990s it is to be expected that this person will, if living in Ireland, read a newspaper at least once a week, I will be ignoring a number of social, psychological and economic variables which might also be deciding factors as to whether this particular person does or does not read a newspaper at least once a week, and also which newspaper is read.**

**The word ‘*discipline*’ when used in an academic context refers to a *body of knowledge*, or, what secondary schools refer to as ‘*subject*’.**

**The disciplines which contribute to an understanding of human behaviour are generally listed as follows:**

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<sup>1</sup> Williams Keith, BEHAVIOURAL ASPECTS OF MARKETING, Heinemann Professional Publishing, 1990, p2

**PSYCHOLOGY  
SOCIOLOGY  
POLITICS  
ECONOMICS  
HISTORY  
LAW  
PHILOSOPHY  
ART / MUSIC  
RELIGION**

Perhaps one could add to this list. You might be able to think of a discipline which is not included.

**EXERCISE 2:**

**BEFORE READING ON TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO THINK ABOUT HOW EACH OF THE ABOVE MIGHT HELP US TO UNDERSTAND OURSELVES. WRITE DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS HERE, AND LOOK BACK ON IT LATER.**

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We will now take a brief look at how each of these disciplines helps our \ understanding of human behaviour.

***PSYCHOLOGY**: defined as the science that seeks to measure, explain, and sometimes change the behaviour of humans and other animals<sup>2</sup>.*

Psychologists primarily attempt to understand the behaviour of *individuals*. By that we mean that the level of analysis is the individual person (not a group).

Psychology gives us insight into how an individual

**LEARNS  
IS MOTIVATED**

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<sup>2</sup> Robbins, Stephen, P., ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR, 8th edition, Prentice Hall, 1998

PERCEIVES  
DEVELOPS PERSONALITY  
DEALS WITH CONFLICT  
ACQUIRES ATTITUDES  
and so forth...

**SOCIOLOGY** defined as *the study of people in relation to their fellow human beings.*<sup>3</sup>

Sociologists have provided great insight into the collective behaviour of people in groups. For example, this discipline has shown us the influence of *power positions* within groups; how *conflict* arises and is resolved within groups ; the influence of *culture* and so forth. The level of analysis is the **GROUP**.

**EXERCISE 3:** WRITE DOWN A LIST OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS YOU BELONG TO AND REFLECT ON THE INFLUENCE OF EACH ON YOUR VALUES, YOUR BEHAVIOUR, YOUR ATTITUDES AND SO FORTH. BEGIN WITH THE *FAMILY*, then continue with groups such as AGE , LEISURE, CHURCH, RACE, FRIENDSHIP, ORGANIZATION and so forth...

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A group of people will assume an identity that is different from the aggregate of the individuals it comprises. Think of the benefits you derive as a member of a *family group*. For example, a *name, social status, history, location, values, ....*

**POLITICS** :defined as *the study of behaviour of individuals and groups within a political environment.*<sup>4</sup>

Specific topics studied by political scientists have implication for understanding the behaviour of individuals and groups within organizations, for example, the manipulation of power for individual or group self interests. This manipulation

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<sup>3</sup> ibid, p20

<sup>4</sup> ibid, p20

will be evident in the culture of the group / organization.

**EXERCISE 4: REFLECT ON THE CULTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION YOU WORK IN. IS IT A CULTURE WHICH REWARDS EFFORT ? A DEMOCRATIC CULTURE ? A BUREAUCRATIC CULTURE ? FRIENDLY CULTURE ? UNEQUAL CULTURE ? SUSPICIOUS CULTURE ? PEOPLE-CENTRED CULTURE ? PROFIT-CENTRED CULTURE ? and so on...**

Write a sentence setting out what you think might be the essential characteristics of each type of culture, as listed above.

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Do you consider that an understanding of the dominant culture of your organization will enable you to understand better the behaviour of individuals within the organization ? Does this understanding make it easier to accept the status quo ? Why ? Why not ?

The level of analysis in politics is the individual, the group and the organization.

*ECONOMICS* : defined as *the study of allocation of scarce resources to unlimited wants*<sup>5</sup>

The main topics of study are those of production, exchange, and consumption of goods and services. 'Work' can be viewed as an economic activity in that , in exchange for labour, individuals receive necessary income with which to support themselves and their families.<sup>6</sup> The level of income is a function of several factors such as education, ambition, social class among others. The level of income has an implication for behaviour and life-style.

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<sup>5</sup> Williams, K., 1990, p2.

<sup>6</sup> Steers, Richard, M., INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR, Scott, Foresman & Company, 1988

**EXERCISE 4: REFLECT ON HOW YOUR INCOME SUPPORTS YOUR LIFE-STYLE. WHAT CONSTRAINTS DOES IT IMPOSE ? WHAT PARTICULAR HOBBY, INTEREST DOES IT MAKE POSSIBLE ?**

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*HISTORY*: defined as ‘the study of past events’, so that we might learn from past successes and failures...

We all use our past experiences to help us interpret the present. We study history to do the same but on a larger scale. We attempt to extol historical figures who have made major contributions to helping us understand ourselves. Through looking into ‘history’ we can recognise patterns of behaviour which might not be obvious to us in present situations...

**EXERCISE 5: THINK NOW OF A PARTICULAR PERSON OR SITUATION FROM THE PAST WHO /WHICH HAS GIVEN YOU UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRESENT OR WHO HAS HELPED YOU TO A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW ‘SOCIETIES’ OR ‘ORGANIZATIONS’ WORK...**

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*LAW*: It is easy to see how the law affects our behaviour. Just think of some of the many ‘employment laws’ and the constraints they impose on behaviour in the work-place ! For example, the Employment Equality Act, or the Unfair Dismissal Act, or the Minimum Wages Act ! Each of these has clear implications for the way people are managed, therefore they influence the behaviour of employers / managers and employees. Since our entry into the



EU we have seen the numbers of such laws increasing at a fast rate. Our behaviour has been modified in the light of these laws.

***PHILOSOPHY / ART & MUSIC:*** Think about each of these and how it might have given insight into human behaviour or the definition of what it is to be 'human'. Philosophy can be used to refer to a body of knowledge which is studied in universities, but in a broader sense it can be used to refer to 'a philosophy of life' underpinning whole civilizations. For example, a Christian philosophy underpins all western societies in that social norms (e.g. monogamy) tend to reflect Christianity. That may be changing slowly and may be replaced by a more secular philosophy. In eastern societies the way of life tends to be underpinned by non-christian beliefs, for example, Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Islam, or Jewism or Taoism ...

Art & Music have also a history behind them. We see them reflecting a particular culture, or society or historical period... We also know that music in particular, can have a major influence on the behaviour of whole groups of people and individuals. This influence may be 'age' related, or 'social class' related, or 'religion' related and so forth. It would be an easy exercise for you to think up examples to illustrate each of these categories, and I'm sure that you could think up many more !

***RELIGION:*** consider the influence that religion has on human behaviour ? Every major civilization is underpinned by a religion, for example, in China and Japan one find that Taoism and Buddhism have a major influence on the day-to-day life of people, in India the influence is

largely through Hinduism and Islam. In the West our institutions such as Law, and Marriage, reflect a Christian influence. Older civilizations, such as the native American Indians also had a system of beliefs which was reflected in their lives, and so on. Several psychologists have drawn attention to the need that humans appear to have for transcendent ‘needs’, that is, as humans even when our physical and emotional needs appear to be satisfied we quite often ‘want’ more, and we seek it in religion or spirituality. We will address this to some degree when we discuss moral reasoning in a later module.

**EXERCISE 6: WRITE ON HOW CHRISTIANITY AFFECTS THE LAW ON MARRIAGE.** -----  
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**FOR EXAMPLE, COMPARE THE CHRISTIAN LAW ON MARRIAGE WITH THAT OF ISLAM.**-----  
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**ANOTHER EXAMPLE MIGHT BE CONSIDER HOW WE PUNISH THEFT WHEN COMPARED WITH HOW ISLAM MIGHT PUNISH AN ACT OF STEALING**-----  
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**THINK OF PARTICULAR FOODS WHICH ARE TABOO IN A JEWISH OR ISLAMIC CULTURE BUT ACCEPTABLE IN OUR OWN**-----

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## **SECTION B;**

### **HOW DO WE STUDY HUMAN BEHAVIOUR ?**

**This might look like an easy question to answer. You might reply something like;**

**We can look at what people do, or, make assumptions about the way a person looks, or, by the way a person behaves in a pub, or at a wedding or a funeral...**

**From the point of view of this course it is more complicated as we need to acknowledge that psychologists take a scientific approach to answering this question. Furthermore, we need to say what we mean by ‘scientific’ approach. We will begin by examining this last point, that is, what is meant by a scientific approach to the understanding of human behaviour?**

**A science is a body of knowledge which has been gathered according to *certain rules*. By following the rules scientists measure events (behaviours), and then go on to *describe, explain*, and sometimes to make *predictions* on the basis of what has been measured and described. When it comes to human behaviour we are much better at *describing behaviour* than we are at *explaining* it. *Explaining* means being able to identify the *cause* of the behaviour. And when it comes to *prediction* we are not yet great at that primarily because people are not that easily understood, and because the interpretation we give to a certain behaviour will depend on the *theory* we are using to make the interpretation. And being able to *predict* a behaviour means that we have no doubt about the *cause* and the circumstances within which the behaviour will occur. For example, we know the**

recorded statistics on suicide in Ireland. We know the gender and average age of people who choose this way of ending their lives. We have lots of data on the background of individuals who have chosen this way, but we still cannot make a definite *prediction* that such and such a person will commit suicide. We can *describe* the 'rates', the vulnerable ages, several factors which may be in common, several factors which appear not to be in common and so on. We cannot *explain* the causes/ s because there are so many different variables (characteristics or situations ) involved. If we take another example to further illustrate: the question of heart disease, or lung cancer. We have information which leads us to associate certain factors with heart disease, for example, lack of exercise. However, we cannot predict with certainty that a person named X will get coronary heart disease because he/she does not get enough exercise. All we can say is that the lack of exercise increases the probability of getting heart disease. We all know or have heard of person X who lives into their 80's , dies a natural death in spite of having smoked 40 cigarettes a day for sixty years ! Or the person who gets lung cancer and may never have smoked at all. In these cases we can explain the lack of exercise or smoking is implicated in disease and will increase the probability of disease, but we cannot predict that specific persons A or B will get the disease.

Having said all that , how do we study human behaviour ? In a variety of ways.

For example, by simple *observation*. I want to know whether my son is doing his homework. If I observe him sitting down with his schoolbooks opened, and he having all the appearance of studying, then I have observed that he is doing his homework. If I want to get an idea of how many people enter a particular shop

on a particular day then I can observe, either by standing outside the shop and counting everyone as they enter, or by placing a video camera in a strategic position so that it gets a view of everyone entering the shop, or I could choose to observe a sample of people at certain times of the day and make predictions from the sample. These are simple examples of where *observation* can give us immediate information about behaviour. There are some situations where the use of observation is more problematic, for example, if I want to know what is going on in my son's classroom at school I might suggest to the headmaster that he should sit-in on a particular class to *observe* what is happening. He might oblige, having firstly obtained the agreement of the teacher of the class. He sits in, makes his *observations* and gives me his *findings*. He might tell me that the class are very well behaved, my son asked several intelligent questions, the teacher appeared to have a good relationship with the class and so on. What he is not telling me is that, by the very fact that he was sitting in the class as an *observer* the behaviour in the class was altered. Therefore, what he observed was true only of the particular situation. I could not make any general conclusions on the basis of this observation.

A second way I might use to get information on human behaviour is by means of a *survey*. This method involves using questionnaires and personal interviews. This method is used extensively in market research. You may have been stopped at some time outside a shopping centre, and invited to answer some questions from a questionnaire. Or, inside the shop, you may have been invited to taste some food, and then your opinion of the taste is noted by means of answers to

questions from a questionnaire. This method is very good for gathering *facts* about a particular situation. It is limited in that the questions posed set the limit as to what data is collected. Also, people are quite often reluctant to answer personal questions, or answer all the questions on a long questionnaire. Therefore, a lot of thought has to be put into preparing the questionnaire, and into deciding who, or what type of people, are needed to get the information been looked for. For example, if I want to survey a group of teenagers on what news papers they read, then I have to go to a location where I can get a group of teenagers to answer my questions, and I have to ask the right questions to get the information I want. Even then, having found a group of teenagers and asked the right questions, I might still be only able to draw conclusions about my particular sample (group). I may not generalise my findings to *all* teenagers if my *sample* does not include a *representation* of all the possible kinds of teenagers there are !! By that I mean, my *sample* should include teenagers who span the ages from 13 - 19 years, include teenagers who live in towns, who live in rural areas, who belong to different social class groups and so on.

**RECAP:** so far we have examined what the term *Behavioural Science* means in terms of understanding human behaviour. We saw that it is a *discipline* (subject) which includes the study of behaviour from the viewpoint of several *disciplines or subjects*. That is, to understand human behaviour one has to bring together the findings and methods of *Psychology, Sociology, Politics, Economics, History, Law, Philosophy and Art / Music*.

We then went on to look briefly at the methods which are used to study human behaviour. This particular topic of methods, could take up a whole course in itself so we have only glanced at it sufficiently to give you a feel for it. Later on in the course we will be illustrating some of these methods when we are looking

at particular studies in , for example, motivation or perception.

Before moving on to Section C of module one be sure that you are clear in your mind about Sections A & B.

**EXERCISE 7:**

Write down a definition of *Behavioural Science*.

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Write down a list of the subjects which contribute to our understanding of behaviour.

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Write down the methods which are used by social scientists to study behaviour.

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**SECTION C:**

**FIVE APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BEHAVIOUR**

In this section we are going to examine the different perspectives used in

interpreting behaviour. You may well be surprised to find that understanding behaviour is dependent on the particular view point taken, in other words, how any *behaviour* is interpreted will depend on the theory used to explain it. For example, a behaviourist (more on this in later pages) would conclude that, for example, smoking is encouraged by the approval of significant people in one's life, and it persists because of this continuing approval (before it becomes an addiction), whereas a Freudian might conclude that smoking is a behaviour which points to the person having not coped adequately with a particular conflict early in life. The former concludes that behaviour will be repeated when it is approved, whereas the latter places weight on experiences in early life as having influences on how the person behaves in later life.

We will look at each of the different perspectives in turn, beginning with the *biological* perspective. From this perspective psychologists primarily study the brain and nervous system with a view to understanding how these bodily structures influence behaviour. We act in the world using our bodies. By that I mean we *move, walk, see, taste, hear, touch and smell* with our sensory systems. We think and reason about the world using our senses, which are mediated through the body, through the nervous system and neuromuscular equipment.<sup>7</sup>

This means that psychology cannot be disentangled from biology. The study of the brain, nervous system and hormones helps with an understanding of how we learn about the world, what we want in and from the world, and why we act in the ways that we do. For example, we know that the sensory system (sight, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling) is the primary means by which we receive

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<sup>7</sup> Gleitman, Fridlund & Reisberg, PSYCHOLOGY (5th ed.), W.W.Norton & Co., 1999



**information about the world, from birth.**

**Normal full-term newborns enter the world with all sensory systems functioning, but not all at the same level of maturity.<sup>8</sup> Make a loud noise and infants only minutes old will startle and may even cry. They will also turn their heads towards the source of the noise, an indication that they perceive sound as localised in space. However, sensitivity to sound improves dramatically in infancy and then more slowly until the age of 10 years, when it reaches adult levels.<sup>9</sup> Infants are also able to distinguish the sound of the human voice from other sounds, and they seem to prefer it. They are especially interested in speech directed to them and spoken with the high pitch and slow pronunciation known as ‘baby talk’.<sup>10</sup>**

**Newborns seem to possess all the physiological prerequisites for seeing colour, however there is disagreement about precisely what colours they can perceive. By two months, however, their colour vision appears to be roughly equal to adults’.<sup>11</sup> We also know that newborns are very nearsighted. By 7 or 8 months of age, when infants are able to crawl, their visual acuity is close to the adult level.**

**The neonate has a very well developed sense of smell. By 5 days of age the baby will turn towards a pad soaked with breast milk, and by 8 to 10 days they will show a preference for the smell of their mother’s milk over the milk of another woman.<sup>12</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup> Cole M., & Cole S., THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN, Freeman & Co., 1996

<sup>9</sup> Werner & Vanden Boss, Developmental psychoacoustics: What infants and children hear, *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 44(7), pp.624-626

<sup>10</sup> Cooper & Aslin, *Child Development*, 61, pp.1584-1595, 1990

<sup>11</sup> Bornstein & Lamb (eds), DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY: An advanced textbook, Hillsdale NJ : Erlbaum, 1988

The abilities to detect a touch to the skin, changes in temperature, and changes in physical position develop very early in the *prenatal* period. Newborns show that they sense they have been touched by making a distinctive movement, such as withdrawing the part touched or turning toward the touch. Sensitivity to touch increases in the days after birth.<sup>13</sup> They are sensitive to changes in temperature and respond to abrupt changes in their physical position with instinctive reflex-like movements.

A number of reflexes are present at birth, for example, *breathing* which provides oxygen and removes carbon dioxide. Further examples are *Eyeblink*, the rapid closing of the eye which protects against bright lights and foreign objects, *Grasping*, when a finger is pressed against the baby's palm, her finger's will close around it. This is present at birth but disappears in 3-4 months when it is replaced by voluntary grasping. The presence of this reflex at birth and its later disappearance is a basic sign of neurological development. Other reflexes are *Rooting* (baby turns his head and opens his mouth when touched on the cheek), *Sucking* (baby sucks when something is put into her mouth), *Stepping* (when baby is held upright over a flat surface, he makes rhythmic leg movements), *Babinski reflex* (when the bottom of the baby's foot is stroked, the toes fan out and then curls). All of these reflexes last only for a period of time. The only permanent reflexes are *Breathing and Eyeblink*.

**RECAPITULATION:** We are looking briefly at the different perspectives

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<sup>12</sup> Macfarlane A.,(1975) in Cole M., & Cole S., The Development of Children, Freeman & Co., 1996

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p.141

from which an understanding of behaviour is achieved. We began with the *biological perspective*. The psychologist working from this viewpoint is interested in how *biology* can assist in enabling us to understand ourselves. We saw that, in this approach, a study is made of the central nervous system, and this study begins with the growth and development of the fetus, and continues with a study of biological changes which take place right through the course of a lifetime. To illustrate the approach we looked at the sensory capacities of the newborn, but any number of examples could have been chosen. All that is required, at this stage, is that you, the student, will understand that we learn about the environment through the use of the senses, and that these senses have a biological base. If you open any basic text-book in psychology you will find that the initial chapters will describe the development of the brain from the prenatal period, will then go on to study the physical and sensory capacities of the baby at birth and as he develops through childhood, and into adolescence and adulthood. As a consequence of what we learn from this study we are able to know what is *normal* development as opposed to delays in development and so on. Later in the course we will come back to some of these points.

We will now continue with a brief introduction to the *Behavioural* perspective. The *behaviourist* perspective focuses on the relation between objects, people or events in the environment (stimuli) and the person's response to these objects or events. It takes the view that human and animal behaviour can be understood entirely without reference to internal states such as thoughts or feelings, in other words, environmental events control behaviour, *and human conduct follows laws of behaviour in the same way as the law of gravity can explain why things fall*

*down instead of up.*<sup>14</sup> For *behaviourists* psychology is the *science of behaviour*.

That is, they held that the study of behaviour needed to conform to the rigorous scientific standards as used in the natural sciences. Therefore one had to study *measurable behaviours*. This means studying what can be seen, what can be measured with instruments, can be measured in an experimental situation.

Therefore behavioural scientists had to ignore the conscious thoughts of the person because only the person has access to their own thoughts, therefore these thoughts cannot be measured in an *objective* manner, they are purely *subjective*.

These subjective thoughts (accounts) cannot be independently verified. They proposed : *Study observable behaviours and environmental events, and build a science around the way people and animals behave. Hence the term*

*'behaviourism'*.<sup>15</sup>

B.F. Skinner observed that the behaviour of animals and people can be controlled by environmental conditions that either *increase the likelihood of the behaviour being repeated ( through reinforcement) or decrease the likelihood of a repetition of the behaviour (through punishment)*. He developed a theory around the notion of *reinforcing behaviour*. He believed that behaviour can be understood as a *learned response* to environmental events, and that behaviours are selected on the basis of their consequences. So, if I am 'approved of' because I use a particular perfume then I am likely to continue to use that perfume. However, if I am avoided because of the particular perfume then I will stop using it, to avoid the punishment of people not wanting to be in my company. The *reinforcement* is the approval, the *punishment* is my knowledge that people do not approve of

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<sup>14</sup> Westen, D., PSYCHOLOGY, MIND, BRAIN & CULTURE, John Wiley & Sons, 1996

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, p.15

the perfume. A better example might be to look at the work-place. If a worker is rewarded for high productivity then he is likely to continue with the high productivity. However, if having given high productivity, the worker is passed over when promotions are taking place, then he is likely to reduce productivity.

While this approach has been very helpful in understanding behaviour it can only give us a limited understanding. It ignores mental processes altogether and we all know that the mind (thinking, emotions, motivations...) has a substantial influence on what we decide to do, how we decide to act. At least, we do not like to consider that human beings simply respond to what happens to them from the *outside* as it were. We like to think that we have some *free will*, or some control over our behaviour. When we are studying module three we will return to this topic at greater length.

**EXERCISE 8: WRITE, IN YOUR OWN WORDS, A DEFINITION OF THE *BEHAVIOURAL* APPROACH. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS APPROACH ?**

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The *Psychoanalytic* perspective is very different from the previous (behaviourism) in that, not only the *conscious* mind is considered but also the *unconscious* mind is presumed to have an influence on how we behave. This approach is derived from Freud's psychoanalytical theories in which the central concept is the *unconscious mind*. Freud considered that this aspect of mind is

the principal determinant of motivation and personality. He stressed that the first five years of life are crucial to the formation of adult personality. He describes three aspects of mind: the *id*, *ego* and *superego*. The *ego* represents reason (rationality) which must be in control of both the other two aspects in order to enable the person to conform to social demands. The *ego* comes under pressure from the *id* and the *superego*. The *id* represents the natural urges which want immediate gratification, whilst the *superego* represents social sanctions (cultural values...) and can be as insistent as the *id*. If you think in terms of a three-way conflict in the mind: on one side of the *ego* (the need for reason to be in control) you have very strong desires for pleasure which want to be satisfied *now*, no waiting ! On the other side of *ego* you have the internalised values of the family, the culture, the religion, the moral code, which is also putting brakes on reason (*ego*), and in the middle you have the awareness that *pleasures* have to wait until the proper time and place for fulfillment, and the urge to be over moralistic has also to be controlled so that each aspect is enabled to have some expression. Freud also held that at different stages of childhood development the gratification needs of the *id* are on different areas of the body. We will be looking further at this theory when we examine motivation in module four.

It is sufficient at this point to be aware that, from this perspective, behaviour will be understood in terms of the conflict that exists between the *id*, *ego* and *superego*, also taking into account the *defence mechanisms* the *ego* uses to deflect otherwise intolerable levels of conflict. It is also necessary to say that post-Freudians have modified the theory to some degree.

The next perspective to be mentioned is *cognitive developmental*. The *cognitive*

*process* is defined as *the psychological processes through which we acquire, store and use knowledge.*<sup>16</sup> When looking at the *cognitive approach* to understanding human behaviour one is concerned with the study of *cognition* or *thought* .

Many cognitive psychologists use the metaphor of the computer to understand and model the way the mind works. They use the term *information processing* to refer to thinking. The environment provides *inputs* , which are transformed, stored, and retrieved using various mental programmes, leading to specific response *outputs*. Just as the computer data-base of a book-shop may code the books according to genre, title, author, so the human memory stores information using codes for easy retrieval. If you think back to sixth class in primary school you are likely to recall immediately an amount of memories stored in the mind under the label *sixth class or primary school or best friend ...* You are probably surprised to find that you recall so many memories of that situation, the name of the teacher, the friends, the enemies, the decor, the books, the subjects, the feelings, the fears, and so forth. The cognitive perspective can also be useful in understanding the decision-making process.

Two researchers who have increased our understanding of the thinking process are Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Piaget identified that the ability to *think* develops from birth in a stage-like manner. These stages are age related and apply equally to all members of the human species.<sup>17</sup> Kohlberg further developed Piaget's theory to investigate how decisions are made in the moral domain. He concluded that logical and moral reasoning are related in that the type of moral decision made is dependent on the ability of the person to use

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p.195

<sup>17</sup> We will be exploring both of these authors later in the course.

logical reasoning. As with Piaget, he held to the notion that the development of the ability to think, in logical and moral domains, is age related. There has been some controversy, in recent years, about the 'stage' aspect of the conclusions of both these authors.

**EXERCISE 9: WRITE , IN YOUR OWN WORDS, A DEFINITION OF THE *COGNITIVE* APPROACH. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS APPROACH ?**

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**HOW DOES THE BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH DIFFER FROM THE COGNITIVE APPROACH ?-----**

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**WHAT DID *PIAGET* PROPOSE ?-----**

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**WHAT DID *KOHLBERG* PROPOSE ? -----**

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We will now return to a brief overview of the final perspective as outlined in the introduction to this module.<sup>18</sup>

The *humanistic* perspective proposes a very positive approach to the analysis of what it is to be human. It views the human being as evolving towards *actualization* or the full development of the self. . Carl Rogers is one of the

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<sup>18</sup> See back to page 1 of this module



psychologists recognised as coming from this perspective. He holds that the 'self' is a dynamic concept which has many aspects to it. For example, the 'self' develops in tandem with the social environment of the person. By that he means that the individual's notion of his/her self is grounded in social relationships such as the relationships within a family or a school or a group of friends... He also proposed that each person has a 'realistic' self concept (based on how he/she perceives others' regard them), and an 'idealistic' self concept (based on the kind of person he/she would like to be).

Carl Rogers views the person as being very vulnerable to the *positive regard* that people emotionally close to her/him feel for her/him. In other words, if my parents love me and think well of me I will experience a positive notion of 'self', however, if they do not love me or are very critical or disappointed in me it will affect my notion of myself in a negative way. We know from the work of Korman<sup>19</sup>(1970) and later Ellis & Taylor (1983)<sup>20</sup> that self- esteem is related to how successful an individual is in getting the job he/she wants, and that that self-esteem is correlated with quality and quantity of output on the job. We will be returning to a discussion of self-concept in Module Four in an examination of its influence on motivation. The topic of self concept is very interesting and also very topical. However, it does have some problems in that it perceives the individual as perhaps being too dependant on other people's reactions to the self.

**EXERCISE 10: WRITE OUT A DESCRIPTION OF HOW YOU THINK OTHERS WOULD DESCRIBE YOU. -----**

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Korman A., *Toward a hypothesis of work behaviour*, Journal of Applied Psychology, 54, 31-41, 1970

<sup>20</sup> Ellis R., & Taylor M., *Role of self esteem within the job search process*, Journal of Applied Psychology, 68, 632-640, 1983

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**NOW WRITE OUT A DESCRIPTION OF HOW YOU ‘SEE’ YOURSELF.** -----  
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**FINALLY, WRITE OUT A DESCRIPTION OF HOW YOU WOULD LIKE OTHERS TO PERCEIVE YOU.**-----  
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**STUDY ANY DIFFERENCES WHICH MIGHT BE PRESENT IN THE THREE ACCOUNTS. THIS EXERCISE WILL GIVE YOU AN INSIGHT INTO THE THEORY OF CARL ROGERS.**

**CONCLUSION:** In this module you have been introduced to as definition of the term *Behavioural Science*. You have a good idea of the disciplines which contribute to it, and which give insight into an understanding of human behaviour. You have been given a brief overview of the methods used by Behavioural Scientists. You have also seen that how a particular behaviour is interpreted will depend to some extent on the *framework* within which it is being interpreted, that is, in the context of whatever theory is being used to explain or describe the behaviour.

In Module Two we will be examining the process of *Perception*. The outline for this module is following the final exercise for Module One.

**EXERCISE 11: WRITE AN ESSAY OF ABOUT 500 WORDS ON**

***HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO UNDERSTAND HUMAN BEHAVIOUR ?***

**POST THE ESSAY TO YOUR TUTOR. YOU WILL HAVE SOME FEED-BACK ON THE ESSAY WITHIN 7 DAYS OF IT BEING RECEIVED BY THE TUTOR.**

**MODULE TWO WILL ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

**How does a human being perceive the world ?**

**What role does our biological inheritance play in this process?**

**What psychological factors are involved ?**

**What social factors are involved?**

**How do each of the five perspectives referred in module one explain the process of perception?**

**Hours for reading: Approximately 10 / 15  
One essay, 500 words 3-4 hours preparation**

## **MODULE TWO: PERCEPTION**

**The plan of this module will take the following format:**

- 1. Definition**
- 2. Reasons for studying perception**
- 3. Sensation and the senses**
- 4. Perceptual selection**
- 5. Perceptual organization**

6. Perceptual defence
7. Social perception
8. Different approaches to an understanding of 'perception'

We, as human beings are constantly processing information which comes to us through the senses. Most objects in the world are charged with *meaning*. To survive we must understand the information we receive.<sup>21</sup> We receive information, we label it, and, if we want to remember it, we store it.

It is this process of organizing and labelling which we call the process of perceiving. In particular, perception is about the interpreting, the labelling of the information. For example, you are reading this document. The pages you are holding are recognised by you as *pages because you have learned to label this type of text on paper as a page*. If you were reading some information off a Cornflakes box you would not label the box as a page, you label it as a *box*. You know it as a *box because someone, perhaps a parent or a teacher, told you many years ago that cornflakes are in a box*. In both of these examples the interpreting and labelling come about as a result of previous learning. Sometimes we come across things or situations which we have not encountered before and therefore we are not sure as to how to label them. When this happens we try to fit the *things* or *situation* into a label which is nearest to where we think the object should belong. So, perceiving is primarily about interpreting information which comes to us through our senses. Later we will look more closely at what we mean by our senses.

Perceiving is also about making *choices*. For example, I am typing at my computer. A short distance away from me is a road with traffic continually going up and down. Whilst I am typing I select to ignore the traffic, I select to

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<sup>21</sup> Gleitman H., Fridlund A., & Reisberg D., *Psychology*, Norton, 1999 (5<sup>th</sup> edition)

ignore the sunshine coming through the window, to ignore the other sounds coming from other rooms in the house, to ignore the strain on my back as I sit before the machine and so on... In other words, I select what I pay attention to. *From the multitude of stimuli constantly bombarding our sensory organs we select certain stimuli to which we attend (Williams 1990).*

Therefore, perception is about the selection and interpretation of events in the world around us.

**EXERCISE ONE: write a description of the room you are sitting in at the moment.**

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**Ask yourself where the labels you are applying to objects came from.** -----

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**How do you know that the object with four legs at which you are sitting is called a table?** -----

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**Would it matter if it had been called, for example, a piano ?**

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**Ask yourself why you are noting some objects but not others-----**  
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**Ask yourself what objects, what sounds you are not noting until prompted to do so by me. Write these down -----**  
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**You won't think of everything now, but later in this module you will note more than you are noting now.**

**Why am I asking you to do this ? Why is an understanding of perception considered to be an important part of understanding ourselves and others ?**

**There are several answers for both of these questions. One reason why I have asked you to do the exercise is to get you actively involved . The chances of you actually recalling the material is higher when you are involved in an active manner. Also, the exercises are designed to give practical insight into material which might otherwise be too theoretical.**

**A few reasons as to why it is important for an understanding of ourselves and others (the second question above) are, firstly, we live in a very market driven environment and business people need to remain competitive. One way of doing so is to have a better understanding than a competitor of how consumer's perceive products and services. Secondly, in the area of managing people it is important to understand how workers perceive particular situations or particular management decisions and so forth. Thirdly, as parents, friends, lovers, we can gain insight into our own perceptions and the perceptions of**

others through devoting some time to thinking about the process itself and about some of the factors which influence this process, for example, as we saw above, *previous learning*.

At the very start of this module we read that 'we, as human beings are constantly processing information which comes to us through the senses.' We will briefly examine what we mean by *senses*. One group of senses informs us about our movements. We call these the *kinesthesia and vestibular senses*. The former term refers to the information that comes from receptors in the muscles, tendons and joints. I am sitting at a computer, using my hands and my head and eyes, holding my back, without any effort. Normally we only notice the body movements when, for some reason, we feel pain or fatigue or become conscious of our body. The balance of the body is controlled by receptors which are located within the vestibules of the inner ear. Hence the use of the term *vestibular*.<sup>22</sup>

Skin sensitivity is controlled by *skin senses*. Consider the different kinds of skin sensation we can experience, for example, *pressure, warmth, cold, pain*. We can add *tickle, itch, vibration*.

When we normally think of the senses we are not usually thinking of any of the above but are likely to rhyme off  
Seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling.

So we will examine each of these five in more detail.

Vision is for humans is the 'distance sense par excellence'<sup>23</sup> The eye is like a

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, p.181

camera. Light enters the eye through the transparent *cornea*, passes through the *lens*, and is focused on the light-sensitive surface of the *retina*.<sup>24</sup> Some objects in our environment emit light in their own right (sun) whilst others give light only if some external light source illuminates them (moon). These latter reflect some of the light cast on them, and absorb the rest.

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p. 193

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