The 6 Perspectives of Psychology

**Biological Perspective of Psychology**

*Brain chemistry controls the emotions and thoughts that eventually produce behaviour*

The biological perspective of psychology attempts to relate overt behavior to electrical and chemical events taking place inside the body, particularly within the brain and nervous system. This approach seeks to specify the nervous system biology processes that underlie behavior and mental processes. The biological approach to depression, for example, seeks to understand this disorder in terms of abnormal changes in the levels of neurotransmitters, which are chemicals produced in the brain that make possible the communication between neurons (nerve cells).

**Behavioural Perspective of Psychology**

*How we learn through rewards, punishments and observations*

A person eats breakfast, rides a bike, walks, talks, runs, blushes, laughs and cries. These are forms of behaviour – the activities of an organism that can be observed. The behavioural approach to psychology studies individuals by looking at their behaviours rather than at their brains and nervous systems. One off shoot of this is stimulus-response psychology. This approach studies the relevant stimuli in the environment, the responses that are drawn out by these stimuli and the rewards or punishments that follow these responses. For example, such an analysis of your social life might focus on: who you interact with (social stimuli), the kinds of responses you make to them (reinforcing, neutral, punishing), the kinds of responses they in turn make to you (reinforcing, neutral, punishing) and how the reinforcements sustain or disrupt the interaction.

**Cognitive Perspective of Psychology**

*How we process information*

The cognitive perspective of psychology is concerned with mental processes, such as perceiving, remembering, reasoning, deciding and problem solving. This perspective believes that only by studying mental processes can we fully understand what organisms do and we can study mental processes in an objective way by focusing on specific behaviours, but interpreting them in terms of underlying mental processes. Cognitive psychologists see our minds as computers. Incoming information is processed in various ways: it is selected, compared and combined with other information already in memory, transformed, rearranged and so forth. When we interpret someone’s behaviour, essentially we are engaging in a form of reasoning (for example, given a certain behaviour, what is its most likely cause), just as we may reason about why a mechanical device functions the way it does. Our reasoning is biased towards traits (like generosity) over situational pressures as causes. Essentially your knowledge controls your behaviour.

**Humanistic Perspective of Psychology**

*How healthy people strive to reach their full potential*

This approach to psychology is concerned with the individual’s personal experience of events. Humanism rejects the notion that behaviour is controlled by external stimuli (behaviourism), or by the straightforward processing of information in perception and memory (cognitive psychology), or by unconscious impulses (psychodynamic psychology). Humanistic psychologists are concerned with describing the inner life and experiences of individuals rather than with developing theories or predicting behaviour. According to humanistic theories, an individual’s principal motivational force is a tendency toward growth and self-actualization. All of us have a basic need to develop our potential to the fullest, to progress beyond where we are now. Though our environment and social obstacles may block us our natural tendency is toward actualizing our potential.

**Sociocultural Perspective of Psychology**

*If we come from a cultural background that values helping, we are more likely to help. We are also more likely to help if we are in a comfortable situation, such as with a good friend, than if we are in a large unfamiliar crowd.*

Unlike the other perspectives, the sociocultural perspective concentrates on an individual's or individuals' culture or society rather than the individual. To understand why people tend to show certain behavior traits, psychologists look at what effects the person's community might have on their thought process. Some of the questions pondered are if a person behaves a certain way to be accepted or commits an act because it is accepted amongst their society. They mainly study how other people affect a person. Some studies look at how male and female roles relate to their respective emotion or how job status relates to their ambitions. In this perspective violence does not reside in instincts or brain waves, but instead, in cultural rules and political arrangements.

**Psychodynamic Perspective of Psychology**

*Unresolved inner conflicts can affect whether we help others*

This approach was developed by Sigmund Freud. It is a mixture of cognitive and biological perspectives of psychology. The basic assumption of Freud’s theory is that much of behaviour stems from unconscious processes. By unconscious processes Freud meant beliefs, fears and desires a person is unaware of but that nevertheless influence behaviour. He believed that many of the impulses that are forbidden or punished during childhood are taken from innate instincts. Since we are born with these instincts they have a pervasive influence that needs to be dealt with. Forbidding these impulses only forces them into the unconscious where they remain to affect dreams, slips of speech or mannerisms and to manifest themselves as emotional problems, symptoms of mental illness or socially approved behaviour such as artistic and literary activity. For example, if you feel a lot of anger toward a person you can’t afford to alienate, your anger may become unconscious and perhaps reflected indirectly in a dream about that person.