

A Quick Psychology Lesson



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Most people think that psychology is 'the study of the mind', but this is not how psychology is generally defined today. The mind is too difficult to define or quantify. Today, we define psychology as the study of behaviour – both normal and abnormal.

Psychology is really the study of the behaviour of people as individuals or in relatively small groups. The study of the behaviour of people in large groups, societies or sub-cultures comes under the heading of Sociology, although the study of hypnosis, particularly mass hypnosis could be considered both a psychological and sociological subject.

Unlike the brain, the mind is not a physical object. Although the mind resides within the brain, it has no particular location and the destruction of any part of the brain can alter the mind in many different ways.

The mind – consciousness – may be nothing more than a by-product of physical processes, in just the same ways a rainbow is the by-product of the interplay of light and raindrops. The point is, these relationships can be influenced by introducing new thoughts and ideas.

Later, we will see that the ebb and flow of emotions can be modified using suggestion, particularly if the suggestions represent a peak experience, but for the time being, we should concentrate on that most elusive of all abstracts – consciousness.

No one really knows what consciousness is. Many psychologists try to avoid the use of terms such as 'consciousness, mental states, mind...' altogether. The famous psychologist F. B. Skinner said that '*we do not need to try to discover what personalities, states of mind, feelings... really are in order to get on with a scientific analysis of behaviour.*'

Most psychologists concentrate on what is observable and measurable in a person's behaviour and this includes the brain's electro-chemical processes as well as consideration of environmental effects on a person such as their upbringing, their surroundings and their culture. To understand the mind, psychology uses experimentation as well as observation.

Unlike mathematics or geometry, psychology does not have a unifying theory, although recently, NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) has had a go at cobbling one together by bringing all the different strands of psychology, including hypnosis, under one umbrella. In this, it has failed, and failed miserably.

Psychology is a science because like any other science it relies heavily on experimentation carried out under controlled conditions to uncover cause and effect.

There are five methods of research a psychologist can choose from – experiment, observation, survey, case study and correlation (experiment has always been my particular favourite because it's the most interesting). Within each method however, various techniques can be used, for example questionnaires, interviews, tests and measurements and so on, although it is important, particularly when dealing with small samples, that they are representative, accurate, reliable and consistent, as in any other science.

The first Social Psychology experiment was carried out in 1898 by Mr. Triplett who tested the theory that boys would wind up fishing rods faster when in pairs than they would if they were alone. As he predicted, the average times for the pairs were shorter than the

average times when the boys were by themselves. This proved Triplett's hypothesis that not only do people work better in pairs but they will tend to compete if they are put together. Humans have a habit of doing this, especially when they are behind the wheel of a motor car. The 'anything you can do I can do better' mentality may seem childish but competitiveness comes so naturally it must be a part of the human survival strategy.

Competition makes activities more interesting, including the dissemination of information, which explains why there are so many quiz shows on television, covering a variety of subjects – Have I Got News for You? A Question of Sport, Never Mind the Buzzcocks, University Challenge, The Chase and more.

Competition is vital for progress too – extreme sports like motor racing, power boat racing, aerobatics etc. constantly push the boundaries of technology, boost discovery and in the end, augment our understanding of science. Collectively, innovation improves our lives. If it were not for the space race, the discovery of Teflon, something we now take for granted, might have taken many more years.

Observation is best carried out in natural environments, for example, in the office, in a railway station, or by observing the audience at an Iron Maiden concert – even at a stage hypnotism show!

But there is always a possibility that people will behave differently if they know they are being watched. The obvious solution to the dilemma is to employ covert observation. However, covert observation runs the risk of being confused with stalking and might be difficult to explain when the police come knocking on your door. So observation is usually carried out in carefully controlled environments where willing participants are told the experiment is about something which it is not. A famous example of this is the Stanford Prison Experiment where a jail was constructed in the basement of the Stanford University Psychology Department.

The survey method usually involves surveying large groups of people using er... surveys, that is, questionnaires or interviews which quiz them about their attitudes. The problem with all surveys however is that the results can often end up distorted by variables such as age group or social class. Even a large scale survey of the attitudes of people living in Mayfair would produce quite different results than a similar survey carried out in the leafy suburbs of Liverpool.

The advantage of the questionnaire is that data can be collected quickly, but the disadvantages are numerous – people taking part are often, even at an unconscious level, tempted to give answers which make them appear more socially acceptable. There can also be an unfortunate tendency for people to just agree for the sake of it or because they can't be bothered to think hard enough about the questions or the answers. Or maybe it's because they are actually on their way to Tesco and want to get away from the questioner as quickly as possible. Some people may even give answers which are purposely designed to shock. I know I do.

The results of interviews, whether carried out individually or in groups can sometimes be affected by the interviewer's style or even perhaps unconscious prejudices. Unstructured interviews can easily stray from the point if you're not careful, and again, interviewees can unintentionally be swayed by the perceived prestige of the interviewer.

A case study or case history is a highly detailed account of an individual or very small group such as a family. In 1970 Oliver Sacks published an account of a brain damaged

adult who could not recognise the difference between people or objects. The subject had tried to take hold of his wife's head because he mistook it for his hat, or at least that was his excuse. Neurological case studies like this reveal a great deal about how the brain works in terms of recognition and memory and these kind of studies are very important in Cognitive Psychology.

Studying an individual using any one, or a combination of some of these methods is something that therapists do all the time. Good therapists look for patterns emerging from client to client and this is one way they build up their expertise and experience. Getting to know individuals this way is extraordinarily time consuming, but in the long run it is easier to form a more accurate view of a client.

Occasionally however, a single case can contradict a whole theory – and then you really are on your own and thinking on your feet! These cases present their own challenges, even if you have actually been to university and managed to stay awake for three years. Therapy is also a learning curve, involving problem solving skills based on what you already know.

Finally, there are three types of correlation. Positive correlation simply means that as one variable increases, so does the other – for example, as a child grows up, its intelligence increases.

Non-Correlation means that there is no relationship between variables – for example, there is no relationship between intelligence and the colour of a person's hair.

Negative Correlation means that as one variable increases, the other decreases – for example, as a person grows old, their eyesight diminishes.

It is always a mistake to simply collect data which appears to support a pet theory. This is bad science. Obvious examples are 'repressed' memories, or the idea that people have been taken aboard flying saucers and undergone experiments, usually of a sexual nature, carried out by space aliens.

So how do we get a real understanding of the human condition? To start, we can use the tried and tested methods described above, employing the kind of observational skills psychologists have been using for the last one hundred and twenty years. Again, psychology isn't about studying the mind, it's about observing behaviour and looking for patterns.

Spotting patterns in behaviour is a really good start because patterns help to predict behaviour, although patterns do not necessarily tell you about cause and effect.

Any theory should be able to stand up to test. Unscientific theories include most religious ideas, many political ideas such as Marxism and Communism, Freudian ideas, for example the theory that all men want to make love to their mothers and kill their fathers, and the conspiracy theories of David Icke. These are all unscientific notions. Other examples of unscientific ideas are phrenology – the feeling of bumps on the head, and discrimination based on race, ethnicity sexual orientation.

Astrology is a perfect examples of an unscientific idea that does not stand up to even the most cursory scrutiny. There are seven billion people on the planet and only twelve star signs, so that means that six hundred million people have the same sort of day – not just one day, but every day. This clearly falls into the category of the unscientific, not to mention the absurd. Horoscopes represent such absolute nonsense that I am astonished

newspaper editors give them space. Yet millions of people are hooked on them, which is why they *are* given the space). Both Ronald Reagan and Adolf Hitler consulted astrologers.

The ancient Greeks studied memory, learning, motivation, perception, dreaming and abnormal behaviour. Aristotle, who lived from 384BC to 322BC, described experiences to do with waking, sleeping, gender, memory, emotions, self-control, and relationships.

Jump forward a few centuries to the Europe of the Middle-Ages and you see a fairly dramatic turn-around in the definition of what psychology was supposed to be all about. Once the Church got a grip on the social order, humanity became pre-occupied with sin, guilt, penance, and above all, authority.

By the Middle-Ages, God's representatives on earth had far too much influence and power and control over the seats of power. They abused it frequently and with impunity. In the twentieth century however, things mercifully improved and today psychology is more focused on individuality and the well-being of the individual, including one's mental health and happiness, which is much nicer.

In 1637 philosopher René Descartes tackled the mind/body debate in his famous work *Discourse on Method* and again in *The Meditations*, which was published in 1641. Descartes coined the immortal phrase 'I think therefore I am' (Cogito Ergo Sum if you went to public school) which sums things up nicely. Its meaning is beautiful in its simplicity – I am self-aware, therefore I must exist!

It is widely accepted that Descartes' words are the work of a genius, and indeed they are. No one has ever come closer to defining consciousness. Cogito ergo sum is straight to the point, it's succinct, and it inspires positive emotional responses such as self-respect, free-will, self-determination and sovereignty over one's own thoughts and actions. It's short and snappy and you could probably put it on a T-shirt. It's got everything – it's the sort of slogan advertising executives dream of.

Cogito ergo sum argues that consciousness is the only evidence that we actually exist. Think about its meaning the next time you have the opportunity to ponder something deep and meaningful...

According to Descartes, the mind had a single function – thought. He said that '*derived ideas come from external stimuli on the senses*' and '*Innate ideas come from the mind, or consciousness or self, or even perfection, infinity, God...*'

Apart from the bit about God, this is Descartes' second greatest piece of genius. It was in part Descartes' thinking that provided the spark that ignited the nature versus nurture debate which still rumbles on to this day. If it were possible to ask Descartes 'why did the chicken cross the road?' he might well reply that it is enough to know that the chicken was aware that there was a road and that he (the chicken) was aware he had crossed it.

Barely half a century after Descartes, in 1690, John Locke in his *An Essay on Human Understanding* said that at birth the mind was a clean slate, devoid of any ideas or morality, and that the mind was the result of experience. This school of thought became known as Associationism and it makes almost as much sense today as it did just over three hundred years ago. The last research however, suggests that morality – ideas of fairness and unfairness – exist in children as young as six months.

Jump forward again nearly a hundred years to 1781 and Immanuel Kant in his acclaimed *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant described three mental activities – knowing, feeling and

willing, which is really an extension of the Cogito ergo sum philosophy, but with the emphasis placed more on the importance of independence and self determination. Ask Kant 'why did the chicken cross the road?' and his answer would be something along the lines of 'the chicken, exercising its right to self-determination, chose to cross the road of its own free will.'

Modern psychology really started in 1879 with Wilhelm Wundt who opened the first recognised laboratory for the study of human behaviour in Leipzig. Wundt was an advocate of introspection – the examination of one's own mental state. Wundt inquired into social customs, laws and morals, language, art and myths and can justifiably be considered the first true social psychologist.

However, introspection has largely been abandoned today because it is considered to be too subjective, although his methods – examination of the senses, estimation of time, reaction times, attention span, emotions and verbal association – are still all used in modern psychology.

Today, psychologists distinguish between the rational and the emotional, particularly when analysing attitudes. Therapists too concentrate on this distinction, as do people trying to avoid fights with Scousers in pub car parks.

John Stuart Mill claimed that the mind is active – that 'mental chemistry' led to 'creative synthesis' – in other words, sensory elements are fused into new compounds which are greater than the sum of the constituent parts. Auguste Comte then added that anything beyond experience was irrelevant; in other words, anything that cannot be publicly verified or empirically tested should be discarded, and this is a view shared by most psychologists today.

And just when you thought that there were already more than enough philosophers throwing their personal ten-cents-worth into the hat, along comes Charles Darwin to throw a spanner in the works with a new Theory of Evolution.

Darwin's theory is very useful to psychologists because it explains a lot of things about human behaviour; for example, courtship rituals and territorial defence. Darwin's theory of why the chicken crossed the road is that chickens, over great periods of time, have evolved by a process of natural selection so that crossing roads has become part of their natural instinct.

Even more recently, Professor Richard Dawkins has joined in the debate and used evolution to explain altruism – the desire to help others without apparent gain to oneself. In *The Selfish Gene* published in 1976, Dawkins linked altruism to the survival of the genes.

Altruism however, might be more than just another human survival strategy. The odds are that people are more likely to lend a hand if they have been on the receiving end of someone else's kindness in the past. This means that altruism may also be a cultural trend. As so often with these things, the probability is that it is a mixture of nature *and* nurture. As a reasonably experienced human, that idea seems to make much more sense.

Francis Galton is the genius who came up with the idea of the Normal Distribution Curve, which covered everything from people's height, to their intelligence. Galton worked out that the majority of people were of average intelligence, whereas only a minority of people were of either very high or very low intelligence. He must have lived in a box all his life to have suddenly stumbled on that idea. It's one of the first things we all suspect roundabout

the age of seven when we are trying to work out who is smarter than who in the school playground. Using statistics, Galton came down very firmly on the side of nature in the nature versus nurture debate.

William James was one of the first functionalists – functionalism being the buzz-word for how the mind works – and founded America's first psychology course in 1875.

James said that '*Psychology is the science of mental life, both of its phenomena and its conditions.*' He also coined the phrase 'Stream of Consciousness' to describe the continuous nature of thought.

However, Descartes' '*I think therefore I am*' remains the overall winner and by a long way.

It was Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) however, who developed Psychoanalysis to describe his theories and techniques for exploring, investigating and curing the mental problems of his patients. He also coined the word 'psychodynamic' which means 'active mind.'

Freud said that there is a constant struggle going on which is especially hidden in the unconscious mind. Most psychologists today agree that this is mainly bollocks and in modern university psychology courses students are unlikely to get more than a couple of hours on Freud and his whacky theories. Most of Freud's thinking is so divorced from reality it's hard to take seriously. But... in the interests of completeness...

Like the modern day NLP brigade, Freud had also searched for a unifying theory of everything to explain all human behaviour.

First, he said, there is the Conscious, which supposedly takes up about one seventh of the mind. The conscious is the awareness we have when we are awake.

Then there is the Pre-conscious which is a kind of boundary layer and this contains memories of dreams and causes 'slips of the tongue' hence the expression 'Freudian slip.' The pre-conscious, Freud said, gives us clues about the unconscious from thoughts and actions that appear there – the idea being that if you recall a dream you are not directly revealing unconscious thought but recalling highly coded ideas – it is also supposed to protect us from the unpleasantness of what our own unconscious is really thinking.

This may have sounded quite clever after a few brandies and a cigar, but does it really make sense? Is it in fact plausible? Based on your own subjective experience do you feel or think, or have you ever thought or felt, that you have a pre-conscious which is shielding you from unpleasant thoughts, the subject matter of which is so nasty and repulsive that you actually have no idea what these thoughts are in the first place?

Finally, there is the unconscious, which accounts for the remaining six sevenths of the mind.

Freud claimed that the unconscious contains secret wishes, fears, traumatic memories – all completely hidden and conveniently unavailable to us. He imagined that this repression of all our most base and hideous thoughts is necessary for our survival so that we can forget past traumas and get on with our lives. In fairness, modern therapists work with clients to create emotional distance from past traumas, but traumas are nonetheless still remembered. It's how we are able to move on from them that's the real issue. The idea of 'repressed memories' was ditched a long time ago.

Freud claimed that we can never directly see into the unconscious. So what this means is that if, as Freud claimed, dark memories are irretrievable and the unconscious forever closed, the hypothesis can never be tested or proved one way or the other. On the balance of probability and with the benefit of hindsight, it seems that Freud was talking rubbish.

What most people don't know about Freud is that he was so severely addicted to cocaine he injected it on a daily basis. I believe that this habit affected his thinking in that special way that hard drugs do, especially over an extended period of time.

Unfortunately, due to Freud's cocaine-fuelled ramblings, a Pandora's Box of unscientific bunkum was unleashed on an unsuspecting world. One of the more undesirable results of this catastrophe was the advancement of the idea of 'repressed memory' which became very popular for several decades, but mercifully is now deeply unpopular because it is profoundly and tragically flawed. We will look at the reasons for this in a later section.

Freud was also the inventor of the idea of the Libido. This has less to do with the sex drive, as is commonly thought and more to do with the inborn energy that motivates us and helps us to survive.

'Inborn Energy' would have been a better term, but using plain language takes away the joy of being able to use big words and decreases one's chances of being taken seriously when one is expounding a theory that is in reality pure common sense or conversely, rubbish. The more big words you can cram into a theory, no matter how inane the premise behind it, the more scientific you can make it sound. NLP does this sort of thing all the time.

One particularly good idea that Freud came up with was the use of the steam engine as a metaphor to help describe the libido. The expressions 'letting off steam' and 'keeping on the rails' have worked their way into common parlance.

The level of inborn energy we are born with differs from person to person (obviously) but it is one of the central aspects of our personalities.

Freud also said that the mind had three distinct parts. Each part has its own motives and developmental progress but they function together to help us survive.

The Id develops first and is inborn and alone for the first couple of years. It is based on the pleasure principle – the baby seeks pleasure (warmth, food, comfort) and avoids the displeasurable (cold, hunger, being wet). The Id is selfish and seeks immediate gratification.

The Ego develops from about two years and is based on the reality principle. To survive we must be realistic and so the Ego often comes into conflict with the Id. As if all this wasn't enough, something called the Superego starts to develop around the age of three and is normally influenced by a child's parents. According to Freud, it becomes fully mature after puberty. Here Freud makes the mistake of assuming that puberty and emotional maturity are reached at the same time and this is obviously not always the case.

The Superego monitors the battle between the Id and the Ego. When applied to criminal behaviour, it could be said that the Superego is not fully developed, especially in those with no remorse or guilt. On the other hand it could be said that the criminal is just immature and selfish and needs to grow up. If he had had a good hiding when he stole his first credit card, he would not now have moved on to BMW's.

The main criticism of Freud is that most of what he thought about the mind is now considered rubbish. Too much of his work is based on sex and sexual repression, which is hardly surprising as when he arrived in the United States to escape the Nazis, he left behind a European society in which sexual activity was habitually repressed as a matter of course.

We should perhaps be a little sympathetic however and remember that Freud had found encouragement in the America of the early twentieth century – a rapidly growing nation thirsty for new ideas and new ways of thinking. Anything new or novel, no matter how bizarre, was warmly embraced.

An example of this outlook is that around the same time Freud was promoting his outlandish theories, the United States was looking for a new and more efficient method of executing its criminals. Believe it or not, America had toyed with the idea of using the guillotine. What was really needed was a more up-to-date solution which would better reflect America's status as an advanced technological power – electricity. A special type of chair would pass massive doses through the brain of anyone unfortunate enough to find themselves strapped into it. About five minutes of this would probably be enough to kill them. Happily, America has moved on to lethal injection, although why Federal law should insist that needles be properly sterilised is something that is beyond my understanding.

Freud's most famous theory – the Oedipus Complex – states all men love their mothers and hate their fathers. The idea is sniggered at today but a coincidence of history conspired to keep the idea on the boil for longer than was healthy. Hitler idolised his mother and despised his father and it seems that was enough to make Freud's theory stand up. Had Freud called the Oedipus Complex the 'f**k your mother, kill your father syndrome' I doubt it would ever have got off the ground.

If Freud came out with this kind of hogwash today, he would probably be regarded as a bit strange and the best he could hope for would be a guest spot on the Jerry Springer Show. Ask Freud 'why did the chicken cross the road?' he would likely reply 'the chicken crossed the road to escape from its own sexual repression and insecurity', which of course is nuts.

The greatest problem with Freud's work is that it is not only unscientific, it is un-testable. It is for this reason, amongst others, that most degree courses in Psychology now contain a good deal less Freudian theory than they did thirty plus years ago. It would be nigh on impossible to find anyone bold enough to come forward and admit they had actually f**ked their own mother, although the world is full of motherf**kers.

A few Freudian ideas though have been adapted and can even be useful. Ideas that have been retained include Denial (chicken... what chicken? There was no chicken and even if there was, it didn't cross any road).

Denial is when a person refuses to recognise reality, for instance when someone is in denial about alcoholism or drug dependency. Denial is still recognised as a psychological dysfunction.

Sublimation means getting rid of stress or anger by doing sport or setting about an effigy of your mother-in-law with a baseball bat.

Freud's ideas on repression – forcing unwanted ideas into the unconscious and keeping them there because we either fear them or feel guilty about them – are so far off the mark as to be laughable. In the real world, experiences that horrible are never forgotten, even though we are usually able to push them to the back of our minds and get on with life. It

takes energy to keep them hidden and too much repression is exhausting. Sometimes it is better for the psychologist to help a patient bring these problems to the surface so that they can be confronted and dealt with.

According to Freud however, it depends on whether they are not too horrible to be brought to the surface in the first place. The idea that in psychoanalysis, the recovery of related ideas using techniques such as word association can give clues to the really hideously repulsive and therefore repressed ideas is not taken anywhere near as seriously as it used to be. This is largely because it doesn't work. It is just as likely to produce erroneous data based on a patient's own fantasies or worse, pressure from an incompetent or zealous therapist.

The brief flirtation with repressed memory syndrome between the 1970's and 1990's has been so discredited it is considered unwise to even go there. Too many people have had their lives ruined because incompetent therapists have suggested, often under hypnosis, that the cause of their emotional problems is that they were abused, sexually, by a family member. The experience was so unpleasant the memory of the event is supposedly hidden so completely and effectively that the individual no longer has any conscious recollection of the incident.

Psychologists and therapists are now more likely to refer to False Memory Syndrome, which is substantially more accurate!

In the main, psychologists today prefer to concentrate on what is observable and therefore measurable rather than on a collection of extreme notions which can't be proved. That brings us back to what can be observed – and therefore can be proved – the study of behaviour.

In 1904, Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov won a Nobel Prize for his experiments with dogs. The dogs were given food every time a bell was rung. After a while, the dogs would salivate in expectation of food every time they heard the bell, even if no food was presented. In this way Pavlov conditioned the dogs to salivate using an unrelated stimulus.

After a while however, when the stimulus (the bell) was presented without the food, the dogs stopped salivating and this Pavlov called extinction. After a couple of days, when the stimulus was presented again, the dogs salivated immediately – this is called spontaneous recovery. Many different sounds produced the same result and this Pavlov called generalisation. Eventually the dogs learned to tell the difference between a circle and an ellipse, the circle being the only shape that produced food. This is called Discrimination.

My great aunt Matilda noticed her two dogs would come running, salivating, when she shouted '*Rover... Fido... dinner!*' Sadly, the Nobel Prize Committee ignored her contribution to science and her work has been forgotten.

Pavlov used conditioning, but another word that could be used is 'Associationism'.

Associationism is a philosophical idea from the time of Aristotle and means the study of how ideas come together to describe and explain behaviour. Associationism can be used to explain Learning.

Learning is a relatively permanent change in behaviour resulting from Experience. This excludes temporary changes caused by tiredness, drunkenness or illness and also excludes changes caused by genetic inheritance, permanent injury or maturation.

Behaviourism is central to Learning Theory and Behaviour Therapy.

Both Learning Theory and Behaviour Therapy are based on the same principles as Pavlov's experiments with canine conditioning.

To give you an idea of the strength of the behaviourists argument – that Learning Theory and Behaviour Therapy really *is* all it's cracked up to be – I quote a well documented case. Instead of giving their young daughter an Advent Calendar in the run-up to Christmas, some imaginative parents gave the girl one small present every day leading up to Christmas. But when Christmas Day came, the child refused to open more than one of her presents, such was the effect of the previous twenty-five days behavioural conditioning. Only after a lot of reasoning and persuasion did they manage to get her to open the rest of the gifts.

Classical Conditioning explains virtually all learning that involves reflexes – heart rate, perspiration, muscle tension and so forth. These reflexes are signs of excitement, including fear, revulsion, even sexual attraction, and they may explain unusual and undesirable behaviour such as fears and phobias. Classical Conditioning is the basis for all behaviour therapy.

Desensitisation Therapy was developed in 1958 by South African psychiatrist Joseph Wolpe.

Desensitisation Therapy therapy is based on gradually reducing the association between the Stimulus – for example a spider – and the Response, the fear of spiders. It is accomplished by slowly introducing the Stimulus and getting the phobic to relax, and it works on two levels.

First, we find out at what distance from the spider, snake, banana, the subject is comfortable.

Secondly, we attempt to rationalise the fear by explaining that a fear of certain types of spiders in certain circumstances or in certain locations is perfectly normal, rational and healthy. For instance, fear of the deadly funnel-web spider is very reasonable if you live in the Australian Outback, but not if you live in Yorkshire where there are no deadly funnel-web spiders. This is all about putting things into perspective and my experience is that clients respond well to this sort of logic. Having someone they perceive as a professional (and therefore very clever) tell them all this is more effective than having a parent or a friend tell them. It works especially well if they are paying for the privilege.

Nine times out of ten, the therapist is only telling the client what they suspected deep down to be the case anyway – they just needed to hear it confirmed by someone in a suit with a few certificates on the wall.

We can then move forward to the next stage which involves persuading the client that spiders, in her native Yorkshire at least, are friendly and harmless and keep the house free of other, nastier pests. We can continue putting this into perspective even further by reminding the client that spiders are not the real problem anyway – the real problem are the drug-crazed murderous rapists who break into your house in the middle of the night and steal your DVD player. Or perhaps not.

Counter Conditioning Therapy replaces the association between the Stimulus (spider) and the Response (fear) with a new bond, for example, associating the spider with something much more pleasant like chocolate.

Viewing the spider as a figure of fun or ridicule can also help re-program the subject's attitude and behavioural response to the stimulus. Relaxation desensitises the person, and helps them to cope in future. The relaxation techniques employed in hypnosis and in conjunction with carefully chosen positive suggestions can get the job done quicker and desensitise the subject to an even greater degree.

Aversion Therapy replaces the association with something that is bad for a person, such as smoking, alcohol, or binge eating with something nasty such as an electric shock. Again, we are on familiar Pavlovian territory here.

The Eclectic Approach is when some or all these therapies are combined.

We are all born with only two fears and those inborn fears are the fear of falling and the fear of sudden loud noises. All other fears are learned.

Children often unconsciously learn a fear from one or both parents in the same way that they learn habits and prejudices. I have often seen clients who are related and share the same phobia – these things are passed from parent to child in the same way as a love of music, appreciation of mathematics or science, or (God forbid) an obsession with a particular football team.

Adults learn fears and phobias from all sorts of sources – friends, TV programmes, lurid stories in cheap magazines and the like. Once a negative thought takes root in the unconscious, it will stick there until it is either modified or replaced... which brings us neatly back to John Locke's 'mind as a clean slate' philosophy.

Connectionism is another type of Associationism and it was discovered in the USA by Edward Thorndike in 1898. Thorndike put cats in a box and taught them to escape by pressing a lever inside the box. At first, the cat escaped by trial and error, but after a while the cat associated pressing the lever with escape and so it very quickly learned how to escape at will. Anyone who has ever owned a cat will know that it only takes a very short time for the cat to learn how to use the cat door and not sit outside meowing all night where it is likely to be ignored.

Thorndike's experiment was very simple and rather basic and was frankly behind the times – circuses had been training chimpanzees to perform much more complex tricks in return for reward at least a hundred years before Thorndike started imprisoning cats. Fortunately, the Nobel Prize committee were a little more wide awake when it came to Thorndike's experiments.

A Steep Learning Curve means that a person learns quickly. A Shallow Learning Curve means that a person is learning slowly. This is really easy to remember. Steep = smart, shallow = not so smart.

The Law of Exercise simply means that repetition strengthens learning. This is a rehash of the old adage that practice makes perfect. Repetition is one of the cornerstones of hypnotic suggestion and repetition intensifies reinforcement – the more an idea is repeated, the more that idea becomes reinforced.

Many women already seem to instinctively understand this principle because of the number of times they repeat themselves. Women are sometimes aware that they are doing it, hence the question 'how many times do I have to repeat myself?' This is a question that men have enjoyed hearing throughout the ages and it is probably as old as civilisation itself.

Learning by rote is employed when we learn mathematical tables or poetry by repeating them over and over again. In hypnosis, repetition works because the repetition of a suggestion reinforces that suggestion. Emile Cue's '*Every day in every way I am feeling better and better*' has as its basis, learning by rote, repetition and reinforcement.

The Law of Effect is when reward strengthens learning. If an act is pleasurable or attracts a pleasurable reward, it will be repeated. This is a much more effective way of learning than mere repetition. Children learn faster when they are rewarded with praise in the same way that chimpanzees learn faster when they are rewarded with a banana. Humans learn by reward in exactly the same way. Young men quickly learn that compliments and flowers are more likely to entice a girl into the bedroom than remarks like 'you don't sweat much for a fat bird do you?'

This brings us neatly to the very eminent psychologist John B. Watson, who claimed psychology is '*the prediction and control of behaviour*'.

One of the premises of Watson's work is that people can train themselves to do anything. This idea is in complete harmony with the thinking that is the backbone of the new self-improvement industry. In fact Watson's work is one of the cornerstones of NLP.

Watson's approach rejects the idea of consciousness altogether. He says that emotions are simply a combination of environmental stimuli and internal responses, and that these internal responses are measurable.

Watson believed that infants show three basic emotions:

1. fear – caused by sudden noises or sudden loss of support
2. rage – caused by restriction of body movement
3. love – caused by caressing and rocking.

Watson also believed that all other emotions are compounds of these and this, at least for the time being remains the conventional wisdom.

In an experiment, eleven month-old Albert was shown a rat which he was not afraid of. When a loud bang was set off behind him, Albert associated the noise with the rat and became afraid every time he saw a rat. How they got this one past the ethics committee is for me, a source of wonder, quite apart from any notion regarding cruelty to children. But again, we can see echoes of Pavlov's experiments with dogs.

Watson argued that many adult anxieties stem from similar childhood experiences. A former client of mine experienced feelings of fear and loathing every time he had to go to Liverpool on business. Upon closer investigation it turned out that he had been beaten up and robbed by some youths with Liverpool accents when he was a teenager and had unconsciously formed an association between Liverpool and being beaten up and robbed, and who can blame him?

Watson spent much of his life applying behaviourism to the prediction and control of human behaviour. Because of his outstanding work, psychologists have been involved in advertising ever since. Why? It's because advertisers make the consumer dissatisfied with what they have and persuade them to desire the new product. We are all susceptible to advertising to some degree even if we think that we are not, hence I am writing this on an Apple computer which cost a fortune, instead of a computer that does exactly the same job and costs half as much.

In the same way that Albert was conditioned to fear rats, people can be desensitised to get rid of fears and phobias. What is happening with this kind of therapy is that conditioned responses are being changed – that is, emotions are being controlled and as a result, behaviour is being shaped and modified.

Whereas Pavlov's experiment's with dogs was based on Respondent Behaviour, Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904 to 1990) studied Operant Behaviour, which simply means non-reflexive behaviour or voluntary behaviour.

Skinner believed that *'the human organism is a machine and like any other machine a human being behaves in lawful and predictable ways in response to the external forces that impinge upon it.'*

So why did Mr. F.B. Skinner think the chicken crossed the road? Because the external influences which had pervaded its senses from birth had caused it to develop in such a fashion that it would tend to cross roads, even believing these actions to be of its own freewill.

To understand how Operant Conditioning works we can look at another rat experiment. This time, the rat is placed in the box with a lever. At first, as the rat presses the lever, no food is released but after a while, food is released when the rat presses the lever. Then, the food is withdrawn again but the rat continues to press the lever anyway. The rat will continue to press the lever indefinitely if food is released from time to time. This is called Partial Reinforcement and we can say that the rat has been Operantly Conditioned. Or we could say that the rat has learned the principle of 'you never know your luck' which in my view is an equally valid conclusion.

Skinner tried four different types of situation where food was given:

1. at fixed intervals – one every minute
2. at variable intervals – after various intervals averaging about once a minute
3. at a fixed ratio – every twenty presses
4. at a variable ratio – after varying numbers of presses but averaging around twenty.

Skinner found that the variable ratio was the method by which responses continued for the longest time before extinction (which kind of supports my own conclusion).

Skinner also found that the best results came when reinforcement was immediate. This is why, especially when dealing with children, reward or punishment should be administered straight away. If, like me, you always wondered why mothers take their children to supermarkets to smack them, now you know.

This also explains one of the reasons why the penal system does not always work as intended. Criminals are brought to court and sentenced often months after committing the offence and this invariably leads to the criminal associating the punishment with the punisher rather than with the offence. Punishment administered a long time after the crime has been committed, is less effective because it brings about slower responses. Punishment may train an individual what *not* to do, but it doesn't train the individual what they *should* do, so some people, social workers for instance, believe that it's best to use a combination of reward and withdrawal of reward.

Reward, withdrawal of reward and punishment are types of reinforcement. Which type of reinforcement will work best depends largely on the individual together with the circumstances and the voltage. There is no golden rule of thumb – the appropriate type of reinforcement can only be found by experimenting with the particular individual.

Skinner's definitions are as follows:

Positive Reinforcement is when there's an increase (or improvement) in behaviour by receiving anything that is pleasant, for example, praise for good behaviour.

Negative Reinforcement is when there's an increase in behaviour by avoiding something unpleasant, for example behaving oneself in order to avoid a mild electric shock.

Punishment is when there's a decrease in behaviour caused by anything that is unpleasant, for instance, a severe electric shock. If only we could do this every time a criminal breaks the law... The equipment could be installed cheaply in our prisons instead of television sets and Xboxes. This would, in my opinion, definitely lead to a decrease in re-offending when criminals were released back into society.

Problem Children are just as emotionally healthy and intelligent as normal children – the situation is that they have inadvertently been mis-trained by their parents. For example, it is no good giving a child attention just when they are naughty if the child is ignored when it's being good.

Skinner's Three Stage Training Method is simple, straightforward and easy to understand. As with a lot of psychology, it's really a matter of common sense. The words in the brackets are not so important – it's the words outside the brackets that hold the real meaning.

1. Define the goal (Terminal Behaviour)
2. Define the start (Entering Behaviour)
3. Positively reinforce each step (Increment) in the desired direction while ignoring all other behaviour.

This three stage model has been applied not just to training but to education generally and it has been shown to work extremely well.

Some people need to have their behaviour modified so that they can live happier, more fulfilled lives. One way of doing this is with Positive Reinforcement, that is, praise, attention or reward.

To do this effectively, one has to be consistent. Consistency is simply a matter of always reinforcing particular behaviour in the same way, and Firmness basically means sticking to the programme to achieve the desired result. Being consistent and firm means not giving up at the last minute.

Stating objectives, or setting goals, is always a useful exercise for individuals and these can sometimes be motivators all by themselves. Writing a list of goals on a piece of paper can work very well. A list of goals however is no good if the list is stuck in a drawer somewhere and then forgotten about – it should be visible. For people who desire to lose weight, it might be a good idea to put the list on the door of the fridge instead of the more traditional padlock, although it would make sense to do both. This purely common sense notion has also been appropriated by NLP (the list, not the padlock).

Behaviour can also be modified without obvious reinforcement and this is known as Social Learning Theory.

In 1947, Julian Rotter claimed that human beings have expectations about their behaviour and people have individual values that they apply to their behaviour as well as individual values they attach to the reinforcements they receive. Rotter also said that there are basically two types of people, depending on their upbringing. Central to Rotter's argument is the concept of 'Locus of Control'.

Internal Locus of Control is when people believe that reinforcement depends on personal efforts. This is so true and an extremely healthy way of looking at things – everyone must take control of their own destiny and exercise control over their actions sometime in their lives.

Those who can take control of their lives turn out to be better at social interaction and are physically and mentally healthier. Their parents have usually been supportive, generous with praise, consistent with discipline and non-authoritarian.

External Locus of Control is when people believe that reinforcement depends on outside influences and as a consequence, they make less effort to improve their own lives. I call these people 'passengers' and they are all too frequently looking for an easy way out, an effortless or magic fix.

Hypnosis is a perfect example of an outside influence and although hypnotherapy can act as a motivator in varying degrees, it is still important to attach suggestions that make it clear that the effort must still originate from the client. Hypnotherapy has to be a partnership. How many hypnotherapists does it take to change a light bulb...? Only one... and only if the light bulb wants to change. OK, it's an old joke I know, but it does illustrate the point.

Observational Learning was demonstrated in 1963 by Albert Bandura when he carried out an experiment with two groups of children who took it in turns to watch an adult play with a large toy doll. The first group saw the adult behaving violently towards the doll while the second group saw the adult playing non-violently. Without any direct encouragement, the first group's behaviour was significantly more violent than that of the second group. What this shows is that children will spontaneously imitate the behaviour of a model without any obvious reinforcement.

Subsequent experiments showed that young children are prone to imitate cartoon violence and are strongly influenced by violence on TV and film, although it is not known if these effects are long term. Unless countered by good parenting I think that they could be... in fact I'll stick my neck out and say that they are. My reasoning is that the vast majority of street criminals come from homes and environments where good parenting has been in short supply, or even non-existent. Criminal parents sometimes pass on their skill to the children, who then also become criminal.

Many years ago, watching my son grow was a joy that only a parent can understand. He imitated both his mother and me. We were once at a friend's house and my son, aged two, spent most of the afternoon playing with their four-year-old. My son's behaviour soon copied that of the older child, in fact when it came time to practice jumping off the coffee table and onto the sofa, a massive distance for a small child, the look on my son's face bordered on hero-worship. Before long, he was jumping as well. He had learned a new trick. Imitation is something that is a common theme in social development.

America is the most violent country in the western world and I am not alone in thinking the amount of TV and film violence contributes to the level of real violence. American society has become a reflection of its gun culture, its drive-by shootings and its portrayal of bizarre and decadent criminal behaviour.

North of the border, in Canada, there is much less violent crime because Canadian TV is on the whole much less violent and more intellectually challenging. TV programmes made in other countries outside America have noticeably fewer stories involving serial killers, gunfights, rape and high speed car chases. Most American dramas are concerned with crime as a normal part of the evenings viewing.

Many of these violent American programmes are broadcast in other countries and yet the populations of those countries don't go around shooting or stabbing each other. This immunity from the transition of TV violence to real violence is a result of our being able to view American TV programmes objectively – as outsiders – rather than subjectively as Americans do.

We already know that America is a violent place and so we're not surprised they're shooting and killing each other on the small screen – it's all happening over there, a long way away. We accept that America is not only a different country but a different culture and we make allowances for that. To the American viewer however, violence filmed in America is filmed at home, on American soil, and so the effect on the viewer is bound to be different.

There is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that teenagers and adults, particularly the less educated variety, are prone to imitate violence they see on television and in the media. Much of this adult violence is copy-cat violence and is often fuelled by news reports of riots that have taken place in other towns and cities. A consequence of this freedom of information is that riots then spread like wildfire across the country.

During the Toxteth riots in Britain in the early 1980's, the atmosphere in the city of Liverpool was electric – I was there at the time. This was partly to do with the huge amount of news coverage similar events in Brixton had received the week before, as well as the number of police suddenly in evidence in the city, many of whom had been drafted in from other forces. There was also an *expectation* of trouble.

Nightly television reports of burning buildings and rumours that the government was about to bring in the army became a magnet for professional troublemakers and others with no agenda of their own. The expectation built up until inevitably, someone threw the first stone. Excitement spread throughout the crowd, the air filled with the unmistakable odour of burning testosterone and normally rational people suddenly found themselves swept up in the heat of the moment, their normal sensibilities brushed aside and replaced with an unexpected yet overwhelming compulsion to throw a petrol bomb at a police vehicle.

There are clear parallels with the Black Lives Matter and Antifa riots in America in late 2020.

Some very clever psychologists have pointed out that this sort of behaviour may be a substitute for deep-seated aggression and innate war-like tendencies that had hitherto remained suppressed by a society that had – in evolutionary terms – only recently chosen order over anarchy.

Researchers at the University of South Carolina have found that the influence of television is not just limited to acts of violence, and their findings have been published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* in the United States.

Over one thousand children between the ages of 12 and 15 were tested before and after exposure to television programmes featuring sexual relations between teenagers. The research concluded that television acts as a 'super peer' which provides information about sex and that the majority of sex depicted on TV is recreational, risk-free and carried on by people who are unmarried, or at least not married to each other.

Viewers are more likely to copy the behaviour of the characters depicted if the behaviour is presented as attractive and not punished, but rather rewarded for their behaviour.

Of course, the same can be said for the influence television has on fashion, tastes in music and the introduction of new words into the teenage vocabulary. The influence of media on young minds, particularly television and radio, is more powerful than any inspiration or encouragement coming from school, religion or parents.

So it's logical to assume that if both children and adults can so readily imitate violence or sex or new fashions, then they can also imitate other traits and these processes of imitation and modelling are just as important in therapy, where the therapist acts as a model in the same way as a teacher or personal trainer.

Cognitive Psychology is basically about thinking, or to put it another way, 'perceiving' and it involves memory, language, problem solving, organising, anticipation, planning and creativity. A lot of cognitive psychologists believe that it is a waste of time talking about the mind because the mind is invisible and impossible to quantify and that the measurement of behavioural responses tell us more than enough about a person or a group of people.

Gestalt Psychology means 'form' or 'shape' or 'pattern.' The emphasis is on 'the whole' rather than on 'parts' – the 'whole' being greater than the sum of all the parts. Gestalt psychologists believe that the mind is active and constantly looking for meanings. This school of thought relates particularly to visual and auditory perception, for instance, recognising a face in a crowd or hearing your own name mentioned at a party. When we perceive, we experience sensory elements that become organised in a meaningful, logical and rational way.

Cognitive Learning, sometimes called Insight Learning, was demonstrated by Wolfgang Kohler in 1913 by setting simple problem solving experiments for chimpanzees – for example, using a stick to retrieve a banana. This is sometimes called 'the Ah-Ha! phenomenon.'

The experiments are a step ahead of Thorndike's cat in the box routine, except that this experiment involves the use of a simple tool – a stick.

Kohler's experiment is of importance because it takes into account the thought processes of the individual. What Kohler was trying to say is that people (and animals) can learn by thinking about a problem and not just by imitation or conditioning. Many optical illusions and puzzles are based on Gestalt thinking.

A Gestalt therapist will look at the whole person instead of concentrating on the symptoms or conditions. Gestalt concentrates on the person's lifestyle and takes into consideration eating habits, job satisfaction, marital happiness, environment, hobbies and interests, and so on.

Gestalt has huge benefits in education. A teacher can better stimulate interest in the subject by giving a more exciting overview and interesting background information. For example, a history lesson can be made more appealing by including attention-grabbing anecdotes and examining the rather yucky social conditions of the time rather than simply relying on a list of dates and battles.

These days it is even possible to show students filmed interviews with people who fought in two world wars and are able to talk about their experiences – they too were just fifteen and sixteen years old when they marched off to the trenches – and this makes the subject far more interesting. The more interest created in a subject, the more a student will be motivated to get involved in it. As a schoolboy, I found history to be a rather dull subject, but in my third year we got a teacher who literally brought the subject to life and my marks shot up in proportion to my increased interest.

Cognitive learning and cognition can be defined as the processes '*by which the sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used... Cognition is involved in everything a human being might possibly do.*'

In this respect, it's handy to consider the brain as a kind of computer, the physical brain being the hardware and sensory inputs of taste, smell, sight, hearing, touch, memory and language being the software – the whole package designed for data processing.

The main principle of Humanistic Psychology is the focus on the individual, especially taking into consideration free will, choice, creativity, and spontaneity. Humanistic psychology also places great emphasis on the conscious experience and the wholeness of human nature. It is this emphasis on these aspects of the human condition that gives humanistic psychology its optimistic and affirmative qualities. It is both constructive and encouraging.

The humanistic approach is based on the study of human experience as it occurs. America in the 1960's provided the perfect environment for humanistic ideas to flourish – flower power, sexual promiscuity, respect for all life, banning the bomb, making love not war and hugging trees were all things that provided humanistic psychology with the inspiration that were the seeds of its foundation.

The humanists rejected Freud's emphasis on mental illness and all the negative aspects of human nature – repression, jealousy, fear and so forth – and concentrated on the more upbeat aspects of human existence such as mental health, with all the attributes of self confidence, happiness, contentment, kindness, caring, sharing, giving and generosity. Good for them. Up with the humanists, down with Freud!

Followers of the humanistic approach believed in the innate human motivation that is now recognised by the self-improvement industry as 'achieving your potential' – by using to the full one's own talents and abilities. Jesus had already said something about this in the parable of the talents. NLP also lays claim to this inspiration as its own, which it isn't.

Humanistic psychology established The Hierarchy of Needs (credited to Abraham Maslow in his book *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*) which is set out below. The idea is that each time a person experiences a sense of fulfilment, it is called a 'peak experience' and this 'peak experience' comes at the top of the Hierarchy of Needs.

The hierarchy can be applied to almost every feature of daily life. In education it can be immensely helpful in training teachers to motivate their students. In therapy it can help

patients understand their own needs and the needs of others. In the world of commerce it's valuable as a tool in training managers to understand the needs of staff, and to motivate, encourage and even praise them.

All in all, the hierarchy of needs helps us to define what will make us happy and fulfilled as human beings, and the hierarchy can be used as a scale or indicator of psychological health and well-being.

THE HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

SELF ACTUALISATION

Realising your full potential – Becoming everything one is capable of becoming

AESTHETIC NEEDS

Beauty in Art and Nature – Symmetry, Balance, Order, Form

COGNITIVE NEEDS

Knowledge and Understanding, Curiosity, Exploration, Need for Meaning and Predictability

ESTEEM NEEDS

Esteem and respect from others; Self-esteem and self-respect.

LOVE AND BELONGINGS

Receiving and giving Love, Affection, Trust and Acceptance. Affiliating, being part of a group, family, friends, work.

SAFETY NEEDS

Protection from potentially dangerous objects or situations (*for example, the elements, physical illness*).

The threat is both physical and psychological (*for example fear of the unknown*)

Importance of routine and familiarity.

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

Food, drink, oxygen, temperature regulation, rest, activity, sex.

Psychologically healthy people exhibit an objective perception of reality as well as an acceptance of their own natures – they respect others and the opinions or beliefs of others and display commitment and dedication to some type of work. Typical attributes of the psychologically healthy are naturalness, simplicity in behaviour and spontaneity together with feelings of independence and a need for autonomy and privacy.

Psychologically healthy individuals have empathy with and affection for all humanity and this fondness for others includes not only friendliness but also social interests. In keeping with the spirit of the 1960's, Humanistic psychology encourages resistance to conformity and the promotion of democratic characteristics as well as a keenness to be creative.

The great psychologist Carl Rogers, developed a form of psychotherapy known as Person Centred Therapy, sometimes called Rogerian therapy.

The essence of Person Centred Therapy is that it is the client who is responsible for improving their lives, rather than the therapist. This represents a dramatic departure from other forms of therapy where the patient is first diagnosed – and then given treatment. In Rogerian therapy the therapist is not responsible for changes in the client. *'The client must consciously and rationally decide for themselves what is wrong and what should be done about it. The therapist is more of a confidant or counsellor who listens and encourages on an equal level.'*

This is fantastic news as it provides a great get-out for the majority of therapists who have no idea what they are doing.

Rogers particularly emphasised the role of Self Concept which consists of three parts – the Ideal Self, Self Image and Self Esteem. Self Esteem depends on the relationship between the Ideal Self and Self Image. Therefore Self Esteem can be increased by raising one's own idea of the Self Image or lowering the idea of the Ideal Self, or both! Confused? You will be...

The idea might be interpreted as one that encourages an individual to set unrealistically low standards which they then consistently fail to achieve. However, that is too literal an interpretation, not to mention a tad unfair. The gist of the concept is that the therapist abdicates all responsibility, leaving it all up to the client who is then the only one to blame if and when it all goes wrong. The therapist is in no way to blame and gets to keep the cash. The idea that all responsibility lies entirely on the shoulders of the patient is one which has been embraced with enthusiasm by hypnotherapists and is always worth quoting when the subject complains they are still smoking forty fags a day after fourteen sessions.

Roger's approach has had a major impact on the self-improvement industry and the many that have jumped on the self-improvement bandwagon in recent years. The view that all responsibility lies entirely on the shoulders of the patient is one which again has been embraced with enthusiasm by the many devotees of NLP.

In 1961 the brilliant psychologist Carl Rogers went one step further and said that the psychologically healthy person has openness to all experience, an ability to live fully in every moment and the will to follow their own instincts rather than the will of others.

Freedom of thought and action, for example spontaneity, flexibility and much creativity are also characteristics of the psychologically healthy.

Put simply, individuals who possess all the character traits listed above tend to be the type of people who live life to the full and this is in itself a good thing because they also tend to be virtuous and moral, reliable and trustworthy with a sunny disposition. They are the people the rest of us aspire to be and make good role models for others. The words 'carpe diem' immediately spring to mind. Hug me somebody, please...!

The humanist's response therefore to the question of why the chicken crossed the road would be 'so it could realise its full potential.' This Humanistic approach to psychology has been assimilated, Borg-like, into NLP.

Conversely, psychologically unhealthy people show symptoms of Psychopathology. The word pathological means 'diseased' and although the term 'mental illness' is used less frequently today, the term 'mental disorder' is now generally held to be more appropriate and politically correct.

The two most common forms of mental disorder are Neurosis and Psychosis.

Neurosis and psychosis are very distinct. With a neurotic person, only a part of the personality is affected: the person is aware that there is something wrong, that they are not thinking straight or that they have some form of 'mental block'. They are able to recognise that they have to take steps to address it. Examples of Neuroses are phobias, obsessions or anxieties where the patient is aware that they have a problem or awareness that their behaviour is abnormal.

With a psychotic person however, the whole personality is affected and the person is not aware. If I was mad, how would I know? One example of psychosis is schizophrenia.

Mood Affective Disorders however, are a different kettle of fish altogether. Examples of these disorders are antisocial behaviour (this also comes under psychopathology) and dependency, that is, dependency on anything from alcohol or drugs, to dependency on one's own emotions, to dependency on another specific person. If you are a therapist, make sure that person is not you!

People who are depressed or who are unable to let go of their own emotional baggage are often addicted to their negative emotions in the same way that someone who cannot stop drinking is addicted to alcohol. They are comfortable in the world of their own depression and use it as a refuge or a barrier against the real world. They lack the confidence to enter into social interaction and have an affinity for self-absorption. They can be difficult customers and would probably get more out of a visit to the Comedy Store than they would out of an hour's consultation with a trained therapist.

Depression is anger without enthusiasm.

When it comes to looking at Psychopathology, the key characteristic of all psychopaths is that they have no conscience and lack any sympathy or empathy with their fellow man. They are skilled at putting on a convincing front but they are predatory by nature. They are always looking for new feeding grounds and do not give a second thought to the victims they leave in their wake. It is estimated that about one to two percent of people fall into this category – roughly two in every hundred people are psychopathic.

This means that there are about ten thousand psychopaths per million people. This may sound a lot, but the label 'psychopath' does not necessarily mean axe-murderer. The vast majority of psychopaths are calm and composed but can at the same time be utterly ruthless in their dealings with others. They are difficult to recognise because their evil is very targeted. If you are the victim of a psychopath, the chances are everyone else around you will think they are likeable, charming people.

Psychopaths are fully proficient in their nefarious dealings and to identify them you need to recognise the character traits that mark them out from the rest of society. All you have to

do is ask the following questions and put a tick in the appropriate box. If you know anyone who might fit this category it might be fun to see how highly they score.

- Do they think that the world revolves around them?
- Do they have an inflated opinion of their own importance?
- Do they pretend to be modest when really wishing to be the centre of attention?
- Do they either overtly or covertly crave approval (particularly from their mothers?!)
- Do they suggest to others that they 'pull themselves together' when they are upset rather than offering solace?
- Do they lack any kind of personal depth?
- Do they sometimes seem arrogant?
- Do they subtly try to dominate others?
- Do they manipulate others for their own personal advantage?
- Do they blame everyone but themselves when things go wrong?
- Do they disregard ethics or rules of decency to get what they want?
- Do they fly into a rage over a small problem?
- Do they throw their toys out of the cot when they can't get their own way?
- Do they react badly to criticism?
- Do they break promises?
- Do they agree to do one thing and then purposely do another?
- Do they take credit for others' work?
- Do they appear to be two-faced?
- Do they behave totally remorselessly when set upon a particular goal?
- Do they resort to bullying when all else fails?
- Do they consider themselves to be always right?
- Do they have scant regard for the opinions of others?
- Do they become smug when things go absolutely right for them?
- Do they become spiteful or revengeful when people get in their way?
- Do they show signs of being a control freak?
- Do they see themselves as some sort of Messiah in their chosen field?
- Do they display narcissistic tendencies?

Of course many characteristics on this list could apply to some politicians, chief executives and estate agents, but that does not necessarily mean to say that they are psychopaths. One must be careful to discriminate between ambition, which is healthy, and ruthlessness, which is not.

If a person scores very high on the list, the alarm bells should start ringing and it might be a good idea to make some distance between them and you.

The same applies when it comes to High and Low Self-Esteem. So much drivel about 'low self-esteem' has been disseminated that we should take this opportunity to put things in proportion.

The majority of people fall into the great grey area between the extremes of high and low self-esteem. What we have to consider now are those extremes.

Jens Pruessner at McGill University, Montreal, believes that low self-esteem may well be the result of genetics. Pruessner has shown that people with low self-esteem tend to have smaller than average hippocampi. So it must follow that those individuals with abnormally high levels of self-esteem must be the owners of larger hippocampi.

The bleeding heart left-wing liberals in society often trumpet the 'well known fact' that low self esteem is the cause of anti-social behaviour. I have been unable to find any scientific paper or text book on the subject that confirms this wholly erroneous concept. Neither have I been able to find any empirical evidence to support it.

Simple observation, in any British town centre, on any Friday or Saturday night, will confirm that the converse is actually the true state of affairs. It is the individuals with high levels of self-esteem who are the ones who display the loud, obnoxious and aggressive, sometimes threatening, anti-social behaviour that characterises a night out on the piss.

Part of the problem is that well meaning researchers and scientists have confused self-esteem with self-respect. The two are completely different.

For eighteen months I lived in an apartment in Manchester city centre and had a birds-eye view of the great unwashed as they spilled out of the bars and nightclubs of Canal Street. There is not a shadow of a doubt in my mind that people with low levels of self-esteem tend to keep themselves to themselves and avoid trouble at all costs. Aggression is risky, and those with low self-esteem avoid risk taking. Those who have inflated levels of self-esteem suffer from an insatiable desire to prove their own superiority, a condition that is all too often aggravated by alcohol.

Another difference is that people with low self-esteem are far more likely to blame themselves when things go wrong instead of blaming others, a progression which often leads someone with higher self-esteem than is normal – or healthy – to kick someone else's head in.

However... people with high self-esteem, or to put it another way, those with an unrealistically high opinion of themselves, do not always resort to violence when their ambitions are thwarted, even though they are more often prone than those with low self-esteem to aggression if their superiority is questioned or undermined. Nonetheless, those with inflated and therefore unstable levels of high self-esteem generally react badly to criticism. Reactions can vary from (on the low end of the scale) to the kind of petulance normally exhibited by spoilt children, metaphorically throwing their toys out of the cot, to (at the high end of the scale) murderous intent.

Alfred Adler, an Austrian doctor, psychotherapist, and founder of the school of individual psychology emphasised the importance of feelings of inferiority. The inferiority complex is recognised as an isolating element which plays a key role in personality development.

Adler said that all human beings are born with a deep-rooted desire for superiority and a craving to be respected, admired and loved. Advance toward those goals, if impeded, can lead to feelings of inferiority, loss of confidence and self-respect or inadequacy. For some people, the need for absolute superiority cannot be sublimated (in the way that deep-rooted desire for sex or violence can be) and their desire for unattainable superiority leads to psychopathic behaviour.

On the whole however, inflated self-esteem does increase the odds of often venomous defensiveness and even violent aggression. The common thread is that this sort of behaviour becomes more likely only when their precious egos are threatened. Then again,

those with ridiculously high self-esteem recover very quickly, even after serious blows to those egos.

On average, there is a tendency for men to have higher self-esteem than women. Conversely, those suffering from depression are far more likely to have lower self-esteem and are less prone to aggression than those to whom depression is a stranger.

Psychopaths are extremely prone to aggression, even if their aggression is non-physical, it is likely to embrace a natural animal cunning and endless patience. Psychopaths hold extremely favourable opinions of themselves and the more intelligent ones will often channel this aggression using more civilised means. For instance, some are notoriously litigious, regarding themselves as special or deserving of preferential treatment. When their perceived status is threatened, for example if a tabloid newspaper prints an unfavourable story about them, they are just as liable to consult their lawyers as others suffering from the same delusions are to lash out with their fists. Either way, the desired end result is to punish and humiliate their opponents.

Playground bullies regard themselves as superior to other children, while those who find themselves on the receiving end of such negative munificence are generally those with lower self-esteem.

There is another highly significant factor here which is often overlooked by researchers and yet it is blindingly obvious once it is pointed out, and that is – Narcissism.

The word comes from the mythical story of Narcissus, a youth so captivated by his own reflection in a pool, he could do no more than gaze at it, unable to tear himself away, until he eventually starved to death. The simple solution would have been to take sandwiches, but I digress.

Narcissism is a recognised mental illness characterised by hugely inflated or grandiose views of the self coupled with excessive self-admiration. Narcissists share many of the symptoms of psychopathology in that they have (secretly and often unknowingly even to themselves) an exploitative attitude toward others, an affinity with the idea of being envied, and underlying delusions of greatness, something which occasionally manifests itself as arrogance. Any relationship between low self-esteem and narcissism is so rare that it is almost completely unknown.

Unlike individuals with puffed up levels of self-esteem, narcissists are very selective in their aggression – they extremely rarely attack innocent parties. This is almost certainly to do with the narcissists own view that they are not only special, they are just – even if they're playing by their own set of rules.

They also tend to see issues in terms of black and white and frequently take the view that others are either for or against them. They also have a tendency to interpret everything literally. Very often, they are individuals who were isolated from their peers in their formative years and so did not have the opportunity for the normal social interactions that are part of growing up.

They have not learned where boundaries are and thus are unable to accept compromise as easily as the rest of us. They may have been teased or made fun of in their adolescence and once they have reached adulthood, display a yearning to be the centre of attention which borders on the abnormal.

These are individuals who must have their own way all the time and seek to impose their will on others at any cost, punishing anyone who stands up to them and can often be spiteful in their pursuit of vengeance.

Real-life violent offenders, at least those whom it has been possible to examine in prison, suffered more from narcissism than simple high self-esteem. It is this crucial trait that distinguishes this type of criminal from ordinary members of the community. These offenders hold on to the idea that they are above everyone else and they do this with a grim determination, suggesting that if 'the system' thinks it will cure them of this delusion, it fails abysmally.

Of course there will still be those who continue to labour under the ridiculous belief that aggressive people are only like they are because they really do suffer from poor self-esteem and that their aggression is only a front, designed to disguise their low opinion of themselves, even if they won't admit it. I'm afraid that this is complete nonsense flies in the face of all the evidence.

To put things in some perspective, it does not necessarily follow that high self-esteem, or even narcissism, always causes aggressive behaviour. In the main it does not, but those who suffer from these traits, especially when they feel they have been insulted, respond in such an over the top manner as to leave the rest of us open-mouthed in astonishment.

One should beware of people who regard themselves as superior, particularly when those beliefs are groundless, because they secretly desire those around them to confirm their special standing – one of the reasons these individuals are predisposed to surround themselves with 'yes men' and cronies who serve to confirm their special status. They are conceited and can turn very nasty toward anyone who dares undermine their pride or offer any kind of injury to their love of self.

Some psychologists believe that psychology is really a biological science. This has added even more fuel to the fire of the nature versus nurture debate. Common sense, suggests that the two are inextricably interlinked and cannot be separated. In other words, a person's inherited genetic 'make-up', their upbringing and collected experiences, are parts of a larger whole! This is known as Interactionism, and it makes perfect sense.

In Social and Cultural Psychology, behaviour is influenced by one's environment in the broadest sense – through family background, upbringing, social class, religion, and almost every aspect of one's cultural surroundings. People from different cultures, from different parts of the world, may not only have different values but may see their respective worlds differently.

The same can be said to apply to people who live in cities and people who live in the country. An example is a picture of a dog in a field. A person living in London will look at the picture and describe it as a picture of a dog, but a Welsh farmer may look at the picture and describe it as a picture of some land, whereas someone from North Korea might think of it as today's special.

Cultural differences can be easy to miss, or even misunderstand. In the West, it would be considered discourteous not to look someone in the eye when having a conversation, and yet to do that when talking to Xhosa people in South Africa would be a sign of disrespect – it is more socially correct to avert one's eyes when engaged in conversation. In our culture, we conduct our conversations quietly – in South Africa, the Xhosa conduct a conversation in a loud voice, so that anyone nearby will not think that they are being talked about!

Socio-cultural psychology helps us understand the social and cultural elements that influence interpersonal relationships during social interaction. This means looking at language and expressions of morality. It takes into consideration the importance of the development of personality and attitudes of group behaviour. Socio-cultural psychology makes us aware of the differences and similarities between ourselves and others.

Culture is defined in two parts. The first is purely objective – for example the technological achievements of a society, and the second is subjective – for example the beliefs, values and roles of a society. As an example, one could look at America both objectively and subjectively. Subjectively, America is a nation where religion exerts a strong influence, where the work ethic is held in high regard and where community spirit and family is of pronounced importance. Objectively, America is also a country that has achieved technological success with the invention of things like condensed milk and the Frisbee.

Culture however, is constantly changing – just take a look at our own culture as it appears today compared with that of just a quarter of a century ago! Traditional cultures change much more slowly compared to modern cultures which change rapidly. Cultures that change more rapidly do so mainly as a result of faster communication brought about by increasingly sophisticated technology.

And then there are cultures within cultures, for example, there are the Amish people in North America and the Masai of Tanzania/Kenya, both examples of cultures within a culture.

In many ways, the culture and traditions of the North East of England, where they once hanged a monkey because they thought it was a French spy, differs markedly from that of the South West, where they prefer to drink cider than Newcastle Brown Ale. Other examples would be the Asian communities in cities such as Bradford and Dewsbury in England.

Social Psychology is the study of Interpersonal Relationships. Our perception of others is based on the key characteristics we recognise – for example, warmth and generosity or coolness and aloofness. There are Central Traits to define and describe the more obvious characteristics and features of someone's personality and Peripheral Traits which describe the less obvious features and qualities of a person.

Something called the Halo Effect occurs when we generalise a person's traits. For example, when we perceive a person as good we tend to perceive all their actions as good and may think that they can do no wrong. In the same way, if we perceive a person as bad we may fall into the trap of disliking them whatever they do.

The Primacy Effect is when we discover something about a person early. First impressions count from the moment we first meet a person, based on cues from facial expression, mannerisms, dress and speech.

The Recency Effect is when we discover something about a person later on. 'I always thought he was such a good friend, but that was before he ran off with my daughter...'

Sexual Attraction is one of the strongest forces known to man, second only to compound interest. Sexual attraction is another element in the human survival strategy and it depends on three key factors, the first of which is Compatibility, for example social class, shared interests, education and culture. The second element covers Rewards and Costs, for example status, wealth, energy, ability to reproduce, security, trust, energy, sex and so on.

Third, we refer to Specific Factors, for example physical attraction, familiarity and exposure, reciprocal respect and liking.

Familiarity and exposure is a well used advertising and political campaigning tool. Comfortable familiarity is one of the things that make soap operas such compelling viewing for some people. We can use the concepts of familiarity and exposure as therapy because they help to convince and persuade.

Attitudes are Social Psychology's cornerstone and there is much ongoing research into changing attitudes concerning social control and its relevance to war propaganda, political campaigning and of course advertising, particularly now that people and populations are becoming better informed.

George Orwell's dire warning that 'Big Brother is watching you' has reached fruition, particularly in cities where there is now a camera on every street corner. Residents of the United Kingdom are photographed on average 350 times a day and they can be tracked to within five metres if their mobile phones are switched on.

Our number plates are recorded by cameras on virtually every motorway and facial recognition software can pick us out of a crowd. That's fine if you're in breach of your ASBO, but a little disconcerting when you realise that the privacy of the individual is being eroded at an alarming rate. For the time being, the government has stopped short of installing surveillance cameras in our homes, but don't hold your breath – new laws now make it possible for a variety of officials to have statutory right of entry to your home without warrants... or your permission.

The upside, if there is one, is that we seem to be approaching a watershed moment in all this. With the advent of better means of communication, especially the internet and those same mobile telephones, populations who are motivated to do so such as human rights groups can now watch the watchers. Let us hope they prevail. The biggest problem is that populations may become schooled in resignation.

An attitude can be divided into three aspects. The first is Cognitive – that is, a belief – for example, the belief in a testable scientific principle such as smoking cigarettes causes cancer. The second is Affective and refers to emotional feelings – for example, I hate the smell of cigarettes. The third aspect is Behavioural – the actions taken – for example, I only eat in non-smoking restaurants. I know... this is so blindingly obvious, but then most psychology is once it has been stripped of its technical language!

Attitude Change can be achieved by working on all three aspects, but the most successful is the Affective component.

Working on the affective component, we are really attempting to use individuals' emotions rather than working with the thoughts behind them.

Prejudice is an extreme attitude. It can be a defence mechanism to avoid potential danger, but on the other hand it can lead to irrational and antisocial behaviour. Prejudice reduction can be achieved by concentration on non-competitive contact on an equal footing and by pursuing common goals through co-operation.

Group Behaviour falls into two distinct categories – Conformity, where the influence of the group is strongest, and Obedience, which is when the individual or the group take and follow instructions from a person (a leader) or elite group.

Even small groups can adversely influence individuals because the individual concerned didn't want to cause embarrassment, didn't want to be different or didn't want to be wrong.

This fear of standing out from the group, or 'rocking the boat' has its roots in the survival strategies of early societies and highlights the sheep-like mentality and behaviour of humans. In the main, individuals do not feel comfortable if they sense that they are drawing attention to themselves. This particularly interesting feature of human behaviour has proved very useful when it comes to keeping public order. It is not so powerful a factor as it was say, a century ago when individuals were expected to know their place, but its influence should not be underestimated.

The Nazis fully understood this concept and thus became very adept at control and dominance. Its power is not only understood but is used to great advantage in the competitive world of charismatic Christian healing. No one in charismatic healer Benny Hinn's audience is going to dare to step forward with any words of criticism lest they brave the displeasure of the fanatically Christian crowd.

The Nazis are long gone and these days, again largely due to the changing attitudes of a much more well-informed and educated society, political leaders can no longer get away with having opponents bumped off in the middle of the night – they are now constrained by public scrutiny and forced to content themselves with an expression of mild bewilderment when they become the target of an intelligent and well informed heckle from the crowd, even if it's just for the sake of the cameras.

Conformity and obedience are important components of hypnosis but the power of obedience and the will to obey has to be witnessed to be truly appreciated. Obedience derives from real or perceived authority, control, influence, rule and dominance. The vast majority of people don't ask why the chicken crossed the road. Someone tells them that the chicken crossed the road, and that is usually good enough.

In 1963, psychologist Stanley Milgram carried out a series of fantastic experiments in which ordinary people were recruited and then asked to administer electric shocks to another person every time that person answered a question incorrectly. These experiments were carried out during what the volunteers thought was a real interrogation. Fortunately, the recipient of the electric shocks on the other side of the screen was an actor who shrieked on cue every time the fake shocks were administered, the screams getting louder each time the 'voltage' increased. I have some footage of this and it's absolutely hysterical. The actor plays his part well and at one point ad-libs, shouting, 'You people have no right to keep me here – you have no right to do this – I want to speak to someone in authority!' Nonetheless, the fake shocks continued to be meted out.

Stanley Milgram's experiments confirmed that normal people could be persuaded to do things that they would not ordinarily consent to do, even commit crimes if they associated the act with legitimate authority. Some people even went on to administer the 'lethal' dose, although one suspects that at least some of the participants might have realised there was something fishy going on because of the clinical conditions in which the experiments were being carried out.

Even so, there are associations here of concentration camps and the willing participation of so many Germans in the mass extermination of their fellow Germans. This obedience is known as Compliance.

If confirmation were needed, Leonard Bickman's experiments showed that people were more likely to comply with an order, for example, an instruction to pick up litter, if the person giving that order was wearing a uniform. Again, this experiment has great significance when it comes to our understanding of the tremendous power of authority, real or perceived.

We should look briefly at the value of IQ tests. When it comes to IQ tests, the brilliant psychologist Hans Eysenck said *'the error is to exaggerate the importance of intelligence. The facts and arguments can easily be abused by racists... Each person has to be treated as an individual'*.

Not just racists but anyone with their own dark agenda.

Research shows that improving the environment can dramatically improve the results of IQ tests. This seems to indicate that testing only certain abilities like numeracy and pattern recognition and not other, more practical everyday challenges, such as a person's ability to use a computer, read a musical score or re-spray a BMW in record time, invalidates any useful result. And indeed it does.

This is because different people have different abilities and skills – some have a better ear for music than others who may be much more at home solving mathematical problems or designing equipment that gives electric shocks to criminals. Some people are much better with their hands than others, and IQ tests simply cannot measure this ability. All things considered, IQ tests are no more a reliable indicator of intelligence than the study of Astrology.

Neither are personality tests an accurate indicator of an individual's true personality for the obvious reason that personality too is extremely difficult to define. The concept of personality has also been a focus for the nature versus nurture debate. Carl Gustav Jung developed the concept of Introversion and Extroversion.

Jung also thought about the theory of the Collective Unconscious, a hypothesis which states that we all store in our unconscious minds a series of collective memories that are shared by everyone and these thoughts are inherited from our ancestors. There might be some truth in this... how do spiders learn to spin intricate and complex webs without going to web school? That knowledge simply must be inherited.

The concept of introversion and extroversion was developed further by Hans Eysenck who agreed that these qualities are largely inborn.

Both extroverts and introverts make good hypnotic subjects. The real test is when results for hypnotisability are applied to stable and unstable personalities. As a rule of thumb, those of a more stable disposition get the most from hypnosis because they are able to absorb and assimilate ideas and suggestions in a more rational and positive manner.

Those of a more unstable temperament, particularly the moody, touchy, aggressive types with low levels of serotonin, poor school attendance records and a propensity toward violent acts, make poor hypnotic subjects. Their general outlook is one of conflict and one-upmanship – they consider themselves to be always in the right (know-it-alls) and believe themselves to be smarter than anyone else, especially if that someone else is an authority figure – or therapist of any kind!

Their aggression is habitually employed to mask their lack of intelligence and all too often the only way they can assert themselves is by resorting to fisticuffs. They are strangers to

reasoned argument and their mantra of 'you can't hypnotise me, I'm too strong willed' is a dead giveaway, as are their other favourite sayings, 'we know where you live' and 'are you calling me a liar?' However, because of their natures, these individuals rarely seek out help and are therefore, thankfully, a rarity in the therapy room.

Hypnosis is a valuable tool for therapy because the hypnotic session uses many of the ideas expressed in behavioural psychology as well as humanistic psychology. For example, the concept of reward, where cravings for cigarettes are replaced by better and healthier feelings of confidence, self-assuredness, pride and better health and fitness.

Hypnotherapy concentrates more on the humanistic principle of encouraging the client to turn their back on the past and embrace a more optimistic future.

Ask a hypnotherapist why the chicken crossed the road, he might reply 'why the chicken crossed the road is now immaterial, the chicken is now cured of its habit of crossing roads.'

Of course if you were to ask a stage hypnotist why the chicken crossed the road, he would be more likely to reply 'the chicken crossed the road? I told him not to leave the theatre!'

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