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EDITORIAL

What is behavioural psychotherapy?

We asked a small, unrepresentative sample of B.A.B.P. members to answer this question and very quickly unearthed a diversity of opinion and no real consensus. Some considered behavioural psychotherapy to be characterized by the application of the concepts, discoveries and methodology of all the behavioural sciences to the solution of human problems, whereas others were interested only in psychological concepts and a few stressed only the use of operant techniques in modifying behaviour. Whilst a majority considered theories of learning to be important, others considered them to be either wrong, simple-minded or irrelevant. A few were biased in favour of individual case investigations where treatment emerges as the end result of the controlled experimental approach to the analysis and modification of an individual client's behaviour.

In our opinion learning theories have been crucial throughout the short history of behavioural psychotherapy and will become increasingly important in the future as they are refined and developed by psychologists applying them to human problems. Only psychoanalytical and learning theories have really attempted to come to grips with irrational

behaviours (e.g. phobias, compulsions and addictions), and of these approaches we prefer the latter. If theories of learning are to be applied to human behaviour then of course they must be linked to theories about growth and development, motivation, perception, thinking, personality and social behaviour. All of these areas are being investigated throughout the world by thousands of psychologists and it would be very surprising if this research could not help the behavioural psychotherapist to understand his client.

Some psychologists have tended to contrast behavioural and cognitive approaches. This is not a valid or useful distinction since an experimental psychologist studying cognition (e.g. thinking and problem solving) would naturally adopt a behavioural approach. He would investigate not only a subject's verbal report of his thought processes and cognitive strategies but would also devise a series of tasks to help him observe these strategies in operation. A good example of this approach is to be found in the work of Bruner, Goodnow and Austin. They investigated concept formation by presenting subjects with cards which differed in number and type of symbols displayed, the extent to which they were shaded and the number of borders. The subject had to guess which concept was specified by the experimenter for a particular trial (e.g. shaded crosses). By recording the subject's guess on each presentation Bruner was able to obtain behavioural data on cognitive processes.

We would not call ourselves behaviourists since this term is associated with Watson and Skinner who frown upon the use of intervening variables as explanations of behaviour. In our view psychologists can construct models of the mind or of the conceptual nervous system which can then be validated by behavioural observations, just as the atomic scientist will build up models of the atom which can only be tested indirectly.

So what is behavioural psychotherapy?

In our view a behavioural approach to psychotherapy is characterized by the following biases:-

- (a) A reliance upon the concepts, discoveries and methodology of all the behavioural sciences but especially psychology.
- (b) A strong emphasis on learning theories (broadly conceived) in the analysis and modification of behaviour.
- (c) An emphasis on behaviour change. Of course, this does not mean that verbal behaviour and verbal reports are devalued. The "cured" alcoholic must be able to drink in a controlled way but he must also say that drink is no longer a problem.

Behavioural Psychotherapy is characterised by a "paradigm shift" away from psychoanalytical and medical models. The shift is towards a formulation in terms of the concepts and findings of the behavioural sciences, behavioural psychotherapy itself being an applied science.