## Key Issues in Psychology

Nature vs. Nurture

* How much of our behaviour is due to heredity (nature) and how much is due to environment (nurture)
* Which side you might agree with will depend on which of the psychological perspectives makes the most sense to you
* If you are a developmental psychologist and you are studying how people grow and change over the course of their lives:
  + the biological perspective would have you believe that hereditary influences would be the most important aspect in growth and development (the nature argument)
  + the behavioural perspective will have you believe that the subject’s environment would be more influential in their growth and development (the nurture argument)

Conscious vs. Unconscious Causes of Behaviour

* How much of our behaviour is produced by forces that we are aware of, and how much is due to unconscious activity (mental processes that are not accessible to the conscious mind)
* Very controversial issue in psychology
* If you were a clinical psychologist with a psychodynamic perspective you would argue that much of the abnormal behaviour of your client was motivated by unconscious factors, beyond the control of the client, if you were employing the cognitive perspective, you would argue that the abnormal behaviour is the result of a faulty thinking process
* Each approach would have a significant impact on how that client’s behaviour is diagnosed and treated

Observable Behaviour vs. Internal Mental Processes

* There are some who believe that the only reliable source of information for psychologists is behaviour that can be seen by outside observers (particularly those psychologists who rely on the behavioural perspective)
* A psychologist who relies on the cognitive perspective, would argue that what goes on in the mind of the person is critical, and that we can’t really understand behaviour without examining the mental processes

Free Will vs. Determination

* How much of behaviour is a matter of free will – choices made freely by an individual and how much is a matter of determinism, the idea that behaviour is largely produced by factors beyond an individual’s control?
* This argument is central to the field of psychology
* Some argue that people make intentional choices, and that those people who choose to behave badly or abnormally, should be considered responsible for that behaviour
* Others argue that such individuals who behave abnormally are the victims of forces that are beyond their control and so should not be held accountable for their actions
* This has important implications, as to how to treat abnormal behaviour, and also whether treatment should be forced on someone who rejects it

Individual Differences vs. Universal Principles

* How much of our behaviour is a consequence of our unique and special qualities, and our personality, and how much of our behaviour can we say is a reflection of our culture and the society that we grew up in
* How much of our behaviour is universally human
* Psychologists who rely on the biological perspective look for universal principles of behaviour – behaviours that occur in people from vastly different parts of the world, vast differences in cultures and upbringing
* Humanistic psychologists focus on the uniqueness that each individual brings to the world, every person’s behaviour is a reflection of distinct and special qualities