

## Editorial

### Is behavioural psychotherapy behaviouristic?

At the turn of the century, psychology was defined by William James as the “science of mental life, both of its phenomena and of their conditions. The phenomena are such things as we call feelings, desires, cognitions, reasonings, decisions and the like.” During the last 80 years the pendulum has been swinging, and we have witnessed a number of paradigm shifts, a dozen or more schools of psychology and various approaches to psychotherapy. Watson argued that, for the behaviourist, “psychology is that division of natural science which takes human behaviour – the doings and the sayings, both learned and unlearned – as its subject matter.” Today, however, most psychologists do not accept the radical behaviourist position with its abhorrence of mediating variables and hypothetical constructs. Psychology is now most commonly defined as the scientific study of behaviour *and* experience. “Its subject matter includes behavioural processes that are observable, such as gestures, speech and physiological changes, and processes that can only be inferred such as thoughts and dreams.” The pendulum has swung from the mental to the behavioural, but is now beginning to swing less violently between these two poles.

Since behaviour therapy or behavioural psychotherapy is very closely associated with psychological theory and methodology, it seems likely that the current movement towards cognitive-behavioural therapies will gather steam during the next decade and now is a good time to ask to what extent behavioural psychotherapy is behaviouristic. For example, Erwin has argued very persuasively against metaphysical, analytical and methodological behaviourism and concludes that:

... behaviourism persists within the behaviour therapy framework only as an unjustifiable, *a priori* restriction on what is to count as acceptable scientific research. It once served a useful purpose in so far as it encouraged experimental rigour and discouraged an unbridled mentalism, but it is no longer needed for that purpose. Behaviourism is false and, for that reason, should be rejected; it is time to get behaviourism out of behaviour therapy.

One of the strengths of behavioural psychotherapy is the very detailed analysis of specific actions or behaviours, of antecedents and consequences, of associated attributions and expectations. But focussing upon behavioural measurement and behaviour change does not rule out inferred mentalistic concepts and to this extent, behavioural psychotherapy is not behaviouristic and behavioural therapists are usually not behaviourists.

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