

General Psychology Introduction

These are general notes designed to assist students who are regularly attending class and reading assigned material: they are supplemental rather than exhaustive and reflect general concepts.

I. Definition of Psychology

- A. Literal: "**Study of the Soul**"
- B. Formal: "**Scientific Study of Behavior & Mental Processes**"
- C. Four Main Goals: **Describe, Understand, Predict, and Control or Modify**
- D. Social Science and related to sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science.
- E. Sister Science: Psychiatry - the medical study, diagnosis, treatment & prevention of mental disorders.

II. Brief History (Time - Line presented in class)

- A. Psychology's roots: Philosophy, Medicine, and History
- B. Significant people: Hypocrites, Aristotle, Descarte, John Lock, Benjamin Rush, & Charles Darwin
- C. **Wilhelm Wundt** considered "Father of Psychology"
 - 1. 1st to set up a psychology research laboratory in Leipiz, Germany in 1879.
 - 2. 1st to publish in a reputable scientific journal.
 - 3. **Structuralism** - studied the basic elements of experience (sensations, images, & feelings); Answer the question what?
 - 4. E. B. Titchner - student of Wundt's who popularized Wundt's idea in the United States.
- D. **Functionalism** studied the purpose of behavior - interested in answering the question why?
 - 1. Roots: Charles Darwin - Survival of the Fittest
 - 2. William James & John Dewey integrated Darwin's work - adaptive psychological processes.
 - 3. Forerunner of Evolutionary Psychology
- E. **Gestalt** Psychology - studies how people interpret sensory information to acquire knowledge.
 - 1. gestalt means pattern or configuration
 - 2. "whole is more than the sum of its parts"
 - 3. Forerunner to Cognitive Psychology

III. Current Approaches to Psychology

- A. **Biological** - emphasizes activity of the nervous system (brain, hormones, and neurochemistry)
- B. **Evolutionary** - emphasizes the adaptive processes passed down from one generation to the next
- C. **Psychodynamic** - emphasizes unconscious conflicts, motivations, and desires (Sigmund Freud)
- D. **Behavioral** - emphasizes learning, also called stimulus-response psychology (John B. Watson)
 - 1. **Classical Conditioning** - **Ivan Pavlov** - activation of reflexive responses through association
 - 2. **Operant Conditioning** - **B. F. Skinner** - rewards & punishments
 - 3. **Social Learning** - learn through imitation and observation (**Albert Bandura**)
- E. **Cognitive** - emphasizes mental processes (memory, learning, perception, language, problem - solving)
- F. **Humanistic** - emphasizes potential for growth/**self-actualization** (**Abraham Maslow/Carl Rogers**)
 - 1. **Existentialism** - meaning of existence (**Rollo May**)
 - 2. Both Humanistic & Existentialism emphasize **free - will or freedom of choice**

G. Subfields - Personality, Developmental (focus on human development over life - span), quantitative (focus on analyzing and interpreting mathematical research data), clinical/ counseling (psychological disorders), community (prevent stressful conditions that lead to mental disorders), educational/school (teaching, learning), social/ industrial (affect of social interactions)

H. **Sociocultural Perspective**

1. **Individualism** - personal goals over group goals

*self-serving values

*feeling good personality

*independence may lead to isolation

*personal distinction & recognition

2. **Collectivism** - emphasizes serving the group by subordinating personal goals

*preserve integrity of group

*harmonious relationships

*interdependence of members

*conformity may lead to lack of self-care

IV. **Critical Thinking** - assessing claims and making judgments based on well supported evidence

A. Five main questions form the basis of good critical thinking.

1. What am I being asked to believe or accept?

2. Is there evidence available to support the claim?

3. Can that evidence be interpreted another way?

4. What evidence would help to evaluate the alternatives?

5. What conclusions are most reasonable?

B. Guidelines for Critical Thinking

*Ask questions

*Examine the evidence

*Avoid emotional reasoning

*Consider other interpretations

*Define the problem

*Analyze assumptions & biases

*Don't oversimplify

*Tolerate uncertainty

V. **Research**

A. **Theory** - an organized system of principles that attempts to explain phenomena

Example: **social learning theory** - behavior is learned through observation and imitation of others and is maintained by positive consequences (based on principles of behaviorism)

B. **Hypothesis** - statement that makes a prediction

Example: children learn (aggressive/violent behavior) from (watching television)

DV

IV

C. **Operationally Defined Hypothesis** - clarifies how variables are to be changed, observed, and measured.

Example: Children who watch Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles will hit the "bop bag" more frequently than children who watch Sesame Street

D. Descriptive Methods of Research

E. **Correlational Studies** - shows the strength of relationship between two variables

1. **Positive Correlation** - high values in one variable associated with high values in another (SAT & G.P.A.)

2. **Negative Correlation** - high values in one variable associated with low values in another (Age & Number of hairs on your head)
- F. Experiment - shows cause and effect relationship - researcher controls situation
1. **Independent variable** - manipulated or controlled by experimenter
 2. **Dependent variable** - the reaction of the subjects (numerical value)
 3. Experimental Group
 4. Control Group
 5. **Placebo** - fake treatment
- G. Ethical Issues
1. 8% of psychological research involves animals - 95% of animals used are rodents (white rat).
 2. Animals used because they are interesting and yield useful results that would be unethical to do on humans.
 3. Must respect & protect the dignity & welfare of subjects (including animals).
 4. Must have informed consent for human subjects (all risks revealed to subject).
 5. When using deception subjects must be debriefed about true intent of research.
 6. All demographic or identifying information must be kept confidential.
 7. Report all information about research accurately.
 8. Must perform only the services that you have been trained for.
 9. No conflict of interest or dual relationships with subjects, clients, or students.