The Story of Psychology

Preview

Psychology traces its roots back to Greek philosophers’ reflections on human nature. Psychologists’ initial focus on mental life was replaced in the 1920s by the study of observable behavior. As the science of behavior and mental processes, psychology had its origins in many disciplines and many countries.

Psychology’s most enduring issue concerns the relative contributions of biology and experience. Today, psychologists recognize that nurture works on what nature endows. The biopsychosocial approach incorporates biological, psychological, and social-cultural levels of analysis. Although different perspectives on human nature have their own purposes and questions, they are complementary and together provide a fuller understanding of mind and behavior.

Some psychologists conduct basic or applied research; others provide professional services, including assessing and treating troubled people. With its perspectives ranging from the biological to the social, and settings from the clinic to the laboratory, psychology has become a meeting place for many disciplines.

Mastering psychology requires active study. A survey-question-read-retrieve-review study method boosts students’ learning and performance.

Guide

Introductory Exercise: Fact or Falsehood?

The Preface to these Lecture Guides includes a Fact or Falsehood questionnaire that covers the entire text, with one item from each chapter. If you have not already used it, you may want to do so now as part of your introduction to the discipline and the text as a whole. Alternatively, you may use Handout P–1 on the next page, the Fact or Falsehood exercise that relates only to the material in this Prologue.

**Fact or Falsehood?**

1. Questions about human nature date back to the speculations of the ancient philosopher Aristotle.  
   **T F**

2. Sigmund Freud established the first psychology laboratory at the University of Vienna, Austria.  
   **T F**

3. The science of psychology developed from the more established fields of biology and philosophy.  
   **T F**

4. Psychology is best defined today as the study of mental life.  
   **T F**

5. Psychology is a way of asking and answering questions.  
   **T F**

6. The biggest and most persistent issue in psychology concerns the nature–nurture controversy—that is, the relative contributions of biology and experience to psychological traits and behavior.  
   **T F**

7. Evolution has become an important principle for psychology.  
   **T F**

8. In contrast to sociology and anthropology, contemporary psychology has little interest in how behavior varies across cultures.  
   **T F**

9. Psychology’s different perspectives contradict one another.  
   **T F**

10. Psychiatry is a branch of psychology that involves the assessment and treatment of psychological disorders.  
    **T F**
Guide

Learning Objectives

Every question in the Test Banks is keyed to one of these objectives.

Psychological Science Is Born

P-1. Describe some important milestones in psychology’s early development.

Psychological Science Develops

P-2. Describe how psychology continued to develop from the 1920s through today.

Contemporary Psychology

P-3. Discuss how our understanding of biology and experience, culture and gender, and psychology’s proper focus has shaped contemporary psychology.

P-4. Describe psychology’s three main levels of analysis and related perspectives.

P-5. Identify psychology’s main subfields.

P-6. Explain how psychological principles can help you learn and remember.

What Is Psychology?

Psychological Science Is Born

- Lectures: Psychology’s First Experiments*; History of Psychology; William James—Founding Father of American Psychology
- Exercise: Eminent Psychologists
- Project: Today in the History of Psychology

P-1. Describe some important milestones in psychology’s early development.

Early philosophers, such as Aristotle, theorized about learning and memory, motivation and emotion, perception and personality. Their thinking about thinking continued until Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychological laboratory in 1879 in Leipzig, Germany. He sought to measure the fastest and simplest mental processes. Edward Titchener introduced structuralism, which used introspection—looking inward—to search for the basic elements of the mind. However, self-reports proved somewhat unreliable, varying from person to person and experience to experience. Under the influence of evolutionary theorist Charles Darwin, William James thought it more fruitful to study how consciousness serves a purpose. Thus, functionalism focused on how mental and behavioral processes enable the organism to adapt, survive, and flourish. James also wrote a textbook for the new discipline of psychology. He mentored Mary Whiton Calkins, the first female president of the American Psychological Association and a distinguished memory researcher. Margaret Floy Washburn, who was the first female psychology Ph.D., was the second female president of APA and the author of *The Animal Mind*.

Psychological Science Develops

- Exercise: Psychology as Science (PAS) Scale
- Project: Notable Figures in Psychology
- Project/Exercise: If a Notable Psychology Figure Tweeted
- Project/Lecture: The Twentieth Century’s Most Eminent Psychologists
- Lecture: Freud Audio Recording
- PsychSim 6: Psychology’s Timeline
- LaunchPad: The History of Psychology: Postpartum Depression: The Case of Andrea Yates

*Each of these items appears in the Instructor’s Resources unit titled Introduction to Psychology.
P-2. Describe how psychology continued to develop from the 1920s through today.

Until the 1920s, psychology was defined as the science of mental life. Wundt and Titchener focused on inner sensations, images, and feelings, and James engaged in introspective examination of consciousness and emotion. From the 1920s through the 1960s, American psychologists, led by John Watson and later by B. F. Skinner, both behaviorists, dismissed introspection and redefined psychology as the science of observable behavior. In responding to Freudian psychology and behaviorism, humanistic psychology emphasized our growth potential and the importance of meeting our needs for love and acceptance. In the 1960s, psychology began to recapture its initial interest in mental processes. Cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience explore scientifically the ways we perceive, process, and remember information. Today, psychology is defined as the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Behavior is anything an organism does. Mental processes are the internal subjective experiences we infer from behavior, for example, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.

Psychology developed from the more established fields of philosophy and biology. Its pioneers included Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov, Austrian physician Sigmund Freud, and Swiss biologist Jean Piaget. Like those pioneers, today’s psychologists are citizens of many lands. Psychology is growing and globalizing.

Contemporary Psychology

- Exercises: The Scientific Approach; Self-Assessment on Psychology’s Big Issues; Is Human Nature Fixed or Changeable?
- LaunchPad: Does Self-Confidence Intimidate Others?

P-3. Discuss how our understanding of biology and experience, culture and gender, and human flourishing has shaped contemporary psychology.

Psychology’s biggest and most persistent debate concerns the nature–nurture issue: the controversy over the relative contributions of genes and experience to the development of psychological traits and behavior. Included in the history of this debate is Charles Darwin’s concept of natural selection, which states that among the range of inherited trait variations, those contributing to reproduction and survival in a particular environment will most likely be passed on to succeeding generations. Evolution has become an important principle for twenty-first-century psychology. Evolutionary psychology focuses on how we are alike because of our common biology and evolutionary history, while behavior genetics asks about our diversity as it results from our differing genes and environment.

Today, contemporary science recognizes that nurture works on what nature endows. Our species is biologically endowed with an enormous capacity to learn and adapt. Moreover, every psychological event is simultaneously a biological event.

- Lectures: Differences in Cultural Norms; Systemizing and Empathizing Brains (For more on culture and gender, see Chapter 4 of these Lecture Guides)
- Exercise: Gender Roles

Although culture shapes our specific ideas, attitudes, values, traditions, and behaviors, the principles that underlie them vary much less. Our shared biological heritage unites us as members of a universal human family. Studying gender differences is not only interesting but also potentially beneficial in preventing conflict and misunderstanding in everyday relationships. It is important to remember, however, that women and men are overwhelmingly similar psychologically as well as biologically.

To balance historic psychology’s focus on human problems, researchers have called for more research on human strengths and human flourishing, referred to as positive psychology.
P-4. Describe psychology’s levels of analysis and related perspectives.

The tiered systems that make up the complex human system suggest different levels of analysis: biological, psychological, and social-cultural. Together, these levels form an integrated biopsychosocial approach. Psychology’s varied perspectives therefore complement one another. Someone working from the neuroscience perspective studies how the body and brain work to create emotions, memories, and sensory experiences. 

The evolutionary perspective considers how the natural selection of traits promoted the survival of genes. 

The behavior genetics perspective considers how heredity and experience influence our individual differences. 

The psychodynamic perspective views behavior as springing from unconscious drives and conflicts. 

The behavioral perspective examines how observable responses are acquired and changed. 

The cognitive perspective studies how we encode, process, store, and retrieve information. 

The social-cultural perspective examines how behavior and thinking vary across situations and cultures.

P-5. Identify psychology’s main subfields.

Some psychologists conduct basic research. For example, biological psychologists explore the link between brain and mind, developmental psychologists study our changing abilities from womb to tomb, and personality psychologists investigate our persistent traits. 

Other psychologists conduct applied research. For example, industrial-organizational psychologists study behavior in the workplace and suggest ways of boosting morale and performance. 

Psychology is also a helping profession. Counseling psychology assists people with problems in living and in achieving greater well-being. Clinical psychology involves mental health professionals who study, assess, and treat people with psychological disorders. Psychiatry is a branch of medicine dealing with psychological disorders, which sometimes involves medical treatments as well as psychological therapy. 

Rather than seeking to change people to fit their environment, community psychologists work to create social and physical environments that are healthy for all. 

Psychology relates to many disciplines, by connecting with fields ranging from mathematics to philosophy and by aiding those disciplines.
Improve Your Retention—and Your Grades

Exercise: Eliciting “Metaphors” for Learning and Teaching

P-6. Explain how psychological principles can help you learn and remember.

What helps you learn new material is repeated self-testing and rehearsal of previously studied material, called the testing effect (or retrieval practice effect or test-enhanced learning). To master information, one must actively process it. People learn and remember material best when they put it in their own words, rehearse it, and then review and retrieve it again. SQ3R, an acronym for Survey, Question, Read, Retrieve, and Review, is a study method that encourages active processing of new information. Distributing study time, learning to think critically, processing information actively in class, and overlearning will also boost learning and performance.