

INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY; SCHOOLS OF THOUGHTS IN PSYCHOLOGY. (WEEK 1)

We all use the principles of psychology everyday and probably don't even realize it. When we spank our child for doing something wrong, we are utilizing the learning principle of punishment. When we get nervous right before we have to give that big speech, we are activating our autonomic nervous system. When we talk to ourselves in our heads, telling ourselves to "calm down," "work harder," or "give up," we are utilizing cognitive approaches to change our behaviors and emotions.

"Psychology" comes from the Greek words *psyche*, meaning "mind" or "soul," and *logos*, meaning *word*. It is the scientific study of human and **animal** behavior and mental processes. **Behavior** refers here to easily observable activities such as walking, talking, or smiling. Mental processes, such as thinking, feeling, or remembering, often cannot be directly observed and must be inferred from observable behaviors. For example, one might infer someone is feeling happy when he or she smiles, or has remembered what he or she studied when doing well on an exam. Psychology is a very broad social science with approximately 10 main fields. The major unifying thread running throughout all of this diversity is use of the **scientific method** and the belief that psychological phenomena can be studied in a systematic, scientific way. Psychologists conduct research very much like scientists in other fields, developing hypotheses or possible explanations of certain facts and testing them using various research methods.

The study of psychology has five basic goals:

1. **Describe** – The first goal is to observe behavior and describe, often in minute detail, what was observed as objectively as possible
2. **Explain** – While descriptions come from observable data, psychologists must go beyond what is obvious and explain their observations. In other words, why did the subject do what he or she did?
3. **Predict** – Once we know what happens, and why it happens, we can begin to speculate what will happen in the future. There's an old saying, which very often holds true: "the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior."
4. **Control** – Once we know what happens, why it happens and what is likely to happen in the future, we can exert control over it. In other words, if we know you choose abusive

partners because your father was abusive, we can assume you will choose another abusive partner, and can therefore intervene to change this negative behavior.

5. Improve – Not only do psychologists attempt to control behavior, they want to do so in a positive manner, they want to improve a person's life, not make it worse. This is not always the case, but it should always be the intention.

Major Schools of Thought in Psychology

When psychology was first established as a science separate from biology and philosophy, the debate over how to describe and explain the human mind and behavior began. The first school of thought, structuralism, was advocated by the founder of the first psychology lab, Wilhelm Wundt. Almost immediately, other theories began to emerge and vie for dominance in psychology.

The following are some of the major schools of thought that have influenced our knowledge and understanding of psychology:

Structuralism vs. Functionalism:

Structuralism was the first school of psychology, and focused on breaking down mental processes into the most basic components. Major structuralist thinkers include Wilhelm Wundt and Edward Titchener.

Functionalism was based on studying human psyche through its mental functioning and was heavily influenced by the work of William James. Major functionalist thinkers included John Dewey and Harvey Carr.

Behaviorism:

Behaviorism became the dominant school of thought during the 1950s. Based upon the work of thinkers such as John B. Watson, Ivan Pavlov, and B. F. Skinner, behaviorism holds that all behavior can be explained by environmental causes, rather than by internal forces. Behaviorism is focused on **observable behavior**. Theories of learning including classical conditioning and operant conditioning were the focus of a great deal of research.

Psychoanalysis:

Sigmund Freud was the founder of psychodynamic approach. This school of thought emphasizes the influence of the unconscious mind on behavior. Freud believed that the

human mind was composed of three elements: the id, the ego, and the superego. Other major psychodynamic thinkers include Anna Freud, Carl Jung, and Erik Erikson.

Humanistic Psychology:

Humanistic psychology developed as a response to psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Humanistic psychology instead focused on individual free will, personal growth, and self-actualization. Major humanist thinkers included Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

Gestalt Psychology:

Gestalt psychology is based upon the idea that we experience things as unified wholes. This approach to psychology began in Germany and Austria during the late 19th century in response to the molecular approach of structuralism. Rather than breaking down thoughts and behavior to their smallest element, the gestalt psychologists believed that you must look at the whole of experience. According to the gestalt thinkers, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Cognitive Psychology:

Cognitive psychology is the branch of psychology that studies mental processes including how people think, perceive, remember, and learn. As part of the larger field of cognitive science, this branch of psychology is related to other disciplines including neuroscience, philosophy, and linguistics.

One of the most influential theories from this school of thought was the stages of cognitive development theory proposed by Jean Piaget. You can find more information in this overview of cognitive psychology or learn more about professional options in this field in this cognitive psychology career profile.

Fields of Psychology

There is an astoundingly diverse range of issues with which psychologists are concerned and settings in which American psychologists work. Let's look at the various subfields of psychology, keeping in mind that within each subfield, psychologists can engage in many different activities. Most conduct research, teach, and/or apply psychological principles to the solution of the real life problems of individuals and society. Psychologists in some major subfields within psychology are described in the booklet, "Psychology: Careers in the 21st Century" (APA, 1997, free):

Biopsychologists: take a comparative and ontogenetic perspective in the experimental analysis of basic psychological processes as they relate to the many ways in which animal species adapt, survive, reproduce and evolve.

Child Psychologists: See Child Clinical Psychologists, Developmental Psychologists, School Psychologists, and Social Worker.

Child Clinical Psychologists: have about the same preparation as clinical psychologists; in addition, they have the responsibility of becoming acquainted with the developmental characteristics of preadolescent.

Clinical Psychologists: are concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of psychological disturbances. After graduate preparation in an accredited university or school of professional psychology, supervised postdoctoral experience, and licensure or certification by the state, some clinical psychologists enter independent practice/consulting roles. Others find themselves responsible for a complete range of psychological services in public settings. Their responsibilities range from administering and scoring psychological tests, to engaging in therapy, to supervising the training of graduate students in the delivery of mental health services, to administering a community mental health program. Some clinical psychologists obtain faculty positions in a college or university where they perform research and train graduate students. Others serve as adjunct (or part-time) faculty, while maintaining independent clinical practices. Many serve as consultants. Ph.D. or Psy.D. needed.

Cognitive Psychologists: are concerned with what organisms know and how they come to know it. They study how people perceive objects and events, how they can store past events in memory, how they transform and manipulate knowledge by thinking, and how they analyze their experience to emerge with new and abstract notions.

Community Psychologists: are concerned with the application of concepts, tools and skills from the fields of counseling, guidance and rehabilitation psychology. Community psychologists are trained to counsel, treat and/or refer outpatients and to assist in the development of community resources for their clients.

Counseling Psychologists: are concerned with counseling, teaching, consulting research, and/or administration. In their work, they are particularly concerned with the role of education and work in an individual's functioning, and with the interaction between individuals and the environments in which they live. Typically, counseling psychologists work with normal or moderately maladjusted persons, individually or in groups. This work includes use of traditional counseling interview methods, interest, ability and personality tests, and educational and occupational information. Most counseling psychologists are employed in educational settings and most of those in colleges or universities. A minority are employed in hospitals, (e.g., the VA), community mental health or rehabilitation centers, industry, government, or in private or community counseling agencies.

Developmental Psychologists: are concerned with growth and development from conception through death. All aspects of the animal or human organism (physiological, biological, physical, cognitive, emotional, social, cultural) may be studied.

Educational Psychologists: are concerned with a range of activities from initial design through development and evaluation of both materials and procedures for education and training. Such positions exist in public schools, in the military, in private research and development companies, and in industrial concerns. They may deal with analyzing education and training needs, with developing materials for instruction in various media, with designing the best conditions for instruction, and with evaluating the effectiveness of instructional programs.

Engineering Psychologists: are concerned with designing and using environments and systems with which human beings live and work. Their job is to improve the interaction between people and their environments. They may help design work areas, equipment, and human-machine systems, as well as the training devices, aids, and requirements needed to prepare people to make such systems function. They work in many different settings, such as the aerospace industry, communications and transportation industries, the military, and other governmental, commercial and industrial enterprises.

Experimental Psychologists: a general title applied to a variety of psychologists who are trained in designing and conducting research in specific basic areas like learning, sensation and perception, human performance, and motivation and emotion. A research oriented doctoral degree (Ph.D.) is usually needed.

Health or Medical Psychologists: are concerned with understanding how psychological factors can affect physical health. Some representative issues: how certain attitudes and behaviors may cause heart disease; how the state of physical health affects one's psychological well-being; and how living with cancer can affect one's attitude and behavior. They also study the psychology of how people can better cope with physical disease

Industrial / Organizational Psychologists: are concerned with the relation between individuals and work. They are employed in business and industry, in government, and in colleges and universities, and may perform a variety of jobs. An industrial/organizational psychologist working in industry may study how work is organized; suggest changes to improve the satisfaction of employees, the quality of the organization's services, and productivity; consult with management on the development of effective training programs for employees; design programs for the early identification of management potential; administer career counseling and preretirement counseling programs; develop affirmative action programs; recommend changes in job definition; design a system of performance evaluation. A master's degree in industrial/organizational psychology is a minimum requirement for a position as a psychological associate but a position as a psychologist requires a Ph.D.

Personnel Psychologists: Compared to industrial/organizational psychologists, personnel psychologists focus more specifically on the hiring, assignment, and promotion of employees. Such a psychologist may be involved in the continued development and validation of assessment tools for selection, placement, classification and promotion of employees. Although positions as test administrators and interviewers are available for those with B.A.'s and M.A.'s, a Ph.D. is a general prerequisite for a position as a psychologist.

Psycholinguists: are concerned with discovering the psychological significance of the properties of language, of linguistic organization, the meaning of words, syntax and how children acquire language.

Psychometric (Quantitative) Psychologists: are directly concerned with the measurement of behavior (mostly through the use of tests) and the design of research investigations. Such a psychologist may be analyzing complex sets of data; designing, developing pilot testing, or validating versions of intelligence, personality, or aptitude tests; or deriving new statistics with which to analyze data. The psychometric psychologist is typically well-trained in mathematics, statistics, and in the programming and use of computers.

Psychotherapists: A very broad term. Generally, anyone can call him or herself a "Psychotherapist", but **ONLY** a person with a Ph.D. in Psychology and a license can use the term "Psychologist". Psychotherapists can include anyone without a Ph.D. who tries to help people deal with their problems. Counselors and Social Workers are psychotherapists, but **not** Psychologists.

School Psychologists: are concerned with increasing the effectiveness of schools in improving the intellectual, social and emotional development of children. They may also serve as consultants in education for the handicapped, mentally disturbed or mentally retarded; or in developing special programs in adult education. They typically function in various roles within the school system. They may assist in implementing and evaluating special education programs, may serve as leaders of in-service training programs for teachers, or as consultants to teachers regarding specific teaching or classroom related problems. They may also help to treat children's psychological and educational problems that influence problems in school. They may also administer tests and interpret their results. An M.A. and certification by the State Board of Education are generally required, and a Ph.D. may be required for supervisory positions.

Social Psychologists: study the ways in which the social context affects the behavior of the individual and groups in the real world and the laboratory. Social psychologists focus on topics such as social roles, attitude formation and change, affiliation, interpersonal attraction and interaction, conformity, and group processes