

Unit 1: History and Approaches

I. Introduction

- A. People have brains—the most complex thing known in the universe.
- B. People have minds—*non*-physical but undoubtedly real.
- C. People are naturally interested in other people and in what goes on in our minds.

II. Psychology's roots

- A. Buddha, Confucius, and Hebrew scholars philosophized on the mind in a broad sense.
- B. The ancient Greeks philosophized on the mind as well.
 1. Socrates and Plato used logic to decide that the mind is separate from the body and that knowledge is innate (born with us).
 2. Aristotle disagreed and said knowledge comes from observing experiences.
- C. Little happened through the Dark Ages until the Renaissance (1500s) that awakened people.
 1. In the 1600s, **Rene Descartes** agreed with Socrates' and Plato's ideas. He was interested in how the physical body and *non*-physical mind work together. Trying to figure out the body-mind connection, he dissected animals to view their brains and nerves.
 2. At the same time, **Francis Bacon** used the scientific method to conduct experiments. For this, he's known as a father of modern science.
 3. **John Locke** wrote that people are born with minds that are a "blank slate" (*tabula rasa*). Everything we know has been learned since then. This is the birth of modern "**empiricism**" – knowledge comes from experiences. Locke then agreed with Bacon: we must use experiments.
- D. The birth of the modern science of psychology
 1. **Wilhelm Wundt** created the first psychology lab in Germany in 1879. In the "first" psych experiment, Wundt measured the time it took people to hit a switch as soon as they heard and perceived a sound.
 2. Psychology soon branched into early approaches or schools of thought...
 - a. Structuralism - below.
 - b. Functionalism - below.
 - c. Behaviorism - below.
 - d. Gestalt psychology - the whole is greater than the individual parts.
 - e. Psychoanalysis - Freud's idea that childhood and the unconscious drives a person's behavior.
 3. **Structuralism**
 - a. Wundt's student **Edward Bradford Titchener** was the first structuralist.
 - b. Structuralism is interested in the structure of the mind.
 - c. To figure out the structure, Titchener encouraged introspection (looking inward).
 - i. His subjects looked at items, like a rose, (or listened or smelled something) then reported sensations, feelings, etc.
 - ii. Introspection had problems: (1) it was unreliable, (2) people often don't know what or why they feel what they feel.
 - iii. In essence, introspection was wishy-washy. We need something *objective* (measurement using numbers) and not *subjective* (people's feelings). Introspection and structuralism began to fizzle out.

4. Functionalism

- a. **William James** started functionalism.
- b. Functionalism was interested in the functions of things – the function of the nose, the brain, etc.
 - i. James was influenced by Charles Darwin's evolution theory. James thought the nose adapted itself to smell because that helped us survive.
 - ii. James' actual ideas were also a bit wishy-washy, like the structuralists.
- c. James' greatest achievement was likely the psych lab that he set up.
- d. James allowed a woman, **Mary Calkins**, to enter the Harvard grad school.
 - i. A woman in the school was a social shocker. Harvard would not grant her the Ph.D. she'd earned.
 - ii. She went on to study memory and become the first female president of the APA (American Psychological Association).
 - iii. **Margaret Floy Washburn** earned the first Ph.D. for a woman and was the 2nd female APA president. Because of her gender, she was not allowed to join the organization of experimental psychologists.

III. Psychological science develops

- A. Since the 1920s, psychology has organized itself into different approaches.
- B. **Psychology** could broadly be defined as the scientific and systematic study of people's behavior and mental processes.
 1. "Scientific and systematic" refers to the scientific method (experiments) and to a logical, orderly way to gather and analyze information.
 2. "Behavior" refers to something observable, like laughing or fidgeting one's hands.
 3. "Mental processes" refers to the biology of thinking, analysis, judgments, and to the subjective (internal things like feelings, perceptions, beliefs).

IV. Psychology's biggest question

- A. The **nature-nurture issue** is likely psych's biggest question. It asks, "Which influences a person the most, their heredity and biology (nature) or their upbringing and surroundings (nurture)?"
 1. This is like Socrates & Plato (innate knowledge) vs. Aristotle & Locke (*tabula rasa*).
- B. **Charles Darwin** believed in a mix of innate and *tabula rasa*.
 1. After viewing variations amongst species, Darwin developed the theory of evolution - from chance genetic mutations, he theorized that nature selects those traits that best allow a species to reproduce and survive.
 2. Darwin would see the nature-nurture mix in things like a polar bear's white coat (nature) or a girl's flirty ways to get a boy's attention (nurture).
- C. The answer to the question is, of course, both. Nature gives us what we've got, but we have the power and ability to nurture things from there.

V. Psychology's three main levels of analysis

- A. Today there's what's known as the **biopsychosocial approach** to understanding behavior. The idea is that all three components influence behavior and thinking. The approach encompasses (1) biological, (2) psychological, and (3) socio-cultural influences.
- B. From the biopsychosocial approach we get the **major approaches of psychology**. Below are the modern approaches of psychology (AKA "perspectives" or "schools" of psych), major people, and the general idea for each.
 1. **Biological** – Olds, Sperry – The body and brain are the dominant influences of behavior and thinking.

2. **Evolutionary** – Darwin – Nature selects traits that allow a species to survive.
3. **Psychodynamic** – Freud – The unconscious drives peoples' behavior.
4. **Behavioral** – Watson, Skinner – Behavior is due to reinforcement, like rewards and punishment.
5. **Cognitive** – Piaget, Chomsky – Focuses on how we store, process, and use information, like a computer.
6. **Humanistic** – Rogers, Maslow – Environmental influences, especially love and acceptance, determine if we become all we can in life.
7. **Socio-cultural** – no one person – Behavior and ideas are different depending on the culture.

VI. Psychology subfields

- A. Psychology is broader and perhaps more difficult to pin down than other sciences, like physics or biology.
- B. There are many, many branches of psychology and types of psychologists, including...
 1. Psychometrics – the study of our abilities, attitudes, and traits.
 2. Biological psychologists – studying the link between the brain and mind.
 3. Developmental psychologists – who study our changes from birth to death.
 4. Educational psychologists – who study teaching and learning.
 5. Personality psychologists – who study our traits.
 6. Social psychologists – who study how we interact in groups.
 7. Industrial-organizational psychologists – who advise businesses on how to improve workers and increase efficiency.
 8. Counseling psychologists – help people deal with issues in their lives.
 9. Clinical psychologists – treat disorders.
 10. **Psychiatrists** are a bit different. They are *medical* doctors (M.D.s) and thus can prescribe medicine to treat biological disorders.
- C. Psychologists, or people with psychological training, work in a very wide range of professions.