Chapter 1 – What is Psychology

Section 1 – Why study psychology

Focus – how are behavior and mental processes different

What are some basic goals and how is it a science?

**Behavior and Mental Processes**

Psych – is the study of human behavior and mental processes. Behavior is action while mental processes are cognitive activities such as dreams, perceptions, thoughts and memories.

Psychologists also look at emotions. Since emotions are not something that can be seen or measured, researchers use psychological constructs to learn about human behavior.

**Goals**

The main goal is to observe, describe, explain, predict and control the events they study – which allows the clients to control their own behavior. The goal of controlling behavior is why some people question psychology. Some think that this allows the psychologist to have the person behave as they want to, but in reality its all about helping the person achieve their own goals.

**Psychology as a Science**

It is a social science but has foundations in the natural sciences because it looks at the functioning of the brain. They use the scientific method while completing their research and conduct experiments, analyze data, and draw conclusions the same way that the natural scientists do.

The most common methods that psychologists use is the survey and the experiment. Psychologistis will focus on humans but also animals. The belief is that by looking at the biological functions of certain animals and doing tests that would be unethical on humans, they can take what they learn and apply it to human learning.

All the research is organized into theories – or a statement that attempts to explain why things are the way they are and why they happen the way they do. They go over principles or basic truths or laws. A useful theory allows you to predict behavior and mental processes.

**Section 2 – What Psychologists Do**

**Focus –** What are some of the major field in psychology and how do specialists in some applied fields of psychology serve people’s needs?

**Major Fields in Psychology**

There are several different type of psychologists. They all have the same goals – but their focus is different.

Clinical – these are the largest group of psychologists and what most people think of when they think of a psychologists. They help with psychological problems ranging from depression to schizophrenia. They help them overcome problems and adjust to the demands of their lives. They are trained to use interviews and tests to determine/diagnose the psychological problems. They work in a variety of settings from hospitals to private practice. Clinical psychologists are not psychiatrists. The main difference is that psychiatrists can prescribe medication.

Counseling – generally work with people who have adjustment problems rather than psychological disorders.

School – identify and help students who have problems that interfere with learning. They can make recommendations for placements

Educational – They focus on course planning and instructional methods for an entire school system rather than individual students. They deal with theoretical issues that relate to measurement of abilities, learning, and child and adolescent behavior. They also help create educational tests like the SAT

Developmental – study changes that occur through the lifespan of a person that include emotional, physical, cognitive, and social changes. They also look at the importance of heredity or the nature side of the nature nurture debate.

Personality – identify human characteristics or traits. They also look at the origins of the psychological disorders.

Social – look at behavior in social settings. They focus on external causes of behavior – so they focus more on the nurture side of the debate.

Experimental – conduct research into the basic processes looking at the biological and psychological reasons for cognitive activities. Most types of psychologists can do experiments – but they don’t apply what they experiment on. They tend to do basic research – meaning they do it just for its own sake, not to apply it to anything in particular.

Applied Fields - there are several specialties in psychology.

Industrial and Organizational – they look at work and the behavior of people in organizations. Their focus is to increase worker output.

Human Factors – look at the best way to design products for people to use.

Community – study and create social systems that promote and foster individual well being. They look to promote change in the social environment, help powerless social groups.

Forensic – working with the criminal justice system about the competence of the defendants

Health – look at how behavior and mental processes are related physical health.

Rehabilitation – work with those that are struggling with a disability to overcome it.

Cross cultural – study behaviors and mental processes under different cultural conditions. For instance they look at how different cultures deal with depression.

**Section 3 – History of Psychology**

**Focus – What were some early views and beliefs about human behavior? Who were some of the pioneers of psychology? What modern developments in psychology have dominated must of the 20th century?**

**Early Views and Beliefs**

Ancient Greece – this started with Socrates, a philosopher whose focus was to “know thyself”. This continues to be an important aspect of psychology. The focus is on introspection or reflecting upon yourself so that you can learn about yourself.

The next development came with Aristotle. He outlined the laws of associationism – which is that experiences often remind us of similar experiences in the past. He wrote Peri Psyches – about the mind – He used the scientific method and argued that human behavior is subject to certain rules just like the rest of the world.

Hippocrates who lived previous to Aristotle and the same time as Socrates was the first to believe that the problems were causes by abnormalities in the brain and had a rational explanation.

The Middle Ages – the above thinking was lost during this time period. Psychological problems were the result of being possessed by demons.

**Pioneers in Psychology**

Wilhelm Wundt – is considered to be the founder of psychology. He opened his first lab in 1879. He founded a school of thought known as structuralism. They wanted to find the basic elements of consciousness. He broke consciousness down into objective sensations – the things that reflect the outside world and subjective feelings – our emotional responses and mental images. The belief was that combing the two is how the human mind functioned.

William James – he disputed Wundt and said that conscious experience couldn’t be broken down and said that experience is continuous like a stream of consciousness. He focused on the relationship between experience and behavior – writing the book The Principles of Psychology – considered to be the first text book. He was the founder of functionalism. The focus was how mental processes helped organisms adapt to their environment. It relied on behavioral observation – not just introspection. They looked at the purpose of the behavior not the structure that caused it. They thought adaptive behavior patterns are learned and maintained because they are successful.. At first you need a lot of attention, but through repetition it becomes automatic.

Sigmund Freud – He is one of the most famous of the early psychologists and introduced psychoanalysis that looks at the importance of the unconscious motives and internal conflicts in determining and understanding human behavior. His resarach was not done in a lab, but through talking with clients which is why it is known as the talking cure. The theory is sometimes called psychodynamic thinking assumed that most of what exists in an individuals mind is unconscious and consists of conflicting impulses, urges and wishes. Behavior is all about satisfying these urges/desires.

**Modern Developments**

Watson and Behaviorism – though studying consciousness was pointless and unscientific. Its private and only known to the individual. For psychology to be a natural science it had to be based on things you could observe and measure and the only thing you could do that with was behaviors. So behaviorism was born which means the scientific study of behavior. He believed that he could make anyone into anything which led to the belief that regardless of who we thing we really are inside, we can be totally conditioned by external events. So individual choice is just an illusion.

Skinner and Reinforcement – he was a behaviorist that added the step of reinforcement saying that when reinforcement is in place, the animal will repeat the behavior. He, like Watson, believed it was unscientific to study personalities and feelings. Thinking is behaving.

Gestalt School – this was an alternative of behaviorism. Gestalt – means shape or form. It is based on he idea that our perceptions of objects are more than the sums of their parts. Rather they are wholes that give shape or meaning to the parts. They reject structuralists belief that consciousness can be broken down into parts. They also believe that learning is purposeful and active not mechanical. Insight is the sudden appearance of the Gestalt or form that enables the individual to see the solution.

**Section 4 – Contemporary Perspectives**

**Focus: What is the role of biology in behavior and survival? What roles does the mind play in determining behavior? How does the role of experience affect behavior? What factors influence the biopsychosocial perspective?**

Today there are few psychologists that would identify solely as following the above perspectives. Instead new ideas have emerged.

**The Role of Biology** – two persepctives look at this role

Biological Perspective – emphasizes the influence of biology on behavior. Its roots are in associationism. Everything is made possible by our nervous system and in particular the brain. They look for the connections between the two. They look at the influence of hormones and genes.

Evolutionary Perspective – looks at the evolution of behavior and mental processes. Much of this is a spin off of Darwin’s theory of evolution that the most adaptive organism is the one that will survive. So people learn to act a certain way to survive.

**The Role of the Mind**  many others are intrigued by the mind and look to see is influence.

The Cognitive Perspective – they look at the influence of thoughts. Focusing on how things are perceived, problems solved, and dream. For the most part it is talking about the mind. Its roots are in Socrates and Know Thyself and the method of introspection. Behavior is influenced by values, perceptions and choices.

Humanistic – stresses the capacity of self-fulfillment and the importance of consciousness, self awareness, and the capacity to make choices. Consciousness is the force that shapes human personality. It views people as basically good and desiring to be helpful to others.

Psychoanalytic Perspective – stresses the influence of unconscious forces on human behavior. Those who follow it today, focus more on conscious choice than unconscious sexual desires and urges.

**The Role of Experience**

The learning perspective looks at the effects of experience on behavior. The issue comes up with the fact that learning means different things to different groups. In behaviorism, learning is not a conscious choice, but a reaction to their learning histories and the influence of their situations. Social learning theory believes that people can change their environment or create new ones and that people can learn intentionally by observation. For the most part those that follow this perspective believe that behavior is learned either from direct experience or by observing other people.

The Sociocultural perspective looks at the influences of ethnicity, gender, culture, and socio economic status on behavior and mental processes.

**The Biopsychosocial Perspective**

This is kind of a catch all – they believe that mental processes are influenced by the interaction of a biological process, psychological dispositions, and social factors. This is actually an old view, but was brought to light again by George Engel in relation to heart health. There is a biological reason for an ailing heart, but your diet and exercise, stress levels also play a part.