Course Learning Outcomes for Unit I

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Relate the historical development of the field to its current form.
   1.1 Explain the circumstances under which the first psychological laboratory was established.
   1.2 Compare the three early psychologies of structuralism, functionalism, and psychoanalysis, and identify the major thinkers who promoted each of these schools of thought.
   1.3 Identify four major perspectives in psychology.

2. Differentiate among research methodologies used in the field of psychology.
   2.1 Summarize the kinds of research that experimental, educational, developmental, industrial, and psychometric psychologists might conduct.
   2.2 Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using case studies and observational methods as a means of data collection.
   2.3 Describe the advantages and limitations of using surveys in data collection.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 1:
What is Psychology?

Chapter 2:
How Psychologists Do Research

Unit Lesson

Chapter 1: What is Psychology?

Psychology, pseudoscience, and popular opinion: Psychology is a diverse field in which many theories are present. According to Wade, Tavris, and Garry (2014), psychology is a specific discipline that seeks to understand mental processing and human behaviors. Psychologists study the internal and external processing of various stimuli and the effects on the organism’s mental and physical state. Many forms of pseudoscience, including psychics and astrologers, seek to compare with psychology. However, psychology is distinguished by its usage of empirical evidence. Although many forms of psychobabble are seemingly tempting due to the natural appeal to various beliefs and prejudices, the authors purport that psychology provides evidence by which to often challenge assumptions and ideologies.

Thinking critically and creatively about psychology: As you read Chapter 1, you will begin to gain critical-thinking skills. By thinking critically, one can evaluate research findings on various psychological issues. In order to think critically, the authors posit that the individual must seek to answer questions, examine the evidence, carefully analyze biases, avoid reasoning grounded in emotions, bypass oversimplification, contemplate various alternatives, and permit uncertainties which may exist.

Psychology’s past: from the armchair to the laboratory: Chapter 1 discusses the various viewpoints from forerunners of psychology including Wilhelm Wundt, Edward Titchener, William James, Wolfgang Kohler, and Sigmund Freud. The authors of the text ascertain that many of the roots for psychology today can be traced back to the work of Freud and his theory of psychoanalysis. Freud postulated that many unconscious thoughts are grounded in various emotional and mental problems experienced by the individual.

Psychology’s present: the four perspectives of psychological science: There are four dominant perspectives in modern psychology today: biological, learning, cognitive, and sociocultural. Each approach seeks to answer various questions about the behavior of humans. The authors further explain other
movements that do not fall into the above categories yet have impacted the field as well. These include feminist and humanist psychology. Each perspective seeks to explain human behaviors in a unique way.

**What psychologists do:** Psychologists today hold a myriad of occupations. Some serve as professors and mental-health providers while others conduct research in either basic or applied psychology. Many psychologists perform the role of practitioner. They often counsel individuals seeking to solve daily issues and conflicts.

**Biology, culture, and psychology:** Most psychologists today embrace more than one school of thought in regards to psychology. The authors describe this as “crossing the border” (Wade et al., 2014). This trend is often reinforced by the growing interest in cultural and biological influences today. The overarching theme is to embrace the crucial element of empirical evidence that makes psychology the science it is today.

Chapter 2: How Psychologists Do Research

**What makes psychological research scientific?** It is inherently important to understand scientific methods within psychological parameters. The writers purport the importance of embracing research methods that will sift foundational conclusions from various, groundless beliefs. By examining diverse research methods, one can begin to improve his or her critical thinking about psychological disputes. Scientists make a concerted effort to practice effective research techniques. They formulate hypotheses and draft concise predictions. They are not gullible beings that believe all claims. These researchers rely on empirical evidence and avoid biases. The research methods of these individuals are open to public scrutiny, and their findings can effectively be replicated. Peer review is an integral portion of the process and provides the proper sense of balance.

**Descriptive studies: establishing the facts:** In a perfect world, researchers would always utilize representative samples when conducting studies so that the larger population could be properly studied. However, due to various reasons, researchers are often forced to embrace convenience samples. When doing such, the data must be interpreted with extreme caution. In descriptive studies, behaviors are predicted and described. These can include case studies, observational studies, psychological testing, and surveys.

**Correlational studies: looking for relationships:** Correlational studies are a type of descriptive study in which the relationships between two variables are examined. It is important to remember that not all correlations are based on supported data. Although correlational studies are helpful in making predictions, they do not necessarily determine causality.

**Experiments: hunting for causes:** Experimental research seeks to identify cause and effect relationships via controlled efforts. In these studies, independent variables are manipulated while measuring the effects on dependent variables. Participants are assigned to either control or experimental groups. Placebos are often given to the control group during treatment efforts. In an effort to keep the results from being influenced, single-blind and double-blind procedures are often embraced to eliminate biases.

**Evaluating the findings:** Descriptive statistics are utilized to summarize the data gathered. Such statistics used are the mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics are implemented as well. Both assist in making research findings significant and meaningful. It is imperative that one does not go beyond the facts of the data when interpreting the results. Often, hypotheses must be tested in various ways. This can include cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

**Keeping the enterprise ethical:** Researchers are bound by various codes of ethics to ensure respect and dignity for participants. It is important to obtain informed consent from participants in a study. The researcher must seek to protect these individuals from harm and make them abreast of any potential dangers associated with the experiment. Morality guidelines have been implemented to protect individuals as well. For many years, various debates have ensued over the usage of animals for various psychological studies. Regulations have been established to govern treatment practices and care of this population.

**Taking psychology with you:** It is important to remember that although statistics assist scientists in evaluating human behaviors, they can often be misrepresented, misused, and misconstrued.
Wade et al (2014) argue that certain efforts must be embraced to avoid these errors. Critical and scientific thinking must be embraced when examining various psychological findings.

References


Suggested Reading

Click here to access the Chapter 1 PowerPoint Presentation. Click here for the PDF version.

Click here to access the Chapter 2 PowerPoint Presentation. Click here for the PDF version.

The following three psychology articles are found within the General OneFile database located in the CSU Online library. The articles discuss the topics of phrenology, psychoanalysis, and social psychology. These three topics are vitally important to the history of psychology as they helped to form the basis of psychological research. Research has changed drastically, and psychological research may not exist today if more than 100 years ago pioneering individuals had not stepped forward and began researching the human psyche.

Phrenology:

Psychoanalysis:

Social Psychology:

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

Quiz

1. Psychology is defined as the discipline concerned with:
   a. the study of all physical stimuli that affect human sensations and perceptions.
   b. behavior and mental processes and how they are affected by an organism’s physical state, mental state, and external environment.
   c. the study of humankind and the importance of culture in explaining the diversity in human behavior.
   d. maladaptive human behaviors and cognitions that are incorporated into a person’s self-worth during childhood.

2. Which modern psychological perspective focuses on how people reason, remember, understand language, and solve problems?
   a. Learning perspective
   b. Cognitive perspective
   c. Sociocultural perspective
   d. Psychodynamic perspective

3. The first person to announce that he intended to make psychology a science was:
   a. William James.
   b. Joseph Gall.
   c. John Locke.
   d. Wilhelm Wundt.
4. Which of the following is an example of a positive correlation?
   a. Height and weight
   b. Average income and shoe sizes
   c. Average income and the incidence of dental disease
   d. School grades and number of hours spent playing video games

5. Which variable does an experimenter manipulate when conducting experimental research?
   a. Control variable
   b. Confounding variable
   c. Independent variable
   d. Dependent variable

6. Which of the following is an advantage of case studies?
   a. Case studies produce a more detailed picture of an individual than other methods do.
   b. The information produced in a case study is easy to interpret.
   c. Data collected during a case study can be easily generalized to other individuals.
   d. Case studies are less susceptible to researcher bias than other methods.

7. Which of the following is true regarding the use of non-human animals in psychological research?
   a. They must give informed consent before being used.
   b. They are no longer used in psychological research.
   c. Federal regulations governing their housing and care have been strengthened.
   d. The APA objects to their use.

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Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.