Module 1: A Brief History of Psychology

Dr. Ferguson

Thought Question: Do the four approaches to psychology discussed in this really matter, or are they just abstract academic exercises with no real meaning?

Psychology: The Science of Behavior and Mental Processes

- Key terms:
  - Stimulus
  - Response/Behavior
  - Brain
  - Mind

Alternative Perspectives

1. Psychoanalysis: Our beginnings

  Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)
Core idea: the human mind consists of 3 components: Id, Ego & Superego. These components are largely unconscious and are continually in conflict with each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superego</th>
<th>No! No! No! Shame on you for even thinking of that!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>Let's work this out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Id</td>
<td>Gimme! Gimme! Gimme NOW!</td>
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Adult behavior reflects the ways the child found to deal with the anxiety produced by those conflicts. For example, defense mechanisms like regression or displacement.

Why do people sometimes misbehave? Adult problems can be traced back to early issues, mostly involving parents, that the adult has no conscious memory of. These lead to imbalances between the Id, Ego and Superego, and also to the Ego adopting bad strategies for working out conflicts between the Id and Superego.

- Ex: the abusive spouse
- Ex: the conflicted gay congressman who publically champions strong anti-gay legislation and takes part in anti-gay rallies.
- Ex: the sexually inhibited survivor of rape who claims to remember nothing about the event

How to deal w/ adult problems? Psychoanalysis (aka, 'The Talking Cure')

Key contributions:
- unconscious forces have a major impact on our thoughts and actions
- early childhood experiences continue to shape us for a lifetime
- the true causes of many adult behaviors are not understood by the individual.
- psychoanalysis

2. Behaviorism: America's response to Freud (1911 - 1960s)
- Core idea: observable behavior is all there is...no underlying, hidden psychological forces are needed to explain human behavior. The infant is a blank slate and the environment...
completely determines who that infant becomes. If you can control the environment in which a person or animal exists, you can control his behavior.


Here's a good summary of his basic idea: "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors." Behaviorism (1930)


Focus on rewards and punishments from the environment: Skinner would have argued that you could get those dozen infants to become doctors, lawyers, beggar-men or thieves by carefully arranging the kinds of rewards and punishments that are given for particular behaviors.

Adult problems are nothing more than maladaptive behaviors that have been rewarded, along with more desireable behaviors that have not been rewarded strongly enough. The solution: change the reward structure in the person’s environment.

- Ex: the 3-yr old with temper tantrums
- Ex: the college student who parties instead of studying
- Ex: the business executive who defrauds her employer

○ Key contributions:

- Psychologists must only study things that can be directly observed and objectively recorded.

- A person's observable behavior...what we can see on the surface... is all we need to know about the person

- Behavior is a product of the individual's environment. Behavior is changed by changing the rewards and punishments the person experiences.

3. Cognitive Psychology: because surface behavior isn't enough. (1960s - today)

○ Cognition: the contents and activity of the mind.

○ Core idea: The person receives, evaluates and remembers events in their world, and then chooses how to act. The focus is on the mental processes (perceptions, memory, attention, etc.) by which we process information and then make decisions.
Mental processes can be studied scientifically:
- effects of study time on memory
- push a button each time this figure changes:

Adult problems are caused by incorrect understandings of the world or inappropriate values, and are changed by helping the person adjust those understandings and values.
- Ex: abusive parents (modeling).
- Ex: the racist who fears all people who look different from him (belief system)
- Ex: the anorexic teenager (body image and peer pressure)

Key contributions:
- Our observable behavior is caused by mental processes, so those mental processes should be of central interest to psychologists.
- Mental processes can be studied scientifically, even though they can’t be directly observed.
- Behavior is changed by helping the person understand and think about the world differently.

- Core idea #1: mental processes like memory or emotions are simply our subjective experience of the workings of the brain, so study the brain.
- Core idea #2: use the mental processes from cognitive psychology as guides to look for corresponding activity in the brain.
- Adult problems represent changes in the structure or function of the brain.
  - Ex: depression (serotonin, acetylcholine and dopamine)
  - Ex: antisocial personality disorder (amygdala & genetics)
  - Ex: eating disorders (serotonin and dopamine)
- Ex: violent behavior (frontal lobe)

- Key contributions:
  - All behavior, and all mental processes, are really brain processes, so that's where you should look for explanations of all things psychological.
  - New imaging techniques are allowing us to actually observe activity in the normal brain as it functions.
  - Abnormal behavior is caused by abnormal brain structure or function (chemistry).

So, Who's right? The elephant analogy.

[Learning Check]

### Individual Activity: Explaining Behavior.

20 points

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. <strong>Goal of the Activity</strong>: to demonstrate your understanding of the basic psychological perspectives.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>The Situation</strong>: Identify an example in which a person you know (friend, relative, yourself) has acted in a way that seems harmful or counterproductive. Then, select ANY THREE of the alternative perspectives and explain why that behavior might have occurred, using the concepts from each perspective.</td>
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<td>3. <strong>To be submitted</strong>:</td>
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<td>- A detailed description of the harmful/counterproductive behavior.</td>
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<td>- 150-200 word analyses of that behavior from EACH of the three perspectives you have chosen (450-500 words total). For each perspective, you should: a) explain the possible origin of the behavior, and b) recommend how to change the behavior.</td>
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