

Psychology Outline

1. While the questions that psychologists have focused on have been asked for centuries, it was only in the late 19th century that they were given a scientific focus that allowed us to understand and predict human behavior.
2. Early approaches
 - a. Wilhelm Wundt, the first man to test behavior rigorously (under controlled conditions) created introspection, which attempted to examine consciousness layer by layer. While it was rigorous, it was inconclusive.
 - b. A slightly more promising approach came from psychoanalysis, which attempted to examine the mind, including non-rational elements, such as desires
 - c. While it can be credited for identifying the unconscious and mechanisms such as repression, it too suffered from an inability to describe behavior objectively
3. Behaviorism
 - a. By the 1940's these inward-looking or introspective approaches had been abandoned
 - b. Psychology moved in exactly the opposite behavior—it was to base its conclusions solely on observable behavior, with no inferences permitted
 - c. Basic principles of behaviorism
 - a. All behavior is observable
 - b. All behavior is the result of out interaction with our environment through the mechanisms of
 - i. Reinforcement
 - ii. Punishment
 - c. There is no discussion of mind, thinking or reasoning
 - d. Strengths of behaviorism
 - i. It restricted itself to what could be seen and measured
 - ii. It explained basic human actions and reaction very well via reinforcement and punishment
 - iii. It was very effective at modifying many types of behavior—smoking, overeating, bad habits
 - e. Limitations of behaviorism
 - i. Not all behaviors seem to be a direct result of reinforcement or punishment
 - ii. To some degree, inner motivations and beliefs shape our actions in a manner behaviorism cannot address

- iii. It seems to assume we are “blank slates” when we now know some responses are innate and/or genetically based
- d. Cognitive Psychology
 - a. By the 1950’s cognitive psychology arose to address the shortcomings of behaviorism
 - b. The idea of cognitive psychology is that our behavior is affected by mental processes that are not directly observable
 - c. Explains how we learn things that have not been reinforced
 - d. It uses new technologies such as brain imaging techniques to further understand mental processes
 - e. This approach therefore focuses on inner workings, but tries to do it in an objective manner
 - i. Alter people’s conditions
 - ii. Observe result
 - iii. Infer the process responsible for the change
 - iv. If possible, verify activity using brain-imaging technology
 - f. Strengths of cognitive psychology
 - i. It explains how our thought processes motivate and influence our behavior
 - ii. It can be correlated by using brain-imaging technology
 - iii. It provides a more thorough answer to more sophisticated behaviors
 - g. Weaknesses
 - i. Always remains an inference
 - ii. Brain imaging can only correlate brain activity in a region to a behavior
- e. Examples of Psychological Research (using cognitive approach)
 - a. Hawthorne effect
 - i. This experiment is notable because of its failure to establish its conclusion.
 - ii. A good example of Popper’s idea of falsifiability
 - iii. The experiment
 - 1. Aim: test if improved lighting boosted productivity
 - 2. Procedure:
 - a. Raised and lowered lighting on control group

- b. Changing lightbulbs in sight of workers and telling them they were brighter
 - 3. Result: productivity went up with any change in conditions—brighter or darker
 - iv. Hawthorne effect: results improve merely by being in an experiment
 - 1. This implies that any attempt to experiment with humans may in an of itself affect the conditions
 - 2. This is also shown in the “Discussion Activity” section. How you display your data affects the interpretation
- b. Milgram’s Obedience Study
- c. This controlled study (unlike Hawthorne study) examined the degree to which we conform to an authority we consider legitimate
 - i. Aim: to see to what degree people obey what they consider to be a legitimate authority
 - ii. Procedure:
 - 1. Select a teacher who was to teach a list of words to a confederate learner
 - 2. If the learner missed a word, as series of escalating shocks was to be administered to the learner
 - 3. Experiment continues until either the learn is shocked to 440 volts or the teacher refuses go on
 - iii. Results: roughly 2/3’s shocked up to maximum
 - iv. Importance: showed people tend to follow what they consider to be legitimate authorities unquestionably. We seemed programmed for obedience
- d. Stanford Prison Experiment
 - i. Aim: to test how a highly structured situation would affect human behavior
 - ii. Procedure:
 - 1. Selected a group of physically and psychologically healthy students
 - 2. Divided them into guards and students
 - a. Guards worked shifts and then went home. Were given uniforms and nightsticks

- b. Prisoners were locked up 24 hours a day

- iii. Results:

- 1. Had to be stopped after six days
 - 2. Guards became too brutal
 - 3. Prisoners became withdrawn and severely distressed

- iv. Significance: it turns out a powerful situation can exert immense control over the individual, and result in doing things not associated with their disposition or temperament.

- f. Summary

- a. Psychology is probably best described as an application in *verstehen* theory.
 - b. We are interested in the meaning and purpose behind people's behaviors
 - i. We do not generate objective laws, but rules to fit specified conditions
 - c. Strengths and Weaknesses
 - i. Strengths:
 - 1. Lends insight into human behavior
 - 2. Allows us to correct for incorrect assumptions about human nature
 - 3. Increasingly linked to biological processes via new technology
 - ii. Weaknesses
 - 1. It is still largely inferential, especially at the cognitive level
 - 2. There are usually too many variables to establish cause and effect relationship
 - 3. Lack of an objective determination means it is much more subject to the influences of belief, motivation, and emotion.