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PSY151: Introduction to Psychology Lecture 2: The Nature of Psychology -

Themes/ Debates and Work of Psychologists

Recapitulation - Lecture 1

- What is psychology all about?
- Why we need to study psychology?
- Discussion of examples to understand how psychology is relevant in today's world?
- Basic definition of psychology acceptable to most psychologists.
- In what ways psychology is a science?
- How scientific psychology is different from everyday common sense psychological notions and intuitions?
- The difference between nomothetic and idiographic psychology.

- In the second lecture the focus of discussion will be on the work of psychologists.
- There are various aspects of work of psychologists and we will discuss some of these
- Themes and debates in psychology
- Psychologists and psychiatrists
- Basic and applied psychology

Themes/ Debates

- There are some themes and major questions that psychologists address
- Psychology has evolved in terms of its history
- Some of the themes and questions are still quite pertinent
- Nature vs. Nurture
- Commonalities vs. Differences
- Automatic vs. Controlled processing
- Free will vs. Determinism

Nature vs. Nurture

- To what extent our behaviour is governed by heredity and biological endowment and to what extent it is governed by environmental inputs, experience and learning contexts
- Scholars who argue in favour of genetics or heredity are known as nativists whereas those scholars who place importance on the role of learning and environment are known as empiricists

- Most psychologists agree that there is no one clear and final answer to the nature – nurture debate
- It is difficult say whether environment or heredity dominates
- Many aspects of behaviour are best understood in terms of interaction between the two

Commonalities vs. differences

- In many ways human beings are similar to each other and they are also different
- Nomothetic and Idiographic approaches
- People differ with reference to their abilities, intelligence and personality. But people are similar in many ways (universal laws)

- In addition to individual differences due to uniqueness that are understood by psychologists who study personality and intelligence, differences also exist due to different cultures, ethnicities and environmental factors
- It is important to recognize and study differences in behaviours occurring due to cultural diversity, gender, socio economic status and other contexts

Cultural relativism

- Bias may occur if cultural differences are not recognized and understood
- Social scientists practice Cultural relativism to deal with bias - Cultural relativism refers to taking into account beliefs and behaviours due to culture

Automatic vs. Controlled processing of information

- Unconscious vs. conscious processing of information
- A wide variety of cognitive processes occur due to automaticity without conscious awareness or intention. These processes are called automatic or unconscious processes
- Conscious or controlled information processing is intentional and within conscious awareness

- Unconscious processing occurs in social domain also
- In social sense automatic and unintentional processing leads to decisions and judgments in the social context
- Ex: Gender stereotypes may get activated in social situations and without conscious realization

Free will vs. Determinism

- Broadly, this debate is related to the question that to what extent human behaviour is governed by personal choice and the capacity to make independent decisions and choices without any constraint
- Free will Human beings can make choices freely and can thus exercise freedom and dignity in responding to situations

- Determinism opposite to the view of free will
- Determinism argues that human behaviour is determined by factors that are not under control of individuals
- Ex: Environmental determinism and biological determinism

- Free will is very subjective, philosophical and not in accordance with scientific approach
- Determinism removes freedom and dignity of human choice, is reductionistic in its approach as it reduces individual responsibility

Holistic vs. Reductionistic approaches

- Holistic approach behaviour can be understood as a whole without breaking it down into components parts
- Reductionistic behaviour can be studied by studying its structure or components

Work of psychologists

- In the remaining part of this lecture we will focus on the work of psychologists
- We will understand the difference between
 - Psychologists and psychiatrists
 - Basic and applied psychology
- We will briefly discuss Ecological validity

Psychologists and Psychiatrists

- Psychologists have a post graduate degree in psychology and in many cases they have a PhD degree in psychology
- They have training in research methods, statistics and psychometrics in addition to their specific field of specialization such as educational, community, social, or organizational psychology etc.

- Most psychologists are not practicing professionals. Those psychologists who specialize in clinical psychology and counselling and have obtained a relevant degree to practice are involved in practice
- Clinical psychologists are different from psychiatrists.
- Psychiatrists are trained in medicine i.e., they are medical doctors or physicians
- Psychologists are not medical doctors. Psychiatrists have a MD degree in psychiatry

Basic and applied psychology

- Basic psychological research: Such research focuses on fundamental aspects and principles of behavioural processes
- Applied research: Related with practical implications and application of psychology in everyday life

- Basic research is related to seeking answers to new aspects and provides knowledge about fundamental questions. Such research leads to understanding of basic questions that may not be immediately applicable but basic principles may be very useful for research in applied areas
- Both basic and applied research and areas are interdependent and complementary

Ecological validity

- To what extent is a research valid in real life
- One question related to ecological validity is that can the research conducted on human behaviour in laboratory setting be generalized to real life
- Generalization of research results is an important issue in psychology
- Generally, if a study is conducted in real life setting it is likely that it will be ecologically valid

Questions

- What are some themes/debates in psychology?
- What is the nature vs. nurture debate?
- How can one explain the commonalities vs. differences theme?
- Provide the definition of automatic processing.
- Outline the debate regarding freewill vs. determinism.
- How are psychologists different from psychiatrists?
- Is there any interdependence between basic and applied research in psychology?
- What is ecological validity?

Thank you