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PSY151: Introduction to Psychology

Lecture 1: The Nature of Psychology – Introduction



Why do we need to study Psychology?

- ▶ A course in introduction to psychology will help in understanding various aspects of self and others (Behavioral aspects)
- ▶ Examples:
- ▶ Understanding mental processes such as perception and memory
- ▶ What is learning? What is the effect of rewards on learning?
- ▶ Understanding others: Why do people behave the way they do?
- ▶ What is the nature of intelligence?
- ▶ How do we understand emotions?



- ▶ A Question: What are some of the problems we are facing today?
- ▶ By studying psychology, what can we learn about these problems?



What are your answers?

- ▶ Most people would include: Disease, terrorism, discrimination, mental health etc.
- ▶ HOW IS PSYCHOLOGY RELEVANT?



Examples

- ▶ Pandemics: Psychological issues
- ▶ Terrorism: Attitudes (religion, violence), personality, psychopathology
- ▶ Mental Health: Stress, anxiety, depression
- ▶ Health: Behavior modification – stop smoking, healthy eating habits, treatment adherence etc.

Psychology is therefore involved in human affairs in various ways



Defining Psychology

- ▶ Difficult to provide a DEFINITION
- ▶ Range and scope is very wide
- ▶ “...the science of human behavior and cognitive processes.” (Baron, 1999, p. 3)
- ▶ Most definitions include the following aspects
 1. Focus on human behavior
 2. Animal behavior
 3. Methods for studying behavior
- ▶ Psychology is a science, a discipline and a profession



Fast Growing Field

- ▶ Psychology is the scientific study of behavioural processes such as learning, perception, motivation and emotion etc.
- ▶ Fast growing and ever changing field of study
- ▶ Brain imaging, neuroscience studies and cultural basis of psychological processes
- ▶ Rapid and diverse changes and advances
- ▶ Constant advances in the study of human behaviour, animal behaviour, and brain processes linked to behaviour



Animal Behaviour

- ▶ Why is animal behavior important?
 - a) Learning about basic processes (physiology)
 - b) Genetic studies
 - c) Animals are easily available; life span is short
 - d) Ease of experimental manipulation.
Example, Harry F. Harlow's work with monkeys. Newborn monkeys were separated from mothers at birth and reared in isolation with inanimate surrogate mothers
 - e) Ethical considerations are important



Is psychology a science?

- ▶ Objective Approach
- ▶ Scientific Method
- ▶ Measurement of variables
- ▶ Systematic observation
- ▶ Use of experimentation and other scientific methods



Studying Behavior

- ▶ Why do we need to study behavior in a scientific manner?
 - How adequate is commonsensical psychological approach?
- ▶ What are the levels of studying behavior?
 - Nomothetic and idiographic



Answering the first question

Commonsensical approach ?

- ▶ We have theories about human behavior
- ▶ We use generic theories in daily life
- ▶ Relating causes and consequences of behavior
- ▶ Prediction and hindsight bias



Inadequacy of commonsense approach

- ▶ It is not scientific
- ▶ Assumptions and conclusions – not valid
- ▶ Cultural/ personal biases and prejudices might creep in
- ▶ Observations are not systematic
- ▶ Information is not examined in a scientific way



Levels of Study

Nomothetic and Idiographic psychology

- ▶ Nomothetic psychology: Establishing universal laws of behavioral processes

Study of generalized patterns of behavior places individuals in fixed slots and denies the differences that lead to uniqueness

- ▶ Idiographic psychology: Importance of uniqueness.
Each individual should be understood in terms of his/ her uniqueness



Idiographic psychology

- ▶ Studying a large number of individuals from the idiographic point of view is difficult and time consuming
- ▶ Research oriented clinical psychologists and counselors might adopt nomothetic approach



Some questions to think –

Why is psychology useful?

What is the definition of Psychology?

Is psychology a science?

Why is animal behavior important in psychology?

Are commonsensical psychological notions scientific?

What is nomothetic psychology?

What is idiographic psychology/



Thank you

