

CHAPTER 1 – THE SCIENCE OF PSYCHOLOGY

YOU KNOW YOU ARE READY FOR THE TEST IF YOU ARE ABLE TO...

- Define psychology and describe the goals that psychologists hope to achieve.
- Describe the history of psychology.
- Discuss the current state of psychology, including the most common perspectives and major professions in the field.
- Describe the scientific method and discuss its strengths and weaknesses.
- Explain the basic guidelines and ethical concerns of psychological research.
- Introduce the criteria for critical thinking and its application in psychology.

RAPID REVIEW

Psychology is defined as the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. The goals of psychology are to describe, explain, predict, and control the behaviors and mental process of both humans and animals. The goals of psychology can be thought of in terms of what, why, when, and how behaviors and mental processes occur.

The field of psychology is relatively new (around 125 years old) but has its origins in the much older fields of physiology and philosophy. Wilhelm Wundt formed the first psychology laboratory in Germany in 1879. Wundt used the method of **objective introspection** in an attempt to objectively study human thought processes and mental activities. Because of his innovative efforts, Wundt is often referred to as the father of psychology. The reality, however, is that multiple people in multiple locations began studying psychology and promoting their particular perspective around the same time. Five historical perspectives are discussed in the text.

Edward Titchener, a student of Wundt's, expanded on Wundt's ideas and brought the method of introspection to the U.S. Titchener called his approach **structuralism** because his ultimate goal was to describe the precise structure of our mental processes. At the same time in the U.S., William James was focused on discovering how our mental processes help us to function in our daily lives and began to promote his viewpoint known as **functionalism**. The terms structuralism and functionalism are no longer used to describe specific viewpoints in the field of psychology. Meanwhile, back in Germany, the **Gestalt psychologists** were studying how sensation and perception create a whole pattern that is greater than the sum of the individual components. Max Wertheimer was a major proponent of Gestalt psychology. In neighboring Austria, Sigmund Freud developed his theory of **psychoanalysis** based on the concept of the unconscious. Freud believed the unconscious played an important role in controlling our day-to-day behaviors and thoughts. Freud's theory is also referred to as the psychodynamic perspective. On the opposite end of the spectrum, and back in the United States, was John Watson. Watson expanded the findings of Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov, to promote the perspective of **behaviorism**. The behaviorists believed that psychology should focus on concepts that could be studied scientifically and they felt that the only area of psychology that could be approached scientifically was observable behavior.

Today there are seven major perspectives within the field of psychology. The **psychodynamic perspective** focuses on the role of the unconscious. **Behaviorism** attempts to study psychology by focusing on observable actions and events. The **humanistic perspective** emphasizes human potential and free will. **Biopsychology** focuses on the biology underlying our behavior and thoughts, while the **cognitive perspective** focuses on the thoughts or "cognitions" themselves. **Cognitive neuroscience** is a specific area of the cognitive perspective that focuses on the physical changes in the brain that occur when we think, remember, or engage in other mental processes. The **sociocultural perspective** explores the role of social and cultural factors on our behaviors and thoughts, while **evolutionary** psychologists attempt to explain behavior and thoughts in terms of their adaptive or "survival" qualities.

There are many professional opportunities within the field of psychology. **Psychiatrists** receive a medical degree (M.D.), treat serious psychological disorders, and can prescribe medication for their patients. A **psychologist** attends graduate school to obtain a doctorate degree (either a Ph.D., Ed.D. or Psy.D.) and can select one of many career options from research to counseling to consulting for a

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