

Introduction to Psychology

Topic I: An Overview of Psychology

- **Psychology** is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes
- **Behavior** refers to *observable actions*
 - Ex. hitting someone or a change in heart rate
- **Mental processes** refers to *internal experiences* such as thinking and feeling which are *not observable*
- **Scientific method** is a set of rules that helps us draw accurate conclusions
- Common sense provides *conflicting* answers to a question
- Common sense leads to conclusions that are the **opposite** of what scientific evidence suggests
- Psychology determines why that answer is correct

The Development of Modern Psychology

❖ **Early Beginnings in Philosophy and Physiology**

- **Philosophers** such as **Aristotle** suggested that differences in behavior were the result of differences in *experience*
 - Philosophers relied on **logic** to develop their explanations
- **Physiologists** such as **Hippocrates** thought differences in behavior were caused by differing levels of body fluids called **humors** or **biles**
 - Physiologists used **observations** and some rudimentary experiments

❖ **Birth of a Science**

- **1879** a professor of physiology named **Wilhelm Wundt** established a new laboratory in which he brought philosophers and psychologists together to form psychology
 - established the first laboratory of psychology
- the first psychology laboratory in the United States was founded at Johns Hopkins University in 1883

❖ **The Structural Approach**

- Wundt and Edward Titchner wanted to determine what components went together to form an experience
- For example, they were interested in how colors and sensations went together to form the image of an apple.
 - This approach is called **structuralism**
 - The structuralists wanted to identify the psychological particles of experience
 - Used a method called **introspection** which involves having individuals describe what they did when they were thinking

❖ **The Functional Approach**

- Psychologist **William James** focused on the question of how experiences helped humans adapt to situations
 - Influenced by **Charles Darwin** who pointed out that animals that are better adapted for their environment are more likely to survive
- **Functionalism**: wanted to understand how humans function

❖ **The Gestalt Approach**

- an experience can be best understood when its parts are considered as a **unified whole**
- the whole is different from or greater than the sum of the parts
- structuralists would focus on the individual aspect
- **Gestalt approach**: step back and see how the dots went together to form the picture
 - Only when you combine separate elements does an experience take form or shape
- **Structuralists** wanted to take an experience apart and study its separate components
- **Gestaltists** wanted to learn how the components of an experience worked together to create the experience
- **Functionalists** wanted to learn what the experience did for the individual
- Other psychologists study how we use intelligence to solve problems and live effective lives (a functional approach)

❖ **Development of Competing Explanations for Behavior**

States of Consciousness

- ❖ **Consciousness**: thinking, being aware of what is going on around you
 - thoughts are based on electrical activity in the brain
 - different levels of consciousness
 - different states of consciousness where you are more or less effective in processing information
 - those states are often related to your level of arousal
 - at **low levels of arousal**: (sleep) consciousness is reduced because you do not process information
 - at **moderate levels of arousal**: (normal wakefulness) consciousness is maximized because you are able to process information effectively
 - at **very high levels of arousal**: (brought on by excitement or strong stimulants) consciousness is reduced because you experience disruptions in your ability to process information
- consciousness involves complex neurological processes, different levels, and different states
- the study of consciousness was based on **introspection**: a method used by early psychologists to study mental processes
 - involved subjective descriptions of what individuals were thinking or feeling
- thought processes could not be observed directly
- **verbal condition**: condition people to think by rewarding them with specific responses
- **behaviorists**: psychologists who focused their attention on behaviors and observable factors such as rewards and punishments
- consciousness is important to our ability to function
- we try to change our states of consciousness with hypnosis, drugs, or meditation

Topic I: Hypnosis

- ❖ **Franz Mesmer**: physician whose treatment of disease was based on suggestion
 - his work led to what today we call **hypnosis**
 - an early term for hypnosis was **Mesmerism**

Two Explanations for Hypnosis

- **Hypnosis**: a procedure which suggestions are used to change sensations, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and behaviors
 - does not explain why the suggestions are effective
- Two widely held explanations for hypnosis:
 - 1. altered state of consciousness
 - 2. role playing
- ❖ **Altered State of Consciousness (Trance and Dissociation)**
 - traditional explanation is that hypnotic procedures result in an **altered state of consciousness**
 - the individual enters a **trance state**: they are given **posthypnotic suggestions**
 - through those suggestions the individual comes under control of the hypnotist
 - after coming out of the trance state the individual does not consciously remember that the suggestions were given, but they follow the suggestions
 - **divided consciousness**: part of the individual is aware of everything going on while the other part is not aware of posthypnotic suggestions
 - hypnosis is said to involve a **dissociation**: part of the individual is a **hidden observer**
- ❖ **Role Playing**
 - the other explanation for hypnosis is role playing: the individual understands what is expected in the role of a “hypnotized person” and implicitly agrees to play that role
 - the hypnotic situation is an **“as if”** situation
 - individuals are asked to temporarily set aside what they know is the case and to **imagine** or **pretend** something else is the case
 - they are aware that they are playing roles
 - the role playing explanation does not imply an altered state of consciousness

Who Can be Hypnotized?

- wide individual differences with which individuals can be hypnotized
- some people can be easily and deeply hypnotized, others can not be hypnotized at all
- ❖ **Hypnotizability**: the ease with which an individual can be hypnotized