

Chapter 1: Psychology and Scientific Thinking

September 8, 2014

What is psychology?

Psychology: the scientific study of the mind, brain and behaviour

The mind is your brain at work while your brain is just an organ.

There are **levels of analysis** which are “rungs” that are biological (brain) at the lower levels and social (mind) at the higher levels. Psychology focuses on aspects of both because they are essential for a complete understanding.

Five challenges related to psychology are:

- Human behaviour is hard to predict (since it is **multiply determined** – caused by many factors)
- Psychological influences are rarely independent of each other (ex. causes of Anorexia such as perfectionism, issues with diet, pre-disposed idea of self image)
- People have **individual differences** – they vary in thinking, emotion, personality, EQ and IQ
- People mutually influence each other’s behaviour, causing **reciprocal determinism**
- Behaviour is shaped by culture, which causes broad generalizations about human nature to be **difficult** (ex. Western people focused on the main detail/individual, Easterners focused on peripherals/group)

Scientists can take the **emic** (insider and native perspective) or **etic** (outsider and observational) approach when studying cultures but both have pros/cons. Emic shows a more personal level while etic is broader and may impose other perspectives. For example, emic focuses on personality traits in an isolated tribe but etic might attribute them to Western terms (“shy”, “introvert”, etc.).

Why can’t we always trust common sense?

We believe contradicting proverbs which makes no sense. We also contradict old adages such as “safety in numbers” since more people present usually means less people actually help. We think that we know a lot about psychology but we really don’t.

Naïve realism – believing that we see the world precisely as it is (“seeing is believing”) – is also an issue. Trusting our perceptions is good in daily life (ex. Avoiding an accident) but sometimes we are wrong (ex. Earth is not flat, Sun doesn’t revolve around Earth). “Believing is seeing” is more accurate since we are biased.

Some common sense (judging if someone is trustworthy, hypotheses, happy = productive) is accurate, but it should only be used sometimes, or combined with science.

Psychology as a science

Psychology From Inquiry To Understanding 3rd Edition

Chapter 1

Wolfgang Tschacher, Claudia Bergomi



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