

Psychology affects us all, but some are more interested than others in learning about everything that makes us human. Still, many people still wonder, just what is psychology exactly?

Psychology covers a wide range of different types of studies into behavior and is used for many different purposes. Usually, when studying psychology, people choose to focus on specific areas since psychology itself is such a broad term.

If you've been considering studying psychology in university, or you're just interested in getting a brief introduction, keep reading to learn more about this field's beginnings, different types of psychology, and what the main goals are.

Source: Pexels

What is Psychology?

According to the American Psychological Association's definition, psychology is the study of behavior and the mind.

Psychology is a relatively new discipline that came from within philosophy, but now covers a wide range of branches of discipline (we'll get into those soon).

Generally, psychologists look at elements like environmental factors, social pressure, and biological influence to try and form an understanding of how humans think, feel, and act.

The purpose of psychology is to gain a deeper insight into human behavior in order to better understand the actions of others as well as ourselves.

The Early Days of Psychology as a Discipline

If we want to go way back to around 400-300 BCE, great philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle arguably laid the groundwork for what we know today as modern psychology. In their philosophical discussions, they brought up topics such as nature vs. nurture and free will, things that are often discussed in modern psychology today.

Fast forward a few hundred years to the 19th century and two dominant theories that led to psychology as we know it today were pioneered: structuralism and functionalism.

Structuralism, an idea created by Wilhelm Wundt, was a research method where subjects relied on trained introspection while they went about doing other tasks. Over time, structuralism was proven to be unreliable since there were too many differences in introspection from subject to subject.

That's when functionalism was developed by William James. James pointed out that the mind is something that is always changing, so the focus of psychology

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should be shifted from searching for structure in introspection to how and why the brain functions as it does. He proposed looking at the underlying cause of a behavior rather than just the behavior itself, which went on to influence a lot of contemporary psychology.

Types of Psychology

Psychology can take on many different forms, and psychologists themselves tend to focus on one area of expertise. Each type of psychology serves its own purpose and is used in different scenarios.

Since the field is so broad, different subfields have become more popularized over the last few decades. Here are a few of the most well-known types of psychology.

Abnormal Psychology

In this field, psychologists focus on studying psychopathology and abnormal behavior. They also mainly deal with patients who experience mental disorders and attempt to find treatment for them and to research their behavior. This is considered a fascinating branch of psychology since it deals with trying to understand a variety of different psychological disorders.

Biological Psychology

Biological psychology looks at how a person's biology influences their behavior. This biological approach stipulates that people's behavior is a result of their physiology and genetics, so biological psychologists will often study things like hormones and chromosomes to see what kind of effect they have on the brain.

Clinical Psychology

This may seem like a familiar term, but what is clinical psychology? In broad terms, a clinical psychologist works to diagnose, assess, and treat patients with various mental disorders. A clinical psychologist's goal is to ease psychological distress in order to promote a more stable lifestyle and improved well-being.

Cognitive Psychology

In this branch of psychology, experts take a look at the internal thought process, paying close attention to things like memory, problem-solving skills, attention spans, decision-making, and learning patterns. In general, cognitive psychologists want to understand how different people process information.

Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychology focuses on how behavior changes over a lifetime as a person grows. Developmental psychologists will look at people of different ages from infants to elderly patients to get a better understanding of how we develop motor skills, problem-solving skills, personalities, how we learn languages, create a personal identity, and a lot more.

Forensic Psychology

You might have heard of forensic psychology from a movie or TV show, but this area of psychology is more than just a dramatic prop. Forensic psychologists work closely with courts and criminal justice authorities to assess psychological factors that can have a direct influence on a suspect or a case. They also appear in court to provide testimony when necessary.

Industrial-Organizational Psychology

The purpose of industrial-organizational psychology is to assess employees' behavior in a place of work. It's a type of business psychology that helps organizations conduct research on things like recruiting the right employees, improving a professional environment, communications, performance reviews, and even to assess employee satisfaction at a company.

Neuropsychology

Unlike biological psychology which looks at a person's entire biology, neuropsychology focuses on the relationship between how the brain functions and a person's actions or behaviors. Neuropsychologists often work with patients who

experience some sort of brain trauma and require rehabilitation. Their work is done to determine if a person is likely to experience any form of behavior or health issue in the future, such as a stroke.

Source: Pexels

The Goals of Psychology

As you can see from all the different types of psychology, there are many different goals for each branch based on what the focus is. That being said, psychology does have its own broad goals that are relevant to all the branches.

Psychology itself has four main goals:

Describe

The first goal is to assess a patient and describe a behavior or behavioral pattern.

Explain

The next goal would be for researchers to explain or find theories as to why a specific behavior is happening.

Predict

Once a behavior has been identified and explained, psychologists will predict future behavior based on researching the patterns they've already seen.

Change

The ultimate goal of psychology is to try and change a disruptive or abnormal behavior in order to establish a better quality of life for the patient.

Should You Study Psychology?

Some people are interested in studying psychology simply because it's a fascinating field and they have a personal interest in it. Having a keen interest in a field is important since you'll be more passionate about your work in your future career, so if you're curious about psychology, then you should look into studying it at the university level.

Other than that, psychology is a field that is always in demand. As the range of options for different types of psychology increases, there will be more and more demand for specialized psychologists for many different fields.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, psychologists earn an average annual salary of \$80,370 " but of course this number can change based on your area of expertise. So, not only is psychology an interesting field to study for your own personal knowledge, but it can also lead to a stable and lucrative career.

Final Words

Hopefully, you have a better overall picture of what is psychology and why it's important. If you're interested in studying in this field, you'll likely begin with broad studies of general psychology, and then narrow down your field of interest as you progress. Still, it's a good idea to try and get a broad idea of what type of psychology you'd like to focus in early on.

At University of the People (UoPeople), we offer tuition-free introductory psychology courses as part of our Health Sciences degree. All of our students study remotely, so you don't have to worry about the cost of going to a physical college. This can be an exciting opportunity if you want to learn about psychology while also learning a bachelor of science in a highly in-demand field.

Reference

[The Wiley Handbook of What Works in Violence Risk Management: Theory, Research, and Practice](#)

[On Hallowed Ground: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital](#)