

PSY1011 – PSYCHOLOGY 1A

SUMMER SEMESTER A, 2016

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Historical Timeline of Psychology

Week 3: Developmental Psychology 1

Week 4: Developmental Psychology 2

Week 5: Learning 1

Week 6: Learning 2

Week 7: Personality 1

Week 8: Personality 2

Week 9: Sensation & Perception 1

Week 10: Sensation & Perception 2

Week 11: Biological Psychology

Week 12: Cross-cultural Psychology

Week 1: Introduction

- *Define psychology*
- *Explain how science can safeguard against the major fallacies of human thinking*
- *Describe the features of psychological pseudoscience, and distinguish it from psychological science*
- *Describe the reasons why we are drawn to pseudoscience*
- *Identify the key features of scepticism*
- *Explain the basic principles of scientific thinking*

What is Psychology?

- Psychology: the scientific study of the mind, brain and behaviour
- Spans multiple levels of analysis - with lower levels being tied most closely to biological influences and higher levels tied most closely to social influences. For example, depression can be examined at differing levels of explanation:
 1. *Molecular level:*
 - variations in genes that predispose to depression
 2. *Neurochemical level:*
 - differences in levels of the brain's chemical messengers that influence mood
 3. *Neurological/physiological level:*
 - differences in the size and functioning of brain structures related to mood
 4. *Mental level:*
 - depressed thoughts
 - sad feelings
 - ideas of suicide
 5. *Behavioural level*
 - decrease in pleasurable activities
 - moving and talking slowly
 - withdrawing from others
 6. *Social level:*
 - loss of important personal relationships
 - lack of social support
- Psychology is difficult to study and many challenges make the study of the brain, mind, and behaviour especially complex. For example:
 1. *Human behaviour is difficult to predict:*
 - Almost all actions are multiply determined (caused by many factors)
 - Need to be sceptical of single-variable explanations of behaviour (widespread in popular psychology)
 2. *Psychological influences are rarely independent of each other:*
 - Makes it difficult to pinpoint which cause or causes are operating
 3. *People differ from each other in thinking, emotion, personality and behaviour:*
 - Individual differences: variations among peopling in their thinking, emotion, personality, and behaviour
 - Each person responds in different ways to the same objective situation

4. *People often influence each other:*
 - Reciprocal determinism: the fact we mutually influence each other's behaviour
 - Difficult to isolate the causes of human behaviour
5. *People's behaviour is often shaped by culture:*
 - Cultural differences place limits on the generalisations that psychologists can draw about human behaviour
- We are prone to naïve realism (the belief that we see the world precisely as it is - i.e., "seeing is believing"):
 - Often serves us well, but appearances can be deceiving and our intuitions are often wrong, especially when it comes to evaluating ourselves and others
 - Can lead us to draw incorrect conclusions about human nature
 - In many cases, "believing is seeing" – our beliefs shape our perceptions of the world (often in ways we don't realise)
- To understand why others act the way they do, most of us trust our common sense (our gut instinct about how the social world works):
 - Sometimes correct, and can be a helpful guide for generating hypotheses that can later be scientifically tested, but should not be relied upon solely

Psychology as a Science

- Science: a systematic approach to evidence consisting of a set of attitudes and skills designed to prevent us from fooling ourselves
- Scientific theory: explanation for a large number of findings in the natural world
 - An account that ties multiple findings together
 - Generate predictions regarding new data not yet observed
- Hypothesis: testable prediction derived from a scientific theory
- Theories are general explanations, whereas hypotheses are specific predictions derived from those explanations
- Scientific methods are objective and use tools for overcoming any potential biases, especially:
 - Confirmation bias: the tendency to seek out evidence that supports our hypotheses and deny, dismiss or distort evidence that contradicts them
 - Belief perseverance: the tendency to stick to our initial beliefs even when evidence contradicts them

Popular Psychology & Pseudoscience

- Popular psychology industry: a sprawling network of everyday sources of information about human behaviour which are often incorrect (e.g., about 95% of self-help books are untested, and recent evidence suggests some may do more harm than good)
- Pseudoscience is a set of claims that seems scientific but isn't – in particular, it lacks the safeguards against *confirmation bias* and *belief perseverance*
- Examples of pseudoscience: ESP, astrology, telepathy