PSYC 1000 Introduction to Psychology Curtin

Psychology

What is it?

Psychology is “The study of mind and behavior and the relationship between them” (Sternberg, 1988, p.6). Psychology is the understanding and changing the behaviours of ourselves and others. To ensure that this course is helpful use myself as an example when reading theory.

Key aspects of psychology as a field of study as well as a practice are:

- **Specific** study of behavior
- Strong **theoretical** underpinnings
- Strong **research** basis
- Emphasis on **empirical evidence**

Goals of Psychology:

- **Describe** behavior: what, where, when it happens
- **Explain** behavior: why it happens
- **Predict** behavior: what will happen next
- **Change** behavior: individuals, groups, society

Developmental Psychology

What is developmental psychology?

“Science of human development seeks to understand how and why people - all kinds of people, everywhere - change and remain the same overtime” (Berger, 2008)

Understanding what “normal development” is; this is to ensure that we are able to understand how we will work with a person of a certain age and how they might react when we work with them. For example: if we are working with a 4 year old we will react and act differently and expect a different level of understanding and engagement than with someone that is 20.

Developmental psychology is also important in the understanding of when things might be going wrong. This area of study is also an important aspect of understanding the factors that affect development and can be important when gaining understanding of the continuity and change in development. Developmental psychology does not stop and is a constant in a person's life; development starts at birth and progresses through to older adulthood. This is a field that studies the common and uncommon aspects of human development.

Importance and Impact of development

Developmental psychology studies the way humans develop and change over time. Nature and nurture both contribute to development, and their roles are not easily separated because environmental events often turn genes on and off. Psychologists continue to debate whether

human development is characterised by critical periods (periods central to specific types of learning the modify future development) or sensitive periods (times that are particularly important but not definitive for subsequent development), and whether development occurs in stages (relatively discrete steps and gradual change) is still a matter up for discussion.

Studying Development

Cross-sectional studies compare groups of participants of different ages at a single time to provide a picture of age differences. Longitudinal studies assess the same individual over time, providing the opportunity to assess age changes. Sequential studies minimise cohort effects by studying multiple cohorts longitudinally.

What kinds of development are we interested in?

- Physical > Size (including neural)
- Cognitive > Way the brain thinks and processes information (including intellect)
- Social > Relationships (including emotional)

These are interdependent and change in one will often cause change in the others. As the brain develops the relationships between physical, cognitive and social development change and adapt.

If any of the following change during development all others are affected:

- Physical Development (Including neural development)
- Cognitive Development (Including intellectual development)
- Social Development (Including emotional development)

Where do we all start?

What did we know when we were born? What did we understand? < these questions are asked in the field of developmental psychology in relation to birth.

What we historically believed:

According to Locke in the early 20th century we started as Tabula Rasa: meaning we start with a blank slate for our brains to work with. Our development was a result of the ways we interacted with the environment around us. Alternatively, Rousseau believed that we were born as small adults; we had a blueprint and we developed around that blueprint - everything was determined and the environment we lived in had no implication.

What we believe now:

Before we are born there are many influences that determine who we are and who we become. These include:

- Shared human genes: We all are apart of the human race. We all share a certain amount of genes that make up the human being.
- Unique genetic variation: We share genes with our biological parents (these affect our appearance, intelligence, IQ). We also have purely unique genes that are purely ourselves.
- Gene environment interaction: This exciting field of research came about in the 1990s from a genome study. This comes from the field of epigenetics which looks at the relationship between our environment and our genes and how this affects our genetic make up. Previously it was thought that there was no interaction between the two; this has been found to be untrue - if a person is exposed to a certain environmental conditions their genes will change generations later. For example: people who live through traumatic events (holocaust, extreme famine), pesticides, etc. future generations

of the people exposed to these conditions have had their genetic make up changed over time.
    - Recommended documentary on genome changes: Ghost in the Genes
- Prenatal environment: This is the environment of the womb as a fetus. any of the following will impact an unborn baby if exposed and will impact on later development. The use/exposure of/to substances that harm unborn babies (teratogens) for example:
    - alcohol
    - smoking
    - certain drugs
    - chronic stress
    - exposure to disease like German measles
- Hormonal activity: different levels of hormones at certain times of development of the fetus have been shown to impact on learning later in life. For example levels of hormone in pregnancy can affect sexual orientation

Nature contributes strongly to some characteristics including physical size, appearance. More complex traits are influenced by environmental factors as well as genes these traits include intelligence and personality.

Developmental Psychology was thought to be nature **VS** nurture and is now thought to be nature **VIA** nurture (Ridley, 2003):

- Nature creates all of our hereditary make up (often causing predispositions)
    - “Additive gene” does not mean that a person will be addicted to something and often means that there are higher chances of developing an addictive nature
- Environment influences how we develop