What is psychology?

- Study of behavior and mental processes
  - Behavior is directly observable
  - Mental processes are *not* directly observable
    - Need behavior to make inferences about them
    - Knowing mental processes, we can predict behavior
- Interpreting behavior *accurately* is difficult
  - It’s *ambiguous*: Many possible interpretations
  - It’s *situational*: Depends on context
  - It’s *variable*: Differs across people and time

What is this?

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Psychological research

• Involves a research question and a research design
  – Just like any other research
  – But the questions and designs are very diverse
    • Behavior and mental processes are very diverse
  • To illustrate, a tour of the MSU Psych department...

MSU Psychology programs

• Behavioral Neuroscience
• Clinical*
• Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience*
• Ecological-Community
• Organizational
• Social/Personality*
  * - Found in most psych departments

Behavioral Neuroscience

• Focuses on model systems
• Lily Yan
  – Studies circadian rhythms
    • Daily sleep/wake/alertness cycle
  – Model system is the rat

Clinical

• Focuses on psychopathology
• Brooke Ingersoll
  – What are developmental signs of autism? What are useful interventions?
• Kelly Klump
  – What factors affect eating disorders (e.g., genetic, environmental)? How do they interact?

Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience

• Focuses on mechanisms of thought
• Erik Altmann
  – How do memory and perceptual processes lead to human error?
• Zach Hambrick
  – What factors (e.g., training, talent) cause individual differences in performance?

Ecological-Community

• Focuses on needs of real-world communities
• Rebecca Campbell
  – How do societal systems (legal, medical, mental-health) respond to needs of rape survivors?
Organizational

- Focuses on work performance in organizations
- Steve Kozlowski
  – How do organizations train employees effectively? How do teams adapt to long-duration missions?

Social/Personality

- Social: Focuses on the individual in a social context
- Personality: Focuses on stable characteristics of the individual
- Joe Cesario
  – What factors (race, class, neighborhood) affect an observer’s assessment of danger?

Other branches of psychology

- School, counseling, educational psychology
  – At MSU, housed in College of Education
- Human factors (engineering) psychology, human-computer interaction
- Neuropsychology
- Forensic psychology
- Behavioral economics, neuromarketing
- ...

Textbook

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