Psy 101, Section 003H

Course webpage:  msu.edu/~ema/psy101
Instructor:  Dr. Erik Altmann

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?
We see what we want to see

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

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 (genetic, neurobiological, environmental)? How do they interact?

Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience

- Focuses on *mechanisms of thought*
- Erik Altmann
  - What factors (psychological, environmental) affect human error?
- Zach Hambrick
  - Is there a role for talent in skilled performance? (yes)
  - Does cognitive training work? (there's no good evidence)

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
  - How does a person’s race and class, and dangerousness of the neighborhood, influence 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

*Psychology*

Copy on reserve in the library