

FOCUS ON VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE

Outer space staggers us with its enormity. But inner space enthralls us. The vastness of the universe (*outer space*) astonishes and amazes us (it *staggers us*). But our consciousness and our internal mental life (our *inner space*) also delight and fascinate us (they *enthrall us*). Scientific **psychology** provides answers to many of the questions we have about ourselves, our thinking, emotions, and behavior, and our interactions (*interplay*) with others.

Have you ever played *peekaboo* with a 6-month-old . . . ? *Peekaboo* is a game played in most cultures where a person hides or pretends to hide from a child and then reappears saying “**PEEKABOO!**” The important questions for psychologists are why do infants all over the world react similarly to this game; what are they actually feeling, perceiving, and thinking?

What Is Psychology?

Psychology's Roots

. . . *milestones* . . . A *milestone* is an event of significance or importance. (Originally, a *milestone* was a large stone by the roadside inscribed with the distance in miles to nearby towns.) Myers asks what are some of the significant events (*important milestones*) in psychology's historical past (*psychology's roots*).

As *introspection* waned, so did *structuralism*. To *wane* means to fade away or decline in power. Systematic *introspection* (self-reflective analysis of immediate sensations, thoughts, feelings, and so forth) was not a reliable scientific method. As its use decreased (*waned*) so too did *structuralism*, the school devoted to finding the basic elements of the mind through *introspection*.

. . . *down-to-earth* . . . This means to be straightforward and practical. William James promoted the study and investigation of basic or ordinary (*down-to-earth*) emotions, memories, habits, and inner subjective experiences as they flow through our minds (*moment-to-moment streams of consciousness*).

But Washburn's *gender barred doors for her*, too. Because Margaret Floy Washburn was female, she encountered many obstacles during her career (*her gender barred doors for her*). However, she persevered and succeeded, eventually becoming the second female president of the APA in 1921. Note that, at that time, the vast majority of APA members were male; today most psychology doctorates are earned by women.)

Psychological Science Develops

. . . *larger-than-life*. . . Watson and Skinner promoted the view that psychology should study only observable behavior and not mental processes. They were controversial and flamboyant figures who attracted attention and gained a certain notoriety (they were *larger-than-life*).

Let's *unpack* this definition. *Unpack* here means to take apart or disassemble. So psychology, defined as the science of behavior and mental processes, is broken down into overt behavior (observable events) and covert processes (events that are hidden within, such as thoughts, feelings, perceptions, beliefs, and so on). It is studied using the scientific or empirical method.

Contemporary Psychology

These “*Magellans of the mind*,” as Morton Hunt (1993) has called them . . . Ferdinand Magellan (1489–1521) was a famous Portuguese navigator who made many discoveries and explored areas of the world previously unknown to his fellow Europeans. Because early psychologists made exciting discoveries and explored unknown frontiers, they were preparing the way (they were *pioneers*) for future psychologists and can thus be considered “*Magellans of the mind*.”

Psychology’s Biggest Question

In the 1600s, European philosophers *rekindled* the [nature–nurture] debate. *Rekindled* means to restart, as in to restart a fire (*rekindle*). In the 1600s, John Locke repeated what Aristotle had said 2000 years before—that humans are born without any knowledge (that is, that we are blank slates, or blank paper, at birth) and that all knowledge comes from experience (*nurture*). Plato, and later René Descartes, argued that we are born with some innate knowledge (*nature*).

Yet over and over again we will see that in contemporary science the nature–nurture *tension dissolves*. . . The main point here is that both sides of the debate have something to offer: Each contributes to the search for the truth. Thus, in modern science the strained relations (*tension*) over this issue diminish (*dissolve*). As Myers notes, we are biologically predisposed (*genetically influenced*) to adapt and learn from experiences (*environmental influences*)—*nurture works on what nature endows*.

Psychology’s Three Main Levels of Analysis

. . . “*red in the face*” and “*hot under the collar*.” These phrases refer to the physical changes that often accompany emotional arousal (for example, anger). A person’s face may become red due to blood rushing to it (blushing), and he or she may feel hot and perspire (*hot under the collar*). Different perspectives (neuroscience, evolutionary, behavior genetics, psychodynamic, behavioral, cognitive, and social-cultural) examine the same event (emotional change) using different **levels of analysis** (see Table 1, *Psychology’s Current Perspectives*). Myers points out that these different levels of analysis are not necessarily in opposition to each other but, rather, are complementary; that is, each level helps to complete the puzzle of why the event occurs by supplying answers from different points of view (*perspectives*).

Psychology’s Subfields

The cluster of subfields we call psychology is a *meeting ground* for different disciplines. “*Psychology is a hub scientific discipline*,” . . . Myers points out that there is much diversity in the discipline of psychology (that is, it lacks unity). However, this is beneficial because it provides a setting that is comfortable to work in (*a perfect home*) for those who have broad or diverse (*wide-ranging*) interests. Thus, it is the ideal gathering place (*meeting ground*) for different disciplines. In a sense, psychology is like those centralized airports (*hubs*) where passengers arrive on flights from many different places (*psychology is a hub scientific discipline*).

. . . *from womb to tomb* . . . Developmental psychologists conduct basic research on the changes that take place throughout the life span, from conception to death (*from womb to tomb*), investigating how we mature physically, psychologically, and socially. (Another humorous expression describing the life span, or life cycle, is from “sperm to worm.”)

. . . *psychoceramics (the study of crackpots)*. This joke derives its humor from the fact that some English words or phrases have more than one meaning, and it is this “play on words” that makes the joke funny. *Ceramics* is concerned with the work (or art) of making pottery, porcelain, and so on. Some of the pots may develop small breaks or splits and consequently would be referred to as “cracked pots.” The term *crackpot*, on the other hand, is a colloquial (informal) expression used to describe a useless, impractical, or even a crazy person. Although psychologists engage in a variety of interdisciplinary studies, such as psychohistory, psycholinguistics, and so on, there is obviously no such thing as *psychoceramics (the study of crackpots)*. **Clinical psychologists**, of course, assess and treat mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders (mental illness or psychopathology). (Note that Myers confesses in a footnote that he wrote this sentence on April 1st, April Fools’ Day, which traditionally involves people playing practical jokes on other people. Did he fool you?)

Close-Up: Improve Your Retention—and Your Grades!

. . . *taking a bird’s-eye view*. Flying overhead, birds have a very good overall view of the landscape and its contents (they literally have a *bird’s-eye view*). Myers suggests that one way to get a general sense of what a chapter is about is to quickly view (*scan*) the organization of the chapter, noting its headings, subheadings, and so on (*take a bird’s-eye view*). This is called *surveying* the chapter and is the first of five steps in the **SQ3R** study method (*Survey, Question, Read, Retrieve, Review*).

One of psychology’s oldest findings is that *spaced practice* promotes better retention than *massed practice*. *Spaced practice* refers to studying over a longer period of time, say 2 hours a day over 5 days rather than 10 hours on 1 day (*massed practice or cramming*). Distributing your study time is much better for learning and retention than an extended *cramming* session (*one long study blitz*). Be sure to follow the other tips, such as the SQ3R method, that Myers suggests in *Close-Up: Improve Your Retention—and Your Grades!*