CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:
• understand that psychology is a system of beliefs
• understand how theories develop and how to crucially evaluate evidence supporting them
• access and evaluate the quality of psychological information
• understand the use of terminology in psychology and its implications
• explain the importance of ethical practice in psychology and what comprises ethical behaviour
• describe the history of the discipline of psychology
• describe the main schools of thought in contemporary psychology
• understand that knowledge in psychology emerges from specific sociocultural contexts and that a critical perspective and caution are needed in applying knowledge across diverse cultural contexts.

Introduction

Young people today do not have the same values their parents had.
Stress is making life unbearable for most people.
The trouble with politicians is that they are all dishonest.
Like it or not, men are more logical than women.
South Africa is a traumatised society.
If you want your child to speak properly, don’t talk baby talk to her.
Only rich people can afford to become mentally ill.

We hear these sorts of statements all the time. They are opinions about people that are stated as though they were facts. You may agree with some of these statements and disagree with others. But how do we decide whether any of the statements are true? How can we gain more confidence in our ideas about people? Can we become more specific in our claims than the above generalisations suggest?

There are many systems of belief about people, our behaviour and what makes us who we are. Psychology is one of these belief systems, but it is not the only one. Many people, for example, look to religion to explain human behaviour. Others base their views on what older, more experienced people in society say is true. Increasingly, perhaps, many of us look to celebrities or famous people to give us lessons in life and knowledge about people. Psychology differs from other systems of belief about people in one crucial respect: psychologists are concerned not only with what we know about people, but also about how we come to know these things.

In many approaches to understanding people, approaches that differ from psychology, it is important to know who is making claims about people, their behaviour and what makes them human. For example, in many systems of belief, the views of a recognised elder or expert are thought to be the best insight we can have into people. In such systems of belief, people will defend
their views by saying that these views are similar to those of an elder or recognised expert. However, in psychology, while there are indeed experts, the way in which we weigh up whether a belief about people is true is rather different.

Consider, for instance, the statement: ‘How people develop in later life is related in some way to their early experiences.’ This statement is so broad that all psychologists would probably agree with it. But a psychologist who is influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, may agree with this statement on the basis of having read Freud’s work. The psychologist may have been convinced that Freud’s method of analysing adults and linking current behaviour to early experience provides useful information on human development. This psychologist would not agree with the statement simply because Freud agrees with it, but would agree with it on the basis of being convinced by Freud’s methods and approach to creating new knowledge about people.

1.1 USING PSYCHOLOGY IN YOUR FUTURE CAREER

Many people, when asked what psychologists do, believe that all psychologists are psychotherapists. In addition, people expect psychologists to have better insights into themselves and others than other people do (although there is also the contrasting image of the ‘crazy’ psychologist). These images of psychologists are, of course, limited. Psychology is a very broad discipline and there are many aspects to it.

The vast majority of people who begin studying psychology at undergraduate level will never become psychotherapists. This is partly because places in professional training courses are limited, but also because most people who study psychology do not choose to go in that direction.

Introductory psychology courses, such as the ones for which this book has been written, are not generally designed as an introduction to psychotherapy. This book offers a very broad introduction to basic knowledge that first-year students in psychology need to master before they go on to more advanced training in psychology. This basic knowledge will help you open your mind to new ideas and to new ways of collecting and analysing information about people. In time, you will be able to apply these to a range of situations.

Learners from a wide range of disciplines take courses in psychology to learn ways of thinking about people that are helpful in their chosen fields, which include health, education, business, management and social development. Psychologists themselves work in a wide range of contexts – in schools, communities, hospitals, prisons, business, training of athletes, the police force and the military, to name just a few.

At present in South Africa, to become a psychologist registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) you have to have a Master’s degree in psychology and you have to have completed a recognised internship (which is like an apprenticeship in your particular branch of psychology). In addition, candidates must write the National Professional Board examination before they can register as a psychologist.

To be accepted into a Master’s programme in psychology, you need to have a first (Bachelor’s) degree majoring in psychology and an Honours degree in psychology. However, many more people wish to train as psychologists than there are places in the Master’s programmes. Students who have done appropriate community or volunteer work, and who are able to speak a number of South African languages, will generally have a better chance of being accepted into postgraduate programmes. The fact is, though, that many people will not be accepted into such programmes, and every sensible psychology undergraduate should consider professional training in psychology as only one of a possible range of options. Some universities in South Africa now offer a Bachelor of Psychology (BPsych) degree, a four-year undergraduate programme leading to registration with the HPCSA as a registered counsellor; once again, places on these courses are limited.

As you study psychology, think about what interests you about the discipline and why, and think about what alternatives there may be to being a psychologist that will allow you to pursue these interests. Studying psychology provides an excellent background for a wide range of careers. Even from your first year, you should plan how to use what you learn to develop a fulfilling career, in whatever direction you choose.

By contrast, there are many psychologists who do not agree with Freud’s approach. These psychologists cannot simply say that they do not like what Freud said. On the contrary, what they would need to do is to show how, in their view, the ways in which Freud came to his conclusions are lacking in logic or simply incorrect. These psychologists would then make their own arguments about how to find out about human development. They could say, for example, that the only way we...
can know for sure whether early experiences affect later development is by observing babies and seeing how these babies develop into adults. This method of careful observation of people over a long period of time is different from Freud’s approach, and could therefore result in different conclusions about human behaviour.

In focusing on the methods of finding things out, psychology is similar to many other scientific approaches to understanding the world. Human sciences, which include psychology, sociology and anthropology, are similar to other sciences, such as physics and zoology, in that they are all concerned with collecting information in a particular way, using particular methods (see Box 1.2). Students of all these sciences must not only learn about what is true; they must also learn why things are true.

Let us look again at the statement about human development: ‘How people develop in later life is related in some way to their early experiences.’ If we assume for the moment that this statement is true, why is it true? How do we explain that it is true? We may have a lot of evidence that it is true, but this does not explain why it is true.

### 1.2 THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Many people begin to feel anxious when they encounter a term like ‘the scientific method’. However, as Kosso (2011) notes, we all practice such methods every day. You want to eat a snack and open a packet of biscuits. But you notice they are soft and taste a bit stale, so you check the ‘best before’ date and see that they expired some months ago. What has happened here is that you developed a hypothesis (‘the biscuits are stale’), gathered consistent evidence from two sources (how they look and taste, and their expiry date) and interpreted that evidence in the light of your knowledge about food. In scientific studies, these methods are slowed down and undertaken more deliberately, but the process is basically the same (Kosso, 2011).

A researcher using the scientific method would follow these steps (considered in more detail in Chapter 2):

- Ask a question (e.g. ‘Is there a difference in psychology marks between male and female students?’).
- Do background research (what have other researchers found?).
- Formulate a hypothesis (e.g. ‘Female students get higher marks’; this may be because they are more mature when they reach university or they are more serious about their studies).
- Collect data – this enables the hypothesis to be accepted or rejected (the researcher could look at all of the undergraduate first-year psychology marks for the last 10 years).
- Analyse the data (e.g. by averaging all of the male students’ marks and all of the female students’ marks, the researcher will be able to say which gender gets higher marks).
- Communicate the results (e.g. publish them in a journal).

Let us think about two possible reasons why it could be true. One reason could be that we learn patterns of behaviour in childhood that we continue to apply throughout life. Another could be that there is something about the way that our brains and bodies work that determines both our early experiences and our later behaviour. Each of these two views represents the beginnings of a theory about how people develop.

The way in which we decide between different theories of human behaviour depends upon the methods that we use to test and develop theories. For example, psychologists have conducted a great deal of research on identical twins (exactly the same in their genetic make-up) who have been raised in different homes and much evidence has been found that identical twins raised apart will tend to develop in ways that are strikingly similar. This evidence has been used by those who favour genetic explanations for human behaviour (those who believe ‘nature’ is very important) to bolster their theoretical approach. But things are not necessarily so simple. Others, who are more convinced of environmental influences (‘nurture’), have shown that even when twins are raised in separate households and never meet each other, those households are often quite similar to each other. And so the debates go on and on.
Figure 1.1 Sigmund Freud
Psychologists have conducted a great deal of research on identical twins.

**Figure 1.2** Psychologists have conducted a great deal of research on identical twins

**SUMMARY**

- Psychology is one of many systems of belief, however it differs in that it focuses on how we know things about people.
- Psychological theories are based on evidence or arguments.
- Research on identical twins can show how some influences on the developing child are genetic (nature) and others are environmental (nurture).
- Training in professional psychology requires a minimum of five years of university study and one year of internship, followed by the National Professional Board exam.

**Finding out about psychology**

This book may well be your first formal introduction to psychology. You will find many topics are covered, but because psychology is such a big field, there are also many aspects that are not covered. A single book can only introduce some of the key issues in psychology. To find out more, you will need to read widely.

An enormous amount of information is available about every aspect of psychology and this can be daunting. Because new ideas are emerging all the time, a good way to keep up to date in the field is always to be on the lookout for new, reputable books. In the field of psychology, however, academic journals are possibly even more important than books. Examples of South African psychological journals are the South African Journal of Psychology, the Journal of Industrial Psychology, Psychology in Society and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in South Africa.

There are also many excellent international journals, and many university libraries now offer online access to these through search engines like PsychInfo and PsychArticles. Psychologists in academic departments and research psychologists, as well as practitioners, will generally publish their work in academic journals.

A big advantage of reading articles printed in good psychology journals is that articles are
assessed for quality before being accepted for publication. In this standard process, any article sent to a journal is reviewed by a number of experts in the field (this is called peer reviewing). Articles which, according to the reviewers and the editor, are not academically up to standard will not be accepted for publication. Unfortunately, this does not mean that bad articles are never published!

The internet is a wonderful resource for gathering information easily, but there are drawbacks. On the plus side, there are thousands of websites which deal with every conceivable aspect of psychology. On the minus side, a person who knows nothing at all about a subject can put ideas on the internet as if these are fact – there is no quality control. Because students often have difficulty in assessing the quality of what they read, some university lecturers do not allow students to access material from the internet. Nevertheless, there are many excellent websites, online journals and discussion forums that use a peer-review process like printed journals do. An added bonus is that sources can be accessed and read as electronic files, rather than in print.

The key to using the internet (or any other knowledge source) is always to assess critically the quality of what you are reading. You will not automatically have this skill. Some old-fashioned educational techniques, where learners are forced to memorise lists of facts or ideas without questioning them, in fact discourage critical thinking. A key purpose of training in psychology (and in other university subjects) is to develop your critical thinking skills.

When we read about psychology, how do we assess the quality of what we read? First, we cannot judge the quality of an argument on the basis of what it concludes about people, or on the basis of whether we agree with the author’s beliefs about people or not. It is quite possible for two excellent psychologists to differ strongly about an aspect of human behaviour, while both providing convincing arguments and good evidence for reaching their conclusions. As you read more widely in psychology, you will find that there are many differences in opinion among researchers. It can even be the case that two researchers conduct what looks like the same experiment in two different settings, but get very different results. This does not mean, necessarily, that either of the researchers did bad work. On the contrary, different findings from different contexts may give us important information.

A discipline such as psychology thrives on debate. People are complex and different ways of studying people provide different sorts of information. It is through engaging with the debates that we learn, and the discipline of psychology can move forward. Students studying psychology for the first time sometimes expect it to teach them the so-called facts about people and assume that psychologists know everything there is to know about the human condition. This is not the case. It is certainly true that there are principles about understanding human behaviour that are supported by good research evidence and strong theories, and you will learn about some of these principles in this book. But the discipline is developing all the time, and new evidence and arguments make for new views about people.

In psychology, you have to be able to assess the research methods used to support an argument before you can assess whether that argument is well made. So you need to understand methods of research, which are the processes whereby psychologists make systematic observations of people and use these observations to develop theories. This is why the second chapter of this book focuses on research methods. But even before you are skilled in understanding the many sophisticated methods psychologists use in their research, there are two basic questions you can ask about anything you read in psychology:

1. Does the author provide evidence for what he/she claims to be true? In psychology, we cannot just make claims because we believe things to be so. Good psychologists rarely generalise, and they show to what extent there is sound evidence to support their views.
2. Does the author provide a clear and logical argument, linking what he/she reports on having read and/or observed to what he/she concludes? When you read a psychological text, assess how well the author builds an argument. When you read closely, you may find that the author leaves out steps in his or her argument, or jumps to conclusions on the basis of insufficient or incorrect evidence.

Learning to read critically in psychology is not something that happens overnight; it is not easy for
some students to make the leap from reading a text for supposed facts (as they may have done in some schools) to reading in order to understand and evaluate what they read. But becoming a critical reader is crucial to becoming a successful psychology student – and it is also fun! As you develop your critical skills, you will start to enter the world of scientific debate. You will no longer be someone who just reads and accepts what you are told; you will become a partner in creating your own knowledge.

**Psychological terminology**

When you learn a new discipline such as psychology, you learn many new words. These terms are sometimes referred to as the **jargon** of the discipline. Some you may have heard before, but they may have a slightly different meaning in the context of psychology. For example, many people use the term ‘depression’ to refer to a wide range of emotions and experiences. However, when psychologists refer to depression as a syndrome, they generally refer to a specific set of symptoms and behaviours.

In some cases, professional people such as psychologists use too much jargon – or use fancy words when simple ones will do. In this book we have tried to keep the amount of jargon to a minimum, but it is important that you understand the terms that are used. There is a glossary of key concepts at the end of each chapter to help you, and you can also consult dictionaries of psychology and the social sciences in your university library.

As in other disciplines, words in psychology change over time and are used differently in different places. For example, the recent edition of the Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2014) no longer uses the term ‘mental retardation’ for impairments in mental abilities but rather ‘intellectual disability’ (intellectual developmental disorder).

Though many of us would now disapprove of words such as imbecile, moron, feeble-minded and even the comparatively recent term, mentally defective, there have been times when each of those terms was quite acceptable to professionals working in the field. It is part of our job when using words in psychology to think of where these words come from, and what they can be taken to mean in the context in which they are used today.

**Subjects, respondents, participants or informants?**

When we do psychological research, we are usually interested in aspects of human behaviour, thoughts or emotions. But what do we call the people we are observing in order to study behaviour, thoughts and emotions? Thirty years ago there was little debate about this – psychological research was conducted on what were termed ‘subjects’. More recently, however, there has been debate about the use of this term. There are two major objections to the term ‘subjects’. First, the term gives the impression that research is being ‘done to them’, which implies coercion or force and the use of power by psychologists. Second, the term ends to make us think of the person being studied as a passive recipient of research and not as a person actively living in and making sense of their environment.

Many researchers now prefer to use the term ‘respondents’, as this gives the sense that we are interested in people who are responding to questions that psychologists pose or to situations in which psychologists place them. Other researchers prefer the term ‘participants’, which emphasises the active role people play when taking part in psychological research. But some psychologists do not like this term as they think it also applies to the psychologists who are conducting the research. Another term that is used for the people being studied by psychologists is ‘informants’.

Nowadays many researchers avoid the subjects/ respondents/participants/informants debate by referring specifically to the group being studied. For example, if we are studying cyclists’ reaction times we can refer to the people we are studying as cyclists, and not use any other term and the same would apply when studying adolescents, musicians, accountants, and so on. There is no hard
and fast rule as to what term to use, but there are different conventions that tend to be adopted by users of different types of research methods (see Chapter 2). Though it is possible to read too much into the ways in which researchers refer to the people they are studying, it is an interesting exercise to think about what may be implied by the use of different terms.

Figure 1.3 Subject, respondent, participant or cyclist?

Patients, clients or consumers?

Historically, clinical psychology has had strong ties to the practice of medicine, and clinical psychology texts have referred to the people whom clinical psychologists try to help as patients. This remains acceptable, but many psychologists have objected to it on the grounds that it implies that the people clinical psychologists work with are ill, when many would argue that the difficulties they face are not diseases. There are various alternative terms to patient, and the word ‘client’ is probably the one most commonly used in psychology as it emphasises that the relationship between the clinical psychologist and the person whom the psychologist is helping may be different from that between doctor and patient, and more similar to that between a person offering services (such as legal services) and that person’s clientele. Even within the health field, though, there is some debate about the word ‘patient’, and we sometimes see people who make use of health services referred to as consumers, service users or even simply users.
In counselling psychology, for some time the person doing the counselling was referred to by some writers as the helper, and the person receiving the counselling as the helpee. This illustrates the extent to which psychologists have struggled to find appropriate terms to refer respectfully and accurately to those with whom they work.

There is no single correct way to use language in a discipline as complex and diverse as psychology. In this book, we have not been prescriptive about many terms, and we have deliberately not imposed a uniform standard on the way all words are used. For this reason, for example, the term ‘patients’ is used extensively in the chapter on nutrition, HIV/AIDS, TB and parasites (Chapter 23), but the term ‘client’ is used in the chapter on psychotherapies (Chapter 25). As an active reader of this book (and other writings in psychology), you will have to make up your own mind about what words are best used where. But remember: always have a reason that supports your choice of words.

There is one area in which we have been consistent about the use of terminology though, and this is in the use of non-sexist language. Until fairly recently, psychologists and others have happily used masculine nouns and pronouns to refer to all people, male and female. However, this kind of usage subtly implies that what is true for men is also true for women, which may not always be so, and that the male gender is taken as the standard for human behaviour. The use of sexist language has been prohibited in most journals in which psychologists publish their articles, and this book follows that tradition. Psychology students, similarly, are expected to use non-sexist language in their writing.

**Ethics in psychology**

In Chapter 17, which is on group concepts, processes and dynamics, you will learn about the classic studies in psychology conducted by Stanley Milgram. Milgram wanted to understand how ordinary people come to be perpetrators of oppression and violence. This is an important question, and one which is as relevant today as it was in the early 1960s when Milgram was doing his work. One
method used by Milgram was to deceive people into believing that they were giving electric shocks to people who were failing at certain tasks. In fact, the people who were apparently receiving shocks were not being shocked at all – they were actors working with Milgram to deceive the research subjects. Milgram’s findings as a result of this work were very important – Milgram was able to show that his subjects would continue, as far as they were aware, to administer electric shocks to the actors as part of a psychological experiment. On the basis of these findings, Milgram was able to conclude that we all have the potential to commit acts of extreme harm when we are in situations in which we are obedient to others in authority. These findings imply that the difference between those who torture others and those who do not may be situational rather than moral.

The importance of this for how we think about many contemporary problems – including those of violence, oppression, terrorism and genocide – cannot be overestimated. But let us think for a moment what it must have been like to have been a subject in Milgram’s experiments. Imagine having to live with the knowledge that you are, in fact, quite capable of inflicting severe pain on others simply because somebody else tells you to do so. Even if it were explained afterwards that you did not really hurt any-one, you may have found out something about yourself which you really did not wish to know.

There have been many debates in psychology about whether Milgram was ethically correct in deceiving people into believing they were hurting others. Was Milgram unethical in what he did? Or does what he found out, by conducting his work in this way, outweigh any concerns about harm to those who participated in his studies? Debates like this in psychology (and there is still debate about the ethics of Milgram’s work) alert us to more subtle questions about the ethics of what we do.

In most, if not all, countries where psychology is organised as a discipline, there are codes of ethics that govern psychologists’ behaviour and protect the public from abuses by psychologists. Psychologists must ensure in all their work that they in no way violate other people’s human rights. Underlying most professional codes of conduct are principles that emphasise the following (adapted from American Psychological Association’s ‘Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct’, 2010):

- beneficence, or acting in the best interests of the client
- competence, or conducting work only for which one is trained and able to do
- non-maleficence, or not causing harm
- fidelity, or behaving in a trustworthy manner
- integrity, or a commitment to the truth
- respect for human rights and dignity.

These principles apply to the work psychologists do with the people they study, with the people they aim to help, with their students and with colleagues. As you read the chapters in this book, think carefully about every study mentioned and consider how ethical that study is. For example, under what circumstances and to what degree is it acceptable to lie to people about the purposes of a research study? How ethical is it to assess a child for learning problems if, once having found that there are such problems, you are not able to offer a way of remedying the problems? If you are concerned about the spread of HIV/AIDS through the sexual abuse of young children, what may be the ethical ramifications of finding out about this abuse? What, if anything, should you, as a researcher, do with the information that a child has been abused and that the abuse may be continuing?

There is scarcely a question in psychology that does not raise ethical debates, and it is important to think about ethics at all times. The question of ethics must be considered not only at the individual level. Given that we know, for example, that poverty can have devastating effects on human development (see Chapter 18), what is the responsibility of psychologists to contribute to the eradication of poverty? Should psychologists, as scientists, be politically neutral, or should we take a stand on political issues in line with our professional ethics, and in line with what we know about human behaviour?

If we, as psychologists, do align ourselves politically with certain positions, does this compromise...
our ability to make as broad as possible a contribution to society as experts in our field? An ethical dilemma, which has confronted clinical psychologists in the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa, has been whether support should be offered to those who committed gross human rights abuses. Do such people deserve psychological help? Who has the right to decide who deserves help and who does not? Even if we feel we would rather not be helping perpetrators of abuse, what are the social consequences of not giving this help? Could psychological help prevent perpetrators of crimes such as rape and child abuse from abusing again? How do we weigh up such questions?

When psychologists choose to work in the public domain, ethical questions are raised again. Psychologists are often called in by courts of law as expert witnesses to help the courts decide on a range of matters. For example, the court may need to decide whether a person who has perpetrated a criminal act can be held legally responsible for his/her actions. In the 2014 trial of Oscar Pistorius, a psychologist’s report was read into evidence by the defence team, who were seeking to establish Pistorius’s mental state and how this may have impacted on his actions. Or a court may need to decide on custody arrangements for children whose parents have decided to divorce and who disagree on what is best for them. In the nature of the legal system, the courts often wish the psychologist, as expert witness, to give an opinion that is based on certainty. But psychologists are often not 100 per cent sure - it is in the nature of our discipline to be critical and to see shades of grey in human behaviour. In order to achieve an outcome that they believe best for society, psychologists may be tempted to claim to be more certain than they are of something. But is this ethical? Is it honest?

Should psychologists offer their services to lessen the harmful effects of certain social practices? Imagine, for example, that you, as a psychologist, are called in to offer assistance to people who are participating in a reality television series in which they are regularly humiliated. What should you do? If you offer help to these participants, are you not subtly lending support and legitimacy to an unethical television show? Will the fact that a psychologist has been involved be used by the show’s producers to convince the public that they are behaving ethically? What if you, as a psychologist, believe the show should not be aired, but a valued colleague of yours feels differently, and is quite happy to provide psychological assistance? Should you try to discuss your differences in private, or should you have a public debate with your colleague? What would such a public debate do to the image of psychology as a profession?

As you have no doubt gathered from the above examples, ethical issues in psychology are not easy to address and resolve. What may appear to be a clear answer to an ethical dilemma may raise other ethical dilemmas that are far more complex. Psychologists can never claim to have resolved all of the ethical issues associated with their work, but what they can do is ensure that, in everything they do, they think carefully about ethical issues, and about how what they do affects the welfare of individuals, groups, communities and nations.
SUMMARY

- Psychological knowledge is developing constantly. It is important for students of psychology to remain up to date.
- Peer-reviewed articles in academic journals are usually of greater accuracy and value than information found on the internet.
- Students need to become critical readers. They should learn how to judge the quality of an article. Academic quality depends on the standard of the evidence (and underlying research) and arguments offered by authors.
- Psychology (like other disciplines) has a dedicated jargon. Students should think carefully about the possible meanings and interpretations of terms.
- There has been much debate about the terms used for people who participate in research and those who come to counselling or psychotherapy.
- All psychological practice (research or interventions) should be conducted in an ethical manner and the profession is governed by an ethical code of conduct. However, many psychological issues are extremely complex and choosing the most ethical action may not be easy.
1.3 BRIEF HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

Source: Norman Duncan and Brett Bowman

Because psychological concepts are used so often in our everyday language, it is tempting to think that the discipline of psychology has been a long-standing knowledge system. However, the discipline of psychology as we know it today was only formalised relatively recently. Although the term ‘psychology’ was already being used around 1520 by Marko Maruli to describe a field of study concerned with the human mind and/or spirit, the scientific discipline of psychology was only formalised in 1879 when Wilhelm Wundt established a laboratory dedicated to psychological research.

Wundt was interested in trying to break down sensory experiences into their smallest parts – a kind of chemistry of experience – and his school of thought is referred to as structuralism. However, William James (1842–1910) founded a different school of thought called functionalism. Functionalists disagreed with Wundt’s ideas and were more interested in the purpose of consciousness. Functionalist thought was strongly influenced by the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin.

The varying historical pathways that led to Wundt’s laboratory in Leipzig are difficult to trace. Some go back many thousands of years. Thus the history of psychology may be understood as a continuing reflection on some enduring questions, such as: What is human nature? How are the mind and body related? Are behaviours learnt or inherited? How do humans acquire knowledge? What is abnormal human behaviour? How do we use psychological techniques to deal with apparently psychological problems? These sorts of questions have been tackled very differently at certain periods in history.

Ancient times

We can find evidence of formal thought on the mind and the human condition in Greece at around 5000 BC, in China at around 4000 BC and in Egypt at around 1550 BC. The texts left by these ancient philosophers contain many of the themes that make up modern-day psychology. From them, historians give special recognition to the Greek philosopher Plato, who distinguished between the rational psyche and the irrational psyche; the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who wrote about human memory; and the Chinese philosopher, Mencius, who contemplated the elements of the human mind (Leahey, 2004). Other key forerunners of psychology included the Greek philosophers Democritus, who proposed a material basis for mental states (Leahey, 2004), and Hippocrates, who argued that both mental and physical pathologies are the result of natural causes (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).

Europe’s Middle Ages and its Renaissance

Europe’s Middle Ages lasted from the 5th century to the 16th century, and during this time concerns of a psychological nature were heavily influenced by religious frameworks. However, there was a move to link faith and reason, notably by St Anselm of Canterbury, who often used logic in his theological writings. During this period there was also a focus on the psychology of love and the examination of those characteristics and feelings that seemed to make humans distinct from one another.

This tendency to highlight emotional states and human relationships continued into the Renaissance, which was characterised by a deep respect for humanism and naturalism. Many historians believe that naturalism’s fascination for uncovering the laws of nature paved the way for the period of the Enlightenment that was to follow.

The European Enlightenment

In Europe, the beginning of the 18th century was marked by an urge to uncover the laws of the universe and the place of human consciousness. Rejecting the taken-for-granted teachings of the church, Enlightenment philosophers and scientists were suspicious of any knowledge that was not acquired from the senses or from rational argument. It was out of this era of scepticism that the scientific method as a means to understanding the natural and social worlds was born.

During this period, the Frenchman René Descartes suggested that thought was the foundation of knowledge. On the other hand, a group of British philosophers suggested that experience formed the basis of all thinking and acting. These philosophers included Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and David Hume, and, although they differed in their theorising of human psychology, each valued the use of a strictly systematic method for investigating human behaviour. The use of this method and an insistence on its utility for understanding human consciousness led to the emergence of a science of mental life in the Leipzig laboratories of 1879.
Psychology in South Africa

While some psychological research took place in South Africa during the first two decades of the 20th century (Foster & Louw, 1991), psychology as a formal discipline emerged in South Africa only in the 1920s with the establishment of the first psychology departments at the Universities of Pretoria, Rhodes, Stellenbosch and the Witwatersrand (Bowman, Duncan & Swart, 2008; De la Rey, 2001; Cooper, Nicholas, Seedat & Statman, 1990). Despite some significant advances made in the sub-discipline of social psychology in South Africa during the 1920s and 1930s, such as the seminal research on intergroup relations and prejudice conducted by MacCrone (Bowman et al., 2008), the overall development of the discipline appeared to be fairly slow.

Until the 1940s, therefore, South African psychology as an academic discipline remained relatively small. Largely for this reason, it was strongly influenced by the psychology of the northern hemisphere, at least until the end of the 20th century.

As in many other parts of the world, the discipline of psychology in South Africa was first driven by an interest in the development, adaptation and application of various intelligence tests. Also as elsewhere in the world, but particularly in North America (Benjamin, 2008), these instruments were largely employed to determine the differences in intelligence between various races (Bowman et al., 2008). This type of research was later harnessed to give a so-called rational basis to various racist state policies and practices in South Africa.

With the outbreak of World War II and a consequent demand for the services of psychologists to develop aptitude tests and programmes for demobilised troops, the growth of the discipline appeared to gain considerable momentum. This momentum was maintained after the war, with the growing realisation of the value of psychology for the South African industrial sector (Bowman et al., 2008).

While South African psychology's growth after World War II was significant, many people criticised it for being unimaginative and too preoccupied with emulating European and North American psychology, rather than developing greater responsiveness to the needs of all South Africans. Indeed, in the past, many have argued that South African psychology's links with, and sometimes overt support for, the apartheid order and the exploitative practices of South African industry compromised the discipline's integrity and legitimacy beyond repair. (See Duncan, Stevens & Bowman, 2004, and Terre Blanche & Seedat, 2001, for critiques of South African psychology's role in the maintenance of apartheid and exploitative practices in South African industry, respectively.)

However, a significant number of progressive psychologists supported the anti-apartheid movement. Their increasing support for the most marginalised in South African society, particularly during the 1980s, as well as their later involvement in various initiatives aimed at the transformation of South African society (such as the prominence of psychologists in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) illustrates the constructive role that psychology has also played in the past and can continue to play in contemporary South African society.

Figure 1.5 There is constant growth in output in psychology

Note: The drop in number for 1940–1949 is attributable to World War II. For the decade 1990–1999 there were about as many entries (over 600 000) as for all of the preceding decades of the 20th century. The decade 2000–2009 is a projection and extrapolation.

Psychology today
Internationally, psychology has undergone substantial change and has grown significantly since its formal establishment as a field of study in 1879. Indeed, so phenomenal has the growth of the discipline been that many authors divide it into various sub-disciplines when they attempt to write its history. By way of illustration, we present the following descriptions for some of the categories of psychology in use today (Coon & Mitterer, 2013):

- Developmental psychology focuses on the study of cognitive, emotional and physical changes throughout the human life span.
- Social psychology involves studying the behaviour of people in groups as well as the influence of social factors on human behaviour.
- Health psychology focuses on how psychology can contribute to optimal health and health care practices.
- Cognitive psychology focuses on the mental processes involved in acquiring, processing, organising and storing information.
- Personality psychology focuses on the study of the human personality and its constituent parts.
- Industrial/organisational psychology involves studying the effects of organisations on individuals and individuals’ adjustment to the world of work.
- Educational psychology focuses on the adjustment of the individual in institutions of learning as well as effective educational practices.
- Clinical psychology involves the study and treatment of non-normative behaviour.
- Counselling psychology focuses on developing and implementing interventions aimed at people with adjustment difficulties.
- Community psychology aims at developing and implementing large-scale interventions that will enhance the wellbeing of communities.
- Neuropsychology seeks to study the interface between the mind and the brain.

Although all of these are sub-disciplines of psychology, they have their own histories. Furthermore, all of them have been more or less dominant at various points in the history of psychology. Fields and sub-fields of psychology tend to grow in response to society’s demands. Currently, with society’s increasing preoccupation with the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with the impact of violence and with social justice, there is a significant growth in the sub-fields of health psychology, neuropsychology and community psychology.

As should be clear from the above, while psychology has a relatively short history it is a richly diverse field of study that will continue to grow and change.

The following section describes current perspectives in psychology, many of which have grown from earlier developments.
The discipline of psychology was only formally established in 1879 with Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig. Wundt was a structuralist who took a 'chemical' approach to the study of sensory experience. William James opposed Wundt, focusing on the purpose of consciousness. The discipline of psychology emerged from thousands of years of reflection on humankind which took place in Greece (Plato and Aristotle), China (Mencius) and Egypt. Greek philosophers (such as Democritus and Hippocrates) thought that pathology was the result of natural causes. In the Middle Ages (5th to 16th century), religion strongly influenced psychological thought. Emotional states and human relationships were examined. This continued into the Renaissance period. The Renaissance was characterised by a deep respect for humanism and naturalism. In the European Enlightenment, there was a focus on uncovering the laws of the universe; only information from the senses was valued. Scepticism led to the emergence of the scientific method as a means of understanding the natural and social worlds. There was debate among theorists about the primacy of thought and knowledge. South African psychology emerged in the 1920s. Until the 1940s, there was relatively little development. South African psychology was strongly influenced by European and North American psychology. Early interest in intelligence testing was later applied to support apartheid policies. Psychometric testing continued to be important for the growth of psychology after World War II. In the apartheid era, it was argued that South African psychology was compromised by links with the apartheid state; however, progressive psychologists supported the anti-apartheid movement. There are now many sub-disciplines in psychology, each with their own history. As society changes, more sub-disciplines will develop.

Contemporary perspectives in psychology

In the previous section, you learned about how psychology became established as a discipline from many different roots. Present-day psychology is also very diverse, with many different (and sometimes conflicting) ways of understanding human behaviour. The variety of views can be very confusing for first-year students, but it is important for you to recognise particular perspectives and to understand their roots. To help with this, some of the chapters have applications of these perspectives to the opening vignette.

It is also important to understand that there is no single correct view in psychology. In the end, it is up to you to decide which makes the most sense to you, depending on the evidence and argument presented.

The major views differ in terms of their focus of study, with some more interested in behaviour while others focus on unconscious processes. They also differ in terms of whether behaviour depends on inherited characteristics or factors in the environment (Engler, 2009). Another very important difference is the degree to which behaviour is determined by internal or external forces, or whether people have freedom to choose their own behaviour.

The psychoanalytic perspective

This is descended from one of the early schools of thought in psychology which grew from the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Freud was the first-born child in his family. He trained as a medical doctor and became interested in patients with physical symptoms (e.g. paralysis, blindness, loss of sensation) with no known physical cause. He thought there must be psychological causes and began using hypnosis to treat these patients. Later he used free association, in which patients lay
on the couch in his office and described whatever came into their minds. Often this related to painful experiences from childhood. On the basis of this, Freud came to believe that all behaviour is determined by innate sexual and aggressive impulses. As these impulses are forbidden and punished in society, they are pushed down (repressed) into the unconscious. But these impulses do not disappear from the unconscious; they continue to influence our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. As a result, we develop and use defence mechanisms to try to manage the anxiety that these unconscious impulses cause us.

Freud’s theory has been heavily criticised for a number of reasons. Many feel he emphasised childhood sexuality too much (see Chapter 5); it is also difficult to do empirical research on the theory. However, the theory recognised the importance of early childhood experiences in our personality development. A number of followers of Freud (neo-Freudians) have developed his theories and taken them in new directions, including Carl Jung (see Chapter 5) and Freud’s daughter, Anna Freud.

The behavioural perspective

Like the psychoanalytic perspective, the behavioural perspective is descended from an early school of psychology. However, it differs greatly from Freud’s views. Behaviourists believe that our behaviour is shaped by our environment. This includes aspects of our present environment as well as past habits we have learned since birth. They believe babies are born as a tabula rasa or blank slate and that personality develops depending on the child’s experiences, which are ‘written’ on the slate. Thus, behaviourists feel that human nature is shaped by environment. The underlying philosophy is empiricism.

Early work on how environment shapes behaviour was done by Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) (see Chapter 9). Pavlov was a Russian physiologist whose work with dogs showed that animals (and people!) can learn by associating different events. Pavlov rang a bell every time he fed the dogs so that, over time, the dogs began to associate the sound of the bell with their food. Thus they learned to salivate at the sound of the bell, even if they were not given food each time. This is known as (respondent) classical conditioning and it is based on reflexes that are already present in an organism. People also learn from the consequences of their actions. Edward Thorndike (1874–1949) developed the law of effect, which said that if behaviour had satisfying consequences, it would most likely be repeated (and behaviour with less satisfying consequences would be less likely to recur).

John Watson (1878–1958) and B.F. Skinner (1904–1990) were the leaders of the school of behaviourism. Watson was especially opposed to the ideas of the structuralists, functionalists and Freud, saying that there was no point in studying the mind and mental processes as these could not be observed.
Skinner was a radical behaviourist, who did a great deal of research mostly using rats and pigeons. Like Watson, Skinner felt it was not helpful to talk about unseen (and unknowable) mental structures and processes. For example, rather than think about how angry a person was, he would try to identify the circumstances that preceded the anger and the events that followed it.

Skinner’s research identified how behaviour can be changed through operant conditioning in which a behaviour leads to a response from the environment and the nature of this response influences whether or not the behaviour is repeated. Thus in operant conditioning, the environment provides (or does not provide) reinforcement. For example, when a teacher draws a happy face in a child’s school book, he/she will probably be pleased and work hard to get another one. A reinforcer is anything that increases the likelihood of the behaviour occurring again.
A descendant of behaviourism is the social learning theory of Albert Bandura. You can read more about Bandura in Chapter 5.

The humanist perspective

Humanist theories developed partly in response to the determinism in the theories of Freud (behaviour determined by the unconscious) and the behaviourists (behaviour determined by the environment). As a result, humanism has been called the third force in psychology. The humanists take an optimistic view of human behaviour, saying that people have free will and they naturally strive towards self-actualisation or reaching their full potential.

Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) and Carl Rogers (1902–1987) were the founders of humanism. Maslow was especially interested in the factors that lead to personal fulfilment and growth so he studied people who had highly productive and happy lives. He found that these people had some characteristics in common, including a sense of purpose in life, a commitment to honesty and ethical behaviour, autonomy, an accurate perception of reality, good relationships with others and a sense of fellowship with all humankind.

Both Maslow and Rogers believed that psychology should focus on a person’s unique, subjective perceptions of the world. Thus, the self is a central concept of Rogers’ theory. The self consists of an organised set of perceptions about oneself that develops over time in response to feedback from others. Because of this process, the self-image (who we think we are) may be different from our real self (who we truly are). In addition, we may develop an ideal self (who we would like to be). For the humanists, our goal in life is congruence between these different aspects of self. If there is incongruence, we will experience tension and anxiety.

Much present-day counselling is based on humanist ideas of providing emotional warmth, empathy and unconditional positive regard. Humanism has contributed greatly to a respectful and positive approach to people. However, some aspects are not well supported by research and the approach may downplay the effort needed to effect real change in one’s life.

Positive psychology

Positive psychology is a present-day descendant of humanism. The movement was founded by Martin Seligman (b.1942) in 1997 (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Seligman argued that psychology as a discipline has focused too much on the pathological and not enough on the positive aspects of humankind (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology aims to identify the conditions that allow people and organisations to flourish (Gable & Haidt, 2005) by studying happy, well-functioning communities or institutions to try to identify what features contribute to this state.

Community psychology research identified specific character strengths (e.g. hope, courage, wisdom, interpersonal skills, and so on) that buffer people against mental illness.

Positive psychology has been criticised for a lack of research support and for being simplistic. It has also been criticised for implying that mainstream psychology is negative. However, supporters of positive psychology are clear that psychology itself is not negative, but rather that the focus has been on pathology (in order to better help people) at the expense of furthering knowledge on human strengths and resilience (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

The biopsychological perspective

Although Wundt was interested in physiological processes, biological psychology has only resumed prominence in more recent decades, primarily due to advances in brain imaging technology. Psychologists working from this perspective see human behaviour as the result of internal physical,
chemical and biological processes; thus, they are interested in the workings of the brain and hormonal system (see Chapter 7). They study the microbiological processes which underlie thoughts, emotions and behaviour.

Donald Hebb (1904–1985) was a Canadian neuropsychologist who was interested in the effects of trauma (including surgery) on brain function. He noted that the brains of children were better able than adult brains to recover from trauma. This suggests that the brain can learn new pathways for functions but that this ability declines with age. Hebb also noted the importance of external stimulation in brain development and recovery. Other research has studied the functions of the different structures of the brain (see Chapter 7 for more information).

The cognitive perspective

This perspective focuses on the mental processing of information. It is a descendant of the early school of gestalt psychology. Gestalt is a German word meaning form or shape. The gestalt school was interested in the way the mind takes sensory stimuli and interprets them into a whole. Think about when you hear a well-known song (e.g. Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika) – you can recognise it regardless of whether it is played by a whole orchestra or just a guitar. Your mind actively assembles the pattern of the song from the individual notes you hear.

The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980) developed a theory of cognitive development (see Chapters 3 and 4) and the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1886–1934) studied how the development of language and thought are related to the social and cultural environment of the growing child (see Chapter 3).

Cognitive psychology grew especially during the computer era when the mind was seen as acting rather like a computer. Thus, your senses take in information and process it to allow you to make decisions, respond verbally or solve problems, among others. In terms of psychopathology, it seems that some people with depression have systematically distorted thought processes.

There is currently cutting-edge research being conducted in the field of cognitive neuroscience. Another important cognitive perspective studies the way people construct their own reality. This is known as social constructionism and it is interested in how members of social groups share similar ways of interpreting and understanding events. This leads to a shared social reality among group members (an example of this would be adolescence, which is constructed differently within different cultural or national groups).

The sociocultural perspective

Over the last 30 to 40 years, there has been a growing realisation that most psychological knowledge is based on research done in a Western context. It has been assumed that this knowledge applies universally. However, this is an example of cultural imperialism and the sociocultural perspective works to redress this assumption. It also considers factors like ethnicity and sexual orientation.

There are a number of branches of the sociocultural perspective. Cultural psychology studies the role of culture in shaping our experiences and development, while cross-cultural psychology tries to assess whether findings are applicable across different cultural groups. This perspective taps into indigenous knowledge systems, recognising that people from within a cultural group are experts on their own cultural systems and practices.

The sociocultural perspective adopts an attitude of cultural relativity, arguing that behaviour needs to be understood according to the culture in which it commonly occurs. An important cultural difference in the African context is the emphasis on collectivism, as opposed to the individualism typical of Western cultures. In collectivist cultures, the focus is on the well-being of the group and individual needs and goals are subordinate to this. In contrast, in individualistic cultures, there is emphasis on individual achievement and competition.
The community psychology perspective

The community psychology perspective aims to understand people as they are embedded in their communities and wider society. Its goal is to improve mental health and quality of life in individuals and communities through the prevention of mental health problems and early intervention in existing problems (see Chapter 26 for more information on this). Prevention programmes may include developing better support systems and access to resources in a community, while early intervention may include the provision of crisis counselling after a natural disaster or other traumatic event.

The community health approach fits well with the policy shift to a primary health care focus taken by the South African government in recent years. Community psychologists are involved in both curative and preventive programmes. They often work in public health settings and may be involved in drafting mental health policy.

One aspect that communities have had to deal with is the discharge of people with mental health problems into the community. This is known as de-institutionalisation and it has happened partly because of improvements in medication and partly because of increasingly limited resources in the public health system. However, there is a risk that individuals who lack family support may end up destitute. On the other hand, where there is good community support, it seems this approach may have significant benefits for patients (Lamb & Bachrach, 2001).

SUMMARY

- Present-day psychology has many different ways of understanding human behaviour; however, there is no single correct view in psychology. The major views differ in terms of their focus of study, understanding of the influences of nature and nurture, and degree of determinism.
- The psychoanalytic perspective (Freud) argues that behaviour is determined by innate sexual and aggressive impulses, which we repress because they are forbidden in society. But these impulses continue to influence our thoughts, feelings and behaviour, resulting in defence mechanisms.
- The behavioural perspective believes that behaviour is shaped by the environment. We learn by association (classical conditioning – Pavlov), response from the environment (operant conditioning – Skinner; Watson) or social learning (Bandura).
- The humanist perspective (Maslow; Rogers) takes an optimistic view of human behaviour, saying that we have free will and we naturally strive towards reaching our full potential. Maslow found that people who lived happy and productive lives had some characteristics in common. For Rogers, a person’s subjective perceptions of the world are most important; hence the self-image, real self and ideal self should be as congruent as possible.
- Positive psychology (Seligman) argues that traditional psychology focuses too much on pathology; in contrast, this approach aims to identify the conditions that allow people and organisations to flourish.
- The biopsychological perspective (Hebb) sees human behaviour as the result of internal physical, chemical and biological processes. This approach studies the microbiological processes which underlie thoughts, emotions and behaviour.
- The cognitive perspective (Piaget; Vygotsky) focuses on the mental processing of information. Thus the mind is seen as acting rather like a computer. A related perspective, social constructionism, is interested in how members of social groups share similar ways of interpreting and understanding events.
- The sociocultural perspective argues that traditional psychology has been based on a Western understanding of people. It seeks to understand people from within their own cultural context. It also seeks to use indigenous knowledge systems.
- The community psychology perspective aims to understand people as they are embedded in their communities and wider society. It has a preventative goal in terms of mental health problems and also promotes early intervention in existing problems.
This book has been written by African authors, with many African examples, and is designed to be used by learners mainly from Africa and developing countries. But does it reflect an African psychology? What does the idea of an African psychology mean? Does it make any sense to speak about an African psychology? This is a much more complex question than it may at first appear.

As was the case during the 20th century, the discipline of psychology is currently dominated by developments in North America. This does not mean that there is not valuable research going on in psychology in Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe, for example, but the sheer volume of work and resources put into psychology in the US ensures that nobody working in the field can ignore this influence.

Consider an example of how the dominance of European and North American ideas influences what we come to know of the world. A rapidly growing field within psychology is that of infant development (see Chapter 3). Over 90 per cent of infants in the world are born in developing parts of the world, but over 90 per cent of international journal articles on infant mental health and development deal with infants in the US, Canada, Europe and Australasia (Tomlinson & Swartz, 2003). This means that there is an enormous imbalance between the context within which most babies live, and the knowledge that enters psychology about babies and their development.

Does this matter? International research in psychology has shown that certain basic principles of human behaviour apply everywhere, but there are also differences in how people grow and develop in different parts of the world. While it would be wrong, for example, to throw out all the knowledge that comes from Europe and North America, it would also be wrong to think this knowledge can be applied without more thought to other contexts.

One of the difficulties with this issue is that researchers working in the developed world may forget or even become blind to the importance of context. Many researchers based at North American universities, for example, conduct experiments using first-year psychology students. The reasons for this are obvious: the students are around, easy to involve in research and may themselves learn a lot about psychology by participating in these experiments. There is no problem at all with this. However, students are by no means typical of the world’s population and it cannot be assumed that this knowledge is applicable to people of all ages and cultures. These researchers need to find proof of universality by looking at the issue in a variety of contexts.

When you read psychology texts, no matter where they are published or where the research has been conducted, every time you see a generalisation, try to make an assessment of the basis on which the generalisation has been made. Where does the evidence come from, and is the evidence enough to support the generalisation?

There is also another sense in which we need to think about the debates on African psychology. The spread of psychology from these northern countries through the rest of the world has been associated with their political, social and economic influence on the rest of the world. It is not simply a coincidence, for example, that just as North American ideas about psychology are known throughout the world, the McDonald’s logo and the Coca-Cola sign are also known throughout the world. Psychology has been spread throughout the world in the context of other social processes, such as colonisation and globalisation.

This raises interesting questions, not only for social science disciplines like psychology. For example, to what extent is our profession’s knowledge about people a product of the views of others who, for a range of reasons, have power? To what extent is our knowledge about people without much power a product of how they are seen by more powerful people? These are complex questions which cannot be answered fully here, but they are important to bear in mind.

In the context of a country like South Africa, we need to ask other questions. Who, even within African countries, is producing psychological knowledge about Africa? Currently, for obvious historical reasons, most of the people who have written about psychology in South Africa have been white. The dominance of white voices in the production of knowledge about psychology is changing (and, indeed, the diversity of the authors of this book is testimony to this), but the dominance is still with us.

When we read what psychologists say about people we need to think about the possible
influences that the psychologists’ backgrounds may have on the conclusions they draw about the people they study. There have been shameful examples in the history of psychology in South Africa and elsewhere where psychologists have deliberately produced supposed scientific knowledge in order to support repressive and racist policies.

But we need to ask a more subtle kind of question. To what extent are people who are outsiders to a group able to understand that group? How should we interpret the many conclusions white South Africans have drawn about black South Africans, for example? How do we factor into our analyses that, in South Africa and many other countries, psychologists try to understand people without even being able to understand the languages these people speak? Once again, there are no easy answers to these questions. Blanket generalisations claiming that outsider psychologists have nothing useful to say or, on the other hand, that outsider psychologists can say anything they wish without their outsider status being a problem, are especially unhelpful. We need to keep thinking about these questions, bearing in mind how complex they are. In this regard, it is probably not very helpful, as is sometimes done, to label all of psychology as Eurocentric, and to call for a more Afrocentric psychology.

Although the authors of the various chapters of this book include African psychologists, this book will not answer all the possible questions about what an African psychology is, or could be. As you read this book, and as you study psychology further, you will return to these questions and debates, and your participation in these debates can help move the field forward.

The approach of this book

Many people study psychology in order to find out as much as they can about people, and in this book you will find no shortage of fascinating, and sometimes surprising, information. However, as mentioned, our knowledge changes all the time. This would be a serious problem if our only concern were with telling you, the reader, what the latest knowledge in the field is. In fact, we are far more concerned with giving you the basic tools whereby you can decide whether new information that comes to you is useful information or not. Ultimately, we hope you will be able to participate in creating new psychological information yourself, using good quality methods to extend our knowledge and to test our theories.

The authors of this book are all experts in their fields who have studied psychology for a long time. All of them have made their own contributions to psychological knowledge through their own research and publications. But the impressive credentials of the authors are far less important than the quality of what they say. It is up to you, as a reader, to critically consider everything that is said in this book, and to come to your own opinions, based on clear arguments. If you agree with the authors (and we hope you often will), it is not enough to agree with them just because you like their conclusions – you must be clear about why their argument is convincing. How have they used evidence? What methods have they used? How good and useful are their theories? If you disagree with the authors (and we hope you will feel free to do this), it is not enough to disagree with them just because you do not like their conclusions. You have to be able to show why their arguments do not hold up. Once you have worked through this book, you should be able to apply your skills to new material that you read, and, ultimately, to develop your own knowledge of people.

The organisation of this book

This book is a general introduction to key issues in psychology, especially as they apply to our South African context as a developing country. Part 1 (which includes this chapter and the one that follows) focuses less on content than on the ways in which psychologists collect and interpret information. This first chapter, as you have seen, talks generally about how psychologists look at the world and make sense of it. There is also an introduction to how psychologists use language, and to the question of how psychologists think about ethics and ethical behaviour. Chapter 2 looks rather more formally at research methods and how they are used to develop new knowledge about people.
It is very important to understand (and critically evaluate) the research processes that underpin our knowledge in psychology. At first reading, you may find Chapter 2 rather difficult. Do not worry about this – research methods are often hard to grasp. You will probably find yourself returning to this chapter again and again throughout your studies in psychology, as you try to evaluate new things you learn. As you reread Chapter 2, you will become more comfortable with its methodological concepts.

In Part 2 of this book, we focus on human development from before birth into late adulthood. It is important not only to gain an understanding of how people develop from being a collection of cells into social, emotional and intellectual beings, but also to know something about the kinds of influences there are on human development from before birth until the moment of death. An understanding of the basics of human development is essential for anyone wishing to conduct research within any field of psychology. In this edition, we have amalgamated the former five chapters into two in order to make the part more streamlined.

Part 3 of this book focuses on different theories of personality and on how psychologists see individuals operating in the world. In addition, it examines how psychologists go about assessing personality, and the methods they use to make their assessments as valid as they can be.

Part 4 of this book focuses on the brain and behaviour. Historically, psychology has always had a connection with the study of the brain and the nervous system. At some times in the history of psychology, psychologists have tried to argue that we do not need to know much about the brain in order to understand people. In the past few years, however, it has become increasingly clear that an understanding of the brain and how it works is essential to a full understanding of our thinking, our emotions and what we do. The approach taken by the authors contributing to Part 4 of this book shows that the traditional divisions between psychological and biological understandings of human behaviour have begun to break down, much to the benefit of psychology and cognitive science more generally. This section has also seen some changes – the four chapters from the previous edition have been slimmed down to two more logically coherent chapters.

Part 5, dealing with cognitive psychology, examines what happens in the mind – in learning, motivation, thinking, attention, memory, language and intelligence. What is clear from this section, however, is that what happens in the mind also happens in a social context, so to understand cognitive psychology we also have to understand how thinking and similar functions operate in the context of the world around us.

This theme of the relationship between the internal world and the world around us is developed further in Part 6. Human beings are social animals, and social psychology focuses on how we change and are changed by our context. In this section, as in other sections, we focus on issues of particular relevance to South Africa and developing countries. We explore, therefore, the social psychology of interpersonal attraction, groups, ethnicity and racism, gender and sex, poverty, violence and trauma, and peacemaking – all crucial issues for social and community development in South Africa and similar countries.

Part 7 introduces the rapidly growing area of health psychology as applied to our context. The chapters in this part focus on behavioural and other influences on human health and development, including stress, risk behaviours and nutritional issues. It also focuses on key health issues facing the poorer countries of the world – HIV/AIDS, TB and parasites (such as malaria and bilharzia) – and shows how psychology has an important role to play in the prevention and containment of these conditions, and in helping people adapt to their consequences.

Part 8 opens with an introduction to the vast field of psychopathology, providing an outline of how psychology classifies mental disorders and giving the theoretical approaches that psychologists have taken to understanding mental health challenges. The rest of the section explores ways in which psychology and connected disciplines attempt to make a difference to people’s mental health, and relates this to the worlds in which they live. The different chapters in this section show how these interventions can be thought about at a range of levels.

In Part 9 we explore one of the ways psychology is applied: organisational psychology. This part has only one chapter, but it is a substantial one that examines how psychologists have contributed to company efficiency, and whether this should be a role for psychologists. There is additional
material on the companion website for Psychology an introduction, including chapters on educational, career and sports psychology.

Part 10 covers African and Eastern philosophies and reflects both the diversity of the southern African population and theoretical developments in the field of African psychology.

What is different about this book?

There are many introductory textbooks in psychology, and many of them are of excellent quality. Why, then, have we put together this one? This book covers the same material as many introductory psychology textbooks, but it has some key features that set it apart. First, we have a very wide range of contributors, most of them from diverse southern African backgrounds. Traditionally, psychology textbooks have been written by authors based in the US, and to a lesser extent in Europe. We believe that if psychology is to be an effective and applicable discipline in South Africa and similar countries, it is important that people with experiences of those societies are the ones writing about it.

This leads to the second way in which this book differs from others, which is that we emphasise throughout the application of psychological thinking to South Africa and similar contexts. Just about every section of this book has African examples, and fields of psychology that are often omitted or touched on only briefly in traditional introductory texts are covered more fully here. For example, the section on social psychology focuses on social issues that are especially pertinent to South Africa and similar countries, such as poverty and ethnicity. The section on health issues extensively discusses those which are particularly relevant to southern Africa, such as HIV/AIDS, TB and parasites.

This edition also sees a brand new chapter covering African and Eastern psychologies. This is an exciting development and one that reflects both the diversity of the southern African population and theoretical developments in the field of African psychology.

In addition to these features, we have included stories of South Africans to help readers link the theory of psychology to lives typically lived in our part of the world. In summary, we have tried to create a book that will equip you as a student of psychology but will also relate to the lives of South Africans.

Finally, at the beginning of certain chapters, we have included narratives about four young South Africans: Nosipho, Yolisa, Melinda and Xolani, who will help to contextualise the discussions that follow. At the end of the relevant chapters, there is a feature that shows how the different psychological perspectives can be applied to the opening narrative.

Studying psychology is a great adventure and we hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed writing this book.

KEY CONCEPTS

- **collectivism**: the ideology that emphasises the importance of group goals over individual goals, as well as social cohesion within groups
- **colonisation**: when one or more groups populate an area, displacing or dominating the former occupants
- **congruence**: matching (in a humanist sense, matching between the different aspects of the self)
- **cultural imperialism**: when a more powerful culture dominates a less powerful one
- **de-institutionalisation**: process whereby long-term mental health patients are discharged from mental health institutions and services provided within the community
- **determinism**: the notion that personality is determined by either external or internal forces
- **free association**: therapeutic technique where a person says whatever comes into his/her mind
- **generalisations**: when information is applied too broadly to people or groups
- **gestalt**: literally means a form or shape; in psychology refers to how we recognise patterns in
sensory inputs

- **globalisation**: a process whereby people, companies and governments interact and become integrated; the process is driven by trade, investment and the development of information technology
- **indigenous knowledge systems**: systems of local knowledge that are unique to a particular culture or society
- **individualism**: the ideology that emphasises the worth of the individual
- **jargon**: terms or speech that is only familiar to a group or profession
- **peer reviewing**: an important method of ensuring quality in published psychological information where articles and/or books are read and evaluated by expert peers
- **self-actualisation**: process of reaching one's full human potential
- **social constructionism**: the idea that people construct knowledge in interaction with their social context
- **tabula rasa**: literally means a blank slate; taken to mean that infants are not born with a personality but learn this from their environment
- **unconscious processes**: aspects of human emotions and thinking which occur outside of a person’s conscious awareness

**EXERCISES**

**Multiple choice questions**

1. To become a psychologist registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa, you have to have:
   a) an Honours degree in psychology
   b) a Master’s degree in psychology
   c) a Master’s degree in psychology and must have completed a recognised internship
   d) an Honours degree in psychology and must have completed a recognised internship.

2. Which of the following is a standard process for journal article publication?
   a) The article must be peer reviewed.
   b) The article must be popular.
   c) The journal must be accredited.
   d) The author must be well known.

3. Evidence that identical twins raised in separate homes will tend to develop in similar ways has been used to highlight the importance of________for human behaviour.
   a) behavioural explanations
   b) cognitive explanations
   c) humanistic explanations
   d) genetic explanations.

4. An objection to the use of the term ‘subjects’ in psychological research is that:
   a) it implies that the people involved in research are passive
   b) it implies that the people involved in research are not very interesting
   c) it implies some form of coercion by psychologists
   d) a and c are correct.

5. The father of psychology and founder of the first psychological laboratory was:
6. During the Middle Ages, concerns of a psychological nature were heavily influenced by:
   a) biological understandings of human behaviour
   b) religious frameworks
   c) natural understandings of human behaviour
   d) ideas of the unconscious.

7. Which of the following would be considered humanists?
   a) Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers
   b) Wilhelm Wundt and E.B. Titchener
   c) Max Wertheimer and William James
   d) B.F. Skinner and John B. Watson.

8. In his research studies, Stanley Milgram wanted to understand:
   a) how well the ‘teachers’ could teach the ‘learners’
   b) how much pain the ‘learners’ could endure
   c) how people make independent decisions
   d) how ordinary people come to be perpetrators of oppression and violence.

9. Which of the following is NOT part of a standard code of ethics to which all psychologists must adhere?
   a) beneficence
   b) competence
   c) maleficence
   d) fidelity.

10. Which of the following is considered a primary interest of cognitive psychologists?
    a) the content of a person’s dreams
    b) the influences of positive and negative reinforcement on behaviour
    c) how an individual solves a very complex puzzle
    d) how the environment shapes behaviour.

**Short-answer questions**

1. Describe how you would evaluate theories of human behaviour.
2. Explain why psychology information obtained from the internet may be problematic.
3. Discuss the various implications of the terms used to study people.
4. Name and explain the ethical principles which underlie ethical codes in psychology.
5. Describe the history of the discipline of psychology, ending with the establishment of the first psychological laboratory.
6. Critically describe any ONE of the contemporary perspectives in psychology.
CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:
- describe what steps to take when planning a research project
- explain the methods employed in conducting research
- explain the ways in which information is gathered from research participants
- show a basic understanding of data analysis
- describe the ways in which research findings are reported
- understand the difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches to research
- demonstrate an understanding of ethical principles in psychology.

CASE STUDY

Nosipho liked the idea of research because it meant finding out something new, perhaps an answer to an important question or information that would help to improve people’s lives in some way. It seemed to her a bit like being a detective. It was particularly interesting to think about discovering new things in a field like psychology when there was still so much mystery about why people felt, thought and behaved the way they did. In some way, she supposed, she had always been a kind of researcher. She had always observed the people around her very closely and, when the opportunity arose, asked them questions about their lives and how they saw the world. However, as Nosipho learned more about research at university, she realised that there were all sorts of useful ways of getting more accurate information and a deeper understanding of how things worked.

Introduction

Consult any thesaurus and you will find that synonyms for research include: investigate, study, explore, look into and examine. Psychologists do all these things in their quest to understand human behaviour and social phenomena, and to generate new knowledge about these. In terms of professional practice, there is also an increasing emphasis on (and demand for) evidence-based practice.

In the past, most psychological research was concentrated on observable, measurable behaviour and phenomena. To study these, psychologists used quantitative research methods, which, broadly speaking, produce numeric data for statistical analysis. Then some psychologists began to use qualitative research methods (which, broadly speaking, produce word-based data in order to understand phenomena from the perspective of the research participants). This led to several years of polarised debate about the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research. However, most psychologists now accept that both approaches are equally legitimate. In many instances, quantitative and qualitative approaches provide complementary insights into human behaviour and social phenomena. This chapter subscribes to this view and, as we explore each of the steps in the research process, both approaches will be described where relevant.

Figure 2.1 provides a useful depiction of the typical steps in the research process. These apply to