UNIT 1: The Science of Psychology

Unit Overview


As psychology continues to evolve as a science, it also continues to focus on the study of biological factors, particularly the brain and nervous system as the keys to understanding psychological phenomena. Barrett proposes a strategy for reconceptualizing the brain’s role in experiencing subjective events.

2. The 10 Commandments of Helping Students Distinguish Science from Pseudoscience in Psychology, Scott O. Lilienfeld, APS Observer, September 2005

Author Scott Lilienfeld contends that beginning psychology students believe that the term “psychology” is synonymous with popular psychology, a discipline not firmly grounded in science. Lilienfeld continues that students should learn to discriminate good science and sound psychology from pseudoscience and psychology, as presented in the mass media, and be skeptical about popular psychology.


Psychology has played in pivotal role in the U.S. Army since the early days of World War I with respect to recruit selection and more recently with treatment of psychological disorders among the rank and file. In this article, the authors show how positive psychology is being used to help improve soldiers’ resilience in the face of repeated combat and related stressors in an effort to prevent or reduce anxiety, depression, suicide, and posttraumatic stress disorder.


Psychologists have an incredible opportunity to promote health and help prevent disease, writes Weir reporting on recent research. One of the greatest threats to human life is malaria—which in 2010 killed over 650,000 people worldwide—which is tragic because the disease is both preventable and curable.


Discussing complex analyses which address scientific publications and relationships between concepts, Cacioppo persuasively makes the argument that psychology could be considered the hub science, just as theology and philosophy were classically believed to be hub disciplines in the Middle Ages.

UNIT 2: Biological Bases of Behavior
UNIT 3: Perceptual Processes

Unit Overview


Some people who suffer blindness due to brain damage have the amazing capacity for blindsight. That is, these individuals can detect visual properties of many stimuli, even though they cannot determine what those stimuli are. Blindsight enables otherwise totally blind individuals to detect, among other things, shapes, movement, color, and in some cases facial displays of emotion.


It is common to use metaphors and analogies grounded in the physical world to describe our perceptions of others and their actions, including moral behavior. Behavioral scientists are now learning just how accurate such language use is in describing our perceptions of morality.

Sleeping and dreaming are altered states of consciousness or altered states of perception, as is extrasensory perception. Dreams have fascinated laypersons and scientists for centuries. New neuroimaging techniques are providing clues as to why people dream, and how sleeping and reaming (or lack thereof) affect us when we are awake.

16. Increasing Speed of Processing with Action Video Games, Matthew W. G. Dye, C. Shawn Green, and Daphne Bavelier, Current Directions in Psychological Science, December 2009

These authors argue that engaging in action-based video games may enhance perceptual reaction times without negatively influencing behavioral accuracy and judgment.

17. Get Me Out of This Slump! Visual Illusions Improve Sports Performance, Jessica Witt, Sally Linkenauger, and Denniss Proffitt (2012), Psychological Science, 23.

In sports, when an athlete focuses directly on a target without moving their eyes, this is known as the quiet eye pattern. Witt and colleagues discovered that by creating an optical illusion on a putting green, sports performance could be improved when both situations (quiet eye and an optical illusion) are at work, providing some foundation for how athletes may be able to break out of slumps.

UNIT 4: Learning

Unit Overview


One of the most famous research subjects of all time, known only by the name of "Little Albert," participated in a classic experiment on classical conditioning conducted by John B. Watson and Rosalie Rayner. Watson and Rayne used Little Albert to study the development of fear. Before Little Albert could be "deconditioned" to the fear stimuli used in the study, he and his family moved and his whereabouts became unknown. As a result, much speculation developed about who Little Albert really was and whether he continued to fear the sorts of stimuli used in the study over the remainder of his life. This article summarizes the Beck and colleagues' detective work used in discovering who Little Albert really was.

19. Psychological Science and Safety: Large-Scale Success at Preventing Occupational Injuries and Fatalities, E. Scott Geller, Current Directions in Psychological Science, April 2011

Behavior analyst, E. Scott Geller discusses the successful application of behavior analytic methods to reducing injuries and fatalities in the workplace. In particular, Geller describes how employees who are trained to identify dangerous work conditions, including their engagement in risky behavior, enhances the tendency to engage in safe work behaviors.

20. The Perils and Promises of Praise, Carol S. Dweck, Educational Leadership, October 2007

Psychologist Carol Dweck explains the positive and negative effects of praise on student learning and how praise can be used as an incentive to produce more learning in students. She contends that students may have one of two mind-sets—a fixed mind-set that focuses on how others judge them or a growth mind-set that centers around learning in general and learning from one's mistakes in particular. Her research has shown that praising students for possessing a quality leads to a fixed mind-set, whereas praising students for making an effort to acquire that quality contributes to a growth mind-set.


What do research outcomes tell us about wakeful resting and its relationship to memory formation and consolidation. Dewar and colleagues uncovered that wakeful resting after new learning can improve memory consolidation processes and allow for memories to be retained longer.


By using a contingency management system, good behaviors can be reinforced by giving cash, such as getting HIV-positive methadone patients to take their medication or convincing pregnant smokers to stop smoking. Dingfelder reports on these and other research efforts that optimize the use of contingency management to positively shape people's behaviors.

UNIT 5: Cognitive Processes

Unit Overview

*Working memory* is key to our ability to use stored information to think and solve problems on a day-to-day basis. It is constrained by the amount of information that it can manipulate at any one time. *Understanding this limitation of working memory* is important to understanding the extent to which people can process information and use it to solve problems effectively.


How did we humans come to acquire language? Why are there so many languages spoken around the globe? Did we learn to speak with our lips first, then with hand gestures, or was it the other way around? Wargo ponders over such questions in an effort to explore the *evolution of human language*.


As technology, especially hand-held devices, continues to permeate our lives, so does the potential for these devices to distract our attention. Such distractions have been implicated in numerous accidents, some of them fatal.


In this article, Lapidos reports on recently research that examines the role of pronouns as unexpected keys to communication. For instance, certain pronouns are content words (such as ‘nice,’ ‘weird’), but this research focuses on functional words such as pronouns, articles, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs.


Are there potential benefits to believing in superstitions? Damisch and colleagues explored this question in a series of four experiments, and they determined that improvements in self-efficacy (your belief that you have the abilities to succeed in a given situation) can be realized by believing in superstitions.

UNIT 6: Emotion and Motivation

Unit Overview


More and more women are emerging as leaders of businesses, industry, and national governments. The authors of this article raise the question as to how do women, who typically have strong family care responsibilities, become such influential and successful leaders. Based on cross-cultural research, the authors develop a *leadership model* to account for why women are able to make it to the top of their fields.


Willpower is the secret of self-mastery or the ability to exercise self-control when confronted with the choice between a smaller, short-term reward and a larger, longer-term reward.


Guilt is a powerful emotion because it is key to maintaining relationships with others in our environment. Reporting on recent research, Markman explored two possible functions of guilt: trying to help the person who was harmed in some way, or trying to help others more generally.


Could it be that the bigger the *smile*, the longer the life? Psychologists Abel and Kruger examined the photographs from baseball cards from the 1952 season and tracked the longevity of the players, controlling for many different factors. and they did find that player's smiles were related to longevity.

UNIT 7: Development
Unit Overview


Five different psychologists showcase their studies of the learning factor from infancy to old age. The studies all point to one important theme—that the human brain is plastic and resilient. The brain is infinitely adaptable across the lifespan.

33. The Mind at Midlife, Melissa Lee Phillips, Monitor on Psychology, April 2011

In this article, the author addresses the belief that middle-aged adults experience diminished brain functioning and shows that in many instances this belief is unfounded. In fact, middle-adults sometimes actually develop new cognitive skills.

34. Social Consequences of the Internet for Adolescents: A Decade of Research, Patti M. Valkenburg and Jochen Peter, Current Directions in Psychological Science, February 2009

Adolescents spend more time on the Internet than any other segment of the population. Many adolescents use the Internet for social connectedness, which has important implications for their well-being. Once thought to have a negative effect on adolescent social development, research over the last decade is showing just the opposite.


John Gottman has devoted his entire career to the study of human relationships, particularly marriage. In this interview, Gottman reveals what makes marriages work and what contributes to their failure.


Americans seem to live in a death-denying society. Puterbaugh, a mental health specialist, discusses appropriate and inappropriate ways friends and family should behave toward someone who is grieving. She also alludes to the seminal work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.


Reporter Maxmen writes about the success of Experience Corps, a nonprofit program that recruits and organizes retired volunteers to serve as mentors to students who are struggling in schools of need. Not only do student benefit, but there is evidence through fMRI studies that there are cognitive benefits to seniors as well.

UNIT 8: Personality Processes

Unit Overview

38. Can Personality Be Changed? The Role of Beliefs in Personality and Change, Carol S. Dweck, Current Directions in Psychological Science, December 2008

A common belief among most people is that their personality is determined at a young age and that it is relatively resistant to change from then on. However, noted psychologist Carol Dweck argues that if people change their beliefs about the nature of their self and their relationship to the world and others, then changes in personality may likely occur.

39. Evolutionary Psychology and Intelligence Research, Satoshi Kanazawa, American Psychologist, May/June 2010

Using his Savanna Principle—the idea that humans have difficulty understanding and adjusting to circumstances absent in their evolutionary history—Kanazawa argues that evolutionary psychology is helpful in studying intelligence and in developing novel approaches for researching intelligence.


Are you ever surprised at how well advertisements attached to your email account or online shopping match with your interests? Hirsh and colleagues studied the effectiveness of matching advertisements to personality traits, with surprisingly effect results.


In an in-depth essay about narcissism, writer Lasch reviews the social and economic influences on our behavior
and how we affect others. How do we find the balance between self-promotion (self-preservation) and the development and encouragement of others around us?

UNIT 9: Social Processes

Unit Overview

42. Replicating Milgram, Jerry Burger, APS Observer, December 2007

Long heralded as one of the most ethically controversial psychology studies of all time, modern-day researchers have questioned whether college and university institutional review boards (IRBs) would approve replication of Milgram’s obedience to authority study today. However, psychologist Jerry Burger received IRB approval to conduct a partial replication of this famous study and tells the story of how he did it in this article.

43. The Psychology and Power of False Confessions, Ian Herbert, APS Observer, December 2009

When charged with committing a crime, some individuals confess to having done it, even though they are completely and totally innocent. Such false confessions seem to transcend logic and have prompted psychologists to study the factors that compel people to confess falsely. A defendant’s confession often convinces juries that he or she is guilty as charged and often corrupts other evidence, including eyewitness testimony, which further leads juries to believe the accused is guilty—even when the confession is false.

44. We’re Wired to Connect, Mark Matousek, AARP The Magazine, January/February 2007

Social intelligence matters, or so says noted psychologist Daniel Goleman. It allows us to connect with others in important ways. Goleman attributes the decline of human relatedness to technology. The brain, however, is wired for us to engage with others, and the neuroplasticity of the brain may save our society from decline.


As Eric Jaffe reports on recent research regarding males and sexuality, it turns out (surprisingly) that males are more complicated that common stereotypes would predict. Jaffe summarizes current research in the areas of body preferences, interpersonal attraction, commitment issues, and overall complexity.


Are you more likely to be happy if you participate in many shallow conversations (“small talk”) with individuals, or a few deeper, more substantive conversations? Mehl and his colleagues studied the relationship between the frequency of small talk conversations and a person’s overall happiness.

UNIT 10: Psychological Disorders

Unit Overview

47. The Kids Aren’t All Right, Christopher Munsey, Monitor on Psychology, January 2010

New research on the development of stress and worry in children shows that parents underestimate the extent to which their children experience stress and worry. This research also shows that mothers experience stress more than fathers and that of eight major metropolitan areas in the United States, residents of Denver experience the most stress.

48. The Recession’s Toll on Children, Amy Novotney, Monitor on Psychology, September 2010

Among the deleterious effects of poverty is impairment of cognitive functioning in children. As psychologists study this relationship, they are discovering new ways of intervening to prevent this problem. Primary among these interventions is parent training.


Despite the unprecedented gains in understanding the causes and treatment of mental disorders, the general public continues to stigmatize individuals who suffer psychological problems. One program that attempts to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness focuses on increasing contact between the public and people who suffer from these disorders.


Hypochondriasis is a condition where a person has an illness where there is no specific identifiable cause for the
illness. In this article, Pearlman discusses his own struggle being a hypochondriac and reviews the most recent research into the causes and treatments of this disorder.


Although the stereotype is that ADHD is a childhood disorder, ADHD in adults can cause substantial disruptions in relationships, careers, and the pursuit of higher education. Smith reports on recent research about the diagnosis of adult ADHD and the role medications (such as stimulants) may play.


An approach gaining more traction in psychology is that mental illness results as a malfunction of brain processes, which leads to the importance of taking a biological perspective. Weir reports on researchers who agree and who do not completely agree with this viewpoint, focusing on the fruitful explanations that a biological perspective can offer.

UNIT 11: Psychological Treatments

Unit Overview


The war in Iraq has brought with it great suffering to many; including a high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among returning American soldiers. DeAngelis describes current treatment options for PTSD and discusses their relative effectiveness. The good news is that several treatments appear to be effective in treating PTSD.


The three most common options available for the treatment of mental disorders include psychotherapy, pharmacotherapy, and the combination of both. Psychologists exploring the efficacy...