Intro to Psychology: Crash Course Psychology #1

Crash Course: Psychology
https://youtube.com/watch?v=vo4pMVb0R6M
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/vo4pMVb0R6M

That dream about the dinosaur in the leotard, those times that you said that thing that you know you shouldn't have said, or even that thing you didn't even know you were gonna say. The little cogs of your consciousness cranking away, making your life possible, making society function, all of the things that you're so glad you can do and all of the ones that you wish you could stop doing. Excluding other human minds, your mind is the most complicated piece of the universe that humans currently know about. The rules that govern it are mysterious and elusive. Maybe our brains just aren't complex enough to understand themselves. But that's not going to stop us from trying!

The word 'psychology' comes from the Greek word for the "study of the soul." And while its formal definition has evolved over the last several decades, today we can safely call it the science of behavior and mental processes. The term 'psychology' wasn't coined until around the turn of the sixteenth century, and the practice that we would actually call science today wasn't established until the mid-1800s. But of course, humans have always been curious about themselves and what's going on up here. Aristotle pondered the seed of human consciousness and decided that it was in the heart, not the head -- being, as we have seen quite a lot here on Crash Course, absolutely and completely wrong.

Two thousand years ago, Chinese rulers conducted the world's first psychological exams, requiring public officials to take personality and intelligence tests. And in the late 800s, Persian doctor Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Rhazes, also known as Rhazes, was one of the first to describe mental illness, and even treated patients in what was essentially a very early psych ward in his Baghdad hospital.

From the efforts of those early thinkers up until today, the field of psychology has been all about tackling some of the big questions: How can humans do horrible things like commit genocide and torture other humans, and how come we know those things are horrible? Do we have free will, or are we simply driven by our environment, biology, and non-conscious influences? What is mental illness, and what can we do about it? And what is consciousness? Or the notion of self? If I lose my awareness of myself, am I still human?

I DON'T KNOW!

But over the next 6 months, these are the questions that we're gonna be exploring together: how our brains work, how they can break, how they can be healed, why we behave the way we do, even when we don't want to, and what it means to be thinking and feeling and alive.

[Intro]

When hearing the word psychology, most people probably think of a therapist listening to a patient unpacking the details of his day while reclining on a couch. Maybe that therapist is wearing glasses, chewing on a cigar, stroking his whiskered chin.

Admit it! If you're thinking about psychology, you're probably picturing Freud.

Sigmund Freud was one of the most tremendously influential and controversial thinkers of his time, maybe of all time. His theories helped build our views on childhood, personality, dreams and sexuality. And his work fueled a legacy of both support and opposition.

His life was long and spanned an important swath of history from the American Civil War to World War II. But like most great scientists, Freud developed his revolutionary ideas by building on the work of others, and of course innovation in the field didn't stop with him.

In truth, psychology is one of the most wildly diverse sciences in terms of the questions it proposes, the methods it applies, and the different schools of thought and disciplines it contains.

Perhaps more than any other science, psychology is just a big old integrated melting pot. For instance, right around Freud's time, there were a lot of different schools of thought of about how the study of the human mind should be tackled. Mainly, there were the ideas of structuralism, functionalism and psychoanalysis.

Scientific psychology got its start in 1879 in Germany when physician Wilhelm Wundt set up the first psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig just a few years after publishing his Principles of Physiological Psychology, considered the first true psychology textbook.

Wundt and his student Edward Bradford Titchener took cues from chemists and physicists and argued that if those people could break down all matter into simple elements or structures, why couldn't they do the same for the brain?

They tried to understand the structures of consciousness by getting patients to look inward, asking them how they felt when they watched the sun set, or smelled a coffee, or licked a kitten, or whatever.

Titchener named this approach 'structuralism', but despite its rigid sounding name, it really relied so much on introspection that it became too subjective. I mean, you may sense and feel something different than I do, even if we lick the same kitten. Psychologists, of course, can't actually observe a patient's inner thoughts or feelings, so ultimately, the structuralist school of thought was fairly short-lived.

By contrast, American physician and philosopher William James proposed a different set of questions, focusing on why we think and feel and smell and lick, or whatever. Basically, he focused on the function of behavior. This approach, 'functionalism', was based on Charles Darwin's idea that adaptive behaviors are conserved throughout the evolutionary process.

James published his seminal book, The Principles of Psychology, in 1890, defining psychology as the science of mental life, just as Freud was starting to flex his big brain.

Sigmund Freud began his medical career at a Viennese hospital, but in 1886, he started his own practice, specializing in nervous disorders. During this time, Freud witnessed his colleague Josef Breuer treat a patient called Anna O with a new talking cure. Basically, he just let her talk about her symptoms. The more she talked and pulled up traumatic memories, the more her symptoms were reduced. It was a breakthrough, and it changed Freud forever.

From then on, Freud encouraged his patients to talk freely about whatever came to mind, to free associate. This technique provided the basis for his career, and an entire branch of psychology.

In 1900 he published his book The Interpretation of Dreams, where he introduced his theory of psychoanalysis. Now, you probably think of psychoanalysis as a treatment -- the whole patient on the couch scenario. And that's definitely part of it. But Freud's concept was actually a lot more complex than that, and it was revolutionary.

A radical kernel of psychoanalysis was the theory that our personalities are shaped by unconscious motives. Basically Freud

suggested that we're all profoundly affected by mental processes that we're not even aware of.

Now that sounds almost obvious to us now, but part of the genius of Freud's theory was that in 1900, it wasn't obvious at all. The idea that our minds could be driven by something that our minds themselves didn't know about was hard to grasp. As hard as like, uhh, maybe organisms evolving by natural selection. It was abstract, invisible, and there was something about it that seemed irrational.

But the other important part of Freud's theory was that the unconscious, literally the thing below consciousness, was still discoverable. Even though you weren't aware of it, you could come to understand it through a therapeutic technique that used dreams, projections and free association to root out repressed feelings and and gain self-insight.

So what Freud was really saying was that mental disorders could be healed through talk therapy and self-discovery. And this was a really big breakthrough. Because prior to this, people with mental illnesses would be confined to sanatoriums and at best given menial labor to do and at worst, shackled to a bed frame.

After The Interpretations of Dreams, Freud went on to publish over 20 more books and countless papers with an iconic cigar in hand all the while. He believed smoking helped him think, but it also helped him get jaw cancer. During the last sixteen years of his life, he underwent at least thirty painful operations while continuing to smoke.

By the late 1930s, the Nazis had taken over Austria, and Freud and his Jewish family narrowly escaped to England. By September 1939, the pain in his cancerous jaw was too great and a doctor friend assisted him in suicide through morphine injection. He was eighty-three.

Whether you love him or hate him - and make no mistake, plenty of people vehemently disagreed with him - there is no question that Freud's impact on psychology was monumental. While competing theories in the young field of psychology either fell away or evolved into something else, psychoanalysis remains an important concept and practice today.

The next big shake-up rolled in during the first half of the 20th century when behaviorism gained a higher profile. Heavy hitters like Ivan Pavlov, John B. Watson, and B. F. Skinner were key players here. They focused on the study of observable behavior. You may remember Skinner as the dude who put rats and pigeons and babies in boxes and conditioned them to perform certain behaviors. Right around when Freud escaped to England, Skinner published his Behavior of Organisms, ushering in the era of behaviorism which remained all the rage well into the 1960s.

The other major force at the time was, of course, Freud's psychoanalysis, and its many descendants collectively known as the psychodynamic theories. These focused on the importance of early experiences in shaping the unconsciousness and how that process affects our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and personalities.

By the mid-20th century, other major forces in psychology were also brewing -- schools we'll explore later in this course including humanist psychology, which focuses on nurturing personal growth; cognitive science and neuroscience, all of which contributed their own unique takes on the study of mind.

Today's formal definition of psychology, the study of behavior and mental processes, is a nice amalgamation that pulls from all these different schools of thought. It recognizes the need for observing and recording behavior, whether that's screaming, crying or playing air saxophone to an imaginary audience, but it also gives credit to our mental processes: what we think and feel and believe while we're tearing it up on our invisible instruments.

Because again, the point I really want you to take home is that psychology is an integrative science. Yes, folks still get grumpy and disagree plenty, but the essence of the discipline has everything to do with creating different ways of asking interesting questions and attempting to answer them through all kinds of data-gathering methods. The human mind is complicated. There is no single way to effectively crack it open; it must be pried at from all sides.

Harvard astronomer Owen Gingerich has gazed into the distant horizon of space, and even he has acknowledged that the human brain is by far the most complex physical object known to us in the entire cosmos. And we all get to have one! Of our very own! Just knocking around right up in here.

We here at Crash Course are really excited to spend the next several months delving into the world of psychology -- how it applies to our lives, our minds, and our hearts, and how it deepens our understanding of each other, our world, and ourselves.

Thanks for watching this first lesson in Crash Course Psychology, and I'd like to especially thank all of our Subbable subscribers, without whom we would literally not be able to do this. Would you like a personalized signed Crash Course Chemistry Periodic Table, or even to see yourself animated in one of our episodes? To find out about these and other perks, go to Subbable.com/CrashCourse.

And thanks to our crew. This episode was written by Kathleen Yale and edited by Blake de Pastino. Our psychology consultant is Dr. Ranjit Bhagwat, our director and editor is Nicholas Jenkins. The script supervisor was Michael Aranda who was also our sound designer, and our graphic team is Thought Cafe.