UNIT 12 CURRENT TRENDS IN PSYCHOLOGY*

Structure

12.0 Introduction

12.1 Cognitivism

12.2 Social Constructionism

12.3 Cultural, Cross-cultural, and Indigenous Psychology

12.4 Feminism

12.5 Positive Psychologya

12.6 Summary

12.7 Key Words

12.8 Review Questions

12.9 References and Further Reading

12.10 References for Figures

12.11 Web Resources

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

● Explain some of the current trends in psychology;

● Discuss the emergence of cognitive psychology;

● Describe the idea of social constructionism in psychology;

● Differentiate between cultural psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology, and understand their significance;

● Elucidate the feminist movement in psychology; and

● Describe the relevance of positive psychology.

12.0 INTRODUCTION

Until now, you have learnt about the schools of thought or different perspectives on human nature and behaviour. In the present Unit, we will discuss the trends and new perspectives in contemporary times. It must be clear by now that after passing the middle of the 20th century, and moving in the 21st century, it was evident that the discipline of psychology was going through a transition. To be specific, psychology that involved identifiable and contrasting systems of psychological investigation, transformed into emphasizing on data collection, and towards the empirical roots of psychology. This transition of the universal rejection of adhering to specific systems, did not take place suddenly. Instead, there was a tendency to investigate specific issues, which reflected a specific research strategy — the systems themselves were less likely to dictate significant issues.

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Contemporary psychology is characterised as a discipline composed of various fields of study, which may include the traditional issues such as learning, perception, development, social activity, or personality. Research in some of these areas have sometimes been found to be reflecting the dominance of a particular research strategy resulting from one of the earlier systems. However, in contemporary times, psychology has been mostly using an eclectic approach, which avoids any kind of engagement with a systematic framework. Instead, being guided by a preconceived framework, psychology is being directed by specific issues. In this sense, even though contemporary psychology can be said to be an empirical science, it is not completely experimental in nature.

Another trend in contemporary psychology is that it tends to redefine substantive areas of study. This takes place either by specializing within psychology or attempting to associate the traditional psychological issue with some other discipline. Newer specializations have often emerged because of psychologists being demanded to bring about changes in functional roles. Current trends in psychology are also towards inter- and multidisciplinary studies, rather than exclusive specializations. The acknowledgement of common methodologies, and the breaking down of the barriers of traditional disciplines, has indeed brought two or more disciplines together, in order to address a given issue. The advancement of technical sophistication of scientific inquiry has further accelerated this trend of making the traditional approaches to become obsolete and inadequate.

Some of the recent advances in psychology that are dominating contemporary psychology are – cognitive psychology, social constructionism, cultural and cross-cultural psychology, feminism, and positive psychology.

12.1 COGNITIVISM

Behaviourism had been dominating psychology for about 50 years. From most of the texts, mentalistic terms like the *mind* or *consciousness* were completely removed. Any usage of mentalistic terms were considered unpopular, and inappropriate. Some psychologists, however, began to have issues with this. There began some rumblings about the usage of mentalistic terms.

In 1978, **Thomas Natsoulas** published an article, *Consciousness*, in the American Psychologist. The paper was suggesting that *consciousness* is being studied again by psychologists, and that it should be given respect in the available literature. A year later, in 1979, **David Lieberman** published an article, *Behaviourism and the Mind: A Call for a Return to Introspection*, in the American Psychologist. **Nicholas Cummings**, the then president of the American Psychological Association (APA), in his annual presidential address suggested that the nature of psychology has become very mechanical, and that psychology is changing, which included a return to the study of consciousness.

Publications in a reputed journal, and the APA president himself suggesting a change to be brought up, were enough to turn the tide within psychology. Textbooks began to be revised, and an inclusion of mentalistic concepts were being suggested. All this was said to have begun what has been termed

as the *cognitive revolution* in psychology. This dramatic shift in psychology appeared slowly and calmly. The founders of cognitive psychology did not occur overnight, nor could they be traced to the persuasiveness of a single individual who changed the domain almost alone. The cognitive movement affirms no single founder, perhaps because none of the psychologists working in the region had the personal ambition to lead a new movement. Two scholars, although not founders in the formal sense of the word, contributed to revolutionary work in the form of a research centre and a book, are regarded as a landmark in the development of cognitive psychology. These two scholars are **George A. Miller** and **Ulric Neisser**.

George Miller, along with his colleague, Jerome Bruner, set up a research centre at Harvard to study the human spirit. Miller and Bruner chose the word *cognition* to designate their topic, and they named the new facility the *Center for Cognitive Studies*. By defining the center, its founders demonstrated how they differed greatly from behaviourism.

A wide variety of subjects were examined at the Center for Cognitive Studies, which included language, memory, perception, concept formation, thinking, and developmental psychology. Most of these topics had been eliminated from psychology, during the dominance of behaviourism. Later, Miller established a cognitive science curriculum at Princeton University.

Miller viewed the cognitive movement as evolutionary rather than revolutionary. He felt that it was a return to a psychology of common sense, one who acknowledged and affirmed that psychology addresses mental life as well as behaviour. Miller's research led to the creation of many cognitive psychology laboratories. His work has also led to the fast evolution of the approach of psychology. Apart from Miller, the other person associated with the founding of cognitive psychology is Ulric Neisser. In 1967, Neisser published *Cognitive Psychology*, a book which established the domain. He reported that the book was personal, an attempt to define himself - the type of psychologist he was and wanted to be.

Figure 12.1: George A. Miller (1920-2012)

Source: www.newyorktimes.com

The book also described a new kind of psychology. The book became hugely popular and Neisser was named the *father of cognitive psychology*. His book helped draw psychology away from behaviourism and move towards cognition. Neisser described *cognition* in terms of these processes whereby sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used. According to him, cognition is evolved in everything a human being might possibly do. Therefore, *cognitive psychology* focuses on feelings, perception, imaging, memory, problem solving, thinking, and all other mental activities.

After the founding of cognitive psychology by Miller and Neisser, computer came to be known as a model for cognitive psychology. This was referred to as the *computer metaphor*. Psychologists have been increasingly relying on using the computer as a way of explaining cognitive phenomena. Computers are said to display artificial intelligence, and often the way they function has been described in human terms. For instance, the storage capacity of computers is called *memory,* program codes are called *languages*, and the term *evolving* is used with respect to the new generations of computers.
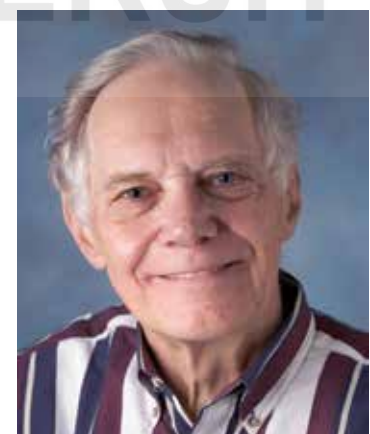

Figure 12.2: Ulric Richard Gustav Niesser (1928-2012)

Source: www.newyorktimes.com

219

It can be said that computer programs, which are mainly a set of instructions for dealing with symbols, function in the same way as the human mind. Both, the computer as well as the human mind, receive and digest a lot of information (stimuli, data) from the environment. This information is processed, manipulated, stored, and retrieved, in many different ways. Thus, computer programming is the model, which is followed in explaining human information processing, reasoning, and problem solving. It is not the computer, but the program that is used to explain the mental operations.

The main emphasis of cognitive psychologists is to understand the sequence of symbol manipulation that underly human thinking. They have little interest in understanding the physiological correlates of mental processes. Cognitive psychologists aim to discover that library of programs stored in the memory of human beings. These are the programs that enable the individual to understand and form sentences, to commit experiences to memory, and solve problems. It is this information processing view of the human mind that forms the basis of cognitive psychology.

Since cognitive psychology emerged at a time when behaviourism was dominating, a good way to understand the nature of cognitive psychology is to differentiate it from behaviourism. Cognitive psychologists emphasize on the process of knowing, and not simply how individuals respond to stimuli. The important factors for cognitive psychologists are mental processes and events, and not the stimulus-response associations, emphasizing on the mind, instead of behaviour. Cognitive psychologists do not ignore behavioural processes, but understanding those processes is not solely their goal of inquiry. The behavioural responses are viewed as a source to make inferences and draw conclusions about the mental processes that accompany them.

Additionally, cognitive psychologists examine the ways in which the mind organizes experiences. The tendency to organize conscious experiences in a way that it makes meaning, is innate. The subject matter of cognitive psychology, is then, the ways in which the mind makes the mental experiences coherent. In contrast to this view, the behaviourists argued that the mind does not possess any such innate organizing abilities. Further, according to cognitive psychology, the individual is an active agent that arranges stimuli in the environment, in a creative manner. Cognitive psychology suggests that human beings actively participate in the acquisition and application of knowledge; deliberately attending to some events and choosing them to commit them to the memory. The behaviourists, on the other hand, never believed in the idea of humans being active in the environment. They always claimed that humans passively respond to external events; they are like blank slates on which sensory experience will write.

Box 12.1: Unconscious Cognition

Cognitive psychologists studying conscious mental processes has led to a renewed interest in unconscious cognitive activities – mental processes beyond conscious awareness. These unconscious cognitive activities are not the same unconscious processes that Sigmund Freud had talked about. The unconscious as referred by cognitive psychologists are rational processes as opposed to Freud's emotional, comprising of trauma, conflict,

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and sexual and aggressive urges. To differentiate the cognitive unconscious from the psychoanalytic form of the unconscious and (from the physical state of the unconscious, sleep or coma), some cognitive psychologists prefer using the term *nonconscious*.

According to cognitive psychologists, the nonconscious is involved in the first stage of human cognition, which occurs in the act of responding to stimuli. It is an integral part of learning and information processing, which can be studied through different forms of controlled experiments. Researchers, now generally agree that most of the mental processes of human beings occur at the nonconscious level.

A well-known example of the nonconscious is *subliminal perception,* which is perception beyond awareness. Researchers have found that people can be affected by stimuli that can neither be seen nor heard. These and other similar discoveries have made cognitive psychologists conclude that the process of acquiring knowledge, inside or outside the experimental laboratory, occurs at both the conscious and nonconscious levels. However, most of the mental work involved in learning takes place at the nonconscious level. Research also suggests that the processing of nonconscious information is faster, more efficient, and more sophisticated as compared to information processing at the conscious level.

12.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Philosophers of science have suggested observations are permeated with theoretical assumptions. Whatever observations are made, they are influenced by the meaning attributed to that object based on prior theory. This idea is referred to as the *theory ladenness* of observation, and has now become a central part of modern philosophy of science.

However, this idea is not unique to philosophy of science. This same idea features in Gestalt psychology as well as the ecological approach to perception. What people see in the world is based on prior assumptions. Gestalt psychology provides an explanation for why theory ladenness occurs. According to Gestaltists, people see things holistically, but that holistic perception is based on prior theory. The idea of theory ladenness or attribution of meaning based on prior theory, existing in philosophy of science and Gestaltian thought, was taken to a further level by the approach called *social constructionism*. The essential idea of social constructionism is that the interpretation of reality is not limited to a person's mind in isolation. Observations and interpretations of events, instead, emerge as part of discourse and dialogue with other people. This means that reality is socially constructed, rather than constructed by the individual. Reality emerges from social interactions.

The term *social constructionism* has been used in many different ways. The term first appeared in the title of a book written by **Peter Berger** and **Thomas Luckman** called *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, published in 1966. As the title of the book suggests, it was used in the context of sociology. Later, the term began to be used by social psychologists. Initially, in psychology, the term *social constructivism* was used to emphasize the development of an individual's

221

meaning in a social context. However, by the 1980s, the term social constructionism was linked with psychology.

One of the major proponents of social constructionism in psychology has been the social psychologist, **Ken Gergen**. In 1985, Gergen wrote the article, *The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology*, in the journal, American Psychologist. This article by Gergen turned out to be like a manifesto, in a positive sense. It offered a succinct account of what he felt were some issues of concern with respect to psychology, and also articulated the benefits he felt due to adopting a social constructionist approach. In his article, Gergen defined what he referred to as the social constructionist inquiry.

According to Gergen, a *social constructionist inquiry* is mainly concerned with elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. It attempts to articulate common forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods, and as they might exist if such creative attention is directed. In other words, instead of looking beyond the everyday language for psychological explanations of *what was really going on*, Gergen was suggesting that psychologists should view their research in terms of socially constructive processes. It is these socially constructed processes, according to Gergen, that yield shared understandings.

In this regard, Gergen was suggesting that psychologists should consider the wide range of implications of what he termed the *linguistic turn*, which could be later found in the scholarly works of hermeneutics. This *'turn'* suggested that the meaning that is given to experience, cannot be viewed in an absolute sense. It, instead, must be viewed as contributions to the continuous human and cultural endeavor.

Figure 12.3: Kenneth Gergen (b 1935)

Source: www.positivitystrategist.com

Gergen's views were exhaustive and were drawn from diverse strands of philosophical, historical and literary thought. The goal of Gergen was to bring about a perspective that advocates a generative knowledge creation, so that that advantages of such knowledge can be optimized for its users. This extended to his view of psychotherapy. According to him therapeutic processes have an insufficient consideration of *language-use* in therapeutic practice. He had the same concern for research in clinical phenomena as well. The idea of social constructionism becomes relevant for social scientists interested in areas such as beauty, gender, morality, pathology, race, science, and sexuality. Whereas it was once widely believed that these phenomena were determined by fixed natural or metaphysical laws and therefore were socio-historically invariant, social constructionists have repeatedly demonstrated the extent to which these concepts are actually culturally relative or historically specific. The conceptual resources with which such demonstrations are achieved hail from a wide range of theoretical traditions both within and beyond the social sciences. With regard to social constructionism, the three most prominent founders of the modern social sciences – **Émile Durkheim, Max Weber,** and **Karl Marx**, have played a significant role. They have set major precedents for the social constructionist social science.

Emile Durkheim had a great influence on social constructionist research. He argued that systems of classification reflect the social organization of the societies in which they occur. This turn towards classification and the sociology of knowledge in anthropology provided an important precedent for a wide range of writers, who became important figures in the realm of constructionism. These writers include **Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas, Peter Winch**, and **Michel Foucault.**

Max Weber, the German sociologist, philosopher, and political economist popularized *Verstehen Sociology*. Verstehen in German roughly translates to *understand in a deep way* or *empathic understanding*. This influenced a wide range of early writers associated with German idealism, including leaders of the constructionist tradition like **Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Dilthey**, and **Friedrich Nietzsche**. It has been suggested that if it were not for Weber's influence, the social sciences might well have provided a far less fertile soil for the cultivation of social constructionism. In more recent times, the writings of Weber on ideal types, meaning, values, and rationalization also exercised a wide range of specific influences on other significant contributors to the idea of constructionism, which include **Alfred Schutz, Karl Mannheim**, and **Jürgen Habermas**.

Among the classical theorists, it is Karl Marx who has been regarded to have the greatest impact on social constructionism by way of his writings on ideology. Marx developed this concept to suggest how people can suffer from a false consciousness that renders them complicit in their own oppression. This idea was developed by later Marxists, such as **Georg Lukacs** and **Antonio Gramsci**. They elaborated on concepts such as class consciousness, reification, and hegemony, which had a great influence on research on social constructionism by linking the supposed legitimacy of ideas to the interests of actors who are sufficiently powerful to influence the standards by which their legitimacy is measured.

Figure 12.4: Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Source: www.britannica.com

Social constructionism focuses on meaning and power. Meaning is not a property of the objects and events themselves, but a construction. Meaning is the product of the prevailing cultural frame of social, linguistic, discursive, and symbolic practices. Individuals and groups interacting together in a social system, over a period of time, form concepts or mental representations of each other's actions. These concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. The roles are made available to other members of the society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions that are said to be institutionalized. In the process of this institutionalization, meaning is embedded in society. Therefore, knowledge, conceptions, and beliefs of what reality is becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of society.

From the perspective of social constructionism, knowledge and systems are inherently dependent upon communities of shared intelligibility and vice versa. They are governed to a large degree by normative rules that are historically and culturally situated. The criteria, which are invoked to identify behaviours and events are largely circumscribed by culture, history and social context. Social constructionism, therefore, locates meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within
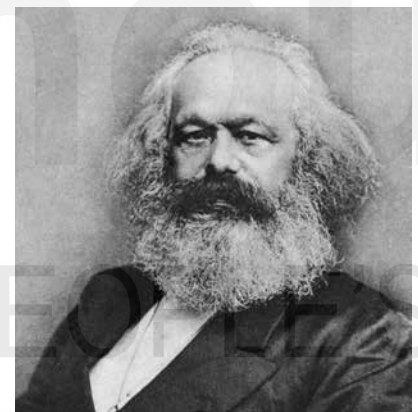
a social, community context. All knowledge evolves in the space between people, and in the realm of the common world. An individual, thus, develops a sense of identity or inner voice only through the on-going conversations with intimates. Social constructionism considers an individual to be an integral part of cultural, political and historical evolution, in specific times and places. Consequently, psychological processes are viewed cross-culturally, in social and temporal contexts. Apart from the inherited and developmental aspects of humanity, social constructionism suggests that all aspects of humanity are created, maintained and destroyed in interactions with others through time. The social practices of life begin and are recreated in the present, and eventually end.

Box 12.2: Constructivism, Social Constructivism, and Social Constructionism

Constructivism is the theoretical perspective that suggests that people actively build their perception of the world and interpret objects and events that surround them in terms of what they already know. Thus, their current state of knowledge guides processing, which has a significant influence on how new information is acquired, and what type of new information is acquired. Constructivists have the belief that knowledge and reality are constructed within the individual. They emphasize on what takes place within the mind and brain of the individual, focusing on cognitive and biological processes.

Social constructivism is the school of thought that suggests that knowledge is embedded in the social context and views of thoughts, feelings, language, and behaviour as the result of interchanges with the external world. Social constructivists argue that there is no separation between subjectivity and objectivity and that the dichotomy between the person and the situation is incorrect. They suggest that individual is intimately and intricately bound within social, cultural, and historical forces and cannot be understood fully without consideration of these social forces. According to social constructivism, not just knowledge but also reality itself is created in an interactive process and thus people are exclusively what their society shapes them to be.

Social constructionism is the epistemological position, mainly associated with postmodernism. According to social constructionism, knowledge of reality is in fact a construct of language, culture, and society that has no objective or universal validity. In this sense, knowledge is contingent on humanity's collective social self instead of on any inherent qualities that items or ideas possess. Social constructionists, therefore, seek to discover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived reality by looking at how various phenomena are created, understood, and accepted by the social institutions and contexts in which they exist.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Discuss how the works George Miller and Ulric Niesser established the field of cognitive psychology.

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2) Discuss the idea of meaning with respect to social constructionism.

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3) What is the main emphasis of cognitive psychologists?

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4) Define subliminal perception.

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5) What is meant by theory ladenness?

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12.3 CULTURAL, CROSS-CULTURAL, AND INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY

There are a number of ways in which it can be seen that how culture got included into the realm of psychology, in the 21st century. First, are the realistic connections with neighboring disciplines such as cultural anthropology and sociology, from where such efforts could find their start. Yet, in the last decade observations have been made in the move inside of the vast field of psychology.

Psychology has always been a heterogeneous discipline. Within psychology, a number of moves towards embracing the idea of culture have been found. When looking at the past, the idea of culture in psychology can be seen to have begun from the educational and developmental concerns of the 1980s, which mostly used the ideas of Vygotsky as the center of their new efforts. However, by 2010s the efforts of social psychology is also considered, both in Europe and the United States, where the generic label *social* becomes frequently taken over by *cultural*.

Second, it is the rapid movement, of messages and people, that has made the former images of homogeneous classes that dominated cross-cultural psychology either moot or problematic. The tradition of comparing societies, that is, countries being re-labeled as cultures had become an accepted practice in cross-cultural psychology. Empirical comparisons of the averages of samples "from different cultures" (countries) can bring out interesting starting data for further analysis by cultural psychology.

All this is supported by real-life social changes. Specifically, globalization has in a way brought *cultural foreigners* to be next-door neighbors. The issue of making sense of their ways of living becomes of interest for the already established colonists of the given place. The world has now changed from what it was in the last century. People now have close interactions with the *cultural others*, and all social-psychological adaptations to this innovation acquire a cultural accent.

Figure 12.5: Lev S. Vygotsky (1896-1934)

Source: www.verywellmind.com

Contemporary social psychology emphasizes to examine such social events that carry complex cultural accents. It is supported by the demand of both the lay publics in different countries and their socio-political organizations to understand and administer the *cultural others* yet retain their own dominant centrality. This effort of uniting culture and psychology that has been taking place from the 1990s to the present time is not actually the first time in the history of psychology. It has been observed, in the recent two decades that multiple efforts have been made to introduce the aspect of culture into the science in general. Likewise, psychology begins to enter into cultural arenas in many new ways that were never imagined.

The historical inroads of psychology have actually delayed such return to culture. The issue of treating complex, meaningful, intentional, and dynamic psychological phenomena has been ideological in the history of psychology. These phenomena were actively addressed in the context of emerging psychology in Germany by philosophers in the first seven decades of the 19th century. Despite that, all these contributions were lost as they were guided out of the history of psychology as it was re-written after the 1870s. Hence, the cultural psychology movement that started in the 1980s constitutes another effort in that direction.

The emergence of culture in psychology led to viewing culture from three different approaches – cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology. The terms *cross-cultural psychology*, *cultural psychology*, and *indigenous psychology* are each fuzzy a concept with partially overlapping sets of exemplars. In *cross-cultural psychology*, culture is generally operationalized as an antecedent variable. In the paradigmatic instances of such an approach, culture is implicitly viewed as being outside of and apart from the individual. Culture and human activity are seen as separate entities. In *cultural psychology*, in contrast, culture is not seen as outside the individual, but as inside in an important way. Culture is *a way of knowing, of construing the world and others*. Through processes of interaction and communication, these construal's acquire a certain degree of inter-subjectivity or shared meaning. Shared knowledge and shared meanings generate a set of everyday practices that also define culture. Thus, culture and behaviour, and culture and mind are viewed as indistinguishable. The method often used in cross-cultural psychology is to take a procedure that has been established in one culture, with known psychometric properties, and compare it with one or more cultures. In cultural psychology, instead of using established procedures and making comparisons, methodological procedures are derived for each culture from the lifeways and modes of communication of that culture. Unlike cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology derives its problems and procedures from an analysis of the nature of culture. In cross-cultural psychology, culture is viewed as an antecedent or an independent variable. It examines culture as an index instead of a process.

In a similar manner*, cross-cultural psychology*, views the individual as a dependent variable. This dependent variable usually functions as indices of individual cultural processes such as cultural activities and social

interactions. The individual in not viewed as constituting to the processes themselves, as can be found in cultural psychology. Because cultural psychology emphasizes on the processes of a particular culture, it does not use measures with pre-established psychometric properties, which can be often found in cross-cultural psychology. Cultural psychology, in contrast, has developed its own tool kit of methods, which include ethnography and discourse analysis. These methods have been adapted from anthropology.

The first emphasis in cultural psychology*,* the symbolic quality of culture, is shared, at least in spirit, with *indigenous psychology*. Although indigenous psychology and cultural psychology have very clear independent origins, they share the notion that the prime subject of study is the individual's creation of meaning systems, particularly systems that are shared or normative within a defined cultural group. In different ways, both traditions have recognized that psychological theories are important aspects of shared cultural meaning.

In recent times, cultural psychologist, **Joan Miller**, has, on a theoretical level, asserted the cultural grounding of all psychological theory. This cultural grounding of theory has been a strong motive, if not an explicit meta-theoretical statement, for indigenous psychology. The unique contribution of indigenous psychology is that both concepts and theory should be developed within each culture.

Unlike indigenous psychology, however, the empirical research tradition of cultural psychology has not been based on formal psychological theories with culture-specific origins. Cultural psychology, instead, in the past few years has focused on developing ethno-theories (folk theories) of psychological functioning and using that to form a discipline for empirical investigation. Indigenous psychology aims to go one step further. The goal of indigenous psychology is to take informal folk theories of psychological functioning and formalize them into psychological theories.

Figure 12.6: Joan Miller
Source: www.newschool.edu

Cultural psychology arrived at the empirical study of folk theories, including, in particular, folk theories of psychological development. Indigenous psychology has, in turn, moved ethno-psychology from an object of empirical study to a source of formal psychological models. In other words, indigenous psychologists have taken steps to translate ethno-theories of psychology into formal theories of psychology and, from these theories, to conduct empirical psychological studies.

Because of its own origins with an emerging scientific elite in developing nations, indigenous psychology, especially in East Asia, tends, on the whole, to privilege elite populations as subjects of study and culture change as a research topic. Cultural psychology, in contrast, tends to focus, to a great extent, on the relatively stable subsistence village cultures.

While indigenous psychology shares the spirit of cultural psychology, its methods tend to be similar to those of cross-cultural psychology. That is, indigenous psychology most often utilizes standard psychological methodology such as questionnaires and gives more emphasis on studying variables rather than processes.

**Box 12.3: Cross-cultural Psychology, Cultural Psychology, and
Indigenous Psychology: Definition and Aim**

Cross-cultural psychology examines the similarities and differences in psychological functioning in different cultures and ethnic groups. The aim of cross-cultural psychology is to develop a psychology that is more in terms of inclusiveness and universalism. It is about comparing thoughts and behaviours in different cultures.

Cultural psychology is about understanding individuals in the historical and socio-cultural context. The aim of cultural psychology is to develop an understanding of how the mind and culture influence each other in specific contexts.

Indigenous psychology is the study of people in a specific cultural context. This is done by scholars in that context for the benefit of the people in that context. The aim of indigenous psychology is the development of a psychology that is not entirely universal, which has meaning and application in specific cultures and ethnic contexts.

12.4 FEMINISM

Feminism is a range of social and political movements that aim to define and establish social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. The feminist movement provided the political and intellectual momentum for overarching changes in many areas, including the discipline of psychology. Feminists who were also psychologists, and psychologists who became feminists used this momentum to move their concerns from the periphery of the discipline to its center, effectively staking out a new field and a new disciplinary presence. Psychologists have posed questions about sex and gender in virtually every area of psychology.

Feminism has always centered on ending the subordination of women and encompasses a wide range of additional ideas, theories, and practices. Among feminist psychologists, this spectrum is fully represented. A key strength of the feminist movement in psychology is that diverse points of view are brought into interaction, leading to a productive intellectual interchange and new developments.

Feminist psychologists view psychology as being *sexist*, that is, women are regarded as inferior to men and are discriminated against because they are women. They also see psychology as *heterosexist*, that is, gay men and lesbian women are considered to be abnormal and are discriminated against because they are gays or lesbians. Further, feminist psychologists claim that even though psychology is considered to be a science, and is suggested to be neutral, objective, and value-free, it is actually value-laden, taking men to be the universal standard, the center around which everything else revolves. Thus, apart from being sexist and heterosexist, feminist psychologists also consider psychology to be *androcentric*, that is male-centred.

Feminist psychology attempts to harness the power of psychology to improve the status of women. In order to use psychology to bring about change in the wider world, feminist psychologists believe they must also

bring about change in psychology. The idea behind this thought is that like the society has an ingrained gender bias, traditional psychology still reflects that bias, even if it may be in subtle and implicit ways. Feminist psychology is explicitly political and nourished by the feminist movement.

Feminist psychologists engage in critical conversations about how best to study gender and how best to do psychology, with respect to being a researcher, practitioner, teacher, or activist. Scepticism about conventional ways of doing psychology has been a hallmark of feminist psychology. Feminists have noted that psychological knowledge has often served the interests of social groups of which psychologists are a part of. They have also analysed the intellectual habits that have led psychologists to relegate knowledge about women to the margins and to regard questions about gender as having little significance.

The field of feminist psychology was officially established in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, efforts by women to break down sexist barriers and undermine sexist assumptions in psychology had started much earlier. The feminist movement in psychology had, actually, begun since the beginning of the discipline itself. When the discipline of psychology was established in the late 1800s, the long trajectory of the first-wave feminism was close to its midpoint.

As the feminist movement was on the rise, feminist psychologists waged their own battles within their chosen discipline, demanding that androcentric theories be acknowledged and reformed and that sexist institutional practices be eliminated. One of these psychologists was **Naomi Weisstein**, an ardent socialist feminist and one of the founders of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union.

Weisstein had herself been a victim of sexism during her graduate studies. These experiences combined with her awareness of critical theory, fuelled her feminist fire. In 1968, she published a paper called *Kinder, Kirche, Kuche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female*. In the paper she criticized the field of psychology for failing to understand women due to an over-reliance on biology, without looking at the social context. This paper laid the groundwork for the social construction of gender, and would go one to become one of the founding documents of feminist psychology.

In her landmark paper *Kinder, Kirche, Kuche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female*, Weisstein argued that psychology had nothing to say about what women were really like because, essentially, psychology did not know anything about it. She proposed, that this was due to the focus of psychologists on inner traits and thus ignoring the social context. Weisstein carefully reported a growing body of research from social psychology that demonstrated how situational and interpersonal factors determine human behaviour, and drew out the implications of these findings for understanding women's behaviour. For Weisstein, without considering social expectations about women and the social conditions under which women lived, psychologists could have nothing of value to say about the experiences of women.

Figure 12.7: Naomi Weisstein (1939-2015)
Source: www.wcwonline.org

In 1969, due to the emboldening of the women's movement and the pioneering efforts of psychologists like Naomi Weisstein, feminist psychologists met

at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association (APA) to discuss sexist practices within the field. These practices included job advertisements indicating that "men only" need to apply, and overt sexual harassment. The result of these often angry and heated discussions led to the formation, in 1969, the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP).

In 1973, a task force established by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that knowledge about women was deficient. Most psychological research, in that time, being published in the field was conducted with White, college-aged men, with the assumption that these results could be generalized to the universal human experience. Research on the experiences of women, such as pregnancy, child rearing, menstruation, sexual harassment, and rape, was simply absent. Consequently, the task force recommended that a division devoted to the psychology of women be established to promote research in this area. In 1973, *Division 35, Psychology of Women*, was formed. **Elizabeth Douvan**, social psychologist at the University of Michigan, was the first president of the division. The division has now become one of the largest divisions of APA.

Over the years, feminist psychologists have quickly moved beyond critique to focus on generating new knowledge about women and gender. The psychology of women and gender is now a varied enterprise that encompasses virtually every specialty area and intellectual framework within psychology. It spans international boundaries, and has produced a large body of research and scholarship.

Feminists in psychology openly challenged the choice of research topics in psychology. They found fault in its theoretical constructs and research methods, and its theories about women's mental health, modes of diagnosis, and therapeutic interventions. According to the feminist perspective, many aspects of psychological knowledge have been male-centered. Feminist psychologists suggested that throughout history men have been studied much more often than women. They gave examples of the classic studies of personality by Murray and Allport, as well as the landmark study of McClelland on achievement motivation, all of which that had excluded women. Additionally, psychological theories about many aspects of cognition, social behaviour, emotion, and motivation have been influenced by cultural biases against women. The behaviour of women, more often than men's, has been seen as biologically determined, with researchers overlooking the different social situations of women and men.

Psychologists, earlier, had assumed profound differences between men and women in cognitive capacities, emotions, personality traits, values, and inclinations. These presumptions supported for the norm of male superiority and justified a range of inequities between men and women. One of the first projects of feminist psychologists, therefore, was a program of corrective research that aimed at re-examining purported differences between men and women. This led to a change in the ways of looking at the idea of sex differences. Over the years, a number of important methodological and conceptual advances have been made in researches of sex differences. Feminist researchers have pointed out repeatedly that a sex-difference finding does not signify a difference that is inherent or biologically determined. A

great deal of feminist research has examined the power of roles, norms, and expectations to influence behaviour, as well as the penalties incurred for role violations.

The conception of the measurement of masculinity and femininity in psychology was challenged by feminist psychologists. In 1973, **Anne Constantinople**, feminist psychologist, pointed out that standard psychological inventories were constructed with masculinity and femininity as opposite ends of a single, bipolar continuum. According to those tests, masculinity and femininity are considered to be mutually exclusive. Constantinople argued against this assumption. She emphasized that an individual could embrace both masculine and feminine traits and behaviours.

The social psychologist, **Sandra Bem**, in 1974, argued that having both masculine and feminine qualities is required for optimal psychological functioning and personal adjustment. She was thus, suggesting to embrace an androgynous sex-role identity. Bem designed the *Bem Sex Role Inventory*, a scale of masculinity and femininity that permitted respondents to endorse both masculine and feminine attributes (or neither). For the next coming years, the ideas of Bem, and her inventory, framed much of feminist research and feminist approaches to therapy. The work during this time, laid the foundation for the subsequent theorizing on gender identity.

Figure 12.8: Sandra Ruth Lipsitz Bem (1944-2014)

Source: www.feministvoices.com

In the early 1980s, a new line of feminist inquiry emerged. Instead of making comparisons between men and women, some researchers shifted their focus to the unique emotional capacities, identities, and relational needs, of women. In this way women were put at the center of inquiry, which made researchers to re-examine and re-evaluate feminine qualities that had been ignored, disdained, or viewed as deficiencies or signs of immaturity.

In response to the early criticisms of the feminists, regarding cultural biases, ignoring social contexts, sexism in diagnosis and clinical practice, and power differences in therapy, feminist psychologists have developed alternate theories and conducted innovative research. They have developed feminist-inspired therapies and diagnostic practices. Feminist psychologists have also worked to improve the conditions of work for female therapists. They have addressed the rights of therapy clients and promoted changes in the APA (American Psychological Association) ethical code in order to provide better protection for clients.

Box 12.4: Feminist Psychology and the Concept of Gender

In 1979, the feminist psychologist, **Rhoda Unger**, introduced the term *gender* to psychology. She defined gender as those characteristics and traits socio-culturally considered appropriate to males and females. The term was intended to set social aspects of *maleness* and *femaleness* apart from biological mechanisms, so it can be scientifically scrutinised. This definition by Unger is considered to be important in that time. However, in today's time, Unger's definition of gender is just one of the many definitions that are used. Some have argued for putting aside the definition of gender as a set of traits of individuals in favour of a view of gender as a socially prescribed set of relations.

Feminist theorists have conceptualized gender that go beyond the perspective of simply individual differences. Gender has been seen as a complex set of principles — a meaning system — that organizes male-female relations in a particular social group or culture. Gender has also been viewed as a marker of status, hierarchy, and social power. Other feminist theorists have conceptualized gender as the set of practices that create and enact masculinity and femininity in mundane social contexts and in social institutions such as language and law.

12.5 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

After the Second World War, the discipline of psychology turned its attention to healing. It concentrated on repairing damage, but gave emphasis to the disease model of human functioning. This almost exclusive attention to pathology neglected the idea of a fulfilled individual and a thriving community. The consequence of this was that the idea of building strength, which is viewed as being highly effective in therapy, was completely ignored. It is within this setup that positive psychology emerges from. The aim of positive psychology is to accelerate a change in psychology from a preoccupation with only repairing the worst things in life to also developing the best qualities in life. In order to compensate for the previous imbalance, psychologists suggested that developing of strength must be at the forefront in the treatment and prevention of mental illness.

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about positive subjective experiences. This includes the experiences of wellbeing, satisfaction, flow, joy, and happiness. It also includes having constructive cognitions about the future, that is hope and optimism. Positive psychology, as a discipline, can be viewed both at the individual and the group level. At the *individual level*, positive psychology emphasizes on positive personal traits. This includes the capacity for love, courage, interpersonal skills, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, high talent, and wisdom. At the *group level*, positive psychology focuses on the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals towards being a better citizen, which includes responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic.

Positive psychology can, thus, be defined as the scientific study of the positive aspects of human subjective experiences, of positive individual traits, and of positive institutions. As such, it proposes to improve the quality of life and also prevention of the various pathologies that arise when life seems to be barren and meaningless.

The idea that psychologists should study the best of human attributes as well as the worst, that is, the positive characteristics as well as the negative, was actually the theme of humanistic psychology. It was, however, reprised in 1998 by the then president of the American Psychological Association (APA), **Martin Seligman**. Seligman suggested that a relentless focus on the negative aspects of human behaviour has made the discipline of psychology to ignore the many positive aspects such as growth, mastery, drive, and insight that develop out of undesirable, painful life-events. Seligman's goal

was to persuade psychologists to develop a more positive conception of human nature and human potential that would build on the pioneering work of Maslow and Rogers.

Seligman called his emphasis on a more positive conception of human nature and human potential as *positive psychology,* which was received with a highly enthusiastic response. By the year 2001, there were many studies of subjective wellbeing dealing with correlates and causes of happiness and other positive emotions.

In less than ten years since Seligman issued his initial call for a positive psychology, the field had become hugely successful. A large number of researches are being done every year, seminars are being held, books are being published, all emphasizing on human strength, potential, and other positive aspects of behaviour. Even popular magazines and television talk shows have been praising the goals of positive psychology. In the present scenario, positive psychology generally covers a wide range of issues that include subjective wellbeing, happiness, life satisfaction, interventions to enhance wellbeing, leisure, peak performance, positive affect, creativity, optimism, hope theory, and positive psychology in the context of organizations.

As with any other movement, positive psychology did not emerge suddenly. It would be inappropriate to suggest that positive psychology began in 1998/1999. It has, in fact, been suggested that positive psychology has always been there in the discipline of psychology. But it has never been viewed as a holistic and integrated body of knowledge. Research into what is now called positive psychology has gone on for decades. Broadly, positive psychology has a lot of commonalities with humanistic psychology. A lot of commonality can be found, specifically, with the emphasis of humanistic psychology on the *fully functioning person* and the study of *psychologically healthy individuals*.

Abraham Maslow, one of the pioneers of humanistic psychology, more than fifty years ago had said that psychology had been focusing a lot more on the negative aspects of human nature, as compared to the positive aspects. He further stated that, psychology has revealed a lot about many of the shortcomings of human nature, but there has been very less information in terms of potentialities, virtues, aspirations, or the full psychological height. Maslow had even mentioned the term *positive psychology*, much before Seligman. In doing so, he was suggesting to have an exclusive focus on people at the extremely positive ends of the distribution.

Figure 12.9: Martin E. P. Seligman (b 1942)

Source: www.britannica.com

Figure 12.10: Abraham Maslow (1907-1980)

Source: www.verywellmind.com

Box 12.5: Happiness

The central topic in positive psychology is the study of *happiness*. Philosophers have debated the definition of happiness for thousands of years, but have not been able to come to a proper agreement. **Aristotle** described happiness as the realization of one's potential, and referred to it as a critical ingredient of life. **Bentham**, on the other hand, has suggested that happiness is the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain.

Contemporary theorists have suggested that happiness emerges when several specific life conditions are met. These may include self-acceptance,

233

environmental mastery, personal growth and relatedness. Others, however, suggest that happiness is the average experiences of pleasure and pain.

The term happiness is used interchangeably with *subjective wellbeing* — the subjective evaluation of one's life. This is said to be a relatively stable feeling of contentment with one's life. It involves cognitive evaluation and positive affect that emphasizes on life satisfaction, relationship quality, meaning, and achievements. This aspect of happiness represents the highest level of a hierarchy of happiness.

The next level of the hierarchy comprises of four components — pleasant emotions, unpleasant emotions, life satisfaction, and domain satisfaction. Each of these can be further subdivided into specific aspects of life experiences like love, worry, meaning, and health. After this, the next level of the hierarchy is the conscious experience of happiness.

Researchers have also distinguished between eudemonic and hedonic happiness. *Eudemonic happiness* is about meaning and purpose, taking part in activities that allow for the actualization of one's skills, talents, and potential. *Hedonic happiness* is about high frequencies of positive affect, low frequencies of negative affect, and evaluating life as satisfying.

Check Your Progress 2

1) In what ways can indigenous psychology be similar to both cross-cultural psychology and cultural psychology?

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2) Discuss the contributions of Naomi Weisstein in the feminist movement of psychology.

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3) What are main issues that are covered in positive psychology?

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12.6 SUMMARY

Now that we have come to the end of this Unit, let us list all the major points that we have learnt.

● After passing the middle of the 20th century, and moving in the 21st century, it was very evident that the discipline of psychology was going through a transition. Current trends in psychology are also towards inter- and multidisciplinary studies, rather than exclusive specializations.

● Cognitive psychology focuses on feelings, perception, imaging, memory, problem solving, thinking, and all other mental activities. Two scholars who contributed in the development of cognitive psychology are George Miller and Ulric Neisser.

- Philosophers of science have suggested observations are permeated with theoretical assumptions. Whatever observations are made, they are influenced by the meaning attributed to that object based on prior theory. This idea is referred to as the *theory ladenness* of observation.

- One of the major proponents of social constructionism in psychology has been the social psychologist, Ken Gergen. According to Gergen, a social constructionist inquiry is mainly concerned with elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live.

- With regard to social constructionism, the three most prominent founders of the modern social sciences – Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx, have played a significant role. They have set major precedents for the social constructionist social science.

- The emergence of culture in psychology led to viewing culture from three different approaches – cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology.

- In cross-cultural psychology, culture is generally operationalized as an antecedent variable. In the paradigmatic instances of such an approach, culture is implicitly viewed as being outside of and apart from the individual. In cultural psychology, in contrast, culture is not seen as outside the individual, but as inside in an important way.

- Feminism is a range of social and political movements that aim to define and establish social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Feminist psychologists view psychology as being sexist, heterosexist, and androcentric.

- Feminist psychology attempts to harness the power of psychology to improve the status of women. Feminist psychologists engage in critical conversations about how best to study gender and how best to do psychology, with respect to being a researcher, practitioner, teacher, or activist. Skepticism about conventional ways of doing psychology has been a hallmark of feminist psychology.

- In 1968, Naomi Weisstein published a paper called *Kinder, Kirche, Kuche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female*. This paper laid the groundwork for the social construction of gender, and would go one to become one of the founding documents of feminist psychology.

- In 1973, *Division 35, Psychology of Women*, was formed. Elizabeth Douvan, social psychologist at the University of Michigan, was the first president of the division. The division has now become one of the largest divisions of APA.

  The social psychologist, Sandra Bem, in 1974, argued that having both masculine and feminine qualities is required for optimal psychological functioning and personal adjustment. She was thus, suggesting to embrace an androgynous sex-role identity.

- The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about positive subjective experience. This includes the experiences of wellbeing, satisfaction, flow, joy, and happiness. It also includes having constructive cognitions about the future, that is hope and optimism.

- Martin Seligman suggested that a relentless focus on the negative aspects of human behaviour has made the discipline of psychology to ignore the many positive aspects such as growth, mastery, drive, and insight that develop out of undesirable, painful life-events.

12.7 KEY WORDS

Cognitive Revolution: The dramatic shift from a dominance of behaviourism to re-examination of mentalistic concepts, leading to the founding of cognitive psychology.

Cognition: Processes whereby sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used.

Cognitive Psychology: The subfield of psychology that focuses on feelings, perception, imaging, memory, problem solving, thinking, and all other mental activities.

Computer Metaphor: Relying on using the computer as a way of explaining cognitive phenomena; the computer being used as a model for cognitive psychology.

Unconscious Cognition: Mental processes that occur beyond conscious awareness. Also called nonconscious. Different than the Freudian unconscious, which is emotional in nature. Nonconscious involves rational processes.

Theory Ladenness: Observations being permeated with theoretical assumptions. Whatever observations are made, they are influenced by the meaning attributed to that object based on prior theory.

Social Constructionism: The epistemological position that suggests that knowledge of reality is a construct of language, culture, and society that has no objective or universal validity. Accordingly, observations and interpretations of events emerge as part of discourse and dialogue with other people. This means that reality is socially constructed, rather than constructed by the individual. Reality emerges from social interactions.

Social Constructionist Inquiry: A research orientation concerned with elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. It attempts to articulate common forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods, and as they might exist if such creative attention is directed.

Constructivism: The theoretical perspective that suggests that people actively build their perception of the world and interpret objects and events that surround them in terms of what they already know.

Social Constructivism: The school of thought that suggests that knowledge is embedded in the social context and views thoughts, feelings, language,

and behaviour as the result of interchanges with the external world.

Cross-cultural Psychology: The study of similarities and differences in psychological functioning in different cultures and ethnic groups. It views culture as operationalized as an antecedent variable. In the paradigmatic instances of such an approach, culture is implicitly viewed as being outside of and apart from the individual. Culture and human activity are seen as separate entities.

Cultural Psychology: The study individuals in their historical and socio-cultural context. It views culture is a way of knowing, of construing the world and others. Shared knowledge and shared meanings generate a set of everyday practices that defines culture. Thus, culture and behaviour, and culture and mind are viewed as indistinguishable.

Indigenous Psychology: The study of people in a specific cultural context. The prime subject of examination is the individual's creation of meaning systems, particularly systems that are shared or normative within a defined cultural group. Focuses on the cultural grounding of all psychological theory.

Feminism: A range of social and political movements that aim to define and establish social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Provided the political and intellectual momentum for overarching changes in many areas.

Feminist Psychology: The movement in psychology that attempts to harness the power of psychology to improve the status of women. Involves engagement of critical conversations about how best to study gender and how best to do psychology, with respect to being a researcher, practitioner, teacher, or activist.

Sexist: The thought that women are regarded as inferior to men and are discriminated against because they are women.

Heterosexist: The thought that gay men and lesbian women are considered to be abnormal and are discriminated against because they are gays or lesbians.

Androcentric: Being male-centred.

Gender: Those characteristics and traits socio-culturally considered appropriate to males and females. Has also been conceptualized as the set of practices that create and enact masculinity and femininity in mundane social contexts and in social institutions such as language and law.

Positive Psychology: The scientific study of the positive aspects of human subjective experiences, of positive individual traits, and of positive institutions. As such, it proposes to improve the quality of life and also prevention of the various pathologies that arise when life seems to be barren and meaningless.

Subjective Wellbeing: The subjective evaluation of one's life. It involves cognitive evaluation and positive affect that emphases on life satisfaction, relationship quality, meaning, and achievements.

Eudemonic Happiness: Happiness with respect to meaning and purpose, taking part in activities that allow for the actualization of one's skills, talents, and potential.

237

Hedonic Happiness: Happiness with respect to frequencies of positive affect, low frequencies of negative affect, and evaluating life as satisfying.

12.8 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1)   Who is considered to be the father of cognitive psychology?

2)   Name the model that is followed by cognitive psychology.

3)   Who is the major proponent of social constructionism in psychology?

4)   Name the three most prominent founders of social sciences who has a direct influence on social constructionism.

5)   What are the three approaches to culture in psychology?

6)   How can contemporary psychology be characterised?

7)   Discuss how cognitive psychology emerged after the dominance of behaviourism?

8)   How did Niesser describe cognition?

9)   What is the essential idea of social constructionism?

10)   What was Gergen trying to convey to psychologists through his approach of the social constructivist inquiry?

11)   Differentiate between cross-cultural, cultural psychology and indigenous psychology.

12)   What were the findings of the task force established by APA, in 1973?

13)   In what ways has psychology been male-centered, according to feminist psychologists?

14)   How was the conception of masculinity-femininity challenged by the feminist psychologists Anne Constantinople and Sandra Bem?

15)   What is the aim of positive psychology? Describe the role of Martin Seligman in the emergence and development of positive psychology.

16)   How is positive psychology similar to humanistic psychology?

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Answers to Review Questions (1-5)

(1) Ulric Niesser; (2) computer metaphor; (3) Ken Gergen; (4) Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx; (5) cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and indigenous psychology

UNIT 13 ISSUES AND DEBATES IN PSYCHOLOGY*

Structure

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe some of the significant issues and debates that have taken place in the realm of psychology;

- Explain the nature-nurture debate;

- Differentiate between free will and determinism;

- Discuss the issue of mind and body, and

- Describe how the individual and society are related to each other.

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13.0 INTRODUCTION

There have been a number of issues and debates within the discipline of psychology, even before its inception as an independent, academic discipline. Different viewpoints arising from various schools and perspectives in psychology have led to conflicts, resulting in unending debates. These debates, however, have only led to the growth of the discipline by raising persistent and pertinent questions.

Some of the widely discussed issues and debates in psychology have been nature versus nurture, free will versus determinism, the mind-body problem, and the relationship of the individual and society. The *nature versus nurture* debate addresses the age-old question of whether we are born a certain way or do we become a certain way. *Free will versus determinism* involves the debate of whether human behaviour is caused by internal and external forces or if behaviour is freely chosen, and that every individual is responsible for their own actions. *The mind-body problem* addresses the issue of mental and physical events, whether or not they are related, and how they may be related to each other. Finally, the issue of *the individual and the society* is about how the individual functions within the society, can the individual be viewed independent of the society, to what extent does the society influence the individual, and whether or not the individual and society influence each other. The issues and debates affect the basic view of the nature of human behaviour. In this Unit, we will be discussing the above mentioned issues and debates within the discipline of psychology.

13.1 NATURE AND NURTURE

The debate of nature versus nurture is about the extent to which individuals and their behaviours are shaped by biological inheritance, that is, *nature*, or by environmental factors, that is, *nurture*.

13.1.1 Nature

Behaviour being shaped by *nature* means that there is an evolutionary and genetic foundation. Proponents of nature suggest that growth takes place in an orderly manner. The evolutionary and genetic basis causes commonalities in growth and development. *Nature*, with respect to genetics, refers to inheritance. This indicates a difference in genetic material, that is, chromosomes and genes, which are transmitted from one generation to another. In modern human genetics, there is a focus on genetic differences among individuals. Nature, in this context, means that emphasis is given on genetically produced differences among individuals, within the human species.

Francis Galton, the pioneer of studying individual differences in humans, with respect to hereditary, used the term *nature* in this very sense. It was Galton who had coined the phrase *nature-nurture*, in 1883, leading to its usage in science over the years, till today's time.

Having an evolutionary and genetic basis does not mean that the environment does not play any role at all. Researchers supporting the idea of nature suggest that extreme environments such as the ones that are psychologically
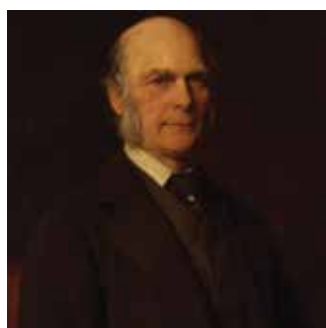

**Figure 13.1: Francis
Galton (1822-1911)**

Source: www.biography.com

242

barren or hostile can lead to stunted development. However, according to them, basic growth tendencies are genetically programmed into humans.

13.1.2 Nurture

In contrast to nature, proponents of *nurture* suggest that individuals are shaped by the environment, which can be further divided into biological environment and social environment. *Biological environment* includes nutrition, medical care, drugs, and physical accidents, all that take place during the prenatal stage (before birth). *Social environment* includes personal experience, circumstances, learning, the social and political background, family, peers, schools, community, media, and culture.

The influence of environment on a person begins right after the particular set of chromosomes and genes combine at the moment of fertilization. This includes all the wide-ranging influences on the embryo, like hormones, drugs taken by the mother, the diet of the mother, and any accidents that may take place. All of this constitutes to what is called the biological environment. This biological environment, which is prenatal, plays a very significant role in the development of the child. If proper care is not taken, it may lead to biological or psychological deficits within the child, after birth.

The social environment includes the environmental context such as the immediate family, which in itself is shaped by the broader social-cultural setting. In such instances, the environment is postnatal. It is viewed as external to the individual, and it refers to all the influences of the environment on a passive individual. According the proponents of nurture, this social environment continuously shapes the individual throughout life.

13.1.3 Nativism versus Empiricism

The idea of nature can be traced back to *nativism*, the philosophical theory that emphasizes heredity to determine abilities and capacities, instead of learning and experience. In contrast to nativism is *empiricism*, the philosophy that emphasizes learning and experience. The idea of nurture can be traced back to the philosophy of empiricism, which is associated to the 17th century British philosophers, especially John Locke. Locke suggested that at birth the human mind is like a blank slate (tabula rasa), and as the child grows older, the blank slate is filled in by learning and experience.

Nativism and empiricism are viewed as two polar opposites, suggesting that human abilities are either completely innate or completely learnt. The present-day psychologists, however, very rarely take such extreme positions, and find it to be highly simplistic. They propose more of an interaction between heredity and environment.

Nevertheless, nativism and empiricism, separately, leading to the ideas of nature and nurture, respectively, have had a significant impact on the discipline of psychology, and there have been different perspectives that have been proponents of either of the two.

The Gestalt psychologists, who believed that perceptual organization is innate, are nativists. Further, one of the pioneers of child psychology, **Arnold Gessel** introduced the concept of maturation, which is said to be genetically programmed sequential patterns of change. According to this, babies and children pass through the same series of changes, in the same order, and almost the same rate.

243

Figure 13.2: Noam Chomsky (1928-)

Source: www.salon.com

A more recent example of nativism is the linguist **Noam Chomsky**'s idea of language acquisition device (LAD). The LAD proposes an innate knowledge of a general or universal system of rules of grammar. The theory suggests that the individual selects the rule of grammar from the universal pool and applies it to the language that he or she is exposed to.

Like nativism, empiricism has also played an influential role in the discipline of psychology, in many different forms. One of such an early influence has been the school of behaviourism. The founder of behaviourism, John Watson in his now infamous statement suggested that given the right kind of environment, he could make an infant to grow up into a doctor, lawyer, artists, and even a beggar or thief, despite whatever talent or abilities they may have. He also believed that there is no such thing as inheritance of capacity, talent, or temperament.

In more recent times, there has been a consensus that both nature and nurture shape behaviour. The argument, therefore, from *'which one?'* has now shifted to *'how much?'* This argument has, however, been criticized, because it tries to quantify the role of genetics and environment. A better argument has been suggested to be *'how do they interact?'* This is more about how heredity and environment influence each other, in a qualitative manner.

Box 13.1: Language Acquisition: An example of the Nature versus Nurture Debate

The debate between the behaviourist B. F. Skinner and the linguist Noam Chomsky, on language acquisition, is well known. It sheds a lot of light on the nature versus nurture debate.

Chomsky's idea of language acquisition supports the idea of nature, whereas Skinner's approach is in favour of nurture. Skinner proposed that language is entirely learned and is, therefore, the result of nurture rather than nature. He used the principles of operant conditioning in explaining language acquisition.

According to Skinner, when children start to speak, they are rewarded in the form of praise, appreciation, and even smiling, from parents and caregivers, for using the correct word. In this way, children gradually acquire language. Chomsky strongly disagreed with this. He suggested that children can only learn vocabulary in this way, and not grammar and syntax.

Chomsky has suggested that every individual is born with a language acquisition device (LAD), which is a universal system of rules of grammar. He suggests that human beings, when exposed to a particular language, select the rule of grammar from the universal pool of that language. In this way, Chomsky suggests that language acquisition is innate, and thus, in accordance with nature.

13.2 FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM

Free will is the idea that behaviour is not constrained by either current circumstances or past experience. That is, the way individuals act is not

simply a response to an immediate stimulus, nor determined solely by previous events. Instead, human beings choose and decide how to behave based on their subjective assessment of a situation. Determinism, on the other hand, is the assumption that all behaviour has specific causes.

Free will is also termed as *non-determinism*. It is a complete rejection of scientific psychology. The psychologists believing in the perspective of non-determinism suggest that behaviour does not necessarily have a cause, because it is self-generated. This is the complete opposite of determinism, suggesting that behaviour does not have a specific cause, it is rather freely chosen. This perspective is held by the humanistic and existential psychologists.

The debate of free will versus determinism is about the assumption of whether or not behaviour is under one's own control. The proponents of free will suggest that every individual is in control of their own behaviour; they can act independently of all external forces. The other side of the argument, that is, the proponents of determinism, suggest that behaviour is caused by forces beyond one's control.

The debate of free will versus determinism centers around the notion of causation. For determinists the assumption is that every event in the universe has a cause. Since human beings are also a part of the universe, all human behaviours have a cause. The psychologists who have a scientific orientation go along with a deterministic perspective in the study of human behaviour. They feel that the more causes of behaviour will be known, the more human behaviour can be controlled and be predictable. Prediction and control of behaviour is a criterion to demonstrate that behaviour has a cause.

13.2.1 The Complexity of Determinism

Even though all the determinists assume that behaviours have a cause, they are in agreement that it is not possible to know all the causes of behaviour. One of the reasons for this is that behaviour, mostly, has more than one cause. That is, behaviour is *overdetermined*. Behaviour is not, usually, caused by a single event. Instead, there are a multitude of events that interact together, causing a specific behaviour.

Another reason for why it is considered to be impossible to know all the causes of behaviour is the aspect of *fortuity*, that is, sometimes behaviours happen accidently or take place by chance. Behaviour taking place due to fortuity, still makes it deterministic. But it is making determinism more complicated. Fortuitous circumstances may not really predict behaviour, but it is certainly causing it.

Apart from behaviour being overdetermined and fortuity, determinism becomes complicated because of the notion of *indeterminism*. When there is an uncertainty about the causes of behaviour, then it is known as indeterminism. A number of psychologists do believe in the doctrine of determinism, but they feel that the causes of behaviour cannot be measured in an accurate manner. The reason why it is suggested that the cause of behaviour cannot be measured is that observation of the behaviour will in itself change the behaviour.

This perspective has been borrowed from the *uncertainty principle* given by the German physicist Werner Karl Heisenberg. Heisenberg found that when electrons are observed, the act of observation influences its activity, which can lead to changing its direction. This creates a lot of doubt on the validity of that observation. Accordingly, Heisenberg suggested that nothing can be known with certainty.

In a similar manner, in experimental psychological studies, the setting of the experiment becomes a confounding variable, playing a role in causing the behaviour. Therefore, it does not become possible to know about the cause in an accurate way. The psychologists that accept this perspective suggest that behaviour has specific causes, but cannot be known with certainty.

Determinists suggest that the idea of causation gets very complicated with respect to human behaviour, as it is not easy to make predictions. However, determinists believe that as more knowledge regarding human behaviour and its causes are gained, making accurate predictions will become easier.

Figure 13.3: Werner Heisenberg

Source: www.britannica.com

13.2.2 Physical and Psychical Determinism

Determinism can be broadly classified as physical determinism and psychical determinism. If a cause of behaviour can be directly measured and can be quantified, then it is called *physical determinism.* Physical determinism includes biological, environmental, and socio-cultural determinism.

Biological determinism is about the role of physiological processes or genetics in determining behaviour. Environmental determinism is about the role of environmental stimuli in behaviour – the source of the behaviour is in the environment, and not within the individual. Sociocultural determinism emphasizes the role of culture, norms, and customs in determining behaviour. In all these cases the causes of behaviour, for instance, genes, environmental stimuli, customs, can be accessed and are quantifiable. Thus, psychologists involved in biopsychology, behavioural theory, and cultural psychology go along with the idea of physical determinism.

In contrast to physical determinism, when the causes of behaviour are explained in terms of cognitive and emotional experiences, then it is called *psychical determinism*. In such a case, the causes of behaviour are said to be subjective, and cannot be directly measured or quantified. These mainly include personal beliefs, emotions, perceptions, ideas, and values, among others. The psychologists that emphasize on conscious, non-conscious, and unconscious mental events such as cognitive psychologists and psychoanalysts go along with the idea of psychical determinism.

13.2.4 Free Will, Determinism, and Personal Responsibility

When talking about free will and determinism, the aspect of personal responsibility comes into play. Free will, that is, behaviour being self-generated, indicates that every individual is responsible for their own behaviour. On the other hand, with respect to determinism, if every behaviour has a cause (physical or psychical), the individual has no personal responsibility for his or her actions.

For instance, according to determinism, a person who commits a crime, the criminal action could have been caused by some circumstances in that person's life or the neural circuitry of that person might have triggered him

of her to behave in that manner. Whereas, according to free will, the criminal activity was well within control of the individual, and if he or she wanted, it could have been avoided.

It is due to this lack of personal responsibility with respect to determinism, that has led to it facing criticism. However, according to William James, the major precursor to the school of functionalism, one type of determinism actually involves personal responsibility.

William James differentiates between *hard determinism* and *soft determinism*. When the cause of behaviour is said to be automatic or mechanistic, then it is referred to as hard determinism. In such cases, there will be no personal responsibility. Soft determinism, on the other hand, involves cognitive processes like intention, motivation, and beliefs. These processes intervene between experience and behaviour. In such cases, behaviour is governed by thoughtful deliberation, which indicates personal responsibility for the action of the individual. There are cognitive and rational processes involved in behaviour, according to soft determinism, which actually give individuals a choice to act in a specific manner. These processes, however, are the causes of behaviour. Thus, even though being deterministic, behaviour is self-governed.

Soft determinism, therefore, is a comprise between hard determinism and free will, which suggests that personal responsibility can be involved in determinism also, and not just free will.

Box 13.2: Free Will Versus Determinism: Systems in Psychology

Throughout the history of psychology, it can be found that different systems of psychology have opposed each other with respect to *free will* and *determinism*. Psychology became an independent discipline by incorporating the scientific method. One aspect of the scientific approach is the assumption of determinism. The initial perspectives that emerged, thus, were deterministic in nature. The perspectives that followed, also believed in the idea of determinism. However, there were perspectives that disagreed with the earlier systems in strictly using the scientific approach. They felt that the scientific approach is not very suitable for studying human behaviour. These were the systems that were more in favor of the idea of free will.

Associationism is considered to be one the oldest perspectives in psychology. With its emphasis on laws that govern behaviour, associationism is largely deterministic in its approach. *Structuralism*, the first school of psychology, due to being rigid in using the mechanistic principle, is deterministic in nature. The second school of psychology, *functionalism,* giving emphasis to adaptation in relation to the environment, is deterministic. *Psychoanalysis*, suggesting that behaviour is caused by the unconscious and childhood experiences, is deterministic in nature. *Gestalt psychology*, emphasizing on universal laws that govern perceptual organization and information processing, is deterministic. *Behaviourism*, suggesting that stimuli within the external environment causes behaviour, is deterministic.

Many of the perspectives that emerged later, can also be termed as deterministic. *Cognitive psychology,* emphasizing on behaviour being

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247

caused by internal cognitive processes such as thoughts, beliefs, is deterministic. *Social psychology*, emphasizing on the role of situation and context in behaviour, is deterministic. *Cultural psychology*, suggesting that cultural processes such as norms, values shape behaviour, is deterministic. *Neuropsychology,* emphasizing on the brain and neural processes in shaping behaviour, is deterministic. Finally, *evolutionary psychology,* giving emphasis on genetics in behaviour, is deterministic.

There are other perspectives in psychology that oppose and criticize the idea of determinism. These perspectives suggest that human beings have free will. *Humanistic psychology*, suggesting that every individual has the potential to overcome obstacles to achieve self-actualization, believes in free will. *Existential psychology*, suggesting that human beings have purpose in life and are seeking meaning in life, believes in free will.

Check Your Progress 1

1)   Differentiate between biological and social environment.

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    ……………………………………………………………………………

2)   Who coined the term *nature-nurture*?

    ……………………………………………………………………………
    ……………………………………………………………………………

3)   Name the 17th century philosopher, associated with empiricism.

    ……………………………………………………………………………
    ……………………………………………………………………………

4)   Describe Chomsky's idea of language acquisition.

    ……………………………………………………………………………
    ……………………………………………………………………………

5)   How is determinism different from free will?

    ……………………………………………………………………………
    ……………………………………………………………………………

(2) Francis Galton; (3) John Locke

13.3 THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

The mind-body problem has been an age-old issue in psychology, which clearly has its roots in philosophy. There has always been the question about the existence of a mind, and the ways in which it could be related to the body. In other words, the issue of mind and body is about mental events and physical events, whether they are related, and how are they related.

Different philosophers and psychologists throughout the years have tried to explain this in their own ways. Some suggest that all events can be explained in physical terms. They believe that all mental events are aspects of physical events. The ones who go along with this notion are called *materialists.* The materialists believe that matter is the only reality. Accordingly, they suggest that everything in the universe, including thoughts, feelings, and behaviour

can be explained in terms of matter. Because they explain everything with respect to one type of reality, they are also called *monists.*

In contrast to materialists, there the *idealists*. The idealists believe that physical reality is based on perception. They are also monists, because like the materialists, they are also explaining everything in terms of one type of reality, that is, the mind or consciousness.

A number of psychologists, however, believe that both physical and mental events exist simultaneously, and are governed by different principles. This position is referred to as *dualism.*

13.3.1 Materialism

Thomas Hobbes, the founder of British Empiricism, was one of the major proponents of materialism. He was highly influenced by the emergence of science at his time, especially by the ideas of Galilei Galileo, which is reflected in his views about human nature.

Hobbes solely believed in the physical reality. According to him, human beings are like engines, suggesting that behaviour and the causes operating on it can be explained in terms of the body. He also emphasized that the idea of a soul independent of the body does not exist. Hobbes asserted that the *body* and the *person* are the same thing.

He strongly believed that all matter is in motion and is determined by external forces acting upon it. He explained human thought, in the same way. He explained human thought in terms of motion of things that affect or act on the senses of individuals, which then creates motion in the senses. According to Hobbes, subsequent to this motion, another motion gets created in the brain until it is degraded by other new motions. Hobbes was, therefore, a strong materialist, in such that he explained all human behaviour and thoughts in terms of the physical, that is, the body.

13.3.2 Idealism

Idealism, another form of monism, emphasizes the role of the ideal or spiritual in experience. According to idealism, reality is mainly about conscious experiences, and that abstract entities are important in understanding reality. It also emphasizes that all that exists can be known in terms of mental events, through ideas.

The two basic forms of idealism are metaphysical idealism and epistemological idealism. *Metaphysical idealism* emphasizes on theorizing about the nature of reality in terms of ideas. It can be viewed as the complete opposite of materialism, which views reality only in terms of matter. *Epistemological idealism* asserts that in processing knowledge, the mind can grasp only what is psychic in nature, and that the conditioning of objects is in terms of their perceptibility.

13.3.3 Dualism

René Descartes, regarded as the founder of modern philosophy, did not agree with the materialism of Hobbes. Descartes felt that the mind and body problem is not as simple as Hobbes had thought of.

Descartes believed that human beings are thinking beings, and cannot be described in terms of materialism. According to him, human beings are
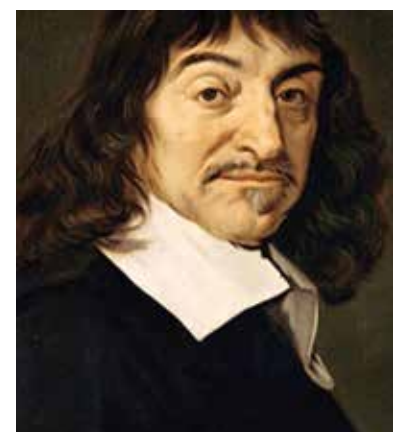

**Figure 13.4: René Descartes
(1596-1650)**

Source: www.biography.com

249

incorporeal, and are only contingently embodied. This belief of Descartes laid the foundation for the philosophical idea of dualism.

Descartes believed that humans are made of two substances – the soul or mind, and the body. The mind, according to Descartes is completely a thinking substance. The body, on the other hand, is a physical substance, and follows the mechanical laws. The mind and the body are, thus, two very distinct entities. However, it no way means that the mind does not interact with the body. According to Descartes, the mind and body both influence each other. Descartes suggested that the mind can make the body perform voluntary actions. Thus, the mind is not simply a mere observer of the activities of the body. Because Descartes suggested that the mind and body interact with each other, this view is also called *interactionism.* Interactionism is also referred to as *Cartesian dualism*.

Descartes, further, suggested that mind or the soul resides in the pineal gland, situated at the top of the brain. The pineal gland is then the seat of the mind and is the physical organ where the mind exercises its functions.

Further, Descartes suggested it is through the pineal gland that the mind makes the body to act or inhibit action. When the mind wills something to happen, the pineal gland gets stimulated. This, in turn, stimulates the appropriate brain areas, leading to the behaviour that was willed. The mind being free, can inhibit or modify the reflexive behaviour that the environment elicits in a mechanical manner.

Unlike behaviour, according to Descartes, emotions are experienced in a conscious manner. Emotions include passions like love, hate, wonder, desire, joy, anger, and sadness. Descartes believed that the will controls the passions in order to result virtuous conduct. For instance, if there is an experience of anger and aggression is viewed as appropriate, only then the mind will allow or facilitate it. If not, the mind will try to inhibit such behaviours. If the intensity of any of the passions is high then it is possible that the will may not be able to prevent any of the reflexive actions, which will make the individual to behave in an irrational manner.

Descartes's idea of dualism shows how the mind, as an immaterial entity, interacts with the body, as a material entity. The idea of Descartes is very different from that of Hobbes, who believed that everything is material. Descartes, however, clearly suggested that the mind and body are very distinct from each other, even though there is interaction between them.

Descartes strongly believed that the mind cannot be explained in terms of materialism. The mind, according to Descartes, is not made of material substances. The body, on the other hand, Descartes suggested, is made of material substances. For him, the body, which involves some mechanical processes, can be explained in terms of materialism.

13.3.4 Double Aspectism

The idea of *double aspectism* was introduced by the French philosopher, Baruch Spinoza. Double aspectism opposed materialism, idealism, and dualism (especially, interactionism).

Initially, Spinoza was highly influenced and impressed by the philosophy of Descartes. The first book of Spinoza was about Cartesian philosophy. Eventually, however, Spinoza disagreed with Descartes and his idea of

mind and matter being separate entities. Spinoza, instead, suggested that both are different aspects of the same substance.

Spinoza believed that the mind and body are inseparable, like being two sides of the same coin. The mind and body being inseparable, Spinoza believed that something that happens to the body is experienced as thoughts and emotions, and these thoughts and emotions influence the body. In suggesting the mind and body being two different aspects of the same entity, Spinoza combined physiology and philosophy into one system. His position on the mind-body issue is referred to as *psychophysical double aspectism*, or *double-aspect monism,* or simply *double aspectism.*

Even though the perspective of Descartes has been highly popular, his dualism has not been appreciated with respect to scientific scrutiny. In comparison to that, the perspective of Spinoza has been found to be more in line with modern, scientific psychology. Spinoza's approach has, in fact, formed the basis of many aspects of modern psychology. Descartes's Cartesian philosophy, with respect to that, has failed.

**Figure 13.5 Baruch Spinoza
(1632-1677)**
Source: www.ethics.org.au

Spinoza's double aspectism led him to propose the notion of psychic determinism, which stimulated the scientific analysis of the mind. Spinoza is often regarded as the first modern thinker to talk about human behaviour, strictly from a deterministic perspective. This, eventually, turned out to be instrumental for Theodor Gustav Fechner and Wilhelm Wundt in introducing the experimental method in psychology.

Box 13.3: Types of Dualism

- **Interactionism:** According to *interactionism*, the mind and body influence each other, indicating that there is an interaction between the mind and the body. Interactionism suggests that the mind can initiate behaviour. René Descartes was the first person to propose this form of mind-body relationship. Sigmund Freud, and the other psychoanalysts have also taken this position of dualism. Psychoanalysis suggests that mental events like conflict and anxiety can cause body ailments, which depicts and interaction between mind and body.

- **Emergentism:** *Emergentism* claims that mental states emerge the physical state. A variant of emergentism suggests that one the mental events emerge from the physical state (brain), the mental events are able to influence brain activity. This means that there is a reciprocal relationship between the mind and the brain (body), making it similar to interactionism. Roger Sperry, the Nobel-prize winner, was a proponent of this.

- **Epiphenomenalism:** *Epiphenomenalism* is a type of emergentism, which is different from interactionism. According to epiphenomenalism, the brain causes mental events, but the mental events cannot influence the brain. This indicates that from the perspective of epiphenomenalism, mental events are the by-products of physical events (brain), but it has no influence on the brain. John Watson, the founder of Behaviourism, initially had taken the position of epiphenomenalism, but later he became a physical monist.

251

- **Psychophysical Parallelism:** *Psychophysical parallelism* suggests the mind and body are completely independent of each other, and have no interaction. According to psychophysical parallelism, environmental experiences influence the mind and body simultaneously, and one does not affect the other. Wilhelm Wundt and Edward Titchener, both, had taken this position.

- **Pre-established Harmony:** According to *pre-established harmony*, mind and body are two separate entities, and mental events are different from physical events, but both are co-ordinated by some external agent.

- **Double Aspectism:** *Double aspectism* talks about mind and body, which makes it related to dualism. According to double aspectism, an individual experiences of both mental and physical events However, this position, proposed by Spinoza, suggests that mind and body are not separate from each other; they are two aspects of the same entity, a unity.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What is the difference between materialism and idealism?

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2) How is Spinoza's *double aspectism* different from Descartes's *dualism*?

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13.4 THE RELATIONSHIP OF INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

A question that has been often addressed is that how does the individual function in the society? Arguments addressing this question gives an understanding of the relationship of the individual and society. This has implications in investigating human behaviour – whether the individual be examined as an independent entity or the individual be examined in the context of societal influences.

Psychology, at the beginning, emphasized on understanding conscious experiences in terms of the elements of consciousness and sensory experiences. Emphasis was given on immediate experience, that is, experience without any interpretation. This emphasis viewed the individual as an independent entity, without looking at the context or the environment. In a way, it was suggested that mind and consciousness can be examined irrespective of the context, ignoring the strong influences exerted by the environment and society.

The idea of consciousness being viewed in terms of elements and immediate experience, was later, opposed by other perspectives in psychology. They suggested that consciousness cannot be examined without taking into

account the context, giving rise to the debate of where the individual stands within the context, environment, and society.

13.4.1 Field Theory

The notion of field relationships emerged in psychology, in opposition to atomism and elementism. The trend of field relationships in psychology can be largely credited to Gestalt psychology, but aspects of it can be traced back to *act psychology* and the *Würzburg school*.

The influence of field theories in psychology came from physics, which used the concept of force fields. Gestalt psychology was very much influenced by this notion, which was then carried forward by Kurt Lewin. Taking forward the Gestaltian perspective, Lewin suggested that personality should be viewed within the dynamic field of individual-environmental interactions. According to Lewin, to understand an individual in a better way, the specific interactions of the individual with the environment should be considered. This interactive field model of an individual was based on Lewin's idea of hodological space. It is defined as a geometric system, which emphasizes:

● Movement along psychologically directed pathways

● The dynamics of person-environment interactions, and

● The behaviour of the individual at environmental obstacles and barriers

Lewin emphasized on describing human behaviour in relation to its physical and social context. Borrowing the idea of field theory from physics, Lewin suggested that an individual's psychological activities occur within a psychological field. Lewin called this psychological field the *life space*. According to Lewin, the life space constitutes all past, present, and future events that may affect an individual. All of these events determine behaviour in specific situations. Thus, the life space consists of the individual and his or her interaction with the psychological environment.

**Figure 13.6: Kurt Lewin
(1890-1947)**

Source: www.verywellmind.com

Extending the idea of life space, Lewin did pioneering work on group dynamics, which is the application of psychological concepts to individual and group behaviour. Lewin suggested that just like the individual and his or her environment constitutes the psychological field, the group and its environment forms the social field. According to Lewin, social behaviours take place as a result of co-existing social entities like subgroups, group members, barriers, and channels of communication. Lewin was emphasizing on how behaviour should be actually viewed within a larger social context, and how the social climate shapes behaviour.

In a now classic experiment, Lewin and his associates, in 1939, examined the influence of authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles on group members. The authoritarian leader took all the decisions by himself, the democratic leader was very co-operative, and the laissez-faire leader was passive and let the members do whatever they felt like. It was found that members in the authoritarian group showed a lot of aggressive behaviour, members in the democratic group were friendly with each other, and showed a lot of potency, and members of the laissez-faire group lacked cohesiveness and were inefficient. The main idea of the experiment was to demonstrate that behaviour is determined by the social climate, which can

253

be artificially induced by the leader. This clearly showed shows that human behaviour should be viewed in the social context, and not independently.

13.4.2 The Individual, the Situation, and the Environment

Kurt Lewin's field theory strengthened the idea that individuals function within a social context, and that examining individual behaviour independent of the context will be inaccurate. This further led to the emergence of the debate of traits versus the situation – whether behaviour is determined by personality traits or the specific situation.

Social psychologists for a long time have been denouncing the notion of traits, suggesting that behaviour is largely caused by the situation in which the individual is involved in. They argue that the same individual behaves differently in different situations. For instance, in one situation a person may be confident and at ease, and in another situation the same person may be anxious.

Other psychologists have, however, argued that behaviour is not so simple. They suggest that the situation alone in itself does not influence behaviour. This can be found is socially proscribed situations, that is, situations in which the individuals have a limited choice such as where strict rules are to be followed. They suggest that even in such situations individual differences can be found. Had behaviour been caused only by the situation then everybody in a proscribed situation would behave in the same manner, which does not happen. In such instances, most psychologists agree that behaviour is caused by an interaction between the traits and the situation. This argument gives an indication that there is an interactive relation between the individual and the context.

Yet, many social psychologists give more emphasis to the context. Taking forward Aristotle's notion of people being social animals, they assert that individuals interact with each other, like to connect with each other, and long to have the feeling of belongingness. As social beings, individuals respond to their immediate context. Social psychologists assert that the power of the situation can be so overwhelming that it compels individuals to behave in a specific manner. Summing this argument, the social psychologist Hazel Markus suggests that people are malleable, and that individuals adapt to their social context, in such that attitudes and behaviour are shaped by external social forces.

This idea of behaviour being determined by external forces has been also been strongly emphasized by behaviourists. The behaviourists emphasized the environmental causes of behaviour and suggested that human beings are passive reactors to external events. They strongly emphasized on the environmental or situational determinants. According to behaviourists, human behaviour is shaped by environmental conditions through learning.

The later behaviourists, known as the social-cognitive theorists, however, disagreed with the earlier behaviourists, suggesting that human beings are not mere passive reactors to the environment. They felt that the internal factors of individuals cannot be excluded when it comes to the understanding of behaviour. The social-cognitive theorists viewed individuals as active entities participating within the environment. They believed that individuals are perceivers, thinkers, and planners, and that every individual interprets

events, think about the past, and try to anticipate what lies in the future, and then eventually takes the decision of how to behave. These cognitive processes, according to the social-cognitive theorists interact with environmental forces. They emphasize that behaviour is determined by the interaction of an active, thinking individual with the social environment.

The social-cognitive theorists, further, stress on the principle of *reciprocal determinism*, that is, the individual and the environment influence each other; there is a two-way relationship between them. This means that the environment shapes the behaviour of the individual, and the individual's behaviour shapes the environment. The individual and the situation shape each other, and to understand behaviour appropriately, there is a need to know the ways in which the characteristics of the individual interact with the specific situation.

Social psychologists, behaviourists, and social-cognitive theorists, with their emphasis on the situation and the environment, gave an impetus for other perspectives to acknowledge the role of the larger social context in determining human behaviour. Psychologists, then began to stress a lot on the significance of the influence of society on individuals, and laid the foundation in understanding the relationship of the individual and society. The ecological perspective is one such example that stresses a lot on societal influences, and sheds greater light on the relationship of the individual and society.

13.4.3 The Ecological Perspective

The ecological perspective refers to the study of organisms and their interaction with the environment. The ecological perspective can be traced back to 19th century Germany. It was then referred to as the science of the relations between the organism and the environment.

Ecological means that there are multiple levels or layers of issues that must be taken into consideration, including the individual, family, neighbourhood, community, and policies at the national level. This perspective is very well represented in the field of community psychology. Community psychology emphasizes on the relationships of individuals with communities and society. It makes an attempt to understand and enhance quality of life for individuals, communities, and societies. Therefore, it is viewed as bringing about a shift beyond the traditional individualistic perspective. Community psychologists look at how individuals, communities, and societies are interconnected, rather than focusing exclusively on the individual. The context or environment is seen as an integral part of understanding and working with the communities and the people who are embedded in it.

Community psychology is about the multiple relationships between individuals, communities, and societies. An individual lives in many communities and on many levels such as family, network of friends, workplace, school, voluntary association, neighbourhood, and even cultures. Accordingly, the individual must be understood in relation to these relationships (communities), not in a vacuum. Thus, it focuses not only on the individual or the community, but on the connections between them. It is about understanding and improving community and individual life, and do not see them as opposites; they see them as inseparable in the long run. The
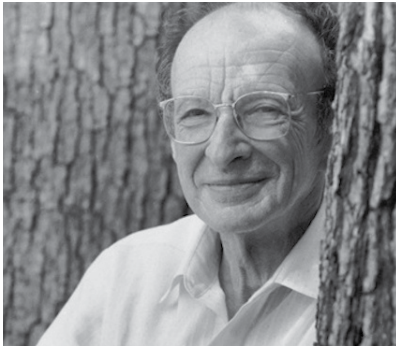
255

Figure 13.7: Uri Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005)

Source: www.firstdiscoverers.co.uk

idea of the individual and the community being inseparable can be found in the psychologist, Uri Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. In 1979, Bronfenbrenner's work on the theory of ecological systems describes the ecology of the individual based on a set of interlocking levels of the environment.

According to Bronfenbrenner, there are five interconnected types of environmental systems - (1) micro, (2) meso (3) exo (4) macro, and (5) chrono. They range from smaller proximal parameters in which individuals interact directly with larger distal parameters that indirectly affect development. The most proximal ecological level is the *micro-system*. This includes the settings that involve direct interaction of individuals. Some examples of the micro-system are family, peer groups, schools, and the neighbourhood. The next ecological level is the *meso-system.* The meso-system involves processes that occur between multiple micro-systems in which the individuals are embedded in. The meso-system consists of many micro-systems. What happens in one micro-system affects what happens in another micro-system.

The next ecological level is the *exo-system.* The exo-system consists of microsystems in which individuals are involved, but are not directly embedded in. The exo-system spreads to influence development through others who contribute to the lives of individuals. The next ecological level is the *macro-system.* The macro-system is the broader culture. It can be said to be a set of dominant beliefs, values, and norms.

The final ecological level is the *chrono-system.* The chrono-system is the sociohistorical condition. It comprises of changes or coherence over time not only in the characteristics of the person, but also in the environment in which they live.
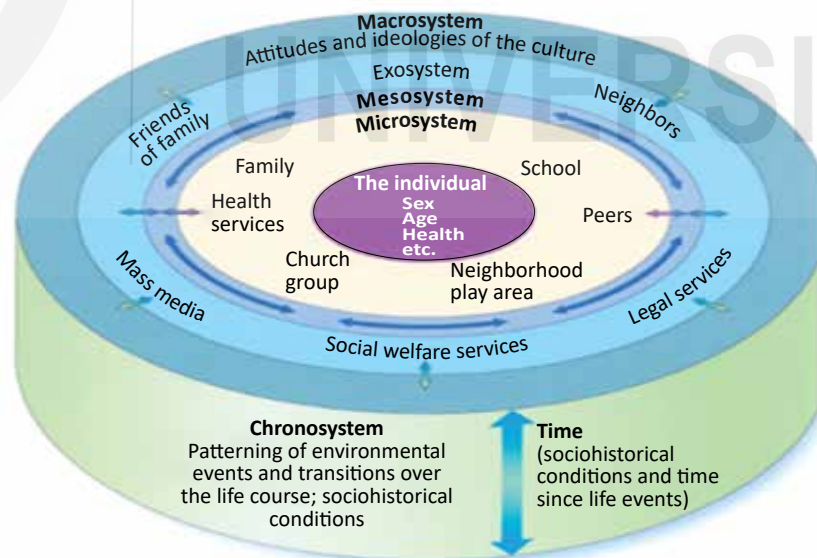

Figure 13.8: Ecosystems Theory

Source: sites.google.com

The ecological perspective as reflected in community psychology and the ecological systems theory clearly indicates that the individual is an integral part of the society, and that the society has a strong influence in shaping the individual.

256

Box 13.4: The Individual Within the Society: Subfields of Psychology

- Even though psychology began as an individualistic discipline, over the years subfields within psychology emerged that emphasized on viewing the individual being influenced by the larger societal context. Following are some of such subfields in psychology:

- **Social Psychology:** *Social psychology* examines the role of the situation and the context on thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. It examines how social contexts like societal norms and social change influence the individual.

- **Environmental Psychology:** *Environmental psychology* examines the interactions the individual with the surroundings. It examines how the individual and the surroundings may influence each other. These surroundings can be a wide range of social settings, including the larger society.

- **Cultural Psychology:** *Cultural psychology* examines how socio-cultural processes bring about change and development in society, and how that collectively, over the years, determines the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of the individual.

- **Community Psychology:** *Community psychology* examines how the individual, community, and society are interconnected. It examines how multiple social contexts influence the individual. It also examines how society influences communities, and how communities influence the individual.

- **Political Psychology:** *Political psychology* examines how the political scenario within a society can play a role on the development of individuals' attitudes, beliefs, thinking, and ideology.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What is Lewins's field theory?

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2) Describe the interaction of mind and body, as suggested by Descartes.

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   ……………………………………………………………………

3) How does the ecological perspective explain the inter-relatedness of the individual and society?

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13.5 SUMMARY

Now that we have come to the end of this unit, let us recapitulate all the major points that we have learnt.

- The debate of nature versus nurture is about the extent to which

257

individuals and their behaviours are shaped by biological inheritance, that is, *nature*, or by environmental factors, that is, *nurture*.

- *Biological environment* includes nutrition, medical care, drugs, and physical accidents, all that take place during the prenatal stage (before birth). *Social environment* includes personal experience, circumstances, learning, the social and political background, family, peers, schools, community, media, and culture.

- Free will, also termed as *non-determinism,* is the idea that behaviour is not constrained by either current circumstances or past experience. Determinism, on the other hand, is the assumption that all behaviour has specific causes.

- Determinism can be broadly classified as physical determinism and psychical determinism. If a cause of behaviour can be directly measured and can be quantified, then it is called *physical determinism.* Physical determinism includes biological, environmental, and *socio-cultural determinism.*

- When the causes of behaviour are explained in terms of cognitive and emotional experiences, then it is called *psychical determinism*. In such a case, the causes of behaviour are said to be subjective, and cannot be directly measured or quantified.

- William James differentiates between *hard determinism* and *soft determinism*. When the cause of behaviour is said to be automatic or mechanistic, then it is referred to as hard determinism. Soft determinism involves cognitive processes like intention, motivation, and beliefs.

- A number of psychologists believe that both physical and mental events exist simultaneously, and are governed by different principles. This position is referred to as *dualism.*

- Thomas Hobbes, the founder of British Empiricism, was one of the major proponents of materialism. According to him, human beings are like engines, suggesting that behaviour and the causes operating on it can be explained in terms of the body.

- *Idealism*, another form of monism, emphasizes the role of the ideal or spiritual in experience. Reality is mainly about conscious experiences, and that abstract entities are important in understanding reality.

- Descartes believed that humans are made of two substances – the soul or mind, and the body. The mind is completely a thinking substance. The body, on the other hand, is a physical substance, and follows the mechanical laws. The mind and the body are, thus, two very distinct entities. The mind and body interact with each other, this view is also called *interactionism.* Interactionism is also referred to as *Cartesian dualism*.

- The idea of *double aspectism* was introduced by Baruch Spinoza. Double aspectism opposed materialism, idealism, and dualism (especially, interactionism).

258

- The influence of field theories in psychology came from physics, which used the concept of force fields. Gestalt psychology was very much influenced by this notion, which was then carried forward by Kurt Lewin.

- Lewin suggested that personality should be viewed within the dynamic field of individual-environmental interactions. Individual's psychological activities occur within a psychological field called as the *life space*. The life space constitutes all past, present, and future events that may affect an individual.

- Hazel Markus suggests that people are malleable, and that individuals adapt to their social context, in such that attitudes and behaviour are shaped by external social forces.

- The social-cognitive theorists stress on the principle of *reciprocal determinism*, that is, the individual and the environment influence each other; there is a two-way relationship between them.

- The ecological perspective refers to the study of organisms and their interaction with the environment. The idea of the individual and the community being inseparable can be found in Uri Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

- According to Bronfenbrenner, there are five interconnected types of environmental systems - (1) micro, (2) meso (3) exo (4) macro, and (5) chrono. They range from smaller proximal parameters in which individuals interact directly with larger distal parameters that indirectly affect development.

- The ecological perspective as reflected in community psychology and the ecological systems theory clearly indicates that the individual is an integral part of the society, and that the society has a strong influence in shaping the individual.

13.6 KEY WORDS

Nature: An evolutionary and genetic foundation of behaviour.

Nurture: The idea that individuals are shaped by the environment.

Nativism: The philosophical theory that emphasizes heredity to determine abilities and capacities, instead of learning and experience.

Empiricism: The philosophy that emphasizes learning and experience.

Free Will: the idea that behaviour is not constrained by either current circumstances or past experience. Human beings choose and decide how to behave based on their subjective assessment of a situation.

Determinism: The assumption that all behaviour has specific causes.

Indeterminism: The causes of behaviour being unable to be measured in an accurate manner, because observation of the behaviour in itself change the behaviour.

Physical Determinism: The cause of behaviour is directly measurable and can be quantifiable.

Psychical Determinism: The causes of behaviour are explained in terms of cognitive and emotional experiences. In such a case, the causes of behaviour are said to be subjective, and cannot be directly measured or quantified.

Hard Determinism: The cause of behaviour is said to be automatic or mechanistic. In such cases, there will be no personal responsibility.

Soft Determinism: The behaviour involves cognitive processes like intention, motivation, and beliefs. These processes intervene between experience and behaviour.

Materialism: The belief that all events can be explained in physical terms, and that all mental events are aspects of physical events.

Idealism: The belief that reality is mainly about conscious experiences, and that abstract entities are important in understanding reality. It also emphasizes that all that exists can be known in terms of mental events.

Dualism: The belief that humans are made of two substances – the soul or mind, and the body. The mind is completely a thinking substance while the body, is a physical substance, and follows the mechanical laws. The mind and the body are, thus, two very distinct entities.

Double Aspectism: The belief that the mind and body are inseparable; they two different aspects of the same entity.

Field Theory: The perspective that personality should be viewed within the dynamic field of individual-environmental interactions.

Life Space: The psychological field in which all the psychological activities of an individual take place. It constitutes all past, present, and future events that may affect an individual. All of these events determine behaviour in specific situations.

Reciprocal Determinism: A two-way relationship between the individual and the environment, suggesting that the individual and the environment influence each other.

Ecological Perspective: The study of organisms and their interaction with the environment. Ecological means that there are multiple levels or layers of issues that must be taken into consideration, including the individual, family, neighbourhood, community, and policies at the national level.

Community Psychology: Understanding the relationships of individuals with communities and society. It makes an attempt to understand and enhance quality of life for individuals, communities, and societies.

Ecological Systems Theory: The theory of ecological systems that describe the ecology of the individual based on a set of interlocking levels of the environment. There are five interconnected types of environmental systems — (1) micro, (2) meso (3) exo (4) macro, and (5) chrono.

13.7 REVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Describe the idea of nature in development.

2) Discuss some of the ways in which nativism and empiricism had an impact on psychology.

3) Why is determinism with respect to human behaviour complicated?

4) How did William James suggest that determinism can also involve personal responsibility?

5) In what ways did Descartes suggest that mind and body are two separate entities?

6) How does Lewin's notion of the psychological field emphasize on the role of context in individual behaviour?

7) Describe how social-cognitive theorists suggest that there is a two-way interaction between the individual and the environment.

8) How is community psychology a shift from the individualistic perspective?

9) Discuss the different ecological levels as described by Bronfenbrenner.

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Timeline of some of the important psychologists, starting from early Greek philosophers to the present day.

Date	Psychologist(s)	Contribution
428-347 BCE	Plato (Greek Philosopher)	Argued for the role of nature in psychological development.
384-322 BCE	Aristotle (Greek Philosopher)	Posited the role of nurture in psychological development
1588-1679	Thomas Hobbes (English Philosopher)	Mechanistic laws of human nature
1596-1650	Rene Descartes (French Philosopher and Mathematician)	*I think, therefore I am*; developed a model of body/soul dualism
1632-1704	John Locke (English Philosopher)	Published the book, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) that provided an impetus on modern empiricism
1712-1778	Jean –Jacques Rousseau (French Philosopher)	*Emile* (1762), the first text on the philosophy of education in the Western world.
1801-1887	Gustav Fechner (German experimental psychologist)	Developed the idea of the just noticeable difference (JND)which is consider to be the first empirical psychological measurement
1809-1882	Charles Darwin (British naturalist)	*On the Origin of Species* (1859); influenced the functionalist school and the field of evolutionary psychology
1832-1920	Wilhelm Wundt (German Physician and Philosopher)	Set up the first psychology laboratory in Leipzig in Germany, and helped develop the field of structuralism. First person to describe himself as a 'Psychologist'
1842-1910	William James (American Psychologist)	The pioneer of American psychology; helped develop the functionalist school of psychology
1849-1936	Ivan Pavlov (Russian Physiologist)	Experiments on learning led to the principle of classical conditioning.
1850-1909	Hermann Ebbinghaus (German Psychologist)	*Memory* (1885); undertook the study of higher mental processes of memory.
1850	Dorothy Dix (Canadian Psychologist)	Contributed to mental health and opened first mental hospital in Halifax, Canada.
1856-1939	Sigmund Freud (Austrian Neurologist)	Founder of Psychoanalysis, the first psychodynamic method of therapy.

1863-1930	Mary Whiton Calkins (American Psychologist)	Became president of American Psychological Association in 1921.
1857-1911	Alfred Binet (French Psychologist)	Constructed the first practical test of IQ, the Binet-Simon test (1905).
1867-1927	Edward Bradford Titchener (British Psychologist)	Developed structural approach to the mind.
1878-1958	John B Watson (American Psychologist)	Posited behaviouristic approach.
1886-1969	Sir Frederic C. Bartlett (British Psychologist)	Forerunner of cognitive psychology
1889–1944	Prof. Narendra Nath Sengupta (Indian Psychologist)	Started India's first psychology journal *Indian Journal of Psychology* (1925) and established Department of Experimental Psychology, Kolkata in 1940
1896-1980	Jean Piaget (Swiss Developmental Psychologist)	Stage theory of cognitive development
1895-1954	Francis Cecil Summer (African American Psychologist)	First African American to earn Phd degree in Psychology. Influential in establishing the psychology department at Harvard. Also known as *father of Black Psychology*
1904-1990	B.F. Skinner (American Psychologist)	Contributed to the school of behaviourism
1908-1970	Abraham Harold Maslow (American Psychologist)	Known for humanistic theory of self-actualization.
1913-1994	Roger Wolcott Sperry (American Neuropsychologist and Neurobiologist)	Recipient of the 1981 Nobel Prize for split-brain research.
1932	Koneru Ramakrishna Rao (Indian Psychologist)	Exemplary work in psychology propelled him to get the Padma Shri, first recipient from the field of psychology.
1955	C. M. Bhatia	Published his work, setting up a battery of performance tests of Intelligence for use in Indian conditions.

1925	Albert Bandura (Canadian Psychologist)	Posited Social Learning Theory with his 'bobo-doll' experiments
1926-1993	Donald Broadbent (British Cognitive Psychologist)	Filter model of attention
1942	Martin Seligman (American Psychologist)	Positive psychology and well-being; theory of learned helplessness.
20th and 21st centuries	Linda Bartoshuk, Daniel Kahneman, Elizabeth Loftus, George Miller (American Psychologists)	Contributed to the cognitive school of psychology by studying learning memory and judgment. In the field of neuroscience, Daniel Kahneman won the noble Prize in Economics for his work in on psychological decision-making
1921-2016	Thomas Schelling (American Economist)	Won the Nobel Prize in 2005 for his work in applying Game theory to understanding conflict and cooperation in economic behaviour.
1922-1998	Durganand Sinha (Indian Psychologist)	Ecological Model (1977) for understanding children's development in the context of India.
1970	Hans Selye (Hungarian Psychologist)	Psychology of Stress
2013	American Psychiatric Association	DSM-5 is the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.