

Briefing

KEEPING SCIENCE IN PSYCHOLOGY
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An examination of every major introduction to psychology course text reveals a wide variety of definitions of psychology. Most appear to be contemporary variations of B. F. Skinner's (1938) classic definition - "Psychology is the scientific study of behavior."

Indeed, if one goes further back, beyond James at Harvard and Wundt at Leipzig, to Greek legends, psychology's roots are well defined. Psychology is composed of two Greek words Psyche and logos. Psyche was the illegitimate yet beautiful mortal daughter of Zeus. After discovering Zeus' affair, his wife threatened Psyche's life. In attempting to determine how to handle the affairs of gods and humans (maybe mind and body), Zeus enlisted the help of Logos, the Greek god of logic. The logical, later scientific, approach to understanding the solving the problems of behavior was born.

The role of science in psychology can also be seen in various definitions of psychology. William James, the father of American psychology, defined psychology in 1890 as the "science of mental life, both its phenomena, and of their conditions." In 1919 the famed behaviorist John B. Watson had defined psychology as "that division of natural science which takes human behavior as its subject matter." Titchner (1905), Woodworth (1921), McDougall (1924), Koffa (1925), and more recently Hebb (1958), Miller (1970), Mayer (1981), Atkinson and Hilgard (1987) have all defined psychology within the concept of science. Indeed, if one reviews all of the nine editions (from 1953 to 1987) of the famed Hilgard and Atkinson's Introduction of Psychology (one of the best-selling introductory books in psychology), science has always been an integral part of the definition of psychology.

The scientific approach has allowed psychology to become a rigorous yet popular discipline. Its unique ability to ask questions about behavior places it in the forefront of human interest. Unfortunately, pseudoscientific approaches to understanding behavior continue to be confused with psychology. Examples of these include biorhythms, creationism, horoscopes and parapsychology.

These pseudoscientific efforts are marked by anachronistic thinking, mysteries, myths, unsystematic approaches to evidence, irrefutable hypotheses, spurious similarities, knowledge through exegesis, and inability and unwillingness to revise in light of contradictory evidence (Radner and Radner, 1982).

Despite its popular conception, science can be interesting and exciting. The systematic gathering of information, theory building and development of a paradigm can provide the excitement and enthusiasm for a new student of psychology. It not only can, but it should. Psychology must work within the confines of currently accepted scientific methods. To do otherwise would endanger our unique position in the eyes

of science, academia, society and, most of all, ourselves. Excitement and enthusiasm are not mutually exclusive with psychology. As its Greek derivation suggests, they are inseparable.

Selected References

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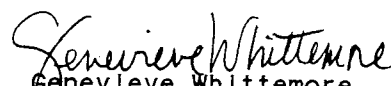
From the Editor's Desk by Genevieve Whittemore, Editor

Preliminary analyses of the 1986 Survey of Precollege Psychology give ground for expecting some interesting data about the current state of high school psychology. A pilot study mailed to a random sample of 200 principals yielded 79 returned surveys completed sufficiently to be analyzed. Some of the findings included: 68.3% of respondents offered psychology; 92.6% offered psychology in the social studies department; 13% of the respondents reported that they were APA affiliates and 87.6% reported that they were not. 90.7% of the respondents reported that they use **Psychology Today** as a teaching resource. Of the respondents who are affiliates, 100% reported that they use and read **High School Psychology Teacher**.

It is interesting to note that APA high school affiliates receive subscriptions to **High School Psychology Teacher** and the **APA Monitor** as well as **Psychology Today** as part of the affiliate package. Affiliates also receive special mailings throughout the year such as the Statement on the Curriculum for the High School Psychology Course. [As of January 1, 1988, the high school affiliate membership annual fee is \$20.]

In October, 1986, the major project of 2000 surveys were mailed with a return rate of approximately 35%. The results are being analyzed by Rachel Ragland, who presented a report on preliminary findings at the August APA Convention (See Page 7 in this issue). The final report will be sent to all high school affiliates as one of the special mailings in 1988.

High school affiliate membership is the best way we know to become part of a national network of professionals interested in the quality of teaching high school psychology. At \$20 per year, it remains one of the best bargains to be found.


Genevieve Whittemore
Editor