

The Rodney Dangerfield of the Sciences

Stanovich Chapter 12

Psychology's Image Problem

- Psychology can be a fascinating topic to the general public.
- At the same time most judgments about the field are resoundingly negative.
- Psychologists feel there is nothing they can do about it, so it is simply ignored.

"I don't get no respect"



Psychology and Parapsychology

- Average person's only reputable psychological research besides Freud and Skinner is virtually nonexistent.
- Look at the kinds of books found in the Psychology section of book stores:
 1. Classics
 2. Pseudoscience
 3. Self-help

A few classics...

- Freud, Skinner, Fromm, Erickson, etc.
- Heavily biased toward old-style psychoanalytic views
- Unrepresentative of modern psychology
- Works by modern psychologists of real worth are shelved under science and/or biology sections
 - i.e. Steven Pinker's *How the Mind Works* (1997)

Pseudoscience

- Pseudoscience masquerades as psychology
 - i.e. telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, precognition, reincarnation, and biorhythms, etc.
- Adds to and explains misconception of psychologists
- Topic of ESP (extrasensory perception)
 - >40% of general public believe in its existence
 - Psychologists study topics that lead to empirical discoveries, ESP though studied for 90 years has not, so has been dropped
 - Psychology is now "guilty by association"
- Ironic because when it is assumed that anything goes in psychology, due to the lack of scientific mechanisms, this leads to being associated with pseudosciences when it has been psychology all along that has been disproving these topics as science.

Self-help Literature

- Categories of self-help books:
 - Motivational topics used to increase self worth/confidence
 - Take familiar clichés about human behavior and package them in new ways
 - Authored by responsible psychologists (fewest)
- Many not of the last category display new "treatments" used to treat the big 3: make more money, less more weight, have better sex.
- Rarely based on controlled experimental investigation relying on personal experience or limited case studies

- Cognitive and behavioral therapies that have emerged through proper psychological investigation are poorly represented on bookshelves.
- Radio/TV carry more bogus 'therapies' with public-seeking media personalities with no connection to psychology
- Psychology doesn't claim an instant cure, guaranteed success, or vast generality for their effects.
- Bogus treatments create confusion in the general public about what psychology focuses its research
 - Being engaged in research/treatment of abnormal behavior (obesity, relationships, and sexuality) when in fact most psychological research is directed at nonpathological behavior that is typical of all humans

Recipe Knowledge

- The knowledge of how to use something without knowledge of the fundamental principles that govern its functioning. i.e. telephone
- Basic researcher seeks to uncover fundamental principles of nature
- Applied researcher is more interested in translating these principles into a product
- People mistakenly view recipe knowledge as psychological research's ultimate goal

Psychology and Other Disciplines

- Contributions of psychologists are often usurped by other scientific fields
 - i.e. 1st major survey of the evidence on TV's effects on children's behavior was conducted under the U.S. surgeon general. Not surprisingly the AMA received praise from the media, not psychological research.
- The word psychologist has become ambiguous
- The work of physiological psychologists is attributed to biology, cognitive psychologists to neuroscience, industrial psychologists to engineering, etc.

Our Own Worst Enemies

- Psychology's image problem can't be blamed entirely on outside sources
- "Intuitive insight" – doesn't exist
- Allow pseudosciences to be linked with psychology

Isn't Everyone a Psychologist?

- Personal psychology vs. Scientific psychology
- Scientific psychology general, underlying principles while personal psychology seeks comfort
- Falsifiability separates personal psychology from scientific psychology
- Everyone isn't a psychologists, they just have theories on human behavior

The Source of Resistance

- Conflict of Interest
- Anything goes atmosphere in psychology
 - \$10 billion is spent annually on medical quackery
- *Daubert vs. Merrell Dow*
 1. Testability
 2. Error rates
 3. Peer review
 4. Accepted in the scientific community

The Final Word

- What has the book, *How to Think Straight about Psychology* revealed?
- See page 202

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