



STUDY OF CURRENT TRENDS IN PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract : Several myths about the status of psychology have emerged in recent years. For instance, there is a myth that there are fewer scientific psychologists graduating with doctoral degrees than ever before. However, Fowler (2001a) indicates that the number of graduating scientific psychologists has actually increased over the last 25 years. An interesting trend is that the rate of growth is greater in applied areas of psychology than in other areas. Fowler (2001a) notes that the applied areas of psychology have been behind in their development and that the growth in those areas represents a “catching up.” In fact, the application of psychology has created greater opportunities for psychologists. Being a psychologist no longer limits you to clinical or academic work. Psychologists today are presented with a wide variety of careers to choose from (Fowler, 2001b). An excellent resource to study the different areas that psychologists are finding employment is the February 2001 issue of the Monitor on Psychology. In that issue, 21 psychologists are highlighted in careers ranging from marketing analysts to internet developers to directors of various interest organizations. Another useful resource is the Psychological Science Agenda which is published by the Science Directorate of the American Psychological Association. A different career in psychology is highlighted in each issue of the Psychological Science Agenda.

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The growing popularity of psychology and possibilities for psychologists that have arisen from the

growing popularity makes psychology an interesting and exciting discipline. Below are some of the current trends in the field of psychology. However, before presenting these trends, I need to make a disclaimer. Psychology is a very broad discipline. Some psychologists work in schools. Some are clinicians. Some conduct what many would consider biological research. Other psychologists design software or instrumentation panels. The list can go on and on. Likewise, there is a great deal of diversity in psychological thought. Therefore, the following comments present some of the recent trends in psychology that I find to be significant. It is not a conclusive list of current trends but should provide a good overview of the changes that are taking place in psychology.

Applied Psychology

As noted above, applied psychology is enjoying a relatively large growth rate. Psychological principles are employed in marketing. Industrial/Organizational psychologists are being used in varying capacities in the business world. However, the area of applied psychology that is growing the fastest is health psychology. Health psychology focuses on the promotion and maintenance of health, the prevention

and treatment of illness, the identification of etiologic and diagnostic correlates of health, illness and related dysfunction, and the analysis and improvement of the health care system and health policy information (Stone, 1987; Matarazzo, 1982). An important aspect of health psychology is that it deals with both prevention and treatment. Thus, some health psychologists may help people maintain a fitness



program while others deal with life after diagnosis. Oncology is one are of medicine that is actively using psychologists to help patients deal with cancer treatment. Health psychology is an exciting area in psychology with great potential for future psychologists.

Another area of applied psychology is psychological testing. Our society tends to measure everything. Baseball is a great example of our need to measure since there is a statistic for everything associated with baseball. Educational attainment and intelligence are among the things we like to measure.

In fact, one of the first applications of psychology was the development of the Army Alpha and Beta tests which were essentially IQ tests given to place solders in positions appropriate for their abilities. Many academic accrediting agencies and insurance companies have become very outcome oriented. Therefore, tests are in demand. Within testing, an interesting trend in intelligence testing is to minimize the verbal nature of tests. This has come about largely for two reasons. First, many have argued that intelligence tests are written using assumptions from one social class and, therefore, are not generalizable to people from other social classes and racial or ethnic groups. The second concern is that the United States has an increasing minority population. It is recognized by test developers that it may be unfair to test children or adults who speak English as a second language with a test that was written for speakers of English.

Although performance on these tests still tends to be correlated with verbal ability, the trend represents the goal to develop a culturally fair test of intelligence.

Public Policy

There has been an increased emphasis over the last several years to both promote psychology and to inform policy makers by providing psychological research on matters important to the general public.

Dr. Richard McCarty, the Executive Director for Science at the Science Directorate of the American Psychological Association, referred to this as giving psychology away (McCarty, 2001). For instance, class sizes have become a growing concern. In fact, in the state of California, it was mandated that class sizes should be limited to only 20 students. Does limiting class size significantly improve student outcomes? Ehrenberg et al. (2001) found that reducing class size in early grades can have a long-lasting positive impact, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, the question still remains as to whether or not decreasing class size by hiring less effective teachers is beneficial to those students who are taught by less effective teachers. Therefore, Ehrenberg et al. (2001) suggest that additional research using a variety of methodologies should be conducted in order to more thoroughly understand the impact of class size on student outcomes. Similarly, psychological research is being used to inform public policy makers in regard to issues associated with aging, children, youth, and families, disabilities, ethnic minorities, HIV/AIDS, lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues, urban initiatives, and women’s issues. The Public Policy Office of the American Psychological Association is also involved in violence prevention, aging, and the Healthy Adolescents Project. The American Psychological Society recently started a new journal,

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