Three Levels of Analysis

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In this lesson, we'll discuss the three aspects of the biopsychosocial approach, which is a contemporary approach to psychology. You will reflect on how you use your self and social awareness skill to understand things in a cultural context. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Biopsychosocial Model

The biopsychosocial model views behaviors as products of ''biological characteristics'' (such as genes), ''psychological factors'' (such as fears, expectations, emotions, and cognition), and ''social conditions'' (such as cultural influences, family relationships, peers, and social support).

Psychologists in certain fields use these different perspectives separately, but this can fail to reveal the whole picture of why someone behaves the way they do. It is best to consider all three levels of analysis in psychology and how they work together to explain behaviors.

> ↗ EXAMPLE Does someone commit a crime because they have a brain disorder or genetic tendencies toward violence? Or is it because they've been rewarded for criminal behavior in the past? Or is it because they live in a society that accepts crime as part of life? Or are all of these situations complementary? The biopsychosocial approach says they are.

2. Biological Perspective

Unlike a lot of the historical perspectives on psychology, the new perspectives are a blend of different theoretical approaches. Instead of saying just one way is the right way to understand the mind and behavior, these new perspectives blend theories to look at things more holistically.

One of these is the **biological perspective**. Looking at the word biological, you can see the word biology, which is the focus of this approach.

A biological perspective psychologist looks at behavior as a result of the internal physical, chemical, and biological processes that occur in all human beings.

These psychologists relate things like thinking, feeling, and perceiving to different physical occurrences, such as what's going on inside of the brain, what chemicals are being sent, or what kind of genetic code allows those sorts of things to happen.

Biological Perspective

Emphasis on explaining human behavior in terms of underlying physical, chemical, and biological principles.

3. Psychological Perspective

Unlike the biological perspective, which looks at the internal physical processes that determine behavior, the **psychological perspective** looks at the internal mental and psychological processes that shape a person's behavior.

The psychological perspective includes parts of "cognitive theory," which focuses on the internal mental processes that are separate from what's happening outside of a person, and "psychodynamic theory," which focuses on unconscious processes that are occurring within a person.

⤳ EXAMPLE People learn from fear and expectations. They use emotional feedback and response to make decisions about their actions.

Psychological Perspective

The view that behavior is shaped by psychological processes occurring internally at the level of the individual.

4. Sociocultural Perspective

Sociocultural psychology has become a major area of study recently due to increases in travel, communication, technology, and globalization.

The **sociocultural perspective** looks at the social and cultural contexts that influence how people behave.

Historically, a lot of psychology was based on American and European ideas. However, with the advances in multiculturalism—especially in the United States, but also extending through other countries around the world—there arose a greater need to understand people in a specific context, and how that context might differ from country to country.

Sociocultural psychology also examines other social differences and their effects on the mind and behavior. These include such differences as gender, economic status, and sexual orientation. Anything else that defines a specific group of people can also be considered part of the sociocultural perspective.

▶ ⚙ **Self and Social Awareness: Skill Reflect**

When we're studying psychological phenomena, it's important to realize that not all of our theories can be applied in different situations. This is because cultural relativity states that an individual's actions and beliefs should be understood by considering the cultural context. We use our self and

social awareness skill to do this.

4a. Fundamental Attribution Error

When considering how certain ideas may not be applicable in all situations, it's important to note the sociocultural concept of fundamental attribution error.

Fundamental attribution error means that when things go wrong, people tend to attribute those problems to personal traits. In other words, the problems are viewed as being "within" a person, as opposed to being a result of outside or environmental factors.

⤷ **EXAMPLE** If somebody on the road cuts you off, you might attribute negative qualities to that person. In fact, this person might have been swerving to avoid hitting a dog on the road. This external behavior was a result of the environment, but you tend to attribute the issue to the person themself.

The study of fundamental attribution error has found that while this type of attribution is very common in the United States and European countries, it is not as prevalent in Asian countries like China, Japan, and Korea. This is because the cultures in those countries tend to be less focused on individuals, and more on the collective or the whole. Psychologists in these counties use self and social awareness to factor in these cultural differences.

4b. Social Norms

Another concept that is important to consider about the sociocultural perspective is the concept of social norms. Social norms are how people within a certain social group should or should not behave, according to that group's views. As you develop your self and social awareness skills, you'll see your own biases related to social norms.

⤷ **EXAMPLE** How you are expected to act at work might be completely different from how you're expected to act at a party with your friends.

This idea also spans different social differences (e.g., culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) as well. Social norms help us to understand what's expected or not expected within our society.

As scientists of human behavior, psychologists must understand and respect the differences between various groups of people, and be sensitive to those groups' specific needs, because the behaviors or ideas that one group of people finds acceptable may be viewed in a completely different way by another group.

⭐ **BIG IDEA**

As we discussed with the biological and psychological perspectives, the sociocultural perspective is just one piece of the puzzle. Modern perspectives of psychology tend to encompass a lot of different perspectives, which is why we consider the biopsychosocial approach as a whole. Looking at psychology from just one of these perspectives doesn't give us the entire view of psychology today.
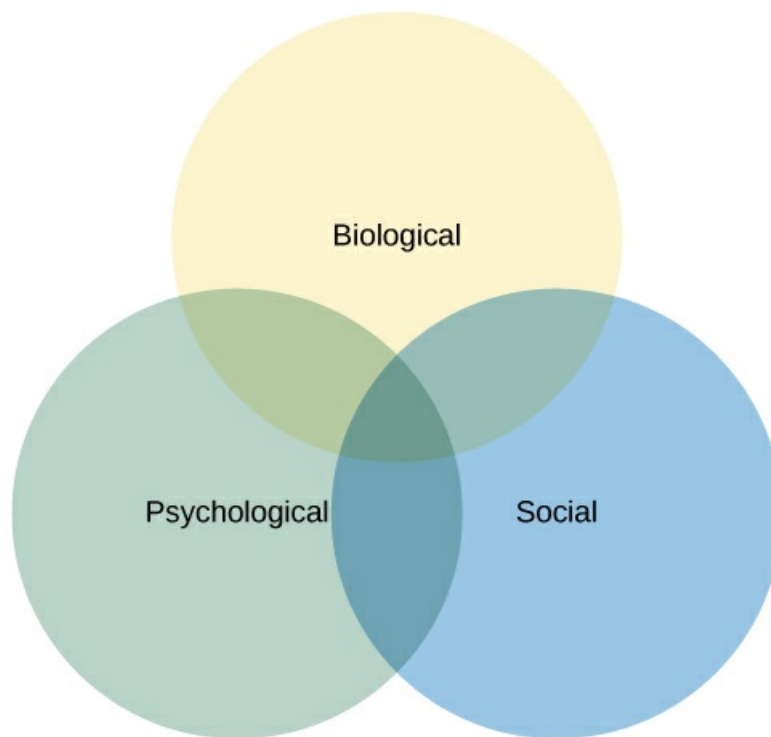
Sociocultural Perspective

The view that social and cultural contexts influence how people behave.

📋 SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the biopsychosocial model, including the **biological perspective** of psychology, which aims to understand behavior as a result of the physical, chemical, and biological processes that occur inside the human body, the **psychological perspective** that examines the internal mental and psychological processes to determine how they shape a person's behavior, and the **sociocultural perspective** which involves looking at how social and cultural contexts influence human behavior.

You now understand that although we have taken the time to examine each of the three contemporary psychological perspectives separately, they each contribute to the larger biopsychosocial perspective of psychology. To get a complete view of psychology today, it's important to consider this perspective as a whole. You also need to use your self and social awareness skill to put things in context.

Good luck!

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📄 TERMS TO KNOW

Biological Perspective

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The view that behavior is shaped by psychological processes occurring internally at the level of the individual.

Sociocultural Perspective

The view that social and cultural contexts influence how people behave.