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Competing Definitions of Psychology: APA and APS Convention

Subject Headings Compared

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In 1999 I was asked by then SWPA president, Theresa Wozencraft, to serve as program chair. While I was mulling over her request, president-elect Randall Wight independently asked me to serve in the same position for his presidential year. The writing was on the wall, it seemed, and acceded to both of their requests. Little did I know then that I would serve as SWPA's program chair until 2004, when I was elected SWPA president and was not permitted to hold both jobs (not that I wanted to!).

I had absolutely no idea what the job of program chair was when I first began. Throughout that first year I was surprised numerous times by the demands of the job. Gradually, I learned that the job had many facets and included soliciting proposals, recruiting referees, coordinating with the convention manager and the convention hotel, informing members about their proposals, preparing the program, getting it to the printer, and much more. Back then, of course, most everything was done by hand and by postal mail although the program itself was prepared using a word processor and was sent to the printer via a floppy disk.

One of my motivations for taking the position of program chair was to computerize the process. Eventually that happened. However, it took several years to implement all of the necessary elements and, in the end, was only accomplished by only allowing the electronic submission of proposals. In this paper, the focus will be on a small portion of that much larger effort, namely how SWPA defined its topics for proposals before 1999, after, and now; how APA and APS currently define their topics for proposals; how the PsycINFO database is organized, and, finally, what all of these lists reveal about the definition of psychology today.

*Defining Psychology*

One way to define psychology is to look at all of the parts that constitute it. Fortunately, others have already done much of that work. The American Psychological Association (APA) and the Association for Psychological Science (APS) have categorized the parts of psychology, albeit in differing ways. In addition, PsycINFO has also categorized its database topically. The APA uses a list of 71 top-level terms to help authors classify the work they submit to the annual convention. Table 1.3 shows that list in its current form. Note that the list is organized alphabetically, not topically or historically. My goal in this paper is to take APA's list, along with APS's list, and PsycINFO's topics and put together a picture of the subdisciplines that make up 21<sup>st</sup> Century psychology.

-----Insert Table 1.3 about here-----

Like the APA, APS too has a list of terms designed for authors submitting work to their annual convention. The APS list has 73 top-level terms, but only 39 of those terms are shared with the APA list. Table 1.4 shows the APS list and Table 1.5 shows the terms shared by both lists.

-----Insert Table 1.4 and Table 1.5 about here-----

Finally, PsycINFO's Content Classification Code System is a listing of 22 top-level terms used to describe the contents of their database. Table 1.6 shows those terms.

-----Insert Table 1.6 about here-----

By themselves, these lists are fairly meaningless. However, when carefully analyzed and compared a picture of the many parts of 21<sup>st</sup> Century psychology emerges. Let's start with the lists from APA and APS. The 39 topics in common provide a starting point for seeing the many subdisciplines that make up the picture of 21<sup>st</sup> century psychology. The picture becomes clearer after adding the topics unique to the APA and APS lists. After comparing the developing picture to the PsycINFO's Content Classification list, 1 more unique subdiscipline was added, intelligent systems.

### Method

I obtained the lists used to classify convention submissions from APA and APS. The APA list (see Table 1.3) had 71 top-level entries and the APS list (see Table 1.4) had 73 entries. I then searched for sufficiently similar topics on both lists and found 39 that were on both lists (see Table 1.5). After, I arbitrarily created six categories: developmental, scientific psychology, applied psychology, social, cognitive, and gender to serve as higher-order labels. (Others, of course, could propose different categories.) Using my categories, I then created a graphic display (see the Appendix) showing which topics were common to APA and APS and which were unique to either organization. Later, I examined PsycINFO's content classification code system to see if it included any topics not found on either APA's or APS's lists. I discovered one, intelligent systems, and included it on my graphic display. Finally, I compared my results to SWPA's pre-1998 convention topic list and to their current list.

## Results

The Appendix shows the picture that emerged. Comparing the two lists from APA and APS yielded 62 subdisciplines, 39 of those were common to both lists, 17 were exclusive to the APA list, and 5 were exclusive to the APS list. One more subdiscipline was added from PsycINFO. In the Appendix I divided those 62 subdisciplines into five higher-level groups: developmental, scientific psychology, applied psychology, cognitive, social, and gender.

Immediately obvious is how much of psychology is devoted to applied science. The applied area of psychology included a total of 23 subdisciplines. Clinicians, counselors, therapists, schools, businesses, the military, police, community developers, and athletes all look to psychology for specific answers to problems in their respective areas. The next largest group was social psychology with 14 subdisciplines revealing the social nature of psychology. Humans are social beings who live in groups and group living imposes social structures and demands. For example, the frictions imposed by group living increase in multicultural societies composed of people with different ethnic backgrounds or religions. Daily, news reports from around the world tell of strife and conflict in places where ethnicity or religion differ. The late Samuel Huntington (1996) identified eight “civilizations” or large groups that were similar ethnically or religiously: Western (USA & Europe), Latin American, Islamic, African, Orthodox, Hindu, Japanese, and Sinic (China, Korea, & Viet Nam). He argued that human conflicts and wars were more likely along the “fault lines” where those civilizations met. Cognitive psychology followed with 10 subdisciplines. Questions about the mind and its workings are ancient. Psychology’s borders with philosophy and biology are fertile ground for such questions.

Philosophers have long wondered about the nature of the mind and its organization while biologists have looked for the mind's underlying mechanisms. Next came scientific psychology with eight subdisciplines. Scientific psychology is mostly concerned with issues of measurement, data collection, replication, and theory construction. Scientific psychologists discover and document new facts about psychology in both humans and other animals. They work on the edge between the known and the unknown.

Developmental psychology included four subdisciplines. Developmental psychologists explore the dynamic nature of human and animal lifespans. They also investigate processes such as aging, maturation, and death itself. Finally, the division of humankind into two genders created another natural division, gender, for study that includes three subdisciplines. While men and women are both members of the same species, the requirements imposed by their reproductive mechanisms spill over into psychology and cause vast social and cognitive differences between them.

### *The APA and APS Unique Items*

The APA list contributes an additional 17 topics. Eight of those items deal directly with interventions, or solving problems: child abuse, AIDS, depression and suicide, stress, rehabilitation, disasters, environment, violence and aggression. It's not a pretty picture; unfortunately it represents much about the realities of living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The APS list adds another five topics. Two of those topics, behavioral genetics and epidemiology lie along the border with biology. Interestingly, the APS topic, self, is the only one to fall in the area of humanistic psychology. One more topic came from the PsycINFO Content Classification list. It was, intelligent systems, which borders computer

science. Taken together, the subdisciplines shown in Table 1.7 form a convenient way of looking at psychology's parts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *SWPA Convention Lists*

When I became program chair, I inherited a list of 18 topics (see Table 1.2). No one I asked seemed to know how those topics had been picked or who had done so. When I compared that list to the Appendix I found that 16 of them were on the list of topics common to APA and APS. The other two, personality and teaching (of psychology) were on the list of APA-only topics. Of the 32 topics (see Table 1.1) listed by SWPA starting in 2009, 9 were not on the pre-1998 list. The majority of them fell into the applied psychology column and on the list of topics common to APA and APS, those were: human factors, community, sport, and crime and delinquency. The other 2 were listed as APA-only topics: (major)depression and suicide, and stress. In addition, 14 topics were common to both SWPA lists. Between 1998 and 2008, SWPA used the APA list to classify its topics.

### Discussion

Of course, there is much more involved in defining psychology than listing and analyzing its many subdisciplines. Somehow, each of those subdisciplines must relate to the subject matter of psychology itself in a clear and recognizable manner. There must be some phenomena that are clearly and obviously psychological. Once again, someone else has already taken the time and effort to put together such a list (available at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/>) .

The highest-level topics on that list are:

- Mental Competency
- Mental Health
- Mental Processes
- Parapsychology
- Personal Autonomy
- Psycholinguistics
- Psychological Theory
- Applied Psychology
- Psychomotor Performance
- Psychophysiology
- Religion and Psychology
- Resilience

The first two items relate to the phenomena of normal vs. psychopathological behavior and are clearly psychological. The next heading, mental processes, includes a large number of phenomena including awareness, learning, memory, and problem solving. Parapsychology includes claims about near death experiences, out of body experiences, precognition, and UFO sightings. Parapsychology is a set of hotly disputed psychological phenomena and most likely no amount of discouragement by scientists will reduce the frequency of parapsychological claims. Hynan (2007) provides methodological guidelines for evaluating such claims and suggests that no one method is likely to be suitable. Personal autonomy relates to living independently of others. Most children, of course, eventually live autonomously while some adults lose autonomy through a variety of means (e.g., accidents or dementia). Psycholinguistics includes neurolinguistic programming (like parapsychology, neurolinguistic programming is controversial) and



the semantic differential, a method for rating attitudes. The next item, applied psychology includes phenomena such as: lie detection, underachievement, absenteeism, and job satisfaction. People look to psychologists to solve these and many other real world problems. The next category, psychomotor performance includes motor skills and task performance. Psychophysiology contains a great many psychological phenomena. They range from consciousness, sensory capacities, and sleep. Another of psychology's early interests was the psychology of religion. Nelson (2006) documents the history of the relationship of science (including psychology) and religion and recommends a return to a broader conception of science so that both psychology and religion can be examined from more similar points of view. The last item, resilience, refers to how individuals differ in their responses to the same situation or stimulus. One example is mental toughness. Crust (2008) reviewed previous research on that phenomenon and concluded that more research is needed in order to better define it.

We all believe we know what makes a topic psychological. We may differ over what specific topics to include within our definition of psychology. Here, I believe, is where the analysis of APA and APS convention topics helps the most. Many of the APA-only topics seem to relate to things requiring intervention: child abuse, AIDS, depression and suicide, stress, rehabilitation, disasters, environment, and violence. The APS-only items are more eclectic. Some relate to biological topics: behavior genetics and epidemiology. The remainder are hard to classify within a single category: performance, self, and couples. Undoubtedly, psychologists will continue to create lists like these and, in some way, analyzing those lists will reveal much about what the authors consider to be the proper subject matter for the discipline.

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Table 1.1 2009 SWPA Convention Topics

Addictive Behavior / Substance Abuse	Health Psychology / Behavioral
Animal Learning / Comparative	Medicine
Clinical / Counseling / Consulting	History and Philosophy
Cognition / Memory	Human Factors Studies
Community Psychology	Industrial/Organizational
Computer Applications	Measurement/Psychometrics/Quantitative/Statistics
Crime / Delinquency	Neuropsychology / Physiology /
Cross-Cultural	Neuroscience
Death Studies	Personality
Depression / Suicide	Religion
Developmental	School Psychology
Educational Psychology	Sensation/Perception
Teaching of Psychology / Faculty	Sexual Behavior / Function
Development	Social Psychology
Experimental (General)	Sports Psychology
Family	Stress
Gay and Lesbian Issues	

Table 1.2 Pre-1998 SWPA Convention Topics

1. animal learning/pharmacology/physiology
2. behavioral medicine/health
3. clinical/counseling/community
4. cross cultural/ethnic/minority
5. developmental
6. educational
7. history/theory
8. I/O
9. language
10. evaluation/measurement/testing
11. memory/cognition
12. neuropsychology
13. personality
14. sensation/perception
15. sex/sex roles
16. social
17. substance abuse
18. teaching
19. other

Table 1.3 APA's List of Psychological Topics (Alphabetical, Top-level only)

1 Addictive Behavior	27 Exercise Behavior
2. Aging	28 Experimental (General)
3 AIDS	29 Family
4 Art/Music/Literature	30 Gay and Lesbian Issues
5 Behavior Analysis	31 Health Psychology/Behavioral Medicine
6 Behavioral Neuroscience	32 History
7 Child Abuse	33 Human Factors Studies
8 Clinical/Counseling/Consulting	34 Hypnosis
9 Cognition	35 Industrial/Organizational
10 Community	36 Information Processing
11 Comparative	37 Injury Prevention
12 Computer Applications	38 International
13 Creativity	39 Law
14 Crime/Delinquency	40 Learning
15 Cross-Cultural	41 Measurement/Statistics/Methodology/ Computer
16 Death Studies	42 Media/Public Information
17 Depression/Suicide	43 Men's Studies
18 Developmental	44 Mental Retardation
19 Disabilities	45 Military
20 Disasters/Crisis	46 Motivation
21 Education	47 Neuropsychology
22 Emotion	48 Peace
23 Environment	49 Personality
24 Ethics	50 Pharmacology
25 Ethnic Minority Studies	
26 Ethnic Studies	

51 Philosophy

52 Political

53 Population

54 Prevention

55 Psycholinguistics

56 Psychology Policy Issues

57 Psychophysiology

58 Rehabilitation

59 Religion

60 Rural61 School

62 Sensation/Perception

63 Sexual Behavior/Functioning

64 Social

65 Sports

66 Stress

67 Substance Abuse

68 Teaching of Psychology

69 Violence/Aggression

70 Women's Studies

71 Work/Employment/Careers

Table 1.4 APS Convention Topics List (Alphabetical)

Adolescent	Consumer	Human Learning and Memory
Adult	Counseling	Human Resources
Advertising	Couples	Infant
Aging	Criminal Justice	Intelligence
Animal Behavior and Learning	Cross-Cultural or Ethnic	Judgment and Decision Making
Applied Experimental	Disabilities	Language
Assessment	Education	Lifespan
Attention	Emotion	Measurement
Attitude/Attitude Change	Engineering/Human Factors/Ergonomics	Media
Behavior Analysis	Epidemiology	Military
Behavior Genetics	Evaluation	Motivation
Categorization	Exercise	Neuropsychology
Child	Families	Organizational Change and Development
Cognitive Neuroscience	Forensic	Other
Communication Systems	Gender Issues/Sex Roles	Perception
Community	Health	Performance
Comparative	History of Psychology	Population
Conflict Resolution		Prevention
Program Evaluation	Relationships	Sexuality/Sexual Behavior
Psychometrics	Religion	Social Cognition
Psychopathology	School	Social Groups
Psychopathology	Selection and Training	Social Interpersonal Relationships
Psychotherapy Research	Self	Social Neuroscience
Public Policy	Sensation and Perception	
Quantitative		

Sport

Substance Abuse

Testing



Table 1.5 Common Topics APA and APS

Aging	Measurement/Statistics/Methodology/Computer
Behavior Analysis	Media
Clinical/Counseling/Consulting	Military
Community	Motivation
Comparative & Animal Learning	Neuropsychology
Conflict Resolution	Population
Crime & Delinquency	Prevention
Cross-Cultural/Ethnic	Public Policy
Disabilities	Religion
Education	Sensation & Perception
Emotion	Sexuality & Sexual Behavior
Exercise	Social
Family	Sport
Forensic	Substance Abuse
Gender Issues & Sex Roles	
Health	
History	
Human Experimental	
Human Factors	
Human Resources	
Intelligence	
Industrial/Organizational	
Language	
Learning and Memory	
Lifespan	

Table 1.6 PsycINFO Classification Codes

**2100 General Psychology**

2140 History & Systems

**2200 Psychometrics & Statistics & Methodology**

2220 Tests & Testing

2221 Sensory & Motor Testing

2222 Developmental Scales & Schedules

2223 Personality Scales & Inventories

2224 Clinical Psychological Testing

2225 Neuropsychological Assessment

2226 Health Psychology Testing

2227 Educational Measurement

2228 Occupational & Employment Testing

2229 Consumer Opinion & Attitude Testing

2240 Statistics & Mathematics

2260 Research Methods & Experimental Design

**2300 Human Experimental Psychology**

2320 Sensory Perception

2323 Visual Perception

2326 Auditory & Speech Perception

2330 Motor Processes

2340 Cognitive Processes

2343 Learning & Memory

2346 Attention

2360 Motivation & Emotion

2380 Consciousness States

2390 Parapsychology

**2400 Animal Experimental & Comparative Psychology**

2420 Learning & Motivation

2440 Social & Instinctive Behavior

**2500 Physiological Psychology & Neuroscience**

2510 Genetics

2520 Neuropsychology & Neurology

2530 Electrophysiology

2540 Physiological Processes

2560 Psychophysiology

2580 Psychopharmacology

**2600 Psychology & the Humanities**

2610 Literature & Fine Arts

2630 Philosophy

**2700 Communication Systems**

2720 Linguistics & Language & Speech

2750 Mass Media Communications

**2800 Developmental Psychology**

2820 Cognitive & Perceptual Development

2840 Psychosocial & Personality Development

2860 Gerontology

**2900 Social Processes & Social Issues**

2910 Social Structure & Organization

2920 Religion

2930 Culture & Ethnology

2950 Marriage & Family

2953 Divorce & Remarriage

2956 Childrearing & Child Care

2960 Political Processes & Political Issues

2970 Sex Roles & Women's Issues

2980 Sexual Behavior & Sexual Orientation

2990 Drug & Alcohol Usage (Legal)

**3000 Social Psychology**

3020 Group & Interpersonal Processes

3040 Social Perception & Cognition

**3100 Personality Psychology**

3120 Personality Traits & Processes

3140 Personality Theory

3143 Psychoanalytic Theory

**3200 Psychological & Physical Disorders**

3210 Psychological Disorders

3211 Affective Disorders

3213 Schizophrenia & Psychotic States

3215 Neuroses & Anxiety Disorders

3217 Personality Disorders

3230 Behavior Disorders & Antisocial Behavior

3233 Substance Abuse & Addiction

3236 Criminal Behavior & Juvenile Delinquency

3250 Developmental Disorders & Autism

3253 Learning Disorders

3256 Mental Retardation

3260 Eating Disorders

3270 Speech & Language Disorders

3280 Environmental Toxins & Health

3290 Physical & Somatoform & Psychogenic Disorders

3291 Immunological Disorders

3293 Cancer

3295 Cardiovascular Disorders

3297 Neurological Disorders & Brain Damage

3299 Vision & Hearing & Sensory Disorders

**3300 Health & Mental Health Treatment & Prevention**

3310 Psychotherapy & Psychotherapeutic Counseling

3311 Cognitive Therapy

3312 Behavior Therapy & Behavior Modification

3313 Group & Family Therapy

3314 Interpersonal & Client Centered & Humanistic Therapy

3315 Psychoanalytic Therapy

3340 Clinical Psychopharmacology

3350 Specialized Interventions

3351 Clinical Hypnosis

3353 Self Help Groups

3355 Lay & Paraprofessional & Pastoral Counseling

3357 Art & Music & Movement Therapy

3360 Health Psychology & Medicine

3361 Behavioral & Psychological Treatment of Physical Illness

3363 Medical Treatment of Physical Illness

3365 Promotion & Maintenance of Health & Wellness

3370 Health & Mental Health Services

3371 Outpatient Services

3373 Community & Social Services

3375 Home Care & Hospice

3377 Nursing Homes & Residential Care

3379 Inpatient & Hospital Services

3380 Rehabilitation

3383 Drug & Alcohol Rehabilitation

3384 Occupational & Vocational Rehabilitation

3385 Speech & Language Therapy

3386 Criminal Rehabilitation & Penology

**3400 Professional Psychological & Health Personnel Issues**

3410 Professional Education & Training

3430 Professional Personnel Attitudes & Characteristics

3450 Professional Ethics & Standards & Liability

3470 Impaired Professionals

**3500 Educational Psychology**

3510 Educational Administration & Personnel

3530 Curriculum & Programs & Teaching Methods

3550 Academic Learning & Achievement

3560 Classroom Dynamics & Student Adjustment & Attitudes

3570 Special & Remedial Education

3575 Gifted & Talented

3580 Educational/Vocational Counseling & Student Services

**3600 Industrial & Organizational Psychology**

3610 Occupational Interests & Guidance

3620 Personnel Management & Selection & Training

3630 Personnel Evaluation & Job Performance

3640 Management & Management Training

3650 Personnel Attitudes & Job Satisfaction

3660 Organizational Behavior

3670 Working Conditions & Industrial Safety

**3700 Sport Psychology & Leisure**

3720 Sports

3740 Recreation & Leisure

**3800 Military Psychology**

**3900 Consumer Psychology**

3920 Consumer Attitudes & Behavior

3940 Marketing & Advertising

**4000 Engineering & Environmental Psychology**

4010 Human Factors Engineering

4030 Lifespace & Institutional Design

4050 Community & Environmental Planning

4070 Environmental Issues & Attitudes

4090 Transportation

**4100 Intelligent Systems**

4120 Artificial Intelligence & Expert Systems

4140 Robotics

4160 Neural Networks

**4200 Forensic Psychology & Legal Issues**

4210 Civil Rights & Civil Law

4230 Criminal Law & Criminal Adjudication

4250 Mediation & Conflict Resolution

4270 Crime Prevention

4290 Police & Legal Personnel