

What's Next?

We asked 33 influential psychologists to identify

the critical questions the discipline must answer

THE INFLUENCERS

DAVID H. BARLOW

BRUCE L. BOBBITT

GILAD CHEN

LE ONDRA CLARK HARVEY

LILLIAN COMAS-DÍAZ

RICHARD DAVIDSON

JOHN F. DOVIDIO

CAROL DWECK

JAMES GARBARINO

JOSEPH P. GONE

ALISON GOPNIK

ADAM GRANT

DOUGLAS HALDEMAN

LISA L. HARLOW

JANET E. HELMS

MARK HILSENROTH

ALAN E. KAZDIN

DACHER KELTNER

SHINOBU KITAYAMA

RICHARD LEE

FREDERICK T.L. LEONG

ELIZABETH F. LOFTUS

ALI MATTU

RICHARD PAK

THOMAS A. PARHAM

WENDY A. ROGERS

DANIEL SCHACTER

MARTIN E.P. SELIGMAN

LONNIE R. SNOWDEN

BETHANY TEACHMAN

ERLANGER A. TURNER

MELBA J.T. VASQUEZ

EDWARD A. WASSERMAN



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SUCCESS AND MOTIVATION

Carol Dweck

Stanford University psychology professor known for the “growth mindset”—the belief that intelligence and talent can grow and develop in a nurturing educational environment

The study of motivation and its impact on personal development and accomplishment is a burgeoning field. Within this field, many new motivational interventions have been designed and tested, but how do they all fit together and how can we evaluate and increase their efficacy? To answer this question, we need three things:

- An integrative theory of motivation that makes contact with these interventions.
- A framework for understanding the principles of effective interventions.
- Research with large, representative samples that allow us to understand heterogeneity in intervention effects: where they work and where they do not (yet) work.



“Many new motivational interventions have been designed and tested, but how do they all fit together?”

CAROL DWECK



BETTER TREATMENTS

David H. Barlow

Founder and director emeritus of the Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders at Boston University whose clinical research focuses on understanding anxiety and depression

To further improve efficacious treatments for anxiety and related emotional disorders, we must go both “bigger” and “smaller” in our clinical research efforts. “Bigger” refers to expanding research on underlying dimensions and temperaments that are shared among disorders of emotion and can become targets for change. This has already begun to lead to identification of a set of broadly applicable behavior change principles. “Smaller” refers to the absolute necessity of personalizing and tailoring these behavior-change principles to the individual using empirically based profiling of strengths and weaknesses along important dimensions and employing well-established principles of functional analysis and case formulation.

KEN RICHARDSON

“How are we going to define our profession in a way that distinguishes it from other professions with similar scope?”

LE ONDRA CLARK HARVEY

BRAIN PLASTICITY

Shinobu Kitayama

Director of the University of Michigan Culture & Cognition lab whose research explores cultural differences and similarities in mental processes

The next important frontier in cultural neuroscience involves mechanisms by which structural properties of the brain (e.g., gray matter volume and anatomical connectivities) are plastically modified through active engagement in varying cultural contexts.

Since this plasticity is likely to be mediated by epigenetic pathways, it would also be crucial to know how these pathways might be up- or downregulated by culture. Given previous, mostly behavioral work on the East and West, it would be fascinating to connect all this back to specific cultural differences in the phenomenal self and all cognitive, emotional and motivational processes that constitute it.

KJ2 PRODUCTIONS

THREATS TO PRACTICE

Le Ondra Clark Harvey

Director of policy and legislative affairs at the California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies and a member-at-large of APA's Board of Directors

Since I work within the political arena in California, I am acutely aware of the scope of practice issues that threaten our field. As such, psychologists need to answer: How are we going to define our profession in a way that distinguishes it from other professions with similar scope? Why would an agency hire a psychologist over a master's-level trained professional who is less expensive to employ? How can psychologists work within integrated-care teams and distinguish their specific expertise? I believe that moving toward integrated models is the best move for our profession and the clients we serve, as it allows for education of other allied health professionals who work on teams beside us as well as provides the best model for approaching whole person health care.





LEFT: ERIC KAYNE; RIGHT: COURTESY OF PAK

OVERCOMING STIGMA

Erlanger A. Turner

A clinical psychologist and assistant psychology professor at the University of Houston–Downtown recognized for his expertise on parenting, mental health, racism and more

One important issue that psychologists need to consider is how to address mental health stigma and improve access to treatment. Research shows that stress is a significant problem for many individuals in society, including youth. Yet we continue to see low rates of treatment use, especially among ethnic and racial groups. In my clinical work and research, I've found that for ethnic-minority populations stigma and religion influence individuals' decisions to engage in treatment. We must use our science to address this public health concern. One important implication is reducing the increasing rates of suicide among black boys, which has been growing compared to their counterparts.



THE HUMAN/MACHINE PARADIGM

Richard Pak

Director of the Clemson University Human Factors Institute, where he investigates the psychological factors that surround the design and use of autonomous technology

Leaps in technological evolution will turn simple tools into autonomous teammates that have the ability to communicate with us in ways that are even more personal and accessible. A diverse range of new users will collaborate with these entities in new settings. The goal of engineering psychology has always been to enhance the safety, performance and satisfaction of human/machine interaction. We must adapt to the idea that these machines are quickly changing and becoming less tool-like and more human-like. How will this new human/machine paradigm affect human safety, satisfaction and performance?



HUMANITY AND INTEGRITY

Thomas A. Parham

President, California State University, Dominguez Hills, who conducts research on black psychology, identity development and multicultural psychology

The great scholar W.E.B. Du Bois challenged America with a question: What does integrity look like in the face of oppression? That prophetic query forces psychologists to interrogate a similar line of reasoning, particularly in a contemporary American reality characterized by inequality, social pathology, racism, oppression, homelessness and political divisiveness.

Given our positions as caretakers of the mind, heart and spirit of the people, psychologists must challenge ourselves—like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

did when he spoke before us at the 1967 APA Annual Convention—to tell America about both the rage and hurt that simmer below the surface in black and other communities of color and to help much of white America confront and challenge the denial it seems to live in about what life is like for their culturally different counterparts who live on the margins of society.

One place to start is to help America brave the question of: What allows each of you (us) to bear witness to the suffering of others, sit in silence and still maintain our humanity? Is that what integrity looks like?

MICHAL CZERNOWKA

INCLUDING EVERY GROUP

Lillian Comas-Díaz

A clinician and faculty member at The George Washington University and a pioneer in the area of culturally competent care

How to integrate diversity and inclusion into psychological theory, research, practice and training? Psychologists need to embrace diversity and inclusion as crucial domains in all aspects of psychology. To achieve these goals, they can incorporate interdisciplinary, holistic, intersectional, multicultural, cultural neuroscientific, and international perspectives into their work. To enhance inclusion, psychologists will expand the diversity construct by including every group that has been perceived as “the other.”

Moreover, psychologists are required to engage in social justice advocacy. Finally, there is a need for a public policy psychology, one that will shape health and mental health policy by giving psychology away.

COURTESY OF LOFTUS

EYEWITNESS MEMORY

Elizabeth F. Loftus

Professor of social ecology, law and cognitive science at the University of California, Irvine, where her research includes work on the malleability of human memory

It has long been suggested that trial jurors should be educated about the limitations of eyewitness memory and how best to evaluate its reliability. The National Academy of Sciences recently endorsed this recommendation in a report titled “Identifying the Culprit.” But what form should this education take? Recent attempts to design “educational” material, to be delivered in the form of jury instructions, have been shown to make jurors skeptical of all eyewitness testimony.

The ideal education would make jurors skeptical of poor eyewitness accounts, but not ones of high quality. A next question for psychologists to answer is what can be done to tweak the material to increase discriminability and not simply induce skepticism.





CHRISTOPHER JACOBS; FAR RIGHT: ROD SEARCEY

**POST-TRAUMATIC
STRESS “DEVELOPMENT”**

James Garbarino

Loyola University Chicago psychology professor whose work centers on the causes of violence in children, how they cope with it and how to rehabilitate them

For 25 years, I have offered a “developmental analysis” as an expert witness in murder cases. This includes teenage killers at their re-sentencing hearings—20 years or more after their crimes. Many of these individuals must overcome traumatic histories—and in doing so exemplify the need to shift the focus from post-traumatic stress disorder to post-traumatic stress *development*. At the heart of this work is this question: How and why do violent teenagers undertake a process of rehabilitation and transformation that results in them becoming not just “safe” for release, but in some cases “remarkable” and “exemplary” human beings?

DEVELOPING CREATIVITY

Alison Gopnik

University of California, Berkeley, developmental psychologist who studies how babies and young children use causal learning to come to understand the world around them

Where do new hypotheses come from? For a long time, developmental psychologists have argued that children are like little scientists, testing hypotheses against the data and changing their theories of the world as a result. They’ve charted the changes in children’s theories as they get older, and they’ve shown that children systematically prefer hypotheses that are a better fit to the data. In the lab, we can give children different hypotheses to choose from.

But there is still a deep mystery about where new hypotheses and ideas come from, both for children and adults. How do we take the ideas we have now and reshuffle or combine them to make new and better ideas? Can we describe this kind of creativity systematically?



“How do we take the ideas we have now and reshuffle or combine them?” ALISON GOPNIK



KEN RICHARDSON

MOVING SCIENCE FORWARD

Lisa L. Harlow

University of Rhode Island professor of behavioral science and editor of *Psychological Methods* whose work centers on increasing interest, diversity, understanding and retention in science

Science is under scrutiny. How can we empower researchers to enact a methodological paradigm shift toward more open, informative and understandable methods to approach, analyze and discuss research?

Beyond just p-values, we need to encourage accessible options for producing verifiable research findings with theoretically grounded research, pre-registered studies and open data practices on relevant samples with adequate power and reliable measures. We need to provide illuminating metrics for evaluating results with tests of fit, effect sizes, confidence intervals, graphs and more. And we need to offer books, articles and tutorials to instruct future scientists, providing clear guidelines to engender sound and reproducible findings that demonstrate verisimilitude, moving science forward.

TACKLING GRAND CHALLENGES

Alan E. Kazdin

Clinical child psychologist and professor emeritus at Yale University and director of the Yale Parenting Center. He served as APA's 2008 president

No single question is likely to be defensible for such a diverse field. I favor more visionary approaches. One would be identifying “grand challenges for psychology” and selecting five to 10 priorities. This approach focuses attention on one or more major problems, identifies the specific barriers that need to be addressed, considers the needed resources and builds collaborations among those who could help exert impact (e.g., business and political leaders, scientists, the public, the media).

Another would be a “science of science” approach that utilizes quantitative techniques to understand the structure of our diverse discipline and related fields. The goal is not only to describe interrelations and processes but also to use the information to accelerate advances to address a variety of social problems.

Each approach is visionary and encompasses a variety of focused processes leading to palpable outcomes. APA could take a leadership role among organizations and move us to a much higher plane of both goals and accomplishments.

“How can we empower researchers to enact a methodological paradigm shift?”

LISA L. HARLOW



AFFORDABLE CARE

Lonnie R. Snowden

Professor in the Graduate School, Health Policy and Management at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) greatly expanded insurance coverage for ethnic-minority populations, and the gains have persisted despite setbacks since 2016. Millions of African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans acquired coverage with policies that must include mental health and substance use coverage, which must be provided at parity with coverage for general medical conditions.

As the ACA remains the law of the land it is important to ask: How much do African-American, Latino and Asian-American coverage increases translate into high-quality mental health and substance abuse treatment and how much do they reduce minority/white disparities?



EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Gilad Chen

Professor in the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland, College Park, as well as the editor of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*

The field of industrial/organizational psychology applies psychological principles to advance knowledge regarding work and organizational phenomena. With changes in the nature of work, the workforce and organizational forms, new knowledge is needed in this field.

In particular, rapid technological changes (e.g., increased reliance on artificial intelligence) require new thinking regarding factors that impact employee effectiveness and well-being. The increased interconnectedness of work across national and cultural boundaries is often conducted within interdependent work units, which necessitates new research that integrates culture, employee attributes, technology and teaming issues. Such research will also require a cross-disciplinary approach to the study of work and organizational phenomena.



OVERCOMING POLARIZATION

Douglas Haldeman

Counseling psychologist who works with the LGBT community and chairs the clinical psychology program at John F. Kennedy University

For the community of sexually and gender-diverse persons, psychology needs to address the issues associated with the intersection of sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability status, age and who we in the LGBT communities are to each other and the mainstream world. This requires an examination of power and privilege, and how we use our influence—and our unity—to advocate for the issues that are important to all persons of diverse identity. What psychology can offer to unite us as allies will be paramount in these times of unprecedented social polarization.



ANIMAL RESEARCH

Edward A. Wasserman

Professor at the University of Iowa whose research focuses on comparing cognitive processes in human and non-human animals

Will psychology ever “lose its mind”? From its inception, psychology has concerned itself with private experience, particularly with the ever-alluring yet obscure notion of consciousness. But natural science must study observables, whether they are the overt behaviors of organisms or the biological activities within organisms. We must at long last “lose our mind” and embrace the same basic paradigm that has proven so effective in physics, chemistry and biology. Only then can we escape from the obscurantism of mentalism and develop a truly scientific psychology. The tools of behavior analysis and neuroscience have matured to the point where this aim is attainable. Let’s get going!



IMPROVING HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Janet E. Helms

Director of the Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture at Boston College whose research explores racial identity

Presently, psychologists’ research, teaching and professional practice vacillate between defining the political constructs of races as makeshift theoretical concepts, contextual factors or nuisance variables, while virtually ignoring the psychological effects of internalized racism on perpetrators and survivors. Racial identity theories instead use diagnoses of the different manifestations of internalized racism to develop and apply psychological interventions to overcome the afflictions of race and racism. Ideally, in the future, racial identity theories will become extinct because racism will no longer exist. But realistically, the question that still needs to be answered is how to encourage psychologists to use racial identity theories to understand and improve human behavior.



ETHNIC STUDIES

Richard Lee

University of Minnesota psychology professor whose research seeks to identify ways to improve the lives of racial and ethnic minorities

How do we move beyond current narratives, theories and methods that are culturally bounded by white/European epistemologies to answer questions that affect the majority of the world’s population that is not white? We need new ways to understand and study health disparities, transnational migrations, intergroup conflicts, and the successful adaptation and accommodations of groups of people who are subordinated, underrepresented and underserved.

“Rapid technological changes ... require new thinking regarding factors that impact

employee effectiveness and well-being.” GILAD CHEN



EXTRACTING THE GOOD

Martin E.P. Seligman

Known as the father of positive psychology, he directs the University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center. He was APA's 1998 president

You are what you eat? Wrong. We are not determined by what we eat. We metabolize our food. We extract what is good for us and we excrete what is toxic or unnecessary. Similarly, the past and the present do not determine our future. We metabolize our memories and perceptions, extracting the gist and excreting most of the rest. How we do this and do it better is a great question for psychology's future.



POVERTY AND WELL-BEING

Joseph P. Gone

Director of Native American Studies and professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, where he examines cultural influences on mental health status

As a clinical-community psychologist who promotes wellness in American Indian communities, I believe the next question that we need to answer concerns the limitations that dire material conditions place on achievement of well-being. Many of the indigenous communities with which I have worked for more than two decades remain mired in desperate poverty. Such conditions too often ripple out to disrupt family dynamics, overwhelm social cohesion, constrain educational opportunity and undermine meaningful employment. Young people in these settings must overcome nearly insurmountable odds to realize their adult potential.

In these contexts, what can helping programs and services realistically accomplish?



WELL-BEING

Richard J. Davidson

Professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison as well as founder of the Center for Healthy Minds

How can we cultivate and measure well-being at scale? There is a plethora of evidence that suggests three important characteristics of well-being:

- Its relevance for mental health.
- Its relevance for physical health.
- That it can be cultivated.

Given the significance of well-being for major institutions in our culture, we must embark upon a campaign that regards well-being as a public health need and promotes the value of simple mental exercises that can be used to strengthen well-being. Improvements in the core constituents of well-being can then be measured and examined in relation to more distal measures of critical importance to all societies, for example, general mental and physical health, productivity and economic indicators.



ROBOTS AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Wendy A. Rogers

Director of the Human Factors and Aging Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign who explores human-robot interaction and technology for aging

How will the presence of robots in everyday life influence human behavior? Telepresence robots, social robots, personal-assistant robots, robot pets, robot toys. Robots at work, in the home, at school and in the community. Robots specifically designed to support children, workers, people with disabilities and elders. General purpose robots designed for use by everyone. Robots are becoming increasingly present in our world, and psychologists must be involved in the design and deployment efforts. We need to understand human-robot interactions—the potential for positive benefits, negative outcomes and unexpected consequences.



EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Dacher Keltner

Director of the Berkeley Social Interaction Laboratory at the University of California, Berkeley, and a founder of the Greater Good Science Center

The field of emotion needs to move toward a taxonomy of emotions beyond the basic six—anger, disgust, fear, happiness, surprise and sadness—that were the focus of Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen's facial expression research 50 years ago. Today there are two discourses that don't speak to one another. One questions the degree to which the basic six are defined by distinct responses. A second documents the characteristics of new emotions—attachment-related emotions (love, desire, sympathy), self-conscious emotions (embarrassment, shame, pride), and epistemological and self-transcendent emotions (awe, ecstasy, gratitude, interest, confusion).

With a taxonomy of emotions in place, the field will be poised to provide new answers to timeless questions: What are the emotions? Where do they come from in the evolution of our species and the individual's life history?



HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY

Bruce L. Bobbitt

President of the Minnesota Psychological Association, winner of APA's Heiser Award and former senior vice president of behavioral health quality at Optum

Since the formalization of psychology training in the 1950s and the state-by-state recognition of psychology as a profession, great progress has been made in improving the quality of care delivered by psychologists. The primary mechanism for this improvement has been rigorous and comprehensive accreditation of training programs accompanied by professional and clinical guidelines developed and promulgated by APA.

The next step in improving the quality of psychological services is to harness rapidly evolving technologies to foster the adoption and use of clinical best practices along with the routine monitoring of outcomes across a wide range of clinical settings.

“We need to understand human-robot interactions—the potential for positive benefits, negative

outcomes and unexpected consequences.” WENDY A. ROGERS



COMPETENCE AND CHARACTER

Adam Grant

Professor at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania specializing in organizational psychology, and author of “Originals” and co-author of “Option B”

Too often, we select leaders based on popularity and ideology. Yet the evidence is clear that competence and character matter far more. What can we do to convince people to accurately judge—and base their decisions on—the competence and character of the candidates?

MICHAEL KAMBER

“Without good theories, our research amounts to a fragmented series of empirical studies akin to the 10 blind men of Hindustan trying to describe an elephant.”

FREDERICK T.L. LEONG

CROSS-CULTURAL HEALTH

Frederick T.L. Leong

Michigan State University professor of psychology and psychiatry who conducts work in cross-cultural mental health and pursues efforts to promote psychology internationally

How can we promote more theory development in the field of counseling psychology?

For me, the desideratum in our field is theory development. While we have all the foundations of a strong discipline such as great journals, handbooks and training programs, what we seem to be lacking across those dimensions is a focus on theory-building.

Without good theories, our research amounts to a fragmented series of empirical studies akin to the 10 blind men of Hindustan trying to describe an elephant. To paraphrase Kurt Lewin: There is nothing so practical as a good theory ... to guide our research.

DAN ADDISON

TARGETING ANXIETY

Bethany Teachman

University of Virginia psychology professor who answered this question with input from her colleagues in the Program for Anxiety, Cognition, and Treatment lab

What are the key mechanisms that are maintaining anxiety for a given individual (e.g., avoidance behavior, rigid threat-oriented thinking, difficulties regulating physiological arousal and distress, etc.) and how can we identify when those mechanisms are operating in real time to then provide targeted, personalized interventions that can be delivered when and where the person needs them most?



GALVANIZING PSYCHOLOGISTS

Melba J.T. Vasquez

APA president in 2011, she is a counseling psychologist in Austin, Texas, whose work focuses on issues faced by women and Latinx

How can we empower and inspire psychologists to recognize, incorporate and utilize their knowledge and skills to promote various strategies at multiple levels to make a difference, particularly in intractable problems such as poverty, immigration, insidious bias and addiction?

In today's climate of increased oppression and antagonism, psychologists can elevate their voices for systemic change. Through the integration of science, practice and education, we have the potential to promote constructive changes to improve the immense challenges in society. This may involve engaging in advocacy, promoting legislation, volunteering, training others, educating young people and influencing opinions through op-eds, social media and other creative endeavors.



PSYCHOTHERAPY SKILLS

Mark Hilsenroth

Professor of psychology at Adelphi University whose research explores the impact personality characteristics and psychotherapy process have on treatment outcomes

It seems timely and prudent that the focus of psychotherapy training expand beyond technical interventions to include issues that involve the therapeutic alliance, relationship and empathy. That is, the field is at a pivotal juncture in which it needs to focus on those skills that most consistently demonstrate direct links to improvement across a broad range of outcomes for patients in psychotherapy.

In addition, an emerging literature suggests that there may be pathways between training and a patient's perception of the alliance and empathic response. Psychology is at a key moment in regards to evolving demands and focus in psychotherapy training. The operative question is not *if* these changes in training and supervision are coming, but rather *when*, *how* and *what* strategies in that process will be included to ultimately most effect patient change.

LEFT: DENNIS BURNETT; RIGHT: COURTESY OF DOVIDIO



UNDERSTANDING POWER

John F. Dovidio

Dean of academic affairs of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Yale University whose research investigates aversive racism and finding ways to reduce conscious and unconscious bias

How do individuals or groups occupying positions of social power exert and retain power in dynamic contexts in which, because of advances in communication technology and practice, individuals or groups in subordinate positions possess an instantaneous capability to act in coalitions to challenge the powerful? What are the strategies of social control and resistance to oppression in a world of increasing social complexity made possible by communication technology and social media?

Addressing this issue goes beyond traditional two-actor models of interaction, communication and social exchange to understand when and how multiple individuals and groups may choose to cooperate, compete, or create new collaborative identities, goals and strategies to reassert, alter, or invert hierarchical power relations in society.

“What are the strategies of social control and

resistance to oppression?”

JOHN F. DOVIDIO



EPISODIC MEMORY

Daniel Schacter

Harvard University psychology professor who studies the nature of human memory, including the relationship between conscious and nonconscious memory and the fallibility of memory

There has been considerable research on episodic memory (i.e., memory for specific personal experiences) in the years since Endel Tulving introduced the concept in 1972. This research has focused mainly on the role of episodic memory in accessing the personal past.

During the past decade, however, research has revealed that episodic memory also contributes to tasks that we don't traditionally think of as "memory," including imagining future experiences, solving open-ended problems and thinking creatively. A key next question for this research: Exactly which component or components of episodic memory support such wide-ranging influences on a range of cognitive processes?

SCALING UP PSYCHOLOGY

Ali Mattu

Clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Columbia University Irving Medical Center who specializes in treating anxiety and hosts the popular YouTube channel "The Psych Show"

While we have developed interventions that reduce suffering, promote meaning and improve cooperation, access to these interventions remains a problem. Our knowledge is hard to discover. Our services are hard to acquire. At the same time, technology has made it easier to discover information through the internet and apply interventions through smartphone apps. Yet few psychologists produce this content or develop these interventions. How can we scale up the best of our applied science to improve lives in a way never before imagined?

“How can we scale up the best of our applied science to improve lives in a way never before imagined?”

ALI MATTU

LEFT: COURTESY OF SCHACTER; RIGHT: BILL WADMAN

