

Discovering Psychology, Then and Now

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Discovering Psychology is a popular public television series that educates students and the general public about psychological science. The series consists of 26 half-hour programs narrated by APS Fellow and Charter Member Philip Zimbardo, a professor at Stanford University.

Each of the 26 programs focus on one specific area of psychological research, for example “The Self,” “Testing and Intelligence” and “Sex and Gender.” The programs features psychological scientists, practitioners, and theorists who explain their research and theories noting direct applications to life examples. The series includes archival footage from early influential psychologists, like Watson and Pavlov, and interviews with more recent influential, or up-and-coming psychologists. As Zimbardo said, the video series “presents the best of science in practice. It is basically modeled after an introductory course. But what’s different about it is that it is visual. It has that visual excitement and the kind of presence you could never bring into a classroom.”

The series, which is produced by WGBH Boston and the Annenberg Foundation, premiered in 1990. The series is used in “most college courses, virtually all high schools and 10 countries around the world,” according to Zimbardo. In 2001, the series was updated. Seventeen programs were modified to reflect new research and to include important rising researchers. In addition, three new programs were created for the series, based on three fields that are gaining increased popularity.

One, “Applying Psychology in Life,” shows some of the ways psychological research is being directly applied in five other fields: health, space travel, law, and negotiation in peace and business. Another new program, “Cognitive Neuroscience,” looks at the dynamic field of brain imaging and understanding mental processes. It just recently received an Emmy for Instructional Television in New England. “Cultural Psychology” presents talks about relationships and diversity, and how people from different cultures view the world differently.