

# Descriptive Psychology Tutorial

Society for Descriptive Psychology

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# What *is* Descriptive Psychology?

- Resources for seeing and describing human situations and issues in terms of the person's world, their place in it, and their behavior
- What kind of resources?
  - Formally defined concepts of
    - **Person**
    - **Behavior**
    - **Language**
    - **Real world**
  - Rather than: theories, definitions, informal generalizations, “internal processes”, etc.

# Why?

- "Descriptive Psychology helps you describe much more clearly what you are looking at. This makes hard and puzzling things about people simpler and easier to move ahead with."

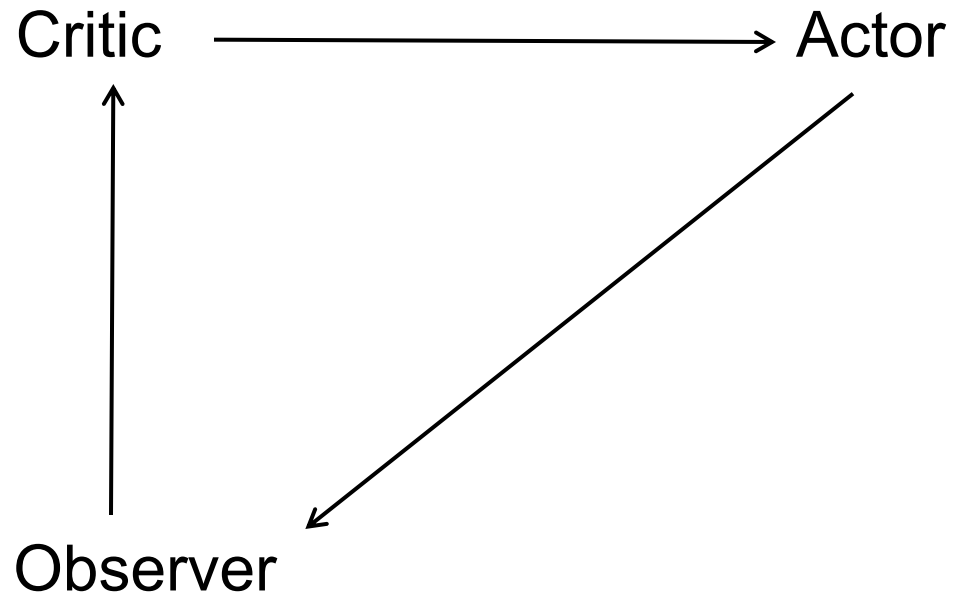
## Articulations of:

- Behavior: **intentional and deliberate action**
- “Social context”: **community**
- World: **state of affairs system**
- One’s place in the world: **one’s position in a community**

# An easy starting point: A-O-C

- Descriptive Psychology: for *describing* people and behavior
- Describing: one of three functions (jobs) a person has
  - Actor: doing something
  - Observer: observing what is done & describing it
  - Critic: critiquing how well the behavior went

# The A-O-C diagram



## A-O-C: an example

- I give a tutorial on Descriptive Psychology
- I observe it as it's going
- I critique it:
  - Am I being understood?
  - Am I accomplishing the goals?
  - Is this order of the slides working?
  - Anything I ought to add or change right now?



# Reminders about A-O-C

- “The Critic is for the benefit of the Actor”
- Critic functioning is *simply* recognizing what has gone right and what has gone wrong, and how to improve
- Critic functioning, like anything else can be done badly
- Many human pathologies are errors in critic functioning:

# Errors in critic functioning

- Failing to act appropriately on success: celebration
- Super-critic: a critic for whom nothing is ever good enough
- “Cat-bird seat”: the position of having such refined and sophisticated critical standards that nothing is good enough

# Behavior: **Intentional Action**

- $B = IA = \langle I, W, K, KH, P, A, PC, S \rangle$ , where
  - I (Individual): the person whose behavior it is
  - W (want): the behavior is engaged in order to bring about this state of affairs
  - K (Know): the concepts and facts the actor must have to do this behavior ; the *distinctions* the person is acting on
  - KH (Know-how): skills, competence, needed
  - P (Performance): the procedural aspect
  - A (Achievement): the outcome state of affairs

# Behavior: **Intentional Action** – cont'd

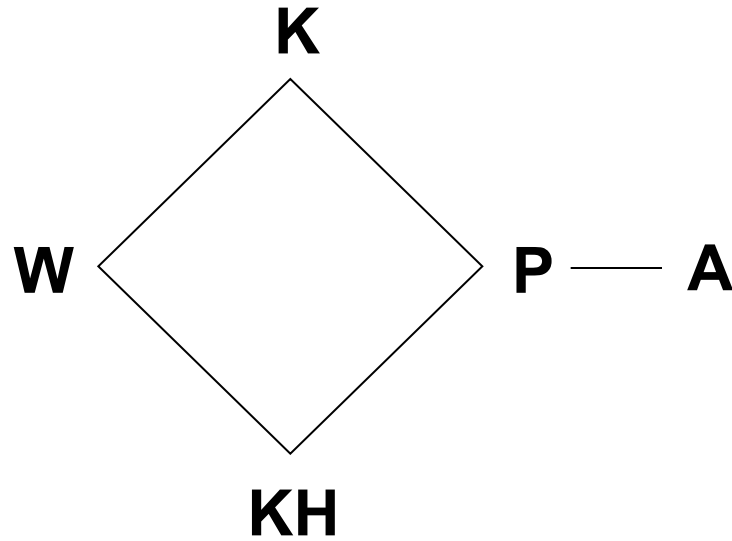
- PC (Personal Characteristics): characteristics about the person that would make this a different behavior, if they were different
- S (Significance):
  - Behavior is multi-level
  - This is the “larger” behavior of which this one is a step, or aspect

# Behavior: **Intentional Action** - example

I close the door to the room

- I: Joe Jeffrey
- W: the door being closed
- K: door vs. other things; closed vs. not closed
- KH: how to close doors
- P: the steps of walking over & pulling the door shut
- A: the door is closed
- PC: JJ values having a closed room when he lectures
- S:
  1. Closing the door is part of arranging the room
  2. Arranging the room is part of giving a tutorial

# The diamond notation



# Intrinsic behavior

- A behavior done for its own sake, not because it's part of something else
- “B intrinsic for P”: P does B when he has an opportunity, not for some other reason
  - Chess players play chess whenever they can
  - Mountain climbing:
    - Interviewer: “Why did you climb Mt. Everest?”
    - Sir Edmund Hillary: “Because it was there.”

# Intrinsic behaviors are what count

- Intrinsic behaviors are what are meaningful
- “Intrinsickness accompanies satisfaction”
- In other words:
  - **Satisfaction and meaning come from doing what is intrinsic**
  - **Loss of potential for doing what is intrinsic is loss of what is meaningful**



# An important special case

- Intentional action: every actor, human or otherwise
  - Amoebas, clams, fleas, dogs, chimpanzees
- Humans: know what they are doing and choose to do it
  - This is the paradigm case of *human* behavior
  - Paradigmatically, not so of any other kind of actor
- If IA represents *everything* about behavior, how do we represent that?

# Deliberate action

- Knows what they are doing:
  - **K parameter specification includes the name of the behavior**
- Wants to do the behavior:
  - **W parameter specification includes the name of the behavior**

# Formal representation of Deliberate Action

$$DA = \langle I, W, K, KH, P, PC, A, S \rangle$$

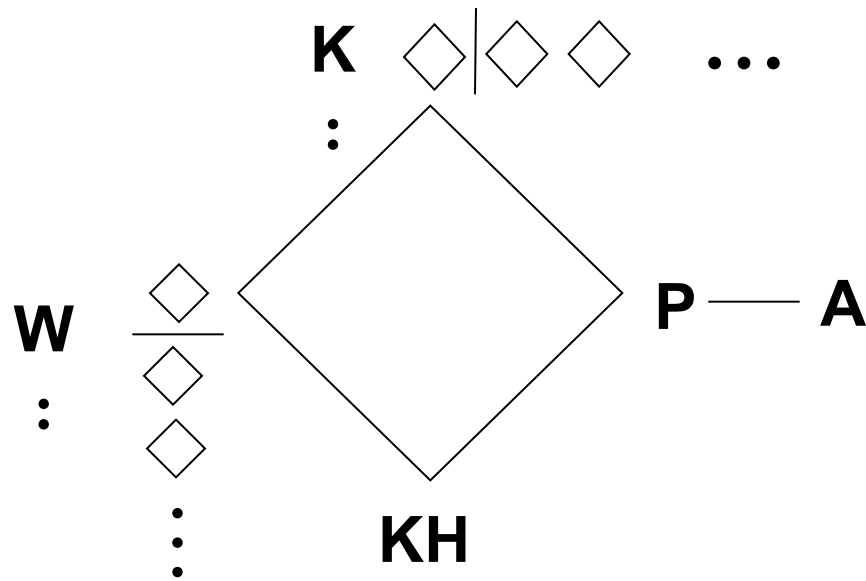
$$(IA_k \mid IA_1, IA_2, \dots, IA_n)$$

$$(IA_k \mid IA_1, IA_2, \dots, IA_n)$$

Wants to do  
behavior k, of the  
ones he could

Knows is doing  
behavior k, of the  
ones he could; is  
distinguishing  
behavior k from  
others

# Diamond notation for deliberate action



# Reasons

- A reason: a states of affairs with an automatic (tautological) implication for behavior
- Example: “This ice cream is delicious!”
  - Being delicious (to P) is a state of affairs
  - Automatic implication: eat the ice cream
  - But P may not engage in the implied behavior (because he may have other reasons not to)

# Kinds of reasons

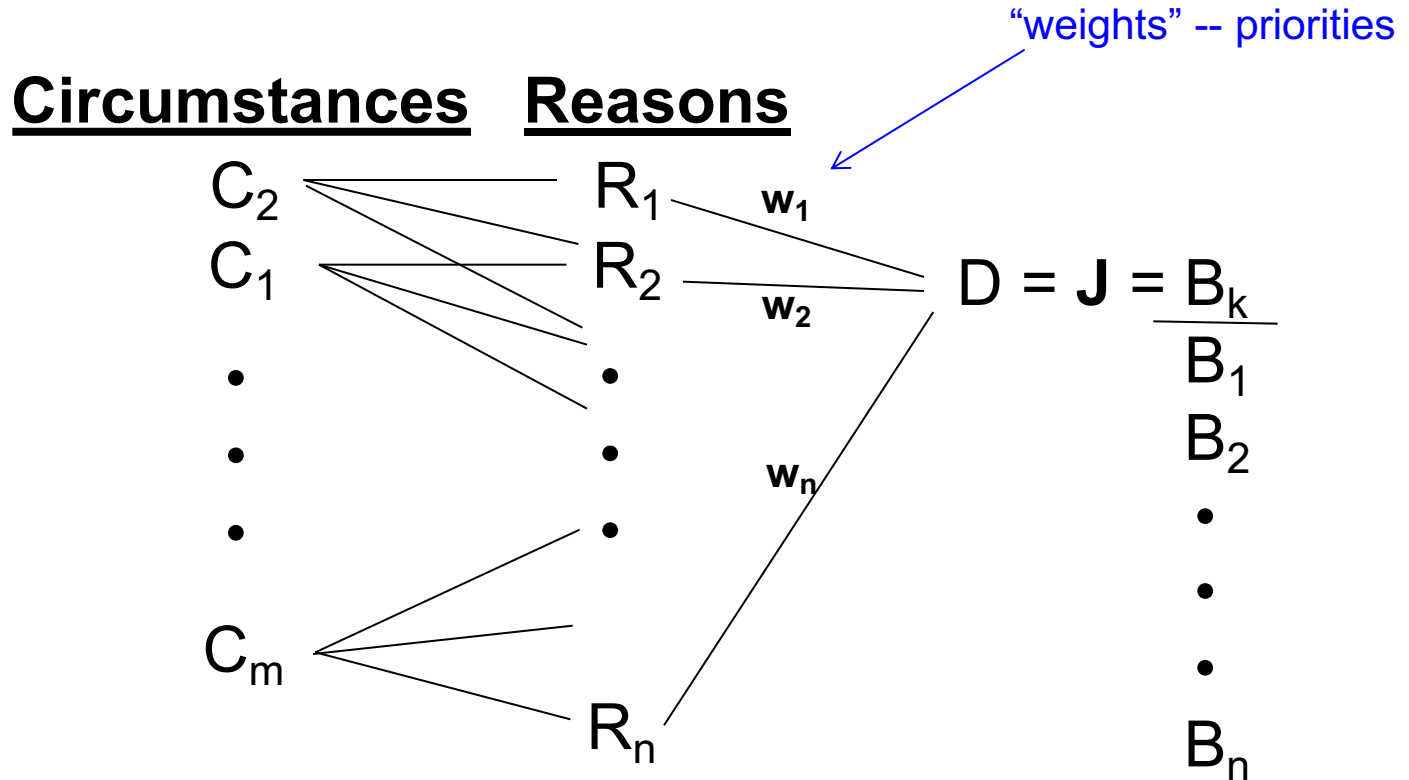
- Four:
  - Prudential (in your interest)
  - Hedonic (fun, pleasurable)
  - Ethical (right/wrong, duties, just/unjust)
  - Esthetic (“’tain’t fittin”)
    - Artistic
    - Social
    - Intellectual
- Why four?
  - That’s all anyone has ever found

# Reasons and behavior

- A person's behavior is the one they choose, of the ones they could do
  - in the light of the reasons they have,
  - in these circumstances,
  - and which have various priorities for them

# CRJ: Reasons and behavior

AKA: "The Judgment Diagram"





# People don't "make decisions"

- The Judgment Diagram is a depiction of *logical* relationships between circumstances, reasons, and behavior
  - A reconstruction of these logical relationships
  - Not a process of any kind
- “Made a decision to do B” means, “Did B, of all the things he could have done, given his reasons.”
  - Just puts emphasis on right-hand side of diagram

# Maxims

- The logic of persons, behaviors, and reasons
  - **Maxim 1:** A person takes things as they seem, unless they have reason to do otherwise.
  - **Maxim 3:** If a person has reason to do something, he will, unless he has stronger reason not to.
  - **Maxim 5:** If a person is called upon to do something he can't do, he will do something else, if he does anything at all
  - **Maxim 9:** Given the relevant competence, behavior goes right, if it does not go wrong in one of the ways it can

# Emotion

- A paradigm case: fear
  - A lion walks into the room
  - I jump out the window
  - A friend asks, “Why did you do that?”
  - I answer, “I was afraid of the lion”

# The logic of emotional behavior

- P observes state of affairs S
- P appraises S as an instance of another state of affairs, T
- T has (tautological) behavioral significance
- P has a learned history of acting on T without deliberation
- P does one of the things that is acting on T

# The lion example

- I see the lion
- I appraise the lion being there as dangerous to me
- “That lion is dangerous” gives me motivation to escape
- I have a learned tendency to escape when I recognize danger
- I escape, by jumping out of the window

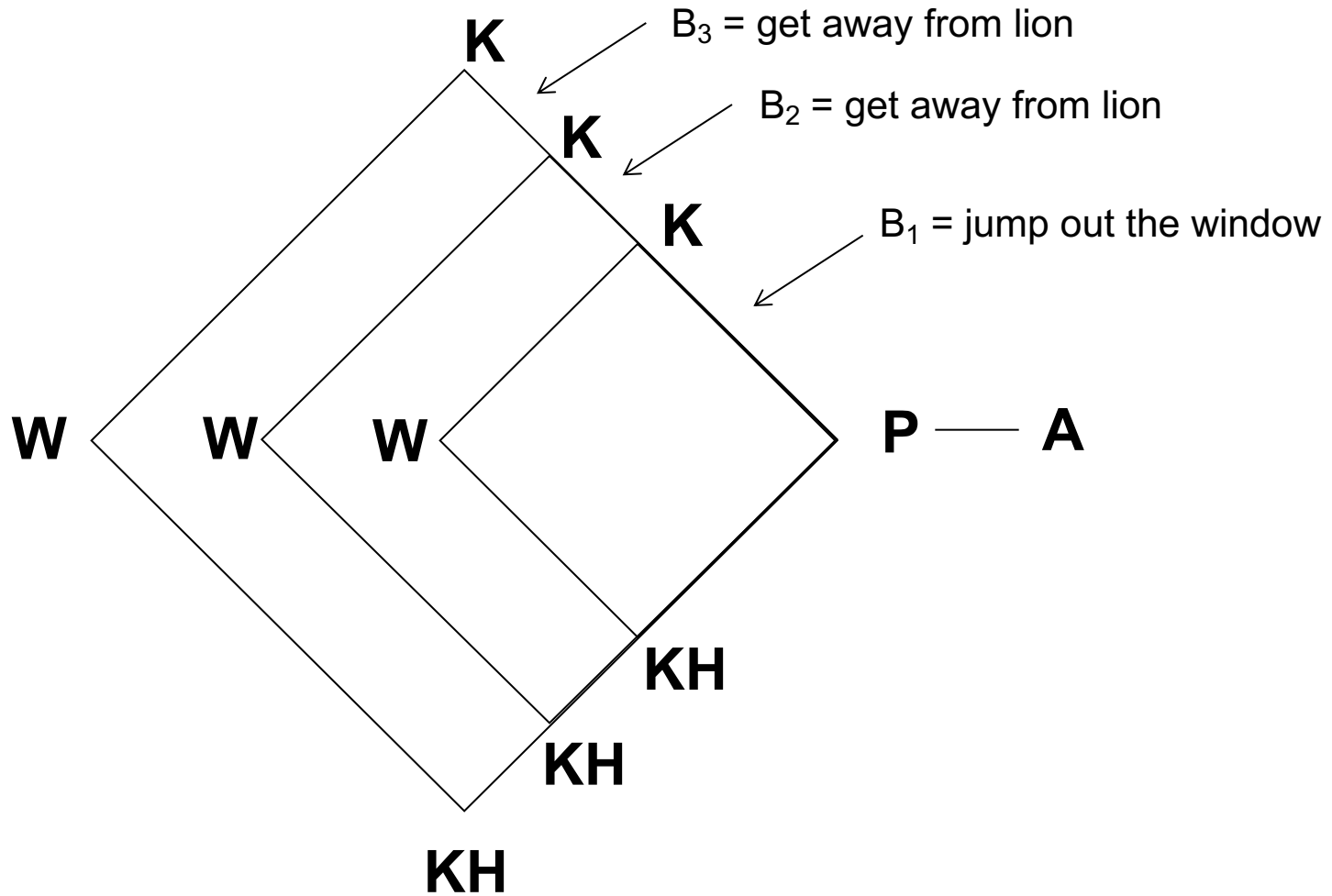
## A little more detail

- I jumped out the window
  - as a way to get away from the lion,
    - which was a way to escape danger

# Reality and emotions

- Emotional behavior is *reality-based*
  - Observing some circumstance
  - Appraising it
  - Acting on the appraisal
- Implication: emotion is not irrational, crazy, disconnected from what's really happening, etc.

# Emotions and significance - diagram





# Common emotions

- Fear: danger elicits avoidance
- Anger: provocation elicits hostility
- Guilt: wrongdoing elicits penance
- Sadness: bad fortune elicits lamentation
- Joy: good fortune elicits celebration

# Contrast with other formulations of emotion

- Feelings
- Physiological states/reactions
- Irrational urges

# What *are* feelings and physiology?

- Feelings:
  - The feeling of walking across the street is whatever you feel when you are walking across the street
  - The feeling of fear is whatever you feel when you recognize danger (if you feel anything at all)
- Physiology:
  - The physiological states and processes that occur when you recognize danger

# Communities

- “No man is an island”
- Core facet of the concept of a person is that persons are members of “cohesive” groups
- $CT = \langle M, Pr, St, La, Co, Cp, W \rangle$  where
  - M = members
  - Pr = practices: patterns of behavior. **What there is for Members to do, as Members**
  - St = statuses: recognizable positions
  - La = language

# Communities – cont'd

- Co = concepts
- Cp = choice principles: principles that govern choice of behavior by virtue of being a member of the community
- W = the world of this community: the world of art, of medicine, of law, of business,...

# Examples

- Family
- Company
- University
- Ethnicity
- Church
- Religion
- Persons

# Status

- A person's place in the world
- Status “encodes” (indicates, corresponds to):
  - Your *eligibility* for behaviors (social practices)
  - Your *relationships*

# Status and intrinsic behaviors

- Intrinsic behavior: behavior done for its own sake
- Intrinsic behavior is intrinsic *to a status*
  - Sometimes: your status in the whole world, as a person
- Every action is a case of engaging in a Practice (of some community)



# Importance of Status

- Your status is your “standing” or “position” – in the world
- Loss of status = loss of behaviors
  - The behaviors intrinsic *to that status*
  - Which means: loss of meaning and satisfaction
- Status gain = gain of behavior potential
  - Gain of meaning and satisfaction

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# Status and behavior potential

- One's status in the world ~ one's entire behavior potential
  - Everything you can do
  - All of your relationships
- **A person will not choose less behavior potential over more.**

# How does Status change?

- Degradation ceremony
  - The Commander strips off the soldier's insignia, breaks his sword, and pronounces, "You are no longer, and never really were, a member of this Regiment."
- Accreditation ceremony
- Commonly: doing the practices intrinsic to that status
  - I became a runner when I started running

# Status change – a rule

- A person becomes what they are treated as being
- If a person acts as an X, and is treated by others as being an X, he becomes an X.

# Each behavior: a social practice

- Social practice: pattern of behaviors
- $B = IA = \langle I, W, K, KH, P, A, PC, S \rangle = SP$
- A person's behavior is always an instance of engaging in a social practice (of some community)

# Relationships

- Status “encodes” (stands for, indicates) relationships
- Example: husband-wife, teacher-student, friend-friend, boss-employee, salesman-customer, doctor-patient, etc. etc. etc.

# Relationships and behavior

- Having relationship  $R$  gives a person reason to engage in certain behaviors
- and reason not to engage in others



# Examples

- Teachers teach students
- Teachers grade fairly
- Marital/romantic fidelity
- Friends confide in each other

# Relationship change – the **Relationship Change Formula**

- If P had relationship R to Q
- P does B with Q, which is consistent with relationship S and inconsistent with R
- Then P's relationship with Q changes in the direction of S
  - i.e., changes to R' which is more similar to S than R is

## This is how...

- Acquaintances become friends
- IT consultants become trusted advisors
- Teachers become mentors
- Friends become lovers
- Friends become enemies
- People “grow apart”
- etc.

# Possibilities

- For any relationship  $R$ , there is another one:
  - **Possible- $R$**
- Examples:
  - Possible-friend
  - Possible-advisor
  - Possible-consultant

# World

- A person's world: everything that is, or could be
- World = world of a community
- Includes:
  - All the “things”
  - All the behaviors
  - All the Statuses
  - All the situations and facts
  - All the relationships
  - All the possibilities for what could happen

# How do worlds change?

- Encountering something that cannot be part of their (current) world
- Ex: “**Face in the wall**”:
  - I look at the back wall of the room, see a huge grinning face staring at me, smiling approvingly.
  - “Whoa! Either I just hallucinated, or the world is nothing like what I thought it was!”

# Other cases

- War: the person sees and does unthinkable things
- Falling in love
- Transcendence: the person sees God (or Ultimate Truth)
  - **“I never imagined it could be like this!”**
  - **“Everything’s the same, but different!”**

# Same and different

- Common to hear, “Everything’s the same, but it’s different!”
- The things around you haven’t changed; the world they’re parts of **has**.



# What *kind of* thing is Descriptive Psychology?

- Common sense?
- Another theory?

“Isn’t this just common sense?”

- What is common sense?
  - Customary general statements
    - **“Women don’t make good programmers”**
  - Facts (statistical or otherwise)
    - **“Men are taller than women”**
  - Conceptual connections
    - **“If you don’t have the necessary skills, you won’t succeed, except by accident.”**

## W-e-e-l-l, sort of

- Careful, precise formulations of the conceptual aspects of “common sense”
- Examples:
  - “Common sense” that if you don’t have the skills, you’ll only succeed by accident (slide 10)
  - “Common sense” that cheating on your spouse will harm the relationship (slides 47-48)
  - “Common sense” that if something is dangerous, you avoid it (slide 30)

# “Isn’t this just another theory?”

- **No.**
- Let’s see why:
  - Start from an observed fact: people disagree about almost everything

# Example: people disagree about behavior

- “What we call behavior is just the physical response to an input stimulus, mediated by cognitive processes.”
- “No. Behavior is the appropriate expression of the self.”
- “No. Behavior is purposeful activities to satisfy needs”

# Change the question

- Usual question: “Who’s right?”
- Instead, we ask:
  - What do these people have to **share**, in order to disagree?
- Answer: **the concept of behavior**
- If they don’t, they’re not disagreeing; they’re misunderstanding each other

# Descriptive Psychology: a set of **concepts**

- A formal articulation of the (shared) concepts of:
  - Person, behavior, language, world, community, status, relationship
  - And the logical relationships between these concepts
- Just as plane geometry is the articulation of the concepts of point, line, and plane

# What good are concepts?

- What good is geometry?
  - For talking about the shapes of things in the physical world
  - Carefully, precisely, systematically
  - To better understand hard and puzzling shapes
- **What good is Descriptive Psychology?**
  - **For talking about people, their relationships, and their behavior**
  - **Carefully, precisely, systematically**
  - **To better understand hard and puzzling (human) situations and actions**