DICTIONARY OF KEY WORDS IN PSYCHOLOGY

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Preface

The other day I overheard one person say to another, 'I don't blame myself. My id made me do it.' That was all I caught of the conversation. But I couldn't help wondering: (1) What it was that the id made the person do, and (2) Was the individual using the term *id* with any degree of accuracy?

The aim of this book is to expand your psychological vocabulary. This aim needs only slight defense during a time period that has been called, among other things, 'the age of psychology', and 'the era of psychobabble.' The popular success of psychology is everywhere evident. Psychology books on all aspects of the art of living regularly make best-seller lists. The authors of these books are interviewed with frequency on talk shows. Our magazines and the feature sections of newspapers favor articles with a psychological slant. Psychology is, if not the most popular, certainly one of the most popular courses on college campuses. We use psychological terms to explain not only the behavior of others, but to explain our own behavior to ourselves. For example, when you reflect, you may find yourself musing to yourself, 'I was being too defensive in my conversation with John. I've got to stop acting that way and start being more assertive.' You may or not be aware that the term *defensive* was lifted out of Freudian psychology, and refers to Freud's concept of ego defense mechanisms. And the use of the term *assertive* was in all likelihood inspired by its recent association with assertiveness training.

Of words and concepts

The book does not seek to present an exhaustive catalog of psychological terms, but a selective list of key terms – terms that are used with very high levels of frequency. These key terms represent the foundation stones upon which psychology builds its house. They are the terms that appear over and over again in the

standard introductory textbooks, in the popular publications, and in conversation. If you know these key terms, and use them correctly, you will be better equipped than most people to understand and use the language of psychology.

One of the principal assumptions of this book is that a term itself is just the tip of an iceberg. The term represents a point of entry into a *concept*, a set of meanings. It is really these meanings that we want to reach for. Accordingly, each important term in the book is presented in tripartite form: (1) definition, (2) example, and (3) connections.

The *definition* sets forth the principal meaning or meanings of the word in abstract form. Each definition is brief, accurate, and to-the-point.

The *example* brings the abstract definition of the term down-to-earth, makes it real. Without examples, terms tend to float off into a nebulous and remote stratospheric realm. Each example is chosen to give the word in question as much solid dimension as possible. I try to give examples that have a ready appeal in terms of familiar experiences. The regular use of examples in the book is one of its recommendations.

The sections headed *Connections* seek to set each term within a larger framework, pointing out associations and links with other aspects of psychological thought. Such connections may include variously the story behind a word, similarities of the word with parallel concepts, the root meaning of a word, anecdotal material, or other items of relevance. The connections help to expand the meaning of the word under discussion. In the early 1930s the influential theorist Edward L. Thorndike said, 'Learning is connecting. The mind is man's connection-system.' Thorndike was known to have a very mechanistic view of the mind, and most of us aren't going to be willing to go all of the way with Thorndike. But we can go half of the way, and agree that even if connections are not all-important they are of substantial importance. It is with this observation in mind that I would assert that the *Connections* sections for each term make up one of the more valuable and unique features of the book.

Additional features

In addition to the characteristics already described, the book has these additional features:

1 *A topical index*, The topical index is arranged according to standard subjects in general psychology such as learning, motiva-

tion, perception, personality, abnormal behaviour, and therapy. Within each category, words are listed alpahbetically with corresponding page numbers. This makes it possible readily to look up sets of related words.

2 *A brief sketch of major personalities.* The basic biographical facts about those individuals who have been the makers and shakers of psychology are given. The book provides a handy reference to such people as Sigmund Freud, Ivan Pavlov, John Watson, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, William James, Wilhelm Wundt, Carl Rogers, and others. The major theoretical viewpoint of these thinkers is identified, as is one or more of their major publications.

3 *A name index.* The name index toward the back of the book includes the major personalities as well as other people referred to in the book.

4 *A subject index.* The subject index immediately following the name index not only lists all of the key words defined in *Dictionary of Key Words in Psychology*, but also other important terms used in the *Connections* sections. This substantially expands the scope of the book.

Concluding remarks

The eighteenth-century Irish political philosopher and author Edmund Burke commented, 'A very great part of the mischiefs that vex this world arises from words.' I take Burke's statement to mean that it is the *misuse* of words that causes problems. The present work seeks to be a partial antidote to the vexation that Burke spoke of by providing a guide to the clear and accurate use of key psychological terms.

Well, I've had my say. Now it's time for the words of psychology to speak for themselves. I hope you find the book enjoyable and instructive.

Frank J. Bruno

Contents

A

ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR

Definition
Abnormal behavior is behavior that deviates significantly from a cultural norm or a group standard. When the word *abnormal* is used in a negative or pejorative sense it refers to behavior that is *maladaptive*, behavior that is self-defeating. Such behavior is usually distressing to the individual or to others.

Example
Martin is a twenty-three-year-old patient in a mental hospital. Martin's psychiatrist has made the diagnosis that Martin is suffering from a *schizophrenic disorder*, a kind of psychotic disorder (see entry) characterized by disordered thinking. Martin believes that this behavior, including his thoughts, are being controlled by aliens from the planet Saturn. He says they are planning to promote him to one of the gods of the Solar System and then sacrifice him. He refuses much of the food that is prepared in the hospital because he thinks it may be poisoned. From time to time he hears a voice that tells him, 'You are the Alpha of the universe and all beings are your enemies!'

Connections
Martin's schizophrenic disorder is just one of the many kinds of mental disorders. A whole spectrum of such disorders has been classified and described, including mental retardation, multiple personality, neurotic behavior, organic mental disorders, personality disorders, and phobic disorders (see entries).

The first question that comes to mind when we observe abnormal behavior is: *Why*? We seek explanations. Many explanations exist, some satisfactory, some unsatisfactory. Demon possession, for example, is an explanation of abnormal behavior that is unsatisfactory to most psychiatrists and clinical psychologists.

A general explanation of much abnormal behavior is that conflicts in one's emotional life are principal causes. This is the line of explanation favored by psychoanalysis (see entry).

Another general explanation of abnormal behavior is in terms of adverse learning experiences. This is the approach favored by behaviorism (see entry).

It is also possible to look at genetic factors, biochemistry, vitamin deficiencies, food additives, and interpersonal relations in our search for explanations of abnormal behavior. It is clear that no single explanation exists. For a spectrum of disorders we need a spectrum of explanations.

ABREACTION

Definition

Abreaction is the discharge or release of emotional tension associated with a repressed idea, conflict, or memory. The term often implies the 'reliving' or vivid recall of a painful emotional experience.

Example

When Paul was three years old his father slapped him across the front of his face so hard that he gave Paul a bloody nose. When Paul cried, his father said, 'Shut up or I'll give you a black eye to go with the bloody nose!' In psychoanalysis, thirty-year-old Paul recalls the long-forgotten incident. It has been apparently blocked or repressed from conscious memory for many years. Now Paul 'relives' the incident and cries again. He even tells his therapist that his nose feels swollen. The emotional release associated with the recall of the memory (i.e. the abreaction) helps Paul to connect with a whole set of attitudes concerning his authoritarian father.

Connections

The concept of abreaction is associated primarily with psychoanalysis. The first psychoanalytic case history was the case of Anna O. conducted not by Sigmund Freud, but by Joseph Breuer. Anna had a number of repressed conflicts about her feelings toward her deceased father who she had cared for during his dying days. When Anna brought out her blocked feelings she often found temporary relief from her neurotic symptoms (e.g.

difficulty in swallowing). She herself referred to Breuer's treatment as 'chimney sweeping.'

Freud gives Breuer credit for conducting the first psychoanalysis, and the concept of abreaction played an important part in Freud's early formulations. (Incidentally, Anna O's real name is now known. It is Bertha Pappenheim, and she is famous in her own right as a founding figure of social work with unwed mothers in Germany.)

Although, as already indicated, the concept of abreaction is associated primarily with psychoanalysis, the idea of relief by emotional release is certainly not unique to psychoanalysis. It is not at all unusual to hear such common-sense advice as, 'Let yourself go. Have a good cry. You'll feel better.' This kind of advice provides an example of the possible value of an abreactive process in daily living. If there is anything that is unique about abreaction as it is thought of in psychoanalysis, it is the idea that repressed material – material that seems 'cold' and forgotten – still contains a strong emotional charge.

ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVE

Definition

The achievement motive is the motive within the person to successfully complete a task, attain a goal, or reach a given standard of excellence.

Example

Oliver, age twenty-four, is an employee of a large manufacturing corporation. He has set himself the goal of being a vice-president in charge of one sales division by the time he is thirty years old. To attain this end he is working toward a master's degree in business administration, is punctual, misses work very rarely, dresses the way the firm expects him to dress, and so forth. Even behavior outside of the day-to-day business of the firm revolves around his achievement motive. Unmarried, he seeks a wife who will 'fit in' with the organization and be approved of by his superiors.

Connections

One of the primary investigators into the nature of the achievement motive has been David McClelland. McClelland and his coworkers discovered that a high level of achievement motivation

is not the same thing as a high *need to avoid failure*. Persons with a high need to achieve tend to take *moderate* risks. They really want to achieve their objectives. On the other hand, people with a high need to avoid failure often suffer from low self-esteem. They can't stand to fail. So they will either take no risk to achieve a goal or a great risk. It is easy to understand why they take no risk. They are playing it safe. But why will they take a substantial risk? They are still playing it safe, psychologically safe. If they do not succeed, they can easily rationalize that the conditions were too difficult, that 'the System' was against them, that 'it's who you know' and so forth.

It has been pointed out that different societies exhibit varying degrees of achievement motivation among their members. For example, the middle class in the United States traditionally exhibits a high level of achievement motivation. It admires the go-getter, the ambitious person. On the other hand, the poor people of many underdeveloped countries exhibit low levels of what we are calling achievement motivation. Persons who see yawning gaps between their present status and lofty goals may give up before they start.

It appears that the achievement motive is quite complex, combining biological tendencies toward mastery with learned values.

ADLER, ALFRED
(1870–1937)

Alfred Adler occupies an important place in the history of psychotherapy. He, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung are often referred to as the Big Three, the principal founders of depth psychology. Adler was one of Freud's associates in the early days of psychoanalysis, but had a falling out with Freud and started his own school of psychotherapy called *individual psychology*. Individual psychology, in contrast to psychoanalysis, emphasized the importance of the conscious will and the ability of the individual to take charge of his or her own destiny.

Adler was a physician, a specialist in ophthamology before he developed a psychiatric practice. It was from his work with eye patients that Adler formulated the concept of *compensation*. He noted that some of his patients with eye problems often became avid readers, placing excessive importance on the faculty of vision.

Adler was greatly influenced by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzche's writings on the subject of the *will to power*, an inborn urge, according to Nietzche, toward mastery, competence, and superiority over others. Adler became convinced that the will to power was certainly as important as the sex drive in human affairs. The frustration of the will to power produces an *inferiority complex*, a feeling of inadequacy, that resides at the core of many neurotic disorders. This was one of the several theoretical points over which Adler and Freud disagreed. Adler felt that Freud made too much out of the sex drive. And Freud felt that Adler had inflated the importance of the will to power.

Toward the latter part of his life Adler defined a concept he called the *creative self*. The creative self is the power within each of us to take a stand against the external forces that shape our personalities. It is the ability of the person to create, to some extent, his or her own personality. Adler said, in essence, that we are not pawns of fate, that we do not need to play the role of victims in the game of life. These views on Adler's part are related to ideas found in existentialism (see entry), and make Adler a forerunner of humanistic psychology (see entry).

Two of Adler's books are *Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* (1927) and *What Life Should Mean to You* (1932).

AFFECTIONAL DRIVE

Definition
The affectional drive is thought of as an inborn tendency in one organism to desire contact, either on a physical or emotional basis, with another organism.

Example
Robby is a nine-month-old infant. He smiles when his parents enter the bedroom, making eye contact. He holds out his arms, indicating he would like to be picked up. He appears to enjoy being bounced, hugged and rocked by his mother and father. When he is alone too long he cries for his parents and they say, 'He just wants attention.' These behaviors on Robby's part are all possible manifestations of the affectional drive.

Connections
Harry Harlow made extensive investigations into the nature of the affectional drive. He placed rhesus monkeys in social isolation

at birth. Subsequently these monkeys were given the opportunity to spend time on *mother surrogates*, dummies resembling monkey mothers. Say that monkey 22 was consistently fed by a milk bottle attached to a mother surrogate with a wire body. A second mother surrogate in the same cage gives no milk, but it is covered with sponge rubber and terrycloth, giving contact comfort when it is hugged.

Say that a fearful stimulus is introduced into the monkey's cage. It is a little toy soldier beating on a drum, and the infant has never seen it before. Monkey 22 lets out a shriek and it runs to one of its 'mothers.' Which one will it run to? One hypothesis is that it will run to the wire mother because it 'loves' the wire mother out of association with being fed. A second hypothesis is that the affectional drive is independent of the hunger drive and the infant will run to the mother surrogate giving the most contact comfort. Monkey 22, like most similar subjects, in fact runs to the terrycloth mother, suggesting the independent status of the affectional drive.

The existence of the affectional drive has been demonstrated to a convincing degree in monkeys. And most people would say that common sense suggests it also exists in infants and young children. But what about adults? Do we too have an active affectional drive? It seems quite likely that we do. It sometimes takes less obvious form in adults than it does in infants and children. More than one psychologist has suggested that the need for recognition – the need to attain a certain status, earn degrees, enjoy applause, and so forth – are all expressions of the affectional drive.

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Definition

Aggressive behavior takes place when one organism makes a hostile attack, physical or verbal, upon another organism or thing.

Example

A husband and wife are bickering, exchanging insults. They are indulging in name calling. He is saying things such as, 'Yo bitch!' And she is saying things such as, 'You jerk!' Both of them are displaying verbal aggression. As the argument escalates, he

loses his temper and slaps her hard across the face. He has now displayed physical aggression.

Connections

Aggressive behavior is so common that it is easy to infer that there is an inborn behavioral tendency to exhibit aggressive behavior, that it is one of the biological drives. Variations of this view have been expressed by researchers of animal behavior such as Konrad Lorenz. Freud also believed that aggressive behavior has a strong inborn basis and postulated a *death instinct*, a primitive urge toward destruction of others as well as self-destruction.

More optimistic thinkers indicate that aggressive behavior is not completely inborn, although it may be the result of an inborn mechanism. The *frustration-aggression* hypothesis advanced by Neal Miller and John Dollard suggests that when an organism is blocked in attaining a goal this frustration invokes a natural aggressive response. The link between frustration and aggression is such that finding ways to reduce the level of frustration in a person's life should have the effect of reducing the amount of aggression expressed.

Even more optimistic is the view of aggressive behavior expressed by B. F. Skinner. He asserts that aggressive behavior is maintained by its *reinforcers* (see entry) or behavioral payoffs. Skinner expresses the hope that we can engineer a world in which human beings get very little out of being aggressive. He suggests that a person will be aggressive primarily because of what he or she gets out of it.

Another way of looking at aggressive behavior is to explain it in terms of *observational learning*, learning by watching a model display behavior. Children who have aggressive parents or siblings are likely to copy some of their behavior. The research of Albert Bandura and his associates suggests that watching models display aggressive acts on television may in some cases induce the observer to imitate the viewed behavior. This seems to be truer of pre-schoolers and emotionally disturbed individuals than it does of emotionally mature adults.

AMBIGUOUS STIMULUS

Definition

An ambiguous stimulus is one that can be perceived in two or

more ways. Its meaning is vague or uncertain.

Example
You and a companion are looking at an oddly shaped cloud. You venture the opinion that the cloud looks very much like an elephant. Your companion disagrees, asserting that the cloud looks very much like a battleship. The cloud itself is an ambiguous stimulus because it is open to a number of perceived organizations.

Connections
Ambiguous stimuli have been used in many contexts in psychology. For example, the famous Rorschach or inkblot test uses ambiguous stimuli (see entry). Another example is provided by research in social psychology. There is an effect known as the *autokinetic effect*. A stationary pinpoint of light is displayed in a very dark room. Because of the spontaneous movement of the eyeballs the light itself will be perceived to move. If a subject is told the light is moving, it will be interpreted as real motion. Because there is no actual motion, and because the motion of the eyeballs is random, the perceived motion of the light is ambiguous. Say that you are the subject in the room, and a friend is brought in. Little do you suspect that the friend has been instructed by an experimenter to engage in deception. The friend is to say that he or she sees the light moving counterclockwise in a circle with a one foot diameter. This suggestion from your friend will exert a great influence on your perception. You too will 'see' the motion described. The significance of a finding such as this is that many situations in life are ambiguous. We are not sure how to act when we are new on a job, when we are at a party with an unfamiliar group of people, and so forth. In such ambiguous situations we take our cues from the opinions and actions of others, and may develop our attitude toward the situation largely on this basis.

An idea that has been advanced is that people are *intolerant of ambiguity*, meaning it frustrates them and makes them anxious. Thus we seek ways to resolve ambiguity, to structure a stimulus and give it meaning.

AMBIVALENCE

Definition
Ambivalence refers to a motivational conflict such that one is simultaneously attracted to and repelled by the same goal.

Example
In the novel *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, Anna, a married woman, finds herself attracted to the handsome bachelor Count Vronsky. Being married, she feels guilty about her attraction and struggles against the process of falling in love. Although she is strongly motivated to seek out the Count, she at the same time is 'repelled' by him in the sense that a sexual affair will spell disaster in her personal life. While she is going through the attraction-repulsion phase of her struggle she is in a state of ambivalence. (If you are familiar with the novel, you know she overcomes her ambivalence and eventually has an affair with Count Vronsky. And the novel has a tragic ending.)

Connections
A term sometimes used to characterize ambivalence is *approach-avoidance* conflict. Approach-avoidance conflicts were studied in some detail by Kurt Lewin, both a social and a Gestalt psychologist. Lewin proposed that each of us lives in a *psychological world*, a personal world created by our own thoughts and feelings. This world is a kind of inner landscape or territory in which we move about. Within this inner space there are goals and *valences*, directional trends of a plus or minus variety. These valences are caused by our own motives and desires. (For example, it is Anna herself who creates the conflict that ends in tragedy. The conflict has no 'real' or objective status.) Looking at the word *valence* as Lewin used it helps us to see its meaning in the word *ambivalence*. A person who is ambivalent is affected by two valences.

Ambivalence is a common problem for human beings. Sometimes the problem is rather trivial. You can't decide if a greeting card is quite right or not. There are things about it you like and there are things you don't like. Sometimes the problem is significant. You can't decide on a vocation. A particular one appeals to you, but you also see its drawbacks.

Recently the term *decideophobia* was coined to describe the behavior of persons who suffer from an inability to make choices, who suffer from chronic ambivalence.

AMNESIA

Definition
The basic meaning of amnesia is simply loss of memory. The use of the word by a clinical psychologist or a psychiatrist usually implies a pathological loss of memory involving a fairly extensive area of experience. The causes of amnesia can be emotional, organic, or a combination of both.

Example
Psychogenic amnesia, amnesia due to emotional causes, has formed the basis for many novels and melodramas. Albert has a furious argument with his wife and comes close to murdering her one night in a fit of rage. Horrified at himself, he runs out of his house. The next day he finds himself wandering in the city with no recollection of the argument, who he is (he does not have his wallet or identification on his person), or why he is where he is. As time passes, he recalls that he is an auto mechanic, and gains employment. Interestingly enough, he has not forgotten how to do his work, suggesting that the amnesia is selective – he is blocking out his identity because it is emotionally painful. As far-fetched as Albert's case appears to be, psychogenic amnesia of the type described does in fact take place.

Connections
The kind of amnesia described in the example, psychogenic amnesia, should be contrasted with *organic amnesia*, amnesia due to brain damage. Brain damage itself can have more than one cause. A severe blow to the head or a stroke are common causes. Somewhat less obvious is brain damage due to *Alzheimer's disease*, a disease involving deterioration of the brain's neurons.

Freud wrote about *infantile amnesia*, the lack of memory most of us have for the early years of life. He contended that this kind of amnesia is due to more than simple forgetting, hypothesizing instead that it is caused by repression (see entry). We block out the early memories because of emotional conflicts associated with them. Freud's hypothesis is, of course, debatable.