

The Study of People



HARVEY MINDESS/PAUL R. MUNFORD

The
H O L O G Y
Study of
People

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VERONICA, ANNA, ARNA, and ALISON

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Preface

Psychology is the study of people. The ways in which we grow from infancy to old age; the ways in which we think, feel, and behave; the ways in which we learn and fail to learn; the ways in which we influence and interact with each other; the ways in which we acquire problems and overcome our problems: all these topics are psychology's domain.

The field contains few absolute answers. Everything from the meaning of dreams to the value of IQ tests is debated by psychologists of different persuasions. In their investigations and debates, however, they have produced a lot of valuable information. It is our intention to convey some of this information to you. We do not wish to convert you to any particular point of view. We simply hope we can help you see how fascinating it can be to study people.

We have tried to compose a clear, candid picture of psychology as it is today. In order to create a text that could be covered in a one-semester course, however, we have had to overlook certain areas of the field. Because we are more interested in getting you to think carefully than in giving you facts and figures to memorize, we have emphasized standpoints and controversies and deemphasized the results of specific studies.

On the whole, we believe this book will tell you what psychologists do, how they reason and investigate their subject matter, what they agree on, and what they argue about. We hope it will also tell you something useful about yourself.

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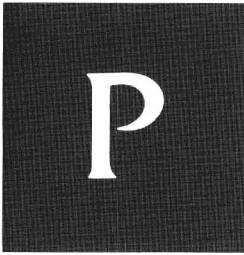
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Section One

Personal Development

OVERVIEW



Psychology's observations on the normal person in our society are presented in the initial section of this text. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 describe the person at various stages of development: as an infant, a child, an adolescent, a young adult, a middle-aged adult, and an elderly man or woman. Chapter 4 compares leading theories of personality. Chapter 5 brings together the views of various psychologists on the characteristics of the healthy individual.

As a whole, then, this section should help you see yourself, your family, and your friends from the psychological perspective. It will also acquaint you with issues that have occupied the field for decades. *To what extent are our personal characteristics inborn? To what extent are they learned from our environment? How do parents mold their children's attitudes and habits? Is behavior controlled by unconscious impulses, shaped by social rewards, or determined by choice and free will? In what ways do people differ from one another? In what ways are we all alike? What does it take to become a mature, fully functioning adult?*

These are issues on which every intelligent person may have an opinion. Psychologists do not pretend to know the final answers, but they can lay claim to membership in a field that has tried systematically, unceasingly, and sometimes ingeniously, to penetrate their core.

Infancy and Childhood

1



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How do we grow from infancy to old age? How does our behavior change? How do our minds and personalities mature? What common problems do we face at different stages of our lives and how do we attempt to solve them? These are some of the questions psychology sets out to answer.

We intend to survey the entire human lifespan in the opening section of this book. Chapter 1 will discuss the growth that occurs in infancy and childhood. Chapter 2 will deal with adolescence. Chapter 3 will explore the development and dilemmas of adulthood and old age. What we hope to get across is a sense of the remarkable journey we make from the time we are born to the time we die—a journey filled with difficulties and achievements, suffering and joy, but always marked by definite stages which psychologists have begun to chart.

Psychology cannot sum up the pattern of a human life, or of life in general, in any simple formula. It engages, however, in a continual attempt to see clearer, dig deeper, and put facts together in ways that will help us understand ourselves better.

We invite you to join us in reviewing some of the main discoveries psychologists have made about human development. When you know what they are, you may be impressed. On the other hand, you may find them insignificant. Or perhaps you will come away intrigued, confused, excited, discouraged, and wishing that someone could explain it all really clearly. If you get that far, you may be on your way to becoming a psychologist yourself. In that case, welcome to the club!