

UNDERSTANDING
PSYCHOLOGY



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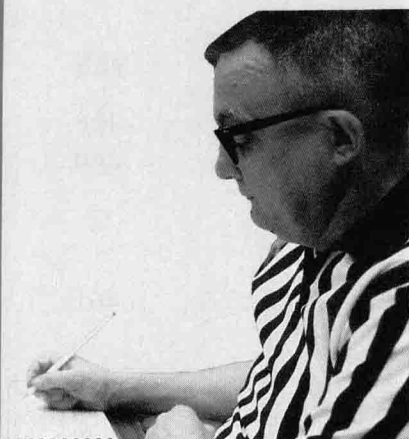
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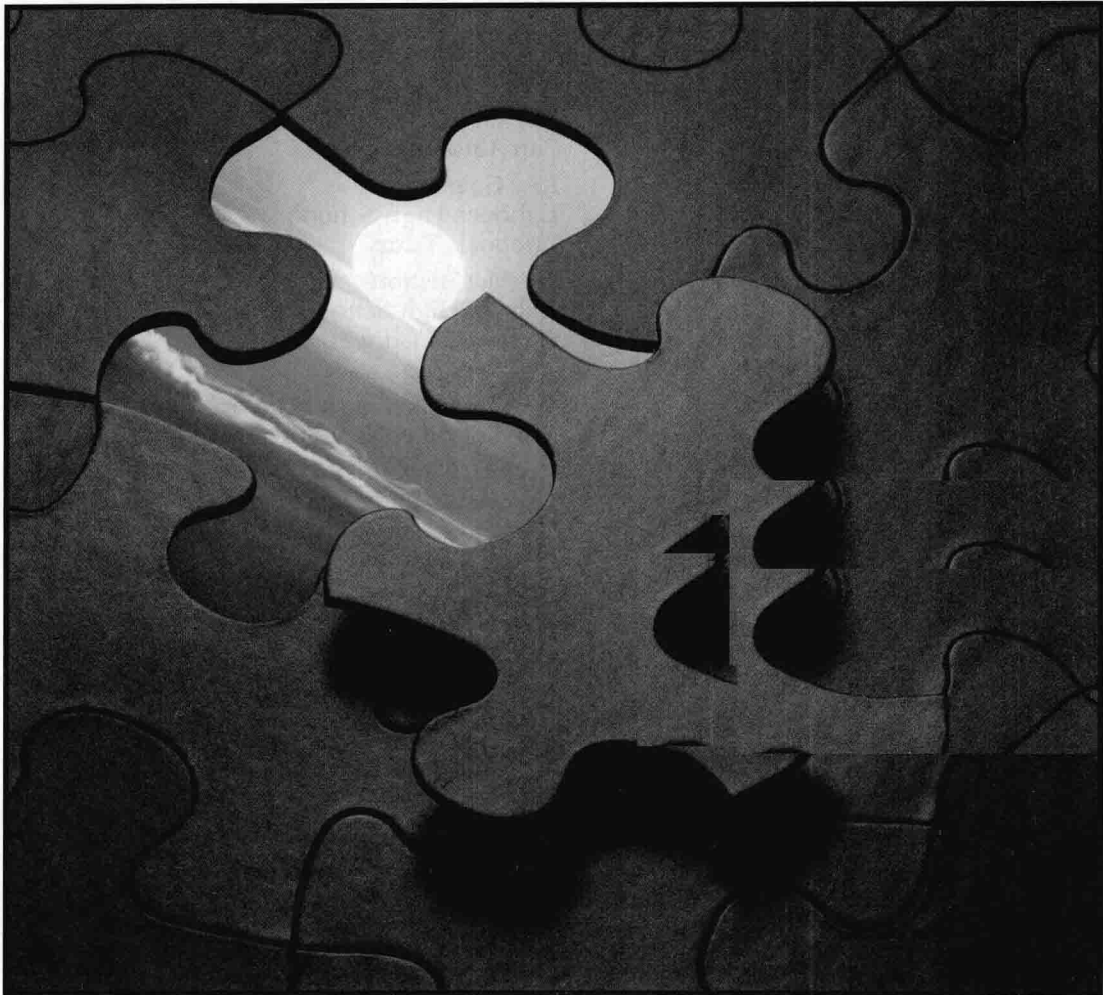
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UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOLOGY



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Introducing Psychology



FIGURE 1.1

Studying psychology can help you gain a perspective on your own behavior.

OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

- describe the range of topics that are covered in an introductory course in psychology.
- cite the questions psychologists ask and describe how research is performed.
- explain important trends within psychology.
- summarize the careers and specialized fields in psychology.

What is it that fascinates psychologists about ordinary behavior? What exactly do they study? One way to answer this question is to look at a slice of life through a psychologist's eyes.

Ruth, a college student, decides to have lunch at the school cafeteria. She walks to the cafeteria, gets in line, chooses tuna salad and orange juice, and pays at the counter. She then looks around for someone with whom to sit. She doesn't see any close friends, so she goes to a table by herself, sits down, and begins to eat.

A few minutes later, Gary, a fellow student in Ruth's English class, comes over to join her. When Ruth looks up at him, she no longer feels like eating. She thinks Gary is good-looking, but he never speaks to Ruth unless he has missed a class and wants to borrow her notes. She greets him coolly, but Gary sits down anyway and begins to tell a long, rambling story about *A Visit from the Little Green People*, the horror movie he stayed up to watch on TV last night. Meanwhile, Ruth remembers that Gary missed English class and catches him eyeing her notebook.

Ruth fantasizes dumping her lunch on Gary's neatly groomed hair, but instead she gets up to leave. Gary attempts a casual smile and asks to borrow her notes. Now Ruth is more than annoyed. Although her English notebook is in plain sight, she tells him curtly that she is sorry

KEY TERMS

- ✓ applied science
- ✓ basic science
- ✓ cognitive
- ✓ hypothesis
- ✓ introspection
- ✓ physiological
- ✓ psychiatry
- ✓ psychology

IN YOUR JOURNAL

Think about your personal reasons for studying psychology. Write an entry in your journal of at least 100 words describing what you hope to gain from this experience.

FIGURE 1.2

Where we might see two people sitting and talking, a psychologist might see a sequence of complex behaviors. **Why are students attracted to the study of psychology?**



but she has left her notes in the library—to which, as a matter of fact, she must return right away. As she leaves the cafeteria, she glances back and sees Gary still sitting at the table. He looks depressed. Suddenly, she feels a bit depressed herself.

This is a simple story, but from a psychologist's point of view, the behavior was complex. First of all, Ruth decided to have lunch because of her **physiological** (physical) state—she was hungry. She may also have been motivated by **cognitive** (mental) elements—she knew she must eat now because she had classes scheduled for the next several hours. When she entered the cafeteria, she *perceived* sensory stimuli different from those outside, but she paid little attention to the new sights, sounds, and smells, except to note that the food smelled good and the line was mercifully short. She went through the line and paid for her food—*learned behavior* similar to that of a hungry rat that runs a maze for a food reward.

Ruth looked for a *social group* to join, but found none to which she belonged. She sat alone until Gary joined her. He felt free to do so because in most schools and colleges there is an informal rule, or *norm*, that students who have a class together may approach each other socially. This rule usually does not apply to looser collections of people, such as commuters who ride the same bus. Ruth *remembered* how Gary had behaved toward her in the past and realized that he was about to follow the same note-borrowing routine. This triggered the *emotional* reaction of anger. However, she did not dump her food on his head as a 2-year-old might have done, but acted in a way that was more appropriate to her stage of *development*. We can assume that her response was characteristic of her *personality*: she told the young man that she didn't have the notes (even though he had seen them) and left.