



# PSYCHOLOGY & ADJUSTMENT


VALUES, CULTURE, AND CHANGE

RONALD JAY COHEN



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## **Values, Culture, and Change**



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## TO THE STUDENT

An innovative science fiction television program called *The Outer Limits* aired from 1963 to 1965—before many of the readers of this book were born. For anyone who has watched the program, whether during one of its original broadcasts or during a wee hours rerun on cable, the most memorable thing about it was the way it began. The video image did strange things as a man with a deep, authoritative voice told us,

There is nothing wrong with your TV set. We are controlling transmission. We can control the vertical. We can control the horizontal. For the next hour we will control all that you see and hear and think. You are watching a drama that reaches from the inner mind to . . .  
*The Outer Limits.*

Psychology textbook writers can identify with the deep-voiced man from *The Outer Limits*. After all, once you have been assigned our books for your courses, it is *we* who are at least partially responsible for the particular topics you are exposed to within that very broad field known as psychology. I take that responsibility most seriously, knowing full well that this will be the only course in psychology some students will ever take. For other students, this course may help them decide whether to pursue additional coursework in psychology—and possibly whether to become a psychologist!

Contemplate for a moment the wide range of psychology-related topics this author had to select from when deciding what topics to discuss, as well as how much discussion to give each topic. What topics would *you* like to see covered? What questions would *you* like to see answered? How much coverage should the topics and questions you've listed receive?

Am I “normal”?

How can I get along better with other people?

How can psychology be used to make the world a better place?

Perhaps these are the types of questions you are thinking about as you begin this course. Note that the first of these questions is at the level of the self, the second question is at a level that involves other people in a very immediate sense, and the third question is at a level that involves other people in a more global sense. In this book, issues of psychology and adjustment will be addressed at each of these levels and from many, varied perspectives. Let's state at the outset that psychologists having varied training, background, and experience may have vastly different responses to questions such as those posed above. In this book, we will explore those different perspectives, cite relevant research, and ask you to think about which of various positions work best for you.

A primary criterion in selecting topics was *your* interests. If you are like many students who take a course labeled as *Psychology of Adjustment*, *Personal Adjustment*, *Personal Development*, *Applied Psychology*, *General Psychology*, or *Toward Self-Understanding*, you are curious about psychology and “what's in it for you.” Stated another way, you would like to gain an understanding, in fairly plain terms, of how and why people act as they do. You hope that you will take away from this course some knowledge of how psychology can be ap-



plied to everyday life, problems, and concerns. You are curious about ways that people—and, perhaps, in particular, you—can act more effectively and achieve more satisfaction from life.

In these pages, you will discover—if not absolute answers—new and more effective ways of thinking about some of your concerns. You will learn about what makes psychological research scientific, and how such research can be applied to, and made to work in the service of, everyday, real-life experience. From some classic studies to current research, the objective is to present a well-balanced and scholarly survey of the field of psychological adjustment. Throughout, an attempt has been made to keep the writing conversational—this the better for us to engage in a kind of dialogue. It is my hope that every time you pick up this book, your reading will be an active experience; an active exchange between me and you. As you read this book, if I pose a question—and I pose many—try to avoid the temptation to keep reading. Rather, pause for a moment to give some thought to the question. Mentally respond to it, then go on. Evaluate and reevaluate your own thinking on the matter in the context of the discussion presented. In many instances, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions raised. What is most important is that you think about the issues.

By now, I hope you are aware that this author, unlike the man with the deep, authoritative voice on *The Outer Limits*, has no burning desire to control all that you see, hear, or think while using this book. Quite the contrary, I hope you will use the printed words and illustrations in this book as stimuli to the active generation of your own private words and images—all to enhance your own personal understanding of psychology and adjustment.

Ronald Jay Cohen  
Chestnut Ridge, New York

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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A French proverb defines gratitude as the heart's memory. From the heart, thanks to my family, with special thanks to my wife, Susan, for their constant support before, during, and after the writing of this book. Thanks also to my former editor, now good friend, Phil Curson, who first encouraged me to write this text. I must also thank Agnes Gelli at the Rockland Community College library, who cheerfully and competently assisted me in obtaining many of the volumes and journal articles required for the writing of this book. Thanks, too, to Paula Blumenthal who generously provided access to her private library of adjustment-related publications.

Reviewers play a critical role in the final form a manuscript ultimately takes. I am grateful to Rajan Natarajan for his thoughtful comments on the Appendix on Research in Behavioral Science. Sincere thanks also to each of the following reviewers for their valuable insights and comments, the fruit of which may be found throughout this book: Marsha Beauchamp, Jackie Gerstein, Victor Joe, Carol Kremer, Salvador Macias, John Nield, Robert A. Reeves, and Norris D. Vestre. Thanks to Bernardo Carducci for his most professional work in developing ancillaries to accompany this text, to Martin Heesacker for developing *Portraits of Adjustment*, a collection of Washington Post articles relating to *Psychology & Adjustment*, and to Kevin Stone at Allyn and Bacon for his editorial input and support.

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# BRIEF CONTENTS

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	Preface & Acknowledgments	xxiii
<b>Part I Perspectives: Frameworks for Understanding</b>		
C H A P T E R	1 The Study of Psychology and Adjustment . . . and How to Study It	xxvi
C H A P T E R	2 Psychological Perspectives	26
C H A P T E R	3 Health: A Biopsychosocial Perspective	56
C H A P T E R	4 Gender and Culture	86
C H A P T E R	5 A Developmental Perspective on Adjustment	116
<b>Part 2 Problems, Coping, and Therapy</b>		
C H A P T E R	6 Stress	146
C H A P T E R	7 Coping	172
C H A P T E R	8 Abnormal Behavior	200
C H A P T E R	9 Therapy	226
<b>Part 3 The Person in Society</b>		
C H A P T E R	10 Interpersonal Relations	258
C H A P T E R	11 Friendship and Love	286
C H A P T E R	12 Human Sexuality	312
C H A P T E R	13 Marriage and Family	346
C H A P T E R	14 Work, Play, and Retirement	380
C H A P T E R	15 Adjustment and the Environment	410
A P P E N D I X	Behavioral Science Research: What It Is, How It Is Done, and How It Is Used	436

xxiii Preface & Acknowledgments

**Part I Perspectives: Frameworks for Understanding**

**C H A P T E R I**

xxvi **The Study of Psychology and Adjustment ... and How to Study It**

2 **The World of Psychology**

2 **The Psychology of Adjustment**

3 Behavioral Science and Adjustment

3 Adjustment and Values

5 Adjustment and Culture

---

6 **A QUESTION OF VALUES:  
Exploring Your Own Values**

---

6 Adjustment and Change

---

10 **IN THE NEWS: Granny  
Dumping and the Sandwich  
Generation**

---

12 **The Role of Student**

12 Critical Thinking

13 Generative Thinking

14 Goal Setting

14 Study Behavior

---

16 **SELF-ASSESSMENT:  
Time Management**

---

20 In-Class Behavior

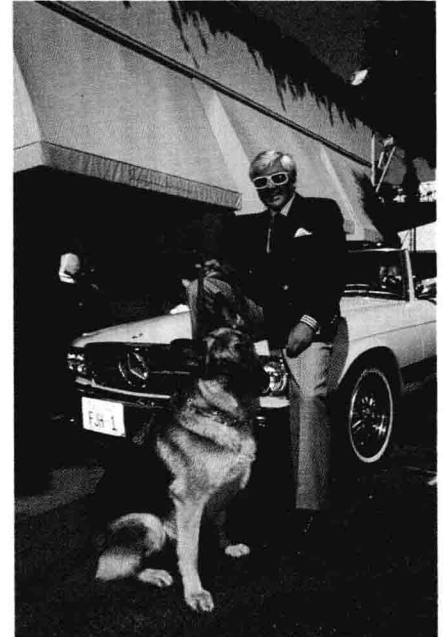
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22 **QUALITY OF LIFE:  
Memory Enhancers**

---

24 Seizing the Opportunity for  
Personal Growth

25 **Summary**





## CHAPTER 2

<b>Psychological Perspectives</b>	26
<b>What Is Personality?</b>	28
Psychological Traits	28
Psychological States	31
Psychological Types	31
<b>A Psychoanalytic Perspective</b>	31
The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud	32
<hr/>	
<b>IN THE NEWS: Mario Cuomo's Freudian Slips</b>	33
<hr/>	
The Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality	33
Psychoanalysis after Freud	39
<b>A Behavioral Perspective</b>	40
Classical Conditioning	40
Instrumental Conditioning	42
Social Learning	46
<hr/>	
<b>A QUESTION OF VALUES: Crime and Punishment</b>	47
<hr/>	
An Evaluation of Behavioral Perspectives	48
<b>A Humanistic Perspective</b>	49
Rogers's Person-Centered Model	49
<hr/>	
<b>SELF-ASSESSMENT: The Family Evaluation Test</b>	51
<hr/>	
Maslow and the Self-Actualizing Person	51
An Evaluation of the Humanistic Perspective	52
<hr/>	
<b>QUALITY OF LIFE: Climbing the Self-Actualization Pyramid</b>	53
<hr/>	
<b>Summary</b>	54



## CHAPTER 3

<b>Health: A Biopsychosocial Perspective</b>	56
<b>Biopsychosocial Perspective</b>	58
Genetics	58

---

61 **A QUESTION OF VALUES:  
Biotechnology and Genetic  
Engineering**

---

62 The Nervous System

62 The Endocrine System

63 The Immune System

64 **Adjustment and Health**

64 State of Health Affects State of Mind

---

65 **IN THE NEWS: Universal  
Vaccination for Children**

---

65 State of Mind Affects State of Health

67 The Mind-Body Connection

70 Psychological Factors in Stress Tolerance

72 **Choosing Health**

72 Lifestyle and Health

---

73 **QUALITY OF LIFE:  
Relaxation as an Antidote  
to—and a Paradoxical Cause  
of—Stress**

---

80 Values, Choice, and the  
Biopsychosocial Perspective

---

82 **SELF-ASSESSMENT: The Health  
Self-Management Experiment**

---

84 **Summary**

---

C H A P T E R 4

86 Gender and Culture

88 **Gender, the Individual,  
and Society**

88 Biology and Gender

89 Society and Gender

90 Psychology and Gender

---

91 **CULTURAL CLOSE-UP:  
Culture, Gender, and Child-  
Rearing Practices**

---



<b>Gender Identity, Roles, and Stereotypes</b>	92
Stereotypes and Gender Stereotypes	93
<hr/> <b>SELF-ASSESSMENT: Real Men, Real Women</b>	95
<hr/> Prejudice and Sexism	96
<b>Towards Gender Equity</b>	100
Minimizing Gender Differences: One Approach	100
Sensitivity to Gender Differences: A Better Approach	101
<b>Culture and Adjustment</b>	102
The Functions of Culture	102
Values and Culture	103
Living in a Multicultural Society	105
<hr/> <b>A QUESTION OF VALUES: Gangster Rap</b>	106
<hr/> Thriving in a Multicultural Society	111
<hr/> <b>IN THE NEWS: Civil Unrest in Los Angeles</b>	112
<hr/> <b>QUALITY OF LIFE: Education for Multicultural Living</b>	113
<hr/> Summary	115



<b>C H A P T E R 5</b>	
<b>A Developmental Perspective on Adjustment</b>	116
<b>Infancy</b>	118
Prenatal Adjustive Challenges	118
The First 2 Years of Life	119
<hr/> <b>IN THE NEWS: Child Abuse and Neglect</b>	120
<hr/> <b>The Preschool Years</b>	123
Play and the Preschooler	123

125	Cognitive Development
127	Social Development
128	<b>The Middle Childhood Years</b>
128	Cognitive Development
129	Social Development
131	Television and the Child
132	Challenges to Health and Safety

---

133	<b>CULTURAL CLOSE-UP: Assaultive Violence Among Young African-American and Hispanic-American Men</b>
-----	--

---

134	<b>Adolescence</b>
134	Physical Development
134	Cognitive Development
136	Social Development
137	A Time of Risk

---

138	<b>A QUESTION OF VALUES: Cameras in the Schools</b>
-----	---

---

141	<b>Adulthood</b>
141	Becoming an Adult
141	The Aging Process
143	Confronting Mortality

---

144	<b>SELF-ASSESSMENT: The Elusive “Inner Child”</b>
-----	---

---

144	<b>Summary</b>
-----	----------------

## Part 2 Problems, Coping, and Therapy

### C H A P T E R 6

146	<b>Stress</b>
148	<b>What Is Stress?</b>
148	The Physical Experience of Stress
152	Psychological Explanations of Stress

---

152	<b>A QUESTION OF VALUES: The Study of Stress in People and Animals</b>
-----	--

---

156	<b>What Are Stressors?</b>
-----	----------------------------



Physical Stressors	156
Psychological Stressors	156
<hr/>	
<b>IN THE NEWS: The Stress of Change</b>	158
<hr/>	
<b>QUALITY OF LIFE: The 10 Irrational Commandments</b>	162
<hr/>	
Cultural Stressors	163
Other Types of Stressors	163
<b>The Perception of Stress</b>	163
The Process of Perception	164
<hr/>	
<b>CULTURAL CLOSE-UP: Cultural Confusion as a Source of Stress</b>	165
<hr/>	
<b>SELF-ASSESSMENT: Hassles in the Lives of Students</b>	165
<hr/>	
A Model of Stressor Perception	168
<b>The Positive Side of Stress</b>	170
<b>Summary</b>	171



<b>C H A P T E R 7</b>	
<b>Coping</b>	172
<b>Varieties of Coping Behavior</b>	174
<b>Personal Coping</b>	175
<hr/>	
<b>QUALITY OF LIFE: Pets Against Stress</b>	176
<hr/>	
Coping by Thinking and Feeling	176
Coping by Acting	181
<b>Coping with the Assistance of Others</b>	183
Social Support	183
A Cultural Perspective on Help Seeking	185
<hr/>	
<b>CULTURAL CLOSE-UP: An Asian Perspective on Coping</b>	185
<hr/>	

186	<b>Cognitive-Behavioral Considerations in Coping</b>
187	Direct versus Indirect Coping Responses
189	A Multimodal Perspective
189	<b>Coping in Everyday Life</b>
190	Learning from Past Experience
<hr/>	
192	<b>SELF-ASSESSMENT: The Stressful Event Analysis Form</b>
<hr/>	
192	Preparing for the Future
194	Coping Behavior and Generative Thinking
195	<b>When to Seek Professional Assistance</b>
195	Obtaining Professional Assistance
<hr/>	
196	<b>A QUESTION OF VALUES: Coping and Assertiveness</b>
<hr/>	
198	<b>IN THE NEWS: Improvisation in Space</b>
<hr/>	
199	<b>Summary</b>

## CHAPTER 8

200	<b>Abnormal Behavior</b>
202	<b>What Is Abnormal Behavior?</b>
202	A Statistical Perspective
203	A Sociocultural Perspective
204	A Psychosocial Perspective
205	An Integrative Perspective
205	<b>What Causes Abnormal Behavior?</b>
205	A Biological Model
207	A Psychosocial Model
<hr/>	
207	<b>IN THE NEWS: Hurricane Andrew and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</b>
<hr/>	
210	A Biopsychosocial Model
211	<b>Identifying and Classifying Abnormal Behavior</b>





Systems of Classification	211
The Tools of Psychological Assessment	212
<b>CULTURAL CLOSE-UP: Koro Epidemics in Asia</b>	213
<b>Varieties of Abnormal Behavior</b>	214
Adjustment Disorders	214
Mood Disorders	215
Anxiety Disorders	216
Psychoactive Substance Use Disorders	218
Personality Disorders	218
Sexual Disorders	219
Schizophrenic Disorders	220
Dissociative Disorders	222
<b>Current Issues in Diagnosing Abnormal Behavior</b>	223
The Need for Cultural Sensitivity	223
<b>Summary</b>	224



<b>C H A P T E R    9</b>	
<b>Therapy</b>	226
<b>What Is Psychotherapy?</b>	228
The Person Seeking Therapy	228
The Person Providing Therapy	229
<b>QUALITY OF LIFE: A Consumer's Guide to Psychotherapists</b>	230
The Context of Therapy	232
Approaches to Therapy	233
Research on Therapy	233
<b>CULTURAL CLOSE-UP: Therapist of the Plains</b>	235
<b>Psychoanalytic Approaches</b>	236
Psychoanalytic Techniques	236
<b>Cognitive, Behavioral, and Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches</b>	238
Cognitive Approaches	239
Behavioral Approaches	240

241	<b>SELF-ASSESSMENT: The Reinforcement Survey Schedule</b>
245	Cognitive-Behavioral Approaches
246	A Perspective
248	<b>Humanistic Approaches</b>
248	Counseling and Psychotherapy According to Carl Rogers
252	Humanistic Approaches in Perspective
252	<b>Other Approaches</b>
252	Group Therapy
253	Biologically Based Approaches
254	<b>A QUESTION OF VALUES: The First Electroshock Treatment</b>
256	<b>Summary</b>

### Part 3 The Person in Society

	<b>CHAPTER 10</b>
258	<b>Interpersonal Relations</b>
260	<b>Social Perception</b>
260	The Process of Attribution
261	The Need for Consistency
262	<b>SELF-ASSESSMENT: The Social Comparison Test</b>
263	<b>Errors in Social Perception</b>
263	The Fundamental Attribution Error
264	The Accuracy Error
264	The Relativity Error
264	Other Attribution Errors
265	<b>Self-Perception</b>
265	Self-Concept
267	Self-Esteem
268	<b>IN THE NEWS: Social Comparison and the 1992 Presidential Campaign</b>
268	Self-Presentation



<b>Group Processes and Behavior</b>	269
Group Identity	269
<hr/> <b>CULTURAL CLOSE-UP: Clothing, Adornment, and Culture</b>	270
Conformity	271
Leadership	272
Obedience	273
Conflict	276
<hr/> <b>A QUESTION OF VALUES: Research on Obedience to Authority</b>	278
Aggression	281
<hr/> <b>QUALITY OF LIFE: Techniques of Conflict Resolution</b>	282
Summary	285

## C H A P T E R   I I

<b>Friendship and Love</b>	286
<b>The Need for Affiliation</b>	288
Loneliness	288
<b>Friendship and Liking</b>	289
Factors in Liking	290
<hr/> <b>SELF-ASSESSMENT: Me in My Role as Friend</b>	291
<b>Attraction and Love</b>	293
Interpersonal Attraction	294
The Nature of Love	296
<hr/> <b>CULTURAL CLOSE-UP: Hand-kissing in Cultural Perspective</b>	297
Sternberg's Triangular Theory	298
<hr/> <b>A QUESTION OF VALUES: Values and Commitment</b>	299