PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PROBLEMS OF TODAY

Michael Wertheimer and Leon Rappoport,
General Editors

Control over

Social

Violence

Violence and Aggression

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INTRODUCTION

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Psychology as a meaningful modern scientific discipline started more than a century ago. It began as the scientific, experimental study of the human mind, and was promoted by a handful of dedicated, enthusiastic people. They devoted their efforts to such esoteric problems as how the sensations of the texture, taste, weight, color, and size of an apple combine into the perception of the fruit; how many hundredths of a second longer it takes to decide which of two lights has just been turned on than to decide whether a single light has just been illuminated; or how the wavelength of a visual stimulus is precisely related to its sensed hue.

This small group of pioneers grew during the present century into an international group of more than 100,000 psychologists, most of whom had left the ivory towers of academe, and most of whom were engaged in trying to improve the human condition.

While textbooks today still define psychology in such terms as "the scientific study of human and animal behavior," few modern psychologists are actually engaged in such an enterprise. Far more of them are concerned citizens, trying to do something about the serious problems and crises confronting today's society and the individuals who make up that society.

In most colleges and universities across the United States today, psychology is presented not only as an esoteric offshoot of philosophy, not only as the experimental study of such areas as visual illusions, rat maze learning, or the memorization of nonsense syllables, but more as a discipline that may well have something significant to say about the "human condition." As a result, students have been flocking to psychology in droves; indeed, psychology is the most popular major on many campuses.

What do students hope to get from

psychology courses? Nobody knows for sure, but one can make guesses concerning at least two kinds of goals. In its popular version, psychology is seen by many people as providing the kinds of comforts and insights that religion used to bring—the sorts of good feelings, emotional fulfillments, and self-respect that now often go by the name of "humanism": sensitivity, awareness, heightened consciousness, human understanding, self-fulfillment, perhaps even love. Conversely, there is the lure of the potential power to master and mold, to create and destroy, to understand completely. In other words, there is the lure of "science": precise measurement, prediction, and even control. Probably many are drawn to psychology by the hope of finding both the gentle comforts of humanism and the powerful "certainties" of science.

Those students who are too unrealistic in their hopes about what psychology can offer them are likely to be disappointed as they delve more deeply into the subject. But those whose idealism is tempered by reasonable expectations will find that while psychology doesn't have many answers to the significant questions facing society today, it does have ways of thinking about these questions, and often data and theories relevant to these questions, that can provide very useful perspectives.

We have organized this book not around the traditional subfields of psychology—like learning, motivation, perception, personality—but around the social issues that are most demanding and important to individuals in our contemporary society. Our purpose in choosing this organization is to show that psychology does have something useful to say about such issues, that it need not be viewed as an isolated, "pure," "irrelevant" discipline.

Ours is a time of accelerating change—individual, social, political. It is a time during which young people are asking questions and seeking answers with an urgency

unknown in former times. What kind of lifestyle do I want, can I have? What kind of career/role do I want in society? How can I live comfortably and happily in the world around me, in harmony with my environment? These are crucial questions for us all in the face of the population explosion, the growing pollution of the globe, and the rapid depletion of natural resources. They are important questions because they are basic, speaking to the core of the human condition and to the meaning of life.

In the sections that follow, we begin by focusing on the individual and then progress to ever larger social issues. Section I explores the most basic question people can ask themselves: Who am I? Everyone searches for an identity; some of us have more trouble with this quest than others. This is especially true today as self-identity has become increasingly complex with the burgeoning choices of what we can be. Closely related to this section is Section II which asks such questions as: What is the nature of human sexuality? What roles does —or should—sex play in my life? Are my sexual impulses and actions normal, are they good or bad, are they a basic, unchanging part of me?

Section III moves the individual questions to a broader scope by raising the fundamental issue of the relationship between the individual and society. Particularly important here is the role of social authority in determining individual conduct. Each of us strives for independence, yet society is, by definition, composed of a group of individuals who must conform to some extent to a shared set of norms, rules, and expectations. Yet excessive conformity can become a very dangerous thing indeed.

One of the methods by which we learn to become part of society is the subject of Section IV—the social institution of education. To become a full-fledged, accepted, and functioning member of society, not only must we learn its norms and expecta-

tions, but we must also each find a formal role to play—usually in the form of a career —that complements our self-identity. In these days when there are many more people qualified for higher level jobs than there are jobs available, it has become particularly challenging to find appropriate educational channels that will provide realistic preparation for the future.

When a person fails to adjust comfortably to living or to society—for whatever reason—attempts are usually made by concerned friends, authorities, or others, to either help the person adjust, or if that fails, to control that person. Section V examines the rather impressive extent to which behavioral science has given people the power to control their own and other people's behavior. This power inevitably raises some technical as well as some serious ethical challenges: How can one person "pull the strings" in such a way as to alter others' conduct? And isn't such control a violation of the freedom of the people who are being manipulated? But the manipulation of others isn't the only potential injustice in society. As Section VI attests, our contemporary civilization has imposed some gross injustices on various subgroups, from native Americans to blacks to the Spanish-surnamed/Spanish-speaking to women. What are the manifestations of these unfortunate discriminations, and what could we do about them so as to provide true social justice for all members of our society?

Section VII addresses a major problem in modern society that affects us all. Aggression and violence are rampant not only on the TV and the movie screen, not only in interpersonal behavior, but also on such a large scale as wars between nations. What is the nature of violence, what stimulates it, and what can we do to control it? Section VIII considers related issues of the characteristics of conflict, and how different kinds of conflict can be managed. Where there's life, there's conflict. What are some

of the least destructive and most realistic ways of living with it?

The last section, Section IX, examines the quality of life, the broad concern of which all the other sections are really a part. We have evolved a reasonably good index of economic health: dollars, whether in the form of an individual's income and expenditures or of a country's gross national product. Can we devise equally useful measures of psychological health, of happiness, fulfillment, contentment—of the quality of life? And what can we do to enhance that quality for every person in the country, every person in the world?

We have tried in this book to provide the best recent thinking about the issues covered. Our strategy was to choose as the editor for each section an individual who is well-known as an expert on that topic. Each of these editors was asked to select the best recent works in the area, using as criteria timeliness, competence, clarity, readability, and representativeness. Each section is introduced by its editor with an essay that focuses on the fundamental questions in the area; this is followed by related readings the editor chose to include. Many of the selections have been edited, typically to remove sexist usage, and each of them is introduced by a short headnote that places it in proper perspective. Every section ends with a commentary in which its editor discusses the major aspects of the articles included in that section, and points to significant implications.

The content of this book should be of interest to almost any member of modern society. The issues with which it deals concern all of us because within their context we can find many problematic aspects of contemporary life. While psychology has few final answers to the problems of living, it can raise a host of questions and ways of approaching them. It can also offer an understanding of a good many interesting things.

SECTION I

SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Keith E. Davis and Dorothy S. Fidler

I have called the major crisis of adolescence the identity crisis; it occurs in that period of the life cycle when each youth must forge some central perspective and direction, some working unity.

Erik Erikson

It is easier to do one's duty to others than to one's self. If you do your duty to others, you are considered reliable. If you do your duty to yourself, you are considered selfish.

Thomas Szasz

SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Keith E. Davis
and Dorothy S. Fidler

University of South Carolina

Who are you? You singly, not you together. When did it start—that long day's journey into self? When do you really begin to know what you believe and where you're going? When do you know that you are unique—separate—alone?

The time of discovery is different for everybody. Some people find themselves in early childhood, some in middle-age, some—the tragic ones—never.

I suggest that the first recognition comes when others try to tell you what you are. And although what happened in my generation is supposed to have no relevance to what happens in yours, I know when it happened to me.

I may have been six years old when aunts and uncles and cousins used to say: "You look just like your mother!" or "You're the image of your brother!"

Now, for reasons that have nothing to do with duty or discipline in that distant day, I loved my family. I loved them because they were interesting, handsome, talented, and loving peo-ple. I was lucky. But in spite of that, I felt an immediate, instinctive resistance to any suggestion that I was like them or like anybody else. I didn't want to be like anybody else. I was Me. Myself. Separate. Alone.

<div align="right">

Marya Mannes[1]

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It is significant that a woman—a very talented social critic and observer—should crystallize these aspects of identity so well, for there is reason to believe that women have a more difficult time in achieving a sense of themselves as worthwhile and unique than do men in our society. Mannes has correctly discerned the importance of the child's acceptance or rejection of labels. In some cases, these labels will be easily accepted and will form the core of the person's sense of identity; in other cases, they

will pigeon-hole the child into an inferior or otherwise unacceptable position, and the fight against such labels will form a central theme in life.

The quotation also raises the issue: What does it mean to have a sense of identity? The sense of direction and of standards that is implied in the quoted material ("to know what you believe and where you're going") seems on a par with the sense of one's uniqueness as a central part of identity. It seems clear that a full sense of identity cannot develop without both a sense of oneself as distinct from others and a knowledge of what one believes and where one is going.

In the excerpts that follow, we have been intent on finding passages that demonstrate the universal potential for identity crises in human development. To suffer a confusion about one's identity and goals in life is not to be fixed in a life of abnormal behavior, even though much bizarre and inappropriate behavior may occur during such states of confusion. The resolution of such crises ranges all the way from creative, personal developments of ethics and life-styles that have implications for political and religious movements, at one extreme, to forced confinement in institutions for the criminally insane or mentally ill, at the other.

Most typically, identity crises are resolved through one of the common career patterns combined with marriage and a family. The selections that follow provide an opportunity to see the importance of particular family patterns, to see some of the characteristic developmental patterns, and to get an idea about the implications of particular identities for the person's life.

A particularly important place to start is with the relationship between identity and society. The very having of an identity is a social fact that makes sense only in the context of a way of life organized and embodied in certain practices, institutions, and rules. The existence of a social setting is required

for a person to have an identity. The options provided by the society in its practices and institutions are the substance of the identities that are available. Thus while many psychological topics can be examined without serious distortion by disregarding the other social sciences and the humanities, no such feat is possible with the phenomenon of identity.

The significance of this essential connection between a sense of identity and a way of life was clearly appreciated by Erik Erikson, whose formulation of eight stages in the development of a healthy personality has been one of the major theoretical innovations in psychoanalytic theory since Freud. Erikson has presented his views in a number of books—Childhood and Society (1950; revised 1964), Young Man Luther (1958), Identity: Youth and Crisis (1968), Gandhi's Truth (1969), Dimensions of the New Identity (1974), and Life History and the Historical Moment (1975).

In Erikson's view, to understand a person's life is to know how one has handled each of a series of significant life problems and how the inadequate handling of early problems incapacitates one in dealing with later problems. An example may help. A fundamental aspect of a person's relationships with others is trust or distrust. Being unable to trust others under ordinary circumstances shuts us off from a large range of social practices and experiences. But to trust others blindly under all circumstances is equally disabling, for it makes us the target of exploitation and abuse. In Erikson's view, a child's sense of basic trust develops out of encounters with feeding, bodily care, and distress-management problems that typify infancy. Not to have had a good start in the development of an appropriate sense of trust will limit the range of human relationships that the person is capable of developing thereafter.

The idea is not that a complex human problem like trust is handled once and for

all in infancy, but that certain problems have their first and most significant periods of encounter at certain stages in the life cycle. How they are dealt with on that first encounter cannot help but limit the range of possible developments in subsequent encounters. The theory assumes a succession of critical turning points at specific stages of the life cycle. Should development go wrong, a pathology related to that stage in the cycle may result. Erikson's eight stages, or turning points, are listed below. The positive capacities versus the related pathologies are provided for each of the critical periods in the life cycle. A fuller elaboration of these stages is provided in the first selected reading.

trust vs. mistrust–infancy
autonomy vs. shame and doubt—toddlerhood
initiative vs. guilt—childhood
industry vs. inferiority—later childhood
identity vs. identity confusion—adolescence
intimacy vs. isolation—young adulthood
generativity vs. stagnation—midlife
integrity vs. despair—old age

Successful resolution of these eight crises results in a "favorable ratio" of the polar opposites, a ratio in which neither extreme is eliminated, but a healthy balance is maintained favoring the positive capacity. To return to our earlier example, the dichotomy of trust versus mistrust is successfully resolved, not by erasing one of the polar opposites, but by maintaining a favorable ratio between them. Thus, a healthy personality develops from the successful resolution of dichotomies throughout the life cycle. The resolution of dichotomies in Erikson's theory of the healthy personality is echoed in Maslow's theory of the self-actualizing person. "At the level of self-actualization, many dichotomies become resolved, opposites are seen to be unities and the whole dichot-

omous way of thinking is recognized to be immature. . . . Dichotomizing seems . . . to be characteristic of a lower level of personality development . . . it is both a cause and an effect of psychopathology" (Maslow, 1968, p. 207).

The dichotomy to be resolved in adolescence is the search for identity versus identity diffusion. Erikson defines identity as the synthesizing function of the ego

". . . to integrate the psychosexual and psychosocial aspects on a given level of development and at the same time to integrate the relation of newly added identity elements with those already in existence—that is, to bridge the inescapable discontinuities between different levels of personality development. For earlier crystallizations of identity can become subject to renewed conflict when changes in the quality and quantity of drive, expansions in mental equipment, and new and often conflicting social demands all make previous adjustments and rewards suspect. The process of identity formation emerges as an evolving configuration—a configuration which is gradually established by successive ego syntheses and resyntheses throughout childhood. It is a configuration gradually integrating constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles." (Erikson, 1968, pp. 162–63)

The availability of acceptable roles in society is thus a critical factor in the search for identity as the ego attempts to integrate the personality over time and within society. Ideally, there is a synthesis of self and society.

Inherent within this synthesizing task are four statuses of identity-seeking (Marcia, 1966) that tell us "where a person is" in the process of identity formation. The polar opposites in Erikson's theory, identity versus identity diffusion, define two statuses of identity. Two intermediate points along the continuum are identity foreclosure and moratorium. The four types of identity status are as follows: