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Mastering

Psychology

Second edition

Roger Davies
and
Peter Houghton

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Preface

Each of us is a student of human behaviour. From the earliest hours of life an infant becomes curious about what those strange large adults all around are up to. It soon learns that they may bring comfort and nourishment, inflict pain or show interest; they are sometimes tender and soothing, and sometimes ill-tempered; they come in numerous shapes and sizes and are never still for long; they are infinitely complex and subtle and ever changeable.

From infancy to old age we continue actively probing and searching our own and others' behaviours, trying to make some sense of it all. Sometimes we may want to understand each other for selfish reasons so we may know how to prosper from the foibles and mistakes of others. At other times we may need to place our trust and confidence in someone, and so we evaluate them for this motive. Yet there is always the desire to understand ourselves as individuals: how we are like other people and in what ways we are unique.

Psychology is the formal science of studying people. The few of us who earn our living from such an activity, which is as natural as breathing, are very fortunate indeed. And yet the science of psychology goes far beyond that which deals with the intuitive, superficial level of explanation. The many popular questionnaires published on a regular basis in magazines entreating you to uncover the darkest secrets of your mind, or to discover whether you are a 'successful person' or a wonderful lover, have nothing to do with psychology. In much the same way as tribal witchdoctors rely upon the superstitious beliefs and faith of their patients, so too do authors and astrologers in the press depend on the fallible curiosity in all of us to understand more about ourselves and others.

As the scientific discipline of psychology is relatively new there are few things that can be said about the subject matter that are certain and known, in the sense that any scientific understanding can be certain or knowable. Psychology is at the stage where its knowledge is contained more in the pages of research articles than it is in textbooks. Whereas many of the early theories in the subject have already been discarded, and progress in our particular era seems slow and laborious, this is an inevitable process in the development of any science.

What, then, does the modern psychology textbook have to offer that press and journal articles do not? Well, the first point is that no rash promises are, or can

be, made that you will come to understand your mind or become a better person after reading it. Rather, the aim of this and every other introductory textbook is to provide a condensed and yet comprehensive account of the major theories that make up the area of study. In this sense this book is a tribute to the generations of psychologists who have already contributed to human knowledge about humans.

Second, since psychology is a scientific discipline, discussion concerning the methods of enquiry and how data is collected and evaluated are inevitable inclusions even at the commencement of your study of the subject. Finally, we hope to infect the reader with a germ of enthusiasm with which to continue the study of psychology. Although we have already said there is no one comprehensive explanation for the workings of the human mind or behaviour, there is a corporate wisdom contained in the many approaches and in the mass of knowledge that has been acquired over the past century since psychology was first inaugurated as a science.

As a scientific endeavour, one of the things that psychology is trying to establish is knowledge structures. Each piece of established 'truth' becomes the starting point for further research. Psychology's 'truths' are simply its theories, which have been verified through its research investigations. Understanding how theories are devised and tested is essential to the scientist, and so this practical side of the subject is an inevitable part of any book or course on psychology.

Yet there is no one logical order of study: the way in which you tackle this book depends upon your own interests and background. After all, the point of studying psychology is to reach some level of understanding of the entire person and so attempts to study fragments of human existence are merely to be thought of as milestones on the road to knowledge of the integrated being. Although all psychological theorists agree on the intended destination, they often disagree about the best means of travel and also on the exact route that should be followed. The student should therefore learn to cope with the conflicting theories that will sometimes arise in any one study area. In fact the ability to evaluate and distinguish between the various theories and approaches to the subject is highly regarded by psychologists and is something to be aimed at, even by students beginning their courses and reading.

This book begins by covering aspects of the developing individual from infancy through to senescence (old age). In the early chapters this is discussed with the intention of giving the reader an overview of the social and emotional development of the child and how early experience may influence later adult behaviour and thought. These opening chapters are often referred to as 'social and development processes' in courses of psychology.

From Chapter 6 a discussion begins of what are treated in psychology as 'individual processes'; that is, facets of behaviour that may be understood regarding the structure of the individual person, such as perception, attention, memory and intelligence.

Chapter 10 continues with the theme of intellectual ability but looks at it from a developmental perspective (that is, how the human capacity for thought and intelligence grows through childhood). The topic of language in Chapter 11 is given a similar perspective.

Chapters 12 and 13 are normally treated as a specialism within the subject, known as 'comparative psychology', which generally means the study of animal

behaviour with the intention of throwing light on human behaviour. This is approached in Chapter 12. The following chapter is more concerned with the discipline of *ethology*, which is the study of animal behaviour in the animals' natural habitat. Chapter 14 is about another specialism within psychology – abnormal behaviour.

The biological bases of human behaviour are an essential component of any psychology course and this is covered in Chapter 15 under the heading of neuropsychology, since its main concern is with the functioning of the nervous system in relation to behaviour. Chapter 16 (personality theory) provides a discussion of some major theories, and in Chapter 17 some selected historical issues are traced back to their nineteenth-century origins.

The authors hope to attempt to treat historical contributions to the subject respectfully, whatever the current vogue regarding their status. For one thing, many current research views owe not only their roots to an earlier theorist but also (in some cases) the original views have been resurrected for a fresh look. Sometimes the grave-robbars concede their debt to the forerunners, but regrettably such tributes are often overlooked.

Chapter 18 is concerned with applied psychology, and looks at specialist fields such as criminology, health and sport, and the ways in which psychology can contribute to the issues that arise in such diverse subjects. Continuing with this theme, Chapter 19 (new to this edition) focuses upon the application of psychology to the world of work.

The remaining three chapters examine the more practical aspects of psychology, with Chapter 20 looking at the basic methods that researchers employ as they attempt to answer questions about human behaviour. Chapters 21 and 22 are both new to this edition, and aim to help students on introductory courses with their own investigations by showing how to lay out a scientific report, and once having gathered data, how to interpret it.

The book concludes with an extensive bibliography and glossary of terms: words defined in the glossary are printed in bold type on their first appearance in the text. It is unfortunate for the student that psychology has evolved such a large amount of technical jargon and we hope this section helps to overcome this potential obstacle. And so from two committed students to another, we welcome you aboard the enterprise!

ROGER DAVIES
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