

PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology is the discipline that studies the phenomena of mental life and the conditions that produce them. Psychology differs from **psychotherapy** in being a strictly empirical field: it observes human mental processes and behavior but does not try to change them. Social psychology, which is concerned with the group aspect of human behavior, with the collective counterpart to the individual personality, stands on the borderline of **sociology**. Psychology must be distinguished from **psychiatry**, the branch of medicine which studies and seeks to cure mental illness.

History and Character of the Field. Psychology originated in the eighteenth century as that branch of philosophy which studied the phenomena of mental life, that is to say, what is introspectively observed as happening in the mind, together with perception, memory, thought, and reasoning. Only in the closing decades of the nineteenth century did psychology as an academic discipline escape from the tutelage of philosophy and become an independent department of the university, with its own methods, books and periodicals, courses, and professional societies. The two leading figures were Wilhelm Wundt and William James. In 1875 Wundt founded the first laboratory dedicated to the experimental study of sensation, memory, and learning. In 1890 James published the classic *Principles of Psychology*, which defined the branches of the discipline; the chapters of today's textbooks are still devoted to perceiving, remembering, thinking and language, concepts and reasoning, as well as emotions, needs, and motives, learning, coping behavior, and conflicts, intelligence and skills, and attitudes and beliefs in regard to social and cultural phenomena.

The growth of the discipline was accompanied by mounting specialization, and also by the formation of schools such as behaviorism, physiological psychology, Gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, pur-

posivism, factor analysis, and ethology. Behaviorism had the effect of narrowing the definition of the subject to exclude all that could not be directly observed and rather to focus on those aspects of behavior that could be mechanically recorded and measured, while **psychoanalysis** addressed those phenomena which could not be observed—because inaccessible to the conscious mind—but only inferred from the observable ones. The rigorous definition of scientific psychology came to mean that the study must be systematic, with observations made under controlled conditions that allow reliable conclusions to be drawn, and with inclusion of the subject's responses to external events or stimuli, whether occurring naturally or under the manipulation of the experimenter. Psychology remains on an uncertain borderline between the natural sciences and the social sciences, and it has further opted to concentrate on particular sets of mental phenomena that are only to a limited extent the subject of political or ideological controversy.

These circumstances, and the legacy of nineteenth-century positivism, have given psychology a peculiar emphasis on the quantifiable, so that the development of tests and scales of all kinds for measuring intelligence, aptitude, and the degree of mastery of academic subjects in relation to native ability has become a prime task of the psychological establishment, which justifies its existence by providing society with the means for determining who is qualified for higher education, employment, and advancement. This very fact led academic psychology to ignore the issue of homosexuality, and of attitudes toward homosexuality—a rather different matter—because these topics rarely intersected with the goals of the discipline as it had come to be defined. Even the specialty of abnormal and clinical psychology, which overlapped with psychiatry, since the Ph.D. in that field could practice psychotherapy, could deal

with homosexuality only as a form of pathology, as a deviation that needed to be cured.

Psychology and Prejudice. The study of prejudice against minority groups within society began in the 1940s, and received a tremendous stimulus from the publication of the work of T. W. Adorno and his associates in *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), which found common denominators in personality types that accepted or rejected individuals who differed markedly from themselves. When the subject of homosexuality became more acceptable, numerous questionnaire studies addressed the problem of attitudes toward homosexuals and the factors that tended to alter them, either positively or negatively. The evaluation of such findings suffers from numerous biases, in particular the tendency of academic psychologists to rely almost entirely on college student populations as the ones most easily accessible and also the most easily instructed in the manner of taking the test, as contrasted, one might say, with barely literate juvenile-delinquent populations. Likewise the pressure exerted by the makers of mass opinion to indoctrinate the general public with a "correct" set of attitudes on sundry issues leads to a certain conformity, as the subject senses that there is a right answer to particular questions—which may differ profoundly from his spontaneous reactions and inner beliefs.

Identity. In general, identity means a person's self-definition in relation to others, but more specifically it connotes the definition derived from membership in various social groups. Identity has both social and personal aspects, the former having to do with the experience of belonging to a defined group, the latter having to do with individual psychodynamics. The concept of social identity has occupied a central place in both social psychology and sociology. Kurt Lewin, for example, whose field theory inspired a whole generation of postwar

social psychologists, did extensive research on the psychological significance of group affiliation, especially for minority and marginal groups. Social identity is also a factor in intergroup discrimination, even in the absence of real conflicts of economic interest, and sheds light on such problems as the dilemma of minority groups, industrial conflicts over pay differentials, and linguistic differences between classes and ethnic groups.

A homosexual identity is a problem for the individual in that it entails first, the discovery of being psychologically different from the norm of the population, and second, the acceptance or rejection of affinity with the collectivity of persons labeled "homosexual" (or "gay") by themselves and by the larger society. It further imposes upon the individual the task of managing a self-concept that in many circumstances of life is perceived as a distinct liability, even an impossible handicap. Because of the attitudes toward homosexuality that have prevailed in Western society the individual with an "inner" homosexual identity has often had to cultivate an "outer" heterosexual one—to function in two social worlds simultaneously.

The range of subcultures and lifestyles within the gay community requires that the individual identify with one in order to be accepted as a full-fledged member and to interact sexually with others in the subculture. This identity must be validated not just by appropriate sexual behavior, but also by the adoption of the style of dress, the mannerisms, the argot, and the ideology of the particular segment of the homosexual world into which the subject desires acceptance. Psychological studies have focused on the process by which the homosexual identity is acquired (or rejected) and the skills needed to cope with the accompanying stigma are developed and internalized.

Functioning. Psychological functioning is another major concern of the academic psychologist. A whole series of

papers and monographs has produced evidence to support the claim that homosexuals function in the circumstances of public and private life as well as heterosexuals, in opposition to the charge that they are neurotically disturbed and conflict-ridden to the point of being dysfunctional. Some authors have even found that their homosexual subjects functioned better than the matching heterosexual control group. Mark Freedman, for example, did a Ph.D. dissertation at Case Western University which concluded that his lesbian subjects differed from heterosexual women in having more independence and inner direction, more acceptance of aggression, and more satisfaction in work. It is remarkable that advocates of gay rights have had to substantiate the claim that their constituency functioned as well as the heterosexual majority despite the psychological pressures imposed by society's intolerance, while for others no such attestation is required to seek escape from inferior status. The inferior performance of some (but not all) members of ethnic minorities is generally ascribed to centuries of **discrimination** and prejudice, but this insight is withheld in respect to members of sexual **minorities**.

Attitudes Toward Homosexuality. Only recently has the study of attitudes toward homosexuality been differentiated from psychological inquiry into the phenomenon itself. Here again, the demand for moral conformity in sexual matters made it impossible until then even to suggest that there could be another attitude than one of uncompromising rejection. Comparative studies have shown that dislike of homosexuals parallels negative attitudes toward other "outsider" groups, but with the difference that decades of propaganda against racial and religious prejudice have compelled most of the general public to profess a formal tolerance of such minorities in reply to questionnaire or interview studies, while open hatred and contempt for homosexuals can still be voiced with no social disapproval.

Hence homosexuals come at the very bottom in nearly all polls of attitudes toward minority and deviant groups. In general, the greatest intolerance is found among the elderly, the poorly educated, and those most involved with traditional religion—categories that overlap to a considerable extent—while the most tolerant are those who have been exposed to the modern psychological and sociological literature on homosexuality.

Conclusion: Structure and Limitations of the Discipline. To a great extent the discipline of psychology, emerging as it did on the threshold of the second Industrial Revolution, has come to reflect the needs of an increasingly complex society to ensure that its members fitted into the model of a self-regulating component of a production team, whether in the office or on the assembly line. Aptitude and performance tests measured whether the educational system was effectively sorting and processing the human raw material fed into it to be readied for active participation in the labor force. Thus academic psychology was oriented toward predominantly utilitarian ends, not toward idle speculation on the "mind-body dichotomy" and other classical issues in philosophy. In a pluralistic society like the United States, moreover, psychology felt summoned to address issues of intergroup relations and the tensions and conflicts which these engendered, including the relationship of the mass culture shared by all Americans to the particular value systems of ethnic and socio-economic subgroups.

The findings of academic psychology are often limited in value by the lack of cross-cultural comparison, although as the discipline grows in other parts of the world it is becoming possible to administer standard tests and questionnaires to individuals raised in very different cultures. The notion of homosexuality, which originated in Northern Europe and has only partially spread into non-Western countries, poses real problems for the

psychologist studying the issues of identity formation, functioning, and public opinion on the subject. Also, the campus-bound inertia of many psychologists makes the base of their investigations too narrow and too divorced from everyday life. College sophomores figure in small print as the subjects in paper after paper, hence the findings apply to this upwardly mobile, middle-class population. Public opinion sampling has addressed the issue of constructing representative groups of respondents who accurately reflect the range of attitudes within a heterogeneous society, but also of ascertaining regional and class dimensions of political and social belief. These inquiries, however, often lack the precision and depth of the psychologist's elaborately constructed and administered questionnaire or interview.

The number of papers and dissertations in which homosexuality figures in one connection or another continues to grow, and the stigma that once attached even to the academic investigator of the subject is waning. So psychology will in the future confront the problem of homosexuality with all the issues that arise from the subject's interaction with the special areas of investigation that comprise the discipline.

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PSYCHOTHERAPY

The effort to treat mental or emotional disorders by psychiatric means,

sometimes accompanied by drugs and surgery, is a characteristic modern phenomenon, stemming originally from a "social engineering" belief system—the idea that societal ills may be attacked and banished in the same way as public health problems such as epidemics and poor sanitation. Recent experience indicates that more modest expectations are in order.

History and Rationale. Medieval and early modern society regarded the insane as simply irretrievable, and relegated them permanently to the margins of society. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, a new group of alienists, influenced by the **Enlightenment**, sought to cure the insane by humane treatments. Their success in this recuperative effort, qualified as it was, nonetheless contributed to the growth of the idea that there was no sharp break between the insane and the mentally healthy, but rather a continuum, with various states of neurosis occupying the zones between the two poles. Human hypochondria being what it is, the spread of this nuanced view had the unfortunate side effect of causing many functioning human beings to regard themselves as neurotic and to seek psychotherapy. Also, many individuals whose problems were essentially ones of morale—an indefinable malaise, lack of purpose in life, boredom at work, the drying up of the creative impulse—sought relief from the psychotherapist as if their difficulties were medical, although they were suffering from no known clinical entity.

Recent social critiques distinguish sharply between coercive and voluntary psychotherapy. It is recognized that coercive therapy, which ranged from family-compelled visits to the therapist to such brutal treatments as psychiatrist-ordered electric shock, has been overused. Even with voluntary treatments, however, clients were kept attending sessions for years, being bled white of their money and developing a crippling emotional dependence on the therapist. To all intents and purposes, the psychotherapist had taken