

The Psychology of Everyday Life

SCH10-1

Module Co-ordinator: Ian Robertson

Assignment title:

What can study of psychology tell us about how we lead our lives?

The way we live depends on interaction with other people as well as on information we receive from the world. We form relationships, some of which are very bonded so we fall in love. Under the influence of environment we produce our behaviours. That is we find the best solutions for what we reoccupy from others and process information in our ways. Sometimes it is analytical that is we think logically, sometimes it is heuristic based on our instincts. The second one may be misleading, but very often there is no time to think. We are also able to learn and store information that draws our experience and prevents from making mistakes later on. Studying psychology-‘science of behaviour’ can give us some clues which we can use to improve our existence. Thanks to many researches, observations, and previous experience we are able to survive and exist. But it has to be bear in mind that there is no simple pattern for leading a good life. ‘Man is the master of his own destiny.’

First of all, people have tendency to approach each other or in other words to attract themselves. Psychology helps us to create positive evaluations, it is being held in high esteem by other people, shows how we are familiar to others and what similarities among us are. It also supplies us with information on psychological appearance. Study conducted by Geller et al. (1974) showed why appropriate evaluation exerts powerful effect. A female was asked to join group discussion with other two women-the confederates of the experiment. Confederates while talking with subjects treated her normally or showed lack of attention by neglecting what she was saying. Ignored women showed signs of distress. She received negative evaluation and felt unhappy. It can be even more harmful. People who are constantly ignored can produce symptoms of depression or social withdrawal.

Another factor that leads people to form relationships is familiarity. We become more familiar to ourselves when we have a chance to meet ourselves more often than usually. Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) found that the likelihood of friendships between people who lived in an apartment house was related to the distance between the apartments in which they lived in; the closer the apartments, the more likely the friendship was. Saegert, Swap, and Zajonc (1973) found interesting information in their experiment involving the sense of taste. Groups of two student were asked to rate various liquids which were located in booths. The movements of women from one booth to another were measured. Then subjects rated their attraction to each other. The study showed that the more we see or interact with each other the more we find familiar and attractive.

Similarity refers to how closely attitudes, values, interests and personality match between people. Despite sayings about opposites attracting, research has consistently shown that similarity leads to interpersonal attraction. Many forms of similarity have been shown to increase liking. Similarities in opinions, interpersonal styles, and amount of communication skill, demographics, and values have all been shown in experiments to increase liking.

Several explanations have been offered to explain similarity increases interpersonal attraction. First, people with similar interests tend to put themselves into similar types of settings. For example, two people interested in literature are likely to run into each other in the library and form a relationship. Another explanation is that we notice similar people, expect them to like us, and initiate relationships. Also, having relationships with similar people helps to validate the values held in common.

Finally, people tend to make negative assumptions about those who disagree with them on fundamental issues, and hence feel repulsion.

There is no doubt that physically attractive people are more likely to get along with others than those who are regarded as less 'beautiful' (Albright, Kenny and Mallow, 1998). If one person finds another attractive, there is more chance that the favoured person will be regarded by other people in the same way.

Walster et al. (1966) asked a group of people to dance. Later on they were asked to rate attraction of their partners. The only variable that was taken into consideration was physical appearance. Obviously there was no occasion to exchange views while dancing.

Mark Snyder, Elizabeth Decker, Tanke, and Ellen Berscheid conducted interesting study in 1977.

Male participants were told that they were in an investigation of "how people become acquainted with each other" and each one of them had been assigned a female partner, with whom they were to get acquainted through phone conversations. But before talking, each male was given a photograph of his female partner.

The woman on the photograph viewed by the male participant was not his female partner in the experiment. For half of the male participants, the picture showed a very attractive woman; for the others, it showed a relatively unattractive woman. But it was the same woman they all later had a conversation.

After the conversation, the male participants were asked to rate their female partner. Independent observers, who had never seen the photograph, were allowed to listen to a tape recording of only the woman's half of the conversation.

As predicted, the male participants who thought they were talking with an attractive partner rated her as more poised, humorous, and socially adept than did those who thought they were talking with a less attractive woman. Surprisingly, the independent observer, who had no idea whether the woman was attractive or not, also rated her more positively, when her conversation partner was given a beautiful photograph of "hers". They rated her as more attractive, more confident, more animated, and warmer than the woman whose partner thought her to be less beautiful.

People are capable of acquiring knowledge and new information through cognition. This phenomenon is one of the basic features to survive. Cognitive psychology tells us that thanks to its study we are able to better perceive world, develop language-communicate, store memory and solve problems. It also shows how we think and pay attention. Cognitive psychologists conduct experiments related to artificial intelligence as well as human one.

The essential thing for existence is memory. Human memory, like memory in a computer, allows us to store information for later use. Storage of information

involves three processes: encoding, storage and retrieval. The first one is transforming the data into a meaningful form such as association with an existing memory, an image or a sound.

Next is actual storage, which is holding onto the information. Eventually, retrieval, which is bringing the memory out of storage and reversing the process of encoding.

There are several types of memory. Sensory memory refers to the information we receive through the senses. This memory is very brief lasting only as much as a few seconds.

Next type is Short Term Memory (STM), which takes over when the information in our sensory memory is transferred to our consciousness or our awareness (Engle, Cantor, & Carullo, 1993; Laming, 1992). This is the information that is currently active such as reading this page, talking to a friend, or writing a paper. Short term memory can definitely last longer than sensory memory (up to 30 seconds or so), but it still has a very limited capacity. According to research, we can remember approximately 5 to 9 (7 ± 2) bits of information in our short term memory at any given time (Miller, 1956).

When describing STM, working memory has to be taken into consideration. Working memory is sometimes thought of as a synonym for STM. However the two terms have slightly different values, since the term working memory emphasised the active, task-based nature of the store. The working memory is implicated particularly in carrying out complex cognitive tasks. The classic example is complicated mental arithmetic, in which a person must hold the results of previous calculations in working memory while they work on the next stage.

Finally, there is Long Term Memory (LTM). LTM is relatively permanent and practically unlimited in terms of its storage capacity. We have enough space in our LTM to memorize every date, number, name etc. and still function normally in terms of remembering what we do now.

People exist also because they have goal to reach. It is our main motive or incentive, to achieve what we thought of even in our childhood. Most people in their lives want to form relationships, have a family, and find sources for its maintenance i.e. simply achieve happiness. Of course, it seems to be very hard to do so and in fact it is because of many problems we have to overcome on our route to happiness. Psychology may not help us to solve our problem, but can narrow down our notion about problem. According to definition, a problem arises when we do not know what steps to take to get the goal and what kind of action to perform to solve it. When we determine our problem we start with initial state of it, which is based on the situation and prior knowledge. Having gone through a number of intermediate problems states, we finally reach our goal state. It looks like simple pattern, but problem solving many times demands complex thinking and performing appropriate actions.

First of all it is good to categorise problem. It can be done in terms of many aspects, for example: the nature of goal involved their complexity or whether the problem tells you everything you need to know to solve it.

But being more specifically, we have extended range of problem categorisation. When have some prior knowledge that is enough to solve the problem, we define them as knowledge-lean problems.

Knowledge-rich problems are opposite, where a lot of prior knowledge is usually required. When we are given information of what steps to take to overcome an obstacle, we say we have well-defined problem.

On the other hand, ill-defined problems contain hard to explicit or unclear support for a problem. Moreover, people can find solution also in terms of experience they have. They are called semantically lean or reach, depending on to what extent our experience seems to be helpful.

Finally, there are insight problems, where the solution is instant, unexpected, also defined as "eureka".

It can be concluded that, aforementioned information, to certain extent can support people in leading their lives. In terms of forming relationships we know that familiarity, similarity and physical attractions, is of massive importance. We are more likely to bond with people who share same attitudes like we. Good looking person has more chances to attract others than unattractive one. Thanks to psychology we know that human memory consist of many components like sensory, short or long term memory. We make a use of working memory to retrieve stored information a put it to action by completing many tasks esp. cognitive. Finally, people live because of their goals. Everyone has its 'mission' to be accomplished. It cannot be overlooked that it is not easy to achieve happiness without overcoming many problems. Psychology will not solve our problems. Instead it helps us to realize that there are certain types of problems and if we categorise them we have better chance for success. To sum up, if people think that 'science of behaviour or mind' is a key for good life, they will never become good psychologists or they will not regard psychology as logical science.