

Additional Try It Yourself Exercises Chapter 1:

- To understand the challenges facing psychology, consider the following:

Complexity: Define yourself. What are you? Human being, male/female, mother/father, son/daughter, brother/sister, niece/nephew, cousin, grandchild, godchild, godparent, student, teacher, worker, friend, acquaintance, mentor, athlete, artist, consumer, employer, etc. These are only a few of the terms you might use to describe who you are. Each of these terms refers to a role, and each role is played differently by each of us, depending upon many factors. It is no wonder that it is said that we are all unique when we consider the incredible complexity of what we are. And it is no wonder that psychologists have a daunting task in trying to understand the human being.

Do you find yourself acting a little differently in each of the roles you play? For example, do you use the same words when you talk to someone in your role of friend as opposed to your role as grandson/granddaughter? Most of us change our way of speaking to conform to what seems appropriate in each role, using more colloquial speech when talking to a friend and more formal speech when talking to an older person, a teacher, an employer, etc. This doesn't suggest that we aren't being true to ourselves when we change our behaviour: it indicates that we are more like multi-faceted diamonds, having the flexibility to present different facets of our personalities in different situations.

Self-awareness: In times of stress, such as examination time in school or high volume business time at work, do your family and friends ever accuse you of 'being in a bad mood'? Feeling less patient and tolerant and more frustrated is an unfortunate but

common reaction to stress. When confronted with their 'bad mood', many people admit to it and say that it is caused by the stress. Others, however, contend that they are not in a 'bad mood' at all, but people around them are causing problems to which they are understandably responding with impatience and intolerance. Is the cause of their behaviour really from external causes? Or are they misinterpreting their behaviour to fit their theories of themselves as reasonable people? Which do you do?

Many people with little self-awareness do not recognise that their behaviour may be controlled by both internal and external forces. And many of these people fall prey to a great deal of self-deception. This can be very protective for them: if they don't admit that they have flaws (attributing their poor behaviour to sources outside themselves), they don't have to worry about changing themselves. Unfortunately, this may mean that their poor behaviour continues and leads them into problems that could have been avoided.

Reactivity: Is there a difference between how you eat when you are alone in your kitchen and when you are in a restaurant with friends? One trick that is often used by people who are trying to teach eating etiquette to others is to have the student eat while sitting in front of a mirror. We are often much daintier and our manners are much better when we are being watched, even if the watcher is ourselves!

Most of us act a little differently when other people are present, often showing our 'best behaviour.' This is a good point to remember when we meet new people. One sad example is illustrated in the words often heard in divorce courts: "He/she changed after we got married." Perhaps one person did change, or then again, perhaps reactivity was decreased after marriage and each person stopped showing their 'best behaviour.'

Causality: Why are you reading this book? Perhaps it has been assigned by your instructor. Did you have no choice in which courses to take? If you did have choice, why did you choose this course over others? And why are you taking a course in which this book might be assigned? In order to gain a degree or diploma? Why do you want the degree or diploma? For greater knowledge? To obtain a better job or advance to a professional career? Or have you picked up this book or taken this course out of interest? Why are you interested in this topic? This is a small issue, yet the numbers of ‘whys’ are amazing and none typically can be answered easily. The point is that you are reading this book for many reasons, and when you take more complex actions or make more serious decisions in your life, your reasons will be many and varied too. Everything we do and everything we are derives from many, many factors—there is never a single small reason responsible for anything we do.

We often ask people why they performed a certain action, and sometimes they respond with "I don't know." This may reveal the fact that there are so many reasons why they did what they did that they feel confused and overwhelmed with them all. Looking for a single simple answer to why someone behaves in a certain way is generally a mistake; it overlooks the complexity that we all have and may mean that we misinterpret both our own actions and the actions of others.

- We live in a world where surveys seem pervasive, from political polls to consumer surveys. Do you think all behaviours are equally suitable for surveys? Ask your

friends which of the following topics they would be willing to be surveyed on: their study habits, their spending habits, their relationships with their families, their sexual behaviour, their tendency to procrastinate, and their weight. (Note that this is *also* a survey!) Are there some topics which they seem more reluctant to talk about than others? Do you think they would be accurate and honest if a survey were to be conducted on any of these topics? Now ask them which topics they think other people would be most likely to be willing to talk about accurately and honestly. Do their views agree with your assessment of their own attitudes?

Again, personal preferences and characteristics come into play. Some people are reluctant to discuss what they see as personal topics (such as sexuality or weight) while others feel quite comfortable discussing these topics. This may also be influenced by their cultural or religious beliefs that indicate that some topics are to be kept private, even from other people who are close to them. For example, in some cultures, talking about death is considered to be unlucky. In others, asking someone how much money they earn may be considered in poor taste.