

The Age of Psychology

- Lloyd Robertson

"Glennis" finished applying the eye shadow that she had bought on the strength of a television ad which had been approved by the head psychologist of an advertising agency. She slipped into a black blouse and jeans similar to what other girls were wearing but sexy enough to be noticed by boys. At the kitchen she grabbed a quick coffee (she was already addicted) and talked with her older brother, Sam, who had just returned from his job at a mine. His fly-in schedule had been approved by an industrial psychologist to maximize work efficiency. Before leaving the house she satisfied her mother's need for affection by giving her a quick hug.

On her way to school Glennis considered the problems of being the youngest in a family with five children. At school she was greeted by a bright pattern of colors, selected on the strength of psychological research, to increase her mental alertness. Her first class was English and the teacher paced her lesson according to what she had been taught in educational psychology as a means of maintaining classroom discipline and increasing motivation. Unfortunately, the teacher had graduated near the bottom of her class and Glennis found her mind wandering. She decided she was definitely "too cool" to be interested in the Spice Girls, any more; but she found herself craving a Pepsi anyway.

After class Glennis was called into the school psychologist's office to discuss the results of some tests he had given her the week before. Glennis was amazed to learn that her interests were similar to those of sailors employed in the merchant marine - she had never even seen the sea before. "I guess I do like to travel and meet people who are really different", she thought.

That evening Glennis and a friend completed a test called "How desirable a date are you?" from a magazine. Glennis smiled at the results and wondered if she could dump her boyfriend without his "going off the deep end". Then she and her friends listened to some music created specifically for the 12-15 year market segment as assessed by the psychological staff in a marketing agency.....

Psychology is a science that studies what causes or motivates people to do what they do. Glennis began her day, in a sense, manipulated by an ad agency. She balanced many factors including the need to be noticed, peer pressure and societal norms. She dealt with the emotional needs of her brother and mother. Her whole day was a psychological give and take.

Elements of psychology have always been with us but it is only within the last hundred years that it has been studied scientifically. As a result, psychology is used by everyone who wants to sell you something - from businesses, to political parties to religions. It is also used by educators to assist students to become more successful academically; by professional sports to give their teams "that winning edge"; and by individuals who are unhappy and who wish to take steps to improve their lives.

This bi-weekly column is about psychology. Future columns will deal with a wide variety of topics ranging from the social psychology of mass movements to the terror of the individual suffering from phobias. Conditions common to the human condition, such as sexuality,

spirituality, grieving, loneliness and stress may be considered. We will be open to discussing specific conditions such attention deficit, depression, conduct and anxiety disorders.