CHAPTER 11

Personality

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Personality is the unique pattern of enduring thoughts, feelings and actions that characterize a person.

I. THE PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH

How did paralyzed patients lead Freud to psychoanalysis?

Sigmund Freud treated “neurotic” disorders—blindness, paralysis—for which no physical cause could be found and that could be removed with hypnosis. This led him to believe in psychic determinism, the idea that personality and behavior are caused by psychological factors—what one thinks and feels—more than by biology or current events. Freud held that one might be unaware of one’s psychic determinants. From these ideas Freud developed psychoanalysis, a theory of personality and treatment of mental disorders. This theory became the basis of the psychodynamic approach, which assumes that various unconscious psychological processes interact to determine our thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

A. The Structure of Personality

Freud claimed that personality develops from a personal struggle to meet inborn basic needs in a world that may frustrate such efforts.

1. Id, Ego, and Superego

Freud saw the personality as made of three basic components: id, ego, and superego.

a) The id contains the basic inborn instincts for food, water, sex, and so on. The life instincts underlie behaviors to satisfy needs for positive elements like love or knowledge, and death instincts underlie aggressive and destructive behaviors. The id operates on the pleasure principle, which seeks immediate satisfaction, regardless of society’s rules or the rights of others.

b) The ego operates on the reality principle and organizes ways to get what a person wants while taking into account the constraints of the real world.

c) The superego develops as one internalizes parental and societal values. The superego houses the person’s sense of morality; the “shoulds” and “should nots” of how to behave. It is just as unreasonable as the id in its demands.

2. Conflicts and Defenses

Freud saw basic needs and urges (id), reason (ego), and morality (superego) as competing with each other, causing anxiety and intrapsychic or psychodynamic conflicts. The ego’s job is to prevent anxiety and guilt that might arise if unconscious, socially unacceptable urges became conscious. The ego may use various problem-solving strategies to accomplish this.

b) The ego may also use defense mechanisms—unconscious tactics that protect against anxiety and guilt by either person by either preventing threatening material from surfacing or disguising it when it does.

(1) Table 11.1 describes repression, rationalization, projection, reaction formation, sublimation, displacement, denial, and compensation.
B. Stages of Personality Development
Freud argued that personality develops during childhood through a series of psychosexual stages. Failure to resolve a stage’s conflicts leaves one fixated, unconsciously preoccupied with the pleasure area associated with that stage. The stage at which a person becomes fixated in childhood can be seen in adult personality characteristics.

1. The Oral Stage
   a) During the first year of life the mouth is the center of pleasure.
   b) When oral needs are neglected or overindulged, problems arise which may lead to adult characteristics such as talkativeness, smoking, overeating, drinking excessively, or “biting” sarcasm.

2. The Anal Stage
   a) The anal stage, during the second year, occurs when the ego develops to cope with parental demands for socially appropriate behavior. In Western cultures, it coincides with toilet training.
   b) If toilet training is too lax or too harsh, problems arise. Anally fixated adults can be stingy, stubborn, and obsessed with orderliness or—conversely—may be sloppy, disorganized, and impulsive.

3. The Phallic Stage
   a) The phallic stage occurs between the ages of three and five, when the focus of pleasure shifts to the genital area.
   b) A boy’s id impulses involve sexual desire for the mother and a desire to eliminate, even kill, the father. This is the Oedipus complex. The ego represses these desires, and eventually a boy identifies with his father and begins to develop a superego.
   c) A girl begins with a strong attachment to her mother. She develops penis envy, when she realizes she is missing a penis, and transfers her love to her father. This is the Electra complex. The child eventually represses the conflict, identifies with her mother, and begins to develop a superego.
   d) Fixation at the phallic stage includes adult problems, such as difficulties with authority figures and problems maintaining a stable love relationship.

4. The Latency Period
   In the latency period, between ages six and adolescence, sexual impulses lie dormant as one focuses on education, same-sex play, and the development of social skills.

5. The Genital Period
   The genital stage begins in adolescence and continues the rest of one’s life. The quality of relationships and the degree of fulfillment experienced during this stage are directly affected by how intrapsychic conflicts were resolved during the earlier stages.

C. Variations on Freud’s Personality Theory
Neo-Freudian theorists revised Freud’s ideas, still stressing many basic ideas in Freud’s theory, but developing their own approaches. Ego-psychologists modified Freud’s ideas to emphasize the ego more than the id.

1. Jung’s Analytical Psychology
   a) One of Freud’s most prominent dissenters, Carl Jung’s approach emphasized people’s innate drive for creativity, growth-oriented resolution of conflicts, and productive blending of basic impulses with real-world demands.
   b) He suggested that people gradually develop differing degrees of introversion or extraversion, along with differing tendencies to rely on specific psychological functions, such as thinking versus feeling.
2. Other Neo-Freudian Theorists
   a) Alfred Adler emphasized that the most important innate factor driving the
development of personality was a desire to overcome infantile feelings of
helplessness and gain control over the environment.
   b) Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, and Harry Stack Sullivan argued that, once
biological needs are met, the attempt to meet social needs is the main shaper of
personality.
   c) Karen Horney, the first feminist personality theorist, argued that it was men who
envy women (“womb envy”) rather than women’s envying men.

D. Contemporary Psychodynamic Theories
   1. Object relations theory focuses on how early relationships, particularly with their
parents, affect how people perceive and relate to other people later in life.
   2. Attachment theory focuses specifically on early attachment processes and how
variations in attachment are related to different adult characteristics and social
behaviors.

E. Evaluating the Psychodynamic Approach
   1. Freud developed the most comprehensive and influential personality theory ever
proposed. Some of his ideas have received support from research on cognitive
processes. He also stimulated the development of personality assessment techniques.
   2. Freud’s psychodynamic approach has several weaknesses.
      a) His sample was unrepresentative, composed primarily of wealthy and mentally
troubled women who were raised in a society that saw discussion of sex as
uncivilized.
      b) Freud’s theory reflected Western European and North American cultural values,
which may or may not be helpful in understanding people in other cultures.
      c) Freud may also have modified reports of what happened during therapy to better
fit his theory and asked his patients leading questions.
      d) Freud’s belief that women envy male anatomy and his focus on male
psychosexual development has also been attacked.
      e) Freud’s theory was not very scientific. Many of his ideas are not measurable or
testable. His theory ignores that much of human behavior is consciously
determined and is motivated by more than impulse gratification.

II. THE TRAIT APPROACH
What personality traits are most basic?

Personality traits are tendencies that help direct how a person usually thinks and behaves. The
trait approach makes three basic assumptions: Personality traits remain relatively stable and
predictable over time; personality traits remain relatively stable across situations; and people
differ with regard to how much of a particular personality trait they possess.

A. Early Trait Theories
   1. Gordon Allport suggested how traits might combine to form unique personalities.
      a) Central traits broadly characterize a person’s behavior in many settings.
      b) Secondary traits are situation-specific, typifying far less behavior.
   2. Raymond Cattell was interested in personality traits that people share.
      a) Cattell used a statistical method called factor analysis to study which traits are
 correlated with one another.
      b) Cattell found sixteen clusters of traits that he believed make up the basic
dimensions of personality.
B. The Big-Five Model of Personality

1. The big-five model or five-factor model of personality was also discovered through the use of factor analysis. Its factors are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

2. Some version of the big-five factors reliably appears in many countries and cultures, thus providing evidence that these factors may represent basic components of human personality.

   Note: These five factors can be remembered with the mnemonic OCEAN, which consists of the first letter of each of the big-five factors.

C. Biological Trait Theories

1. Eysenck’s Biological Trait Theory
   a) Hans Eysenck’s research using factor analysis convinced him that personality can be described using two main factors or dimensions:
      (1) **Introversion-Extraversion**
      (2) **Emotionality-Stability**
   b) Eysenck argued that variations in personality characteristics could be traced to inherited differences in the nervous system, especially the brain.
   c) His theory suggests that extroverts inherit lower than ideal levels of arousal and will be constantly looking for excitement to increase their arousal. Introverts inherit higher than ideal levels of arousal that lead them to try to reduce arousal. People who are more stable have nervous systems that are relatively insensitive to stress, and those who are more emotional have systems that react more strongly to stress.

2. Gray’s Approach-Inhibition Theory
   a) Gray claims that the two personality dimensions stem from two related brain systems:
      (1) The behavioral approach system (BAS) affects people’s sensitivity to rewards and their motivation to seek these awards. People with an active behavioral approach system tend to experience positive emotions.
      (2) The behavioral inhibition system (BIS) affects sensitivity to punishment and the motivation to avoid punishment. People with an active behavioral inhibition system are more likely to experience negative emotions.
   b) Gray’s theory is more widely accepted than Eysenck’s because it is supported by neuroscientific research.

D. Thinking Critically: Are Personality Traits Inherited?

1. What am I being asked to believe or accept?
   Some core aspects of personality might be partly, or even largely, inherited.

2. Is there evidence available to support the claim?
   Anecdotal stories describe personality similarities among family members. Studies show small but significant correlations on personality test scores between family members. Such correlations are stronger in identical twins (who share identical genes) even when reared apart. Behavior geneticists conclude that at least 30 percent and possibly as much as 60 percent of variability in adult personality traits is due to genetic factors.

3. Can that evidence be interpreted another way?
   Parent-child similarities in personality may come from their similar environmental surroundings, especially from the modeling that parents and siblings provide. Compared to twins, nontwins tend to be affected more by nonshared environments.
4. **What evidence would help to evaluate the alternatives?**

Studies of infants before the environment exerts an influence are needed. Newborns do show differences in temperament, suggesting a biological and perhaps genetic influence. Studies evaluating the personality characteristics of adopted children show that their personalities are more like that of their biological family rather than their adoptive family. More research should address which environmental aspects most importantly shape personality.

5. **What conclusions are most reasonable?**

The genetic contribution to personality most likely comes as genes influence people’s nervous systems and general predispositions toward certain temperaments. These characteristics interact with environmental factors to produce specific features of personality. People appear to inherit raw materials that are then shaped by the world into individual personalities.

E. **Evaluating the Trait Approach**

1. Trait theories describe personality more than they explain it. And they tell little about how traits relate to the thoughts and feelings that precede, accompany, and follow behavior.

2. Trait approaches only give a static list of superficial personality descriptions, without clarifying the dynamics of how such traits combine and interact in a real person, as well as how such traits interact with situations.

III. **THE SOCIAL-COGNITIVE APPROACH**

**Do we learn our personality?**

The social-cognitive approach sees personality as a full set of behaviors that people acquire through learning and then display in particular situations. This view expands beyond traditional behaviorism by emphasizing learned patterns of thought as guiding actions and the fact that much of personality is learned in social situations from interacting with and observing others.

A. **Prominent Social-Cognitive Theories**

1. **Rotter’s Expectancy Theory**

   a) Julian Rotter argued that learned cognitive expectancies guide behavior. Behaviors reflect both expected outcomes and the value one places on those outcomes. Thus behavior is determined by its rewarding or punishing consequences and by an expectation that a particular behavior will be rewarded or punished.

   b) Rotter suggested that people learn general expectancies about how rewards and punishments are controlled. Internals expect that their own efforts will control events (“I failed the test because I did not study”). Externals expect events to be controlled by external forces over which they have no control (“I failed the test because it was too hard”).

2. **Bandura and Reciprocal Determinism**

   a) Albert Bandura argues that thought, environment, and behavior all interact; each can only be understood relative to the other two. Personality is shaped by the mutual influence of these elements, which is called reciprocal determinism.

   b) In Bandura’s view, one important cognitive element is perceived self-efficacy, a learned expectation that you can perform well regardless of past failures or current obstacles.

3. **Mischel’s Cognitive/Affective Theory**

   a) Walter Mischel’s theory is based on learned, trait-like cognitive person variables—identifiable dimensions along which people differ.
The most important person variables are encodings (the person’s beliefs about the environment and other people), expectancies (including self-efficacy and what the person expects to follow from various behaviors), affects (feelings and emotions), goals and values (the things a person believes in and wants to achieve), and competencies and self-regulatory plans (the things a person can do and the ability to thoughtfully plan behaviors).

b) The cognitive person variables interact with situation variables to produce characteristic behaviors called behavioral signatures.

c) The new focus is on similarities between the trait and the social-cognitive approach—on the relationship between personal and situational variables and how they affect behavior under various conditions. Four conclusions consistent with Bandura’s concept of reciprocal determinism have emerged:

1. Traits influence behavior only in relevant situations.
2. Traits can lead to behaviors that alter situations, which in turn promote other behaviors.
3. People choose to be in situations that are in accord with their traits.
4. Traits are more important in some situations than in others.

B. Evaluating the Cognitive-Behavioral Approach

1. The social-cognitive approach expanded the role of learning principles to include socially important areas. Social-cognitive principles have also generated several effective treatment methods for psychological disorders.

2. This approach is criticized as reducing humans to behavior-acquiring machines and neglecting the complexities and uniqueness of human personality. It neglects unconscious processes, subjective experiences, and genetic or biological issues.

IV. THE HUMANISTIC APPROACH

Is everyone basically good?

The humanistic approach, or phenomenological approach, holds that personality and behavior are guided by one’s unique perceptions and values, and by an innate drive to grow and fulfill one’s natural potential.

A. Prominent Humanistic Theories

1. Roger’s Self Theory

a) Carl Rogers thought that people have an actualizing tendency, an innate inclination toward growth and fulfillment that motivates all human behavior. In this view, personality is the expression of that actualizing tendency as it unfolds in each person’s uniquely perceived reality.

b) Rogers’s concept of self refers to who a person really is—preferences, abilities, shortcomings, desires. Self-actualization requires a correct self-concept, one’s understanding of one’s self.

c) The need for positive regard—approval of the self from others—also shapes actions. When others’ evaluations agree with one’s own, or are congruent, the person sees him/herself as “good”; this becomes part of his/her self-concept. When the feelings people experience or express may be negatively evaluated by others, they often are suppressed. The socially acceptable feelings that are expressed or experienced instead are incongruent with their true feelings and may result in psychological discomfort or mental disorder.

d) Positive regard is usually conditional, coming only when conditions of worth are met. Conditions of worth are created whenever people, instead of behaviors, are evaluated. Thus you may learn to believe that your worth as a person depends on showing the “right” attitudes, behaviors, and values.
2. Maslow’s Growth Theory
   a) Abraham Maslow saw self-actualization as a human need, not just a capacity. He felt it was the highest need in a hierarchy of needs that exist in life. However, people often do not seek to meet this need, because they are focusing on lower needs in the hierarchy.
   b) He argued that most people have a deficiency orientation, a preoccupation with perceived needs for material things. This tends to render life as meaningless, disappointing, and boring.
   c) Those with growth orientations focus on being satisfied with what they have, what they are, and what they can do. Such people are more likely to have peak experiences, feelings of joy over the mere fact of being alive, human, and utilizing their fullest potential.

B. Evaluating the Humanistic Approach
   1. The humanistic approach fits many people’s views of themselves. These ideas, which are consistent with the field of positive psychology, have inspired therapies, personal growth experiences, and parental techniques.
   2. Critics see the humanistic approach as vague, naïve, romantic, and unrealistic. They see this approach as giving too little attention to the role of inherited characteristics, learning, situational influences, and unconscious motivations. Some humanistic ideas are culture-specific, particularly the notion of striving to fulfill one’s individual and unique potential.

V. LINKAGES: PERSONALITY, CULTURE, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In Western cultures, particularly North America, many people develop personalities that are largely based on a sense of high self-worth. The values of achievement and personal distinction are taught to children very early in life. Many Western personality theorists see a sense of independence, uniqueness, and self-esteem as fundamental to mental health.

Many non-Western cultures, such as those of China and Japan, discourage people from developing a unique and independent self. Children are encouraged to get along with others and to avoid standing out in crowds, lest they diminish someone else. In fact, the Japanese word for “different” (tigau) also means “wrong.”

In contrast to the independent self-system common in many Western cultures, cultures with a more collectivist orientation promote personality development that sees the self as interdependent on others, each person only a fraction of the whole. In the United States, a sense of well-being is associated with having positive attributes, whereas in Japan, a sense of well-being is associated with having no negative attributes. In collectivist cultures life satisfaction is associated with having social approval and harmonious relations with others. In individualist cultures, life satisfaction is associated with having high self-esteem and feeling good about one’s own life.

Gender differences must also be evaluated. Females in the United States tend to have an interdependent self-system, whereas males tend to have an independent self-system.

A. Focus on Research: Personality Development over Time
   1. What was the researchers’ question?
      Can young children’s temperament predict their personality characteristics and behaviors as adults?
   2. How did the researchers answer the question?
      Avashalom Caspi and colleagues sought to answer such questions in a longitudinal study in which the same group of people were followed over a long period of time. The research sample included all children born in Dunedin, New Zealand, between April 1972 and March 1973, about 1,000 people.
a) At the age of three, research assistants observed them in a standard situation and made ratings on a number of dimensions. Each child was placed into one of five temperament categories: undercontrolled; inhibited; confident; reserved; and well-adjusted.

b) The children were observed and categorized again at ages five, seven, and nine. Different people made the ratings each time. The ratings indicated that the children’s temperaments stayed about the same from three to nine.

c) When participants were age twenty-one, they were interviewed about their involvement in risky and unhealthy behaviors by interviewers who were given no information about childhood temperaments. At age twenty-six, they took a standard personality test and were rated by friends on the big-five personality dimensions.

3. **What did the researchers find?**
   The researchers found several significant differences in the personality test results of the five original temperament groups. For example, those who had been classified as “undercontrolled” in childhood showed that they were much more aggressive, alienated, negative, and hostile than any other temperament group. Also, there were small but significant correlations between childhood temperament and risky behavior in young adulthood.

4. **What do the results mean?**
   We can make relatively accurate predictions about people’s personality and behavior as adults if we know about their temperament as children. However, it is important to note that, although personality is influenced and shaped by temperament, it is not completely determined by it.

5. **What do we still need to know?**
   We still need to know why there is continuity between temperament as a child and personality as an adult. The researchers proposed an explanation that draws heavily on Bandura’s concept of reciprocal determinism. The process of mutual influence between personality and situations can continue over a lifetime.

VI. **ASSESSING PERSONALITY**

   **How do psychologists measure personality?**

   There are four basic methods in assessing and describing personality:
   - *Life outcomes* are such things as records of education, income, or marital status.
   - *Situational tests* are observations of behavior in situations designed to measure personality.
   - *Observer ratings* are judgments made about a person by friends or family.
   - *Self-reports* are people’s own responses to interviews and personality tests.

   **Interviews** gather information from the person’s point of view. *Structured* interviews are standardized from person to person, aimed at gaining specific information without taking too much time (for example, a quick medical screening interview before donating blood). *Open-ended* interviews can be tailored to the intellectual level, emotional state, and special needs of the person being assessed.

   **Personality tests** are a standardized, inexpensive way to gather information. As with all tests, useful personality tests must be *reliable* (measure things in a consistent or stable way) and *valid* (measure what they claim to be measuring).
A. Objective Personality Tests

1. **Objective personality tests** ask clear and direct questions about a person’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. They are usually in a multiple-choice or true-false format, can be administered to many people at once, and can be scored by machine. The results are compared to norms, average scores from others of the same age and gender.

2. Objective tests can focus on one trait or on many, like the *Neuroticism Extraversion Openness Personality Inventory, Revised* (NEO-PI-R), which measures the big-five factors. The NEO-PI-R is quite reliable and has successfully predicted performance on specific jobs and overall career success, social status, and the likelihood of continued criminal behavior.

3. The *Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory* (MMPI), the most widely used objective personality test for diagnosing psychological disorders, consists of 556 true-false items. It has been revised and updated in the MMPI-2.
   a) The MMPI has ten **clinical scales** (groups of items that have previously been shown to correlate with specific psychological disorders) and four **validity scales** (groups of items intended to detect if people distort answers, misunderstand items, or are uncooperative). The person’s scores on the scales form a **profile**, which is compared with the profiles of others who are known to have certain personality characteristics or problems. Interpretation of the profile focuses on the pattern formed by the overall pattern in the scales, particularly on the combination of the highest two or three scales.
   b) Considerable evidence supports the MMPI’s reliability and validity.
   c) The MMPI-2 uses norms that represent a more culturally diverse population. However, psychologists must still be cautious when interpreting the profiles of people who identify with minority subcultures and may have different perceptions, values and experiences.

B. Projective Personality Tests

1. **Projective test** items are unstructured stimuli that can be perceived in many ways. How people respond to such items presumably reflects their unconscious needs, fantasies, conflicts, thoughts, and other personality features.
   a) The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), designed to measure need for achievement, is a series of pictures showing people in ambiguous situations. The test taker must make up a story describing what is happening in each picture.
   b) In the Rorschach Inkblot Test, people explain what each of a series of inkblots might be. (Scoring methods pay attention to what part of the blot the person responds to; what features [such as details or color] appear to determine each response; the content of the responses; and how unusual the responses are.)

2. Projective test results are very subjective; they are difficult to put reliably into numerical form. Though supporters claim that projective tests can measure personality features that people might be able to hide on objective tests, they are substantially less reliable and valid than objective tests and often add little new information about individuals.

C. Personality Tests and Employee Selection

1. Personality tests are used to select people for jobs.
   a) Several researchers have found significant relationships between scores on the big five dimensions and overall job performance. They have also been shown to reduce thefts and other disruptive employee behaviors.
   b) However, personality tests are not perfect tools for employee selection.
      1) Some tests measure traits that are too general to predict specific job performances.
(2) Traits may influence performance in some job situations, but not others.
(3) Some employees see personality tests as an invasion of privacy and that their tests will be misinterpreted and hurt their chances for promotion or employment. These concerns have prompted the APA and related organizations to publish ethical standards relating the procedures for the development, distribution, and use of all psychological tests.