CHAPTER 11

Personality

I. The Psychodynamic Approach

1. The psychodynamic approach to personality, developed by Freud, emphasizes the role of unconscious mental processes in determining thoughts, feelings, and behavior. (see The Psychodynamic Approach)

   Example: A psychologist taking the psychodynamic approach to personality would interpret a characteristic such as “funny” in light of potential unconscious fears or aggression. For example, he or she might say a funny person uses humor as a way of putting down people. It allows one to be “aggressive” in a socially acceptable way.

   Remember: Freud introduced the idea that psychological activity plays a major role in behavior, mental processes, and personality. Psych refers to “mental,” and dynamic pertains to “energy, motion,” and “forcefulness.” Psychological factors have energy and play a forceful role in the determination of personality, behavior, and mental processes.

2. The id, one of the structures of personality, contains the basic life-and-death instincts, desires, and impulses with which people are born. Life instincts promote constructive behavior; death instincts promote aggression and destructiveness. The id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification, regardless of society’s rules or the rights and feelings of others. (see The Structure of Personality)

   Example: Freud might say that an infant cries whenever it is hungry, wet, bored, or frustrated because the infant’s id wants instant fulfillment of every wish.

3. The pleasure principle is the operating principle by which the wants and desires of the id push people to do whatever feels good. (see The Structure of Personality)

   Example: A child screaming for a snack is operating on the pleasure principle.

   Remember: The id operates on the pleasure principle, guiding people to do whatever gives them pleasure.

4. The ego evolves from the id and attempts to satisfy the id’s demands without breaking society’s rules. The ego operates according to the reality principle. (see The Structure of Personality)

   Example: Suppose the id creates a desire to cut people with knives. The ego would consider society’s rules and laws about this type of activity, which say that cutting other people is wrong. But a person can become a surgeon and cut people on a daily basis. Being a physician who cuts people does not violate society’s rules and may symbolically satisfy the id’s demands.

5. The reality principle is the operating principle of the ego because the ego must find compromises between irrational id impulses and the demands of the real world. (see The Structure of Personality)

   Example: Naomi’s id wants her to eat an entire plate of donuts, but the ego suggests a more moderate response, which may partially satisfy the id. Naomi decides to have one donut (or two).
6. The **superego** is formed from internalized values and dictates what people should and should not do. (see The Structure of Personality)

*Example:* Suppose you are a small child in a candy store. Your id is “screaming” for candy. The superego is saying, “You know it is wrong to steal candy.” The ego decides that the best way to handle this dilemma is for you to go home and ask your mother for your allowance. Then you can go back and buy the candy, satisfying both the id and the superego.

7. **Defense mechanisms** are unconscious psychological and behavioral tactics that help protect a person from anxiety by preventing conscious awareness of unacceptable id impulses and other unconscious material. (see The Structure of Personality)

*Example:* Jansen has a new baby brother whom he dislikes for taking away his parents’ attention. Jansen would be very upset about his intense dislike of his sibling if he were consciously aware of it; therefore, his ego employs a defense mechanism, reaction formation, to push the negative feelings into the unconscious. Now Jansen is overly attentive and affectionate with his brother.

8. The **psychosexual stages** of development are part of Freud’s psychodynamic theory of personality. Each stage is distinguished by the part of the body from which a person derives dominant pleasure. The five stages are, in their respective order, oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital. Failure to resolve the problems that occur during the oral, anal, or phallic stages can lead to fixation. (see Stages of Personality Development)

9. The **oral stage** occurs during the first year of life, when the child derives pleasure from the mouth. If a child is weaned too early or too late, problems that can lead to fixation may arise. (see Stages of Personality Development)

*Example:* Bill was weaned too early, thus depriving him of pleasure during the oral stage of personality development. As an adult, he talks quite a bit, is a heavy smoker, and loves to eat.

10. The **anal stage** occurs during the second year of life, when pleasure is derived from the anal area. If toilet training is too demanding or is begun too early or too late, problems that can lead to fixation may arise. (see Stages of Personality Development)

*Example:* Art was toilet trained at a very young age and is fixated at the anal stage. As an adult, he is very neat, orderly, and extremely organized.

11. The **phallic stage** occurs from three to five years of age, when pleasure is derived from the genital area. During this stage, boys experience the Oedipus complex and girls experience the Electra complex. A fixation at the phallic stage could lead to problems with authority or difficulties maintaining love relationships. (see Stages of Personality Development)

*Example:* Eve hasn’t had a long-term romantic relationship because she finds fault with each person she dates. Although Eve doesn’t realize it, she wants people to match her unreasonably high expectations and becomes irritated when they don’t.

12. The **Oedipus complex** is a constellation of impulses that occur during the phallic stage. A boy’s id impulses involve sexual desire for the mother and a desire to eliminate the father, with whom the boy must compete for the mother’s affection. However, the fear of retaliation causes boys to identify with their fathers and acquire male gender-role behaviors. (see Stages of Personality Development)

*Example:* Little Joey likes to do everything “just like Dad.” Freud would argue that Joey’s identification with his father is a way to solve the Oedipal complex. Joey desires his mother sexually; but fearing his father’s wrath, identifies with his father instead.
13. The **Electra complex** occurs during the phallic stage when girls experience penis envy and transfer their love from their mothers to their fathers. To resolve this stage, girls identify with their mothers and acquire female gender-role behaviors. (see Stages of Personality Development)

*Example:* Little Erin likes to help her mother make dinner and clean house. She borrows her mother’s makeup and likes to have her hair fixed just like her mom’s. Freud would argue that Erin is identifying with her mother as a way to solve her Electra complex.

14. The **latency period** occurs after the phallic stage and lasts until puberty. Sexual impulses lie dormant during the latency period. (see Stages of Personality Development)

*Example:* Will is excited about playing soccer on his grade-school team and works hard to do his homework well and on time.

15. The **genital stage** occurs from puberty onward. The genitals are once again the primary source of sexual pleasure. The satisfaction obtained during this stage is dependent on the resolution of conflicts experienced in the earlier stages. (see Stages of Personality Development)

*Example:* Penny began college this year and has made many new friends. Although she is not sexually active, Penny believes that her current romantic relationship is secure enough that it may eventually lead to a sexual relationship.

II. The Trait Approach

16. The **trait approach** views personality as a unique combination of dispositions or tendencies to think and behave in certain ways. The three basic assumptions of this approach are that dispositions are stable and consistent over time, that the tendency to think and behave in certain ways is consistent in diverse situations, and that each person has a unique combination of dispositions. (see The Trait Approach)

*Example:* When people say that they have a friend who is sociable, understanding, and generous, they are using the trait approach to describing personality.
17. The big-five or five-factor model are the five factors that trait theorists believe best define the basic organization of personality. These factors are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. (see The Big-Five Model of Personality)

Example: Linda worries constantly about everything, is very talkative and outgoing, does not like to try new things, is somewhat argumentative, and always gets her work done on time. Linda is probably high on the big five traits of neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness. She is probably low on the big five traits of agreeableness and openness.

Remember: The first letters of the five traits spell the word ocean.

III. Thinking Critically: Are Personality Traits Inherited?

IV. The Social-Cognitive Approach
18. The social-cognitive approach views personality as the array of behaviors that a person acquires through learning. Also important are the roles of learned thought patterns and the influence of social situations. (see The Social-Cognitive Approach)

Example: Devorah explains that her friend has learned to be obnoxious at parties. Devorah believes they could shape her friend’s behavior to be less obnoxious by rewarding her for more appropriate behavior.

19. Self-efficacy, a term used by Bandura, is the expectation of success in a given situation. These cognitive expectations may play a major role in determining behavior in that situation. (see Prominent Social-Cognitive Theories)

Example: Jessica has low self-efficacy in interviewing situations and expects to do poorly. She can never think of answers to questions or creative solutions to the problems posed by the interviewer. Sandra, in contrast, has high self-efficacy in interviewing situations. Because she expects to do well, she is confident and approachable. Interviewers enjoy talking with Sandra because she is enthusiastic and energetic. The interviewers’ responses further enhance Sandra’s self-efficacy.

V. The Humanistic Approach
20. The humanistic approach (also called the phenomenological approach) to personality focuses on the individual’s unique perception, interpretation, and experience of reality. Humanistic theorists assume that humans have an innate drive to grow and to fulfill their own unique potentials. (see The Humanistic Approach)

Example: Perry tells the jury that his client did not take her ill daughter, Sarah, to the hospital because she firmly believed that prayer would heal her and that taking Sarah to the hospital would show that she had no faith. In his summation, Perry argues that his client perceived that western medicine would not cure Sarah and might cause her death because prayers from nonbelievers are not answered. Perry took a humanistic approach to explain that his client’s view of reality influenced her behavior.

21. An actualizing tendency is an innate tendency toward realizing one’s potential. This concept is important in many humanistic personality theories. If growth toward self-actualization is not impeded, a person will tend to be happy and comfortable. (see Prominent Humanistic Theories)

Example: Adam wanted to be a nurse ever since kindergarten, when his younger sister was sick. In his nursing classes, Adam feels a sense of accomplishment and of motivation to learn more.
22. **Self-concept** is the way one thinks about oneself. Self-actualizing tendencies and others’ evaluations influence one’s self-concept. (see Prominent Humanistic Theories)

*Example:* Lucy loves to bake in her play oven. Her whole family raves over how tasty her creations are, although Lucy’s apple pie was a little chewy. Now Lucy thinks that she’s a fine baker and a nice person for treating her family to new desserts every day.

23. **Conditions of worth** are the beliefs that a person’s worth depends on displaying the “right” attitudes, behaviors, and values. These conditions are created whenever people, instead of their behaviors, are evaluated. (see Prominent Humanistic Theories)

*Example:* Bruce sat on the desk folding all the papers into little squares, thinking that his mom would think it looked very neat. “No! Bad boy! Get down from there this instant!” yells Bruce’s mom. Suddenly, he doesn’t feel like his ideas are good ones. If this happens often enough, Bruce might come to believe that he is a bad person.

VI. Linkages: Personality, Culture, and Human Development

VII. Focus on Research: Personality Development over Time

VIII. Assessing Personality

24. **Objective personality tests**, one type of personality test, are paper-and-pencil tests containing clear, specific questions, statements, or concepts to which a person writes responses. (see Objective Personality Tests)

*Example:* The multiple-choice tests that you take in your classes are called objective tests because they can be graded objectively. Your score on an objective test can be compared mathematically with other students’ scores. Likewise, personality tests such as the NEO-PI-R, which measures the big-five factors of personality, can be scored objectively.

*Remember:* Objective tests are scored objectively. The scorer has a key that shows how to assign scores, rather than each scorer choosing a way of interpreting responses.

25. **Projective personality tests** are composed of unstructured stimuli that can be perceived and responded to in many ways. People who use these kinds of tests assume that responses will reflect aspects of personality. It is relatively difficult to transform these tests’ responses into numerical scores. (see Projective Personality Tests)

*Example:* The TAT is a projective test that involves showing people pictures and asking them to tell a story about each picture. A psychologist then interprets their responses as meaningful indications about their personality.