CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY?

CHAPTER OUTLINE

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Personality is a hard concept to define. Thinking about how people use the concept, however, suggests three reasons for its use. People use it to convey a sense of consistency or continuity within a person, to convey the sense that the person is the origin of behavior, and to convey the sense that the essence of a person can be summarized or captured in a few salient qualities.

The field of personality addresses two fundamental themes. One is the existence of differences among people. The other is how best to conceptualize intrapersonal functioning—the processes that take place within all persons, giving form and continuity to behavior.

Much of this book deals with theories. Theories are summary statements, sets of principles that pertain to certain classes of events. Theories have two purposes: to explain things that are known and to predict possibilities that haven't yet been examined. One way to evaluate the worth of a theory is to ask whether research supports its predictions. Scientific psychology has a continuing cycle between theory and research, as theories are tested, modified on the basis of results, and tested again.

Theories can be evaluated on grounds other than research. For example, a theory shouldn't be based on a single kind of information. Theories benefit from being parsimonious—having relatively few assumptions (or concepts). People also tend to favor theories that fit well with their intuitions.

The theories described in this book derive from several perspectives, or viewpoints, on human nature. Each theory chapter focuses on assumptions about the nature of personality within a particular theoretical framework. Also included are a discussion of assessment from the viewpoint of the theory under discussion, and a discussion of problems in behavior and how they can be remedied.

KEY TERMS

Individual differences: Differences in personality from one person to another.

Intrapersonal functioning: Psychological processes that take place within the person.

Parsimony: The quality of requiring few assumptions; simplicity.

Personality: A dynamic organization, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create the person's characteristic patterns of behavior, thoughts, and feelings.

Theory: A summary statement, a principle or set of principles about a class of events.

TEST ITEMS

<u>Multiple Choice</u>

(d/2)   1.   When laypersons use the term *personality*, they generally refer to _____, whereas when personality psychologists use the term, they generally refer to _____.

        a.   generic ideas about things everyone has in common; specific traits of particular people
        b.   specific traits of particular people; concrete concepts about personality
        c.   concrete concepts about personality; specific traits of particular people
        d.   specific traits of particular people; abstract concepts about personality

(b/3)   2.   The term *personality* conveys a sense of _____ about an individual's qualities.

        a.   diversity
        b.   consistency
        c.   complexity
        d.   inevitability

(d/3)   3.   In the study of personality, *consistency* involves looking for continuity across:

        a.   time.
        b.   similar situations.
        c.   situations that are relatively different from each other.
        d.   all of the above

(c/3)   4.   One reason people use the term *personality* is to convey:

        a.   that no other person will behave in the same manner as another.
        b.   that a person's actions in a situation are determined by genetics.
        c.   that a causal force within a person is influencing their behavior.
        d.   none of the above

(d/3)   5.   The personality concept helps us to:

        a.   understand the behavior of others.
        b.   predict how people will behave in certain situations.
        c.   understand our own behavior.
        d.   all of the above

(a/3)   6.   The term *personality* describes a sense of:

        a.   personal distinctiveness.
        b.   internal conflict.
        c.   morality.
        d.   all of the above

(c/4)   7.   Which of the following did Allport say about personality?

       a.   It's simply an accumulation of bits and pieces.
       b.   It is not inextricably tied to the physical body.
       c.   It is a causal force that determines behavior.
       d.   It is generally displayed in just one way.

(d/4)   8.   Allport's definition of personality includes all of the following points EXCEPT the idea that personality:

       a.   has organization.
       b.   is a causal force.
       c.   shows up in patterns.
       d.   is a purely psychological concept.

(c/4)   9.   No two personalities are exactly alike. This is captured by the notion of:

       a.   genetic differences.
       b.   differences in socialization.
       c.   individual differences.
       d.   none of the above

(a/4)   10.   *Intrapersonal functioning* describes:

       a.   the dynamic organization of systems within the person.
       b.   the interactions between individuals within society.
       c.   individual differences in behavior.
       d.   the degree of consistency of an individual's behavior across settings.

(c/5)   11.   The idea that our behavior at a given time stems from the motives we hold at that time emphasizes the concept of:

       a.   individual differences.
       b.   internal consistency.
       c.   intrapersonal functioning.
       d.   personal distinctiveness.

(c/5)   12.   A *theory* is a:

       a.   scientifically proven set of facts.
       b.   set of ideas that are not supported by scientific data.
       c.   summary statement about events.
       d.   layperson's speculation about a phenomenon.

(d/5)   13.   The two basic functions of theories are to:

a.   explain and modify behavior.
b.   describe and modify behavior.
c.   describe and explain behavior.
d.   explain and predict behavior.

(b/6)   14.   A good personality theory should be:

a.   abstract.
b.   testable.
c.   correct.
d.   all of the above

(a/6)   15.   The broader a theory is:

a.   the more likely it is to be ambiguous.
b.   the more likely it is to be correct.
c.   the more likely it is to make clear predictions.
d.   the more likely it is to deny scientific facts.

(c/6)   16.   In characterizing Freud's ideas about testability, it is most accurate to say that he:

a.   insisted that his theoretical ideas be supported by research.
b.   preferred that his theoretical ideas be supported by research but recognized that some of them were untestable.
c.   was not interested in whether or not his theoretical ideas were supported by research.
d.   none of the above

(a/7)   17.   Which of the following is NOT a legitimate criticism of a psychological theory?

a.   It is too parsimonious.
b.   It is based on laboratory animals in artificial settings.
c.   It is based on the theorists' experiences conducting therapy.
d.   It does not stimulate enthusiasm.

(d/7-8)   18.   Which of the following criteria should a good theory fit?

a.   It should be parsimonious.
b.   It should "feel" right.
c.   It should be testable.
d.   all of the above

(b/7)　　19.　A theory is parsimonious if it:

　　　　a.　can predict behavior accurately.
　　　　b.　contains few assumptions.
　　　　c.　is testable.
　　　　d.　is able to stimulate research.

(d/7)　　20.　The best theories are characterized by:

　　　　a.　parsimony.
　　　　b.　substantial research support.
　　　　c.　intuitive appeal.
　　　　d.　all of the above

(d/8)　　21.　According to William James, people prefer theories that fit their:

　　　　a.　aesthetic needs.
　　　　b.　emotional needs.
　　　　c.　active needs.
　　　　d.　all of the above

(d/8)　　22.　According to the trait perspective, _____ is a major focus.

　　　　a.　what traits are most important
　　　　b.　how many traits are important
　　　　c.　how trait differences are expressed in behavior
　　　　d.　all of the above

(a/8)　　23.　The motive perspective on personality suggests that:

　　　　a.　motives are the sole determinant of behavior.
　　　　b.　motives wax and wane in different contexts.
　　　　c.　motives are not deeply embedded in the person.
　　　　d.　motives are exclusively genetic.

(b/8-9)　24.　The inheritance and evolution perspective:

　　　　a.　is the only biological perspective on personality.
　　　　b.　could suggest that aspects of personality exist because they were adaptive millennia
　　　　　　ago.
　　　　c.　emphasizes how a parent's social experiences will influence his or her child's personality.
　　　　d.　all of the above

(d/9)   25.   According to the biological process perspective:

    a.   personality is purely genetic.
    b.   all nervous systems function the same way.
    c.   nervous system processes, but not hormonal processes, influence personality.
    d.   both nervous system and hormonal processes influence personality.

(a/9)   26.   The view that human nature incorporates a set of internal pressures that compete and conflict with each other reflects the:

    a.   trait perspective.
    b.   dispositional perspective.
    c.   psychosocial perspective.
    d.   learning perspective.

(d/9)   27.   Which of the following perspectives is most closely aligned with the psychoanalytic perspective?

    a.   the meta-theoretical perspective
    b.   the dispositional perspective
    c.   the phenomenological perspective
    d.   the psychosocial perspective

(b/9)   28.   The social learning perspective emphasizes:

    a.   constancy in personality.
    b.   change in personality.
    c.   school and peer influences on personality, but not family influences.
    d.   parental influences but not peer influences.

(c/9)   29.   According to the organismic perspective on personality:

    a.   sex drive has a primary influence on personality.
    b.   people do not have free will.
    c.   every person has the potential to grow into a person of value.
    d.   environment is less important than biology.

(b/9)   30.   The cognitive perspective suggests that:

    a.   mental organization influences how people think but not how they behave.
    b.   human nature involves deriving meaning from experiences.
    c.   personality does not exist.
    d.   all of the above

(d/9)   31.   Which of the following is an assumption of the self-regulation perspective?

        a.   People are complex.
        b.   Personality is organized.
        c.   People synthesize and move toward goals.
        d.   all of the above

(b/10) 32.   Newer theories in personality psychology tend to _____ than older theories.

        a.   explain more aspects of personality
        b.   explain fewer aspects of personality
        c.   rely more on case studies
        d.   be less parsimonious

(a/11) 33.   Accurate assessment of personality is necessary:

        a.   to conduct valid research on personality.
        b.   for making smart hiring decisions.
        c.   for treating mental illness.
        d.   all of the above

True and False

(T/2)   1.   When we describe personality, we reduce a large amount of information to a smaller set.

(F/2)   2.   Psychologists typically use the term *personality* to refer to specific characteristics of specific persons.

(T/2)   3.   When psychologists use the term *personality* they are likely referring to an abstraction.

(F/2)   4.   Personality psychologists generally agree on a single definition of *personality*.

(T/3)   5.   One reason to use the term *personality* is to communicate continuity in personal qualities.

(F/3)   6.   *Personality* refers to consistency across similar situations but not consistency across very different situations.

(T/3)   7.   One reason to use the term *personality* is to suggest that a person's behavior is caused by internal forces.

(T/3)   8.   The term *personality* suggests that a few characteristics can summarize what a person is like.

(F/4)   9.   According to Allport, personality has little to do with the physical body.

(F/4)   10.   Identical twins have identical personalities, even if they try to conceal this.

(F/4)   11.   Two core themes in personality psychology are individual differences and social functioning.

(T/4)   12.   The concept of intrapersonal functioning describes the dynamic processes that occur within the individual.

(F/5)   13.   Although they differ in other ways, all personality theories give equal emphasis to individual differences and intrapersonal functioning.

(F/5)   14.   Theories must explain complex phenomena more complex than, for example, the behavior of individual nerve cells.

(T/6)   15.   A good theory needs to generate novel predictions.

(T/6)   16.   Because personality is a broad construct, personality theories must be broad and complex.

(F/6)   17.   The explanatory aspect of personality theories is more subtle than the predictive aspect.

(F/6)   18.   The fewer things a theory has to account for, the more likely it is to be ambiguous.

(F/6)   19.   A theory is sufficient if it provides an explanation for known facts; it need not allow you to make new predictions.

(T/6)   20.   Most personality theories have some ambiguity, making it unclear exactly what their predictions should be.

(T/6)   21.   Theories should be open to the possibility of being disconfirmed as well as to the possibility of being supported.

(T/6)   22.   Results from psychological research often fail to fully support predictions.

(F/7)   23.   Good theories should contain as many theories as possible.

(F/8)   24.   Personality psychologists only use objective information when evaluating theories.

(T/8)   25.   The trait perspective suggests human nature is a set of relatively permanent qualities embedded in a person.

(F/8)   26.   The motive perspective on personality argues that motivations are constant across contexts.

(T/9)   27.   The inheritance and evolution perspective argues that many aspects of personality exist because they were adaptive for humans that existed millennia ago.

(F/9)   28.   According to the biological processes perspective, nervous-system functioning is important in determining personality, but hormonal functioning is not, because hormone levels fluctuate so rapidly.

(F/9)   29.   Sigmund Freud is most closely associated with the biological process perspective.

(T/9)   30.   The psychosocial perspective is historically linked to the psychoanalytic perspective.

(F/9)   31.   The social learning perspective on personality emphasizes constancy rather than change.

(T/9)   32.   The belief that people tend naturally toward self-perfection is one of the roots of the self-actualization perspective.

(F/9)   33.   The cognitive perspective on personality focuses on the notion that self-actualization is a fundamental part of human nature.

(T/10)   34.   Each perspective on personality generally begins with a different conception of human nature.

(F/10)   35.   Newer personality theories tend to be aimed at all aspects of personality whereas older theories tended to focus on more specific aspects of personality.

(F/10)   36.   If a particular theory does not cover the entire domain of personality, it is not a valuable contribution to the field.

(T/11)   37.   Assessment techniques often differ from one theoretical approach to another.

(T/11)   38.   Assessment techniques are an important part of applied psychology.

(F/11)   39.   Each theoretical perspective suggests different things about normal behavior, but similar things about abnormal behavior.

(T/12)   40.   Each theoretical perspective suggests different ways to promote behavior change.

Short Essay

(4)   1.   Allport's definition of *personality* emphasizes several elements. Identify three of the Ideas it contains.

          Personality has organization; it is not just a collection of bits and pieces.
          Personality has processes; it is active.
          Personality is a psychological concept, inextricably tied to the physical body.
          Personality is a causal force; it helps determine how an individual relates to the world.
          Personality appears in patterns, recurrences, consistencies.
          Personality is displayed in many ways, in behaviors, thoughts and feelings.

(5)   2.   Define the term *theory* and identify a theory's two basic purposes or functions.

A theory is a type of summary statement, a general principle or set of principles pertaining to a class of events. Two basic purposes are: (1) explain the set of phenomena the theory addresses; (2) predict new information.

(6-8)   3.   Identify and briefly discuss the characteristics of a good theory.

Generally, a good theory explains and predicts behavior. In addition, the following questions should be answered affirmatively: (1) Is the theory stimulating? (2) Is the theory parsimonious? (3) Does the theory feel reasonable or sensible? Finally, a theory should not be based on too narrow a set of information.

(8-9)   4.   Name four of the broad perspectives and describe the fundamental assumption of each.

Trait perspective – People have relatively stable characteristics display across contexts.

Motive perspective – Motives are the key element underlying behavior.

Inheritance and evolution perspective – Human nature is deeply rooted in genes.

Biological process perspective – Personality reflects the functioning of the body and brain.

Psychoanalytic perspective – Personality is formed by the dynamics of competing internal forces.

Psychosocial perspective – Relationships with others and the way in which they play out are the most important aspect of human nature.

Social learning perspective – Behavior changes as a function of experience.

Self-actualization (or self-determination or organismic) perspective – Every person has the potential to develop into a valuable human being.

Cognitive perspective – Human beings derive meaning from experiences.

Self-regulation perspective – People are complex systems similar to homeostatic systems that are self-regulating.

(11)   5.   Identify three ways in which personality psychologists use assessment.

(1) to portray personalities of specific persons; (2) to study personality variables and their influence on behavior; (3) to use in applied psychology, e.g., as a basis for hiring decisions or to diagnose psychopathology.

CLASS DEMONSTRATION 1-1

Purpose: To have students think about their everyday use of the term personality and how it fits the ideas of personality researchers.

Exercise: Have students complete the following stem on a piece of paper: "I use the term *personality* to refer to..." After students have time to write down their answers, collect the completions and randomly select a few to read and analyze aloud in class.

Results: This exercise should demonstrate that students use the term *personality* in much the same manner as do personality psychologists: i.e., to refer to the individual differences that give rise to human uniqueness; to capture a sense the consistency in people's behavior across time and situations; and to acknowledge that behavior often seems to be motivated internally, by something about the person, rather than by aspects of the situation in which the person is embedded.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Allport, G. W. (1961). Pattern and growth in personality. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Maddi, S. R. (1980). Personality theories: A comparative analysis. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.