# CHAPTER 15: WHERE WILL WE FIND PERSONALITY?

At the conclusion of the course, it is valuable to have students feel that they have learned something relevant and important. This way, they will be more likely to apply the lessons of different views of personality to ongoing issues in their lives, even long after they have forgotten the details of this course. To this end, it is useful to raise major personal and social issues.

What kind of world would it be if everyone had their brain chemistries continually adjusted or their behavior conditioned so that no one would yell at you, no one would rush to get ahead of you, no one would cry, and no one would worry whether he or she had turned the oven off? For every psychosocial problem, a pill or a therapist would be there. Even if such a world does not sound appealing, modern technology is increasingly providing us options that will allow personality to be altered. We must be educated about personality so that we know how to respond to these new options in a manner that is ethically appropriate. Each perspective teaches us something valuable, and together they provide a comprehensive understanding of what it means to be a person.

# Possible Lecture Outline

1. Who studies personality? Who cares about what personality is?
   1. Gough’s “psychological mindedness” scale of the CPI
      1. Interest in the needs, motives, and experiences of others
      2. Good judges of others’ feelings
   2. Personality psychology has implications for a wider philosophical view of what it means to be a person. The applications go into a wide variety of courses and disciplines.
2. The brave new world of personality psychology: coming developments are likely to change the field of personality psychology dramatically.
   1. Better understanding of brain biochemistry (the possibility of “drug-designed personalities”)
      1. Use of psychedelic substances such as peyote for hundreds of years
      2. Use of amphetamines, tranquilizers, etc. to treat mental problems
         1. Leary’s experiments with LSD
      3. Use of “designer drugs” (such as Prozac) to alter personality
   2. Social engineering: more accurate societal control of environmental contingencies, resulting in better ability to control individual behavior
   3. Knowledge of the human genetic code (i.e., behavioral genomics) may change our views of the genetic bases of personality.
      1. Cartesian dualism: knowing that the mind has a physical basis doesn’t mean that the mind is simply biology.
      2. Genetics do affect brain and body development, thereby influencing some aspects of personality directly (such as by impacting activity level) and others indirectly (such as by impacting physical appearance, which influences how we are treated and how we act in return).
3. Can a person change his or her personality?
   1. Through external forces (drugs, surgery, extreme conditioning, gene replacement)
   2. Through changes in habits, beliefs, people and situations chosen, interactional style, goals, interpretations of the world and of the self
4. Practical applications of personality psychology
   1. Employers deciding whom to hire
   2. Online dating and matchmaking services
   3. Law enforcement screening for potentially violent individuals
   4. Politicians and salespeople
5. The Eight Perspectives Revisited
   1. Psychoanalytic, neo-analytic/ego, biological, learning, cognitive, trait, humanistic/existential, and interactionist
   2. Which perspective is most correct?
      1. The perspectives are really philosophies rather than testable theories, although some do yield testable hypotheses.
      2. It’s important to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.
   3. Should our goal be to merge all the perspectives? Should each person develop his/her own eclectic view of personality?

# Classroom Activities, Discussion Topics, and Projects

1. With the increasing computer capabilities of the modern age, all sorts of information about each of us is constantly being gathered and stored. Our purchases, newspaper and magazine subscriptions, music downloads, and frequently visited restaurants are recorded. What are the implications in terms of behavioral manipulation? How might knowing what we like/value/need allow others to control our behavior?

2. Just as many animals are bred to have certain characteristics, we may, at some point in the future, be faced with the ethical issues of genetically engineering people in the same way. With recent advances in cloning research, we are fast approaching this day. What are the ramifications of such science?

3. Using the worksheet on the following page, “Worksheet for Comparing the Perspectives,” have the students evaluate the same ten statements about personality from each of the eight perspectives. This can be done as a whole-class activity, with students suggesting and justifying a rating for each item, or the worksheet can first be filled out individually or in small groups, and then discussed by the class.

4. Divide the class into eight groups. Assign each group one of the eight perspectives on personality that we have discussed in this text: psychoanalytic, neoanalytic, biological, learning, cognitive, trait, humanistic, and interactionist. Give each group about 20 minutes to discuss the main strengths and weaknesses of the perspective they were assigned. Have a spokesperson from each group share what their group has discussed. Use this exercise to reiterate the many different perspectives discussed in class. This activity provides a good segue to a discussion about which theories are most/least useful, etc.

5. Ask students to bring in news stories (from the newspaper or the news on T.V.) that are relevant to personality psychology. Have the class discuss how the different perspectives can help us to make sense of these specific events going on in the world around us.

6. As a final project — one that might be valuable for more than an in-class activity — have students consider what, if any, aspects of personality have not been adequately covered by the perspectives that were addressed in the course. As a higher level of challenge, students can be asked to construct their own theory of personality based both on the perspectives they’ve learned as well as their own autobiographical experiences. Such an assignment would be very relative in terms of grading — focusing on critical thinking skills and appropriate application of material rather than “correct” use of specific life experiences.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Psychoanalytic | Neo-Analytic | Biological | Behaviorist | Cognitive | Trait | Humanistic | Interactionist |
| People behave People behave consistently across situations. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| People can change over time. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| The laws of behavior apply uniformly to all people. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| People are motivated to improve themselves. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| How a person is at birth determines his or her personality for life. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Events early in life have lasting psychological effects. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| People are motivated more by pleasure than by rules. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| People across all cultures are basically the same. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| With the proper experiences, any person could be capable of works of genius like those of Mozart, Einstein, Rembrandt, or Shakespeare. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Men and women differ psychologically even without any effects of culture. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

# Worksheet for Comparing the Perspectives (graph appears above)

Evaluate each of the statements below as though you were a proponent of the perspective listed at the top of the column, using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means “not at all true in this theory” and 7 means “completely true in this theory.” Do the perspectives one at a time, going down each column before moving on to the next perspective.

# Recommended Outside Readings

Funder, D. C. (2001). Personality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*, 197–221.

Hogan, R., Johnson, J., & Briggs, S. (Eds.) (1997). *Handbook of personality psychology*. San Diego: Academic Press.

John, O. P., Robins, R. W., & Pervin, L. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Kramer, P. D. (1993). *Listening to Prozac*. New York: Viking.

Pervin, L. A. (1985). Personality: Current controversies, issues, and directions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *36*, 83–114.

Pervin, L .A. (1990). Personality theory and research: Prospects for the future. In L .A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality theory and research*. New York: Guilford.

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Sulston, J., & Ferry, G. (2002). *The common thread: A story of science, politics, ethics, and the human genome*. Washington, DC: National Academic Press.

Wertz, D. C., & Fletcher, J. C. (2004). *Genetics and ethics in global perspective*. Boston: Kluwer Academic.