CHAPTER ONE
Studying Personality: Assessment, Research, and Theory

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the development of the history of personality.

2. Explain the definitions of psychology.

3. Describe how ethnic and gender issues affect personality development.

4. Describe the concepts of assessment and research in the study of personality.

5. Explain and give examples of various types of assessment instruments used in studying personality.

6. Describe the theories of personality and inquire about human nature by asking questions for further discussion throughout the pages of this text.

OUTLINE

I.   The Study of Personality

    A.   The Place of Personality in the History of Psychology

        1.   Psychology emerged from ideas borrowed from philosophy and physiology to become an independent and primarily experimental science. In the early 20th century, Wilhelm Wundt was largely responsible for this development as he established the first psychology laboratory. Concerned with studying human behavior, psychologists studied only those processes which could be controlled or manipulated by the experimenter.

        2.   John B. Watson, an American psychologist, opposed Wundt's focus on conscious experience. Watson's movement was called **behaviorism**. Behaviorism presents a mechanistic picture of human beings as well-ordered machines that automatically respond to external stimuli.

        3.   Freud called his theory of personality **psychoanalysis**. Psychoanalysis was based on his clinical observations of his patient's feelings and past experiences, which he creatively interpreted.

        4.   In the 1930s, Gordon Allport formalized and systematized the study of personality in American psychology. Since Allport's

time, the study of personality includes the life span approach, the trait approach, the humanistic approach, the cognitive approach, as well as psychoanalysis and behaviorism.

B.   Definitions of Personality

1.   Personality is derived from the Latin word *persona*, which refers to a mask used by actors in a play. We may conclude that personality refers to our external and visible characteristics, (the aspects of us that other people can see). However, the word *personality* may refer to enduring characteristics, which may be stable or not stable over a person's life. A definition of *personality* could be "an enduring and unique cluster of characteristics that may change in response to different situations."

C.   Personality: the Internet, and Social Networking

1.   Research shows that most people are honest about their online faces. Studies suggest that social networking sites do convey accurate images or impressions of the personality profiles we offer, however; a person may want to impress others. Researchers have shown that online social networking sites like Facebook can both shape and reflect our personalities.

C.   Ethnic and Gender Issues in Personality

1.   Most early studies by personality theorists used participants that were nearly all white men of European or American heritage. The study of ethnic minorities was limited. And yet, the personality theorists would imply that their scientific findings concerning personality were valid for **all** people, regardless of gender, race, or ethnic origin. Today, research across cultures, naturalistic observations, and our own experiences tell us that culture and ethnic issues really impact personality.

D.   Assessment in the Study of Personality

1.   Assessment measures are vital in our attempt to understand personality by differentiating between normal and abnormal behaviors and feelings. Clinicians are able to diagnose disorders and determine the best course of therapy. School psychologists assess student learning problems; counseling psychologists measure job applicants for certain employment requirements. Psychologists conducting research assess the participants to account for their behavior in an experiment or to correlate their personality traits with other measurements.

2.   *Standardization* involves the consistency or uniformity of conditions and procedures for administering a test. Everyone

taking a test must take the test under the same conditions and in the same or similar environment as others. *Reliability* involves the consistency of response to an assessment device. There are several methods to determine the reliability of a test before use. The *test-retest method* involves giving a subject the same test twice over a period of time to see if the two sets of scores on the tests are highly correlated. Reliability is further measured by the use of the *equivalent-forms method*, which consists of two comparable forms of a test. The *split-halves method* is where a test is administered once and then the scores of half the test are compared with the scores of the other half. *Validity* refers to whether the assessment device measures what it is intended to measure. A good test must first have good validity and good reliability. *Predictive validity* is a prediction, (before the test is given) on how well future behavior can be predicted by the test scores. *Content validity* refers to the test's individual items or questions, and whether or not they describe behavior accurately like we want them to do. *Construct validity* relates to a test's ability to measure a construct, such as a question concerning behavior, like a trait or motive.

3.   The *self-report inventory* approach involves a paper-and-pencil type test which subjects complete by themselves about their own behavior and feelings. The *Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)* is the most widely used psychological test. A true-false test consisting of 567 statements for assessing personality issues, this test is a valid measure that can discriminate between neurotics and psychotics and between emotionally healthy and emotionally disturbed persons (MMPI-2). The *California Psychological Inventory* (CPI) provides 17 personality dimensions. These self-report measures are objective in their scoring and have led to the widespread use of automated personality assessment programs on a computer. However, research has shown that minor changes in the wording of such tests can lead to major changes in the results. A test-taker may give more socially acceptable answers, especially when taking tests for employment. Many Self-Report Inventories can be taken on a computer laptop, easing the constraints of administration with no significant difference in results over paper and pencil tests. Test-takers report greater privacy and a sense of anonymity when revealing personal information.

4.   Projective techniques were developed to probe into the unconscious and were inspired by Freud's work. The tests present a stimulus, such as an inkblot or a picture which can then be interpreted, especially with those who may be emotionally disturbed. **Projective tests** are subjective and are **not** high in reliability or validity. The *Rorschach Inkblot Technique* is a test with 10 cards of black and sometimes

colored ink. The subject is asked what they perceive in the inkblots. Responses are interpreted by the examiner. Several interpretation systems are available for scoring the Rorschach but it is a less valid test than the MMPI. The *Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)* consists of 20 vague pictures. The subject is asked to make up a story about what they perceive in the pictures. The interpreter subjectively scores the TAT and these scores are used to measure specific aspects of personality, such as the needs for achievement, affiliation and power. Word associations and sentence completions require emotional responses from the client; however, interpretation of results can be highly subjective. **Clinical interviews**, along with psychological tests, help evaluate the effects of past and present life experiences, general appearance, behavior, degree of self-insight and contact with reality.

5. **Behavior assessments** are given with the use of questionnaires, while positive and negative experiences are observed in the use of thought sampling. This procedure is typically used with groups.

6. According to the authors, the assessment of personality can be influenced by a person's gender. For example, women score higher in depression, anxiety, and related disorders than men. More women are seen in therapy and for longer periods of time than men.

7. Some personality tests have been translated for use in other cultures; however there might be potential problems with "westernizing" important personality characteristics such as close family orientation, emphasizing harmony with others, and showing frugality in everyday lives. These values are important to Asian cultures, but not as valued in western cultures. When using assessment measures, the authors caution that psychological assessment techniques were developed largely for middle-class European-American populations. Cultural variations, various religious viewpoints and diversity must also be considered in the evaluative process. This requires knowledge of cultural differences and sensitivity in the assessment process.

E. Research in the Study of Personality

1. The *clinical method* used in personality research is the **case study**, which researches patients' past and present to help with their emotional problems. Freud used psychoanalysis in his case studies to develop his theory of personality. Here, the psychologists would use techniques such as dream analysis, tests, and interviews to obtain data for assessment. However,

the type of data obtained could be less accurate than either the experimental or correlational methods and could lead to different interpretations. For example, memories from childhood that are remembered as an adult may become distorted with time. One cannot control the preciseness of their own memories of the past when compared to memories that others have of the same life events.

2. There are two kinds of variables in an experiment. One is the **independent or stimulus variable**, which is manipulated by the experimenter. The **dependent variable** is the research participants' behavior or response to that manipulation. The **experimental group** includes the research participants to whom the experimental treatment is given, while the **control group** is not exposed to the independent variable.

3. The **correlational method** investigates the relationships that exist among variables and how behavior on one variable changes or differs as a function of the other variable. The reliability and validity of assessment devices are typically determined through the correlational method. The statistical measure we use to compare the variables is the **correlation coefficient**. The relationship of the variables could be positive or negative, with a perfect correlation having a correlation coefficient of +1.00 or -1.00. The stronger the relationship, the more confident we become in making predictions about one variable to another. We cannot determine cause and effect with correlational research. Even though there may be a strong relationship between variables, this does not mean that one caused the other.

F. Theory in the Study of Personality

1. Theories are sets of principles used to explain a particular class of phenomena, such as behaviors and experiences relating to personality. Researchers must be able to conduct experiments to determine whether aspects of the theory should be accepted or rejected.

2. **Formal** theories are based on data from observations of large numbers of persons. We can generalize from formal theories more effectively to explain and predict the behavior of more kinds of people. **Personal** theories are based on ourselves and others. With personal theories, we tend to evaluate our reactions to people we study with our own personal thoughts and feelings.

3. The intent of formal theories is greater objectivity; personal theories tend to be more subjective. Personality theories are

more subjective and may relate events in a theorist's life, much like an autobiography. The first stage in constructing a theory may be based on intuition, which is later modified and refined by the theorist's knowledge and experience. There is a sense of the autobiographical nature of personality in this text. There may also be distortions or errors in our information about a theorist.

G. Questions about Human Nature

1. Each theorist has a conception of human nature. The study of these different theories allows meaningful comparisons of human nature.

2. The question of whether or not we as humans have free will or not is addressed by theorists in the text. The second area of questioning is with nature or nurture. Do our abilities, temperaments, and predispositions determine our personality, or are we influenced mainly by our parents, education, and training? Do past events, such as experiences in early childhood, shape our personalities to the point that is critical for personality development? This view is known as **historical determinism**. The opposite position considers personality to be more independent of the past, capable of being influenced by events and experiences in the present as well as the future. Is human nature unique or universal? Theorists differ on what constitutes our major motivation in life. Are we like machines that only seek equilibrium or balance? Are we optimistic or pessimistic? The final question addressed in this text is in terms of cultural influences. Are we influenced by culture, religion, individualism, or groupness? The impact of cultural issues in personality development has been seen to be significant in research.

LECTURE TOPIC 1.1

My own Theory of Personality

Students are to create (in groups or individually) their idea of the "perfect" person. Have the groups or individuals brainstorm ideas to come up with a list of traits that describe this "perfect" individual. An artistic rendering by the group or individual would be an added ingredient as a visual report for the entire class when reporting on their findings. Part of the purpose of this exercise is for the student to understand what a personality theorist needs to do in order to create their own theory. Elements of the "perfect" person may be drawn from characteristics in genetics, the influence of the environment, traits, and/or cultural and ethnic background.