

born with this vulnerability faces a much greater likelihood than the average individual of reacting to stressful life events with depression. Because of this inherited tendency, these people often experience repeated bouts of depression throughout their lives.

Humanistic personality theorists explain depression in terms of self-esteem. That is, people who frequently suffer from depression are those who have failed to develop a good sense of their self-worth. A person's level of self-esteem is established while growing up and, like other personality concepts, is fairly stable across time and situations. The ability to accept oneself, even one's faults and weaknesses, is an important goal for humanistic therapists when dealing with clients suffering from depression.

Psychologists from the behavioral/social learning approach point to learning histories as a cause of depression. Behaviorists argue that depression results from a lack of positive reinforcers in a person's life. That is, you may feel down and unmotivated because you see few activities in your life worth doing. A more extensive behavioral model of depression, covered in Chapter 14, proposes that depression develops from experiences with aversive situations over which people have little control. This theory maintains that exposure to uncontrollable events creates a perception of helplessness that is generalized to other situations and may develop into classic symptoms of depression.

Cognitive personality psychologists argue that some people are prone to episodes of depression because of the way they process information. Depressed individuals have negative thoughts about themselves, are pessimistic about the future, and tend to interpret events in a negative manner. Cognitive psychologists maintain that some individuals use a depressive filter to interpret and process information. Depressed people can easily recall unhappy experiences and are prepared to see the world in the most depressing terms possible.

Which of these accounts of depression strikes you as the most accurate? If you have been depressed, was it because of your low self-esteem, because you experienced an uncontrollable situation, or because you tend to look at the world through a depressing lens? As in the aggression example, more than one of these approaches may be correct. You may have found that one theory could explain an experience you had with depression last year, whereas another seems to better account for a more recent bout. In addition, the theories can at times complement each other. For example, people might interpret events in a depressing way because of their low self-esteem.

One more lesson can be taken from these two examples: You need not align yourself with the same approach to personality when explaining different phenomena. For example, you may have found that the cognitive explanation for aggression made the most sense to you, but that the humanistic approach provided the best account of depression. This observation demonstrates the main point of this section: Each of the six approaches has something to offer the student interested in understanding personality.

Personality and Culture

Psychologists have increasingly recognized the important role culture plays in understanding personality. To some students, this observation at first seems inconsistent with the notion of personality as distinct from situational influences

on behavior. However, psychologists now recognize that many of the assumptions people in Western developed countries make when describing and studying personality may not apply when dealing with people from different cultures (Benet-Martinez & Oishi, 2008; Cheung, van de Vijver, & Leong, 2011). It is not just that different experiences in different cultures affect how personalities develop. Rather, psychologists have come to see that people and their personalities exist within a cultural context.

Perhaps, the most important distinction cross-cultural researchers make is between individualistic cultures and collectivist cultures (Triandis, 2001). **Individualistic cultures**, which include most Northern European countries and the United States, place great emphasis on individual needs and accomplishments. People in these cultures like to think of themselves as independent and unique. In contrast, people in **collectivist cultures** are more concerned about belonging to a larger group, such as a family, tribe, or nation. These people are more interested in cooperation than competition. They obtain satisfaction when the group does well rather than from individual accomplishments. Many Asian, African, Central American, and South American countries fit the collectivist culture description.

Concepts commonly studied by personality psychologists in individualistic countries often take on very different meanings when examined in collectivist cultures. For example, research reviewed in Chapter 12 suggests that the Western notion of self-esteem is based on assumptions about personal goals and feelings of uniqueness that may not apply to people in many other countries (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Similarly, Western psychologists studying achievement motivation sometimes try to predict who will get ahead in academic or business situations. However, this definition of achievement and success is not shared universally. In some collectivist cultures, success means cooperation and group accomplishments. Personal recognition may even be frowned upon. We also need to consider the culture a person comes from when identifying and treating psychological disorders (Benish, Quintana, & Wampold, 2011; Draguns, 2008; Ibaraki & Hall, 2014). For example, behavior that suggests excessive dependency or an exaggerated sense of self in one culture might reflect good adjustment in another.

In short, it is worth remembering that most of the theories and much of the research covered in this book are based on observations in individualistic cultures. In fact, most of this work was conducted in the United States, the country that was found in one study to be the most individualistic of 41 nations examined (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). This does not mean the research should be dismissed. Rather, we should keep in mind that whether a particular description applies to people in all cultures remains an open question. In some cases, such as the research on dream content presented in Chapter 4 and the studies on marriage patterns presented in Chapter 10, investigators find nearly identical results across very different cultural groups. In other cases, such as in the self-esteem and achievement examples, they find important differences among cultures. Identifying the cultural limitations or universality of various phenomena provides additional insight into the nature of the concepts we study.

The Study of Personality: Theory, Application, Assessment, and Research

If you spend a few minutes looking through the table of contents, you will notice that this book is divided into sections. Each section presents one of the different approaches to personality, although the psychoanalytic approach is divided into two sections, Freudian and neo-Freudian. Within each of these seven sections, you will find the four components necessary for a complete understanding of personality—theory, application, assessment, and research.

The first chapter of each section begins with a presentation of theory. Each of the personality theorists covered in these pages presents a comprehensive model for how human personality is structured and how it operates. Next comes an example of how psychologists apply the theory and research findings to questions that directly affect people’s lives. These applications include psychotherapy, education, religion, and performance at work. The first chapter of each section ends with a discussion of how psychologists from that approach measure the personality constructs of interest to them. You will also notice as you make your way through this book that examples of personality assessment are scattered throughout. If you take the time to try each of

“There can scarcely be anything more familiar than human behavior. Nor can there be anything more important. Nonetheless, it is certainly not the thing we understand best.”

B. F. Skinner



Jerry Burger

It’s difficult to make it through college without taking a personality test somewhere along the way. One reason that self-report inventories are frequently used in personality research can be seen here—researchers can quickly collect information from a large number of people.

these inventories, not only will you obtain a better understanding of how psychologists from the different approaches measure personality, but you will also gain insight into your own personality. As you complete each inventory, you can record your scores in the Appendix of this book.

Finally, the second chapter within each of the seven sections is devoted entirely to research relevant to that approach. Personality psychology is, after all, a science. Each research chapter is organized around a few topics that have been studied extensively by personality psychologists, such as social anxiety, gender roles, and loneliness. As you will see, sometimes this research tests principles and assumptions central to the theory; other times researchers are interested in exploring some of the concepts introduced by the personality theory. By examining a handful of research topics in depth for each of the approaches, you will see how theories generate research and how the findings from one study typically lead to new questions and more research.

Summary

1. Personality psychology is concerned with the differences among people. Although there is no agreed-upon definition, personality is defined here as consistent behavior patterns and intrapersonal processes originating within the individual.
2. For convenience, the many theories of personality are divided into six general categories: the psychoanalytic, trait, biological, humanistic, behavioral/social learning, and cognitive approaches. Each approach provides a different focus for explaining individual differences in behavior. The six approaches can be thought of as complementary models for understanding human personality, although occasionally they present competing accounts of behavior.
3. Personality psychologists need to consider the culture from which an individual comes. Most of the findings reported in this book are based on research in individualistic cultures, such as the United States. However, these results don't always generalize to people in collectivist cultures.
4. A thorough understanding of human personality requires more than the study of theory. Consequently, we'll also examine how each of the approaches is applied to practical concerns, how each deals with personality assessment, and some of the research relevant to the issues and topics addressed by the theories.

Key Terms

collectivist culture (p. 10)

individualistic culture (p. 10)

personality (p. 4)