

PART

IV

Conclusions

A Final Word

- ◆ *Evaluation of Personality Theories*
- ◆ *Theorists of Personality*
- ◆ *Future Directions*

In the first chapter, we defined scientific theory as a set of related assumptions that allow scientists to use logical deductive reasoning to formulate testable hypotheses. Chapters 2 through 18 examined in some detail 23 of the most important personalities of the past 100 years. In this chapter, we evaluate these theories, discuss the importance of the theorist's own personality in shaping a personality theory, and briefly speculate on the future directions of personality theory.

Evaluation of Personality Theories

In Chapter 1, we said that a useful theory must be evaluated against six criteria; that is, it should (1) generate research, (2) be falsifiable, (3) organize knowledge, (4) guide action, (5) be internally consistent, and (6) be as parsimonious as possible.

First, how well do current personality theories generate research? Although much of current psychological research is without theoretical focus, a significant portion has been stimulated by attempts to test hypotheses drawn from established theories, including those within the scope of personality. Of the personality theories discussed in this book, those of Freud, Adler, Jung, Skinner, Bandura, Rotter, Mischel, Eysenck, McCrae and Costa, Allport, Rogers, and Maslow have led to the most research, with the names Skinner, Bandura, Eysenck, McCrae and Costa, and Rotter appearing in the scientific literature more than any of the others.

The second criterion of a useful theory is falsifiability, but by this standard personality theories generally do not fare well. For example, Freud's theory alone has generated thousands of research studies over the decades, most of which have been neither experimental nor subject to falsification. Thus, a weakness of Freud's theory, as well as other philosophically based theories, is a lack of falsifiability or verifiability. Although these theories have **heuristic** value in generating research, results of that research can usually be explained in other ways and thus do not specifically support the parent theory.

Third, how well do personality theories organize knowledge? Most findings from psychological research can be explained by one or more of these theories. Human behavior, from the most mundane to the most fanciful, from the simplest to the most complex, from the most altruistic to the most sadistic, from the most healthy to the most psychotic, can be explained by at least one, and usually most, of these theories. Not all explanations, of course, would be the same, and some may be quite unsatisfactory to some readers. This situation is understandable, because readers have their own personal preference and can reject explanations not compatible with their philosophical orientation.

Explanation is precisely what personality theories do best. Personality theories are considerably more useful and accurate in explaining behavior than they are in predicting or controlling behavior. Encouragingly, the more recently developed theories are more sophisticated at predicting human behavior, and they are also more effective at suggesting the means to control it. The earlier theories, especially those of Freud and Adler, are sufficiently comprehensive and flexible to explain what is already known about human behavior, but they are less proficient at predicting it. Although Freud's psychoanalysis can accommodate nearly anything human, we gave it only a moderate rating on its ability to organize knowledge because it often offers the same explanation for contradictory findings and contradictory explanations for the same finding. However, we gave Adler's theory a high rating on this criterion because nearly all behavior can be seen as either useless or

useful attempts to gain superiority or success. The only very high rating on this criterion was that given to Maslow, whose theory is able to organize most of behavior in terms of the hierarchy of needs concept and to offer an explanation for a wide range of human activity.

The fourth criterion for evaluating personality theory is the extent to which it serves as a guide for the practitioner. Also included in this criterion is the extent that the theory fertilizes thought and action in other disciplines, such as art, literature, sociology, philosophy, business administration, education, and psychotherapy.

Theories do not exist in some abstract realm far removed from practical concerns; they help people make daily decisions about human behavior and can eliminate endless floundering in the darkness of trial and error. Table 19.1 reveals our ratings on each of the major personality theories.

TABLE 19.1**Ratings of Personality Theorists on the Criteria of a Useful Theory**

	Generate Research	Falsifiable	Organize Knowledge	Guide Action	Internally Consistent	Parsimonious
Freud	M	VL	M	L	L	M
Adler	H	L	H	H	L	M
Jung	M	VL	M	L	L	L
Klein	L	L	L	H	H	L
Horney	VL	L	VL	L	M	M
Fromm	VL	VL	H	L	L	L
Sullivan	L	VL	M	M	M	L
Erikson	H	M	M	M	H	M
Maslow	H	L	VH	H	M	M
Rogers	M	H	H	H	VH	VH
May	VL	VL	M	VL	L	M
Allport	M	L	L	M	H	H
Eysenck	VH	VH	M	M	M	H
McCrae & Costa	VH	VH	H	M	M	H
Skinner	VH	H	M	VH	VH	H
Bandura	VH	H	H	H	VH	H
Rotter	H	M	H	M	H	H
Mischel	M	M	H	M	H	H
Kelly	L	L	M	M	VH	VH

VH = Very High H = High M = Moderate L = Low VL = Very Low

more detailed discussion is found in the "Critique" section of Chapters 2 through 18. Notice also that these personality theories receive the highest marks on their ability to organize knowledge and to explain what is known about human behavior. Only Horney, Klein, and Allport fail to receive at least a moderate rating on this criterion. In summary, useful theories are practical. Not only do they explain data and offer guidance to the

researcher, but they also help the clinician, teacher, parent, and administrator make decisions that involve human behavior.

Theorists of Personality

This book devotes a little more space to the lives of the theorists than is typically found in personality textbooks. In addition, we have placed extended biographical information on several theorists on the book's Web site. One reason for this addition information is that personality differences among the theorists account, at least in part, for differences in their theories. Differences in birth order, family size, early religious practices, socioeconomic background, closeness to mother or father, and training and education, in part, account for differences in the manner in which these theorists viewed humanity.

What other characteristics do these theorists have in common? Without indulging in too much groundless speculation, we can say that all of them have possessed superior intelligence, nearly all have been highly creative, and most have had outstanding literary skills. Several of the theorists were unusually romantic, almost to the point of sentimentality.

Like creative people in general (Feist, 1998), many personality theorists were introspective, lonely, and introverted at least at one time or another during their lives. Freud remained somewhat distrustful of outsiders throughout his life; Jung retreated into extreme isolation during his late 30s; Klein had difficulties with many of her colleagues and waged a bitter and endless war with her own daughter; Eysenck was not close to either parent and was literally a man without a country for some time; Maslow was painfully shy during his youth and retained a deep hatred for his mother; Rogers, who like Maslow came from a large family, spent most of his childhood and adolescence as a loner and never felt close to his mother; and Sullivan, an only child, had difficulties with interpersonal relationships during most of his life.

Another characteristic shared by most of these theorists is the fervent belief that they were scientists and were making observations and constructing theories within the framework of science. As scientists they shared some of the traits of most creative scientists. For example, Greg Feist (1993, 1994) found that eminent scientists were highly creative, independent, flexible, self-confident, arrogant, hostile, open to new experiences, and mostly introverted. Some combination of these personal traits describes nearly all the men and women whose theories of personality we have discussed in this book.

Future Directions

Perhaps the only accurate statement one can make about the future is this: "No accurate statements can be made about the future." Nevertheless, we venture a few guesses about the future direction of personality theory, guesses that do not require prophetic vision, because most of these forecasts simply call for extending current trends.

First, recent years have seen a shift away from practicing clinicians formulating grand, all-encompassing theories based largely on their therapeutic experiences. This procedure was followed by many early theorists—Freud, Adler, Jung, Klein, Horney, Fromm, Sullivan, Erikson, Rogers, and Kelly. Currently, however, personality theories are being built piece by piece on the foundation of empirical research, and it appears that this

trend will continue. These newer theories are less inclusive, less speculative, and less philosophical than those that emanated from the consulting rooms and libraries of early theorists.

These smaller, lower level theories are being developed by academic, research-oriented psychologists studying one variable at a time and developing a limited model to explain that variable. Being less philosophical, these theories will be less concerned with postulating a single master motive for human behavior or discussing the issue of causality versus teleology. Conscious versus unconscious motivation and human agency versus determinism will be matters for empirical research, not personal opinion. Empirical observations will replace philosophical speculation as the cornerstone of future personality theories.

Another trend in personality theory is the greater reliance on team effort rather than on the work of a single person. The vast research on which future theories will be constructed can only be conducted by a well-coordinated group effort. Gordon Allport and Carl Rogers initiated this procedure in the 1930s and 1940s by relying on graduate students and colleagues for assistance in conducting their research. Albert Bandura has refined this approach while being much more empirical. Bandura is building a social cognitive theory in small increments as he gathers data from studies carried out by him and his colleagues.

No single individual will be able to conduct enough research to support an adequate theory of personality. At the very least, a lifetime of solid empirical research by one person would be needed before a theory could begin to have firm underpinnings. For one person to come up with insightful, comprehensive, consistent, and researchable ideas concerning the nature of human personality is one thing; but for that same person to single-handedly conduct research, compile data, and publish results covering the full range of personality would seem to be impossible. Only a cooperative team approach can provide sufficient data for even a moderately comprehensive theory of personality. The late Hans Eysenck came close to single-handedly developing and researching a global personality theory, but even he had help from his wife, son, and other collaborators.

Currently, a leading example of an empirically developed, lower level theory has been McCrae and Costa's development of the Big Five personality trait. McCrae and Costa began their factor analytic approach by first building a taxonomy—a classification of traits. Over the past few years, this taxonomy has evolved into a useful personality theory; that is, one that rates high on each of the six criteria of a useful theory.

Agreement that personality has five basic dimensions is a step toward understanding the structure of personality. However, a more recent trend—evolutionary psychology—aims at providing explanations for both the cause and the development of human personality (Buss, 1990). The basic tenet of evolutionary theory is that the human mind, or brain, is an evolved adaptive mechanism and that the causes of human nature and individual differences can only be explained by evolutionary psychology. This grandiose theory, which is rooted in Charles Darwin rather than Sigmund Freud or B. F. Skinner, goes against the recent trend toward lower level theorizing in personality.

In the future, the task of evolutionary psychologists, as well as other personality theorists, will be to explain why certain individuals exhibit their particular combination of consistent and unique personality dimensions. Description of personality is but the first modest step in explaining and predicting human behavior. Accurate prediction of behavior must still be left to the future.

Reference

Buss, D. M. (1990). Toward a biologically informed psychology of personality. Journal of Personality, 58, 1-16.