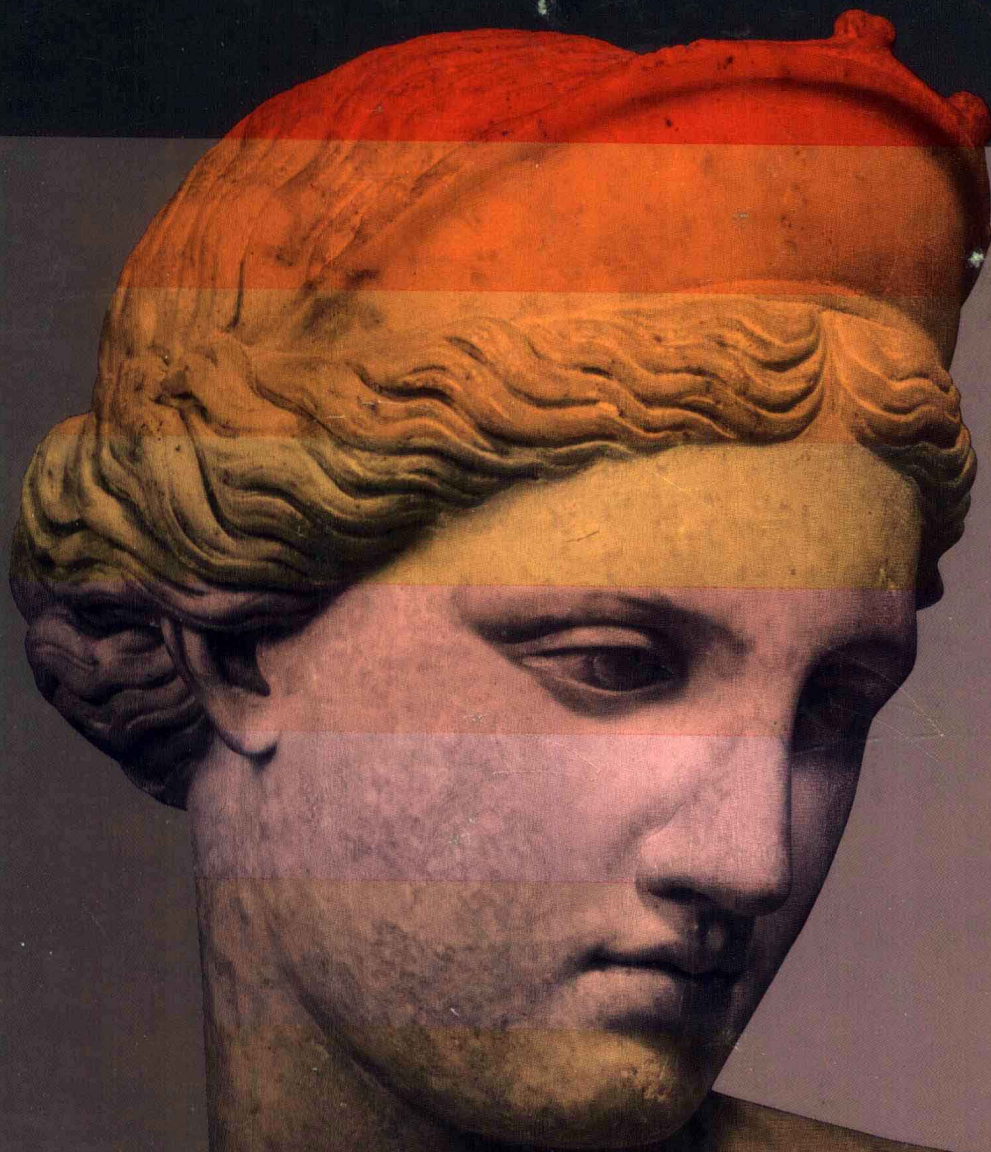


# Personality

JERRY M. BURGER

THEORY AND RESEARCH



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## PREFACE

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I wrote *Personality: Theory and Research* to integrate within one textbook the two approaches typically taken by teachers of an undergraduate course in personality. Some personality courses focus on the great theories and theorists—Freud, Jung, Adler, Skinner, and so on. Students in these courses gain insight into the structure of the mind and issues in human nature, as well as background for better understanding abnormal behaviors and psychotherapeutic procedures. But these students are likely to be puzzled when they pick up a current journal of personality research only to find that they recognize few, if any, of the topics or questions with which personality researchers grapple.

Other courses emphasize the research end of personality. Students in these courses learn about some of the topics that interest researchers concerned with individual differences and personality processes. Although these students may be exposed to the great theories, they probably see little relationship between the abstract theories and the research topics that are the focus in the course.

These two approaches to teaching personality do not represent separate disciplines that happen to share the word *personality* in their titles. Indeed, I wrote this book to demonstrate to students that classic theories stimulate relevant research, and that research findings often shape the development of these theories, influencing their level of acceptance and subsequent modification.

My belief is that students learn about research best by seeing *programs* of research. Unlike some personality textbooks, this book explores a variety of topics, examining each in some depth. I begin by showing how the questions being investigated are connected to the larger theory. Then I present some early and some recent research, discussing in detail several experiments within each topic. In this way, students can appreciate how

investigators generate and examine research questions, and they are exposed to some of the issues that surround this process. The research chapters are filled with data from many of these experiments; before they can begin to think like personality researchers, students need to look at many figures and tables of data to fully realize how numbers are related to abstract concepts. By examining programs of research instead of a few examples, students should learn how questions evolve and how alternate hypotheses are entertained and examined. They should also gain a fuller understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of various methodologies and, I hope, an excitement for the process of going from theory to questions to data to question, and so on.

Naturally, many relevant and important areas of personality research have to be left out of a book like this. The following questions guided my selection of topics: a) Is the topic relevant to the larger approach to personality being illustrated? b) Which consistent programs of research best demonstrate how new experiments flow from earlier findings? c) Is the topic either a classic area of personality research or a current area generating a large amount of research? d) Would students find the topic interesting, that is, do the research findings relate to questions they entertain in their daily lives?

The theories and research presented here inevitably overlap with developmental psychology, psychological assessment, and clinical psychology. To avoid diffusing the book's focus on personality, I introduce these areas where they are most relevant within the framework of the book. Thus, developmental issues and applications for clinical psychology are dealt with where relevant, and examples of relevant assessment procedures and issues close each theory chapter, rather than being consigned to separate assessment and personality development chapters.

Acknowledgments usually seem inadequate for what are often very considerate and thoughtful investments of time and talent. But failing to recognize the contributions of the following people at least this once would be so much worse. Therefore, let me begin by thanking all of the folks at Wadsworth, particularly Ken King, whose enthusiasm for my writing and ideas was motivation enough to launch the process and to push it along. I also wish to thank all of the colleagues who, directly or indirectly, had a hand in forming the ideas in this book. Thanks to all of the people who typed the pages—Bobi Anderson, Rosa Antoine, Teresa Hill, Mary Jackson, Lisa Lopes, and most particularly, Jane Reade. The support from

Wake Forest University, where the book began, and the University of Santa Clara, where it was completed, is much appreciated.

I also would like to express appreciation to the many reviewers of the manuscript. They are Professors Vincent J. Adesso, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee; Arthur L. Beaman, University of Montana; Brian Hayden, Brown University; John D. Kelton, Davidson College; Matthew R. Merrens, State University of New York at Plattsburgh; Norman Sundburg, University of Oregon; Gil Tunnell, New York University Medical Center; Jacquelyn White, University of North Carolina–Greensboro; and Stanley Woll, California State University–Fullerton. Kathy MacLean is to be thanked for taking many of the photographs. Finally, there is Marlene, who gave encouragement throughout the process in a thousand little, invaluable ways.

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# Personality

THEORY AND RESEARCH

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## CHAPTER ONE

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# What Is Personality?

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**I**t has been said there are few differences between people, but that what differences there are really matter. This book, therefore, is about that which really matters. The subject of this book is *personality*: why some people tend to be aggressive, intelligent, achieving, depressed, or introverted; why some of us make friends easily while others are lonely; why two people come away from a party with different perceptions of what happened; why people sometimes act in very uncharacteristic ways; and why some children grow up to be leaders in their fields. In the next eleven chapters we will explore how our personalities are related to, among other things, hypnotic susceptibility, reactions to stress, our choice of friends, and the chances of having a heart attack.

All of us have paused at various times in our lives to ask who we are and what we are really like. Erik Erikson, whose theory of personality is covered in Chapter 3, has called the times when these questions gnaw at us “identity crises.” An understanding of the way psychologists describe personality—and what researchers have discovered about how personality operates—should provide some added perspectives from which to deal with these questions. This is not to say that the answers to all of your questions about yourself will be found in this book. However, an exposure

to different ways of looking at yourself, an understanding of how different people have been found to behave in different situations, and a view of how different psychologists go about helping people change undesirable aspects of their personalities can expand your perception of yourself and may even provide some as yet undiscovered insight. But first, the task of defining personality must be undertaken.

## Problems of Definition

Anyone who has been in college for a while can begin to anticipate the topic of the first lecture of the term. The philosophy professor will ask “What is philosophy?” The first class meeting in a communication course will center on the question “What is communication?” Those who teach geography, history, journalism, and calculus will have similar lectures. And so, for traditional and practical reasons, we too will begin with the basic question: “What is personality?”

Although a definition will be provided, bear in mind that psychologists do not agree on one answer to this question. Indeed, personality theorists and researchers frequently ask themselves and their colleagues about the nature of their field and how it is different from or related to other areas of psychology and other disciplines (see Blass, 1984; Carlson, 1984; Hogan, DeSoto, & Solano, 1977). To illustrate this confusion, let’s take a look at how those who must define the area of personality have dealt with the problem. The point here is not to suggest that personality psychologists are confused, but to illustrate the difficulty of delineating borders for an area with a scope and application as potentially far-reaching as the study of the human personality.

The difficulty experienced by the recent editor of the *Journal of Personality*, C. Peter Herman, in selecting articles to appear in the journal provides a case in point:

Inevitably, the task of determining the range of personality psychology—let alone adequately representing it—posed problems. . . . There is no widely accepted formal or deductive definition of our field. And defining the field in terms of “what personality psychologists do” or “what sorts of papers are submitted” begs the question. Defining the field by default (“psychology in the gap between abnormal and social”) is uninspiring, to say the least. . . . It

seems likely that this problem will never be solved to everyone's satisfaction. (Herman, 1982, p. 117)

Robert Hogan, a recent editor of the personality section for the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* described his problem this way:

Persons who are perceptive know that they are and can recognize others who are and are not. Persons who are imperceptive, however, do not know that they are and cannot tell when others are or are not. The same state of affairs seems to typify personality psychology. Thus we receive many manuscripts that have nothing to do with individual differences, that clearly assume there is no stable core to personality, and that display only the most rudimentary knowledge of psychometrics. Yet the authors obviously believe they are doing personality research. (Hogan, 1981, p. 7)

Finally, Russell Geen, recent editor of the *Journal of Research in Personality*, provides the following warning:

[W]hat areas of research are properly subsumed by the term "personality" [?] In a field as nebulous and controversial as personality psychology is today, answering this question can be a difficult and treacherous step to take. (Geen, 1977, p. iii)

Obviously, confusion abounds over what the field of personality is supposed to cover, even by those who are called upon to make this decision. Thus, despite Dr. Geen's warning, what follows is *one* definition of personality. Although this definition will guide the organization and topic selection of this book, not all personality psychologists will agree with it. Nonetheless, the definition is sufficiently broad to include much of what generally is accepted as personality theory and research today.

**Personality** is defined as *consistent behavior patterns originating within the individual*. At least four aspects of this simple definition need elaboration. First, personality is *consistent*; in other words, a person's behavior patterns display some stability. This consistency in behavior should exist across time and across situations. When we say "He was not acting like himself" or "It was just like her to do that," we are implying that people tend to act in characteristic ways. We expect someone who is outgoing today to be outgoing tomorrow and, indeed, in most situations. This does not mean, of course, that the extraverted person will be boisterous and jolly

all the time—on solemn occasions as well as at parties. Nor does it mean that people cannot change. But if personality exists in the individual and is not just a reflection of whatever situation he or she may be in, then we must expect that there is some consistency of behavior.

Second, the behavior originates *within* the individual. This is not to say that external sources, such as the way parents discipline their children or later life experiences, cannot influence our personalities. Indeed, these probably are important sources of individual differences. But it does mean that behavior is not solely a function of the situation: The fear that we experience while watching a frightening movie is a result of the film, but the different ways each person expresses or deals with that fear come from within the individual. Those differences are the aspects of behavior that interest personality psychologists.

Third, this definition focuses on the *individual's* behavior. A social psychologist knows that people are different and that people may behave in several different ways in response to the same situation; however, the social psychologist looks at how people *usually* behave in a given situation, when all individual differences are averaged out. The personality psychologist, in contrast, acknowledges the importance of the situation but is more interested in understanding, for example, why some people respond to a challenge with increased effort while others react by giving up. As will be seen in Chapter 5, the importance of the influence of the person versus the influence of the situation upon behavior remains an area of great controversy and debate among psychologists.

Finally, the term *behavior* will be treated rather broadly here. Although overt actions are of primary interest to personality psychologists, an examination of such things as thoughts, emotions, and attitudes is often required to understand them. Thus, consistent patterns in the way people, for example, conceive of themselves, expect that good or bad things will happen to them, or classify events into cognitive categories are all considered part of personality.

## Five Approaches to Personality

What are the sources of consistent behavior patterns? Unlike some “harder” sciences, which provide fairly precise answers to these types of basic questions, the response from personality psychologists must be, “It depends.” The answer to what causes a person to behave in a consistent



manner—what causes personality—depends upon what kind of personality psychologist you are talking with. Theories of personality cover a wide range, from those providing a broad application to many different behaviors to those limited to certain types of behavior. And although some theories appear to be better supported by research than others, and some are regarded as more influential than others, not one of the hundreds of personality theories can really be identified as wrong. Each theory possesses some ability to explain certain aspects of personality, and each explanation is at least somewhat accurate.

For convenience, the various personality theories covered in this book have been placed into five general categories. Each of these categories, or *approaches* to personality, is distinguished from the others largely by its assumptions and its focus, as well as by the methods it uses to assess personality and treat problem behaviors.

Let us take an example of how each approach might deal with one type of behavior. Suppose you have observed that John often behaves in an aggressive manner. As a youth, John constantly was in trouble for fighting with other children. When he gets in an argument with someone over some small detail, John frequently will threaten the other person with violence. You conclude from these observations that aggressive behavior is part of John's personality.

But *why* is John aggressive? One approach to answering this question would look at the unconscious causes of John's behavior. A psychologist who subscribes to the *psychoanalytic approach* might suggest that John is expressing an instinct that we all have to act in an aggressive manner. However, for John, unlike most of us, the unconscious mechanism that usually holds this impulse in check is not functioning properly. A closer examination might reveal that John acts aggressively only in certain situations or only with certain people—for example, only against middle-aged males. The psychoanalytic psychologist might speculate that John is expressing some unconscious hostility toward his father, hostility that John may be unable to express to himself consciously.

Another type of psychologist, following the *trait approach*, might describe John's behavior pattern in terms of an aggressive trait: Because of some past experiences or even some inherited tendency, John is more likely to respond to situations with aggression than people who are lower in this aggressive trait.

A psychologist from the *humanistic approach* might suggest that John's aggressiveness is his response to the frustration of some basic needs.