

# ASSESSMENT OF *P*ERSONALITY AND *B*EHAVIOR *P*ROBLEMS

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*INFANCY THROUGH ADOLESCENCE*

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**ROY P. MARTIN**

# ASSESSMENT OF PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Infancy through Adolescence

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CIP

*To Janet, Gregory, and David*

*Also to Seymour Epstein, Walter Mischel, and Sandra Scarr,  
whom I have never met, and Stella Chess, Charles Halverson,  
Robert Plomin, and Alex Thomas, all of whom have influenced  
my thinking in important ways.*

# Preface

This book was designed to introduce graduate students to the most fundamental considerations in personality assessment of infants, preschoolers, school-age children, and adolescents. It should be useful to psychologists-in-training in child clinical psychology, counseling psychology, pediatric psychology, and school psychology. The focus of the book is more generalized behavioral tendencies. This focus is consistent with recent increased interest in generalized tendencies (traits, personality) on the part of child development researchers and with current trends in behaviorally oriented assessment toward the inclusion of more trait-like constructs. Further, the procedures described were selected to be most useful to applied child psychologists who use assessment devices to aid in diagnosis, placement, and prediction.

The personality assessment practices of the 1980s and 1990s are much changed over the practices of the 1940s and 1950s. They have been influenced strongly and positively by behaviorism, they are evaluated against rigorous empirical and psychometric criteria, and they are less theory-based. This book represents these influences. For example, the instruments reviewed are limited to those for which there is substantial empirical support of their reliability and validity. This eliminates many of the projective techniques so enthusiastically endorsed by assessors of personality in the 1950s.

Applied child psychologists being trained in the 1980s and 1990s must be equipped to assess younger children. It is not uncommon for pediatric psychologists to be asked to evaluate infants only a few weeks of age or for school psychologists to be asked to discuss the social and emotional adjustment of children 3 years of age in a nursery school setting. For this reason, instrumentation and practices that apply to infants, preschoolers, and their families, as well as to school-age children and adolescents, are presented.

Psychologists must be able to defend their assessment designs and instrumentation choices in courts of law and in quasi-legal settings such as placement hearings in schools. Many recently trained lawyers study psychological testimony and the techniques that are used to buttress such testimony. Therefore, they are better able to examine and discredit faulty measurement practices than has been the case historically. Psychologists need to have a reference volume for a core set of instruments that can put at their fingertips recent articles that address the reliability and validity of the

measures they use. This volume, in addition to serving as an introductory training manual, should help to serve the need of the practitioner for this type of reference volume. The instrument review parts of the book and the appendices present listings of publishers of the tests and procedures described, references for published articles on the development of these instruments, and references for articles that have used the procedures whose results provide empirical evidence of reliability and validity.

The final characteristic of this volume that deserves mention is that it represents the opinions and perspective of one author. While creating the likelihood, indeed certainty, that one person's biases permeate the discussion, the perspective is seen throughout the volume and provides a level of integration that is not possible in edited books.

The book is organized into four parts. Part I (consisting of Chapters 1 and 2) discusses the assumptions and issues on which the practice of personality assessment is based. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, as well as definitions of central constructs. Chapter 2 deals with four issues that are central to the rationale behind personality assessment. Stated in the form of questions, these issues are as follows: Is personality consistent over time and place? To what extent are the ratings of self and others a reflection of reality? To what extent can personality variables be used to predict other classes of behavior? Is knowledge of generalized traits useful in planning treatment and behavior changes?

Part II deals with the techniques used in the design of instruments (Chapter 3) and the decisions that must be made in the design of assessments (Chapter 4). Chapter 3 covers general methods of instrument construction and methods of controlling response sets and styles. Assessment design is discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter deals with the decisions that must be made by the assessing psychologists in order to ensure that the referral problem has been addressed, that the assessment has a clear purpose, that costs are considered, and that errors of measurement are minimized.

Chapters 5 and 6 make up Part III of the book, which is devoted to instruments and procedures that are used to assess social-emotional behavior of infants and preschoolers. Chapter 6 through 11, constituting Part IV, present discussions of instruments designed for use with school-age children and adolescents. Finally, Chapter 12 provides speculations about the future of assessment practices for children.

Any single volume on personality assessment of children will necessarily be limited in coverage in one way or another. This book is no exception. The primary limitation is that behavioral observation techniques are not covered as well as some other techniques that have been traditionally included under the rubric of behavioral assessment. In addition to space limitation, these techniques were not included in this volume because they have been discussed so well by many other authors. For those interested in

these techniques, the excellent works of Mash and Terdal (1981a), Hersen and Bellack (1976), and Sackett (1978) can be consulted. It should be noted that many of the rating scales discussed in these sources have also been covered in the present volume; thus, there is considerable overlap in treatment. However, behavioral observation methods, electromechanical measurement devices, and methods of measuring environments will not be covered here.

This book would not have been possible were it not for my students, who sat through lectures on which it is based. They provided some of the most authentic and thus valuable feedback I have received about the ideas included in the volume. Some of these students played a more instrumental role, reading drafts, providing case material, and generally presenting insights about the audience for which the book is intended. Among the most helpful were Judy Pearson, Diane Drew, and Barbara Orthner. The professional insights of Janet Martin and Donna Davis also played a central role.

Roy P. Martin

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# THEORETICAL ISSUES AFFECTING THE PRACTICE OF PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

The purpose of Part I is to extract from personality theory a few of the central concepts and issues that have direct bearing on the assessment process. After a brief introduction, the concepts of personality, temperament, personality structure, traits, and behavior are defined, and some of the implications of various definitions of the constructs are considered. Further distinctions are made among measurement, testing, assessment, and diagnosis. Chapter 1 concludes with a discussion of the current status of personality assessment as a technology and a professional practice.

Chapter 2 reviews some major criticisms of personality assessment, particularly those directed at trait measurement by psychologists who prefer the more molecular approach often referred to as *behavioral assessment*. The review of these criticisms addresses four questions:

- Is personality consistent over time and place?
- Can an individual provide a description of himself or herself that is reflective of reality?
- Can personality variables be used to predict other classes of behavior?
- Is personality assessment useful in planning behavior changes?

A central theme of Chapter 2 is that there is a place in applied assessment for measurement of behavior and of traits.



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# Introduction to the Assessment of Personality and Temperament

Everyone assesses personality as a part of daily life. Mothers describe their newborn babies as demanding, cuddly, difficult, or happy after only a few days' contact. Soon after language develops, children begin to describe their parents, siblings, and peers in terms designed to capture the social and emotional characteristics of the person described: Daddy is angry; Mommy is nice; Sally is a bad girl.

Developing children become progressively more sophisticated and interested in the characteristics of themselves and others during the elementary school years. From age 10 through young adulthood, the individual normally has a particularly intense interest in the social and emotional behavior of others, especially peers (Stone & Church, 1973). Much of this energy is spent in attempting to obtain consensual validation of self-appraisals and the appraisals of others. The inordinate amount of time adolescents spend in private conversations with peers can be seen as attempts to come to an understanding through the perceptions of peers of their social and emotional environment.

As one result of these validation attempts, children come to incorporate cultural labels and the evaluations of these labels. They begin to understand characteristics such as anxiety and extraversion, to label these characteristics appropriately, and to associate values with such attributes. Further, they begin to understand that everyone does not see a behavior or a person in the same way and that others do not necessarily attribute the same characteristics to their acquaintances that they attribute to them. In sum, by age 10 or so, most children are well on their way to an understanding of their own social and emotional behaviors and those of others.

As the individual enters the major institutions of the society, personality assessment may take on a more formal aspect. In school, teachers assess children from their earliest years for achievement motivation, the ability to get along with others, and emotional stability. Individuals in the work force may find that they are evaluated by the personnel officers of the corporation, their supervisor, or peers on such traits as introversion-extraversion, persistence, general mood quality, affability, tolerance for ambiguity, ability to lead, ability to follow, attitude toward authority, and so forth.

Thus, from birth to death, human beings attempt to understand their

own social and emotional behaviors and those of others. In conjunction with academic and occupational skills, these characteristics form the primary basis on which an individual is evaluated throughout life.

Why does the average person spend so much energy attempting to understand the personalities of friends, family, and self? In the most general sense, people make personality assessments in order to make their world more understandable (Kelley, 1972; Wegner & Vallacher, 1977). Such understanding has survival value: Is this person a friend or dangerous? Can I count on this person to help me when I need it? Will this man be a good husband for me?

An important consequence of the idea that personality assessment is founded on basic survival instincts is that people will make such appraisals regardless of the amount of knowledge they have of the person being appraised. They may allow their behavior toward the person to be governed by stereotypes about skin color, the type of clothing the person wears, the kind of car the person drives, or where the person lives. Social psychologists who study attitude change (McGuire, 1969) and social cognition (Landman & Manis, 1983; Wegner & Vallacher, 1977) have found that these processes can be influenced by minimal data about other persons. The need to know is so strong that in the absence of other information or in conjunction with it, the person may use pseudoscientific technology such as astrology, palmistry, or fortune-telling. Thus, the motive to make social life more manageable is so strong that people will make evaluations based on whatever information is available.

Because there is a need to assess the social-emotional behavior of individuals throughout life, cultures develop specialized techniques for these assessment functions. Further, social groups identify and reward persons with specialized knowledge to carry out the assessment function (e.g., the medicine man in Native American culture, the fortune-teller, the psychologist) when there is a concern that the individual is not functioning appropriately. The assessment may be motivated by fear that the individual may cause harm to himself or herself or to others, or it may result from an attempt to predict future behavior.

Persons or institutions may seek to screen out others who do not manifest certain social-emotional characteristics. For example, police departments in major cities often require a personality assessment of applicants in order to screen out the mentally ill. During World War II, the Office of Strategic Services sought to select persons who could infiltrate enemy lines for purposes of sabotage and intelligence gathering (Wiggins, 1973, Chapter 2). The persons doing the selection believed that specific social and emotional characteristics were necessary for such persons to function optimally.

The examples mentioned up to this point are from the adult world, but children also are assessed for reasons similar to those that motivate adult

assessments. School psychologists may assess children who appear to have emotional or social problems in school in order to determine if they are eligible for placement in a special education program. Clinical psychologists may assess for the presence of such problems as autism or childhood schizophrenia. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (1982), the total enrollment in 1980 in special education was 3,234,337 children. The social-emotional characteristics of all these children were assessed in some fashion. Further, 2%-20% of the total population of school-age children manifest clinically significant emotional problems (Hewett & Taylor, 1980; Quay, 1979), and perhaps another 15%-20% occasionally manifest problems for which they and their parents could benefit from a psychological consultation that may involve assessment. Thus, current demand for assessments of the social and emotional behavior of children is enormous, and the potential demand is even larger. As assessment techniques improve, the demands for such services will undoubtedly increase.

## Definitions of the Basic Terminology of Personality Assessment

### Personality

In order to understand the technology and procedures of social and emotional assessment, it is necessary to know some of the basic concepts that will continually appear in the discussion. One of the most confusing concepts for the serious student of personality is the concept of personality itself.

Unfortunately, the attempt to clarify the meaning of personality is immediately complicated in that the word has so many different meanings for so many different people. Hall and Lindzey (1978) state that "no substantive definition can be applied with any generality" to the concept. In their authoritative textbook on personality theory, they demonstrate that the term *personality* cannot be easily defined outside of a particular theoretical frame of reference. That is, the meaning of the word is determined by the theory of personality to which one subscribes.

Several definitions can be delineated. Many classical definitions include within the boundaries of the concept individual differences on a wide range of characteristics. For example, Eysenck (1953a) defines personality as "the more or less stable and enduring organization of a person's character, temperament, intellect and physique, which determines his unique adjustment to his environment" (p. 2). In contrast, many applied psychologists use the term to indicate those variables that are not primarily cognitive. Also excluded are individual differences relating to motor behavior or physique. In this usage, personality is limited to individual differences in social and emotional functioning. It is, of course, clear that cognitive

capacity and physique affect social-emotional functioning, but those using this more circumscribed definition of personality simply choose to focus their attention of social-emotional behavior in order to emphasize these aspects of human functioning. While this usage limits the concept somewhat, it includes a broad area: social traits, motives, personal conceptions (such as values), adjustment versus maladjustment, personality dynamics, and characteristics of emotions (Nunnally, 1984).

Some definitions of personality emphasize publicly observed behavior, whereas others focus on internal structures. An example of the latter is the famous definition offered by Allport (1937): "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment" (p. 48). In contrast, there are several learning-based theories of human behavior that make no reference to the word or concept of personality because their proponents believe that the word implies internal structures that are scientifically unjustified. This stance is based, in part, on the belief that behavior is so situationally determined that enduring characteristics or patterns of behavior exist only in circumstances in which the persons stay within narrow environmental bounds. Mischel (1968) takes this position in a discussion of the differences between personality and behavior from the perspective of social learning theory:

Personality is an abstraction, or hypothetical construct, from or about behavior. Statements that deal with personality describe the inferred, hypothesized, mediating internal states, structures, and organization of individuals. Traditionally, personality psychology has dealt with these inferences about the individual's personality, focusing on behavioral observation as signs of the underlying attributes or process. . . . (p. 4)

In contrast, many behaviorists focus their attention on the externally observed behavior as the event of primary interest, not as a sign of an underlying state or trait.

In an attempt to reconcile the diversity of definitions of personality, Lanyon and Goodstein (1982) take a pragmatic stance and offer the following definition: "The best approximation we can offer, one that reflects the concern of most psychologists for utility ahead of theory, is that personality is an abstraction for those enduring characteristics of the person which are significant for his/her interpersonal behavior" (p. 35). This definition, while lacking specificity on several issues, comes the closest to the connotations given the term as it is used in this book. The definition places its main emphasis on social behavior. This emphasis is a valid reflection of the situation in which the professional psychologist becomes involved in personality assessment. That is, personality assessment is called for when individuals or those around them find their behavior inappropriate for a



social context or wish to optimize the fit between an individual and a particular social environment.

The definition also clearly limits the concept of personality to those characteristics that have some temporal stability. The practice of personality assessment demands the assumption that some important aspects of human behavior are determined by the characteristics of the individual, that they are not exclusively determined by the situation in which the person finds himself or herself. Finally, this definition makes it clear that personality is an abstraction, like intelligence and many other psychological variables. One cannot see personality, only behavior. From the accumulation of behavioral observations over time and situations, the abstraction is formed.

One final word is necessary before closing this discussion. The distinction between the cognitive and social-emotional realms of behavior is purely arbitrary and clearly does not reflect reality. Most, if not all, social or emotional behaviors have a cognitive component. Anxiety, for example, is most often thought of as an emotional state or trait. However, the appraisal of an environmental stimulus as a threat often initiates anxious behavior. Such an appraisal has a cognitive component. Likewise, the worry aspect of state and trait anxiety is a cognitive process (Spielberger, 1966). It is the anticipation or expectation of a possibly harmful occurrence. Many other emotions, such as joy, anger, and surprise, have similar cognitive components (Lazarus & Averill, 1972; Leventhal & Tomacken, 1986; Lewis & Michalson, 1983; Schacter, 1966). Thus, the distinction between social-emotional behavior (or personality) and cognitive behavior is arbitrary and is justified only if it makes a body of knowledge more amenable to study.

Throughout this book, *personality assessment* refers to the assessment of relatively stable characteristics in the social-emotional realm. It should be understood that I am taking a pragmatic stance toward the definition of personality, much like that of Lanyon and Goodstein (1982). That is, nothing is implied in the use of the word personality other than a generalized characteristic that has some situational and temporal stability.

## Temperament

One subset of variables in the personality domain is referred to as *temperament variables*. Although most authorities agree that *temperament* refers to those personality variables that are most influenced by the genetic makeup of the individual, there is no greater agreement about the definition of temperament than there is about the definition of personality. Several definitions will be offered for the purpose of acquainting the reader with the various emphases of writers on the subject.