

Introduction to Psychology Lecture

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Hello, everybody, and welcome to our introductory lecture in the psychology of personality. When we think of personality, I don't know what comes to your mind, but clearly we might argue that what personality is is kind of what makes each of us uniquely us. So today I want to talk about what personality is, introduce it, give a few definitions, and elaborate the concept so as we get in our subsequent lectures to particular theories, we have some kind of overall context in which to understand

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personality. Of course the word "personality" contains the smaller word "person," and really if you want to ask what a personality is, it might make sense to ask what a person is. That might seem like a simple question, but there's actually thousands of answers to that question. "What is a person?" There are certainly philosophical answers, there are theological answers, there are legal answers, sociological ones, I suspect biological ones. We're, of course, interested in the psychological ones here and we can organize the various answers to that question in different ways. Certainly each of our theories that we'll look at this semester tries to answer that question, "what is a person," and each one elaborates on what they think makes up a person. I think the simplest way to divide those definitions would be maybe abstract answers, answers to that that seem applicable to every person that ever existed, but those answers tend to be relatively impractical and useless when we try to understand a particular person. On the opposite end of the continuum, what we might call "practical" answers, a person is this, that, and it helps us understand a particular person. But the difficulty with practical answers is once we apply them to people everywhere, they lose some of their applicability, so if you think of a long continuum, extremely abstract on one end and extremely practical on the other end, as you go through the semester you might want to be wanting to ask yourself, "Where does this theory fit? Where does this theory fall?" And I think what you'll probably come to terms with is that practical answers seem good at certain times in certain places for certain people, but lose their applicability in other cultures, in other times, perhaps in other situations, whereas abstract answers, again, retain their applicability almost universally but don't really help us much in terms of practically understanding a particular person.

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If we were to use Rene Descartes famous phrase, "cogito ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"), to try and go through how the various theories we'll cover this semester answer the question "what is a person," I think it's kind of helpful. So for instance, let's start with the cognitive approach in psychology. The cognitive approach in psychology is going to agree with Descartes and simply say that what becomes central to understanding what a person is is their thinking processes. The cognitive way in which our brains and minds work and so cognitive perspectives tend to focus on thinking as the core of the answer to the question "what is a person." But if we look at some of the other perspectives, for example, the humanistic approach would answer the question "what is a person" by focusing on feelings, perhaps the emotional life, self-esteem, self-worth, the way we view ourselves, the way others view us. So we really might simply say the humanist might say "I *feel*, therefore I am" as the central tenet of personhood. The behaviorist, again, would ignore what the cognitive and humanist might say and they would simply say, "No, we're behaviorists, we focus on behavior" so their approach would be "I *behave*, therefore I am." And finally, the existentialists might answer it differently. They focus it on the mere fact of existence and they would simply say, "I *exist*, therefore I am," or "I *am*, therefore I am." This is just one way to get at it and the reason that I wanted to present these definitions is simply that when we look at all these theories of personality, realistically all of them have to take a priority approach when coming at human personhood: we think, we feel, we behave, we exist. All of that goes into being a person and having a personality. But as you'll see as we go through this semester the various theoretical approaches tend to over-, or specifically emphasize one aspect of being a person.

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My favorite definition of all time is from the 18th century, excuse me, 19th century Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard, and you can find this definition in his book *Sickness Unto Death* on page 13. It's a long definition but I think it will illustrate for us, even though Kierkegaard's not a psychologist per se, he certainly is very psychological. And what this definition illustrates for us this this: any time you try to answer the question "what is a person?" if you're going to be honest, you have to be open and clear about your presuppositions. What I mean by that is our definition has to start with some assumptions and what I like about Kierkegaard's definition is he lays out all of the assumptions that he believes in and he believes are part of personhood and *then* defines it. We don't always get such straightforward honesty from the various psychological definitions. In fact, they often assume that their assumptions should be everyone's assumptions and we almost sometimes have to sometimes go back and ask the question "What is Freud assuming about human beings? What is Jung and Rogers and Maslow and Allport, what are the assumptions they made?" So let's start with Kierkegaard as a really good example of a clear definition which you could certainly disagree with, but he's clear about it. So he simply begins with a human being as spirit. And let's stop there. Because Kierkegaard first of all makes the assumption that human beings are spiritual beings. Clearly not everybody agrees and clearly probably the majority of personality theorists that we'll look at this semester would not agree with that. But Kierkegaard is going to lay that out as assumption. He was a Christian theologian and as such, he believed that human beings were created in the image of God and part of that meant that we had a spiritual soul, a spirit if you will, and that's assumption #1: a human being is a spirit. But Kierkegaard's smart enough to say, "But what is a spirit?" because our definition doesn't really say anything. And here he simply says spirit is the self. For Kierkegaard, the bedrock point here is "I am a spirit, therefore I am," not I behave, not I think, not I exist, but the spiritual aspect, the spirit of us, whether you believe in that or not, it's Kierkegaard's definition. That is the central self. Of course, then he goes along to say well, "Well, yeah, but what is the "self"?" Really, our definition is going in circles.

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Well, here he begins to lay it out. And this gets complicated and I'm not really concerned about you understanding all the relationships here but he said the self is a relation that relates itself to itself, or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation. Now, let's just pause here for a second. What Kierkegaard wants to say is what the self is, is a bunch of parts. We can divide ourselves into all kinds of parts as some psychologists have divided into the real self, the ideal self, the future self, the past self, the present self, the spiritual self, the psychological self, the physical self. He doesn't really go into great detail here but as persons, we have all these components, aspects, elements that go into making up the whole. I hope you're with me still. The parts don't make up the whole, Kierkegaard says, but in order to understand the self, all the parts relate to the other parts in an ongoing, continuous way and collectively, or collaboratively, we are the relations relating itself in itself. The self, for Kierkegaard, is all the parts of us interacting with each other relating to the other aspects of self, and we do that in an ongoing way depending upon every factor you can possibly imagine in your life your self changes and relates. Kierkegaard wants to point out, in the second little paragraph here, the self is not the relation, he's wanting to say that we don't find ourselves only in the relation but in the parts relating, the combined combination of the parts relating to each other or, as he puts it, the relations relating itself to itself. Now that makes it complicated to you, what Kierkegaard is simply wanting to affirm in the assumption he makes is that human beings' relationships, internal relationships between aspects of myself, and later he goes on to say external relationships, relationships with myself with others, with groups, and, for Kierkegaard, with God, with the physical world around me, are core to defining human personality. Hopefully I haven't lost you by now, or you've clicked ahead and you've just given up. Now Kierkegaard wants to point out what he sees as important aspects. Once he defines this relations relating itself to itself, he says human beings are basically a synthesis of three sets of kind of impossible opposites: we are a synthesis of the infinite and finite, of temporal and eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis. Now what Kierkegaard is saying here, he's responding to a philosopher who was around right before he hit the scene by the name of George Frederick

Hegel, and I don't know how familiar with Hegel but Hegel was famous for saying that the way things go in the world, there is a thesis and an anti-thesis, or antithesis, and then we eventually come up with a synthesis between the thesis and the antithesis. In other words, the synthesis is the relation, the halfway point, if you will, put them both in a blender and come up with a synthesis/antithesis smoothie. What he's simply saying is that it is very difficult to grasp what it means to be a human personality because we are, we have these kind of relationships within us of what appears to be at first glance these opposites. Because he believes that we are spiritual and physical beings, he says that we are infinite in that our minds can go anywhere. I can imagine being on Mars, I can imagine—there is an infinite ability in my mind to project myself and yet I am very finite. I'm stuck right here in my office making this lecture at Caldwell, I can't jump right now to China, although later today I'm going to go to San Diego. I'm finite and yet, because I'm a human being and in my imagination, I can imagine infinite possibilities almost. I can imagine things that not only never existed but never will exist: unicorns, and Klingons, and any number of other things. We're also a combination of other temporal and eternal. Temporal means I'm stuck in time, I'm stuck on this day, Thursday, I'm stuck in time—I can't go back to the past, I can't go to the future. I am locked into time. And yet, there is an infinite aspect to human beings, for Kierkegaard, because he believes there is a life to come, a heaven and hell, and so forth, standard Christian doctrine. So there is an eternity to us. And lastly, this question, Are we free, or are we predestined? Are we conditioned? Kierkegaard says yes, both. I am conditioned by my past and yet I have, in the present, freedom. I have the freedom to stop talking and walk out in the hallway and yell at the students or drink my Ocean Spray cranapple grape juice here, or open the window. I'm free, yet I'm not completely free, I'm constrained by the limits. I'm not free to be the best basketball player that ever lived. I'm constrained by my ability, my age, quite frankly my talent. So Kierkegaard is simply saying the very essence of what it means to be human is this relationship between these opposite, these dialectical pairs, to use the language of these 19th century philosophers.

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So, we are spirit, we have all these kind of relationships that two things relating to each other—it not just the relation, it's the two things relating but it's also the two things. And then what he calls these dialectical, these opposite, pairs: finite/infinite; possible/necessity/ and stuck in time and eternal. Now that's a long discussion you've listened to so congratulations. The reason I did that is I just want you to see what I think is a good and fair definition to the answer "what is a person?" Kierkegaard is going to lay out exactly where he's coming from and you don't have to agree with that. Plenty of people will say that's nonsense, but that's his definition. And I want to follow up with Kierkegaard's definition because you might guess that, because I picked it, I think it's a good one. Because I do think, and this is just Stephen Maret's opinion, I do think that idea that Kierkegaard grasps and articulates, that as human beings that relationality is just about everything. I want to just talk through that a little bit

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and understand it. But before we do that, here's the standard definition that just about every psychology of personality textbook uses and it's from Gordon Allport (we'll cover his theory a little later in the semester) and it is a good one. He would say it is "The unique way in which an individual characteristically or typically organizes their experiences to their past and then, on the basis of that, reacts to their ongoing environment." So Allport is going to say we're unique, our past affects our choices, and personality is simply the adding up of all those, the conglomeration of all those organizations of the past and how they affect our choices in the present, and, of course, as we move into the future.

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I like the definition best of personality as I started off earlier. I think what personality is pretty much is that what makes us who we are. No one is going to put that in a textbook, but that's the essence of what personality is. And I would add, that which makes us uniquely who we are.

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Now let's talk about Kierkegaard's idea of relationality. If we thought about all the relationships, we could speak of 3 or 4 or 5 levels. What I call "intra-relationality." This would simply be the internal relations that we have. I'm not going to cover that very much because that's pretty much our whole semester. All of these theories talk about the internal dynamics of parts of who we are, the id, ego, superego, or the collective unconscious, or whatever it is we'll talk about. I just want to mention a couple of these others. What we might call object relations. We have relations with our physical environment. We live certain places, we dress in certain clothes, we have phones and televisions, cars we drive. That relationship—we'd be naïve to think that those things don't reflect on and reflect out who we are. We pick our clothes for a reason, not just because they're available but when we have choices. There's a reason we dress the way we do in this occasion as opposed to that occasion. We pick our cars for a particular reason though we're going to be restrained by the amount of money we have, but within those restraints, there would be a big difference if I picked a pickup truck as opposed to a Toyota Prius. They say things about us. So I want to talk about object relations, then relationships with other people. You cannot underestimate the impact on us. And finally, the relationships we have with groups. We belong to all these groups and our membership in those groups kind of helps to define us, and we define ourselves by our group memberships. "I'm a Mets fan." "I'm a Yankees fan." "I'm a Giants fan." "I'm a Jets fan." Again, those aren't big indicators, but they say something about us. And Kierkegaard would have added a last category: the human person's relationship to God. He would have believed that that is very important. But since this is not theology, it's psychology, we'll leave that off our list.

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As I said before, intra-relations or internal relations--we're just going to leave that alone.

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Let's go on and talk about object relations. I want you to imagine, for a second, the famous desert island scenario. You're begin taken to a desert island, you're going to be dropped off for the rest of your life and you are offered the option of bringing one book (it can't be a kindle or an iPad), one book and the only book you'll read for the rest of your life, one piece of music, if you will, a cd (we don't buy CDs anymore), but one album or whatever it's called, or collection of songs, and then one miscellaneous, non-living object, you won't be able to bring your child or your boyfriend or your dog, it's just a miscellaneous object. Now if you've thought about that, what book you would pick, what music you would choose to listen to (by the way, you could have a solar operated player so you could listen to the songs over and over and over again), and then whatever miscellaneous object. But think about your choices of those three things. And I suspect, if I was able to hear what your choices are of those three things, I suspect that would tell us something about who you are. So for instance, if I picked a novel, a horror story, or I picked the Bible, or I picked the Dummy's Survival Guide on a Desert Island or I picked a book on, I don't know, on butterflies—right off the bat, we would probably be accurate in judging that your choice says something about your personality. Similarly with music, that if you picked soul music or rap music or jazz music or classical music, or again any type of music, even if we got into the categories of rock music, if you picked say Cold Play as opposed to say the Doors, the Beatles, I don't know, Muse...that would kind of say something about you. But we don't want to over-emphasize this, some of us have wide tastes in music. And then again, our miscellaneous object: would you be practical and take a toothbrush or pillow, or a machete? Or would you be sentimental. Your object you'd want to be a picture of your family. Again, it would tell us something about you. That scenario could really just simply say the physical world around us helps define us, and then we select the physical objects in our lives, let's face it, because they become extensions of who we are. They become, if you will, emanations from our personality. So you may not have thought about your relationship to your computer, to your phone, to your car, to your clothes, to your sunglasses, to your furniture, to your television, to the bed you pick, the mattress, the colors you paint your walls, and on and on and on it goes. But those things are part of relationality, relationship with inanimate objects around us.

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As I mentioned before, people that we've know, beginning with parents, family, important people that have influenced us for good or for harm. Let's face it, they shape who we become in terms of our personality. You might have been harmed by someone greatly and your response is that you're never going to let another person get close to you again. Well, that's going to affect your personality. You may have been greatly inspired by someone at some point in life, they were just one of these admirable characters that are rare and you may have chosen your major on the basis of what you want to be in your career because this person inspired you to be a counselor or an occupational therapist or any number of other things. The little scenario you might want to play is ask yourself this: let's say you were able to have a dinner party, it was catered so you don't have to do any of the cooking, serving or cleaning up, and you could invite any five people that not only live now but have ever lived or will ever live. So you can pick five people to have dinner with. Who would you pick? Again, think about that for a second. Now as with our earlier scenario with the desert island, think about the five people you picked and what that says about you. Would you pick important historical figures, you know, Napoleon, Abraham Lincoln, Cleopatra, Marie Antoinette, St. Catherine the Great? Would you pick entertainment people like Beyonce, Eminem, and...I don't know, I'm running out of people because I don't pay attention that much. Would you pick family members, your great-great-great grandfather? Your future grandchildren? Would you pick great moral figures? Mahatma Gandhi, Jesus, or Martin Luther King, Jr.? Or some combination of those things. The people you would pick certainly would probably reflect your personality. So inter-personal relationality would just speak to the fact that our personalities are not only shaped by other but we, in turn, influence and shape all of the people we interact with, some profoundly, some barely at all. But it is a notion, this kind of relationality that I think we can't ignore if we really want to understand what it means to be a person.

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Finally, we belong to various groups which give us identity and shape our personalities. Some of these groups we can't really pick and choose: we're born into a family, we're born into a particular ethnic identity, it may be combined or it may be complicated, we're born male or female or some combination. Some of these things we can't pick. But some of these things we normally can pick and do pick but we do it very deliberately and when we do make these big choices, it not only reflects who we are but who we want to be and then it turns around and shapes us. For instance, let's say you were born into one religious kind of understanding and then at some point in your life you reject those beliefs and you embrace a very different set of religious beliefs. Well, you're still going to be shaped a little bit by your religious background, but by virtue of the fact that you've chosen to sever that relationship with whatever religious group you grew up in and identify yourself with something completely different again that kind of says a lot. We are part and parcel of many, many different groups and these impact and affect us. I'm a big Met fan and I like meeting other Met fans. There something cool about it, there's not many of us around here. It seems like everybody is a Yankee fan. So it's like, "Hey, you're a Met fan? I'm a Met fan!" Or "You're from Dominican Republic? So am I!" or "Hey, I grew up in Sparta and you grew up in Sparta." There's these kind of passing groups, identities. And then there are the more profound ones, obviously, the ones that shape us, the ones we see as core to who we are. However we look at this, this group relationality, this inter group relationality, defines us because once we were a member of one group, then we see ourselves over against members of other groups. So if you're a Giants fan, you're probably not very fond of Patriots fans, or Eagle fans, or Dallas Cowboy fans and so on and so forth because sports is us against them, so to speak. So these things define us, they give us our identity, we select them and in some ways, we select the groups and then the group really shapes us into an identity. So just to conclude here, what Kierkegaard is pointing out is the relationality is core of who we are. There are all these parts, they interact, they relating in an ongoing, evolving way, and it's really in the parts and their relationship together as they relate that for Kierkegaard would define and answer the question "what is a person?".

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Now I want to end just with a writer named Larry Crabb who has this list of what he thinks a good personality theory should do, that it must deal with certain things otherwise it has flaws and weaknesses. I don't know what you think about this list but I liked it because sometimes when I read the various theories that you'll be reading this semester, I think to myself, well, they really ignore "X" or they don't deal with "Y" or whatever. But here's what Crabb says. He says a good personality theory should deal with the notion of responsibility, and this is simply "am I the way I am because of past influence and if so, do I get to blame my parents, or blame society, or blame Obama" or whoever people blame these days. Or do I really say, "okay, that's who I am, but do I choose who I'm going to become?" So where does personal responsibility fit in the theory? Number 2, what is the relationship between our thinking and our behavior and our emotions? You could think about that one. Does thinking come first and then behavior and emotions follow? Do emotions come first and then thinking? How do those three things relate to each other? That is a pretty important question because if you think about it, we behave, we think, and we feel. How do those three things relate in this theory? Number 3: I love this one because so many psychological theories pretty much are scared away from what we might consider philosophical or even religious, theological notions but where in the theory is the idea of meaning and hope? These are big questions but we can a lot as people about the minutia of life, what I'm anxious about, what tv shows I watch, what my major is, and so on and so forth. But in the big scheme of things, we all probably get to that question, maybe late at night, maybe after a near death experience, or some kind of "aha" moment, but why am I here? What is the meaning of this? What's my hope for the future? So where does meaning and hope go? Along with that Crabb would say what is the need for love? Love is a big need for humans? We spend a lot of time thinking about it, worrying about it, pursuing it, mourning its loss. Where does love fit in? And again, maybe not love, but we relate to other human beings. We have all different kinds of types of relationships and they're very different. Where does that fit into the theory?

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Where does the idea of what he calls "personal authenticity" fit in. The idea that "I need to be me" as opposed to "I need to follow what everybody else believes and be a sheep in the big pasture of the world." To what extent is it import for us to embrace our unique selves as opposed to conforming to the expectations and social conventions of our environment. I love that because I think, and again, I'm editorializing, I think there is something in us that desires to be authentically us and again to follow up think that a hunger to be loved and accepted by others as we are instead of having to change ourselves into what that person expects me to be. Number 6, and this is easy, is what are the environmental on us. Number 7, again, this is one of my favorites, how do our goals define our personality. Why are you listening to this lecture, siting in your room listening to me yap away here. Well, I suspect you contributed this half an hour, 40 minutes, whatever this is going to turn out to be because you have a goal, which is to do well in this class, and if you do well in this class, you could eventually graduate, and if you graduate, you eventually get a particular job. Goals are important. Goals propel us forward and shape our personality. Our goals shape us. And finally, to what extent do our interactions with others, what Crabb calls social functioning, to what extent is that influenced by our often unmet and unconscious needs? As human beings, we're needy creatures, quite frankly. I need this, I need food, I need shelter, but social needs, to what extent is personality affected by those needs. I love those goals.

I hope this hasn't been too confusing and like "Whoa, it's a pie in the sky." I really wanted to give you a big, bird's eye view which we haven't spent too much time talking about personality theories, psychological ones but I hope this will be helpful. So until the next lecture, take care of yourself and we'll "see you soon."