

**Personality Psychology:
An Integrated Text**

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DEDICATION

To you, the UTEP student: Many of you working long hours and multiple jobs. Some of you waiting in enormous lines and/or caring for family. You are doing all this while going to school both for self-improvement and a better life. I salute you.

Chapter 1: What is personality?

Personality, as simply as I can put it, is a dispositional tendency towards particular thoughts, feelings, reactions, and behaviors. Personality Psychology is not to be confused with Social Psychology, which argues that the situation dictates someone's behavior. Radical Social Psychologists have tried (unsuccessfully) to make the argument that it is "all the power of the situation." This is patently false. In truth, you need both. In fact, it is a shame that there is a rift between Personality and Social Psychology politically, because the two dance so well together. So, yes, the situation will dictate a certain reaction in people, but different people will interpret and react to that situation in different ways.

Take for example the highly publicized "Stanford Prison Study." Zimbardo touted (and still does) the power of the situation and how at the mere flip of a coin assigning some to be guards and some to be prisoners, led the prisoners to act meek and the guards to act brutally. Well, what has not been advertised as much is that Zimbardo's recruitment method was flawed. He recruited individuals for a study on "prison life." Well, two psychologists (Camahan & McFarland, 2007), tested what types of people would sign up for that particular study as volunteers? They found that dark personalities (e.g., low empathy, high social dominance orientation) along with obedient types (e.g., high right wing authoritarianism) were more likely to sign up for a study on "prison life" as opposed to a study simply labeled, "psychology study." So, did the situation matter? Absolutely, however, it is likely that the dispositional tendencies that drew people to the study, interacted with the situation to create the toxic behavior observed. So you need both.

Why take a class on personality (Or any psychology course for that matter?)

Publishing lag times

Let's say I come up with a research idea. Let's say this is a very simple study, to test the effect that both neuroticism and frustration have on anger. Simple enough, right?

OK, now let's assume that I have done ALL the readings necessary, built up a literature review, and understand what has been done and what gaps I am filling in the literature. Let's also assume at every step that I am moving quite quickly, and that there are no unanticipated delays or problems (which usually NEVER happens! There are almost always snags along the way).

The first thing I need to do is prepare my materials. This would include my questionnaires (e.g., how will I measure neuroticism?), stimulus (e.g., how will I measure anger? How will induce frustration? What will my control task be?). Once I have decided on these materials, I need to submit to the "Institutional Review Board" or IRB for ethics approval. To do all of these things would take at least a **month**.

Next, we need to run our study. Let's again assume that you have trained all of your people and you have launched your study. It usually (if your sample needs are small enough) takes **2-3 months** to collect the data for a single study. (Again, assuming the study is fast, participants show up, the needs are not too big).

The next thing that needs to happen is a cleaning and analysis of the data. Usually this takes several weeks, data are rarely as simple as "run a regression."

The next thing, *assuming* the data support your hypotheses and make sense, you would want to write up your paper. This, again, takes **2-3 months** for analyses and write-up.

So far, we are up to 7 months since I came up with my idea!

The next thing we do is submit to a journal that may be an appropriate place to publish our findings. Journals take **ON AVERAGE 3 months** to review your paper. People who have published in that area before (experts in the field) will read it and decide whether it is worthy of publication, if there are issues that need to be corrected, and so on.

You may receive one of five decisions:

- Accept without changes (which **RARELY** happens!)
- Accept with minor changes (which also **RARELY** happens!)
- Revise & Resubmit with major revisions (Usually what you are hoping for)
- Reject with the option to resubmit
- Reject

If you are fortunate enough to receive a "Revise and Resubmit" then you must spend **3 months** revising your manuscript, trying to address all the issues that the reviewers identified in your paper.

From there you spend another 3 months in review. If they decide then to accept your paper, it usually takes another 6-12 months for your paper to be printed (although now, papers are available faster through online channels).

So let's count backwards, 1 month + 3 months + 3 months + 3 months + 3 months + 12 months = 25 months! Or just about 2 years! That is from the time you had your idea until anyone else would know about it!

Now, textbooks only update once every 4-5 years. So it could be as long as 8 years before a new idea comes out in the literature!

The point of telling you all of this is twofold: First, to teach you how science operates (it is **SLOW!**)

Second, to tell you that in taking this course with me, you will be exposed to cutting edge research and novel perspectives that no textbook could possibly have yet. By going to conferences, networking with colleagues, reading articles, and conversing with my peers, I have knowledge that won't be in any textbook yet.

What do personality psychologists do?

Well, I cannot tell you how many times people will find out what I do and say, "OH my GOD, you have to meet my great aunt Ida! She'd be a study for you!" I usually smile and try to move the conversation forward, because this person clearly does not know what I do.

Personality psychologists RARELY if ever use samples of "1" or case studies. It isn't that those types of studies do not have their place, they do, but we are much more interested in personality across the general public than we are about one person's aunt.

Second, we are interested in how specific TRAITS (not specific PEOPLE) predict behavior. So, in order to make the argument that extraversion predicts happiness (for example) we would need to assess extraversion and happiness across a wide variety of people and culture. This would be to assure us that it is extraversion itself, and not something else, that is predicting happiness.

Third, we rarely if ever "diagnose." Clinicians generally give people diagnostics and determine if pathology is present and (if so) how to treat it. Personality psychologists are scientists. We are interested in the basic and general science of how individual differences affect the world around us.

You will find most personality psychologists in the laboratory at a university or in a large company, conducting research on human or non-human animals.

What do personality psychologists study?

So, now that we have established that personality psychologists are researchers (almost all of us) and that science, not diagnostics, is the backbone of our profession. That means we study human behavior, but what specifically about human behavior do we study?

Individual differences

Although any individual difference (meaning anything that is stable, measurable, and consistently affects behavior) is fair game for a personality psychologist, it is nevertheless the case that we are MOST interested in its constructs.

What is a construct?

A construct is something that is not readily observable, but is still there, and it affects human and non-human animal behavior.

Let me explain. Self-esteem for example, can you take your self-esteem out and put it on a table for me to measure? No, that is absurd. However, does self-esteem EXIST? Of course! To think otherwise is also absurd. Just because we cannot put a ruler to your self-esteem and see how big it is does not mean that it, (a) doesn't exist, (b) isn't important, (c) doesn't affect a whole HOST of behaviors.

Personality & Social Psychology

Sadly, there is a political rift between personality and social psychology in modern psychology. (Radical) Social Psychologists want to believe that all human behavior is dictated primarily through experiences and situations. This is simply not true. There are genetic and predispositional behaviors we come into the world with, and the situation INTERACTS with these dispositions to create reliable patterns of behavior. It is sad that there are political tensions between personality and social psychology because they NEED each other! The situation affects behavior just as much as personality and the two often mix to create unique and much more reliable predictions!

Carnahan, T., & McFarland, S. (2007). Revisiting the Stanford Prison Experiment: Could participant self-selection have led to the cruelty?. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Zimbardo, P. G., Haney, C., Curtis Banks, W., & Jaffe, D. (1972). *Stanford prison experiment: A simulation study of the psychology of imprisonment*. Philip G. Zimbardo, Incorporated.