

A MIX OF MANY:  
A THEORY OF MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES

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### Abstract

For our final paper for the course Psychology of Personality, the class has been asked to individually examine and explain our own theory of personality. Why do people do what they do? Does the “why” of it even matter? No matter what, life will out. That said, is it not important, or even simply interesting, to examine the why’s of it all? I think it is. I would not describe myself as Skinnerian or Adlerian, Jungian or Freudian, but a mixture of many, a multitude of personality theories. My theory spans the dimensions of personality, embracing the duality of determinism and free choice, pessimism and optimism, causality and teleology, conscious and unconscious, biological and social, uniqueness and similarity. In addition, I believe that my theory could generate research, is falsifiable to a miniscule degree, capable of organization and guided action, and has qualities of consistency and parsimony. In my paper I will discuss the theories and elements of theories covered in our text of which I agreed with and would hope to utilize in my future psychological practices, as well as some additions of my own.

## A MIX OF MANY

## A THEORY OF MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES

*“The pendulum of the mind alternates between sense and nonsense, not between right and wrong.”*

*—Carl Jung*

The text, *Theories of Personality*, defines theory as a set of related assumptions wherein logical deductive reasoning is used to formulate a testable hypothesis (Feist, Feist, & Roberts, 2018). None of the words within define a rule or law; by definition, a theory is neither right nor wrong. Like the pendulum of the mind, as a theory is created it will swing between sense and nonsense, ideally coming to rest at the side of sense—at least until another theory knocks it back into motion. It is my hope that the pendulum of my mind, as it forms *my* personality theory described in this paper, will land on the side of sense, despite being neither right nor wrong. Why do people do what they do? Does the “why” of it even matter? No matter what, life will out. That said, is it not important, or even simply interesting, to examine the why’s of it all?

Given that theory is not definitive, there are a multitude of theories out there to study. Personality theory is no exception. The American Psychological Association’s dictionary (2018) defines personality development as “the gradual development of personality in terms of characteristic emotional responses or temperament, a recognizable style of life, personal roles and role behaviors, a set of values and goals, typical patterns of adjustment, characteristic interpersonal relations and sexual relationships, characteristic traits, and a relatively fixed self-image.” Some key theories of personality include psychodynamic theories, humanistic/existential theories, dispositional theories, biological/evolutionary theories, and learning-cognitive theories, among others. Although there are some theories that I identify with more than others, I believe

that each has at least something to offer in personality development, beyond simply being a stepping stone to other theories, or some part in historical significance.

Psychodynamic theory is defined as the interworking of drives and motives, the process of change, and interpersonal and transactional perspectives of personality development (APA, 2018). Some psychodynamic theorists I related to at least in part include, Freud, Erikson, Jung, and Adler. It is inarguably true that people go through stages of development in life, and only the particulars of these stages are then left to discussion. Freud's stages included the infantile stage, the latency period, the genital stage, and the maturity stage, with a focus on the beginnings of life. Erikson later extended Freud's developmental stages to include infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age. Jung also believed in stages of development (childhood, youth, middle life, and old age) but with an emphasis on the later stages of life. I believe, as these three theorists did, that we as humans follow stages of development and our personality is affected by this and formed along the way, *unconsciously*. But how? According to Adlerian theory, personality is formed by the individual's desire for success, subjective perceptions, self-consistency, social interest, style of life, and creative power (Feist et al. 2018). These things, involved within the stages of development, form a personality, *unconsciously*. But personalities are so complex, there must be more to it than all that even. Do we not have any control over who we become? Here, I would add in elements of humanistic theory.

Humanistic theory is defined as "...an individuals' capacity to make their own choices, create their own style of life, and actualize themselves in their own way. Its approach is holistic, and its emphasis is on the development of human potential through experiential means rather than the analysis of the unconscious or the modification of behavior," (APA, 2018). This theory

provides the element of the conscious, as compared or added to the unconscious focusing of psychodynamic theory. Where psychodynamic theory examines unconscious stages of development, humanistic theory examines conscious drives experienced throughout the stages. Maslow's hierarchy of needs can coincide well with the stages of development. Our first and foremost needs are those of physiological nature: food, water, warmth. Our next need is of safety: housing, law and order, stability. Following these, we need love and belonging: family, friendship, partnership. Then we need esteem: respect, confidence, competence. And finally, we need self-actualization: fulfillment, creativity. (Feist et al., 2018). Throughout our stages of development, we seek these needs, climbing and falling up and down the ladder of motivations, forming our personality. And yet still, that just doesn't fully explain it, does it? Perhaps our cognition and behavior can explain our personality further?

Learning-cognitive theory, or cognitive-behavioral theory, "considers cognitive or thought processes as significant mediators of behavioral change [...] people respond primarily to cognitive representations of their environments rather than to the environments themselves," (APA, 2018). As we go through the stages of development, climbing and falling in a struggle to meet our needs, we respond to our perceptions of the ever-changing environments around us. Skinner described a process in cognition, called conditioning, wherein we react in one way or another to stimuli. Bandura, Rotter and Mischel focused on how we learn attitudes, skills, and behaviors, informing our personalities further. Kelly focused on how we think and act, based upon our perception of what might happen. These five cognitive theorists combined create a past, present, and future formation of personality.

Individually, each of the above theories provides some form of explanation as to where our personalities come from; why people do what they do. Psychodynamic theory explains our

unconscious, humanistic theory explains our conscious drives, and cognitive theory explains our thoughts and actions amongst it all. It is my theory that by combining the mentioned elements of psychodynamic theory, humanistic theory, and cognitive theory, a more complete personality theory is formed. We are not who we are and do not do what we do without our unconscious, conscious, and processes.

In order for a theory to be useful, and therefore a legitimate theory, it must *generate research, be confirmed or disconfirmed, have organization, guide action, be internally consistent, and be parsimonious*; and my mixed personality theory stands the test. In order to examine the usefulness of my theory, we can look at the theories I am combining on these factors. Freud's theory generates ample research, is difficult to falsify, has loose organization, has applicability, is internally consistent, and lacks simplicity. Erikson's theory generates research, is rather falsifiable, low on organization, lacks application, is high on internal consistency, and has some level of simplicity. Jung's theory generates some research, is difficult to falsify, has organization, some guidance, internal consistency, and lacks parsimony. Adler's theory generates research, difficult to verify, has organization, guides action, lacks internal consistency, and has some level of parsimony. Combining these psychodynamic theories' factors, they prove useful; they generate research, have organization, guide action, are internally consistent, but are difficult to falsify and aren't all that simple. Maslow's humanistic theory also proves useful; it generates research, is highly organized, guides action, is internally consistent, and has simplicity, but lacks falsifiability. Skinner, Bandura, Rotter, and Mischel's cognitive theories prove useful too; they are all able to generate research, prove falsifiable, are organized, guide action, are internally consistent, and have simplicity. Since *my* theory is a combination of these theories, then it would appear that my theory is legitimate; it could generate research, has

organization, could guide action, is internally consistent, and has some level of simplicity, but rides the line on falsifiability.

Using this same process to examine my concept of humanity, one would find that I, like my theory, am mixed. I believe in determinism and free choice, causality and teleology, conscious and unconscious, biological and social influences, and uniqueness and similarity, but I am overwhelmingly optimistic, rather than pessimistic, and these things can be seen in how I would apply my theory to therapeutic practices.

In order to give a more real life look at my theory, I would like to show some examples of therapeutic practices from psychodynamic, humanistic, and cognitive theory that I would utilize in my future therapy sessions. For reference, I will be going into forensic psychology, so I will likely be working with the criminal populous but would also like to eventually work with the general population as well as with veterans, if my training and experience allows. Psychotherapy would mainly be utilized for my theory, and would include psychodynamic, humanistic, and cognitive techniques. Psychotherapy is defined as, “any psychological service provided by a trained professional that primarily uses forms of communication and interaction to assess, diagnose, and treat dysfunctional emotional reactions, ways of thinking, and behavior patterns,” (APA, 2018). Psychodynamic therapies focus on change and development by examining unconscious forces and transferences, humanistic therapies focus on growth through direct experience, and cognitive therapies focus on distortions in cognition and processes of restructuring. My theory would utilize each, either as a mixture or individually, as necessary.

An example of the usefulness of psychodynamic therapy is shown in one study featured in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, wherein psychodynamic therapy was used to help treat veterans with PTSD. The study showed a positive correlation between the use of psychodynamic

group therapy and reduction in PTSD and depression symptoms as well as overall functioning and feelings of hope (Levi, Shoval, Fruchter, Bibi, Bar, & Wald, 2017). Humanistic therapy has also shown to be useful in a myriad of cases. One study took an initial and then additional follow-up look at humanistic therapy and found a strong positive correlation in its use of coping with bereavement especially (Piazza-Bonin, Neimeyer, Alves, Smigelsky, & Crunk, 2016). Cognitive therapy is one of the most popular therapy types used today and has been shown to prove useful in a wide varietal number of cases, including but certainly not limited to mood and anxiety disorders and substance and eating disorders. One study examined the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral therapy in adolescents with depression and anxiety and found that participants reported improvements in depression, anger, anxiety, and self, even with use with a digitally formatted CBT therapy (Alavi, Stefanoff, Hirji, & Khalid-Khan, 2018). These examples are just a few of many that show the usefulness of psychotherapy in psychodynamic, humanistic, and cognitive applications. My theory would likely only provide more of such.

I asked at the beginning, “Why do people do what they do? Does the why of it even matter?” My theory posits that people do what they do because of a mixture of unconscious drives experienced throughout the stages of life, conscious needs sought after amidst those stages, and cognitive and behavioral factors in our past, present, and future. If the why did not matter we would not seek to better ourselves, fix ourselves, or find happiness in life. We would not seek counseling, and my future profession would likely not exist. If it didn’t matter, we wouldn’t ask, now would we?



## References

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