Personality Psychology: The Way We Were and the Way We Are

Larry A. Hjelle and Daniel J. Ziegler
Personality Theories: Basic Assumptions, Research, and Applications (3rd ed.)

Christopher Peterson
Personality (2nd ed.)
San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace

Dan P. McAdams
The Person: An Introduction to Personality Psychology
San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace

Review by
Todd F. Heatherton

They tackle the major positions of the standard theorists (Freud, Adler, Jung, Erikson, Horney, Fromm, Allport, Cattell, Eysenck, Skinner, Bandura, Rotter, Kelly, Maslow, and Rogers), and they provide examples of current research that fits within the theorist's orientation. They also examine how each of these theories fits within various philosophical dichotomies (such as, freedom--determinism, rationality--irrationality, holism--elementalism, and six others). Thus, Personality Theories adequately informs students about the most important theories and research findings that historically have defined the field of personality psychology.

However, Personality Theories falls far short of being a satisfactory introductory text to contemporary personality psychology. For instance, a textbook should excite students about the current state of the discipline and perhaps even encourage them to pursue further studies or, better yet, to pursue a career in the field. Had I read this book as an undergraduate, I doubt I would have ever considered a career in personality research. After all, did not theoretical progress really die out about 30 years ago? One would gain that impression from reading this text.

To assess the extent to which Personality Theories covers the field of personality psychology, I examined the major themes, constructs, and theories of some 700 articles published since 1987 in the Journal of Personality and the Personality and Individual Differences section of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. This brief examination of contemporary personality psychology revealed a number of important topics that are not covered in Personality Theories. For instance, more than two dozen studies have examined various aspects of gender (such as androgyny and sex roles), and yet this topic is covered in only a cursory fashion under Freud's oedipal theory. Such important topics as self-esteem, self-concept, attributional processes, stress and coping, and the Big Five are not considered at all (at least not in any form related to current thinking). Other significant topics that are barely considered include methods of psychobiography, the influence of evolutionary and biological processes, cultural influences, and social influence.

Hjelle and Ziegler suggest that their book is not intended to be the final word on the field, and they do offer a "tentative look at what may lie ahead" (p. 534). However, many of the topics that they identify as up and coming (such as situ-...
Of the three books reviewed, McAdams was my personal favorite. It is one of the best textbooks I have read in any area of academia. The Person is exquisitely written and tries more than the other texts to represent a novel synthesis of historical and contemporary approaches to personality. A particular strength is the emphasis on examining the whole person as the primary goal of personality psychology. McAdams argues that to understand the whole person people need to consider sources outside traditional personality theory, such as literature, folklore, mythology, biography, and other social sciences. By taking such an integrative and interdisciplinary approach to understanding the whole person, McAdams manages to convey the fundamental and universal importance of personality psychology.

Showers (1992) recently noted that the organizational structure of The Person is occasionally difficult to follow. I also found that the organization is, at some points, peculiar. For instance, scattering Erikson's psychosocial stages across multiple chapters diminishes the breadth and elegance of his theory. Similarly, the placement of Adler within a section on identity and the life story was somewhat surprising. Thus, McAdams might consider clarifying his organization in future editions. However, McAdams text is best suited to top-notch schools, where students might have less difficulty with the book's innovative style and will profit from the interdisciplinary approach.

McAdams's text is not simply a rehashing of old theories with current research, as are so many of the competing personality textbooks. Rather, McAdams's book is in the spirit of the old classics, such as Allport's 1937 volume, in that it tries to shape the field as it explains the field. More than any other recent book, McAdams's text fashions a vision for what personality psychology should be.

References

Unravelling the Mystery of Social Psychology

John Sabini
Social Psychology
ISBN 0-393-96201-6. $44.95 (students); $35.97 (bookstore)

John Sabini, professor and chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), has taught both introductory and social psychology courses at Hunter College (New York) and at the University of Pennsylvania. Sabini is coauthor, with M. Silver, of Moralities of Everyday Life. • C. A. Elizabeth Luus, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Victoria (British Columbia, Canada), is coauthor, with C. L. Wells, of the chapter "Eyewitness Confidence" in the forthcoming D. F. Ross, J. D. Read, and M. P. Toglia (Eds.) Eyewitness Testimony: Current Trends and Developments and, with C. L. Wells, of the chapter "The Perceived Credibility of Child Eyewitnesses" in H. Dent and R. Flin (Eds.) Children as Witnesses.

The Preface describes the author's approach as analogous to a mystery writer introducing characters and facts in a fashion designed to stimulate the curiosity and thinking of readers. This is an apt depiction, as evidenced by Sabini's skill in weaving together the contents of each chapter in a building-block style that successively pieces together information to create coherent slices of social psychology. Sabini's clear, engaging style of expression makes the text appealing and involving.

Following an introductory chapter outlining the content and methods of social psychology, the text is divided into