**The Trait Perspective**

Gordon Allport attempted to explain personality in terms of a person's pattern of behaviors, or**traits**. Unlike Freud, Allport was concerned with a person's *conscious* motives and instead of explaining the reasons for certain behaviors, Allport focused on *describing* individual traits.

The **assessment of personality traits** is usually carried out with the aid of **Personality Inventories**, questionnaires (often with true-false or agree-disagree items) on which people respond to items designed to gauge a wide range of feelings and behaviors.

William Sheldon classified people according to their body type assuming that there was a connection between a particular body shape and personality type. According to Sheldon, the plump *endomorph* is typically relaxed and jolly, the muscular *mesomorph* is typically bold and energetic, and the thin *ectomorph* is seen as high-strung and solitary.

Hans Eysenck and Sybil Eysenck used **factor analysis** to statistically identify clusters of behaviors and thus identify a particular trait. For example, behaviors such as avoiding crowds, preference for solitary activities, difficulty in showing affection, and dreading social events taken together may indicate an introverted personality. The Eysencks use two main personality factors:**extraversion-introversion** and **stability-instability** for their analysis. They believe that varying the combination of these traits produce more specific traits.

Currently, many believe that the best description of personality using basic traits is seen in a test called the **"Big Five"** personality factors. The basic trait dimensions include:

1. Emotional Stability
2. Extraversion
3. Openness
4. Agreeableness
5. Conscientiousness

For instance, one would be considered an extravert if they were affectionate (vs. reserved), talkative (vs. quiet), active (vs. passive) and passionate (vs. unfeeling).

Researchers can also assess several traits at once by using personality inventories. The most widely used is the MMPI otherwise known as the **Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory**which was originally developed to identify emotional disorders and is now used now used for many other personality screening purposes. It is an **empirically derived** test and in contrast to the subjectivity of projective tests, the set of MMPI tests are scored objectively and often by computer.

Some people consider astrology and palm reading as an alternative ways of assessing traits. Astrologers have a keen way of taking statements that are commonly true for everyone and making them sound specifically descriptive of their client. An example would be when your horoscope states: "you are worried about something more than you let on". Acceptance of such statements as personally accurate is called the **Barnum effect.**

***Evaluating the Trait Perspective***

With respect to trait assessment, it is possible that people can fake desirable responses on self-report measures of personality. Research does show however that averaging behavior across several situations seems to indicate that people do have distinct personality traits.
Genetic studies have supported the claim that genetic predispositions influence most personality types and that many traits are biologically rooted.

**The Humanistic Perspective**

Humanistic psychologists are not interested in hidden motives or assessing traits, instead they focus on nurturing growth and self-fulfillment. **Abraham Maslow (1908-1970)** studied self-actualization processes of productive and healthy people. **Self-actualization** is defined as the ultimate psychological need that arises after basic physical and psychological needs such as the need for food, security, love, etc. are met and self-esteem is achieved; it is the need to fulfill one's potential.

While Maslow focused on self-actualization, **Carl Rogers (1902-1987)** emphasized people's potential for growth and fulfillment. Rogers suggested that the process involving this person-centered perspective required three conditions:

1. Genuineness
2. Acceptance (unconditional positive regard)
3. Empathy

**Unconditional Positive Regard** refers to having an attitude of total acceptance toward another person. Being *empathetic* requires one to listen carefully and reflectively to another person and to be nonjudgmental.

For both psychologists, a person's beliefs about themselves or their **self-concept** is central to one's personality. **Assessment techniques** would naturally include *questionnaires* regarding one's self-concept. Research shows that people with **high self-esteem** (high self-worth) are more likely to be healthier, happier and more accepting of others compared with those having low self-esteem.

A self-affirming attitude is obviously adaptive and some feel that we are all programmed to make the effort to see ourselves in a more positive light. **Self-Serving Bias** is defined as a readiness to perceive oneself favorably. Research has shown that generally we do accept more responsibility for good deeds and successes than for our failures and we see ourselves as better than the average Joe. Many studies have shown although we all suffer from feelings of inferiority at times, we tend toward self-serving perceptions.

***Culture and the Individual***

Our identities are molded in the context of the cultures in which they have developed.

In **Individualistic**cultures such North American culture, a person gives priority to his own goals over group goals and defines his identity in terms of his own personal characteristics rather than group characteristics. **Collectivism** on the other hand describes a culture in which there is priority given to the goals of one's group (often one's extended family or work group) and defining one's identity accordingly. Collectivist cultures such as Asian cultures give priority to family identity and the goals of the group. North Americans on the other hand, emphasize personal identity and individual goals and aspirations.

***Evaluating The Humanistic Perspective***
Critics of this theory suggest that concepts like "self-actualization" are vague and lack objectivity and that the emphasis on "self" may promote a lack of concern for others. Although it is the most optimistic personality perspective, this theory does not acknowledge human capacity for evil. The humanistic perspective however has strongly influenced our ideas on child rearing, education, management, counseling, etc.