Traits and Personality

Chapter 10

Nomothetic vs. Idiographic Distinction

- Nomothetic research refers to the study of large groups to determine the frequency with which certain events occur
  - Normalcy = high frequency
  - Infer common traits, universal principles
- Idiographic research centers on one individual at a time that attempts to document distinctiveness and uniqueness
  - Complex research, often used to answer specific questions about individuals

Assessment and Research

Henry Murray’s 20 Needs

Thematic Apperception Test

Human Needs and Press

• Alpha Press
• Beta Press

Proceedings

Serials
Henry Murray

- 1893-1988
- Born & raised in NYC
- Privileged family
- Medical school first, then psychology
- Meeting with Jung provided inspiration
  - Experienced the unconscious
- Had affair with Christiana Morgan who did not get appropriate credit for TAT

The Study of Personology

- Murray emphasized the complexity of personality
- Personology defined as the study of “human lives and the factors that influence their course”
  - Normal people and natural settings
  - Study of individual human lives

The Study of Personology

- Wanted to separate the total of a person into manageable units
- The basic unit, the proceeding refers to a short significant behavior pattern that has clear beginning and ending
  - Interactions of the person with other individuals or objects
    - Picking up a book, writing a letter, pacing back and forth
- Proceedings chained together into serials
  - A planned series of proceedings leading to a goal is a serial program
Human Needs

- Murray’s most significant contribution to the study of personality
- Needs are “forces within the brain that organize our perceptions, understanding, and behavior in such a way to change an unsatisfying situation or increase satisfaction”
  - Aroused by internal states (hunger) or external stimuli (food)

Human Needs and Press

- Derived and articulated 20 basic human needs
- Not all needs present in all people
- Needs are in varying strength and intensity
  - These fundamental needs are ordered into a hierarchy by Maslow
- Press refers to forces from objects or persons with the environment that help or hinder an individual in reaching goals

Alpha vs. Beta Press

- Alpha Press refers to actual properties or attributes of the environment
- Beta Press refers to the individual’s perception of the environment
  - Beta presses are the real determinants of behavior
Murray’s 20 Needs

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Thematic Apperception Test

TAT
- Murray’s most enduring contribution
- Projective Test still used in clinical psychology assessment
- Patients respond to cards with ambiguous drawings by telling a story and describing the needs of the characters therein
- Patients “project” their own needs onto the card

TAT: An Example

Blacky Test
TAT: An example

1. What story does the picture tell?
2. What led up to the event in the picture?
3. How are things going to work out?
4. What are the people in the card thinking and feeling?
Thematic Apperception Test

- Extensively used
- Limited empirical evidence
- Poor reliability when scored
- Used primarily for the narrative themes that patients describe