Personality Theories

HUMANISTIC APPROACH
Humanistic Theories: Rejects biological determinism & emphasizes free will and personal growth, and the ability to choose our own destiny.

Kurt Cobain

Cobain showed no particular evidence of having outstanding musical skills when he was young.

Charles Dutton

How does a mean, tough, convicted murderer become a Yale educated, award winning actor?

The lives of these two men demonstrate the difficulty in predicting someone’s potential and whether he or she will develop it.
Three characteristics of Humanistic Theories

- **Phenomenological Perspective**
  - Your perception of the world, accurate or not, becomes your reality.

- **Holistic View**
  - Personality traits combine to form a unique entity that functions as a unit.

- **Self-Actualization**
  - Refers to our inherent tendency to develop and reach our true potential.
Abraham Maslow

- Originally a behaviorist, but wanted to focus on human nature, feelings & beliefs.
- He developed his own theory that emphasized our capacity for growth (Self Actualization) & our desire to satisfy a variety of needs. (Hierarchy)

Characteristics of a Self Actualized Person
1. They perceive reality accurately.
2. They are independent and autonomous
3. They prefer to have a deep, loving, relationship with only a few people.
4. They focus on accomplishing their goals.
5. They report peak experiences, which are moments of joy and satisfaction.

Maslow believed that, although very few individuals reach the level of self-actualization, everyone has a self-actualizing tendency. This motivates us to be the best kind of person we are capable of becoming.
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is shown above. The pyramid illustrates the five levels of human needs. The most basic are physiological and safety/security, shown at the base of the pyramid. As one moves to higher levels of the pyramid, the needs become more complex.

- **Physiological**: Physical survival needs: water, food, sleep, warmth, exercise, etc.
- **Safety/Security**: Physical safety, economic security, freedom from threats.
- **Social (Belonging)**: Acceptance, be part of a group, identification with a successful team.
- **Ego (Esteem)**: Important projects, recognition from others, prestige and status.
- **Self-Actualization**: Challenging projects, opportunities for innovation and creativity, learning and creating at a high level.
If the tendency toward self-actualization is innate, why aren’t more adults self actualized?

- Self–Actualization is the weakest of all needs.

- Childhood experiences may inhibit personal growth.
  - “freedom within limits” in which there is the right mixture of permissiveness & regulation.

- Jonah Complex
  - We fear and doubt our own abilities.
  - One must have enough courage to sacrifice safety for personal growth.
Why are there millions of dog owners?

- Because they love us unconditionally.
- The need to feel appreciated is obviously important in this society.
  - Mother’s Day,
  - Valentine’s Day
  - Secretary’s day

- Positive regard includes love, sympathy, warmth, acceptance, and respect, which we crave from family, friends, and people important to us.
- Conditional VS. Unconditional Positive regard.
Dead Poets Society

- How would the Humanistic Theory describe the conflict in Neil’s life?
- What part of Erikson’s Theory is illustrated in this clip?
- How do Mr. Keating and Neil’s father play a role in Neil’s personality development?
Humanistic Approach

Carl Rogers’ personality theory

The needs for self-actualization and positive regard create potential for conflict.
The Real Self:

- According to Rogers, our real self is based on our actual experiences and represents how we actually see ourselves.
- Why do I sometimes feel that I don’t know myself?
- Why do I sometimes say or do things that aren’t really me?
- Carl Rogers developed a clever answer to these relatively common and perplexing questions.

- Label a blank sheet of paper “Perceived Self”
- Spend about 1 minute describing how you see yourself.
Ideal Self

- The ideal self, according to Rogers, is based on our hopes and wishes and reflects how we would like to see ourselves.
- Label a piece of paper “Ideal Self” and spend about 1 minute describing who you would LIKE TO BE.
- Did anyone write the same thing on both papers?
- The Humanistic perspective argues that a fully self-actualized person finds the “Ideal Self” completely congruent with the “Perceived Self”
Contradiction between the ideal and real self

- A glaring contradiction between the “real” and “ideal” self can result in personality problems.
- We can resolve these contradictions by paying more attention to our actual experiences, working to have more positive experiences, and paying less attention to the expectation of others.

- What might account for the glaring differences between the real & ideal self?
  - Maturity
  - Still achieving goals
  - Still in the process of finding our true identity
How popular is Humanism?

- Perhaps the main reason humanistic theories, such as those of Maslow & Rogers, continue to be popular is that they view people as basically good and believe that people can develop their true potentials.

- Criticisms?
  - Provide little or no scientific proof that an innate tendency to self actualize exists.
  - Description of human behavior rather than an explanation?
  - Humanistic theories tend to ignore research showing that 20-60% of the development of intellectual, emotional, social, and personality traits comes from genetic factors.