

Wesleyan University
Graduate Liberal Studies Program
The Dynamics of Character
Syllabus

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Personality can be defined as a dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations, and behaviors in various situations (Ryckman, 2004). The word "personality" originates from the Latin *persona*, which means mask. Significantly, in the theater of the ancient Latin-speaking world, the mask was not used as a plot device to *disguise* the identity of a character, but rather was a convention employed to represent or *typify* that character.

Personality psychology is a branch of psychology that studies personality and individual differences. One emphasis in this area is to construct a coherent picture of a person and his or her major psychological processes (Bradberry, 2007). Another emphasis views personality as the study of individual differences, in other words, how people differ from each other. A third area of emphasis examines human nature and how all people are similar to one another. These three viewpoints merge together in the study of personality.

The study of personality has a rich and varied history in psychology, with an abundance of theoretical traditions. The major theories include dispositional (trait) perspective, psychodynamic, humanistic, biological, behaviorist and social learning perspective. There is no consensus on the definition of "personality" in psychology. Most researchers and psychologists do not explicitly identify themselves with a certain perspective and often taken an eclectic approach.

In this class, we will explore one of the problems plaguing the fields of psychiatry and psychology: differentiation, especially when the possibility of borderline character pathology exists. These conditions must be differentiated from, on the one hand, the neuroses and neurotic character pathology and, on the other hand, the psychoses, particularly schizophrenia and the major affective disorders. We will analyze the qualities of various kinds of experience and behavior, such as the ways of thinking, the attitudes (recognized and unrecognized), and the modes of action that characterize the different personality/character conditions.

A review of the description and analysis of the general forms of pathological experience and behavior of these forms or "styles" seems to constitute what might be called the structure of the pathological character and, in turn, determine the form of characteristic symptoms, what Wilhelm Reich called "ways of being."

Required Texts:

Stout, M. (2005). *The Sociopath Next Door*. New York: Three Rivers Press

Kreisman, J & Straus, H. (2010). *I Hate You – Don't Leave Me. Understanding the Borderline Personality*. New York: Penguin.

Payson, E. (2009). *The Wizard of Oz and Other Narcissists*. Michigan: Julian Day Publications.

There are other sources that will be used/referenced in class. These sources include first-person accounts and clinical case

Course Objectives:

The study of personality concerns individuality in human behavior patterns, with behavior defined broadly to include thoughts, feelings, desires, intentions, and action tendencies. Personality concerns human behavioral tendencies at a rather broad level, and the purpose of this course is to help you learn ways of thinking usefully and critically (i.e., carefully) about human behavior, through the most important concepts and findings of personality psychology. The course has two interlinked goals: promoting knowledge of personality and sharpening thinking skills. Knowledge of personality psychology can aid one in thinking usefully and critically about human behavior patterns, which is useful not only in psychology and human services professions, but in many areas of human life.

Assessment:

- **40% - Final Literature Review Paper and Short Presentation**

Summarize and critique recent research articles on a relatively narrow topic in personality psychopathology, to produce a paper of 15 typed, double-spaced pages. Each participant will present a summary of her/his Literature Review Paper during class. Presentations must last no longer than 5 minutes, with a brief question and answer period to follow.

- **60% - Participation and discussion**

This course will be conducted in a seminar style involving minimal lecture and mostly discussion. Thus, participants must attend class meetings each week having read all of the assigned articles for that day. In class meetings, please be prepared to contribute, and then turn in, **one issue or question for discussion**. Typed discussion items may range from one sentence to one paragraph in length, and I will assess them by the degree to which they reflect mastery of the concepts, clarity of analysis, and thoughtfulness. Your overall class participation grade will reflect your attendance record, regular contributions to discussions that demonstrate good preparation, and the quality of your discussion items.

Course Schedule:

Session	Topic
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1	Historical Thoughts What is character? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Structural understanding- Diagnostic understanding- Adolescence versus older age Approaches: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Trait- Biological- Psychoanalytic- Humanistic- Cross-Cultural- Process (Learning, Motivation and the Self)	Presentation of the clinical aspects of personality disorder (PD) diagnosis and treatment. Source articles and summaries will be presented during the first class to provide a baseline for future topics.
2	From Neurotic to Psychotic: Rigidity in the Structure of Character Organization, Drives, Styles, and Defense	Texts listed above should be completed before the start of the second class session, as these will provide the basis for discussion on the Cluster B Personality Disorders (Narcissistic, Antisocial, Borderline, Histrionic/Hysterical).
3-4	On the Border between Neurotic and Psychotic: Defining Borderline Pathology Change	
4-5	Student Presentations	To be determined by presenters