



CHARACTER STYLES*

INTRODUCTION

This is the book I wish I'd had when I began the serious study of psychology over thirty years ago. Like many young people, I went into the field with broad, straightforward, significant questions--What makes people tick? Why are we so crazy? What can be done about it? Eight years later, with a Ph.D in hand, I know far more about experimental design, statistics, and the learning of nonsense syllables than I did about what had initiated my quest. It wasn't until six years after that, with tenure in a respectable psychology department and the freedom of a sabbatical, that I finally returned to these more fundamental questions. It required abandoning the restrictive narrowness then required by mainstream academic psychology concerning what forms of knowledge are valid. Empirically derived knowledge, acquired by sticking to the rules sanctioned at any particular time, just won't suffice for such questions. I found that the answers had to involve a number of ways of knowing and the integration of many, often independent, contributions. Completing this book has closed a circle, if it has not brought me full circle, in answering the questions that brought me to the field. Elements of the answers come from within the mainstream, but much comes from outside it. What you will find here is the product of intuition, theory, experience, deductions and, yes, a good deal of mainstream empirical research.

"What makes people tick?" is very similar to the equally broad, important question "What is human nature?" It seems to me that developmental research and theory, in their essence, attempt to answer that question. Sustained watching of infants, babies, and children leads one to speculate about the essential nature of this being who is so initially helpless and potentially accomplished. Careful and often contrived observation is sometimes necessary to discover how already accomplished this little one really is. Theories are particularly useful in this endeavor to suggest the right questions.

What developmental theory and research have given us is an increasingly broad yet increasingly precise description of human nature. This particularly includes the kinds of needs humans must have met and the kinds of environments that must be provided to

achieve human potential. Similarly, observations of children in development tell us what happens when these needs are chronically frustrated or when the needed environments are not provided. Again, the theories suggest what to look for and posit the most central relationships between early environment and resulting development.

I've always found the most fascinating application of this basic knowledge to involve answering the second question: "Why are we so crazy?" It is obvious that were it not for our craziness, there would be so much less suffering and destruction in the world. Humans solve problems far better than any other life-form but our craziness interferes profoundly with that process at every level. It is in the family, the workplace, and the politics of humankind that we see the colossal waste and pain of our proclivity for destructive dysfunctionality.

In answering the second question, I have found it particularly useful to study the most common patterns or syndromes in which our craziness expresses itself. These patterns are best described by those clinicians who have attempted to treat pathology. Among these, those who have escribed character structures, styles, or disorders have often been the most astute. The resulting character syndromes have stood well the test of time and clinical practice and have done relatively well under the scrutiny of more systematic research. In their more extreme forms, these disorders of character or personality are widely used for diagnostic purposes around the world.

Now, here is the integration of two ways of knowing that help us to answer these questions. The studies of human development or human nature fit very nicely with the descriptions of the patterns of human craziness. Furthermore, these patterns don't just occur in the most severe form of mental illness. Such patterns are clearly documented in normal populations and in less severely pathological groups. I believe there are several useful continua of human dysfunction from the most to the least severe, which reflect quintessential building blocks of human nature. I believe I've found seven such building blocks around which personality and psychopathology are organized. There may be more.

Critical to any individual's adjustment on any of these continua is interaction. That interaction is between the individual, with his changing but basic needs, and the changing environment's ability to meet them. Such interaction makes personality and produces psychopathology. In an era when our most basic science, particle physics., asserts that matter itself is made of interaction, we are ripe to understand and experience our personality and our personal pathology as the product of interaction. The interactional perspective in psychiatry is far from new. Fairbairn (1974, originally published 1952) and Guntrip (1968, 1971) are among its earliest, clearest, and most seminal contributors. These figures represent part of what has come to be known as the British School of Objects Relations Theory, which emphasizes the role of the parent-child relationship in the development of personality and psychopathology. Theirs is a variation of psychoanalytic theory that emphasizes theoretically derived dimensions of child development and psychopathology based on early interactions.

Character is not usually a central focus for these theorists though they do address it. And, their theories are not typically informed or modified by child development research. What is necessary, then, for a more profound understanding of the essential questions is the integration of developmental process, interactional determinants, and characterological syndromes.

While all the building blocks for this have been available for some time, they are just now, here and there, being brought together. I've attempted to do this in my prior books written for therapists in practice and training (Johnson, 1985, 1987, 1991). Each of these books addresses one or two characterological patterns with an emphasis on treatment. I have tried to write each of these books in sufficiently nontechnical language so that an educated layperson could read them. Yet, the bulk of each book does not speak to non-therapists, and any serious student would have to pull together all of my books and those of others to complete the picture. This book brings all of this together, first to describe the overall theoretical-empirical model, which integrates development, character, and interaction. Then, each of the character structures reflecting the seven basic existential life issues are thoroughly described.

My hope is that this work will be accessible to anyone on the mature side of college sophomore and that it will help you answer your own questions about human nature and craziness. I hope it will help set the stage for your discovering what you can do about the craziness not only in psychotherapy but in your life and relationships. I also hope that you, like me, will relate to this as a work in progress. These questions are too important and the problems too intricate to lend themselves to any last words or final solutions. Theoretical, empirical, intuitive, deductive, experimental, and other forms of knowing will continue to inform and correct our work.

Answers to the third question, what can we do about human craziness, is where I experience the least closure. These answers will certainly continue to evolve and will come from fields as varied as psychopharmacology to ecology and others we haven't even dreamt of. I have, however, held to the strategy of my earlier books in retaining the section on psychotherapeutic objectives for each character type. Here, I tend to address the therapists, but the considerations encountered may be applied to one's own personal development or that of another.

The first four chapters of this book present the overall theoretical-empirical model. They were originally in The Symbiotic Character (Johnson, 1991) and Chapters 2 through 4 review the model in reference to each of the seven basic existential issue and their characterological manifestations. The novice reader might consider skipping Chapters 2 through 4, at least initially, because they are more research-oriented than the chapters that follow.

Each of the subsequent chapters describes one existential life issue and the etiology, expression, and treatment objectives for the character formed by its mishandling. With minimal updating and editing I have then used the descriptive chapters from my earlier books. Chapters 5 and 6 come from Characterological Transformation (Johnson, 1985),

Chapter 7 comes from 5 The Symbiotic Character (Johnson, 1991), and Chapter 8 comes from Humanizing the Narcissistic Style (Johnson, 1987). Chapters 9 through 11 were written explicitly for this book to complete the description of all seven character types.

For the most part, each chapter stands on its own, and one could read this book in any order. The first chapter presents the overall theory, however, and would be generally useful for more fully understanding the others. For those readers familiar with personality disorders, this chapter also will show how my treatment relates to the currently employed categories of personality disorder.

Sophisticated readers have, on occasion, asked me what is new or different about my approach. The answer is there's not much here that's new. What's different is this: It is not psychoanalytic, not object relations, not self-psychology or ego psychology. It is not behavioral or cognitive or affective. It is not characterological, developmental, empirical, experiential, intuitive, or deductive. It is all of this and more in a mix. It attempts to answer important questions with the information available. For each of us who are curious about such questions, this is what we must do. Here's my answer. I hope it helps.

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