PSYC 219: THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

GLOBAL ASSIGNMENT

One of the most important functions of language is to help us describe various phenomena such as events, situations and people. Not only do we describe such things with language we also *evaluate* them because our words are not only descriptions which are objective, but the words we use almost always are value laden, because they reflect our own likes and dislikes and therefore are subjective. Thus, our use of any particular term not only describes, but also *prescribes* what is desirable or undesirable to us.

We may try to stay neutral but the constraints of language get in our way. If you are conducting research and need to describe people it is almost impossible to find neutral adjectives to describe personality characteristics, of a person or a group of people.

Look below at a chart of the same person as described from two perspectives:

From Paul’s Value System From Paula’s Value System

Old Mature

Naïve Idealistic

Reckless Brave

Childish Childlike

Obsessed Committed

Dependent Loyal

Narcissistic High Self-Esteem

Lunatic Visionary

Now try the exercise below. Remember that Paula’s attitudes and values are always more positive than Paul’s.

Paul Paula

Failure

Problems

Primitive

Brainwashed

Abnormal

Ethnocentrism

Child neglect

Kleptomaniac

Terrorist

Handicapped

Note how this exercise underscores the reciprocal influences of attitudes and language. If you refer to a person or group as *sick,* then we are more likely to view them as sick which in turn leads us to label them as sick which leads us to assume they are sick, and so on. Consider the ways in which names applied to various ethnic groups have changed as a function of changes in social and historical contexts. How has this affected “politically correct” terminology?

Why is “person of color” okay but” colored person “isnot?

What values might be related to Oriental versus Asian? Iranian versus Persian?

Note to Faculty: This exercise is based on one found in the book Cross-Cultural Psychology , Fourth Edition, by Eric B. Shiraev, and David A. Levy