

# Personality

Definition: Personality refers to the pattern of psychological and behavioral characteristics that distinguish each person from everyone else.

## ***Methods of assessing personality:***

Personality is usually assessed through some combination of observation, interviews and tests.

Tests can be classified as either objective or projective. Objective personality tests are often used in an effort to identify people suited for certain kinds of jobs, but this use of personality tests does not usually work as well as employers might wish.

## ***Systematic approaches to personality***

The four main approaches to personality are:

- the psychodynamic approach
- the dispositional approach
- the behavioral approach
- the phenomenological approach

Each approach contains basic assumptions and methods of measuring personality.

### The psychodynamic approach

The psychodynamic approach, founded by Freud, assumes that personality is formed out by conflicts between basic needs and the demands of the real world. Most of these conflicts occur at an unconscious level, but their effects can be seen in everyday behavior.

#### ○ *The structure of personality*

Freud believed that personality has three components:

- Id: is the reservoir of the “psychological energy” (libido) and operates according to the pleasure principle

- Ego: is the “executive” of the personality (is responsible for organizing ways to get what a person wants in the world) and operates according to the reality principle
- Superego: is represented by personal values, “should” and “should not” and operates according to the morality principle
  - o *Conflicts and defenses*

Id, ego and superego are often in unconscious conflict. Various ego defense mechanisms are:

- Denial consists in distorting reality by simply negating the truth.
- Displacement in which the unacceptable impulses are diverted toward alternative targets.
- Intellectualization helps a person to minimize anxiety by viewing threatening issues in abstract terms.
- Projection consists in attributing your own unacceptable desires to others.
- Rationalization attempts to explain away unacceptable behavior.
- Reaction formation is a defense in which your behavior runs exactly opposite to your true feelings.
- Repression consists in forcing unacceptable impulses out of awareness.
- Sublimation is the conversion of repressed yearnings into socially approved action.
  - o *Stages in personality development*

Freud proposed that the personality develops in several stages. These are called psychosexual stages, because at each stage a particular part of the body becomes the main source of pleasure . Each stage is characterized by unique problems and conflicts

Freud identified the following psychosexual stages:

- the oral stage – a child’s first year or so
- the anal stage – occurs during the second year
- the phallic stage – by the age of three or so and for about two years thereafter
- the latency period – after the phallic stage until puberty

- the genital stage – spans the rest of the life
- *Variation on Freudian personality theory*

Numerous psychodynamic theories have been based on Freud's original formulations. Prominent theorists include:

- Jung, who argued that each person has both a personal and a collective unconscious, which stores archetypes (the images and ideas the human race has accumulated since its evolution from lower forms of life);
- Adler, who held that a person style of life constitutes personality;
- Erikson, who proposed that personality develops through psychosocial stages.

These and other psychodynamic variations tend to downplay the role of instincts and the unconscious, emphasizing instead the importance of conscious processes, ego functions, and social and cultural factors.

#### The dispositional approach

The dispositional approach assumes that personality is made up of a set of stable internal characteristics that guide behavior. These characteristics have sometimes been described as personality types but more often as traits or needs.

- *Personality types*

For centuries, people have tried to place other people into a small number of personality types, but this effort has not been successful.

- *Personality traits*

Personality traits are seen by many as the building blocks out of which personality is created. These traits can appear at varying strengths in each person.

Factor analysis of the results of personality tests is one method of isolating underlying personality dimensions. Recently, personality researchers have begun to agree on five such dimensions:

- *Neuroticism*

Persons scoring high on this factor are prone to feeling anxious in many situations. They are generally susceptible to experiencing other negative emotions like anger and

depression, do not cope well with stress, and are likely to have unrealistic ideas about themselves.

- *Extraversion*

Extraverts typically like other people, prefer to be a part of social gatherings, and tend to be assertive, active, upbeat, and cheerful. Introverts, in this model, are not exactly the opposite of extraverts. Rather, they seem to lack extraverted qualities and therefore appear reserved, aloof or independent, and emotionally even-paced.

- *Openness*

Open persons have active imaginations, are sensitive to sights and sounds around them, are intellectually curious, and seem receptive to diverse inner and outer experiences. Openness is also correlated with a tendency to feel emotions keenly. Those low on openness tend to be conventional, down-to-earth, narrower in their interests, and inartistic.

- *Agreeableness*

This dimension describes whether a person has a positive or negative orientation toward others. Agreeable persons are eager to help others and expect they will be treated with sympathy and cooperation. Cynicism, suspiciousness, and uncooperativeness characterize people low on this factor.

- *Conscientiousness*

High conscientiousness is reflected in a determined persistence to accomplish highly valued tasks. Conscientious persons are usually reliable; when they promise to do something, they do it. Conscientious people may also tend to be puritanical in their attitudes. Low scores on this factor are associated with laxness, aimlessness, and unreliability.

Personality traits may be derived from inherited tendencies that provide the raw materials out of which experience molds each personality.

### The behavioral approach

The behavioral approach to personality assumes that personality is a label that summarizes a person's unique patterns of learned behaviors. It explains the inconsistencies in behavior by the concept of situational specificity.

- *The operant approach*

Skinner is the most prominent exponent of the operational approach to personality. He has argued that personality can be understood through the functional analysis of behavior, which examines how behavior has been rewarded or punished.

- *Cognitive-behavioral approaches*

The cognitive-behavioral approach includes learned patterns of thinking among the factors shaping behavior and emphasized the outcome of person-situation interactions. For example, Bandura highlighted the learned expectations he called self-efficacy and argued that reciprocal determinism characterizes the relationship among behavior, cognitions, and the environment.

Mischel described how the varying importance of a person variables and situation variables may account for consistencies and inconsistencies of behavior.

### The phenomenological approach

The phenomenological approach, which is also called the humanistic approach, is based on the assumption that personality is determined by the unique ways in which each individual views the world. These perceptions form a personal version of reality and guide behavior as people strive to reach their fullest human potential.

- *The self theory of Carl Rogers*

Rogers believed that personality development is driven by an innate tendency toward self-actualization and shaped by social evaluations. He proposed that when people are free from conditions of worth, their personalities will be undistorted and free from psychological disorders.

- *Maslow's humanistic psychology*

Maslow saw self-actualization as the highest need in a hierarchy of needs. Personality growth is optimized when people adopt a growth orientation rather than a deficiency orientation.