

## **7. PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT THEORIES OF**

**7.1 WHAT IS PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT:** Personality development has been a major topic of interest for some of the most prominent thinkers in psychology. Our personalities make us unique, but how does personality develop? How exactly do we become who we are today?

In order to answer this question, many prominent theorists developed theories to describe various steps and stages that occur on the road of personality development. The following theories focus on various aspects of personality development, including cognitive, social and moral development.

### **Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development**

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development remains one of the most frequently cited in psychology, despite being subject to considerable criticism. While many aspects of his theory have not stood the test of time, the central idea remains important today: children think differently than adults. Learn more about Piaget's groundbreaking theory and the important contributions it made to our understanding of personality development.

### **Freud's Stages of Psychosexual Development**

In addition to being one of the best-known thinkers in the area of personality development, Sigmund Freud remains one of the most controversial. In his well-known stage theory of psychosexual development, Freud suggested that personality develops in stages that are related to specific erogenous zones. Failure to successfully complete these stages, he suggested, would lead to personality problems in adulthood.

### **Freud's Structural Model of Personality**

Freud's concept of the id, ego and superego has gained prominence in popular culture, despite a lack of support and considerable skepticism from many researchers. According to Freud, three elements of personality—known as the id, the ego, and the superego—work together to create complex human behaviors.

### **Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development**

Erik Erikson's eight-stage theory of human development is one of the best known theories in psychology. While the theory builds on Freud's stages of psychosexual development, Erikson chose to focus on how social relationships impact personality development. The theory also extends beyond childhood to look at development across the entire lifespan.

## **Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development**

Lawrence Kohlberg developed a theory of personality development that focused on the growth of moral thought. Building on a two-stage process proposed by Piaget, Kohlberg expanded the theory to include six different stages. While the theory has been criticized for a number of different reasons, including the possibility that it does not accommodate different genders and cultures equally, Kohlberg's theory remains important in our understanding of how personality develops.

**7.2 Personality Psychology: Defining Personality:** Personality is made up the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that make a person unique. It arises from within the individual and remains fairly consistent throughout life. How exactly do psychologists define personality? What are the different components of personality? You can learn about the answers to these questions and more in this [overview of personality](#).

### **Theories of Personality:**

A number of different theories have emerged to explain different aspects of personality. Some theories focus on explaining how personality develops while others are concerned with individual differences in personality. The following are just a few of the major theories of personality proposed by different psychologists:

#### **Trait Theories**

- [Gordon Allport's dispositional perspective](#)
- Hans Eysenck's three-trait model
- [Myers-Briggs Types](#)
- ["Big Five" Personality Dimensions](#)

#### **Psychoanalytic Theories:**

- [Freud's Theory of Psychosexual Development](#)  
Freud's theory of psychosexual development is one of the best known personality theories, but also one of the most controversial. Learn more about the psychosexual stages of development.
- [Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development](#)  
According to Erik Erikson, each stage plays a major role in the development of

personality and psychological skills. During each stage, the individual faces a developmental crisis that serves as a turning point in development.

- Horney's Theory of Neurotic Needs

Theorist Karen Horney developed a list of neurotic needs that arise from overusing coping strategies to deal with basic anxiety. Learn more about these neurotic needs described by Horney.

### **Behavioral Theories:**

- Classical Conditioning

Classical conditioning is one of the best-known concepts of behavioral learning theory. In this type of conditioning, a neutral stimulus is paired with a naturally occurring response. Once an association has been formed, the previously neutral stimulus will come to evoke the response.

- Operant Conditioning

Operant conditioning is one of the fundamental concepts in behavioral psychology. This process involves strengthening or weakening a behavior using reinforcement and punishment.

### **Humanist Theories:**

#### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs emphasizes the importance of self-actualization and is often pictured as a pyramid. The base of the pyramid consist of basic survival needs, while the top of the pyramid is focused on self-actualizing needs.

### **Personality Disorders:**

An estimated 10 to 15% of adults in the United States experience symptoms of at least one personality disorder. What are personality disorders? A personality disorder is a chronic and pervasive mental disorder that affects thoughts, behaviors, and interpersonal functioning. The DSM-IV currently lists 10 different personality disorders, which you can learn more about in the following article: [Overview of Personality Disorders](#)

## **Personality Tests:**

You can find a number of personality tests here on the About Psychology site. These tests and quizzes are designed to give readers an idea of how formal assessments are used. However, these personality tests are not intended for use in assessment or diagnosis.

**7.3 Overview of Personality Disorders:** According to a study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, an estimated 30.8 million American adults experience symptoms of at least one personality disorder. Just what are personality disorders, anyway? A personality disorder is a chronic and pervasive mental disorder that affects thoughts, behaviors and interpersonal functioning. The DSM-IV currently lists 10 different personality disorders, including borderline, antisocial and avoidant personality disorder.

You can learn more about the causes, diagnosis and treatments in this overview of personality disorders.

## **What are Personality Disorders?**

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV), a personality disorder is an "enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectation of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or impairment." Because these disorders are chronic and pervasive, they can lead to serious impairments in daily life and functioning.

## **What Causes Personality Disorders?**

The causes of personality disorders are the subject of considerable debate and controversy. Some experts believe that personality disorders are caused by early experiences that prevented the development of normal thought and behavior patterns. Other researchers believe that biological or genetic influences are the root cause of personality disorders.

While a definitive cause has not been established, it is likely that a combination of genetic predisposition and environmental variables contribute to the development of personality disorders.

### **How are Personality Disorders Diagnosed?**

In order to be diagnosed with a personality disorder, an individual must exhibit symptoms that meet the diagnostic criteria established in the DSM-IV.

- These patterns of behavior must be chronic and pervasive, affecting many different aspects of the individual's life, including social functioning, work, school and close relationships.
- The individual must exhibit symptoms that affect two or more of the following areas: thoughts, emotions, interpersonal functioning and impulse control.
- The pattern of behaviors must be stable across time and have an onset that can be traced back to adolescence or early adulthood.
- These behaviors cannot be explained by any other mental disorders, substance abuse or medical conditions.

### **What are the Different Types of Personality Disorders?**

Personality disorders are described on Axis II of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. The DSM-IV lists a total of ten different personality disorders. These disorders are classified into three separate clusters.

#### **Cluster A - Odd or Eccentric Disorders**

- Paranoid Personality Disorder
- Schizoid Personality Disorder
- Schizotypal Personality Disorder

#### **Cluster B - Dramatic, Emotional, or Erratic Disorders**

- Antisocial Personality Disorder
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Histrionic Personality Disorder
- Narcissistic Personality Disorder

#### **Cluster C – Anxious or Fearful Disorders**

- Avoidant Personality Disorder
- Dependent Personality Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder

## Differential Diagnosis

Before a clinician can diagnose a personality disorder, they must rule out other disorders or medical conditions that may be causing the symptoms. The symptoms that characterize personality disorders are often similar to those of other disorders and illnesses. Personality disorders also commonly co-occur with other illnesses.

The following are potential differentials that must be ruled out before diagnosing an individual with a personality disorder:

- Substance Abuse
- Anxiety Disorders
- Depression
- Dissociative Disorders
- Social Phobia
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Schizophrenia