

1. ETHICS

1.1 Where do we begin: What is Personality?

First, we must start by answering the most basic question: What is personality? Personality is made up the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that make a person unique. Researchers have found while some external factors can influence how certain traits are expressed, personality originates within the individual. While a few aspects of personality may change as we grow older, personality tends to remain fairly consistent throughout life.

Personality psychologists are interested in the unique characteristics of individuals, as well as similarities among groups of people.

In this first section of our personality study let us, start by learning more about how psychologists define personality: **What is Personality?**

Characteristics of Personality

1. Personality is organized and consistent. We tend to express certain aspects of our personality in different situations and our responses are generally stable.
2. Personality is psychological, but is influenced by biological needs and processes. For example, while your personality might lead you to be shy in social situations, an emergency situation might lead you to take on a more outspoken and take-charge approach.
3. Personality *causes* behaviors to happen. You react to the people and objects in your environment based on your personality. From your personal preferences to your choice of a career, every aspect of your life is affected by your personality.
4. Personality is displayed through thoughts, feelings, behaviors and many other ways.

The Study of Personality

Now that you know a bit more about the basics of personality, it's time to take a closer look at how scientists actually study human personality.

There are a number of different techniques that are used in the study of personality. Each technique has its own strengths and weaknesses.

- **Experimental methods** are those in which the researcher controls and manipulates the variables of interests and takes measures of the results. This is the most scientific form of research, but experimental research can be difficult when studying aspects of personality such as motivations, emotions, and drives. These ideas are internal, abstract, and extremely difficult to measure.
- **Case studies and self-report methods** involve the in-depth analysis of an individual as well as information provided by the individual. Case studies rely heavily on the interpretation of the observer, while self-report methods depend upon the memory of the individual of interest. Because of this, these methods tend to be highly subjective and it is difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population.
- **Clinical research** relies upon information gathered from clinical patients over the course of treatment. Many personality theories are based upon this type of research, but because the research subjects are unique and exhibit abnormal behavior, this research tends to be highly subjective and difficult to generalize.

Next, learn more about some of the basic research methods used by psychology researchers.

Personality psychology is the focus of some of the best known psychology theories by a number of famous thinkers including Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson. In this section of the personality we learn more about some of the major theories of personality and the psychologists who developed them.

Biological Theories

Biological approaches suggest that genetics are responsible for personality.

Research on heritability suggests that there is a link between genetics and personality traits.

One of the best known biological theorists was Hans Eysenck, who linked aspects of personality to biological processes. For example, Eysenck argued that introverts had high cortical arousal, leading them to avoid stimulation. On the other hand, Eysenck believed extroverts had low cortical arousal, causing them to seek out stimulating experiences.

Behavioral Theories

Behavioral theories suggest that personality is a result of interaction between the individual and the environment. Behavioral theorists study observable and measurable behaviors, rejecting theories that take internal thoughts and feelings into account.

Psychodynamic Theories

Psychodynamic theories of personality are heavily influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud, and emphasize the influence of the unconscious mind and childhood experiences on personality. Psychodynamic theories include Sigmund Freud's psychosexual stage theory and Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development.

Freud believed the three components of personality were the id, the ego, and the superego. The id is responsible for all needs and urges, while the superego for ideals and moral. The ego moderates between the demands of the id, the superego, and reality.

Erikson believed that personality progressed through a series of stages, with certain conflicts arising at each stage. Success in any stage depended upon successfully overcoming these conflicts.

Humanist Theories

Humanist theories emphasize the importance of free will and individual

experience in the development of personality. Humanist theorists emphasized the concept of self-actualization, which is an innate need for personal growth that motivates behavior. Humanist theorists include Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

Trait Theories

The trait theory approach is one of the largest areas within personality psychology. According to this theory, personality is made up of a number of broad traits. A trait is basically a relatively stable characteristic that causes an individual to behave in certain ways. Some of the best known trait theories include Eysenck's three-dimension theory and the five factor theory of personality.

As we wrap up our overview of personality, it is time to learn more about some key terms in personality.

Key Terms

Personality - The characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors arising from within that make a person unique.

Classical Conditioning – A behavioral training technique in which a naturally occurring stimulus is paired with a response. Then, a previously neutral stimulus is paired with the naturally occurring stimulus. Eventually, the previously neutral stimulus comes to evoke the response without the presence of the naturally occurring stimulus. The two elements are then known as the conditioned stimulus and the conditioned response.

Operant Conditioning – A behavior training technique in which reinforcements or punishments are used to influence behavior. An association is made between a behavior and a consequence for that behavior.

Unconscious – In Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality, the unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that are outside of our conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict. According to Freud, the unconscious continues to influence our behavior and experience, even though we are unaware of these underlying influences.

Id – According to Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality, the id is the personality component made up of unconscious psychic energy that works to satisfy basic urges, needs, and desires. The id operates based on the pleasure principle, which demands immediate gratification of needs.

Ego – According to Freud, the ego is the largely unconscious part of personality that mediates the demands of the id, the superego, and reality. The ego prevents us from acting on our basic urges (created by the id), but also works to achieve a balance with our moral and idealistic standards (created by the superego).

Superego – The superego is the component of personality composed of our internalized ideals that we have acquired from our parents and from society. The superego works to suppress the urges of the id and tries to make the ego behave morally, rather than realistically.

Self-Actualization – An innate human need to achieve personal growth that motivates behavior.