

3. PERSONALITY

3.1 PERSONLAITY: Almost every day we describe and assess the personalities of the people around us. Whether we realize it or not, these daily musings on how and why people behave as they do are similar to what personality psychologists do.

While our informal assessments of personality tend to focus more on individuals, personality psychologists instead use conceptions of personality that can apply to everyone. Personality research has led to the development of a number of theories that help explain how and why certain personality traits develop.

Definitions of Personality

While there are many different theories of personality, the first step is to understand exactly what is meant by the term *personality*. The word personality itself stems from the Latin word *persona*, which referred to a theatrical mask worn by performers in order to either project different roles or disguise their identities.

A brief definition would be that personality is made up of the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that make a person unique. In addition to this, personality arises from within the individual and remains fairly consistent throughout life.

Some other definitions of personality:

- "Personality refers to individuals' characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior, together with the psychological mechanisms -- hidden or not -- behind those patterns. This definition means that among their colleagues in other subfields of psychology, those psychologists who study personality have a unique mandate: to explain whole persons."
(Funder, D. C., 1997)
- "Although no single definition is acceptable to all personality theorists, we can say that personality is a pattern of relatively permanent traits and unique characteristics that give both consistency and individuality to a person's behavior." (Feist and Feist, 2009)

Components of Personality

So what exactly makes up a personality? As described in the definitions above, you would expect that traits and patterns of thought and emotion make up an important part. Some of the other fundamental characteristics of personality include:

- **Consistency** - There is generally a recognizable order and regularity to behaviors. Essentially, people act in the same ways or similar ways in a variety of situations.
- **Psychological and physiological** - Personality is a psychological construct, but research suggests that it is also influenced by biological processes and needs.
- **It impacts behaviors and actions** - Personality does not just influence how we move and respond in our environment; it also *causes* us to act in certain ways.
- **Multiple expressions** - Personality is displayed in more than just behavior. It can also be seen in our thoughts, feelings, close relationships and other social interactions.

Theories of Personality

There are a number of different theories about how personality develops. Different schools of thought in psychology influence many of these theories. Some of these major perspectives on personality include:

- **Type theories** are the early perspectives on personality. These theories suggested that there are a limited number of "personality types" which are related to biological influences.
- **Trait theories** viewed personality as the result of internal characteristics that are genetically based.
- **Psychodynamic theories** of personality are heavily influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud, and emphasize the influence of the unconscious on personality. Psychodynamic theories include Sigmund Freud's psychosexual stage theory and Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development.

- **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. Behavioral theorists include B. F. Skinner and John B. Watson.
- **Humanist** theories emphasize the importance of free will and individual experience in the development of personality. Humanist theorists include Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

Personality Vs. Traits and Character

"Having closed in on a sense of what personality is, it may be helpful to compare the concept to others with related meanings. Two concepts that quickly come to mind are 'temperament' and 'character.' In everyday language these terms are sometimes used more or less interchangeably with 'personality,' and historically they have often been used in contexts where, in more recent times, 'personality' would be employed. Within psychology, however, they have somewhat distinct meanings. Temperament usually refers to those aspects of psychological individuality that are present at birth or at least very early on in child development, are related to emotional expression, and are presumed to have a biological basis... Character, on the other hand, usually refers to those personal attributes that are relevant to moral conduct, self-mastery, will-power, and integrity."
(Haslam, N., 2007)

3.2 FACTS ABOUT PERSONALITY: Personality makes us who we are. It influences nearly every aspect of our lives, from what we choose to do for a living to how we interact with our families to our choices of friends and romantic partners. But what factors influence our personality? Can we change our personalities, or do our overall traits remain constant throughout life?

Learn more about what researchers have learned in these ten fascinating facts about personality.

1. Birth Order Can Influence Your Personality

You've probably heard of this concept before. First born children are often described as "bossy" or "responsible," while last-born children are sometimes described as "irresponsible" and "impulsive." But how true are these common stereotypes?

For decades, pop psychology books touted the effects of birth order on personality, but hard evidence on the phenomenon remained elusive until recently. A few recent empirical studies have found that such things as birth order and family size may indeed have an impact on personality. One study even found that birth order can influence your choices of friends and romantic partners; first-borns tend to associate with other first-borns, middle-borns with other middle-borns and last-borns with last-borns.

2. Your Personality Is Relatively Stable throughout Life

In long-term studies of personality, some of the most core parts of personality remain stable throughout life. Three aspects that do tend to change as we age are anxiety levels, friendliness and eagerness for novel experiences.

According to researcher Paul T. Costa Jr., there is no evidence our overall personalities change as we grow older. "What changes as you go through life are your roles and the issues that matter most to you. People may think their personality has changed as they age, but it is their habits that change, their vigor and health, their responsibilities and circumstances - not their basic personality," he suggested in a *New York Times* article.

3. Personality Traits Are Linked to Certain Illnesses

In the past, a number of different personality traits have been suspected of contributing to particular illnesses. For example, hostility and aggression were often linked to heart disease. The difficulty was that while some studies would reveal a link, other studies demonstrated no such connection.

Recently, researchers have used a statistical technique known as meta-analysis to reevaluate previous research on the connection between personality and disease. What they discovered were some previously unnoticed connections between neurotic personality traits and five illnesses; headaches, asthma, arthritis, peptic ulcers and heart disease.

Another study suggested that shyness might be linked to a shorter lifespan.

4. Animals Have Distinctive Personalities

Does it ever seem like your beloved pet has a personality that makes him utterly unique? Animal researchers have found animals from nearly every species of animal (from spiders to birds to elephants) have their own personalities with preferences, behaviors and quirks that persist throughout life.

While some critics suggest that this represents anthropomorphism, or ascribing human traits to animals, animal personality researchers have been able to identify consistent behavioral patterns that can be empirically measured and tested.

5. Current Research Suggests that there are Five Core Personality Traits



In the past, researchers have debated exactly how many personality traits exist. Early researchers such as Allport suggested that there were as many as 4,000 distinct personality traits, while others such as Raymond Cattell proposed that there were 16. Today, many personality researchers support the five-factor theory of personality, which describes five broad personality dimensions that compose human personality:

1. Extraversion
2. Agreeableness
3. Conscientiousness
4. Neuroticism
5. Openness

6. Personality Influences Personal Preferences

It may come as no shock to learn that your personality can have a profound effect on your personal preferences, but you just might be surprised by how far reaching these effects may be. From your choice of friends to your taste in music, your unique personality can influence nearly every choice you make in your daily life.

For example, while you might pride yourself on carefully considering the issues before choosing a candidate to support, research suggests that personality may play a strong role in political preferences. One study conducted by researchers at the University of Toronto found that individuals who identified themselves as conservatives were higher in a personality trait called orderliness, while those who self-identified as liberal were higher in empathy.

Researchers suggest that these underlying personality needs to either preserve order or express empathy can have a strong influence on political preferences.

7. People Can Accurately Judge Your Personality Based on Your Facebook Profile

When you think about people's online identities, you might imagine that most people try to present an idealized version of their real selves. After all, in most online situations you get to pick and choose the information you want to reveal. You get to select the most attractive photos of yourself to post and you can edit and revise your comments before you make them. Surprisingly, one study discovered that Facebook profiles are actually quite good at conveying your *real* personality.

In the study, researchers looked at the online profiles of 236 U.S. college-aged individuals. The participants also filled out questionnaires designed to measure personality traits including extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. Observers then rated the personalities of the participants based on the online profiles, and these observations were compared to the results of the personality questionnaires. The researchers found that observers were able to get an accurate read on a person's personality based on their Facebook profile.

"I think that being able to express personality accurately contributes to the popularity of online social networks in two ways," explained psychologist and lead author Sam Gosling. "First, it allows profile owners to let others know who they are and, in doing so, satisfies a basic need to be known by others. Second, it means that profile viewers feel they can trust the information they glean from online social network profiles, building their confidence in the system as a whole."

8. Numerous Factors Can Contribute to Personality Disorders

An estimated 10 to 15% of adults in the United States experience symptoms of at least one personality disorder. Researchers have identified a number of factors that may contribute to the onset of different personality disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and borderline-personality disorder.

These factors include:

- Genetics
- Relationships with peers
- High sensitivity
- Verbal abuse
- Childhood trauma

9. Cardinal Traits Are Rare

Psychologist Gordon Allport described cardinal traits as those that dominated an individual's life to the point where that person is known and often identified specifically by that trait. These traits are considered rare, however. In many cases, people become so known for these traits that their very names become synonymous with that type of personality. Consider the origins of these often-used terms: Freudian, Machiavellian, narcissism, Don Juan and Christ-like. For most people, personality is instead composed of a mixture of central and secondary traits. Central traits are those that make up the core foundation of personality, while secondary traits are those related to preferences, attitudes and situational behaviors.

10. Your Pet May Reveal Information About Your Personality

Would you consider yourself more of a "dog person" or a "cat person"? According to one personality study, your answer to this question might actually reveal important information about your personality.

In a study of 4,500 people, researchers asked participants whether they considered themselves to be more dog people or cat people. These individuals also completed a personality survey that measured a number of broad traits including conscientiousness, openness, neuroticism and agreeableness.

The researchers discovered that people who identified themselves as dog people tended to be more extroverted and eager to please others, while those who described themselves as cat people tended to be more introverted and curious. According to researcher Sam Gosling, a psychologist at the University of Texas-Austin, the results might have important implications in the field of pet therapy. By using personality screenings, therapists might be able to match people in need with animals that are best suited to their personality.