Personality

Definition of personality :a set of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral tendencies that people display over time and across situations and that distinguish individuals from each other.

# Historical views:

**Freud**: Freud’s structure of personality has 3 levels: the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. Along with these, we have three mental structures—the id, ego, and superego. The id is the only one present from birth and is fully unconscious. It relies on the *pleasure principle*, meaning that it wants what it wants immediately, with no regard to reality. (If it were up to the id, when you need to pee, you’d just pee wherever you are, regardless of whether a bathroom is nearby.) The id is like a demanding infant, and in fact, infants are completely id-driven. When our id impulses threaten to erupt, anxiety can result, which ultimately leads to mental illness. To help rein in the id, the ego starts to develop early in life. The ego exists at all 3 levels of consciousness. Its main job is to satisfy the id within the constraints of reality; thus, it abides by the *reality principle.* When you need to pee, the ego will tell you to wait until you can get to a bathroom. A final structure, the superego, is our moral branch…our “conscience.” We internalize the values of our parents, teachers, religious leaders, etc. to learn a sense of right and wrong. It largely resides in the unconscious but can also reside in the other two levels. Depending on how our parents raised us, our superego can be more or less punishing. If you have a very harsh superego, you’ll experience a lot of anxiety and strive for perfection. It can cause feelings of guilt and inadequacy. The superego’s morality is responsible for the *ego ideal*, which provides the ultimate standard of what a person should be.

The ego’s job is to mediate between the id and superego. It also houses our cognitive functions (reasoning and problem-solving). It develops out of the id early in childhood, although Freud wrote in later life that the ego’s characteristics might be determined by heredity. The ego handles threatening information by using defense mechanisms, which are various unconscious processes that prevent unacceptable thoughts from reaching conscious awareness. In this way, anxiety is reduced. (SEE THE TABLE OF COMMON DEFENSE MECHANISMS ON PAGE 285. These are just some of the defense mechanisms, which number about 20.

**Freud’s Theory of Psychosexual Development: Development of Personality across the Lifespan**

Freud believed that we pass through a series of 5 stages from birth to death and must resolve a “crisis” at each stage to avoid fixation there. Most of these stages involve the libido, or energy of the sex instinct, settling in one or more “erogenous zones”(to Freud, these zones brought pleasure, which he thought of as sexual, even though they’re not overtly sexual). Fixation means that you’re in a state of “arrested development” and have energy focused in a particular erogenous zone even though you’ve moved on to another stage. It can lead to neurosis, which is an abnormal behavior pattern that arises from a conflict between the ego and either the id or superego. If the conflict is great enough, the neurosis will turn into a psychosis, or severe mental illness in which you suffer a break from reality.  
Freud’s five stages:

1. **Oral**: birth to one year. Focus of sexual pleasure is in the mouth (sucking and biting). If the baby is not weaned properly, he can become fixated here and be overeaters, drinkers, smokers, or loud talkers.
2. **Anal**: 1-3 years; focus of pleasure is the anus (expelling/withholding feces). If not toiled trained properly, you can become fixated here and become either a total prude/neat freak or a slob. You could also have a love of bathroom humor.
3. **Phallic**: 3-6 years; focus is on the penis or lack of one (phallus means “penis.”) This is Freud’s most controversial stage. It assumes that children of both genders have an incestuous desire for the opposite-sex parent. Boys have an *Oedipal complex*—they desire their mothers and want to kill their fathers for her attention. They reach a point, though, in which they realize Dad is must stronger than they are and could really hurt them if their incestuous desire was discovered. Specifically, boys fear *castration anxiety*—they’re afraid their dads will castrate them because of their incestuous desire. Because the anxiety is very great, they repress (a defense mechanism) their love for their mothers and become psychologically male. Girls have the *Electra complex*. They notice that they have no penis and blame their mother for castrating them. They believe that by having sex with their fathers and possibly bearing a male child, they could have a surrogate penis. They have *penis envy.* Freud did not know how, or whether, girls were able to get past their incestuous desire. Because they have no castration anxiety (since they have no parts to castrate), they don’t have the major crisis that boys have and thus have weaker superegos. In other words, they aren’t as moral as boys are because they have no castration anxiety to resolve. They only ambivalently identify with their mother, unlike boys strongly identifying with their fathers.
4. **Latency**: 6-puberty: fortunately, there is no erogenous zone prevalent in this stage. Sexual impulses are repressed while the child grows up.
5. **Genital**: Puberty onward; locus of pleasure is on the genitals. Successful reproduction (love, marriage, parenthood) becomes the goal, along with becoming a productive member of society. Freud believed that most people revert to an earlier stage of development in extreme old age.

Obviously, Freud’s theory is hard to test. Aside from the findings that our interactions with our parents do contribute to personality development and that some mental processes can be unconscious, most of Freud’s theory has not held up well to scientific scrutiny.

**Humanistic Psychology**: associated with Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Developed as a reaction against Freud and the psychoanalysts. Cornerstone of this theory is the idea of self-actualization: we all strive to attain our highest emotional and intellectual potential—be all that we can be. Other central ideas are that of the self-concept (our sense of who we are and how others see us) and unconditional positive regard, acceptance without any conditions. Rogers advised parents to distinguish between bad behavior and the child’s character as a whole.

# Factors of Personality

**Superfactors vs. Traits**: Superfactors are more general, global personality dimensions, and traits are the specific characteristics that make up the superfactors. Superfactors predict behavior less well than specific traits do. This is partly because people can score high on the same dimension but attain their high scores by getting extreme scores on different traits that are part of that dimension.

**Temperament:** an inclination to engage in a certain way of thinking or react a certain way to something (e.g., easy, difficult, or “slow-to-warm-up” children). These are personality traits in the broadest terms. They arise out of genetics but are modified somewhat by the environment. Temperaments tend to remain consistent over the lifespan, however, and unlike personalities, temperaments tend to remain stable and consistent over situations. A child’s temperament at age 3 is related to his personality at age 18.

**Costa & McCrae’s Big Five** (Superfactors):

Superfactor Traits

Extraversion (aka “sociability”): Warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement

seeking, positive emotions

Neuroticism (aka “emotionality”): Anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impusiveness,

Vulgarity

Agreeableness Trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, tender-mindedness

Conscientiousness (aka “dependability”) Competence, order, dutifulness, achievement-striving,

deliberation, self-discipline

Openness Fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, values

Mnemonic device for Big Five: OCEAN

**Eysenck’s Big Three**

**Extraversion**—Eysenck believed that extraverts have a higher threshold for arousal; the cerebral cortex of extraverts is not as easily aroused by stimulation of the senses as it is for introverts, so they seek out activities that are more stimulating or arousing. Extraverts and introverts have different biological responses to caffeine, nicotine, punishment, reward and punishment, and even have different brain waves. However, other studies of the influence of arousability of the cerebral cortex on personality have yielded mixed results.

**Neuroticism**—easily and intensely emotionally aroused; more likely to experience conditioned emotional responses, especially fear. Neuroimaging data confirm that neuroticism is distinct from extraversion because different areas of the brain are activated; we do not know the neural foundations of neuroticism yet, however.

**Psychoticism --**originally thought to measure the tendency to become psychotic, but it also measures traits related to social deviance and non-conformity. In general, this is a “negative” personality dimension, although it also contains some of the traits listed under the Big Five’s superfactors of agreeableness and conscientiousness. Eysenck viewed people high on this dimension as having less control over their emotions and proposed that they are more likely to be aggressive, impulsive, engage in delinquent behavior, and become psychotic. Research is not consistent in regards to this factor, and no specific biological foundations of it have been pinpointed.

\*\*All personality models include some version of the broad personality types ***extraversion*** and ***neuroticism.***

\*\*Both the Big Five and Big Three theories are **biologically-based** theories of personality.

**Other biologically-based models:**

1. **Gray’s Behavioral Activation and Inhibition Systems:** Gray proposes that two brain systems work in different ways to explain temperament and personality. The behavioral activation system (BAS) is a mechanism based on the *activation* of behavior and on the effects of reward on behavior. It triggers positive feelings (elation, hope) but also underlies impulsivity and is correlated with substance abuse. The BAS system is associated with extraversion. The BIS, or behavioral inhibition system, is based on the *inhibition* of behavior and is activated by threat-related stimuli and punishment, which trigger anxiety and inhibit behavior. People with an easily-activated BIS are prone to anxiety and depression and feel easily threatened. Correlates with neuroticism. The BAS and BIS brain systems arise from characteristics of specific brain structures and neurotransmitters; research supports this assertion.
2. **Cloniger’s Theory**: (1993): proposes that people differ on 4 personality dimensions, each of which corresponds to some combination of the Big Five superfactors and has its own distinct brain system.
   1. **Reward Dependence:** a desire for socially rewarding experiences. Its opposite is aloofness. Corresponds to BAS and extraversion.
   2. **Harm avoidance:** pessimism, shyness, and a fear of uncertainty; an inhibition of approach behaviors and an increase in avoidance behaviors. Related to BIS/neuroticism.
   3. **Novelty seeking:** an excited response to new situations; related to BAS and a high score on extraversion with a low score on conscientiousness. Hypothesized to be related to the dopamine-based reward system in the brain.
   4. **Persistence:** the tendency to continue to seek a goal in the face of obstacles or resistance.
3. **Zuckerman’s Theory:** Known as the “alternate five.” Each is thought to be rooted in brain mechanisms.
   1. **Sociability:** related to extraversion
   2. **Neuroticism/anxiety:** similar to neuroticism
   3. **Impulsive sensation seeking:** tendency to act impulsively. A reconceptualization of Eysenck’s psychoticism and is related to sensation-seeking and BAS; it’s the opposite end of the Big Five’s conscientiousness. This dimension is the most studied factor f the Alternate Five; more typical of men than women and is associated with insensitivity to punishment or loss of reward. High genetic component.
   4. **Activity:** a need for activity; a high energy level; preference for challenges and difficulty in relaxing.
   5. **Aggression/hostility:** a tendency toward antisocial behavior, verbal aggression, and vengefulness. Opposite of the Big Five’s agreeableness.

**Comparing the Biologically-Based Theories:**

Many of the factors are variants of the same idea. All four theories have a dimension related to sociability and a dimension related to anxiety or emotionality. The theories differ in the breadth of these dimensions and specific traits associated with each.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Gray | Eysenck | Cloniger | Zuckerman |
| Behavioral activation system (BAS) | Extraversion \* | Reward dependence | Sociability |
| Behavioral inhibition system (BIS) | Neuroticism | Harm-avoidance | Neuroticism-anxiety |
|  | Psychoticism | Novelty seeking \*\* | Impulsive sensation seeking\*\* |
|  |  | Persistence | Activity |
|  |  |  | Aggression-hostility |

\*Extraversion is also inversely related to BIS levels.

\*\*Novelty-seeking and impulsive sensation-seeking are also related to BAS levels.

**Genetics and Personality:**  
There are several methods of measuring the impact of genes on personality:

1. Twin studies comparing fraternal to identical twins reared together—if identical twins have higher correlations between personality factors than fraternal twins do, then that factor is more *heritable* or genetic.
2. Twin studies comparing fraternal & identical twins reared apart to those reared together. If twins (especially identical twins) reared apart have similar correlations to those reared together, the personality factor is more heritable—in other words, genetics has more of an impact than environment does.
3. Scientists are trying to identify specific genes with a personality dimension or trait by comparing different gene *alleles* (alleles are the different “flavors” of the same gene, which cause variations in the same characteristic—for example, eye color, hair color, or aspects of behavior.

\*\*There is no doubt that genes affect various aspects of personality (see chart on page 301), but it’s hard to tease apart the impact of a shared environment. Evidence exists that genes contribute to very specific behaviors. There’s a substantial heritability index for work and leisure interests and a subjective sense of well-being. Some researchers have found that well-being has a higher heritability index in women than in men (.54 vs. .46), leading to the possibility that different genes may underlie variations in happiness in men and women.

**How do genes affect specific behavior**? By influencing characteristics such as how easily your autonomic nervous system is aroused. If you have a hard-to-arouse autonomic nervous system, you may really like action movies with lots of adrenaline rushes. If you’re easily aroused, then you might like more sedate movies or books with less action. Even physical traits, such as how attractive or athletic you are, may indirectly reflect the influence of your genes on personality. If you have a “low activity” gene, then you’re unlikely to participate in many sports, leading you toward more sedentary pursuits. \*\*Just because you may genetically lean toward certain personality traits does not mean that you’re “fixed” in that pattern from birth until death. Your environment and personal experiences do have a large influence on how your personality develops.

**Shared family environment**: In general, having a shared family environment among siblings does not contribute greatly toward personality traits, EXCEPT for social closeness (desire for intimacy for others) and positive emotionality (a set of traits characterized by an active engagement in one’s environment). This may be because different siblings experience the environment differently, based on each child’s temperament, birth order, etc.

**\*\*New research is focusing on how genes affect neurotransmitters and their activities, but this research is still in its infancy**.

**Sociocognitive view of Personality**: Early learning theorists (Skinner & Watson) said that personality was learned through conditioning. Our personalities are shaped through nothing but conditioning—there’s no genetic basic or “thinking” involved at all. Sociocognitive researchers have amended that view to emphasize that *social interactions alter thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—and consistent thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (in a given situation, at least) create personality. That is, personality develops in part via a child’s thoughts, which in turn are shaped by social interactions.*

Part of this view involves the idea of expectancies. What we expect to happen in a given situation (based on learning from past experiences) shapes our personalities. If you were in a social situation before and were rebuffed, it created a “punishing” experience, and you may have become more shy as a result because you then expected such a reaction in future social settings. \*To the extent that expectancies are consistent across situations, they can be thought of as personality traits.

\*\*Sociocognitive view emphasizes that our society & culture contribute to a person’s experiences and therefore, ultimately affect biology. For example, the average level of neuroticism among Americans has risen from 1963 to 1993.

**Locus of Control**: When the cause of an event is ambiguous, people differ in the extent to which they perceive they have control over the event. Locus of control refers to a person’s perception of the source of control over life events when the cause is ambiguous. People with an ***internal*** locus of control are more likely to see control over events as coming from within themselves; they perceive that they have control over things that happen to them. People with an ***external*** locus of control are more likely to feel powerless to an outside force—you attribute causes to factors beyond your control (fate, destiny, someone else’s fault). \*\* Research shows that college students are becoming more external; an average college student in 2002 had a more external locus of control than 80% of college students did in the 1960s. College students today feel less personally responsible for their outcomes and less control over what happens to them.

Internals and externals have different responses to success and failure. Internals are more likely to increase their expectancies when they succeed and lower them after failure. Externals do the opposite—lower their expectancies when they succeed and increase them when they fail (because it’s just chance that led them to succeed in the first place). \*\*It is far better to have an internal rather than an external locus of control.

**Self-efficacy**: the sense of having the ability to follow through and produce desired behaviors. High self-efficacy: high expectations that they will be able to behave in a specific way if they want to do so. Distinct from locus of control because LOC focuses on inferring a cause to an ambiguous situation, whereas self-efficacy involves a specific goal. Basically, having high self-efficacy means you’re self-confident and believe you can succeed.

**Sociocultural Influences on Personality**

**Birth order**: Adler first researched the role of birth order on personality. He was a colleague of Freud’s. Early research wasn’t promising, but later studies have supported the idea that birth order is a contributor to personality. The superfactor *openness to experience* has been found to be shaped by birth order (Sulloway, 1996). Birth order alone is not as big a factor as birth order combined with other factors such as the # of children in the family and the level of conflict between each child and his parents. Other factors, such as gender of the children, spacing between children, temperament, social class, and loss of a parent can affect birth order effects on personality.

**Firstborns/Only children:** more likely to support parental authority, see things the way their parents do, be less open to new ideas, more responsible, ambitious, organized, academically successful, energetic, self-disciplined, and conscientious. Also more neurotic, anxious, temperamental. More assertive and dominant.

**Middle-borns:** lots of research on these children. Less likely to define their self-identities by their families; less close to families; more into friends than siblings; more rebellious, impulsive, less conscientious, les likely to ask parents for help in an emergency, less likely to report having been loved as a child, more likely to live farther apart from parents, less likely to visit parents than siblings are.

**Later-borns:** the charmer of the family; more agreeable, warmer, more idealistic, easygoing, trusting, accommodating, altruistic, adventurous, prone to fantasy, attracted by novelty, untraditional; more sociable, affectionate, excitement-seeking, fun-loving, and more self-conscious.

Birth order effects have not been shown consistently across all studies; other factors may temper the way birth order affects a given individual.

**Sex Differences**: Women score higher on social-connectedness (focus on the importance of relationship) and higher on neuroticism. More empathic than men and more nurturing. Men score higher on aspects of individuality and autonomy (separateness from others and self-sufficiency); higher than women on measures of anger and aggression. The sex difference of assertiveness has declined over time, though.

**Sociocultural explanations for gender differences**: Social role theory suggests that boys and girls learn different skills and develop different beliefs based on the social roles of males and females. (Boys don’t cry…they’re supposed to be tough; girls are delicate and play with dolls.) Boys are taught to be more competitive and girls are taught to be more nurturing and tuned in to others’ needs. Expectancy theory also plays a role. Boys and girls come to expect different responses to behaviors that are seen as appropriate or inappropriate for typical gender roles.

It has been argued that sex (biologically-based) and gender (culturally-based) differences shouldn’t be studied because the differences are often context-specific and not true personality differences.

Biological explanations focus on differences in hormones. Evolutionary theory suggests that men and women have evolved differently because of differences in mate selection and parenting strategies.

Results from the NEO-PI (measuring the Big Five) suggest that in general, gender differences are not as large as within-gender differences, which suggest that true sex differences aren’t very important. Individual differences trumps gender differences. Can’t put people in a box based on gender.

Researchers have found consistent differences in people’s personality traits & superfactors over time and across countries, which provides evidence for the belief that the environment impacts personality development.

Personality changes have occurred in American culture over the last few decades. We have more neuroticism and anxiety and a higher external locus of control. We’ve also gotten more extraverted. Fear of crime, terrorism, and an increasing focus on extraversion in America have led to these changes.

Big Five in other Cultures: Personality tests are able to identify the Big Five in most, but not all cultures. In China, there have been five personality factors identified, but they’re not the same as the Big Five. Chinese-Americans, however, reflect the North American Big Five and not the personality factors of China, which shows that culture influences personality.

**Individualist vs. Collectivist Cultures**—Individualist cultures such as the U.S., Britain, Canada, and Australia place the most value on the self—individual freedom, equality, and enjoyment. Collectivist cultures such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Arab nations place more value on the needs of the group rather than the individual. People in these cultures care more about others and are less oriented toward the self. Crime rates are lower in these cultures. People in collectivist societies incorporate other people in their definition of “self,” and they see themselves in relation to specific situations and contexts. Therefore, personality traits may be less useful in predicting behavior in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures.

**Attachment Styles:** We will go over this topic in much more detail in the Development section. Attachment is a close emotional tie with another person (or object); attachment style is how we relate to others, and it’s based on our interactions with our parents early in life. In terms of personality, though, Hazan & Shaver (1987) have developed three categories of adult attachment:

1. **Secure attachment:** these adults seek closeness and interdependence in relationships and are not worried about the possibility of their partner leaving them. This is the most common style in America (59%) and is correlated with a good relationship between parent and child. When romantic relationships come to an end, securely attached adults are more likely to rely on family and friends for emotional support.
2. **Anxious attachment:** these adults want a close relationship but fear it at the same time. Characterized by 11% of Americans, but it’s the most common style in Japan and Israel. Based on inconsistent care by parents early in life. They react the worst to break-ups…more likely to report distress, anger, and even drug or alcohol use to cope. One study shows that women with a more easily activated BIS have an anxious attachment style.
3. **Avoidant:** these adults are uncomfortable with intimacy and closeness and structure their daily lives to avoid closeness. They pay less attention to emotional events and store in memory less information about relationship issues. Deal with relationship breakups with self-reliance and distance. Found in 25% of American adults, but it’s the most common style in Germany. Associated with emotional avoidance OR overprotectiveness in parents with their children. Women with an easily activated BAS tend to NOT have an avoidant attachment style.

Temperament of the infant interacts with temperament of the adult to produce either a secure or insecure attachment style. “Easy” children & laidback adults tend to form secure attachments. Difficult children have a harder time forming secure attachments, especially with difficult adults. Research shows that infants tend to develop the same attachment style as their mothers. It’s the environment, not genetics, that has the biggest impact here.