The Nature of Personality

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- Explain the concepts of personality and traits.
- Describe the “Big Five” personality traits.
- Discuss how the Big Five traits are related to important life outcomes.

Personality is “an individual’s unique constellation of consistent behavioral traits.”
A personality trait is “a durable disposition to behave in a particular way in a variety of situations.”

- Common personality traits
  - Honest
  - Moody
  - Impulsive
  - Friendly

Robert McCrae and Paul Costa (1987, 1997, 1999) state that there are five “higher-order” traits that are known as the "Big Five" (see Figure 2.1)
1. Extraversion (or positive emotionality)
2. Neuroticism (or negative emotionality)
3. Openness to experience
4. Agreeableness
5. Conscientiousness

However, this is but one of many perspectives on human personality.

Psychodynamic Perspectives

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- Describe Freud’s three components of personality and how they are distributed across levels of awareness.
- Explain the importance of sexual and aggressive conflicts in Freud’s theory.
- Describe eight defense mechanisms identified by Freud.
Psychodynamic Perspectives, continued

LEARNING OBJECTIVES, continued.

• Outline Freud’s stages of psychosexual development and their theorized relations to adult personality.
• Summarize Jung’s views on the unconscious.
• Summarize Adler’s views on key issues relating to personality.
• Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of psychodynamic theories of personality.

Psychodynamic Perspectives, continued

Psychodynamic theories include a variety of theoretical models derived from the work of Sigmund Freud.

• All focus on unconscious mental forces that shape our personalities.
• Well-known psychodynamic theorists
  – Freud
  – Jung
  – Adler
  – Erikson

Psychodynamic Perspectives, continued

1. Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory of personality is somewhat controversial and is based on three main assumptions

1. Personality is governed by unconscious forces that we cannot control.
2. Childhood experiences play a significant role in determining adult personality.
3. Personality is shaped by the manner in which children cope with sexual urges.

Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory

• Freud argued that personality is divided into three structures
  1. The id is “the primitive, instinctive component of personality that operates according to the pleasure principle”.
  2. The ego is “the decision-making component of personality that operates according to the reality principle”.
  3. The superego is “the moral component of personality that incorporates social standards about what represents right and wrong”.

Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory, continued

• The id, ego and superego are distributed across three layers of awareness
  1. The conscious — “material we are fully aware of at a particular time”.
  2. The preconscious — “material just below the surface of awareness”.
  3. The unconscious — “material well below the surface of conscious awareness, but that greatly influences behavior” (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Freud’s model of personality structure. Freud theorized that we have three levels of awareness: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. To dramatize the size of the unconscious, it has often been compared to the portion of an iceberg that lies beneath the water’s surface. Freud also divided personality structure into three components—id, ego, and superego—that operate according to different principles and exhibit different modes of thinking. In Freud’s model, the id is entirely unconscious, but the ego and superego operate at all three levels of awareness.
**Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory, continued**

- Freud believed that behavior is the result of ongoing internal conflict among the id, ego, and superego.
- Conflicts stemming from sexual and aggressive urges are especially significant.
- Such conflicts arouse anxiety, so we use defense mechanisms – “largely unconscious reactions that protect a person from painful emotions such as anxiety and guilt”.

**Psychodynamic Perspectives, continued**

2. Jung’s Analytical Psychology

- Jung also focused on the role of the unconscious in shaping personality.
- However, he argued that the unconscious is comprised of two layers:
  1. The personal unconscious, which contains the same material as Freud’s unconscious layer, and
  2. The collective unconscious, which contains traces of memories, shared by the entire human race, inherited from our ancestors.

**Jung’s Analytical Psychology**

- The collective unconscious does not contain memories of distinct, personal experiences.
- Rather, it contains archetypes – “emotionally charged images and thought forms that have universal meaning”.
- Jung was also the first to describe
  - Introverted (inner-directed), and
  - Extroverted (outer-directed) personality types.
Evaluating Psychodynamic Perspectives

- Psychodynamic theory contributed many important ideas
  1. Unconscious forces may contribute to personality.
  2. Internal conflict may play a key role in psychological distress.
  3. Early childhood experiences can influence adult personality.
  4. People may rely on defense mechanisms to reduce unpleasant emotions.

Evaluating Psychodynamic, continued

- Psychodynamic theory has also been criticized
  1. Poor testability – it is too vague to subject to scientific tests.
  2. Inadequate evidence – the theories depend too much on case studies of clients whose recollections may have been distorted to fit the theory.
  3. Sexism – the theories have a male-oriented bias and do not adequately address women’s issues.

Behavioral Perspectives

- LEARNING OBJECTIVES
  - Describe Pavlov’s classical conditioning and its contribution to understanding personality.
  - Discuss how Skinner’s principles of operant conditioning can be applied to personality development.
  - Describe Bandura’s social cognitive theory and his concept of self-efficacy.
  - Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of behavioral theories of personality.

Behavioral Perspectives, continued

- Behaviorism - “is a theoretical orientation based on the premise that scientific psychology should study observable behavior”.
- Behavioral theorists view personality “as a collection of response tendencies that are tied to various stimulus situations”.
- They focus on personality development, and how children’s response tendencies are shaped by classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning.

Behavioral Perspectives, continued

1. Pavlov’s Classical Conditioning is “a type of learning in which a neutral stimulus acquires the capacity to evoke a response that was originally evoked by another stimulus” (see Figure 2.8).
   - Classical conditioning may explain how people acquire particular emotional responses such as anxiety or phobias.
Behavioral Perspectives, continued

2. **Skinner's Operant Conditioning** is “a form of learning in which voluntary responses come to be controlled by their consequences”.

- Favorable consequences, called **‘reinforcers’**, tend to cause organisms to repeat the behaviors that precede them, and
- Unfavorable consequences, called **‘punishers’**, tend to discourage behaviors.

- **Positive reinforcement** – “occurs when a response is strengthened because it is followed by a pleasant stimulus”.
- **Negative reinforcement** – “occurs when a response is strengthened because it is followed by the removal of an unpleasant stimulus” (see Figure 2.11).
- **Punishment** – “occurs when a response is weakened because it is followed by an unpleasant stimulus”.

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**Figure 2.11 Positive and negative reinforcement in operant conditioning**

Positive reinforcement occurs when a response is followed by a favorable outcome, so that the response is strengthened. Negative reinforcement, the removal of an **aversive stimulus** (symbolized here by the “No” sign), serves as a reinforcer. Negative reinforcement produces the same result as positive reinforcement: The person’s tendency to emit the reinforced response is strengthened (the response becomes more frequent).

**Figure 2.12 Observational Learning**. In observational learning, an observer attends to and stores a mental representation of a model’s behavior (for example, showing off) and its consequences (such as approval or disapproval). According to **social cognitive theory**, many of our characteristic responses are acquired through observation of others’ behavior.

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Behavioral Perspectives, continued

3. **Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory**

- **Observational learning** - “occurs when an organism’s responding is influenced by the observation of others, who are called **models**” (see Figure 2.12).

- This theory is unique in that it requires that we:
  - pay attention to others’ behavior,
  - understand the consequences that follow others’ behavior, and
  - store this information in memory.

Bandura’s theory, continued

- Bandura stressed the importance of **self-efficacy** – “one’s belief about one’s ability to perform behaviors that should lead to expected outcomes”.
- High self-efficacy is associated with confidence whereas low self-efficacy creates doubt in one’s abilities.
- Bandura believed that self-efficacy is one of the most important personality traits because it is tied to success in many endeavors and resistance to stress.
Evaluating the Behavioral Perspectives

- Behavioral theory has been credited for suggesting that both personality and situational factors work together to shape behavior.
- However, this perspective has also been criticized
  1. Recently, behaviorism has given too much credence to the presence of cognitive influences.
  2. It relies too heavily on animal models.
  3. Fragmented view of personality.

Humanistic Perspectives

- LEARNING OBJECTIVES
  - Discuss humanism as a school of thought in psychology.
  - Explain Rogers’s views on self-concept, development, and defensive behavior.
  - Describe Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and summarize his findings on self-actualizing persons.
  - Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of humanistic theories of personality.

Humanistic Perspectives, continued

- **Humanism** – “a theoretical orientation that emphasizes the unique qualities of humans, especially their free will and their potential for personal growth”.
- This perspective is based on the following ideas:
  1. Humans have an innate drive toward personal growth.
  2. Humans exercise free will over their actions.
  3. Humans are largely rational beings driven by conscious, not unconscious, needs.

Humanistic Perspectives, continued

1. Rogers’s Person-Centered Theory

   - Personality contains only one construct, the self, or **self-concept** – “a collection of beliefs about one’s own nature, unique qualities, and typical behavior”.
   - If our ideas about ourselves match our actual experiences, our self-concept is **congruent** with reality.
   - However, if our ideas about ourselves do not match reality, this disparity is called **incongruence**, which undermines our well-being (see Figure 2.13).

Rogers’s Person-Centered Theory, continued

- **Self-Concept and Development**
  - All humans have a need for affection, and experiences early in life are key.
    - If parents make affection **conditional** (given only if the child’s behavior meets their expectations), children do not feel worthy of love and develop an incongruent self-concept.
    - If parents give affection **unconditionally**, children feel worthy of love and develop congruent self-concepts.
**Humanistic Perspectives, continued**

2. **Maslow’s Theory of Self-Actualization**
   - Human motives are organized into a **hierarchy of needs** — “a systematic arrangement of needs, according to priority, in which basic needs must be met before less basic needs are aroused” (see Figure 2.15).
   - Humans have an innate drive toward personal growth and the greatest need is the need for **self-actualization** — the fulfillment of one’s potential.

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**Maslow’s Theory, continued**

- Maslow called people with extremely healthy personalities “**self-actualizing persons**”.
- They have demonstrated significant personal growth and tend to share certain ideal characteristics, listed in Figure 2.16.

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**Evaluating Humanistic Perspectives**

- Humanistic theory is credited with
  1. Identifying the self-concept as a key element of personality.
  2. Placing an emphasis on a more positive outlook on human behavior and personality.
- However, this perspective has also been criticized for
  1. Poor testability.
  2. An unrealistic view of human nature.
  3. Inadequate evidence.

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**Biological Perspectives**

- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**
  - Describe Eysenck’s views on personality structure and development.
  - Summarize recent twin studies that support the idea that personality is largely inherited.
  - Summarize evolutionary analyses of why certain personality traits appear to be important.
  - Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of biological theories of personality.
Biological Perspectives, continued

1. Eysenck’s Theory
   • Eysenck viewed personality as a “hierarchy of traits” (see Figure 2.17).
   • He placed special emphasis on biological differences that occur along the extraversion-introversion dimension.
     • **Introverts** have higher levels of physiological arousal, causing them to avoid overly stimulating social situations.
     • **Extroverts** have lower baseline levels of arousal and, thus, seek stimulation from social situations.

   Figure 2.17 Eysenck’s model of personality structure.

   Eysenck describes personality structure as a hierarchy of traits. In this scheme, a few higher-order traits (such as extraversion) determine a host of lower-order traits (such as sociability), which determine one’s habitual responses (such as going to lots of parties).


Biological Perspectives, continued

2. Recent Research in Behavioral Genetics
   • A **heritability ratio** is “an estimate of the proportion of trait variability in a population that is determined by variations in genetic inheritance”.
   • Results from twin studies suggest that the heritability of personality is close to 50%.
   • Results also indicate that shared family environment has little effect on personality.
   • Together, this research suggests that biology has a greater influence than environment on personality traits.

Biological Perspectives, continued

3. The Evolutionary Approach to Personality
   • **Evolutionary Psychology** – “examines behavioral processes in terms of their adaptive value for members of a species over the course of many generations”.
   • David Buss (1991, 1995, 1997) maintains that the “Big Five” traits are present across a variety of cultures because they had significant adaptive value for humans.

Evaluating Biological Perspectives

• Recent research has generally supported many of the assumptions of this perspective.
• However, the biological perspective has also been criticized on the following grounds:
  1. There are statistical problems with the estimation of hereditary influence.
  2. “Hindsight bias” may be present.
  3. There is no comprehensive biological theory of personality.

Contemporary Empirical Approaches to Personality

• LEARNING OBJECTIVES
  – Describe the personality trait of sensation-seeking.
  – Summarize some of the correlates of high sensation-seeking.
  – Explain the chief concepts and hypothesis of terror management theory.
  – Describe how reminders of death influence people’s behavior.
Sensation-Seeking: Life in the Fast Lane

- Sensation-seeking – “is a generalized preference for high or low levels of sensory stimulation”.
- Zuckerman (1991, 1996, 2008) believes this is a biologically based trait with four components
  1. Thrill- and adventure-seeking
  2. Attraction to unusual experiences
  3. Lack of inhibitions
  4. Easy susceptibility to boredom

Sensation-Seeking, continued

- Is the sensation-seeking trait good for you?
  - Pro: individuals who score high on the sensation-seeking trait have a higher tolerance for stress.
  - Con: they also are more likely to engage in risk-taking behavior that may be harmful to their health.

Essentials of Terror Management Theory

- Terror Management Theory is based on the following assumptions:
  1. Human cognition is unique in that it allows us to be aware of our own mortality.
  2. This creates great anxiety, which can be reduced by cultural worldviews that promote self-esteem and faith.
  3. These constructs give people a sense of order, context, and meaning.
  4. These, along with self-esteem, serve as buffers against the anxiety that death awareness creates.

Terror Management Theory, continued

- Terror management theory has been applied as an explanation for many phenomena:
  1. Excessive materialism.
  2. Depressive disorders.
  3. Appreciation of art.
  4. Suppression of sexual urges.
  5. Inhibition of health-protective behaviors.
  6. Psychological discomfort about bodily processes.

Culture and Personality

- LEARNING OBJECTIVES
  - Discuss whether the five-factor model has any relevance in non-Western cultures.
  - Explain how researchers have found both cross-cultural similarities and disparities in personality.
  - Summarize recent research on the accuracy of perceptions of national character.

Culture and Personality, continued

- Links between culture and personality, a concept called national character, have been studied for decades in order to determine if certain traits are more prevalent in particular cultures.
- However, research has found little or no support for this view.
- Rather, people’s perceptions of national character seem to be rooted in inaccurate stereotypes.
Assessing Your Personality

• LEARNING OBJECTIVES
  – Explain the concepts of standardization, test norms, reliability, and validity.
  – Discuss the value and the limitations of self-report inventories.
  – Discuss the value and limitations of projective tests.
  – Analyze the emerging role of the Internet in personality testing.

Application: Assessing Your Personality

• Key Concepts in Psychological Testing
  – A psychological test - "a standardized measure of a sample of a person’s behavior”.
  – Standardization – “uniform procedures used to administer and score the test.”
  – Norms – “provide information about where a score ranks in relation to other scores on the test”.

Assessing Your Personality, continued

• Key Concepts, continued
  – Reliability – “refers to the measurement consistency of the test”.
  – Validity – “refers to the ability of the test to measure what it was designed to measure”.

Assessing Your Personality, continued

• There are two main types of personality tests
  1. Self-Report Inventories – “are personality scales that ask individuals to answer a series of questions about their characteristic behavior”.
     – A vast range of traits can be measured with these tests, but responses can be inaccurate.

Common self-report inventories:

1. The 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF), (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970), measures 16 basic “source traits” (see Figure 2.23).
2. The NEO Inventory, (Costa & McCrae, 1985, 1992) is designed to measure the “Big Five” in research and clinical settings.

![Figure 2.23 The 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF). Cattell’s 16PF is designed to assess 16 basic dimensions of personality. The pairs of traits listed across from each other in the figure define the 16 factors measured by this self-report inventory. The profile shown is the average profile seen among a group of active pilots who took the test. 16PF, (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970). Copyright © 1970 by Psychological Corp. Reprinted by permission of Psychological Today Magazine. Copyright © 1973 Sussex Publishers, Inc.](image-url)
Assessing Your Personality, continued

2. Projective Tests – individuals respond to ambiguous stimuli in ways that may reveal aspects of their personalities.
   – It is more difficult for the respondent to deceive the tester, but reliability and validity are lower.

• Common projective tests
  1. The Rorschach test consists of a series of inkblot pictures.
     – Respondents are asked what they see in the inkblots.
  2. The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) consists of a series of pictures of various scenes.
     – Respondents must tell a story that explains what is happening in the picture (see Figure 2.24).

Assessing Your Personality, continued

3. Personality Testing on the Internet:
   – Self-report inventories are increasingly being administered online.
   – They have the following advantages:
     • Completed quickly at a reduced cost.
     • Access for rural respondents who might not otherwise easily reach a psychologist.
     • Efficient data collection.
     • Capture new data such as answer changes and time taken on each item.

Figure 2.24. The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). In taking the TAT, a respondent is asked to tell a story about scenes such as the one. The themes apparent in each story can be scored to provide insight about the respondent’s personality. From Murray, H. A. (1971). Thematic Apperception Test. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Copyright © 1943 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Copyright © 1971 by Henry A. Murray. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.