

Chapter 11:
Personality

Personality

An individual's characteristic style of behaving, thinking, and feeling

Studied in part to look at explanations of the basis for psychological differences among people

How Can We Study It?

Personality consists of **traits** - relatively enduring predispositions that influence our behavior across many situations

Two primary approaches:

Nomothetic approach – focuses on identifying general laws that govern the behavior of all individuals (most modern research)

Idiographic approach – focuses on identifying the unique configuration of characteristics and life history experiences within a person (most case studies)

Causes of Personality Differences

Genetic factors

Shared environmental factors (e.g., parents raise their children similarly)

Nonshared environmental factors (e.g., parents treat one child more affectionately)

Causes of Personality Differences

Birth order (nonshared environmental influence)

Later-borns are 3 times more likely than firstborns to favor revolutionary scientific ideas
Still controversial, little repeated evidence

Causes of Personality Differences

Twin studies

Genetic factors have a heavy influence on personality, but not complete control
Identical twins reared apart are as similar as identical twins reared together
Shared environment plays little to no role in adult personality

Causes of Personality Differences

Molecular genetic studies – pinpoint genes associated with specific personality traits

Remember that genes code for proteins, not specific behaviors

The greater similarity is in personality, the greater is the overlap in genes (heritability estimates between .40–.60)

Apply Your Thinking

Imagine a specific gene is found to be more prevalent in Christians than in Muslims. Does this mean that this gene could be considered the Christianity gene? Why or why not?

Absolutely not. While the popular media might publicize this finding in a skewed manner, good scientists will not. Remember that genes code for proteins, not behaviors. This gene may code for any number of behaviors closely related to Christianity. Also, this gene may be more prevalent in certain areas of the world where different religions are practiced.

Psychoanalytic Theory

Freud believed mental illness was psychogenic rather than somatogenic

Caused by psychological factors

Evidence from glove anesthesia, hypnosis, and catharsis

Core assumptions:

Psychic determinism – all psychological events have a cause

Symbolic meaning – all actions are meaningful

Unconscious motivation – we rarely understand why we do things

Freud's Pieces of the Mind

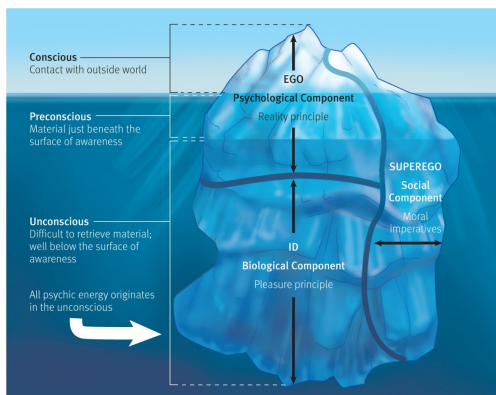
Id – basic instincts; the reservoir of our most primitive impulses, including sex and aggression

Pleasure principle – the tendency of the id to strive for immediate gratification

Ego – the boss; the psyche's executive and principal decision maker

Reality principle – the tendency of the ego to postpone gratification until it can find an appropriate outlet

Superego – our sense of morality



Three Pieces in Conflict



Freud believed that these three agencies interacted continuously

Hypothesized that psychological distress is caused by disharmony between three agencies of the psyche

All dreams are wish fulfillments – expression of the id's impulses

The superego commands the ego to convert these wishes into symbols

Freudian Personality Development

Personality develops in psychosexual stages differing in the **erogenous zone**, the sexually arousing area of the body:

Oral stage (12-18 months) - infants obtain sexual gratification by sucking and drinking

Anal stage (18 months-3 years) - focuses on toilet training

Phallic stage (3-6 years) - focuses on genitals

Oedipus complex, **Electra complex**, and **penis envy**

Latency stage (6-12 years) - sexual impulses are submerged into the unconscious

Genital Stage (12 years - adulthood) - sexual impulses awaken and begin to mature into romantic attraction toward others

Criticisms of Freud

Unfalsifiability

Failed predictions

Lack of evidence for defense mechanisms

Questionable conception of the unconscious

Reliance on unrepresentative samples

Flawed assumption of shared environmental influences

Freud's theories have exerted a profound influence on conceptions of the mind, but they are problematic, scientifically

Freud's Followers

Neo-Freudian theories - derived from Freud's model:

Emphasize unconscious influences on behavior

Early experiences are important in shaping personality

Place less emphasis on sexuality as a driving force in personality

More optimistic regarding the prospects for long-term personality growth

Behavioral Views of Personality

Behaviorists believe personality is controlled by genetic factors and contingencies (reinforcers or punishers)

Determinists – believe all our actions are products of preexisting causal influences

Believe unconscious variables that play a role in causing behavior lie outside, not inside, us

Social Learning Theories

Emphasize thinking as a cause of personality

Reciprocal determinism – mutual influence of personality and cognitive factors, behavior, and environment

Observational learning – learning can occur by watching others

Locus of control – extent to which people believe that reinforcers and punishers lie inside or outside of their control

Humanistic Model of Personality

Core motive in personality is **self-actualization**: the drive to develop our innate potential to the fullest possible extent

Carl Rogers – personalities consist of three major components: organism, self, and **conditions of worth**

Incongruence – inconsistency between our personalities and innate dispositions

Abraham Maslow – studied the characteristics of self-actualized people

Prone to **peak experiences** – transcendent moments of intense excitement and tranquility marked by a profound sense of connection to the world

Trait Theories of Personality

Factor analysis – statistical technique that analyzes the correlations among responses on personality inventories

Used to reduce a large diversity of personality traits into as few as three to five factors

Walter Mischel – argued that personality traits did not predict behavior very well

Seymour Epstein – demonstrated that while Mischel was correct for specific events, personality traits can predict aggregated behaviors

The Search for Core Traits

- Traits can be classified by using adjectives (language), which may be organized in a hierarchical pattern.
- *Factor analysis* sorts trait items into small dimensions. Researchers have argued how many core factors exist.

Trait Theories of Personality

Big Five - traits that have surfaced repeatedly in factor analysis of personality measures

Extraversion – social and lively

Neuroticism – tense and moody

Conscientiousness – careful and responsible

Agreeableness – friendly, and easy to get along with

Openness – intellectually curious

The Big Five-Factor Model

	High on trait	Low on trait
Openness to experience	imaginative.	down-to-earth
	variety.	routine
	independent.	conforming
Conscientiousness	organized.	disorganized
	careful.	careless
	self-disciplined.	weak-willed
Extraversion	social.	retiring
	fun loving.	sober
	affectionate.	reserved
Agreeableness	softhearted.	ruthless
	trusting.	suspicious
	helpful.	uncooperative
Neuroticism	worried.	calm
	insecure.	secure
	self-pitying.	self-satisfied

Evaluating the Big Five

Able to predict real-world behaviors

Some question the lexical approach because there may be *unconscious* features of personality

There appear to be limits to the cross-cultural universality

Other Considerations

Cultural influences on personality:

Individualistic vs. Collectivistic societies

National character? No evidence to support

We can express our personality traits in different ways: basic tendencies vs. characteristic adaptations

Sensation seekers - firefighting vs. crime

Most personality traits don't change much after age 30

Trait models focus on description, rather than explanation, of individual differences

Personality Assessment

Structured personality tests – paper-and-pencil tests consisting of questions that respondents answer in one of a few fixed ways

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) – widely used structured test designed to assess symptoms of mental disorders

Built using **empirical method of test construction**: an approach in which researchers begin with two or more criterion groups, and examine which items best distinguish them

Results in low **face validity** – the extent to which respondents can tell what the items are measuring

MMPI and Validity

What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of having low face validity?

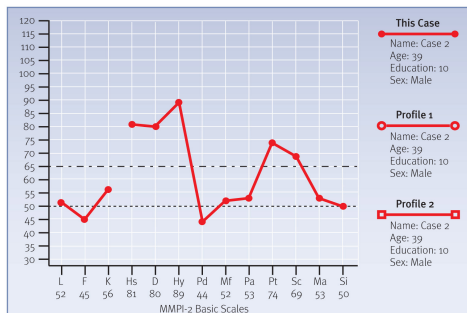
Advantages:

Does not allow people to consciously skew results toward a positive or negative diagnosis
May add unconscious feelings to the evaluation that cannot be done with direct questions

Disadvantages

Questions without direct relevance may not be helpful in evaluating personality
Subjects may think questions are not important and give random answers

MMPI-2 Profile





Personality Assessment

Projective tests - consist of ambiguous stimuli that examinees must interpret

Projective hypothesis – examinees project aspects of their own personality onto the ambiguous stimulus

- Rorschach Inkblot Test
- Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)
- Human figure drawings
- Graphology

Lack **incremental validity**

Pitfalls in Personality Assessment

P.T. Barnum effect – tendency of people to accept high base rate descriptions as accurate

Demonstrates that personal validation (subjective judgments of accuracy) are a flawed method for evaluating a test's validity

Illusory correlation – the perception of nonexistent statistical associations between variables in personality test results
