

CHAPTER 12: PERSONALITY

IF YOU LEARN ONLY SIX THINGS IN THIS CHAPTER . . .

1. Personality refers to patterns of behavior that remain constant across situations.
2. There are different approaches to personality, including psychoanalytic, trait, humanistic, and learning theories.
3. Sigmund Freud is responsible for the psychoanalytic approach, which states that we are controlled by unconscious conflicts.
4. Trait theorists argue that our personality is simply a collection of traits.
5. Humanistic theorists argue that humans are basically good and strive for perfection.
6. Learning theorists argue that personality is nothing more than a shorthand description for clusters of behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The study of personality is always interesting to students of psychology. People want to know what “makes us tick.” Interestingly, though we use the term *personality* quite a bit and speak about liking someone because he has a “good personality,” we don’t have a good definition of the term. For the purposes of this chapter, we will define **personality** as a pattern of behavior that remains somewhat consistent across situations.

Psychologists have defined the concept of personality in different ways. In this chapter, we will concern ourselves with the following theories: psychodynamic theory, trait theories, humanist

theories, and learning theories. Each approach attempts to explain the individual differences we see in humans. Further, each has its own set of unique explanations for the diversity of behavior that exists.

The study of personality is not easy. We cannot see personality, so measuring the construct is a challenge. With careful research, however, we can draw certain conclusions that might help us understand human behavior.

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

No discussion of personality would be complete without describing the psychoanalytic approach to understanding human behavior. And no discussion of the psychoanalytic approach would be complete without a description of the work of **Sigmund Freud**.

Freud was not a psychologist. In 1881, he was awarded a medical degree. While he was never interested in pursuing medicine as a career, he believed that his training as a neurologist would help him investigate the causes of human behavior.

Freud spent much of his early career working with other psychologists, as he developed different aspects of his theory—those learning how to treat “hysterical” women, for example. The belief was that some women could not control their emotions because of some unnamed conflict.

Freud first learned how to do hypnotism as a treatment strategy but then decided that this avenue was a dead end. Dream analysis came next, with the help of Breuer. Eventually, the two psychologists had a falling out and parted ways (a common occurrence with Freud), though dream analysis did become part of Freud’s theory.

Freud soon developed more than just a description of human behavior—his became one of the most complete theories of the causes of human behavior. The main idea was that many of the **causes of human behavior are outside of consciousness**. We do what we do for reasons that we don’t completely understand. Moreover, many of our desires are either sexual or aggressive in nature.

According to Freud, we have **three levels of consciousness**:

Conscious	What we are currently aware of
Preconscious	What we are not aware of but could be if we wanted to recall the information
Unconscious	Information that is potentially dangerous to think about, so it is buried; we are not able to access this information, but it does come out under some circumstances

These three levels of consciousness contain the **three components of personality**:

Id	The pleasure principle—This is the part of our personality that wants what it wants, immediately. According to Freud, the id demands immediate satisfaction. The desires are typically sexual or aggressive in nature.
Superego	Our conscience—This is the part of our personality that is the moral principle. The superego wants to do what is right at all times.
Ego	The mediator—The ego tries to satisfy the demands of the id within the context of the superego. That is, the ego mediates between the id and the superego.

To protect the ego, we often engage in what Freud and his daughter (**Anna Freud**) called **defense mechanisms**. A defense mechanism protects the ego by diverting the anxiety that might occur and deflecting that energy toward something else.

Some of the more important defense mechanisms are listed below:

Repression	Anxiety is so strong that we push the cause of the anxiety deep into the unconscious. At times, the anxiety may rise to the surface via dreams or “Freudian slips.”
Projection	We see anxiety-causing behavior in others rather than in ourselves.
Reaction Formation	We engage in the opposite of an anxiety-producing behavior. Suppose one is interested in pornography. This is a socially unacceptable behavior, so to protect his ego, he might engage in a protest against pornography.
Sublimation	We replace a socially unacceptable desire or urge with something socially acceptable. We would replace our desire to hit someone with exercise, for instance.
Displacement	We take out our anxiety on someone other than the person who caused the anxiety.
Regression	When confronted by anxiety, we retreat to an earlier stage of development. We may curl up on the sofa like a baby, or we may ask our parents to bail us out of a dilemma.

Denial	We push the existence of some problem right out of our heads as if it did not exist, or we refuse to acknowledge and confront it.
Rationalization	We legitimize our failures by coming up with logical-sounding excuses for what happened. For example, we might say, "The college that did not accept me has a poor perception in the academic community."

Freud's theory also argued that we go through several stages of **psychosexual development**. We must successfully navigate the issues of each stage to develop without issues that will influence behavior later.

But what happens if the stage is not successfully navigated?

Oral stage Pleasure gained by feeding	If not successfully weaned, child will become orally fixed. Thus, as an adult, one may drink too much, smoke too much, etc.
Anal stage Pleasure gained by controlling one's bowels	If potty training is tough, child will become anal retentive. Thus, as an adult, one will become obsessed with organization and control of environment.
Phallic stage Pleasure gained by exploring one's body	Stifling this stage may result in poor body image or in inappropriate body image.
Latency stage Focus moves away from one area	
Genital stage Mature sexuality	

During the phallic stage, children go through a period where they unconsciously desire their opposite-sex parent (the Oedipus complex in males). During this time, children form a bond with the parent that they are jealous of because of their unconscious fear of what might happen.

Freud's theory is well known, and many people associate it with mainstream psychology. In modern psychology, however, very few completely embrace this theory. The most common complaint is that it does not have any real empirical support.

Neo-Freudians are those psychoanalysts who followed Freud but often veered off in other directions to develop their own ideas. The most well-known is **Carl Jung**, whose theories include the **collective unconscious**, which was similar to Freud's idea of the unconscious, except this was one that would be shared by all humanity. Jung used stories and myths in various cultures to show that the same ideals (called **archetypes**) evolved in all cultures.

Other neo-Freudians include Alfred Adler, who developed the concept called the inferiority complex, and Karen Horney, who stressed the importance of childhood anxiety and countered Freud's view of women as the weaker sex.

TRAIT THEORIES

Other theories of personality focus on different aspects of behavior. Trait theorists, for example, argue that **personality consists of a collection of traits or personality characteristics**. People vary on traits such as introversion/extraversion, aggression, talkativeness, etc. Each person is born or learns behavior patterns that represent these traits. Take the test for introversion or extraversion developed by Hans Eysenck, for example. One could ask questions that would allow the development of a score. The score represented the degree to which one might possess this trait.

HUMANISTIC THEORIES

According to humanistic theories, **humans are born inherently good**. What drives them is the **goal of self-actualization**. Self-actualization is the achievement of one's personal best. To achieve self-actualization, we strive toward becoming better people. So the goal becomes being the best person one can be. Noted humanistic psychologists are **Carl Rogers** and **Abraham Maslow**.

LEARNING THEORIES

Learning theories argue that **personality is an explanatory fiction**. Rather, what is called "personality" is really a **collection of behaviors**. We learn patterns of behaviors through the traditional strategies of reinforcement and punishment, just like we learn everything else. Personality is just a description of behaviors under certain environmental circumstances.

AP EXPERT TIP

Trait theorists argue that traits such as introversion/extraversion are stable across a lifetime. Learning theorists argue that introverts could become extraverts if properly reinforced.