

Theories of personality

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Introduction

Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment (Gordon Allport). Personality consists of distinctive patterns of behaviour that characterize each individual's adaptation to the situations of his or her life (Walter Mischel).

Theories of personality

1. Type and trait approaches
2. Dynamic approaches
3. Learning and behavioural approaches

Type theories

One of the first type theories given by Hippocrates; grouped people into four temperamental types: sanguine (cheerful, vigorous, confidently optimistic), melancholic (depressed, morose), choleric (hot-tempered), and phlegmatic (slow-moving, calm, unexcitable). Type is simply a class of individuals said to share a common collection of characteristics. Introverts are people who share characteristics like shyness, social withdrawal and tendency to not talk much. Extroverts are outgoing, friendly and talkative.

Trait theories

Descriptive terms like impulsive, strong etc. represent traits – the characteristics that lead people to behave in more or less distinctive and consistent ways across situations. Allport's theory was given by psychologist Gordon Allport. He counted about 18,000 trait-like terms in English language; terms that designated distinctive and personal forms of behaviour. Cardinal traits can be defined as those which are so dominant that nearly all of the individual's action can be traced back to them. Most people have no cardinal traits. Central traits become crucial in people without cardinal traits. These are described as characterizing an individual's behaviour to some extent but not in such a complex way as in cardinal traits. Secondary traits are least generalized characteristics of the person e.g. 'likes chocolates', 'prefers foreign cars', etc. Allport tried to describe people in terms of the traits that captured their uniqueness.

a. Idiographic approach: Search for consistencies within particular individual; psychological study of the individual case. It entails efforts to understand, explain, and predict an individual's behaviour in certain circumstances.

b. Nomothetic/Dimensional approach: This approach is aimed at discovery of personality principles that apply to people in general.

Single trait research: Some trait theorists and researchers tried to focus carefully on one single trait. Locus of control is the degree to which we believe that we cause or control the events in our lives. If we believe that we are the cause of most events, we have a highly internal locus of control. If we believe most events are caused by luck, fate, or powerful others, we have an external locus of control. Julian Rotter developed a questionnaire to measure internal versus external locus of control.

Questions about type and trait theories involves reliability, validity, type and trait consistency.

Dynamic theories

Dynamic approaches involve a search for the processes by which needs, motives, and impulses often hidden from view interact to produce the person's behaviour. Dynamic theories are often criticized because of its tendency to over interpret i.e. to attribute deeper meaning to behaviour than the behaviour really warrants.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory

The raw materials Freud used to shape this theory were the thoughts and recollections from his patients. One such case to be mentioned is patient 'Frau Emmy von M' whom Freud began treating in 1889. Personality structure consists of id, ego and superego. Id is the most primitive part; storehouse of biologically based urges, like urge to eat, drink, be sexually stimulated. The sexual energy underlying these urges is called the libido. Id operates according to pleasure principle. Ego consists of elaborate ways of behaving and thinking which constitute the executive functions of the individual. Ego delays satisfying id motives and channels behaviour into more socially acceptable outlets. Ego works 'in the service of reality principle'.

Superego closely corresponds to what we call 'conscience'. It consists mainly of prohibitions learned from parents and higher authorities. It is concerned with moral behaviour based on unconscious behavioural patterns learned at early pregenital stages of development.

Personality dynamics and levels of consciousness

Personality is an ongoing interplay between id, ego and superego. Ego acts as a sort of mediator between id with its blind demand for instant gratification and superego with its rigid often irrational rules, prohibitions and ideals. Freud's heavy emphasis on primitive sexual nature of human drives and energy (libido) has helped make his theory controversial.

Freud's notion on levels of consciousness

Conscious level: We are aware of certain things around us and of certain thoughts.

Preconscious level: Memories or thoughts that are easily available with a moment's reflection.

Unconscious level: Memories, thoughts, and motives which we cannot easily call up. We repress or banish from consciousness, ideas, memories, feelings or motives that are especially disturbing, forbidden or unacceptable to us, called repression. Whenever ideas or impulses are painful or anxiety-arousing, we try to escape from it and the anxiety triggers repression and the unacceptable material is buried in the unconscious.

According to Freud's theory, the repressed material does not remain safely tucked away. Instead, it continues to operate underground, often converting the repressed conflicts into neurosis – disturbed behaviour involving anxiety or defenses against anxiety. Unconscious processes also figured in Freud's ideas about dreams and accidents. He saw dreams as disguised manifestations of id motives and he described dreams as 'the royal road to the unconscious'.

Psychosexual stages of development

Freud placed heavy emphasis on biological development in general and sexual development in particular. Freud's idea was that from birth on, we have an innate tendency to seek pleasure specially through stimulation of parts of the body that are sensitive to touch - mouth, anus, genitals. These are referred to as erotogenic zones. Freud believed that if a child's needs at one of the stages is unfulfilled or over fulfilled fixations occur i.e. child would show continued attachment to an old stage even after moving to a new one. As a result, behaviour patterns and problems from the fixed stage would often persist into adulthood.

Oral stage: First 18 months of life

The infant's needs, perception and modes of expression are primarily centered in the mouth, lips, tongue and other organs related to the oral zone. Excessive oral gratification or deprivation can result in libidinal fixations that contribute to pathological traits like excessive optimism, narcissism, pessimism and demandingness. Successful resolution of this stage provides a basis in character structure for capacities to give to and receive from others without much dependence or envy.

Anal stage: One to three years

This stage is prompted by maturation of neuromuscular control over sphincters, particularly the anal sphincter. Orderliness, obstinacy, willfulness, frugality are features of anal character derived from fixation in anal stage. Successful resolution provides the basis for personal autonomy, a capacity for independence and personal initiative without guilt.

Urethral stage: Transitional phase between the anal and phallic stages of development

Pathological traits are competitiveness and ambition, probably for compensation of shame due to loss of urethral control. Successful resolution gives a sense of pride and self confidence.

Phallic stage: Starts in the third year of life and continues upto fifth year

The phallic stage is characterized by a primary focus of sexual interests, stimulation and excitement in genital areas. The penis becomes the organ of principle interest in children of both sexes, with lack of penis in female considered evidence of castration. The threat of castration and castration anxiety arises in connection with guilt over masturbation and Oedipal wishes. The objective of this stage is to focus erotic interest in the genital areas and genital functions. Pathological traits focus on castration in males and penis envy in females. Successful resolution gives rise to gender identity. The influence of castration anxiety and penis envy and defenses used against them, and pattern of identification that emerge from the phallic stage are primary determinants of development of human character.

Latency stage: The stage of relative inactivity of sexual drive during the period from resolution of Oedipus complex until pubescence (from five to six years to 11-13 years)

In this phase, sexuality is largely repressed and ego expands.

Genital phase: From onset of puberty 11-13 years till person reaches young adulthood

The physiological maturation of sexual functioning and attendant hormonal system leads to an intensification of drives, particularly libidinal drives. Previous unsuccessful resolution and fixations in various phases or aspects will produce pathological deficits in rising adult personality. Successful resolution leads to a fully mature personality with capacity of genital potency and a self integrated and consistent sense of identity.

Differences with Freud's theory

Carl Gustav Jung's psychic apparatus differs from Freudian structure of id, ego and superego. Jung thought childhood psychosexual development to be not nearly so important to adult adjustment as Freud did. Jung placed much less emphasis than Freud on sexual and aggressive impulses arising from past conflicts and much emphasis on people's future-oriented goals, hopes and plans.

Jung's personality theory

In developing his theory, Jung drew on both his own dreams and fantasy material and also that of his patients. Complexes are groups of unconscious ideas associated with particular emotionally toned events or experiences. Jung inferred them from his early word association studies that certain words provoked intense reactions or produced less reaction than expected. Archetypes are the inherited capacity to initiate and carry out behaviour typical of all human beings, regardless of race or culture, such as nurturing and accepting nurturance, being aggressive or dealing with aggression by others.

Unconscious: The Jungian unconscious has two layers.

Personal unconscious - the superficial one. Complexes exist here. It is a repository of individual memory that have been repressed.

Collective unconscious - it is the deeper layer. It is the residue of what has been learnt in humankind's evolution and ancestral past.

Law of compensation: For any conscious attitude or experience that is intense, there is an unconscious compensation e.g. a person experiencing neglect might fantasize or dream about a many breasted mother.

Symbols: Symbols are expressions of content not yet consciously recognized or conceptually formulated. It is an attempt to unite and strike a balance between images from collective unconscious and the personal unconscious.

Personality structure: At the centre of conscious personality is the complex called ego. The persona or public personality mediates between ego and the real

world. The shadow, the reverse image of the persona, contains traits that are unacceptable to the persona. Anima is the residue of all experiences of woman in a man's psychic heritage. Animus is the residue of all experiences of a man in a woman's psychic heritage.

Self: Self is the archetype of ego. In the first of life, the ego attempts to identify with the self and to appropriate the power of the self in the service of ego's growth and differentiation. If ego is cut from self there may be a sense of alienation and depression.

Individuation: It is the drive for individuals to become unique and to fulfill the spiritual propensities common to all humanity. In the second half of life, ego begin to attend more to self than to conscious realms of life.

Psychological types has three axes -

Extroversion-introversion: Extroverts are oriented to others and to the world of consciousness. Their energy flows outwards first then inwards. Introverts are oriented to their inner world; their energy flows inwards first.

Sensation-intuition polarity: The sensation type comes to understand a situation by assembling the details. The intuitive type grabs the overall situation.

Thinking-feeling polarity: Deals with information processing and judgement. In thinking mode data are evaluated according to logical principle. Feeling is making judgements through nonlogical processes having to do with values and understanding relations.

Adler's individual psychology

Alfred Adler was a colleague of Freud and Jung but his theory took a different turn. Adler believed that people are forever struggling to overcome their feelings of inferiority. He identified this as the most basic life urge. People strive continually for 'superiority' and 'mastery over external world'. When someone fails repeatedly to overcome weakness and achieve some mastery, the result is what Adler termed 'inferiority complex'.

Compensation and overcompensation: The pursuit of activities designed to make up for or to overcome inferiority.

Style of life: According to Adler, every individual has his or her own approach to living; this style grows out of the individual's unique sense of his or her inferiorities and the strategies he or she develops to overcome these inferiorities.

Birth order as an influence on personality development: First borns begin their life as exclusive

focus of their parent's attention and are often abruptly dethroned with the birth of their first sibling. Child feels cheated and becomes unruly misfit.

Adler versus Freud versus Jung

Adler joined Freud's inner circle in 1902, and rose to the presidency of Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and the coeditorship of the psychoanalytic journal *Zentralblatt*. But by 1911, the conflict between Freud and Adler became so intense that he resigned from both the posts. Jung had his own opinion about both Freud's and Adler's theories. He believed that both had missed some key issues in personality and both had misunderstood the true nature of the unconscious. After years of collaboration, Freud, Adler and Jung went off in separate directions.

Horney's psychoanalytic interpersonal theory

Karen Horney, an early feminist who took sharp issues with Freud on some of his views on 'feminine psychology'. She acknowledged and agreed on Freud in many issues but was also critical of him on several beliefs. Freud's notion of penis envy in particular was subject to criticism by Horney. Horney accepted that penis envy might occur occasionally in neurotic women but stated that 'womb envy' occurs just as much in men. Horney felt that men were envious of women's ability to bear children. The degree to which men are driven to success maybe merely a substitute for the fact that they cannot carry, nurture and bear children. Horney was also bewildered by Freudian tendency to place so much emphasis on male sex organ. Horney also reworked the Freudian Oedipus complex of sexual elements claiming that clinging to one parent and jealousy of the other was simply the result of anxiety caused by a disturbance in parent-child relationship.

Prominent theories of Horney:

Theory of neurosis

Theory of narcissism

Theory of self

Feminine Psychology

Theory of neurosis: Horney believed neurosis to be a continuous process, with neurotic symptoms occurring sporadically in one's lifetime. She placed significant emphasis on parental indifference towards the child, believing that a child's perception of events as opposed to the parent's intention is the key to understanding a person's neurosis. Basic anxiety, is what arises in childhood when the child feels helpless in a threatening world. Children learn that they are relatively weak and powerless, dependent on their parents for safety and satisfaction. Basic hostility is what usually accompanies basic anxiety and grows out of resentment over the parental behaviour that lead to

anxiety in the first place. The ten needs that Horney classified according to her so called coping strategies are as follows -

1. Moving towards people - need for affection and approval, need for a partner.

2. Moving against people - need for power, need to exploit others, need for social recognition, need for personal admiration, need for personal achievement.

3. Moving away from people - need for self sufficiency and independence, need for perfection, need to restrict life practices.

Horney believed that normal people used all three modes of social interaction at times but in a relatively balanced and flexible manner, adjusting their approach to situational demands. Neurotic people allow only one approach to dominate their social interactions and this rigidity gets them into trouble.

Defense mechanisms in dynamic theory

Psychoanalytic theory holds that because the id's unconscious demands are instinctual, infantile and amoral, they must often be blocked by the ego and superego. Because of this conflict and the persistence of unsatisfied demands, anxiety and guilt are aroused. The person then seeks ways to protect the ego from this anxiety and guilt by setting up defenses.

Repression: Repression is the fundamental technique people use to allay anxiety caused by conflicts. It is an active mental process by which a person forgets by pushing down into the unconscious any thoughts that arouse anxiety.

Reaction formation: Reversal of motives is another way by which people attempt to cope with conflicts. It is transforming an unacceptable impulse into its opposite.

Projection: Blaming others or projection, is a way of dealing with one's unwanted motives by shifting them on to someone else. The anxiety arising from internal conflict can be lessened and dealt with as though it were in the external world.

Rationalization: This defense mechanism substitutes an acceptable conscious motive for an unacceptable unconscious one. It is offering rational explanations in an attempt to justify attitudes.

Intellectualization: Intensity anxiety is reduced by a retreat into detached, unemotional abstract language. Excessively using intellectual processes to avoid affective experience or experience.

Displacement: In displacement, the motive remains unaltered, but the person substitutes a different goal object for the original one. It is shifting an emotion

or drive cathexis from one idea or object to another that resembles the original in some aspect or quality.

Regression: In the face of a threat, one may retreat to an earlier pattern of adaptation, possibly a childish or primitive one.

Sublimation: Achieving impulse gratification and retention of goals by altering a socially objectionable aim or object to a socially acceptable one.

Questions about dynamic theory

These theories include ideas that are difficult to prove or disprove e.g. Oedipus complex or penis envy. Most dynamic theories consist of disguised motives, hidden goals, indirect ways of coping. These are the products of the cultural environment in which they are formed.

Learning and behavioural theories of personality

Learning and behavioural theories of personality are specifically structured to be tested. These theories emerged from experiments in classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning and cognitive learning. Based on assumptions, first many behaviours originate somewhere in the learning history of the individual. Second current condition of the individual's environment helps maintain those behaviour. Neal Miller, an experimental psychologist and John Dollard in 1930 tried to draw an analogy between Freud's belief that conflicts between id demands and ego/superego constraints lead to neuroticism, and the conflict between approach and avoidance tendencies. They argued that we may act indecisive and neurotic when we are torn between approaching and avoiding a certain course of action e.g. we want to get a tooth filled but we fear the pain. Tendency to approach is often stronger than tendency to avoid initially. But as we get closer to the moment of truth, the tendency to avoid wins over and we retreat from the planned action.

Skinner's radical behaviourism

BF Skinner's view is exclusively instrumental or operant. It deals only with processes by which reinforcement (reward) and punishment influence the likelihood of behaviour. Ruled out of Skinner's analysis were 'unobservables' such as drives, motives and emotions.

Given by Albert Bandura and Richard Walters in 1963, based on observational learning or imitation, observational learning generally takes place in a social situation involving a model and an imitator. The imitator observes the model and experiences the model's behaviour and its consequences vicariously – this process is called vicarious reinforcement.

Questions about learning theories

Strict learning theory approach leads only to an understanding of behaviour in specific situations and such 'situationism' ignores the consistencies that many people show from one situation to the next. Social learning theorists as Bandura and Walters do use concepts about internal cognitive processes to explain imitation and delayed performance.

Humanistic theories: personality as the self

Humanistic theories focus upon the individual's subjective perception of self, the world and the self within the world. The term self has two distinct set of meanings. One set has to do with people's attitude about themselves; their picture of the way they look and act; the impact they believe they have on others and their perceived traits, abilities and weakness.

Carl Rogers' theory (1959,1961) came out of his client-centered approach to psychotherapy and behaviour change. Rogers's theory does not involve complex personality structure or stages of development. Roger emphasized the whole of the experience, the phenomenal field. This is the individual's subjective frame of reference; it may or not correspond to external reality.

The self: Rogers states that it seemed clear that self was an important element in the experience of the client, and that in some odd sense his goal was to become his 'real self'. In addition to present, there is also an ideal self, the self the person would like to be. Trouble occurs when there are mismatches or incongruences e.g. the perceived self may not match the real self and this may be very disturbing.

Personality development: As children grow up, parents and others react to their behaviour, sometimes in a positive way and sometimes with disapproval. Children thus learn to regard some of their actions, feelings and thoughts as unworthy, and they often react by denying or distorting these unworthy aspects of self. Rogers encouraged research to test his hypothesis. He also encouraged Q-sort technique, a method of self-description, in personality research. In this technique, individual is given a large number of descriptions and is asked to sort them into categories from 'least characteristic' to 'most characteristic'. In support of his therapy, it has been seen that people who are seeking psychotherapy indicate more of a disparity between real and ideal self. On the other hand, acknowledging a disparity between real and ideal self is a sign of maturity.

Maslow's self-actualization theory

Abraham Maslow was another phenomenological theorists who emphasized development of the self.

Maslow stated that we have higher level growth needs - need for self-actualization and understanding of ourselves. But these higher needs only assume a dominant role in our lives after our primitive needs, physiological needs, safety needs, need for love and belongingness, esteem needs are satisfied. Self actualization refers to a person's need to develop his or her potentialities i.e. to do what he or she is actually capable of doing. Self-actualizers are actually people who make the fullest use of their capabilities. He studied models of self-actualized people and found that:

1. They are open to experience vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption.
2. They were in tune with themselves, their inner self.
3. They were spontaneous, autonomous, independent with a fresh, unstereotyped appreciation of people and events.
4. They devoted total efforts to their goals, wanting to be first-rate or atleast as good as they could be.
5. They were dedicated fully and creatively, to some cause outside themselves.
6. They related to a few specially loved others on a deep emotional plane.
7. They resisted conformity to the culture, they could be detached and private.

Questions about humanistic theory

Humanistic theories are often criticized for their heavy reliance on their subjective self report data.

Erik Erikson's theory of psychological development

Erikson's theory of psychological development and crisis extended across the entire life-cycle. He focused on boundary between child and the environment and then graphed the evolution of the maturing ego's relations with an expanding social world.

Epigenetic principle: It holds that development occurs in sequential, clearly defined stages, and that each stage must be satisfactorily resolved for development to proceed smoothly.

Genes and personality

Research, specially that involving twins has uncovered evidence for a genetic contribution to personality.

Studies of temperament: Research on temperament – the aspect of personality that includes mood, activity level and emotion, and the variability of each. One investigative team had mothers of monozygotic twins (MZ), other had mothers of dizygotic twins (DZ). Each mother rated their child on four dimensions like emotionality, activity, sociability, impulsivity. Correlations were higher for MZ twins than DZ twins in almost all dimensions because MZ twins share 100% identical genes while DZ twins share only 50%.

Trait, type and chromosome: Moving beyond child temperaments, we can find some evidence of a genetic contribution to a large number of adult traits too. Correlations were much higher for MZ twins than DZ twins.

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