



Personality

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Personality is the pattern of enduring characteristics that produce consistency and individuality in a given person. Personality encompasses the behaviors that make each of us unique and that differentiate us from others. Personality also leads us to act consistently in different situations and over extended periods of time.

Psychodynamic Approaches to Personality

Psychodynamic personality theorists illustrate that behavior is triggered by inner forces that are beyond our awareness. These hidden drives, shaped by childhood experiences, play an important role in energizing and directing everyday behavior.

Psychodynamic approaches to personality are based on the idea that personality is primarily unconscious and motivated by inner forces and conflicts about which people have little awareness. The most important pioneer of the psychodynamic approach was Sigmund Freud. A number of Freud's followers, including Carl Jung, Karen Horney, and Alfred Adler, refined Freud's theory and developed their own psychodynamic approaches.

Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory: Mapping the Unconscious Mind

According to Freud's theory, conscious experience is only a small part of our psychological makeup and experience. He argued that much of our behavior is motivated by the unconscious, a part of the personality that contains the memories, knowledge, beliefs, feelings, urges, drives, and instincts of which the individual is not aware.

Like the unseen mass of a floating iceberg, the contents of the unconscious far surpass in quantity the information in our conscious awareness. Freud maintained that to understand personality, it is necessary to expose what is in the unconscious. But because the unconscious disguises the meaning of the material it holds, the content of the unconscious cannot be observed directly.

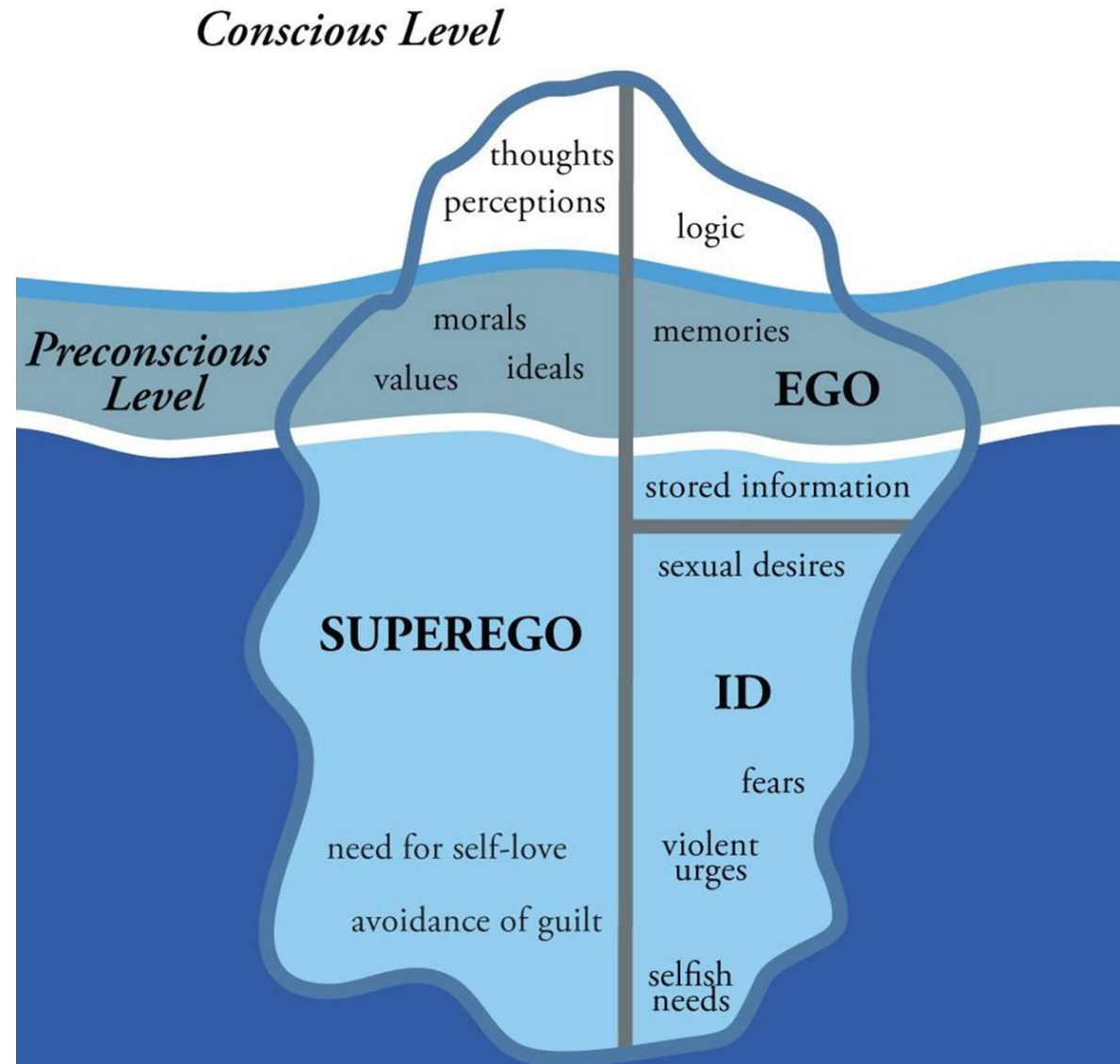
Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory: Mapping the Unconscious Mind

It is therefore necessary to interpret clues to the unconscious—slips of the tongue, fantasies, and dreams—to understand the unconscious processes that direct behavior.

To Freud, much of our personality is determined by our unconscious. Some of the unconscious is made up of the preconscious, which contains material that is not threatening and is easily brought to mind, such as the knowledge that $2 + 2 = 4$. But deeper in the unconscious are instinctual drives—the wishes, desires, demands, and needs that are hidden from conscious awareness because of the conflicts and pain they would cause if they were part of our everyday lives. The unconscious provides a “safe haven” for our recollections of threatening events.

Freud's view of human mind: The mental iceberg

In Freud's personality model, there are three major components: the id, the ego, and the superego. As the iceberg analogy shows, only a small portion of personality is conscious.



Structuring Personality: Id, Ego, & Superego

To describe the structure of personality, Freud developed a comprehensive theory that held that personality consists of three separate but interacting components: the id, the ego, and the superego. If personality consisted only of primitive, instinctual cravings and longings, it would have just one component: the id.

The **id** is the instinctual and unorganized part of personality. From the time of birth, the id attempts to reduce tension created by primitive drives related to hunger, sex, aggression, and irrational impulses. Those drives are fueled by “psychic energy,” which we can think of as a limitless energy source constantly putting pressure on the various parts of the personality. The id operates according to the **pleasure principle** in which the goal is the immediate reduction of tension and the maximization of satisfaction. However, in most cases, reality prevents the fulfillment of the demands of the pleasure principle: We cannot always eat when we are hungry, to account for this fact of life, Freud suggested a second component of personality, which he called the ego.

Structuring Personality: Id, Ego, and Superego

Ego is the part of personality that attempts to balance the desires of the id and the realities of the objective, outside world. It starts to develop soon after birth. The ego operates according to **the reality principle** in which instinctual energy is restrained to maintain the individual's safety and to help integrate the person into society. In a sense, then, the ego is the “executive” of personality: It makes decisions, controls actions, and allows thinking and problem solving of a higher order than the id's capabilities permit.

Superego is the final personality structure to develop in childhood. According to Freud, the superego is the part of personality that harshly judges the morality of our behavior. It represents the rights and wrong of society as taught and modeled by a person's parents, teachers, and other significant individuals. The superego includes the **conscience**, which prevents us from behaving in a morally improper way by making us feel guilty if we do wrong. The superego helps us control impulses coming from the id, making our behavior less selfish and more virtuous.

Defense Mechanisms

Anxiety (an intense, negative emotional experience) is a danger signal to the ego. Although anxiety can arise from realistic fears—such as seeing a poisonous snake about to strike—it can also occur in the form of neurotic anxiety in which irrational impulses emanating from the id threaten to burst through and become uncontrollable.

Freud believed that people develop a range of ways to deal with it, which he called defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies that people use to reduce anxiety by distorting reality and concealing the source of the anxiety from themselves. The primary defense mechanism is repression. **Repression** occurs when the ego pushes unacceptable or unpleasant thoughts and impulses out of consciousness but maintains them in the unconscious. Repression is the most direct method of dealing with anxiety; instead of handling an anxiety-producing impulse on a conscious level, we simply ignore it. E.g., memories of childhood abuse may be repressed.

Trait Approaches: Placing Labels on Personality

Traits are consistent, habitual personality characteristics and behaviors that are displayed across different situations. Trait theory is the personality approach that seeks to identify the basic traits necessary to describe personality. Trait theorists do not assume that some people have a particular trait while others do not. Instead, they propose that all people possess a set of traits, but the degree to which a particular trait applies to a specific person varies and can be quantified. For instance, they might assume that all people have the trait of “friendliness,”

ALLPORT'S TRAIT THEORY: IDENTIFYING BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

came up with 18,000 separate terms that could be used to describe personality. Although he was able to pare down the list to a mere 4,500 descriptors after eliminating words with the same meaning and suggested that there are three fundamental categories of traits:

Trait Approaches: Placing Labels on Personality

- **Cardinal traits.** A cardinal trait is a single characteristic that directs most of a person's activities. For example, a totally selfless woman may direct all her energy toward humanitarian activities
- **Central traits.** Most people possess a handful of central traits that make up the core of personality such as honesty and sociability, are an individual's major characteristics; they usually number from five to ten in any one person.
- **Secondary traits.** are characteristics that affect behavior in fewer situations and are less influential than are central or cardinal traits. For instance, a reluctance to eat meat and a love of modern art would be considered secondary traits

Cattell and Eysenck: Factoring Out Personality

Using factor analysis (a statistical method of identifying patterns among a large number of variables), personality psychologist Raymond Cattell suggested that 16 pairs of traits represent the basic dimensions of personality. He found that personality could best be described in terms of just three major dimensions:

Extraversion

- Sociable
- Lively
- Active
- Assertive
- Sensation-seeking

Neuroticism

- Anxious
- Depressed
- Guilt feelings
- Low self-esteem
- Tense

Psychoticism

- Aggressive
- Cold
- Egocentric
- Impersonal
- Impulsive

The Big Five Personality Traits

Using factor analytic statistical techniques, a consistent body of research has identified a similar set of five factors that underlie personality.

The Big Five Personality Factors and Dimensions of Sample Traits

Openness to experience

Independent—Conforming

Imaginative—Practical

Preference for variety—Preference for routine

Conscientiousness

Careful—Careless

Disciplined—Impulsive

Organized—Disorganized

Extraversion

Talkative—Quiet

Fun-loving—Sober

Sociable—Retiring

Agreeableness

Sympathetic—Fault-finding

Kind—Cold

Appreciative—Unfriendly

Neuroticism (Emotional Stability)

Stable—Tense

Calm—Anxious

Secure—Insecure

Learning Approaches: We Are What We've Learned

SKINNER'S BEHAVIORIST APPROACH

Personality is a collection of learned behavior patterns. Similarities in responses across different situations are caused by similar patterns of reinforcement that have been received in such situations. in the past. If I am sociable both at parties and at meetings, it is because I have been reinforced for displaying social behaviors.

Learning Approaches: We Are What We've Learned

SOCIAL COGNITIVE APPROACHES TO PERSONALITY

emphasize the influence of cognition—thoughts, feelings, expectations, and values—as well as observation of others' behavior, on personality. People can foresee the possible outcomes of certain behaviors in a specific setting without actually having to carry them out. This understanding comes primarily through observational learning—viewing the actions of others and observing the consequences.

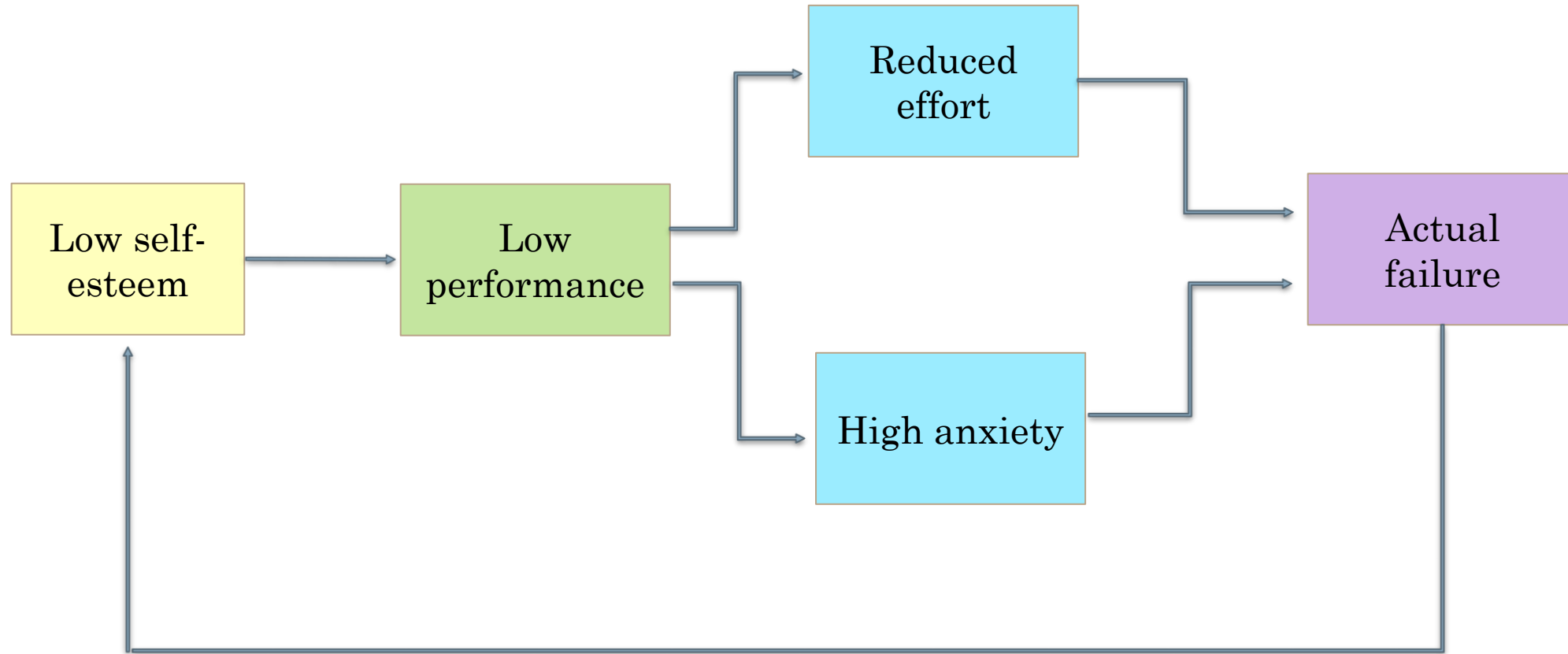
Self-Efficacy. is the belief that we can master a situation and produce positive outcomes. Self-efficacy underlies people's faith in their ability to successfully carry out a particular task or to produce a desired outcome. People with high self-efficacy have higher aspirations and greater persistence in working to attain goals. Furthermore, they ultimately achieve greater success than do those with lower self-efficacy.

Learning Approaches: We Are What We've Learned

Self-Esteem. is the component of personality that encompasses our positive and negative self-evaluations. It relates to how we feel about ourselves and it is not unidimensional. We may see ourselves positively in one domain but negatively in others. For example, a good student may have high self-esteem in academic domains but lower self-esteem in sports.

Although almost everyone goes through periods of **low self-esteem** (for instance, after an undeniable failure), some people are chronically low in self-esteem. For them, failure seems to be an inevitable part of life. In fact, low self-esteem may lead to a cycle of failure in which past failure breeds future failure. **High levels of self-esteem** can also be troublesome if it is unwarranted. According to a growing body of data, an increasing number of college-age students have high levels of **narcissism**, in which people show self-absorption and hold inflated views of themselves.

The cycle of low self-esteem



The cycle of low self-esteem begins with an individual already having low self-esteem. As a consequence, the person will have low performance expectations and expect to fail a test, thereby producing anxiety and reduced effort. As a result, the person will actually fail, and failure in turn reinforces low self-esteem.

Humanistic Approaches: The Uniqueness of You

emphasize people's inherent goodness and their tendency to move toward higher levels of functioning. It is this conscious, self-motivated ability to change and improve, along with people's unique creative impulses that make up the core of personality.

ROGERS AND THE NEED FOR SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Rogers maintains that all people have a fundamental need for **self-actualization**, a state of self-fulfillment in which people realize their highest potential, each in a unique way. He further suggests that people develop a need for **positive regard** that reflects the desire to be loved and respected. Because others provide this positive regard, we grow dependent on them. We begin to see and judge ourselves through the eyes of other people, relying on their values and being preoccupied with what they think of us.

Humanistic Approaches: The Uniqueness of You

One outgrowth of placing importance on others' opinions is that a conflict may grow between people's experiences and their self-concept. **Self-concept** is the set of beliefs and perceptions people hold about their own abilities, behavior, and personality.

If the discrepancies between people's self-concepts and what they actually experience in their lives are minor, the consequences are minor. But if the discrepancies between one's experience and one's self-concept are great, they will lead to psychological disturbances in daily functioning. E.g., people with large discrepancies may experience frequent anxiety.

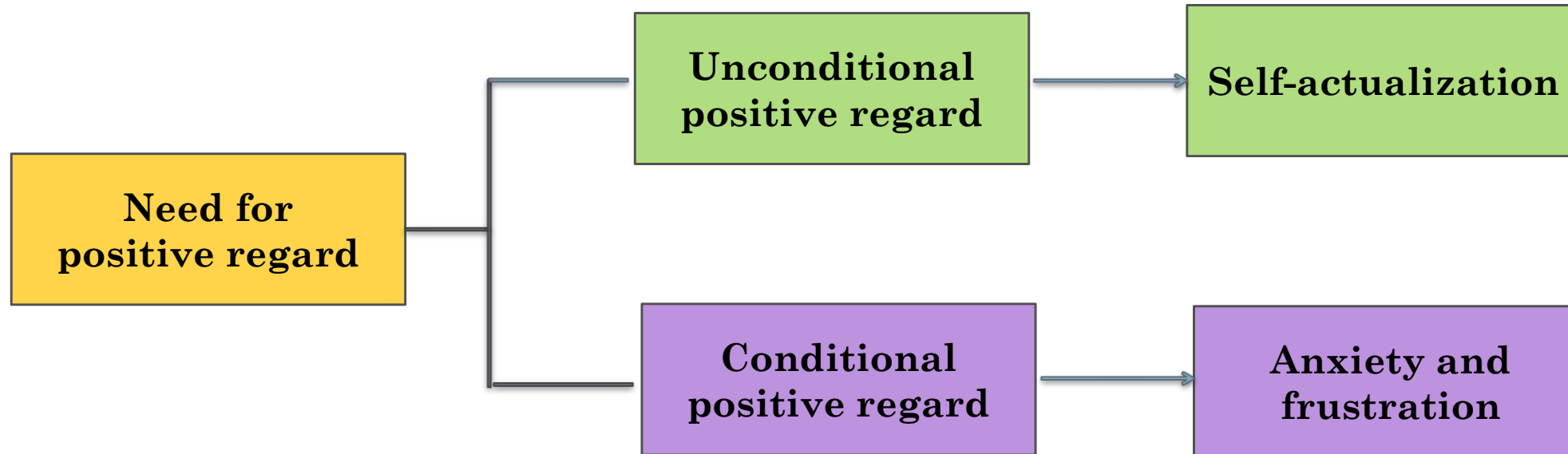
One way of overcoming the discrepancy between experience and self-concept is through unconditional positive regard from another person—a friend, a spouse, or a therapist. **Unconditional positive regard** is an attitude of acceptance and respect on the observer's part, no matter what a person says or does.

Humanistic Approaches: The Uniqueness of You

This acceptance, says Rogers, gives people the opportunity to evolve and grow both cognitively and emotionally and to develop more realistic self-concepts. You may have experienced the power of unconditional positive regard when you confided in someone, revealing embarrassing secrets because you knew the listener would still love and respect you even after hearing the worst about you.

In contrast, conditional positive regard depends on your behavior. In such cases, others withdraw their love and acceptance if you do something of which they don't approve. The result is a discrepancy between your true self and what others wish you would be, which leads to anxiety and frustration

Humanistic Approaches: The Uniqueness of You



People have a basic need to be loved and respected. If you receive unconditional positive regard from others, you will develop a more realistic self-concept; but if the response is conditional, it may lead to anxiety and frustration.