

Personality Theory and Assessment

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will cover the topic of personality. You will also consider how your self and social awareness skill relates to your character. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Personality Psychology

When you think about a person's psychology, what assumptions do you make? Generally, people assume that there's something regular or consistent in a person. They don't constantly change and act differently.

Typically a person has a sense of self or a **personality**. Personality psychology is the study of a person's unique, consistent, and stable patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving over time.

There are three important aspects when we study personality psychology:

- *A person's personality is unique.* This means it differs from person to person. Although traits can be consistent over many people over time, the extent to which that trait is exhibited can vary.
- *Personality is consistent.* It's the same, and a person performs similar types of behaviors in different kinds of situations.
- *Personality is stable.* It stays the same over time. This is unlike a concept like mood, which can change depending on things that happen to a person.



TERM TO KNOW

Personality

Unique pattern of consistent feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that originate within the individual across time and situations

1a. Character

Character is an aspect of psychology which describes what we consider to be desirable or undesirable in a person. Character refers to the parts of personality that are valued or not valued.

Personality is descriptive; it tells what a person is like. Character is prescriptive; it says how someone should or shouldn't be. Character is just one aspect of personality and is developed by cultural and social influences.



Self and Social Awareness: Why Employers Care

Your character is one of the things employers look for when they interview you. It's not just about whether you can do the work, it's about how you are as a person and if that character will fit it with and complement the other employees.



TERM TO KNOW

Character

Desirable or undesirable aspects of a person; characteristics that a person values or doesn't value

1b. Temperament

Temperament is our innate and inherited aspects of personality. Things like how emotional, irritable, or sensitive a person is are part of temperament. While these traits can be developed, they are innate to an individual. Temperament is an aspect of **behavioral genetics**, which is the study of behaviors and personality that are inherited. These traits are not necessarily situational, which explains why personality can be stable and consistent over time.



WATCH

As you watch this video interview with Dr. Barbara Greenberg on the development of the adolescent brain, consider times when you were a teen and felt the ability to control your emotions or make good decisions seemed almost impossible, but as your body and brain developed your character and temperament also matured.



TERMS TO KNOW

Temperament

Innate and inherited aspects of personality, like emotionality, irritability, or sensitivity

Behavioral Genetics

Study of the link between personality traits and heredity (genetic instructions)

2. Approaches to Personality Psychology

In the field of personality psychology, there are many different approaches, just like the rest of psychology. Biological approaches focus on temperament and how heredity affects personality, while social or sociocultural approaches focus on things like character and the influence of others.

There are three approaches that are important to know specifically:

- Trait Theory
- Psychodynamic Theory
- Humanism

Trait theory is the identification of the basic stable and consistent qualities that people show. This is one of the most widely used aspects of personality psychology. It uses personality tests and attempts to break down into single components which make up a person's psychology.

Psychodynamic theory emphasizes the importance of the unconscious on personality and temperament. There are several aspects to this theory with ideas developed by several important psychologists:

- Sigmund Freud, who theorized on the idea of competing forces and conflicts.
- Neo-Freudians like Horney and Adler who focus on anxiety and the need for superiority.
- Jung, who emphasized the collective unconscious.

Humanism involves the discussion of the development of ideas of self. This area focuses on self-esteem and self-concept. It looks at the positive views of self, and how we can achieve the most ideal version of ourselves.

3. Personality Assessments

Personality psychology is the study of people's individual patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving over time. How do we determine what those patterns are for each person?

An assessment, or a test, is a way to help to measure the various different traits and aspects of a person's personality. There are different tests for different kinds of theories.

➞ **EXAMPLE** There could be one test for trait theories, one for psychodynamic, and one for humanistic; however, they could also be applicable to a wide range of theories.

Each one of these different types of assessments has different strengths and limitations. Two important assessments are:

- Interviews
- Direct observations

These are two types of assessments that are more qualitative in nature. That means they are based on descriptions and observations themselves, and they are a little subjective. The questions depend more on the subject and on the psychologist, and are not necessarily the same for each person.

3a. Interview

An **interview** is a face-to-face conversation that a person has with a psychologist. They are asked questions by a psychologist and share information about their psychological history, their current status, and their personality in general. Interviews can take two different forms:

- Structured interview, comprising a series of pre-planned questions.
- Unstructured interview, which is an open and informal discussion. It is more directed by the person that wants to talk about themselves than by the psychologist.

The strength of interviews is that they can be tailored to individual subjects. A great deal of information can be gathered from interviews because it allows the psychologist to talk to one subject in depth. Interviews do have some weaknesses, however. They can be affected or biased by the subject or interviewer's preexisting beliefs.

➞ **EXAMPLE** What the subject looks like might affect how the psychologist is rating the person within the system.

There's also what is called the **halo effect**. The halo effect is the tendency to view a person as generally positive or negative based on things like attractiveness or age.

➞ **EXAMPLE** It's been shown that when a person is physically attractive, others are generally more likely to look at them as being intelligent or more worthwhile than other people.

Within an interview, a person can also lie, which can affect the information as well.



TERMS TO KNOW

Interview

Evaluator asks a series of questions, face-to-face, about qualities, traits, their response to different scenarios, etc.

Halo Effect

Favorable view based on partial information or first impression, can complicate later information.

3b. Direct Observation

The second type of assessment is **direct observation**. Direct observation refers to watching the subject within a naturalistic sort of setting to gather information about them.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A person might go to a school and watch a child playing and interacting with other children. This can provide information about that child's personality and their social interactions.

Direct observations can give more in-depth information about the subjects. They can also provide more accurate information because it's within a natural setting, so they're not being affected by being in a room with a psychologist or in some strange environment.

However, direct observation can be affected by observer bias, meaning preexisting beliefs or ideas that impact the observation process.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you think that teens are more argumentative, then you may tend to focus on more argumentative behavior that you observe, versus non-argumentative behavior.

To prevent this, a lot of direct observations have different tools that help to control bias. They might use a **rating scale**, which is a list of traits or behavioral aspects that guides the observations and prevents misinterpretations. It tells the researcher what to look for, so they don't necessarily miss it within those situations.

Researchers can also do what's called **behavioral assessment**. This is when an observer records how many times they observe certain kinds of behaviors. Instead of trying to measure the internal processes that are going on or the different personality traits, they can just note each time they see a behavior that they're looking for. They can create categories for different behaviors.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For example, a researcher can record how many times a person mentions a particular subject in a conversation.



TERMS TO KNOW

Direct Observation

Individual is asked to perform a team project together, interviewers watch the candidates' behavior and take notes but don't interact

Rating Scale

Evaluation depends on a checklist of qualities wanted; some may be more important than other qualities

Behavioral Assessment

3c. Questionnaires

An objective assessment is when the same questions and measures are used for each person so they're not varying and can be studied in more depth. In addition, a questionnaire or an objective form of assessment should give the same score when different people are scoring it.

A **personality questionnaire** is a written form of test, where a person is given a list of questions that reveal different aspects of a person's personality, depending on the answers they give. Personality questionnaires often include questions about likely behaviors, a person's feelings, and their responses in different kinds of scenarios.

An advantage of questionnaires is that they can be given to a large number of people. A large amount of data can be collected to support whatever theories are being tested.

The weakness of questionnaires is that they can be inflexible. They can't be changed depending on what type of person is being studied. They can also be biased toward particular groups. The way that they are written can affect what kinds of scores you get from different kinds of people.



TERMS TO KNOW

Objective Test

Test with standardized, consistent scoring and administration

Personality Questionnaire

Type of objective test; a written test with questions that ask about aspects of a person's thinking, feeling, or behavior

3d. Projective Tests

Another type of test is a **projective tests**, which is a little bit different. Projective tests tend to use ambiguous words or images to attempt to uncover unconscious thoughts or desires. Projective tests are focused on psychodynamic theories of the unconscious.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The Rorschach inkblot test is a projective test that records people's responses to different images of inkblots, which are then interpreted by an observer.

The strengths are that projective tests are very difficult to fake because there aren't right or wrong answers. Often, the person doesn't realize what they're being tested on, because the test focuses on their unconscious, rather than their conscious mind. These tests can also provide in-depth information about the subject's mental processes that are otherwise very difficult to understand.

Weaknesses for projective tests include that they tend to be very low in validity since it is hard to tell at times what they are measuring. They're also subject to some interpretation by the psychologist who's giving it because the psychologist is recording the responses. There are specific procedures when scoring, however, so it's not completely up to the psychologist to determine what the interpretation will be.



TERM TO KNOW

Projective Test

Tests that present ambiguous stimuli; responses are analyzed for meaning.



SUMMARY

Personality psychology is the study of a person's unique, consistent, and stable patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving over time. Character refers to the values a person places on specific traits, and temperament is the inherited aspects of a person's personality. Your self and social awareness skill relates to your character and employers seek out individuals with character that is a fit for their company. There are many **approaches to personality psychology**, including: biological, social or sociocultural, trait theory, psychodynamic theory, and humanism.

An assessment is given to determine patterns of behavior. One type of assessment is an **interview**. This is a face-to-face conversation between a person and a psychologist. Interviews can be subject to either the subject's or the interviewer's biases. Another type of assessment is **direct observation**. This can provide accurate information because of the natural setting but is also subject to the observer's preexisting beliefs. Tools like rating scales and behavioral assessments can reduce bias influence. The **questionnaire** is a form of written test that can reveal personality traits based on the answers a test taker gives. **Projective tests** are used for testing the unconscious. These tests give insight into mental processes that are otherwise hard to understand, though they tend to have low validity due to the fact that it is hard to determine scope of measurement.

Good luck!

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TERMS TO KNOW

Behavioral Assessment

Evaluating the frequency of specific behaviors.

Behavioral Genetics

Study of the link between personality traits and heredity (genetic instructions).

Character

Desirable or undesirable aspects of a person; characteristics that a person values or doesn't value.

Direct Observation

Individual is asked to perform a team project together, interviewers watch the candidates' behavior and take notes but don't interact.

Halo Effect

Favorable view based on partial information or first impression, can complicate later information.

Interview

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Temperament

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