

DEFINED: Personality is the study of why people act the way that they do and why different people act differently. Personality theory is necessarily bound up in clinical theory, so a great deal of information about personality can be found in the Clinical Psychology chapter. For example, Freud's theory asserted that personality is what emerges from the struggle between the ego, id, and superego. (For more on Freud, turn to the Clinical and Developmental Psychology chapters.) In fact, all of the clinical theorists mentioned in the Clinical Psychology chapter necessarily have their own slant on personality. You should know these. But to avoid redundancy, those clinical theorists are not covered in this chapter.

OLD SCHOOL: TYPE THEORY

Type theory originally dominated personality theory. As far back as Hippocrates, people were placed into personality-type categories often based on physical appearance. In the 1800s, **phrenology** (the practice of examining head and skull shape) was used to discern personality.

Later, **William Sheldon** devised a system based on **somatotypes** (body types). Although the theory has no modern credence, it is an important part of the evolution of the field. Sheldon isolated three physiques and the corresponding personality types:

- **Endomorph**—short, plump body = pleasure-seeking, social behavior.
- **Mesomorph**—muscular, athletic body = energetic, aggressive behavior.
- **Ectomorph**—skinny, fragile body = inhibited, intellectual behavior.

More recently than Sheldon, **Alfred Adler** suggested a personality typology (see Clinical Psychology chapter). For the most part, however, type theories have given way to trait theories.

NEW SCHOOL: TRAIT THEORY

Gordon Allport emphasized an **ideographic** approach to personality theory. This approach attempts to capture an individual's unique, defining characteristics, opposed to a **nomothetic** approach, which uses large numbers of people to study the commonalities of personality. Allport was concerned only with conscious motives governed by the **proprium** or **propriate function** (his version of the ego), and he believed that the proprium acted somewhat consistently based on traits it had developed through experience.

Allport and his students worked to identify all of the possible traits that could go with personality. Traits are the relatively stable characteristics of behavior that a person exhibits, such as introversion, politeness, and stinginess. Using a **lexical approach** (meaning picking all of the possible traits out of the dictionary), Allport gathered about 5,000 possible traits. Next, Allport hypothesized that people act differently in different situations because they have a trait hierarchy: at the top a **cardinal** trait, then **central** traits, then **secondary** traits. So while circumstances may cause a person to show conflicting secondary traits, he will always be consistent with his cardinal trait. (In trait theory, be sure to understand the difference between **traits** and **states**. Traits are relatively enduring characteristics. States are temporary feelings or characteristics. A trait might be "outgoing," whereas a state might be "tired").

Later, statistical techniques were used to create **taxonomies** (organized categorization systems) for personality. Most importantly, **Raymond Cattell** used factor analysis in data reduction of Allport's 5,000 traits. Eventually, he identified **sixteen bipolar source traits**, such as relaxed-tense, that seemed to underlie all of the 5,000 (often overlapping) traits. These were Cattell's **sixteen personality factors** tested in his sixteen personality questionnaire. Amazingly, Cattell accomplished this massive factor analysis before the computer age.

Later, using advanced computer statistical programs, modern theorists could not replicate Cattell's findings, but they did generate findings of their own. The hot topic in personality trait theory today is the "**Big Five**." The Big Five are **superfactors**, or five dimensions that seem to encompass all of personality. They are superordinate traits or facets. Know these Big Five dimensions:

1. **O-dimension** (openness to experience, intellectual curiosity)
2. **C-dimension** (conscientiousness)
3. **E-dimension** (extroversion, enthusiasm)
4. **A-dimension** (agreeableness)
5. **N-dimension** (neuroticism, nervousness)

WHERE DOES PERSONALITY COME FROM?

Originally personality theory was dominated by **dispositionists** (people who emphasized internal determinants of behavior). Of course, **situationists** (such as behaviorists) have argued that only circumstances determine behavior. Currently, **interactionists** are in the forefront; they assert a combination of stable, internal factors and situations.

Evidence for both disposition and situation exists. Critics such as **Seymour Epstein** and **Walter Mischel** have asserted that trait and type theories have always had a big problem: Both theories assume that a person's behavior is stable across situations and that people fail to take circumstances into account. Studies (and real life) show that people often act differently in different situations. The possibility a person may behave inconsistently—that a respected minister may be a closet adulterer, for example—is called the **consistency paradox** and presents real problems for labeling people as having one internal disposition.

One way of showing that personality traits exist within a person would be to show that the person exhibits those traits in a variety of different situations. Mischel, with **Nancy Cantor**, proposed the **cognitive prototype approach**, in which cognitive behavior (such as the formulation of and attention to prototypes), is examined in social situations. In short, Mischel thought that consistency of behavior is the result of cognitive processes, rather than the result of personality traits per se.

Twin studies have indicated that the heritability of personality is about 40–50 percent. After locating identical twins separated at birth, psychologists have found remarkable similarities in personality and behavior. Most notably, the "Jim" twins had wives with the same name, dogs with the same name, and the same habits. But, of course, they were not exactly the same, and this shows that environment has some impact on personality.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

The **nature-nurture debate** is most alive in the area of gender differences. Some assert that no true gender differences exist—children are simply reinforced for stereotypical behaviors. It is true that after taking into account **differential social reinforcement**, very few gender differences remain. Still, the prevailing point of view is **interactionist**.

- **Kay Deaux** found that **women's successes** at stereotypical "male" tasks are often attributed to **luck**, while **men's successes** are often attributed to skill. This suggests that gender is a social construct that colors interpretations. Also, studies have found that women themselves attribute their successes to luck more than men, indicating that women have **lower self-esteem** than men.
- **Sandra Bem** studied **androgyny** (possessing both male and female qualities) and created the **Bem Sex Role Inventory**. Androgenous individuals have been found to have higher self-esteem, lower anxiety, and more adaptability than their highly masculine or feminine counterparts.
- **Matina Horner** suggested that females shunned masculine-type successes not because of fear of failure or lack of interest. Rather, women **feared success** and its negative repercussions, such as resentment and rejection.
- **Alice Eagly** found an interaction between gender and social status with regard to how easily an individual might be influenced or swayed.
- **Eleanor Maccoby** and **Carol Jacklin** scrutinized studies of sex differences and found that relatively few existed that could **not** be explained away by simple social learning. The most consistent difference that seems independent of social influence is that **females have greater verbal ability** and **males have greater visual/spatial ability**. This has been attributed to internal biological or hormonal differences but is still hotly debated.
- Women are twice as likely as men to become depressed.

OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **Meyer Friedman** and **Ray Rosenman** studied Type A personality. **Type A personality** is characterized by drive, competitiveness, aggressiveness, and tension and is most commonly found in middle-to-upper-class men. **Grant Dahlstrom** linked Type A personality to heart disease and other health problems. The connection between personality and health is currently a popular vein of study.
- **Hans Eysenck** used factor analysis to identify the traits underneath the two personality-type dimensions of **introversion-extraversion** and **stable-unstable (neuroticism)**. These two dimensions formed a cross and, therefore, four quadrants: **phlegmatic, melancholic, choleric, and sanguine**.