Personality is one’s characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Sigmund Freud, in his psychoanalytic perspective, proposed that childhood sexuality and unconscious motives influenced personality. For Sigmund Freud, conflict between pleasure-seeking biological impulses and social restraints centered on three interacting systems: id, ego, and superego. Freud believed that children develop through psychosexual stages and that people’s later problems are rooted in how they resolve conflicts associated with these stages.

The neo-Freudians agreed with Freud’s basic ideas but placed more emphasis on the conscious mind and on social influences. Today, psychodynamic theorists agree with many of Freud’s views but not his idea that sex is the basis of personality. Contemporary research confirms that, more than most of us realize, our lives are guided by nonconscious information processing.

The humanistic perspective emphasizes the growth potential of healthy people. Abraham Maslow believed that if basic human needs are met, people will strive to actualize their highest potential. Carl Rogers suggested that being genuine, accepting, and empathic helps others to develop a positive self-concept.

The trait perspective attempts to describe the predispositions that underlie our actions. Through factor analysis, researchers have isolated five distinct dimensions of personality. People’s specific behaviors vary across situations as their inner dispositions interact with particular environments.

The social-cognitive perspective emphasizes how personal-cognitive factors combine with the environment to influence behavior. More than other perspectives, it builds from research on learning and cognition. Researchers assess how people’s behaviors and beliefs both affect and are affected by their situations.

Currently, the self is one of Western psychology’s more vigorously researched topics. Studies confirm the benefits of positive self-esteem but also point to the possible hazards of pride. Compared to defensive self-esteem, secure self-esteem depends less on external evaluations and enables us to lose ourselves in relationships and purposes larger than self.

CHAPTER GUIDE

➤ Introductory Exercise: Fact or Falsehood?
➤ Lecture: Issues in Personality Theory
➤ Exercises: Introducing Personality; Your Theory of Personality
➤ Feature Film: Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring
➤ Video: Module 26 of Psychology: The Human Experience: Origins of Personality
1. Define personality.

Psychologists consider personality to be an individual’s characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting.

The Psychoanalytic Perspective

➤ Exercise: Fifteen Freudian Principle Statements; Defense Mechanism Miniskits; Defense Mechanisms; The False Consensus Effect
➤ Lectures: Freudian Slips; The Case of Little Hans
➤ Video: Discovering Psychology, Updated Edition: The Mind Hidden and Divided
➤ Transparencies: 149 Freud’s Idea of the Mind’s Structure; 150 Freud’s Psychosexual Stages

2. Explain how Freud’s experiences in private practice led to his theory of psychoanalysis.

In his private practice, Freud found that nervous disorders often made no neurological sense. Piecing together his patients’ accounts of their lives, he concluded that their disorders had psychological causes. His effort to understand these causes led to his theory of psychoanalysis, the first comprehensive theory of personality.

3. Discuss Freud’s view of the mind as an iceberg, and explain how he used this image to represent conscious and unconscious regions of the mind.

Freud believed the mind is like an iceberg—mostly hidden, with the unconscious containing thoughts and memories of which we are largely unaware. Some of these thoughts we store temporarily in a preconscious area. Our conscious awareness is the part of the iceberg that floats above the water. Initially, he thought hypnosis might unlock the door to the unconscious. However, recognizing patients’ uneven capacity for hypnosis, Freud turned to free association, which he believed produced a chain of thoughts in the patient’s unconscious. He called the process (as well as his theory of personality) psychoanalysis.

4. Describe Freud’s view of personality structure, and discuss the interactions of the id, ego, and superego.

Freud believed that personality arises from our efforts to resolve the conflict between our biological impulses and the social restraints against them. He theorized that the conflict centers on three interacting systems: the id, which operates on the pleasure principle; the ego, which functions on the reality principle, and the superego, an internalized set of ideals. The superego’s demands often oppose the id’s, and the ego, as the “executive” part of personality, seeks to reconcile the two.

5. Identify Freud’s psychosexual stages of development, and describe the effects of fixation on behavior.

Freud maintained that children pass through a series of psychosexual stages during which the id’s pleasure-seeking energies focus on distinct pleasure-sensitive areas of the body called erogenous zones. During the oral stage (0–18 months), pleasure centers on the mouth and during the anal stage (18–36 months) on bowel/bladder elimination.

During the critical phallic stage (3–6 years), pleasure centers on the genitals. Boys experience the Oedipus complex, with unconscious sexual desires toward their mother and hatred of their father. They cope with these threatening feelings through identification with their father, thereby incorporating many of his values and developing a sense of gender identity. The latency stage (6 years to puberty), in which sexuality is dormant, gives way to the genital stage (puberty on) as youths begin to experience sexual feelings toward others.

In Freud’s view, maladaptive adult behavior results from conflicts unresolved during the oral, anal, and phallic stages. At any point, conflict can lock, or fixate, the person’s pleasure-seeking energies in that stage.
6. Describe the function of defense mechanisms, and identify six of them.

**Defense mechanisms** reduce or redirect anxiety in various ways, but always by distorting reality. **Repression**, which underlies the other defense mechanisms, banishes anxiety-arousing thoughts from consciousness; **regression** involves retreat to an earlier, more infantile stage of development; and **reaction formation** makes unacceptable impulses look like their opposites. **Projection** attributes threatening impulses to others, **rationalization** offers self-justifying explanations for behavior, and **displacement** diverts impulses to a more acceptable object.

7. Contrast the views of the neo-Freudians and psychodynamic theorists with Freud’s original theory.

The neo-Freudians accepted Freud’s basic ideas regarding personality structures, the importance of the unconscious, the shaping of personality in children, and the dynamics of anxiety and defense mechanisms. However, in contrast to Freud, the neo-Freudians generally placed more emphasis on the conscious mind in interpreting experience and coping with the environment, and they argued that we have more positive motives than sex and aggression. Unlike other neo-Freudians, Carl Jung agreed with Freud that the unconscious exerts a powerful influence. In addition, he suggested that the **collective unconscious** is a shared, inherited reservoir of memory traces from our species’ history. Contemporary psychodynamic theorists and therapists reject the notion that sex is the basis of personality but agree with Freud that much of our mental life is unconscious, that we struggle with inner conflicts, and that childhood shapes our personalities and attachment styles.

8. Describe two projective tests used to assess personality, and discuss some criticisms of them.

**Projective tests** provide ambiguous stimuli that are designed to trigger projection of one’s inner dynamics. In the **Thematic Apperception Test**, people view ambiguous pictures and then make up stories about them. Presumably their accounts reflect their interests and inner feelings. The **Rorschach Inkblot Test** seeks to identify people’s inner feelings and conflicts by analyzing their interpretations of 10 inkblots. Critics question the validity and reliability of the tests. Nonetheless many clinicians continue to use them.

9. Summarize psychology’s current assessment of Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis.

Critics contend that many of Freud’s specific ideas are implausible, unvalidated, or contradicted by new research, and that his theory offers only after-the-fact explanations. Recent findings question the overriding importance of childhood experiences, the degree of parental influence, the timing of gender-identity formation, the significance of childhood sexuality, and the existence of hidden content in dreams. Many researchers now believe that repression rarely, if ever, occurs. Nevertheless, Freud drew psychology’s attention to the unconscious and to our struggle to cope with anxiety and sexuality. Indeed, studies testing **terror-management theory** show that thinking about one’s mortality provokes enough anxiety to intensify prejudices. Freud also focused attention on the conflict between biological impulses and social restraints. Unquestionably, his cultural impact has been enormous.

**The Humanistic Perspective**

➤ Lecture: Obstacles to Self-Actualization
➤ Exercise: Perceived Self Versus Ideal Self
➤ Feature Film: Dead Poet’s Society—Burying the True Self

10. Summarize Abraham Maslow’s concept of self-actualization, and explain how his ideas illustrate the humanistic perspective.

According to Maslow, **self-actualization** is the motivation to fulfill one’s potential. It is the ultimate psychological need that arises after basic physical and psychological needs are met and self-esteem is achieved. In his effort to turn psychology’s attention from the baser motives of troubled people to the growth potential of healthy people, who are thought to be basically good, Maslow reflects the humanistic perspective.
11. Discuss Carl Rogers’ person-centered perspective, and explain the importance of unconditional positive regard.

Carl Rogers agreed with Maslow that people are basically good and are endowed with self-actualizing tendencies. To nurture growth in others, Rogers advised being genuine, empathic, and accepting (offering unconditional positive regard). In such a climate, people can develop a deeper self-awareness and a more realistic and positive self-concept.

12. Explain how humanistic psychologists assessed personality.

Humanistic psychologists assessed personality through questionnaires on which people report their self-concept. One questionnaire asked people to compare their actual self with their ideal self. Other humanistic psychologists maintained that we can only understand each person’s unique experience through interviews and intimate conversations.

13. State the major criticisms of the humanistic perspective on personality.

Humanistic psychologists assess personality through questionnaires on which people report their self-concept and by seeking to understand others’ subjective personal experiences in therapy. First, critics complain that the perspective’s concepts are vague and subjective. For example, the description of self-actualizing people seems more a reflection of Maslow’s personal values than a scientific description. Second, the individualism promoted by humanistic psychology may promote self-indulgence, selfishness, and an erosion of moral restraints. Third, humanistic psychology fails to appreciate the reality of our human capacity for evil. Its naive optimism may lead to apathy about major social problems.

The Trait Perspective

- Lectures: Personality Traits of U.S. Presidents; The NEO Personality Inventory; Evolution and the Big Five Personality Traits; Personality Traits in the Workplace
- Exercises: Extraversion and Emotional Stability; Shyness; Empirically Derived Tests and the Importance of Cross-Validation; Assessing Social Desirability; The Self-Monitoring Scale; The Barnum Effect; Astrology and the Barnum Effect: “Big Five” Inventories
- Transparency: 151 The “Big Five” Personality Factors

14. Cite the main difference between the trait and psychoanalytic perspectives on personality.

Freud attempted to explain personality in terms of hidden, unconscious motives. In contrast to the psychoanalytic perspective, trait theorists attempt to describe personality in terms of stable and enduring behavior patterns, or dispositions to feel and act. Some theorists use dominant traits and their associated characteristics to describe personality “types.”

15. Describe some of the ways psychologists have attempted to compile a list of basic personality traits.

One way has been to suggest traits, such as anxiety, that some theory regards as basic. A newer technique is factor analysis, a statistical procedure that identifies clusters of behaviors that tend to appear together. For example, through factor analysis, Hans and Sybil Eysenck reduced normal variations to two or three genetically influenced dimensions, including extraversion–introversion and emotional stability–instability. Brain activity scans suggest that extraverts and introverts differ in their level of arousal, with extraverts seeking stimulation because their normal brain arousal level is relatively low. Jerome Kagan maintains that heredity, by influencing autonomic nervous system arousal, also affects our temperament and behavioral style, which help define our personality.
16 Explain how psychologists use personality inventories to assess traits, and discuss the most widely used of these inventories.

Psychologists assess several traits at once by administering personality inventories on which people respond to items designed to measure a wide range of feelings and behaviors. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is the most widely used personality inventory. Originally developed to identify emotional disorders, this test is now used for many other screening purposes. The MMPI items were empirically derived—that is, from a large pool of items, the test developers selected those on which particular diagnostic groups differed. The objective scoring of the test does not guarantee its validity. For example, those taking the MMPI for employment screening may give socially desirable responses that create a good impression.

17 Identify the Big Five personality factors, and discuss some of the strengths of this approach to studying personality.

Researchers have isolated five distinct personality dimensions, dubbed the Big Five: emotional stability, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These traits appear to be stable in adulthood, largely heritable, common to all cultures, and good predictors of other personal attributes. Locating an individual on these five dimensions provides a comprehensive picture of personality.

18 Summarize the person-situation controversy, and explain its importance as a commentary on the trait perspective.

Although people’s traits seem to persist over time, critics of the trait perspective note that human behavior varies widely from situation to situation. Thus, traits are not good predictors of behavior. For example, being conscientious on one occasion is only modestly related to being conscientious on another occasion. Defenders of the trait perspective note that, despite these variations, a person’s average behavior across different situations is fairly consistent. We do have distinct personality traits. Moreover, research suggests that our traits are socially significant; they influence our health, our thinking, and our job performance.

19 Explain why psychologists are interested in the consistency of the trait of expressiveness.

In informal social situations, our expressive styles—our animation, manner of speaking, and gestures—are impressively consistent. Moreover, we can judge individual differences in expressiveness in a matter of seconds. Thus, we may form lasting impressions within a few moments of meeting someone. Research suggests people have little voluntary control over their expressiveness.

The Social-Cognitive Perspective

➤ Lectures: Perceived Efficacy and Acquirable Skills; George Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory; Locus of Control
➤ Exercises: Satisficers Versus Maximizers; The Life Orientation Test and Optimism; Defensive Pessimism
➤ PsychSim 5: Helplessly Hoping
➤ Feature Films: The Shawshank Redemption and Reciprocal Influences; Schindler’s List and Personal Control
➤ Transparency: 152 The Biopsychosocial Approach to the Study of Personality
➤ Video: Module 27 of Psychology: The Human Experience: The Social/Cognitive Model

20 Describe the social-cognitive perspective, and explain how reciprocal determinism illustrates that perspective.

The social-cognitive perspective applies principles of learning and cognition to the understanding of personality. Reciprocal determinism refers to the interacting influences between personality and environmental factors. Interactions between individuals and environments occur when different people choose different environments, when our personalities shape how we interpret and react to events, and when our personalities help create situations to which we react.
21. Discuss the effects of a perception of internal or external control, and describe the concept of learned helplessness.

In examining our interactions with our environment, social-cognitive psychologists emphasize our sense of personal control, that is, whether we learn to see ourselves as controlling, or, as being controlled by, our environment. People who perceive an internal rather than an external locus of control achieve more in school, are more independent, and are less depressed. Moreover, they are better able to delay gratification and cope with various stresses. Faced with repeated traumatic events over which they have no control, people come to feel helpless, hopeless, and depressed. This learned helplessness may result in passivity in later situations where their efforts could make a difference. In contrast, under conditions of personal freedom and empowerment, people thrive.

22. Discuss the link between performance and optimistic or pessimistic attributional styles, and contrast positive psychology with humanistic psychology.

Our attributional style, that is, our way of explaining positive and negative events, can reveal how effective or helpless we feel. For example, those who optimistically see setbacks as flukes rather than as signs of incompetence are likely to be more persistent and successful. Optimists have also been found to outlive pessimists, as well as to have fewer illnesses. Excessive optimism, however, can lead to complacency and can blind us to real risks.

The study of personal control and optimism reflects the new interest in positive psychology, the scientific study of optimal human functioning. Although it shares with humanistic psychology an interest in fostering human fulfillment, its origins and methodology are scientific. Positive psychology studies positive emotions, positive character, and positive groups, communities, and cultures.

23. Explain why social-cognitive researchers assess behavior in realistic situations.

Social-cognitive researchers observe how people’s behaviors and beliefs both affect and are affected by their situations. They have found that the best way to predict someone’s behavior in a given situation is to observe that person’s behavior pattern in similar situations.

24. State the major criticism of the social-cognitive perspective.

Critics argue that the social-cognitive perspective focuses so much on the situation that it fails to appreciate the importance of the person’s inner traits, emotions, and unconscious motives. Indeed, research indicates that our biologically influenced traits predict behavior at work, love, and play. At the same time, the social-cognitive perspective builds on psychology’s well-established concepts of learning and cognition and reminds us of the power of social situations.

Exploring the Self

➤ Lectures: The Dark Side of Self-Esteem; The Sociometer Theory of Self-Esteem
➤ Exercises: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; A Single-Item Measure of Self-Esteem (SISE); Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale; Self-Concept Clarity; The Name-Letter Effect; Biased Self-Ratings; Self-Handicapping; Taking Credit for Success, Denying Responsibility for Failure
➤ Videos: Discovering Psychology, Updated Edition: The Self; Program 20 of Moving Images: Exploring Psychology Through Film: Fostering Self-Esteem: The Hazards of Pride

25. Explain why psychology has generated so much research on the self, and give three examples of current research on the self.

The self is one of Western psychology’s most vigorously researched topics. Underlying this research is the assumption that the self, as organizer of our thoughts, feelings, and actions, is pivotal in understanding personality. One example of research on the self is the study of possible selves. It explores people’s visions of the self they dream of becoming. Such possible selves motivate us by laying out specific goals and calling forth the energy to work toward them. Another example is the study of the spotlight effect, which reflects our tendency to overestimate others’
noticing and evaluating our appearance, performance, and blunders. Still a third example is research on the self-reference phenomenon, our tendency to remember information better if we encode it in terms of ourselves.

26. **Give two alternative explanations for the positive correlation between low self-esteem and personal problems.**

People who have high **self-esteem** have fewer sleepless nights, are less conforming, are more persistent at difficult tasks, are less shy and lonely, and are just plain happier. Some research shows a destructive effect of low self-esteem. For example, temporarily deflating people’s self-esteem can lead them to disparage others and express greater racial prejudice. Other researchers suggest that personal problems and failure may cause low self-esteem. Self-esteem reflects reality; thus feeling good about oneself follows doing well. According to this explanation, the best way to foster self-esteem in children is to help them meet challenges, not rewarding them despite their failures.

27. **Discuss some ways that people maintain their self-esteem under conditions of discrimination or low status.**

Members of groups who experience discrimination and low status maintain their self-esteem by (1) valuing the things at which they excel, (2) attributing problems to prejudice, and (3) comparing themselves to those in their own group.

28. **Discuss some evidence for self-serving bias, and contrast defensive and secure self-esteem.**

**Self-serving bias,** our readiness to perceive ourselves favorably, is evident in our tendency to accept more responsibility for good deeds than for bad, and for successes than for failures. Most people also see themselves as better than average. Defensive self-esteem is fragile and focuses on sustaining itself which makes failure and criticism feel threatening. Like low self-esteem, **defensive self-esteem** correlates with antisocial behavior. In contrast, **secure self-esteem** is less fragile because it depends less on external evaluations. Feeling accepted for who we are enables us to lose ourselves in relationships and purposes larger than self.