**15 Personality**

What is personality?

* Each person is like all other persons in some ways (human attributes), like just some other persons in certain ways (differences in traits), and like no other person in other ways (unique qualities).
* Personality is the set of common human psychological characteristics and unique patterns of traits and behaviour possessed by each individual.
* These sets of traits and behaviour patterns are organized, integrated, and relatively enduring.

The ‘grand theories’ of personality

* The grand theories of personality include psychoanalysis, behaviourism, and humanism.
* Psychoanalysis is possibly the most complex theory in the history of psychology and also the most controversial. Three central components of the theory are the structural model of the mind, theory of psychosexual development, and theories of dynamic processes.
* The structural model of the mind includes id, ego, and superego. The five stages of psychosexual development are the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital.
* Freud believed that dreams contained hidden symbolic meanings that express forbidden sexual and aggressive wishes and impulses.
* Ego defences, as detailed by Freud’s daughter Anna, include repression, denial, displacement, projection, reaction formation, sublimation, and undoing.

The behaviourists: personality as learned through experience

* Behaviourist theories of personality assert that personality is learned behaviour, and that one acquires personality traits through operant and classical conditioning.

The humanistic psychology perspective

* The founders of humanistic psychology were optimistic, believed in free will, and had faith in human nature—believing that people generally face problems in a rational manner.
* Humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers believed that each person needs a growth-promoting environment to grow into the fully functioning, competent, fulfilled human being he or she was designed to be.
* For a person to develop a healthy self-concept, four conditions are necessary: accurate empathy, congruence, unconditional positive regard, and positive self-regard.
* Self-esteem is a person’s cognitive and emotional assessment of his or her own self-worth. People with high self-esteem are happier, suffer less from depression, and are more likely to enjoy the good things that happen to them to the fullest and help others do the same.
* Two theories attempt to explain the importance of self-esteem: terror management theory, which suggests that self-esteem acts as a buffer against the anxiety we all feel when reminded of our own inevitable death; and sociometer theory, which focuses on the idea that a person’s level of self-esteem gives important feedback about social acceptance or rejection.
* Contrary to popular belief, evidence for the psychological benefits of high self-esteem is mixed. Low self-esteem is strongly linked to eating disorders, however, and it may be linked to aggression or antisocial behaviour in men.

Trait approaches to personality

* Traits are relatively stable personality characteristics, attributes, and motivations. Gordon Allport identified 4,500 possible traits. Trait psychology emphasizes description of a person’s characteristic patterns of behaviour, thought, emotion, and motivation.
* Hans Eysenck created the two-factor model, which views personality as having a limited number of characteristics which interact within any individual and can be measured using psychological tests. Eysenck proposed two basic trait dimensions, extraversion–introversion and emotional instability–stability (neuroticism).
* Some psychologists, including Lewis Goldberg and Robert McRae, developed a five-factor model (the ‘Big Five’) after conducting statistical research in nations throughout the world. The five factors are Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism.

Personality vs situation

* Walter Mischel argued that situations, not traits, play the largest role in determining behaviour. However, Seymour Epstein proposed that if a person were observed on a number of occasions and the person’s behaviour ‘aggregated’ or averaged out, the effects of traits would be apparent.
* Later work by Mischel and Shoda suggested that people’s behaviour is best understood by looking at the patterns created by the intersection of people’s traits with the various situations in which they find themselves—patterns known as trait-situation behaviour profiles.

Nature and nurture in the development of personality

* Genes play an important role in personality development. However, some personality traits are more heritable than others, and heritability estimates may vary from study to study. On average, approximately 50% of differences among people in Big Five or Eysenck’s two-factor traits is due to genetic factors.
* Non-shared environments contribute the bulk of the environmental portion of influence on personality. Non-shared environmental experiences that are likely to have the greatest effects on personality include simple chance, peer influence, and the possibility of differing parental treatment of each child.
* Rich Harris is the most vocal proponent of the idea that peer groups, not parents, are the primary socializers of children and the strongest influences upon the development of personality.

Culture and personality

Personality measurement

* Personality assessment is the measurement of personality. Projective tests (eg, Rorschach and TAT) emerged primarily from psychoanalytic theory, and they are designed to allow a person to ‘project’ his or her personality unconsciously onto ambiguous test items.
* Objective tests of personality (eg, MMPI-2 and NEO PI-R) are constructed empirically and scored by computer.

Personality change over time

* Personality traits are relatively stable over time. Evidence of trait stability comes primarily from research in rank-order stability, which measures an individual’s scoring on various traits over time. These studies show that temperament is stable to age 3, and personality is most stable past age 50.
* Evidence for changes over time in traits comes from research using mean-level stability. In this type of analysis, researchers compare the average score of the entire group of participants on each single trait separately, to see if change has occurred over time for that trait.

Other aspects of personality may undergo considerable change without necessarily signalling trait change. Characteristic adaptations include goals, values, beliefs, social roles, plans for the future, and self-narratives.