

## Theories of Personality

PSY 100:  
Foundations of Contemporary  
Psychology

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## Defining Personality: Consistency and Distinctiveness

- **Personality** refers to an individual's unique constellation of behavioral traits
  - Used to describe **consistency** (i.e., stability across time and situations) and **distinctiveness** (i.e., behavioral differences to the same situation between individuals)
- Perspectives on personality
  - Trait
  - Psychodynamic
  - Behaviorist and Social Cognitive
  - Humanistic
  - Biological



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## Trait Perspective

- **Personality traits** are durable dispositions to behave in a particular way in a variety of situations
- The dominant trait model of personality is the Five Factor Model (use the acronym OCEAN to help you remember the five factors)

<b>O</b> <b>Openness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Imaginative or practical</li><li>• Interested in variety or routine</li><li>• Independent or conforming</li></ul>	<b>C</b> <b>Conscientiousness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organized or disorganized</li><li>• Careful or careless</li><li>• Disciplined or impulsive</li></ul>	<b>E</b> <b>Extraversion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sociable or retiring</li><li>• Fun-loving or somber</li><li>• Affectionate or reserved</li></ul>	<b>A</b> <b>Agreeableness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Softhearted or ruthless</li><li>• Trusting or suspicious</li><li>• Helpful or uncooperative</li></ul>	<b>N</b> <b>Neuroticism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Calm or anxious</li><li>• Secure or insecure</li><li>• Self-controlled or self-indulging</li></ul>
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- Criticized for being descriptive and not dealing with personality development

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## Eysenck's Trait Model (P-E-N)

- This model began with two factors
  - **Extraversion:** the tendency to seek excitement and social contact in order to heighten their level of arousal
  - **Neuroticism:** the tendency to become upset or emotional
- The third factor was included in the 1970s
  - **Psychoticism:** a personality feature characterized by aggressiveness and interpersonal hostility
- A major strength of this model is that it considered the development of personality from a biological perspective
  - e.g., Extraversion was due to variations in cortical arousal such that extraverts experienced less internal arousal so they would seek out stimulation from the environment

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## Psychodynamic Perspectives



- **Psychodynamic theories** include all the diverse theories descended from the work of Sigmund Freud which focus on unconscious mental forces
- Freud's **psychoanalytic theory** developed as a means for treating mental disorders
  - Explains personality, motivation, and mental disorders by focusing on the influence of early childhood experiences, unconscious motives and conflicts, and methods used to cope with sexual and aggressive urges

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## Psychodynamic Perspectives



- Structural model of personality
  - **Id:** primitive, instinctive component of personality that operates according to the pleasure principle
    - Raw biological urges (e.g., eat, sleep)
  - **Ego:** decision-making component of personality that operates according to the reality principle (i.e., mediates between the id and external reality)
    - Delays gratification until appropriate methods can be employed and allows attainment of long-term goals
  - **Superego:** moral component of personality that incorporates social standards about what represents right and wrong
    - Many social norms are internalized over time
- These components are distributed differently across three levels of awareness

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## Psychodynamic Perspectives

- Freud recognized the influence of unconscious forces on behavior (e.g., Freudian slips, dreams, humor)
- Levels of awareness (topographical model)
  - **Conscious:** consists of whatever one is aware of at a particular time
    - Example: Dr. Zeigler-Hill keeps rambling on about Freud
  - **Preconscious:** contains material just beneath the surface of awareness that can easily be retrieved
    - Example: Your phone number
  - **Unconscious:** contains thoughts, memories, and desires that are well below the surface of conscious awareness but that nonetheless exert great influence on behavior
    - Examples: Forgotten trauma from childhood, hidden feelings of hostility toward a parent, and repressed sexual desires

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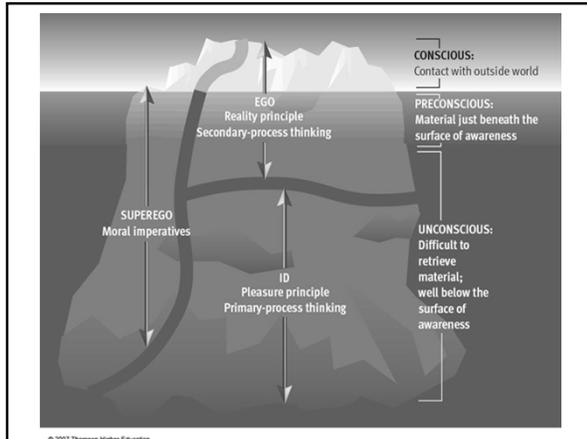
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## Psychodynamic Perspectives

- Freud assumed that behavior is the result of a series of ongoing internal conflicts between the id, ego, and superego
  - These conflicts arise frequently
    - Ex. Your alarm clock rings at 7am...your id urges you to go back to sleep but your ego tells you to go to your 8am class because you have a test next week
  - Sexual and aggressive drives are important
    - We often receive conflicting messages about appropriate behavior
    - These drives are thwarted more regularly than other drives (e.g., if the car in front of you is driving too slowly, you aren't allowed to ram your car into them)

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## Psychodynamic Perspectives

- Some internal conflicts produce considerable **anxiety** (i.e., intense nervousness)
  - Anxiety is produced by the ego and the type of anxiety depends upon the source of the threat
  - **Realistic (or objective) anxiety** is caused by danger in the environment (e.g., threatening person approaching you at night)
  - **Neurotic anxiety** is the result of fears that you will yield to powerful and dangerous id impulses (e.g., giving in to one's sexual desires)
    - Fear of external punishment (e.g., rejection)
  - **Moral anxiety** is caused by acts or wishes that violate one's standards of right and wrong (superego)
    - Fear of internal punishment (e.g., guilt)

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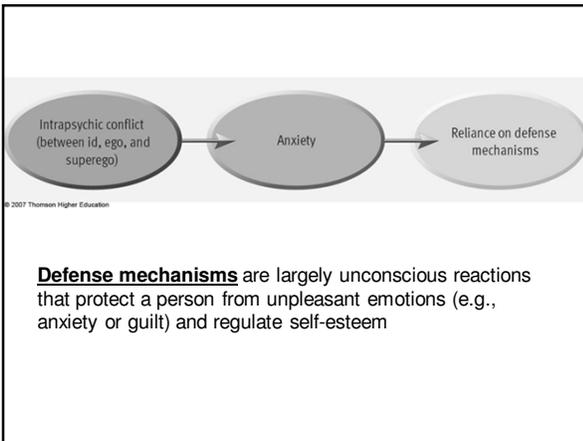
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Defense Mechanism	Definition	Example
Repression	Keeping distressing thoughts and feelings buried in the unconscious	A traumatized soldier has no recollection of the details of a close brush with death.
Projection	Attributing one's own thoughts, feelings, or motives to another	A woman who dislikes her boss thinks she likes her boss but feels that the boss doesn't like her.
Displacement	Diverting emotional feelings (usually anger) from their original source to a substitute target	After parental scolding, a young girl takes her anger out on her little brother.
Reaction formation	Behaving in a way that is exactly the opposite of one's true feelings	A parent who unconsciously resents a child spoils the child with outlandish gifts.
Regression	A reversion to immature patterns of behavior	An adult has a temper tantrum when he doesn't get his way.
Rationalization	Creating false but plausible excuses to justify unacceptable behavior	A student watches TV instead of studying, saying that "additional study wouldn't do any good anyway."
Identification	Bolstering self-esteem by forming an imaginary or real alliance with some person or group	An insecure young man joins a fraternity to boost his self-esteem.

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## Freud on Development: Psychosexual Stages

- “The child is father to the man”
  - The foundation of personality is established early in life (by around age 5)
- Based his theory on how children deal with their immature but powerful “sexual” urges
  - Sexual = physical pleasure

Stage	Approximate Ages	Erotic Focus	Key Tasks and Experiences
Oral	0-1	Mouth (sucking, biting)	Weaning (from breast or bottle)
Anal	2-3	Anus (expelling or retaining feces)	Toilet training
Phallic	4-5	Genitals (masturbating)	Identifying with adult role models; coping with Oedipal crisis
Latency	6-12	None (sexually repressed)	Expanding social contacts
Genital	Puberty onward	Genitals (being sexually intimate)	Establishing intimate relationships; contributing to society through working

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## Other Psychodynamic Theorists



- Carl Jung: Analytical Psychology
  - **Personal unconscious**: similar to Freud's construct
  - **Collective unconscious**: inherited latent memories
  - **Archetypes**: emotionally charged images/thoughts with universal meaning (e.g., mandala or “magic circle”)
  - **Introversi**on (focused on internal world) and **Extraversi**on (focused on external world)
- Alfred Adler: Individual Psychology
  - **Striving for superiority**: universal drive to adapt and improve oneself (primary goal of life!)
  - **Compensation**: effort to overcome real or imagined inferiorities by developing one's abilities
    - **Inferiority complex**: excessive feelings of inferiority
    - **Overcompensation**: focus on achieving status, power, and trappings of success
  - **Birth order**

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## Evaluating Psychodynamic Perspectives

- Positives
  - Unconscious forces can influence behavior
  - Psychological conflict often plays a key role in generating psychological distress
  - Early childhood experiences can have powerful influences on adult personality
  - People do use defense mechanisms to reduce negative emotions and regulate self-esteem
- Negatives
  - Poor testability
  - Inadequate empirical base
  - Sexist views

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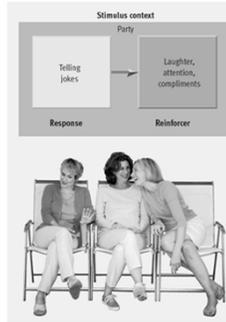
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## Behaviorist and Social Cognitive Perspectives

### ● B. F. Skinner

- Viewed personality as a collection of **response tendencies** that are tied to various stimulus situations
- The importance of reinforcement, punishment, and extinction



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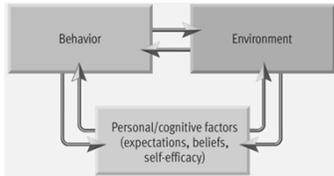
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## Behaviorist and Social Cognitive Perspectives

### ● Albert Bandura

- Social learning theory
  - Emphasized cognitive processes
  - **Reciprocal determinism**: internal mental events, external environmental events, and overt behavior all influence each other



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## Behaviorist and Social Cognitive Perspectives

### ● Walter Mischel

- He found that there is less consistency in behavior than is commonly believed
- The person-situation controversy has led to a recognition that both the individual and the situation are important for determining behavior
  - The particular circumstances of any given situation will influence the way in which traits are expressed
  - Personality signatures (e.g., a man does X if one thing happens but does Y if something else happens)

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## Evaluating the Behaviorist and Social Cognitive Perspectives

- Positives
  - Based on rigorous research
  - Insights into effects of learning and environmental factors
- Negatives
  - Overdependence on animal research
  - Dehumanizing nature of radical behaviorism
  - Fragmented view of personality

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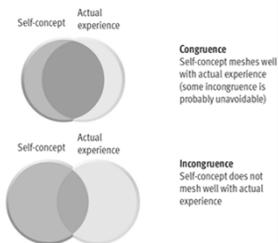
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## Humanistic Perspectives

- Carl Rogers
  - **Self-concept**: collection of beliefs about one's own nature, unique qualities, and typical behavior
  - **Incongruence**: disparity between one's self-concept and one's actual experience; may lead to psychological problems (e.g., anxiety)
  - Conditional & unconditional positive regard




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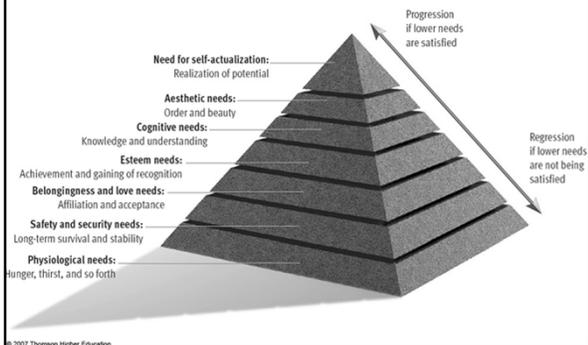
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## Humanistic Perspectives

- Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs




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## Evaluating Humanistic Perspectives

- Positives
  - Highlight the importance of a person's subjective view of reality
  - Focused attention on what constitutes a healthy personality.
- Negatives
  - Lacked a strong research base
  - Poor testability
  - Overly optimistic view of human nature

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## Biological Perspectives

- Physiological predisposition to respond to the environment in certain ways
    - Ancient Greeks proposed temperaments (i.e., sanguine, melancholy, choleric, and phlegmatic)
  - Twin studies
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- | Trait                  | Identical twins (h²) | Fraternal twins |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Extraversion           | 0.7                  | 0.4             |
| Neuroticism            | 0.7                  | 0.4             |
| Agreeableness          | 0.7                  | 0.4             |
| Conscientiousness      | 0.7                  | 0.4             |
| Openness to experience | 0.7                  | 0.4             |
- The evolutionary approach
    - Traits conducive to reproductive fitness have emerged

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## Evaluating Biological Perspectives

- Positives
  - Convincing evidence for genetic influence
- Negatives
  - Conceptual problems with heritability estimates
  - Artificial carving apart of nature and nurture
  - No comprehensive biological theory

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## The Assessment of Personality



- **Interviews**
  - Ex. Structured and semi-structured
- **Projective Tests**
  - Ex. Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Test
- **Behavioral Assessments**
  - Ex. Direct observation, rating scales, and frequency counts
- **Personality Inventories**
  - Ex. Neuroticism/Extraversion/Openness Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)



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