Cheat Sheet: Personality

Essential Concepts

Psychodynamic Approaches to Personality

Personality has been studied for over 2,000 years, beginning with Hippocrates. More recent theories of personality have been proposed, including Freud's psychodynamic perspective, which holds that personality is formed through early childhood experiences. Other perspectives then emerged in reaction to the psychodynamic perspective, including the learning, humanistic, biological, trait, and cultural perspectives.

Sigmund Freud presented the first comprehensive theory of personality. He was also the first to recognize that much of our mental life takes place outside of our conscious awareness. Freud also proposed three components to our personality: the id, ego, and superego. The job of the ego is to balance the sexual and aggressive drives of the id with the moral ideal of the superego. Freud also said that personality develops through a series of psychosexual stages. In each stage, pleasure focuses on a specific erogenous zone. Failure to resolve a stage can lead one to become fixated in that stage, leading to unhealthy personality traits. Successful resolution of the stages leads to a healthy adult.

The neo-Freudians were psychologists whose work followed from Freud's. They generally agreed with Freud that childhood experiences matter, but they decreased the emphasis on sex and focused more on the social environment and effects of culture on personality. Some of the notable neo-Freudians are Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, and Karen Horney. The neo-Freudian approaches have been criticized, because they tend to be philosophical rather than based on sound scientific research. For example, Jung's conclusions about the existence of the collective unconscious are based on myths, legends, dreams, and art. In addition, as with Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the neo-Freudians based much of their theories of personality on information from their patients.

Explaining Personality

Behavioral theorists view personality as significantly shaped and impacted by the reinforcements and consequences outside of the organism. People behave in a consistent manner based on prior learning. B. F. Skinner, a prominent behaviorist, said that we demonstrate consistent behavior patterns, because we have developed certain response tendencies. Mischel focused on how personal goals play a role in the self-regulation process. Albert Bandura said that one's environment can determine behavior, but at the same time,

people can influence the environment with both their thoughts and behaviors, which is known as reciprocal determinism. Bandura also emphasized how we learn from watching others. He felt that this type of learning also plays a part in the development of our personality. Bandura discussed the concept of self-efficacy, which is our level of confidence in our own abilities. Finally, Rotter proposed the concept of locus of control, which refers to our beliefs about the power we have over our lives. He said that people fall along a continuum between a purely internal and a purely external locus of control.

Humanistic psychologists Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers focused on the growth potential of healthy individuals. They believed that people strive to become self-actualized. Both Rogers's and Maslow's theories greatly contributed to our understanding of the self. They emphasized free will and self-determination, with each individual desiring to become the best person they can become.

Some aspects of our personalities are largely controlled by genetics; however, environmental factors (such as family interactions) and maturation can affect the ways in which children's personalities are expressed. The culture in which you live is one of the most important environmental factors that shape your personality. Western ideas about personality may not be applicable to other cultures. In fact, there is evidence that the strength of personality traits varies across cultures. Individualist cultures and collectivist cultures place emphasis on different basic values. People who live in individualist cultures tend to believe that independence, competition, and personal achievement are important. People who live in collectivist cultures value social harmony, respectfulness, and group needs over individual needs. There are three approaches that can be used to study personality in a cultural context: the cultural-comparative approach, the indigenous approach, and the combined approach, which incorporates both elements of both views.

Personality Traits

Trait theorists propose that personality can be understood through characteristic ways of behaving, such as being sociable or shy, optimistic or pessimistic. Early trait theorists categorized personality traits into cardinal (dominant), central (defining), and secondary (contextual) traits. Raymond Cattell narrowed down traits to 16 factors, while the Eysencks focused on extroversion/introversion and neuroticism/stability dimensions. The Five Factor Model (Big Five) is the most widely accepted theory today, encompassing openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Another model, HEXACO, includes honesty-humility, emotionality, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience as broad traits.

The person-situation debate in psychology challenges the belief in consistent personality traits across different situations. Walter Mischel argued that behavior is influenced by specific, psychologically meaningful features of the situation and individuals' unique perception and abilities. While there is evidence of average stability and changes in personality traits with age, it is recognized that individuals can respond and adapt to their environments, suggesting the

possibility of personality change and transformation. Overall, both personal factors and situational factors are considered important in understanding behavior.

Measuring Personality

Personality tests are techniques designed to measure one's personality. They are used to diagnose psychological problems as well as to screen candidates for college and employment. There are two types of personality tests: self-report inventories and projective tests. The MMPI is one of the most common self-report inventories. It asks a series of true/false questions that are designed to provide a clinical profile of an individual. Projective tests use ambiguous images or other ambiguous stimuli to assess an individual's unconscious fears, desires, and challenges. The Rorschach Inkblot Test, the TAT, the RISB, and the C-TCB are all forms of projective tests.

Validity refers to the extent to which a test accurately measures what it intends to measure. Different types of validity, such as convergent validity (comparing results with similar traits), discriminant validity (comparing results with dissimilar traits), criterion validity (comparing results with real-world outcomes), and predictive validity (assessing if results predict behavior), are used to evaluate the validity of a test.

Glossary

anal stage

   psychosexual stage in which children experience pleasure in their bowel and bladder movements

analytical psychology

   Jung's theory focusing on the balance of opposing forces within one's personality and the significance of the collective unconscious

archetype

   pattern that exists in our collective unconscious across cultures and societies

collective unconscious

   common psychological tendencies that have been passed down from one generation to the next

congruence

state of being in which our thoughts about our real and ideal selves are very similar

conscious

mental activity (thoughts, feelings, and memories) that we can access at any time

Contemporized-Themes Concerning Blacks Test (C-TCB)

projective test designed to be culturally relevant to African Americans, using images that relate to African-American culture

convergent validity

the relationship between traits that are similar to (but not identical to) the trait being measured

criterion validity

the relationship between some measure and some real-world outcome

culture

all of the beliefs, customs, art, and traditions of a particular society

defense mechanism

unconscious protective behaviors designed to reduce ego anxiety

discriminant validity

the relationship between some traits that should have weak or no relationship

displacement

ego defense mechanism in which a person transfers inappropriate urges or behaviors toward a more acceptable or less threatening target

ego

aspect of personality that represents the self, or the part of one's personality that is visible to others

Five Factor Model

theory that personality is composed of five factors or traits, including openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; also called the "Big Five"

genital stage

psychosexual stage in which the focus is on mature sexual interests

heritability

proportion of difference among people that is attributed to genetics

id

aspect of personality that consists of our most primitive drives or urges, including impulses for hunger, thirst, and sex

ideal self

the person we would like to be

incongruence

state of being in which there is a great discrepancy between our real and ideal selves

individual psychology

school of psychology proposed by Adler that focuses on our drive to compensate for feelings of inferiority

inferiority complex

refers to a person's feelings that they lack worth and don't measure up to others' or to society's standard

latency period

psychosexual stage in which sexual feelings are dormant

locus of control

the beliefs about the power we have over our lives; an external locus of control is the belief that our outcomes are outside of our control; an internal locus of control is the belief that we control our own outcomes

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)

personality test composed of a series of true/false questions in order to establish a clinical profile of an individual

neurosis

tendency to experience negative emotions

oral stage

psychosexual stage in which an infant's pleasure is focused on the mouth

personality

long-standing traits and patterns that propel individuals to consistently think, feel, and behave in specific ways

phallic stage

psychosexual stage in which the focus is on the genitals

predictive validity

the relationship between experimental results and the ability to predict people's behavior in certain situations

projection

ego defense mechanism in which a person confronted with anxiety disguises their unacceptable urges or behaviors by attributing them to other people

projective test

personality assessment in which a person responds to ambiguous stimuli, revealing hidden feelings, impulses, and desires

psychosexual stages of development

stages of child development in which a child's pleasure-seeking urges are focused on specific areas of the body called erogenous zones

rationalization

ego defense mechanism in which a person confronted with anxiety makes excuses to justify behavior

reaction formation

ego defense mechanism in which a person confronted with anxiety swaps unacceptable urges or behaviors for their opposites

real self

the person who we actually are

reciprocal determinism

belief that one's environment can determine behavior, but at the same time, people can influence the environment with both their thoughts and behaviors

regression

ego defense mechanism in which a person confronted with anxiety returns to a more immature behavioral state

repression

ego defense mechanism in which anxiety-related thoughts and memories are kept in the unconscious

Rorschach Inkblot Test

projective test that employs a series of symmetrical inkblot cards that are presented to a client by a psychologist in an effort to reveal the person's unconscious desires, fears, and struggles

Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank (RISB)

projective test that is similar to a word association test in which a person completes sentences in order to reveal their unconscious desires, fears, and struggles

selective migration

concept that people choose to move to places that are compatible with their personalities and needs

self-concept

our thoughts and feelings about ourselves

self-efficacy

someone's level of confidence in their own abilities

social-cognitive theory

Bandura's theory of personality that emphasizes both cognition and learning as sources of individual differences in personality

sublimation

ego defense mechanism in which unacceptable urges are channeled into more appropriate activities

superego

aspect of the personality that serves as one's moral compass, or conscience

TEMAS Multicultural Thematic Apperception Test

projective test designed to be culturally relevant to minority groups, especially Hispanic youths, using images and storytelling that relate to minority culture

temperament

how a person reacts to the world, including their activity level, starting when they are very young

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

projective test in which people are presented with ambiguous images, and they then make up stories to go with the images in an effort to uncover their unconscious desires, fears, and struggles

traits

characteristic ways of behaving

unconscious

mental activity of which we are unaware and unable to access