

# Psychology in the News

## Michael Jackson Memorial Draws Thousands

**LOS ANGELES, July 7, 2009.** Thousands of friends, family, and fans gathered at the Staples Center today to pay tribute to Michael Jackson, the King of Pop. Jackson died of cardiac arrest at age 50, at his rented mansion on June 25. The organizer of the memorial gave away 17,500 free tickets to fans through an online lottery that drew over 1.2 million applicants in 24 hours and over a half billion hits on its web page.

At the ceremony, Jackson's 11-year-old daughter Paris tearfully told the crowd, "Ever since I was born, Daddy has been the best father you could ever imagine." Berry Gordy, founder of Motown Records, lauded him as "the greatest entertainer who ever lived."

Throughout his life, people have argued over who Michael Jackson really was. Many think of him simply as an enormously gifted entertainer who transformed the music video and created a unique choreographic style. Others remember him as a philanthropist who raised more than \$300 million for dozens of charities and for his own Heal the World Foundation. On hearing of his death, one of his closest friends, Elizabeth Taylor, said

they had shared "the purest, most giving love" and that she could not imagine life without him.

Yet Jackson was also the subject of many sensational reports and rumors that painted a different picture. His androgynous appearance, his change in skin color from dark brown to pale white, and the marked changes in his facial features inspired debate about his comfort with his gender and racial identities. (Jackson said the change in skin color was due to treatment for a skin condition and he admitted to only two rhinoplasties.)

The biggest controversy surrounding the star concerned allegations of child sexual abuse. A 13-year-old boy and the boy's father accused him of abuse, but Jackson's insurance company settled out of court and Jackson was never charged. Later, another boy made a similar accusation and Jackson was charged with seven counts of child molestation. He was eventually acquitted on all counts.

The many twists and turns of Jackson's life led some to refer to him as "Wacko Jacko," a term he despised. But at the memorial, the Reverend Al Sharpton got a standing ovation when he told Jackson's children, "Wasn't nothing strange about your Daddy. It was strange what your Daddy had to deal with."



Michael Jackson (in purple pants) as a child with the Jackson Five and as the superstar he became.

Psychodynamic Theories of Personality

The Modern Study of Personality

Genetic Influences on Personality

Environmental Influences on Personality

Cultural Influences on Personality

The Inner Experience

Psychology in the News, Revisited

Taking Psychology with You: How to Avoid the “Barnum Effect”

## Theories of Personality

**W**ho was the real Michael Jackson? Was he a “born performer,” as his childhood stardom with the Jackson Five would suggest? How much of his life was shaped by childhood experiences with verbal and physical abuse? Was his personality characterized primarily by the sweetness and generosity that friends like Elizabeth Taylor saw, by neurotic patterns of coping with the celebrity that the world conferred on him, by his childlike attraction to children, or by other factors? Who was the real Michael Jackson? *Was there a real one?*

In this chapter, we will see how psychologists answer such questions—how they define and study personality. **Personality** refers to a distinctive pattern of behavior, mannerisms, thoughts, motives, and emotions that characterizes an individual over time and across different situations. This pattern consists of many distinctive **traits**, habitual ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling: shy, outgoing, friendly, hostile, gloomy, confident, and so on.

We will begin with the oldest theory of personality, the psychodynamic view, so that you will have a sense of how influential it was, why it still appeals to some, and why many of its ideas have become outdated. Next we will consider evidence for the newest theory, the genetic view. Few scientists think anymore that babies are tiny lumps of clay, shaped entirely by their experiences, or that parents alone determine whether their infant becomes an adventurer, a sourpuss, a worrywart, . . . or Michael Jackson. On the other hand, if only half of the human variation in personality traits is due to genetics, what is responsible for the other half?

To answer that question, we will then examine leading approaches to personality that are neither psychodynamic nor biological: the environmental approach, which emphasizes the role of social learning, situations, parents, and peers; the cultural approach, which emphasizes cultural influences on traits and behavior; and the humanist and existential approaches, which emphasize self-determination and people’s own view of themselves. When we are done, we will return to the puzzle of Michael Jackson and the forces that may have contributed to his unique personality.



**personality** A distinctive and relatively stable pattern of behavior, thoughts, motives, and emotions that characterizes an individual.

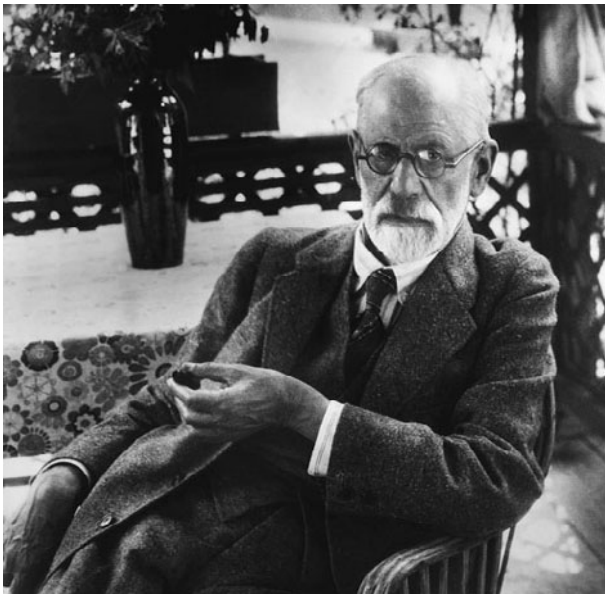
**trait** A characteristic of an individual, describing a habitual way of behaving, thinking, or feeling.

**psychoanalysis** A theory of personality and a method of psychotherapy, originally formulated by Sigmund Freud, that emphasizes unconscious motives and conflicts.

**psychodynamic theories** Theories that explain behavior and personality in terms of unconscious energy dynamics within the individual.

**id** In psychoanalysis, the part of personality containing inherited psychic energy, particularly sexual and aggressive instincts.

Sigmund Freud  
(1856–1939)



## YOU are about to learn...

- Freud's theory of the structure and development of personality.
- Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and how it applies to Harry Potter's archenemy, Lord Voldemort.
- the nature of the "objects" in the object-relations approach to personality.
- why many psychologists reject most psychodynamic ideas.

## Psychodynamic Theories of Personality

A man apologizes for "displacing" his frustrations at work onto his family. A woman suspects that she is "repressing" a childhood trauma. An alcoholic reveals that he is no longer "in denial" about his drinking. A teacher informs a divorcing couple that their 8-year-old child is "regressing" to immature behavior. All of this language about displacing, repressing, denying, and regressing can be traced to the first psychodynamic theory of personality, Sigmund Freud's theory of **psychoanalysis**.

Freud's theory is called "psychodynamic" because it emphasizes the movement of psychological energy within the person, in the form of attachments, conflicts, and motivations. (Freud did not use "dynamic" in today's sense, to mean "powerful" or "energetic." *Dynamics* is a term from physics that refers to the motion and balance of systems under the action of outside or internal forces.) Modern **psychodynamic theories** have changed a great deal since Freud's time, and they differ from one another; but they all share an emphasis on unconscious processes going on within the mind. They also share an assumption that adult personality and ongoing problems are formed

primarily by experiences in early childhood. These experiences produce unconscious thoughts and feelings, which later lead to characteristic habits, conflicts, and often self-defeating behavior.

## Freud and Psychoanalysis

To enter the world of Sigmund Freud is to enter a realm of unconscious motives, passions, guilty secrets, unspeakable yearnings, and conflicts between desire and duty. These unseen forces, Freud believed, have far more power over our personalities than our conscious intentions do. The unconscious reveals itself, said Freud, in art, dreams, jokes, apparent accidents, and slips of the tongue (which came to be called "Freudian slips"). According to Freud (1920/1960), the British member of Parliament who referred to the "honourable member from Hell" when he meant to say "from Hull" was revealing his actual, unconscious appraisal of his colleague.

**The Structure of Personality** In Freud's theory, personality consists of three major systems: the id, the ego, and the superego. Any action we take or problem we have results from the interaction and degree of balance among these systems (Freud, 1905, 1920/1960, 1923/1962).

The **id**, which is present at birth, is the reservoir of unconscious psychological energies and the motives to avoid pain and obtain pleasure. The id contains two competing instincts: the life, or sexual, instinct (fueled by psychic energy called the **libido**) and the death, or aggressive, instinct. As energy builds up in the id, tension results. The id may discharge this tension in the form of reflex actions, physical symptoms, or uncensored mental images and unbidden thoughts.

The **ego**, the second system to emerge, is a referee between the needs of instinct and the demands of society. It bows to the realities of life, putting a rein on the id's desire for sex and aggression until a suitable, socially appropriate outlet for them can be found. The ego, said Freud, is both conscious and unconscious, and it represents "reason and good sense."

The **superego**, the last system of personality to develop, is the voice of conscience, representing morality and parental authority. The superego judges the activities of the id, handing out good feelings of pride and satisfaction when you do something well and handing out miserable feelings of guilt and shame when you break the rules. The superego is partly conscious but largely unconscious.

According to Freud, the healthy personality must keep all three systems in balance. Someone



"VERY WELL, I'LL INTRODUCE YOU. EGO MEET ID. NOW GET BACK TO WORK."

who is too controlled by the id is governed by impulse and selfish desires. Someone who is too controlled by the superego is rigid, moralistic, and bossy. Someone who has a weak ego is unable to balance personal needs and wishes with social duties and realistic limitations.

If a person feels anxious or threatened when the wishes of the id conflict with social rules, the ego has weapons at its command to relieve the tension. These unconscious strategies, called **defense mechanisms**, deny or distort reality, but they also protect us from conflict and anxiety. They become unhealthy only when they cause self-defeating behavior and emotional problems. Freud, his daughter Anna Freud, and later other analysts identified a number of defenses; here are five of the primary ones (A. Freud, 1967; Vaillant, 1992):

**1 Repression** occurs when a threatening idea, memory, or emotion is blocked from consciousness. A woman who had a frightening childhood experience that she cannot remember, for example, is said to be repressing her memory of it. Freud used the term *repression* to mean both unconscious expulsion of disturbing material from awareness and conscious suppression of such material. However, modern analysts tend to think of it only as an unconscious defense mechanism.

**2 Projection** occurs when a person's own unacceptable or threatening feelings are repressed and then attributed to someone else. A person who is embarrassed about having sexual feelings toward members of a different ethnic group, for example, may project this discomfort onto them, saying, "Those people are dirty-minded and oversexed."

**3 Displacement** occurs when people direct their emotions (especially anger) toward things, animals, or other people that are not the real object of their feelings. A boy who is forbidden to express anger toward his father may "take it out" on his toys or his younger sister. When displacement serves a higher cultural or socially useful purpose, as in the creation of art or inventions, it is called *sublimation*. Freud argued that society has a duty to help people sublimate their unacceptable impulses for the sake of civilization. Sexual passion, he observed, is often sublimated into the creation of art or literature.

**4 Regression** occurs when a person reverts to a previous phase of psychological development. An 8-year-old boy who is anxious about his parents' divorce may regress to earlier habits of thumb sucking or clinging. Adults may regress to immature behavior when they are under pressure—say, by having temper tantrums when they don't get their way.

**5 Denial** occurs when people refuse to admit that something unpleasant is happening, such as mistreatment by a partner; that they have a problem, such as drinking too much; or that they are feeling a forbidden emotion, such as anger. Denial protects a person's self-image and preserves the illusion of invulnerability: "It can't happen to me."

**The Development of Personality** Freud argued that personality develops in a series of **psychosexual stages**, in which sexual energy takes different forms as the child matures. Each new stage produces a certain amount of frustration, conflict, and anxiety. If these are not resolved properly, normal development may be interrupted, and the

**libido (li-BEE-do)** In psychoanalysis, the psychic energy that fuels the life or sexual instincts of the id.

**ego** In psychoanalysis, the part of personality that represents reason, good sense, and rational self-control.

**superego** In psychoanalysis, the part of personality that represents conscience, morality, and social standards.

**defense mechanisms** Methods used by the ego to prevent unconscious anxiety or threatening thoughts from entering consciousness.

**psychosexual stages** In Freud's theory, the idea that sexual energy takes different forms as the child matures; the stages are oral, anal, phallic (Oedipal), latency, and genital.



"I'm sorry, I'm not speaking to anyone tonight. My defense mechanisms seem to be out of order."

**Oedipus complex** In psychoanalysis, a conflict occurring in the phallic (Oedipal) stage, in which a child desires the parent of the other sex and views the same-sex parent as a rival.

child may remain *fixated*, or stuck, at the current stage. Some people, he thought, remain fixated at the *oral stage*, which occurs during the first year of life, when babies experience the world through their mouths. As adults, they will seek oral gratification in smoking, overeating, nail biting, or chewing on pencils; some may become clinging and dependent, like a nursing child. Others remain fixated at the *anal stage*, at ages 2 to 3, when toilet training and control of bodily wastes are the key issues. They may become “anal retentive,” holding everything in, obsessive about neatness and cleanliness. Or they may become just the opposite, “anal expulsive”—messy and disorganized.

For Freud, however, the most crucial stage for the formation of personality was the *phallic (Oedipal) stage*, which lasts roughly from age 3 to age 5 or 6. During this stage, said Freud, the child unconsciously wishes to possess the parent of the other sex and to get rid of the parent of the same sex. Children often proudly announce, “I’m going to marry Daddy (or Mommy) when I grow up,” and they reject the same-sex “rival.” Freud labeled this phenomenon the **Oedipus complex**, after the Greek legend of King Oedipus, who unwittingly killed his father and married his mother.

Boys and girls, Freud believed, go through the Oedipal stage differently. Boys are discovering the pleasure and pride of having a penis, so when they see a naked girl for the first time, they are horrified. Their unconscious exclaims (in effect), “Her penis

has been cut off! Who could have done such a thing to her? Why, it must have been her powerful father. And if he could do it to her, my father could do it to me!” This realization, said Freud, causes the boy to repress his desire for his mother and identify with his father. He accepts his father’s authority and the father’s standards of conscience and morality; the super-ego has emerged.

Freud admitted that he did not quite know what to make of girls, who, lacking a penis, could not go through the same steps. He speculated that a girl, upon

discovering male anatomy, would panic that she had only a puny clitoris instead of a stately penis. She would conclude that she already had lost her penis. As a result, Freud said, girls do not have the powerful motivating fear that boys do to give up their Oedipal feelings and develop a strong superego; they have only a lingering sense of “penis envy.”

Freud believed that when the Oedipus complex is resolved, at about age 5 or 6, the child’s personality is fundamentally formed. Unconscious conflicts with parents, unresolved fixations and guilt, and attitudes toward the same and the other sex will continue to replay themselves throughout life. The child settles into a supposedly nonsexual *latency* stage, in preparation for the *genital stage*, which begins at puberty and leads to adult sexuality.

In Freud’s view, therefore, your adult personality is shaped by how you progressed through the early psychosexual stages, which defense mechanisms you developed to reduce anxiety, and whether your ego is strong enough to balance the conflict between the id (what you would like to do) and the superego (your conscience).

As you might imagine, Freud’s ideas were not exactly received with yawns. Sexual feelings in 5-year-olds! Repressed longings in respectable adults! Unconscious meanings in dreams! Penis envy! This was strong stuff in the early years of the twentieth century, and before long, psychoanalysis had captured the public imagination in Europe and America. But it also produced a sharp rift with the emerging schools of empirical psychology.

This rift continues to divide scholars today. Many believe that the overall framework of Freud’s theory is timeless and brilliant, even if some specific ideas have proved faulty (Westen, 1998). Others think that psychoanalytic theory is nonsense, with little empirical support, and that Freud was not the theoretical genius, impartial scientist, or even successful clinician that he claimed to be. On the contrary, Freud often bullied his patients into accepting his explanations of their symptoms and ignored all evidence disconfirming his ideas (McNally, 2003; Powell & Boer, 1995; Webster, 1995).

On the positive side, Freud welcomed women into the profession of psychoanalysis, wrote eloquently about the devastating results to women of society’s suppression of their sexuality, and argued, ahead of his time, that homosexuality was neither a sin nor a perversion but a “variation of the sexual function” and “nothing to be ashamed of” (Freud, 1961). Freud was thus a mixture of intellectual vision and blindness, sensitivity and arrogance. His provocative ideas left a powerful legacy to psychology, one that others began to tinker with immediately.

Freud believed that during the Oedipal stage, little boys fantasize about marrying their mothers and regard their fathers as rivals.



## Quick Quiz

Have Freudian concepts registered in your unconscious? Which Freudian concepts do the following events suggest?

1. A 4-year-old girl wants to snuggle on Daddy's lap but refuses to kiss her mother.
2. A celibate priest writes poetry about sexual passion.
3. A man who is angry with his boss shouts at his kids for making noise.
4. A racist justifies segregation by saying that black men are only interested in sex with white women.
5. A 9-year-old boy who moves to a new city starts having tantrums.

Answers:

1. Oedipus complex 2. sublimation 3. displacement 4. projection 5. regression

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## Other Psychodynamic Approaches

Some of Freud's followers stayed in the psychoanalytic tradition and modified Freud's theories from within. Women, as you might imagine, were not too pleased about "penis envy." Clara Thompson (1943/1973) and Karen Horney [HORN-eye] (1926/1973) argued that it was insulting and unscientific to claim that half the human race is dissatisfied with its anatomy. When women feel inferior to men, they said, we should look for explanations in the disadvantages that women live with and their second-class status. Other psychoanalysts broke away from Freud, or were actively rejected by him, and went off to start their own schools.

**Jungian Theory** Carl Jung (1875–1961) was originally one of Freud's closest friends and a member of his inner circle, but the friendship ended with a furious quarrel about the nature of the unconscious. In addition to the individual's own unconscious, said Jung (1967), all human beings share a vast **collective unconscious**, containing universal memories, symbols, images, and themes, which he called *archetypes*.

An archetype can be an image, such as the "magic circle," called a *mandala* in Eastern religions, which Jung thought symbolizes the unity of life and "the totality of the self." Or it can be a figure found in fairy tales, legends, and popular stories, such as the Hero, the nurturing Earth Mother, the Powerful Father, or the Wicked Witch. It can even be an aspect of the self. For example, the *shadow* archetype reflects the prehistoric fear of wild animals and represents the bestial, evil side of human nature. Scholars have found that some basic archetypes, such as the Hero and the Earth Mother, do appear in the stories and images of virtually every society

(Campbell, 1949/1968; Neher, 1996). Jungians would consider the Joker, Darth Vader, Dracula, the Dark Lord Sauron, and Harry Potter's tormentor Voldemort as expressions of the shadow archetype.

Although Jung shared with Freud a fascination with the darker aspects of the personality, he had more confidence in the positive, forward-moving strengths of the ego. He believed that people are motivated not only by past conflicts but also by their future goals and their desire to fulfill themselves. Jung was also among the first to identify extroversion/ introversion as a basic dimension of personality. Nonetheless, many of Jung's ideas were more suited to mysticism and philosophy than to empirical psychology, which may be why so many Jungian ideas later became popular with New Age movements.

**The Object-Relations School** Freud essentially regarded the baby as if it were an independent, greedy little organism ruled by its own instinctive desires; other people were relevant only insofar as they gratified the infant's drives or blocked them. But by the 1950s, increased awareness of the importance of human attachments led to a different view of infancy, put forward by the **object-relations school**, which Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, and others developed in Great Britain. To object-relations theorists, the central problem in life is to find a balance between the need for independence and the need for others.



In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wicked Witch of the West is a beloved example of the archetype of evil.

**collective unconscious** In Jungian theory, the universal memories and experiences of humankind, represented in the symbols, stories, and images (archetypes) that occur across all cultures.

According to object-relations theory, a baby constructs unconscious representations of his or her parents that will influence the child's relations with others throughout life.



This balance requires constant adjustment to separations and losses: small ones that occur during quarrels, moderate ones such as leaving home for the first time, and major ones such as divorce or death. The way we react to these separations, according to object-relations analysts, is largely determined by our experiences in the first year or two of life. The baby will find parts of himself or herself that the mother appreciates and values, to get her recognition. If the baby's need for recognition goes unheeded, the baby's personality will be warped. The infant may develop what Winnicott called a "false self," because certain parts of the baby's "true self" remain undeveloped (Orbach, 2009).

The reason for the clunky word *object* in object-relations school, instead of the warmer word *human* or *parent*, is that the infant's attachment is not only to a real person (usually the mother) but also to the infant's evolving perception of her. The child creates a *mental representation* of the mother—someone who is kind or fierce, protective or rejecting. The child's representations of important adults, whether realistic or distorted, unconsciously affect personality throughout life, influencing whether the person relates to others with trust or suspicion, acceptance or criticism.

The object-relations school also departs from Freudian theory regarding the nature of male and female development (Sagan, 1988; Winnicott, 1957/1990). In the object-relations view, children of both sexes identify first with the mother. Girls, who are the same sex as the mother, do not need to separate from her; the mother treats a daughter as an extension of herself. But boys must break away from the mother to develop a masculine identity; the mother encourages a son to be independent and separate. Thus men, in this view, develop more

rigid boundaries between themselves and other people than women do.

## Evaluating Psychodynamic Theories

Although modern psychodynamic theorists differ in many ways, they share a general belief that to understand an individual's personality we must explore the unconscious dynamics of that person's mind. Many psychologists in other fields, however, regard most psychodynamic ideas as literary metaphors rather than as scientific explanations (Cioffi, 1998; Crews, 1998). They point out that most of the cornerstone assumptions in psychoanalytic theory, such as the notion that the mind "represses"

traumatic experiences, have not been supported scientifically (McNally, 2003; Rofé, 2008; see Chapter 8). Object-relations analysts make all kinds of assumptions about what an infant feels and wants, but how do they know that a "true self" is being suppressed? Moreover, psychological scientists have shown that psychodynamic theories are guilty of three scientific failings:

Thinking Critically  
about Psychodynamic  
Ideas



**1 Violating the principle of falsifiability.** As we saw in Chapter 1, a theory that is impossible to disconfirm in principle is not scientific. Many psychodynamic concepts about unconscious motivations are, in fact, impossible to confirm or disconfirm. Followers often accept an idea because it seems intuitively right or their experience seems to support it. Anyone who doubts the idea or offers disconfirming evidence is then accused of being defensive or in denial.

**2 Drawing universal principles from the experiences of a few atypical patients.** Freud and most of his followers generalized from a few individuals, often patients in therapy, to all human beings. Of course, sometimes case studies can generate valid insights about human behavior. The problem occurs when observers fail to confirm their observations by studying larger, more representative samples and including appropriate control groups. For example, some psychodynamically oriented therapists, believing in Freud's notion of a childhood latency stage, have assumed that if a child masturbates or enjoys sex play, the child has probably been sexually molested. But research finds that masturbation and sexual curiosity are not found just in abused children; these are normal and common childhood behaviors (Bancroft, 2006; Friedrich et al., 1998).

### object-relations school

A psychodynamic approach that emphasizes the importance of the infant's first two years of life and the baby's formative relationships, especially with the mother.

**3** Basing theories of personality development on the retrospective accounts of adults. Most psychodynamic theorists have not observed random samples of children at different ages, as modern child psychologists do, to construct their theories of development. Instead they have worked backward, creating theories based on themes in adults' recollections of childhood. The analysis of memories can be an illuminating way to achieve insights about our lives; in fact, it is the only way we can think about our own lives! But, as we discuss in Chapter 8, memory is often inaccurate, influenced as much by what is going on in our lives now as by what happened in the past. That is why, if you are currently not getting along with your mother, you may remember all the times when she was hard on you and forget the counterexamples of her kindness.

Retrospective analysis has another problem: It creates an *illusion of causality* between events. People often assume that if A came before B, then A must have caused B. If your mother spent three months in the hospital when you were 5 years old and today you feel shy and insecure in college, an object-relations analyst might draw a connection between the two facts. But a lot of other things could be causing your shyness and insecurity, such as being away from home for the first time, at a large and impersonal college. When psychologists conduct longitudinal studies, following people from childhood to adulthood, they often get a very different picture of causality from the one that emerges by looking backward (see Chapter 3).



Despite these serious problems, some psychodynamic concepts have been empirically tested and validated. Researchers have identified unconscious processes in thought, memory, and behavior (Bargh & Morsella, 2008). They have found evidence for the major defense mechanisms, such as projection, denial, and displacement (Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998; Cramer, 2000; Marcus-Newhall et al., 2000). They have demonstrated the interaction of mind and body in the generation of stress-related physical problems. And they have confirmed the important psychodynamic idea that we are often unaware of the motives behind our own puzzling or self-defeating actions.

Some psychodynamic theories can be tested empirically, such as Freud's belief that playing or observing aggressive sports will channel aggressive energy into socially accepted forms. But empirical research finds just the opposite: Aggressive sports often *increase* the hostility and aggression of participants and observers, such as these soccer fans.

## Quick Quiz

### Are you feeling defensive about answering this quiz?

- An 8-year-old boy is hitting classmates and disobeying his teacher. Which of the following explanations of his behavior might come from a Freudian, Jungian, or object-relations analyst?
  - The boy is expressing his *shadow* archetype.
  - The boy is expressing the aggressive energy of the id and has not developed enough ego control.
  - The boy has had unusual difficulty separating from his mother and is compensating by behaving aggressively.
- What criticism of all three of the preceding explanations might a psychological scientist make?
- In the 1950s and 1960s, many psychoanalysts, observing unhappy gay men who had sought therapy, concluded that homosexuality was a mental illness. What violation of the scientific method were they committing?

### Answers:

1. a. Jung b. Freud c. object-relations analyst 2. All three explanations are nonfalsifiable; that is, there is no way to disconfirm them or confirm them. They are just subjective interpretations. 3. The analysts were drawing conclusions from patients in therapy and failing to test these conclusions with gay men who were not in therapy or with heterosexuals. When such research was done using appropriate control groups, it turned out that gay men were not more mentally disturbed or depressed than heterosexuals (Hooker, 1957).

✓ Study and Review on [mysychlab.com](http://mysychlab.com)





**objective tests (inventories)**

Standardized questionnaires requiring written responses; they typically include scales on which people are asked to rate themselves.

**YOU are about to learn...**

- whether you can trust tests that tell you what “personality type” you are.
- how psychologists can tell which personality traits are more central or important than others.
- the five dimensions of personality that describe people the world over.

## The Modern Study of Personality

People love to fit themselves and their friends into “types”; they have been doing it forever. Early Greek philosophers thought our personalities fell into four fundamental categories depending on mixes of body fluids. If you were an angry, irritable sort of person, you supposedly had an excess of cholera, and even now the word *choleric* describes a hothead. If you were sluggish and unemotional, you supposedly had an excess of phlegm, making you a “phlegmatic” type.

## Popular Personality Tests

That particular theory is long gone, but other unscientific tests of personality types still exist, aimed at predicting how people will do at work, whether they will get along with others, or whether they will succeed as leaders. One such test, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, is hugely popular in business, at motivational seminars, and with matchmaking services; at least 2.5 million Americans a year take it (Gladwell, 2004). The test assigns people to one of 16 different types, depending on how the individual scores on the dimensions of introverted or extroverted, logical or intuitive. Unfortunately, the Myers-Briggs test is not much more reliable than measuring body fluids; one study found that fewer than half of the respondents scored as the same type a mere five weeks later. And there is little evidence that knowledge of a person’s type reliably predicts behavior on the job or in relationships (Barbuto, 1997; Paul, 2004; Pittenger, 1993). Equally useless are many of the tests that some businesses and government agencies require their employees to take, hoping to predict which “types” are apt to steal, take drugs, or be disloyal on the job (Ehrenreich, 2001).

Thinking Critically about Personality Tests



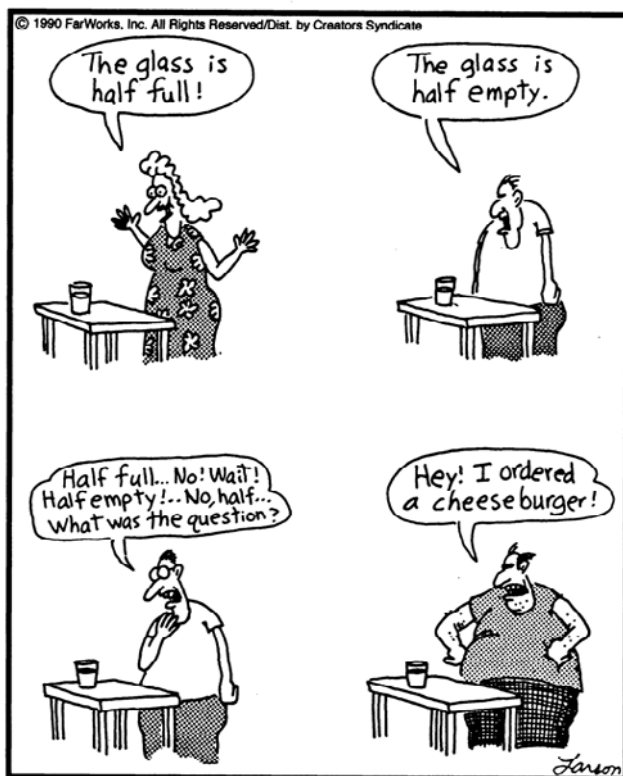
In contrast, many measures of personality traits are scientifically valid and useful in research. These **objective tests (inventories)** are standardized questionnaires requiring written responses, typically to multiple-choice or true–false items. They provide information about literally hundreds of different aspects of personality, including needs, values, interests, self-esteem, emotional problems, and typical ways of responding to situations. Using well-constructed inventories, psychologists have identified hundreds of traits, ranging from sensation seeking (the enjoyment of risk) to erotophobia (the fear of sex).

## Core Personality Traits

Are some personality traits more important or central than others? Do some of them overlap or cluster together? For Gordon Allport, one of the most influential psychologists in the empirical study of personality, the answer to both questions was yes. Allport (1961) recognized that not all traits have equal weight and significance in people’s lives. Most of us, he said, have five to ten *central traits* that reflect a characteristic way of behaving, dealing with others, and reacting to new situations. For instance, some people see the world as a hostile, dangerous place, whereas others see it as a place for

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The four basic personality types

fun and frolic. *Secondary traits*, in contrast, are more changeable aspects of personality, such as music preferences, habits, casual opinions, and the like.

Raymond B. Cattell (1973) advanced the study of this issue by applying a statistical method called **factor analysis**. Performing a factor analysis is like adding water to flour: It causes the material to clump up into little balls. When applied to traits, this procedure identifies clusters of correlated items that seem to be measuring some common, underlying factor. Today, hundreds of factor-analytic studies support the existence of a cluster of five central “robust factors,” known informally as the *Big Five* (McCrae & Costa, 2008; McCrae et al., 2005; Paunonen, 2003; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008):

**1 Extroversion versus introversion** describes the extent to which people are outgoing or shy. It includes such traits as being sociable or reclusive, adventurous or cautious, socially dominant or more passive, eager to be in the limelight or inclined to stay in the shadows.

**2 Neuroticism (negative emotionality) versus emotional stability** describes the extent to which a person suffers from such traits as anxiety, an inability to control impulses, and a tendency to feel negative emotions such as anger, guilt, contempt, and resentment. Neurotic individuals are worriers, complainers, and defeatists, even when they have no major problems. They are always ready to see the sour side of life and none of its sweetness.

**3 Agreeableness versus antagonism** describes the extent to which people are good-natured or irritable, cooperative or abrasive, secure or suspicious and jealous. It reflects the tendency to have friendly relationships or hostile ones.

**4 Conscientiousness versus impulsiveness** describes the degree to which people are responsible or undependable, persevering or quick to give up, steadfast or fickle, tidy or careless, self-disciplined or impulsive.

**5 Openness to experience versus resistance to new experience** describes the extent to which people are curious, imaginative, questioning, and creative or conforming, unimaginative, predictable, and uncomfortable with novelty.

Culture can affect the prominence of these personality factors and how they are reflected in language (Toomela, 2003). Nonetheless, in spite of some semantic and cultural variations, the Big Five have emerged as distinct, central personality dimensions throughout the world, in countries as



diverse as Britain, Canada, the Czech Republic, China, Ethiopia, Turkey, the Netherlands, Japan, Spain, the Philippines, Germany, Portugal, Israel, Korea, Russia, and Australia (Digman & Shmelyov, 1996; Katigbak et al., 2002; McCrae et al., 2005; Somer & Goldberg, 1999). One monumental research venture gathered data from thousands of people across 50 cultures. In this massive project as in many smaller ones, the five personality factors emerged whether people were asked for self-reports or were assessed by others (McCrae et al., 2005; Terracciano & McCrae, 2006). **Explore**

Although the Big Five are quite stable over a lifetime, especially once a person hits 30, there are some exceptions. In later adulthood, people tend to become less extroverted and less open to new experiences (see Figure 2.1), and, with the right experiences, many young people eventually become more self-confident and emotionally stable (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008). There is also some good news for crabby neurotics, especially young ones. A survey of thousands of people in 10 countries, and a meta-analysis of 92 longitudinal studies, found that although young people, ages 16 to 21, are the most neurotic (emotionally negative) and the least agreeable and conscientious, people tend to become more agreeable and conscientious and less negative between ages 30 and 40 (Costa et al., 1999; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Because these changes have been found in many different countries, they may reflect the universality of adult experiences, such as work and family responsibilities, or common maturational changes over the life span.

The Big Five do not provide a complete picture of personality, of course. Clinical psychologists note that important traits involved in mental disorders are missing, such as psychopathy (lack of remorse and empathy), self-absorption, and obsessiveness

Where do you think this man would score on extroversion?

**Explore**  
the **Five Factor Model** on  
[myspsychlab.com](http://myspsychlab.com)

**factor analysis** A statistical method for analyzing the intercorrelations among various measures or test scores; clusters of measures or scores that are highly correlated are assumed to measure the same underlying trait, ability, or attitude (factor).

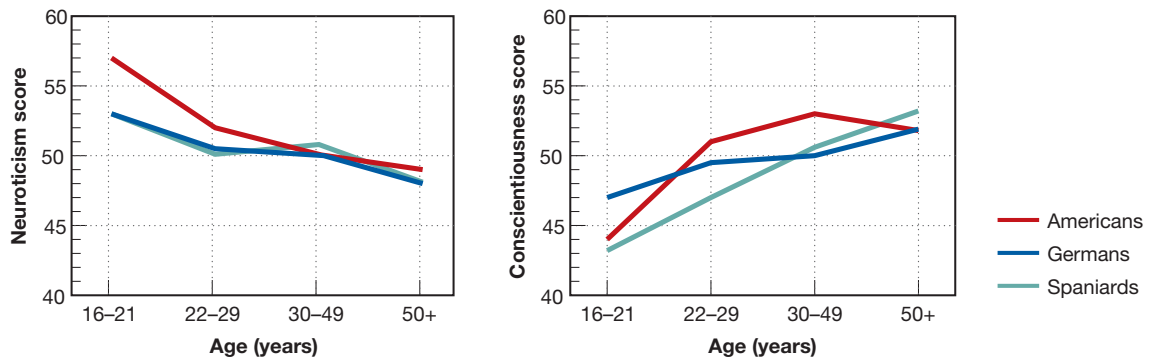


FIGURE 2.1

**Consistency and Change in Personality over the Life Span**

Although the Big Five traits are fairly stable, changes do occur over the life span. As you can see, neuroticism (negative emotionality) is highest among young adults and then declines, whereas conscientiousness is lowest among young adults and then steadily increases (Costa et al., 1999).

(Westen & Shedler, 1999). Personality researchers note that other important traits are missing, such as religiosity, dishonesty, humorousness, independence, and conventionality (Abrahamson, Baker, &

Caspi, 2002; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001). But most researchers today agree that the Big Five do lie at the core of key personality variations among individuals, and not only human individuals, either.

**Get Involved! Rate your Traits**

For each of the ten items that follow, write a number from 1 to 7 indicating the extent to which you see that trait as being characteristic of you, where 1 = “I *disagree* strongly that this trait describes me” to 7 = “I *agree* strongly that this trait describes me.” Use the midpoint, 4, if you neither agree nor disagree that the trait describes you. (This self-test was designed by Samuel D. Gosling.)

1. \_\_\_ Extroverted, enthusiastic
2. \_\_\_ Critical, quarrelsome
3. \_\_\_ Dependable, self-disciplined
4. \_\_\_ Anxious, easily upset
5. \_\_\_ Open to new experiences, complex
6. \_\_\_ Reserved, quiet
7. \_\_\_ Sympathetic, warm
8. \_\_\_ Disorganized, careless
9. \_\_\_ Calm, emotionally stable
10. \_\_\_ Conventional, uncreative

To score yourself on the Big Five traits, use this key:

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Extroversion:      | High on question 1, low on question 6  |
| Neuroticism:       | High on question 4, low on question 9  |
| Agreeableness:     | High on question 7, low on question 2  |
| Conscientiousness: | High on question 3, low on question 8  |
| Openness:          | High on question 5, low on question 10 |

Now ask a friend or relative to rate you on each of the ten items. How closely does that rating match your own? If there is a discrepancy, what might be the reason for it?

## Quick Quiz

Show that you have the trait of conscientiousness by taking this quiz.

1. What is the advantage of inventories over projective tests in measuring personality?
2. Raymond Cattell advanced the study of personality by (a) developing case-study analysis, (b) using factor analysis, (c) devising the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.
3. Which of the following are *not* among the Big Five personality factors? (a) introversion, (b) agreeableness, (c) psychoticism, (d) openness to experience, (e) intelligence, (f) neuroticism, (g) conscientiousness.
4. Which one of the Big Five typically decreases by age 40? (a) agreeableness, (b) extroversion, (c) openness to experience, (d) neuroticism.

Answers:

1. In general, they have better reliability and validity. 2. b 3. c, e 4. d

✓ Study and Review on [myspsychlab.com](http://myspsychlab.com)



## YOU are about to learn...

- whether animals have “personalities” just as people do.
- the extent to which genes influence temperamental and personality differences among people.
- why people who have highly heritable personality traits are not necessarily stuck with them forever.

## Genetic Influences on Personality

A mother we know was describing her two children: “My daughter has always been difficult, intense, and testy,” she said, “but my son is the opposite, placid and good-natured. They came out of the womb that way.” Was this mother right? Is it possible to be born touchy or good-natured? What aspects of personality might have an inherited component?

For centuries, efforts to understand why people differ from one another have swung from biological answers (“It’s in their nature; they are born that way”) to learning and environmental ones (“It’s all a matter of nurture—how they are raised and the experiences they have”). The *nature–nurture* debate has been one of the longest-running either–or arguments in philosophy and psychology. Edward L. Thorndike (1903), one of the leading psychologists of the early 1900s, staked out the nature position by claiming that “in the actual race of life . . . the chief determining factor is heredity.” But in stirring words that became famous, his contemporary, behaviorist John B. Watson (1925), insisted that experience could

write virtually any message on the blank slate of human nature:

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and yes, even beggarman and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors.

Today, almost all psychologists would say the nature–nurture debate is over. The answer is both. Biology and experience, genes and environment, are interacting influences, each shaping the other over time (Johnson et al., 2009). In this section and the next, we will examine the interlaced influences of nature and nurture on personality.

How can heredity affect personality? **Genes**, the basic units of heredity, are made up of elements of *DNA* (deoxyribonucleic acid). These elements form chemical codes for the synthesis of proteins. Proteins, in turn, affect virtually every aspect of the body, from its structure to the chemicals that keep it running. Genes can affect the behaviors we call “personality” through their effects on an infant’s developing brain and nervous system. They can also affect the functioning of an adult’s brain and nervous system, directly and also indirectly, by switching other genes on or off. Interestingly, 98.8 percent of our total DNA, called *noncoding DNA*, lies *outside* the genes. This DNA used to be called “junk DNA” as scientists believed it was not very important, but this belief is changing fast. Noncoding DNA may also affect the expression (activity) of

**genes** The functional units of heredity; they are composed of DNA and specify the structure of proteins.

### temperaments

Physiological dispositions to respond to the environment in certain ways; they are present in infancy and are assumed to be innate.

key genes, and mutations in it may be associated with common diseases. This exciting line of research means that genes do not provide a static blueprint for development. Rather, our genetic heritage is more like a changing network of interlinked influences, including environmental ones, affecting us throughout life (Feinberg, 2008).

Researchers measure genetic contributions to personality in three ways: by studying personality traits in other species, by studying the temperaments of human infants and children, and by doing heritability studies of twins and adopted individuals. You will be hearing lots more about genetic discoveries in the coming years, so it is important to understand what they mean and don't mean.

## Puppies and Personalities

In 1993, scientists published the first academic article that referred to personality in a nonhuman species. Can you guess what species it was? Dogs? Horses? No, it was the humble, squishy octopus! When the researchers dropped a crab into a tank of octopuses and had independent observers note what happened, some of the creatures would aggressively grab that dinner right away; others seemed more passive and waited for the crab to swim near them; and some waited and attacked the crab when no one was watching (Mather & Anderson, 1993). Apparently, you don't have to be a person to have a personality. You don't even have to be a primate.

In recent years, scientists have been drawing on research in physiology, genetics, ecology, and ethology (the study of animals in their natural habitats) to better understand the evolutionary and biological underpinnings of human personality traits. These investigators argue that just as it has been evolutionarily beneficial for human beings to vary

in their ways of responding to the world and those around them, so it has been for animals. It would be good for a species if some of its members were bold or impulsive enough to risk life and limb to confront a stranger or to experiment with a new food, and if other members were more cautious.

In an imaginative set of studies, Samuel D. Gosling and his colleagues (2003) recruited dog owners and their dogs in a local park. In their first study, the owners provided personality assessments of their dogs and filled out the same personality inventory for themselves. The owners then designated another person who knew them and their dogs, and who could judge the personalities of both. In a second study, the owners brought their dogs to an enclosed section of the park where three independent observers rated the dogs, so the researchers could compare the owners' judgments of their dogs' personalities with the observers' ratings. The dog owners, their friends, and the neutral observers all agreed strongly in their ratings of the dogs' personalities along four of the Big Five dimensions: extroversion, agreeableness, emotional reactivity (neuroticism), and openness to experience.

To date, Gosling and his colleagues have found evidence of most of the Big Five factors in 64 different species, including the squishy squid, bears, dogs, pigs, hyenas, goats, cats, and of course primates; all have distinctive, characteristic ways of behaving that make them different from their fellows (Weinstein, Capitanio, & Gosling, 2008). These findings point to the evolutionary importance of the Big Five and their biological basis. So when you hear your dog- or horse- or cat-crazy friend say, "Pluto is such a shy and nervous guy, whereas Pepper is outgoing and sociable," your friend is probably being a pretty accurate observer.

## HereditY and Temperament

Let's turn now to human personalities. Even in the first weeks after birth, human babies differ in activity level, mood, responsiveness, heart rate, and attention span (Fox et al., 2005a). Some are irritable and cranky; others are placid and calm. Some will cuddle up in an adult's arms and snuggle; others squirm and fidget, as if they cannot stand being held. Some smile easily; others fuss and cry.

These differences appear even when you control for possible prenatal influences, such as the mother's nutrition, drug use, or problems with the pregnancy. The reason is that babies are born with genetically determined **temperaments**, dispositions to respond to the environment in certain ways (Clark & Watson, 2008). Temperaments include



Family portraits of dogs, as of people, often reveal different personalities: Someone is bored, someone is cuddling up next to a pal, and someone is really grumpy about being there at all.



Extreme shyness and fear of new situations tend to be biologically based, stable aspects of temperament, both in human beings and in monkeys. On the right, a timid infant rhesus monkey cowers behind a friend in the presence of an outgoing stranger.

*reactivity* (how excitable, arousable, or responsive a baby is), *soothability* (how easily the baby is calmed when upset), and positive and negative emotionality. Temperaments are quite stable over time and are the clay out of which later personality traits are molded (Clark & Watson, 2008; Else-Quest et al., 2006; Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans, 2000).

For example, highly reactive infants, even at 4 months of age, are excitable, nervous, and fearful; they overreact to any little thing, even a colorful picture placed in front of them. As toddlers, they tend to be wary and fearful of new things—toys that make noise, odd-looking robots—even when their moms are right there with them. At 5 years, many of these children are still timid and uncomfortable in new situations and with new people (Hill-Soderlund & Braungart-Rieker, 2008). At 7 years, many still have symptoms of anxiety. They are afraid of being kidnapped, they need to sleep with the light on, and they are afraid of sleeping in an unfamiliar house, even if they have never experienced any sort of trauma.

In contrast, nonreactive infants take things easy. They lie there without fussing; they rarely cry; they babble happily. As toddlers, they are outgoing and curious about new toys and events. They continue to be easygoing and extroverted throughout childhood (Fox et al., 2005b; Kagan, 1997). Children at these two extremes differ physiologically too. During mildly stressful tasks, reactive children are more likely than nonreactive children to have increased heart rates, heightened brain activity, and high levels of stress hormones.

You can see how biologically based temperaments might form the basis of the later personality traits we call extroversion, agreeableness, or neuroticism.

## Hereditability and Traits

A third way to study genetic contributions to personality is to estimate the **heritability** of specific traits within groups of children or adults. This method is central to the field of **behavioral genetics**, which attempts to identify the genetic bases of individual differences in personality, behavior, and mental ability. Within any group, individuals will vary in shyness, cheerfulness, impulsiveness, or any other quality. Heritability gives us a statistical estimate of the *proportion of the total variation in a trait that is attributable to genetic variation within a group*. Because the heritability of a trait is expressed as a proportion (such as .60 or 60/100), the maximum value it can have is 1.0 (which would mean that 100 percent of the variation in the trait was due to genetic variation).

We know that heritability is a tough concept to understand at first, so here's an example. Suppose that your entire psychology class takes a test of shyness, and you compute an average shyness score for the group. Some students will have scores close to the average, whereas others will have scores that are much higher or lower than the average. Heritability gives you an estimate of the extent to which your class's variation in shyness is due to genetic differences among the students who took the test. Note that this estimate applies only to the group as a whole. It does not tell you anything about the impact of genetics on any *particular* individual's shyness or extroversion. You might be shy primarily because of your genes, but your friend might be shy because of an embarrassing experience she had in a school play at the age of 8.

One obvious example of a highly heritable trait is height: Within a group of equally well-nourished

**heritability** A statistical estimate of the proportion of the total variance in some trait that is attributable to genetic differences among individuals within a group.

**behavioral genetics** An interdisciplinary field of study concerned with the genetic bases of individual differences in behavior and personality.



"THERE'S ANOTHER HEREDITARY DISEASE THAT RUNS IN THE ROYAL FAMILY. YOUR GRANDFATHER WAS A STUBBORN FOOL, YOUR FATHER WAS A STUBBORN FOOL, AND YOU ARE A STUBBORN FOOL."

individuals, most of the variation among them will be accounted for by their genetic differences. In contrast, table manners have low heritability because most variation among individuals is accounted for by differences in upbringing. Even highly heritable traits, however, can be modified by the environment. Although height is about 90 percent heritable, malnourished children may not grow up to be as tall as they would have if given sufficient food. Conversely, if children eat an extremely nutritious diet, they may grow up to be taller than anyone thought they could. North and South Koreans share the same genetic background, yet they currently differ in average height by fully 6 inches (Schwekendiek, 2008).

**Computing Heritability** Scientists have no way to estimate the heritability of a trait or behavior directly, so they must infer it by studying people whose degree of genetic similarity is known. You might think that the simplest approach would be to compare blood relatives within families; everyone knows of families that are famous for some talent or personality trait. But the fact that a trait runs in a family doesn't tell us much, because close relatives usually share environments as well as genes. If Carlo's parents and siblings all love lasagna, that doesn't mean a taste for lasagna is heritable! The same applies if everyone in Carlo's family is shy, moody, or loves music.

A better approach is to study adopted children (e.g., Loehlin, Horn, & Willerman, 1996; Plomin & DeFries, 1985). Such children share half of their genes with each birth parent, but they grow up in a different environment, apart from their birth parents. On the other hand, they share an environment with their adoptive parents and siblings, but not their genes. Researchers can compare correlations between the children's traits and those of their biological and adoptive relatives and can then use the results to estimate heritability.

Another approach is to compare identical twins with fraternal twins. *Identical twins* develop when a fertilized egg divides into two parts that then become separate embryos. Because the twins come from the same fertilized egg, scientists have always assumed that they share all their genes. Some surprising recent work, however, suggests that duplicated or missing blocks of DNA can exist in one identical twin but not the other (Bruder et al., 2008). (Identical twins may also differ slightly at birth because of different prenatal experiences, such as differences in the blood supply to the two fetuses or other chance factors.) Nonetheless, identical twins are far more genetically alike than are other siblings.

In contrast, *fraternal twins* develop when a woman's ovaries release two eggs instead of one and each egg is fertilized by a different sperm. Fraternal twins are wombmates, but they are no more alike genetically than any other two siblings (that is, they share, on average, only half their genes), and they may be of different sexes.

Behavioral geneticists can estimate the heritability of a trait by comparing groups of same-sex fraternal twins with groups of identical twins. The assumption is that if identical twins are more alike than fraternal twins, then the increased similarity must be due to genetic influences. Perhaps, however, people do not treat identical and fraternal twins the same way. To avoid this problem, investigators have studied identical twins who were separated early in life and were reared apart. (Until relatively recently, adoption policies and attitudes toward births out of wedlock permitted such separations to occur.) In theory, separated identical twins share all their genes but not their environments. Any similarities between them should therefore be primarily genetic and should permit a direct estimate of heritability.

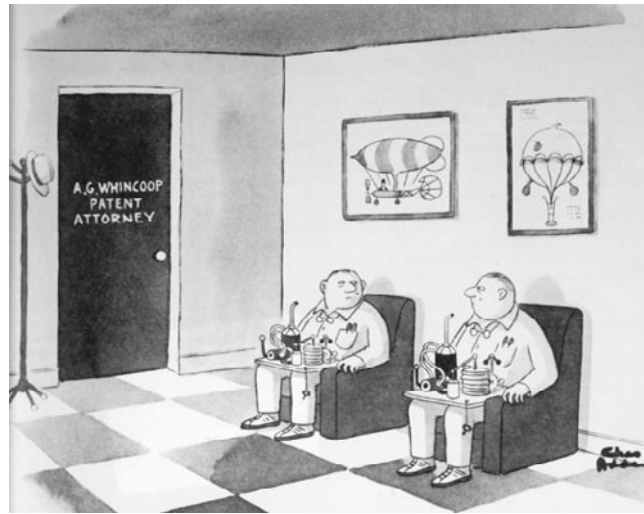
There is still another problem, though. Some psychologists argue that the range of environments in adoptive homes, including those of separated twins, is quite narrow, because most people who adopt children are screened to be sure they have a

pretty secure income, are psychologically stable, and so forth. As a result, there is not much variation in adopted children's environments, and this fact spuriously inflates the variation due to heredity (Nisbett, 2009). When environments are similar, any differences among individuals appear to be heritable. As soon as environments differ, the proportion of genetic influence on individuals wanes (Johnson et al., 2009).

### How Heritable Are Personality Traits?


Nonetheless, findings from adoption and twin studies—representing some 800,000 pairs of twins and more than 50 different study samples—have provided compelling support for a genetic contribution to personality (Johnson et al., 2009). Identical twins reared apart will often have unnerving similarities in gestures, mannerisms, and moods; indeed, their personalities often seem as similar as their physical features. If one twin tends to be optimistic, glum, or excitable, the other will probably be that way too (Braungert et al., 1992; Plomin et al., 2001).


Behavioral-genetic findings have produced remarkably consistent results on the heritability of personality traits. For the Big Five and for many other traits, from aggressiveness to overall happiness, heritability ranges from .20 to .50 (Bouchard,

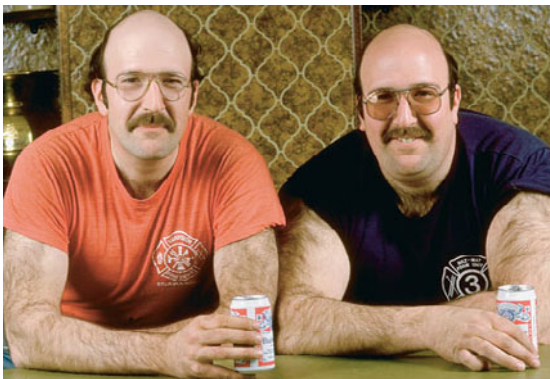


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Separated at birth, the Mallifert twins meet accidentally.

1997a; Jang et al., 1998; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Waller et al., 1990; Weiss, Bates, & Luciano, 2008). This means that within a group of people, up to 50 percent of the variation in such traits is attributable to genetic differences among the individuals in the group. These findings have been replicated in many countries.  **Watch**

 **Watch the Video on Twins Separated at Birth, Reunited on [myspsychlab.com](http://myspsychlab.com)**



Identical twins Gerald Levey (left) and Mark Newman were separated at birth and raised in different cities. When they were reunited at age 31, they discovered some astounding similarities. Both were volunteer firefighters, wore mustaches, and were unmarried. Both liked to hunt, watch old John Wayne movies, and eat Chinese food. They drank the same brand of beer, held the can with the little finger curled around it, and crushed the can when it was empty. It's tempting to conclude that all of these similarities are due to heredity, but we should also consider other explanations: Some could result from shared environmental factors such as social class and upbringing and some could be due merely to chance. For any given set of twins, we can never know for sure.

## Evaluating Genetic Theories

Psychologists hope that one intelligent use of behavioral-genetic findings will be to help people become more accepting of themselves and their children. Although we can all learn to make improvements and modifications to our personalities, most of us probably will never be able to transform our personalities completely because of our genetic dispositions and temperaments.

Yet we should not oversimplify by assuming that “It’s all in our genes!” A genetic *predisposition* does not necessarily imply genetic *inevitability*. A person might have genes that predispose him or her to depression, but without certain environmental stresses or circumstances, the person will probably never become depressed. When people oversimplify, they mistakenly assume that personality problems that have a genetic component are permanent—say, that someone is “born to be bad” or to be a miserable grump forever. That belief can affect their behavior and actually make matters worse (Dweck, 2008). Oversimplification can also lead people to incorrectly assume that if a problem, such as depression

**Thinking Critically about Genetic “Inevitability”**





or shyness, has a genetic contribution, it will respond only to medication, so there is no point trying other interventions. We discuss what is wrong with this assumption in Chapter 12.

It seems that nearly every year brings another report about some gene that supposedly explains a human trait. A few years back, newspapers even announced the discovery of a “worry gene.” Don’t worry about it! Most human traits, even such seemingly straightforward ones as height and eye color, are influenced by more than one gene. Psychological traits are especially likely to depend on multiple genes, with each one accounting for just a small

part of the variance among people. Conversely, any single gene is apt to influence many different behaviors. So at this point, all announcements of a “gene for this” or a “gene for that” should be viewed with extreme caution.

Robert Plomin (1989), a leading behavioral geneticist, once observed, “The wave of acceptance of genetic influence on behavior is growing into a tidal wave that threatens to engulf the second message of this research: These same data provide the best available evidence for the importance of environmental influences.” Let us now see what some of those influences might be.

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## Quick Quiz

We hope you have a few quiz-taking genes.

1. What three broad lines of research support the hypothesis that personality differences are due in part to genetic differences?
2. In behavioral-genetic studies, the heritability of personality traits, including the Big Five, is typically about (a) .50, (b) .90, (c) .10 to .20, (d) zero.
3. Researchers announce that their study of identical twins has revealed a high heritability for divorce (McGue & Lykken, 1992). Given that our prehistoric ancestors hadn’t yet invented marriage, let alone divorce, what on earth could this finding mean?

Answers:

1. Research on animal personalities, human temperaments, and the heritability of traits. 2. a. 3. There obviously cannot be a “divorce gene,” but perhaps personality factors with a heritable component, such as neuroticism and hostility, make it harder for a person to get along with a partner and thereby increase the likelihood of getting divorced (Rogge et al., 2006).



## YOU are about to learn...

- how social-cognitive theory accounts for apparent changes in personality across situations.
- the extent to which parents can—and can’t—influence their children’s personalities.
- how your peers shape certain aspects of your personality and suppress others.

## Environmental Influences on Personality

The environment may be half of the influence on variations in personality, but what *is* the environment, exactly? In this section, we will consider the relative influence of three aspects of the environment: the particular situations you find yourself in, how your parents treat you, and who your peers are.

## Situations and Social Learning

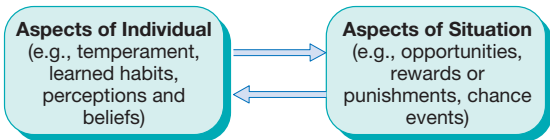
The very definition of a trait is that it is consistent across situations. But people often behave one way with their parents and a different way with their friends, one way at home and a different way in other situations. In behavioral learning terms, the reason for people’s inconsistency is that different behaviors are rewarded, punished, or ignored in different contexts. (In Chapter 9, we will examine in greater depth the important principles of behavioral theory.) You are likely to be more extroverted in an audience of screaming, cheering *American Idol* fans than at home with relatives who would regard such noisy displays with alarm and condemnation. Because of such variations in behavior across situations, strict behaviorists think it does not even make sense to talk about personality. In their view, people don’t have traits; they simply show certain behavior patterns in some situations and not others.

However, a major contemporary learning view, **social-cognitive learning theory**, holds that

**social-cognitive learning theory** A major contemporary learning view of personality, which holds that personality traits result from a person’s learning history and his or her expectations, beliefs, perceptions of events, and other cognitions.

personality traits result, in part, from your learning history and your resulting expectations and beliefs. A child who studies hard and gets good grades, attention from teachers, admiration from friends, and praise from parents will come to expect that hard work in other situations will also pay off. That child will become, in terms of personality traits, “ambitious” and “industrious.” A child who studies hard and gets poor grades, is ignored by teachers and parents, and is rejected by friends for being a grind will come to expect that working hard isn’t worth it. That child will become (in the view of others) “unambitious” or “unmotivated.”

Today, most personality researchers recognize that people can have a core set of stable traits *and* that their behavior can vary across situations (Fleeson, 2004). There is a continual interaction between your particular qualities and the situation you are in. Your temperaments, habits, and beliefs influence how you respond to others, whom you hang out with, and the situations you seek (Bandura, 2001; Cervone & Shoda, 1999; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). In turn, the situation influences your behavior and beliefs, rewarding some behaviors and extinguishing others. In social-cognitive learning theory, this process is called **reciprocal determinism**.



The two-way process of reciprocal determinism (as opposed to the one-way determinism of “genes determine everything” or “everything is learned”) helps answer a question asked by everyone who has a sibling: What makes children who grow up in the same family so different, apart from their genes? The answer seems to be an assortment of experiences that affect each child differently, chance events that cannot be predicted, situations that children find themselves in, and peer groups that the children belong to (Harris, 2006; Plomin, Asbury, & Dunn, 2001; Rutter et al., 2001). Behavioral geneticists refer to these unique and chance experiences that are not shared with other family members as the **nonshared environment**: for example, being in Mrs. Miller’s class in the fourth grade (which might inspire you to become a scientist), winning the lead in the school play (which might push you toward an



Is Susan Boyle, a plain woman who stunned the world with her great voice, a shy, modest introvert or a self-confident performer? Social-cognitive learning theory holds that genetic dispositions and personality traits, such as Boyle’s remarkable skill as a singer, cause people to choose some situations over others. But situations, such as Boyle’s appearance on “Britain’s Got Talent,” in turn influence which aspects of their personalities people express.

acting career), or being bullied at school (which might have caused you to see yourself as weak and powerless). All of these experiences work reciprocally with your own interpretation of them, your temperament, and your perceptions (did Mrs. Miller’s class excite you or bore you?).

Keeping the concept of reciprocal determinism in mind, let us take a look at two of the most powerful environmental influences in people’s lives: their parents and their friends.

## Parental Influence—and Its Limits

If you check out parenting books online or in a bookstore, you will find that in spite of the zillion different kinds of advice they offer, they share one entrenched belief: Parental child-rearing practices are the strongest influence, maybe even the *sole* influence, on children’s personality development. For many decades, few psychologists thought to question this assumption, and many still accept it. Yet the belief that personality is primarily determined by how parents treat their children has begun to crumble under the weight of three kinds of evidence (Harris, 2006, 2009):

**Thinking Critically about the Influence of Parents**



**1 The shared environment of the home has little if any influence on personality.** In behavioral-genetic research, the “shared environment” includes the family you grew up with and the

**reciprocal determinism** In social-cognitive theories, the two-way interaction between aspects of the environment and aspects of the individual in the shaping of personality traits.

**nonshared environment** Unique aspects of a person’s environment and experience that are not shared with family members.

experiences and background you shared with your siblings and parents. If these had as powerful an influence as commonly assumed, then studies should find a strong correlation between the personality traits of adopted children and those of their adoptive parents. In fact, the correlation is weak to nonexistent, indicating that the influence of child-rearing practices and family life is small compared to the influence of genetics (Cohen, 1999; Plomin, Asbury, & Dunn, 2001).

**2 Few parents have a single child-rearing style that is consistent over time and that they use with all their children.** Developmental psychologists have tried for many years to identify the effects of specific child-rearing practices on children's personality traits. The problem is that parents are inconsistent from day to day and over the years. Their child-rearing practices vary, depending on their own stresses, moods, and marital satisfaction (Holden & Miller, 1999). As one child we know said to her exasperated mother, "Why are you so mean to me today, Mommy? I'm this naughty every day." Moreover, parents tend to adjust their methods of child rearing according to the temperament of the child; they are often more lenient with easygoing children and more punitive with difficult ones.

**3 Even when parents try to be consistent in the way they treat their children, there may be little relation between what they do and how the children turn out.** Some children of troubled and abusive parents are resilient and do not suffer lasting emotional damage, as we discuss in Chapter 3. Conversely, some children of the kindest and most nurturing parents succumb to drugs, mental illness, or gangs.

Of course, parents do influence their children in lots of ways that are unrelated to the child's personality. They contribute to their children's religious beliefs, intellectual and occupational interests, motivation to succeed, skills, values, and adherence to traditional or modern notions of masculinity and femininity (Beer, Arnold, & Loehlin, 1998; Krueger, Hicks, & McGue, 2001). Above all, what parents do profoundly affects the quality of

their relationship with their children—whether their children feel loved, secure, and valued or humiliated, frightened, and worthless (Harris, 2009).

Parents also have some influence even on traits in their children that are highly heritable. In one longitudinal study that followed children from age 3 to age 21, kids who were impulsive, uncontrollable, and aggressive at age 3 were far more likely than calmer children to grow up to be impulsive, unreliable, and antisocial and more likely to commit crimes (Caspi, 2000). Early temperament was a strong and consistent predictor of these later personality traits. But not *every* child came out the same way. What protected some of those at risk, and helped them move in a healthier direction, was having parents who made sure they stayed in school, supervised them closely, and gave them consistent discipline.

Nevertheless, it is clear that, in general, parents have less influence on a child's personality than many people think. Because of reciprocal determinism, the relationship runs in both directions, with parents and children continually influencing one another. Moreover, as soon as children leave home, starting in preschool, parental influence on children's behavior *outside* the home begins to wane. The nonshared environment—peers, chance events, and circumstances—takes over.

## The Power of Peers

When two psychologists surveyed 275 freshmen at Cornell University, they found that most of them had secret lives and private selves that they never revealed to their parents (Garbarino & Bedard, 2001). On Facebook too, many teenagers unself-consciously report having committed crimes, drinking, doing drugs, cheating in school, sexting, and having sex, all without their parents having a clue. (They assume, incorrectly, that what they reveal is "private" and read only by their friends.) This phenomenon of showing one facet of your personality to your parents and an entirely different one to your peers becomes especially apparent in adolescence.

Children, like adults, live in two environments: their homes and their world outside the home. At

## Get Involved! **Situation and Self**

Are you a different person when you are alone, with your parents, hanging out with friends, in class, or at a party? If so, in what ways? Do you have a secret self that you do not show to your family? Consider the Big Five factors, or any other personality traits that are important to you, as you answer these questions.

home, children learn how their parents want them to behave and what they can get away with; as soon as they go to school, however, they conform to the dress, habits, language, and rules of their peers. Most adults can remember how terrible they felt when their classmates laughed at them for pronouncing a word “the wrong way” or doing something “stupid” (that is, not what the rest of the kids were doing), and many recall the pain of being excluded. To avoid the controlling forces of being laughed at or rejected, most children will do what they can to conform to the norms and rules of their immediate peer group (Harris, 2009). Children who were law-abiding in the fifth grade may start breaking the law in high school, if that is what it takes—or what they think it takes—to win the respect of their peers.

It has been difficult to tease apart the effects of parents and peers because parents usually try to arrange things so that their children’s environments duplicate their own values and customs. To see which has the stronger influence on personality and behavior, therefore, we must look at situations in which the peer group’s values clash with the parents’ values. For example, when parents value academic achievement and their child’s peers think that success in school is only for sellouts or geeks, whose view wins? The answer, typically, is peers (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Harris, 2009). Conversely, children whose parents gave them no encouragement or motivation to succeed may find themselves with peers who are working like mad to get into college, and start studying hard themselves.

Thus, peers play a tremendous role in shaping our personality traits and behavior, causing us to emphasize some attributes or abilities and downplay



Have you ever been in this situation, as the excluded student or the one doing the excluding? Being rejected by peers is one of the most painful experiences that adolescents report having.

others. Of course, as the theory of reciprocal determinism would predict, our temperaments and dispositions also cause us to select particular peer groups (if they are available) instead of others, and our temperaments influence how we behave within the group. But once we are among peers, most of us go along with them, molding facets of our personalities to the pressures of the group.

In sum, core personality traits may stem from genetic dispositions, but they are profoundly shaped by learning, peers, situations, experience, and, as we will see next, the largest environment of all: the culture.

## Quick Quiz

**Do your peers take these quizzes? Does the answer determine whether you will?**

1. What three lines of evidence have challenged the belief that parents are the major influence on their children’s personalities?
2. Which contributes most to the variation among siblings in their personality traits: (a) the unique experiences they have that are not shared with their families, (b) the family environment that all of them share, or (c) the way their parents treat them?
3. Eight-year-old Dwayne is pretty shy at home, where he is the middle of six children, but extroverted at school, where he is the leader of his friends. What might be the reason for his apparent personality change?

**Answers:**

1. The shared family environment has little if any influence on personality; few parents have a consistent child-rearing style; and even when parents try to be consistent in the way they treat their children, there may be little relation between what they do and how the children turn out. 2. a 3. Peer groups have a powerful influence on which personality traits are encouraged and expressed, and peers can even override the child’s situation at home.

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## YOU are about to learn...

- how culture influences your personality, and even whether you think you have a stable one.
- why men in the South and West are more likely to get angry when insulted than other American men are.
- how to appreciate cultural influences on personality without stereotyping.

## Cultural Influences on Personality

If you get an invitation to come to a party at 7 P.M., what time are you actually likely to get there? If someone gives you the finger or calls you a rude name, are you more likely to become furious or laugh it off? Most Western psychologists regard conscientiousness about time and quickness to anger as personality traits that result partly from genetic dispositions and partly from experience. But culture also has a profound effect on people's behavior, attitudes, and the traits they value or disdain. A **culture** is a program of shared rules that govern the behavior of members of a community or society, and a set of values and beliefs shared by most members of that community and passed from one generation to another. It provides countless rules that govern our actions and shape our beliefs (see Chapter 10). And it is just as powerful an influence on personality and behavior as any biological process.

**culture** A program of shared rules that govern the behavior of members of a community or society and a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes shared by most members of that community.

### individualist cultures

Cultures in which the self is regarded as autonomous, and individual goals and wishes are prized above duty and relations with others.

### collectivist cultures

Cultures in which the self is regarded as embedded in relationships, and harmony with one's group is prized above individual goals and wishes.

## Culture, Values, and Traits

Quick! Answer this question: Who are you?

Your answer will be influenced by your cultural background, and particularly by whether your culture emphasizes individualism or community



Individualistic Americans exercise by running, walking, bicycling, and skating, all in different directions and wearing different clothes. Collectivist Japanese employees at their hiring ceremony exercise in identical fashion.

(Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1996, 2007). In **individualist cultures**, the independence of the individual often takes precedence over the needs of the group, and the self is often defined as a collection of personality traits ("I am outgoing, agreeable, and ambitious") or in occupational terms ("I am a psychologist"). In **collectivist cultures**, group harmony often takes precedence over the wishes of the individual, and the self is defined in the context of relationships and the community ("I am the son of a farmer, descended from three generations of storytellers on my mother's side and five generations of farmers on my father's side."). In one fascinating study that showed how embedded this dimension is in language and how it shapes our thinking, bicultural individuals born in China tended to answer "Who am I?" in terms of their own individual attributes when they were writing in English—but they described themselves in terms of their relations to others when they were writing in Chinese (Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002).

As Table 2.1 shows, individualist and collectivist ways of defining the self influence many aspects of life, including which personality traits we value, how and whether we express emotions, how much we value having relationships or maintaining freedom, and how freely we express angry or aggressive feelings (Forbes et al., 2009; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Individualist and collectivist orientations affect us in countless subtle but powerful ways. For example, in one study, Chinese and American pairs had to play a communication game that required each partner to be able to take the other's perspective. Eye-gaze measures showed that the Chinese players were almost always able to look at the target from their partner's perspective, whereas the American players often completely failed at this task (Wu & Keysar, 2007).



**TABLE 2.1**  
**Some Average Differences between Individualist and Collectivist Cultures**

Members of Individualist Cultures	Members of Collectivist Cultures
Define the self as autonomous, independent of groups.	Define the self as an interdependent part of groups.
Give priority to individual, personal goals.	Give priority to the needs and goals of the group.
Value independence, leadership, achievement, and self-fulfillment.	Value group harmony, duty, obligation, and security.
Give more weight to an individual's attitudes and preferences than to group norms as explanations of behavior.	Give more weight to group norms than to individual attitudes as explanations of behavior.
Attend to the benefits and costs of relationships; if costs exceed advantages, a person is likely to drop a relationship.	Attend to the needs of group members; if a relationship is beneficial to the group but costly to the individual, the individual is likely to stay in the relationship.

Source: Triandis, 1996.

Of course, members of both cultures understand the difference between their own view of things and that of another person's, but the collectivist-oriented Chinese pay closer attention to other people's non-verbal expressions, the better to monitor and modify their own responses. People in these two cultural traditions also tend to develop different cognitive styles: Westerners value analytic ways of thinking, such as focusing on the individual as a cause of an event; Asians value holistic ways of thinking, focusing on contexts and relationships (Varnum et al., 2010).

Because people from collectivist cultures are concerned with adjusting their own behavior depending on the social context, they tend to regard personality and the sense of self as being more flexible than people from individualist cultures do. In a study comparing Japanese and Americans, the Americans reported that their sense of self changes only 5 to 10 percent in different situations, whereas the Japanese said that 90 to 99 percent of their sense of self changes (de Rivera, 1989). For the group-oriented Japanese, it is important to enact *tachiba*, to perform your social roles correctly so that there will be harmony with others. Americans, in contrast, tend to value "being true to your self" and having a "core identity."

**Culture and Traits** When people fail to understand the influence of culture on behavior, they often attribute another person's mysterious or annoying actions to individual personality traits when they are really due to cultural norms. Take cleanliness. How often do you bathe? Once a day, once a week? Do you regard baths as healthy and invigorating or as a disgusting wallow in dirty

water? How often, and where, do you wash your hands—or feet? A person who would seem obsessively clean in one culture might seem an appalling slob in another (Fernea & Fernea, 1994).

Or consider helpfulness. Many years ago, in a classic cross-cultural study of children in Kenya, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Okinawa, the United States, and five other cultures, researchers measured how often children behaved altruistically (offering help, support, or unselfish suggestions) or egoistically (seeking help and attention or wanting to dominate others) (Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). American children were the least altruistic on all measures and the most egoistic. The most altruistic children came from societies in which children are assigned many tasks, such as caring for younger children and gathering and preparing food. These children knew that their work made a genuine contribution to the well-being or economic survival of the family. In cultures that value individual achievement and self-advancement, altruism as a personality trait is not cultivated to the same extent.

Or consider tardiness. Individuals differ in whether

In many cultures, children are expected to contribute to the family's needs, by taking care of their younger siblings or doing important work for the family's income. These experiences encourage helpfulness rather than independence.



they try to be places “on time” or are always late, but cultural norms affect how individuals regard time in the first place. In northern Europe, Canada, the United States, and most other individualistic cultures, time is organized into linear segments in which people do one thing “at a time” (Hall, 1983; Hall & Hall, 1990; Leonard, 2008). The day is divided into appointments, schedules, and routines, and because time is a precious commodity, people don’t like to “waste” time or “spend” too much time on any one activity (hence the popularity of multitasking). In such cultures, being on time is taken as a sign of conscientiousness or thoughtfulness and being late as a sign of indifference or intentional disrespect. Therefore, it is considered the height of rudeness (or high status) to keep someone waiting. But in Mexico, southern Europe, the Middle East, South America, and Africa, time is organized along parallel lines. People do many things at once, and the needs of friends and family supersede mere appointments; they think nothing of waiting for hours or days to see someone. The idea of having to be somewhere “on time,” as if time were more important than a person, is unthinkable.

## Culture and Violence: The Cultivation of Male Aggression

Many people think that men are more violent than women because men have higher levels of testosterone. But if that is so, then why, given that men everywhere have testosterone, do rates of male aggressiveness vary enormously across cultures and throughout history? Why are rates of violence higher in some regions of the United States than others?



To answer these questions, Richard Nisbett (1993) began by examining the historical record. He found that the American South, along with some western regions of the country originally settled by Southerners, have much higher rates of white homicide and other violence than the rest of the country has—but only particular kinds of violence: the use of fists or guns to protect a man’s sense of honor, protect his property, or respond to perceived insults. Nisbett considered various explanations, such as poverty or racial tensions. But when he controlled for regional differences in poverty and the percentage of blacks in the population, by county, “Southernness” remained an independent predictor of homicide. Nisbett also ruled out a history of slavery as an explanation: Regions of the South that had the highest concentrations of slaves in the past have the lowest white homicide rates today.

Nisbett hypothesized that the higher rates of violence in the South derive from economic causes: The higher rates occur in cultures that were originally based on herding, in contrast to cultures based on agriculture. Why would this be so? People who depend economically on agriculture tend to develop and promote cooperative strategies for survival. But people who depend on their herds are extremely vulnerable; their livelihoods can be lost in an instant by the theft of their animals. To reduce the likelihood of theft, Nisbett theorized, herders learn to be hyperalert to any threatening act (real or perceived) and respond to it immediately with force. This would explain why cattle rustling and horse thievery were capital crimes in the Old West, and why Mediterranean and Middle Eastern herding cultures even today place a high value on male aggressiveness. And indeed, when Nisbett looked at



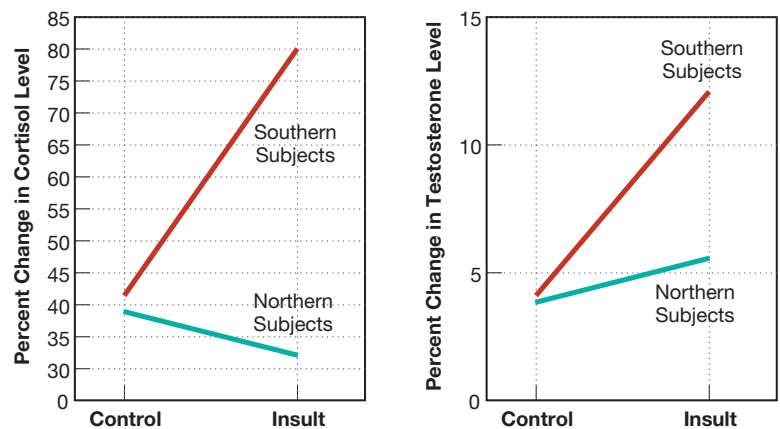
Many people assume that men can’t help being violent because of their biology. Yet, on average, men in agricultural economies are far more cooperative and nonviolent than men in herding economies. Amish farmers have always had very low rates of violence, whereas in the Old West, the cattle-herding cowboy culture was a violent one. (Fortunately, the shoot-out here is a reenactment.)

agricultural practices *within* the South, he found that homicide rates were more than twice as high in the hills and dry plains areas (where herding occurs) as in farming regions.

The emphasis on aggressiveness and vigilance in herding communities, in turn, fosters a *culture of honor*; in which even small disputes and insults put a man's reputation for toughness on the line, requiring him to respond with violence to restore his status (Cohen, 1998). Although the herding economy has become much less important in the South and West, the legacy of its culture of honor remains. These regions have rates of honor-related homicides (such as murder to avenge a perceived insult to one's family) that are five times higher than in other regions of the country. High school students in culture-of-honor states are far more likely than students from other states to bring a weapon to school and to use that weapon: They have more than twice as many school shootings per capita than other states (Brown, Osterman, & Barnes, 2009). Cultures of honor also have higher rates of domestic violence. Both sexes in such cultures believe it is appropriate for a man to physically assault a woman if he believes she is threatening his honor and reputation by being unfaithful or by leaving him (Vandello & Cohen, 2008).

Nisbett and his colleagues also wanted to demonstrate how these external cultural norms literally get under the skin to affect physiology and personality. They brought 173 Northern and Southern male students into their lab and conducted three experiments to measure how these students would respond psychologically and physiologically to being insulted (Cohen et al., 1996). They explained that the experiment would assess the students' performance on various tasks and that the experimenter would be taking saliva samples to measure everyone's blood sugar levels throughout the procedure. Actually, the saliva samples were used to measure levels of cortisol, a hormone associated with high levels of stress, and testosterone, which is associated with dominance and aggression. At one point in the experiment, a confederate of the experimenter, who seemed to be another student participant, bumped into each man and called him an insulting name (a seven-letter word beginning with "a," if you want to know).

As you can see in Figure 2.2, northerners responded calmly to the insult; if anything, they thought it was funny. But many southerners were immediately inflamed and their levels of cortisol and testosterone shot up. They were more likely to feel that their masculinity had been threatened, and they were more likely to retaliate aggressively than northerners were. Southerners and northerners who were not insulted were alike on most measures,



**FIGURE 2.2**  
**Aggression and Cultures of Honor**

As these two graphs show, when young men from northern states were insulted in an experiment, they shrugged it off, thinking it was funny or unimportant. But for young Southern men, levels of the stress hormone cortisol and of testosterone shot up, and they were more likely to retaliate aggressively (Cohen et al., 1996).

with the exception that the southerners were actually more polite and deferential. It appears that they have more obliging manners than northerners—until they are insulted. Then, look out.

Being raised in a culture of honor, however, is only one cause of male aggression. Another cause has to do with the dangers that a culture faces. In cultures in which competition for resources is fierce and survival is difficult, men are “toughened up” and pushed to take risks, even with their lives (Gilmore, 1990). In contrast, among the Ifaluk, the Tahitians, and the people of Sudest Island near New Guinea, where resources are abundant and there are no serious hazards or enemies to worry about, men do not feel they have to prove themselves and they are not raised to be tough and aggressive (Lepowsky, 1994; Levy, 1984). When a society becomes more peaceful, so do its men.

## Evaluating Cultural Approaches

A woman we know, originally from England, married a Lebanese man. They were happy together but had the usual number of marital misunderstandings and squabbles. After a few years, they visited his family home in Lebanon, where she had never been before. “I was stunned,” she told us. “All the things I thought he did because of his *personality* turned out to be because he’s *Lebanese!* Everyone there was just like him!”

Our friend’s reaction illustrates both the contributions and the limitations of cultural studies of personality. She was right in recognizing that some



of her husband's behavior was attributable to his culture; for example, his Lebanese notions of time were very different from her English notions. But she was wrong to infer that the Lebanese are all "just like him": Individuals are affected by their culture, but they vary within it.

Cultural psychologists face the problem of how to describe cultural influences on personality without oversimplifying or stereotyping (Church & Lonner, 1998). As one student of ours put it, "How come when we students speak of 'the' Japanese or 'the' blacks or 'the' whites or 'the' Latinos, it's called stereotyping, and when you do it, it's called 'cross-cultural psychology'?" This question

shows excellent critical thinking! The study of culture does not rest on the assumption that all members of a culture

behave the same way or have the same personality traits. As we have seen, people vary according to their temperaments, beliefs, and learning histories, and this variation occurs within every culture.

Moreover, culture itself may have regional variations within every society. America is an individualist culture overall, but the Deep South, with its history of strong regional identity, is more


collectivist than the rugged, independent West (Vandello & Cohen, 1999). The collectivist Chinese and the Japanese both value group harmony, but the Chinese are more likely to also promote individual achievement, whereas the Japanese are more likely to strive for group consensus (Dien, 1999; Lu, 2008). And African Americans are more likely than white Americans to blend elements of American individualism and African collectivism. That difference may help explain why an individualist philosophy predicts grade point average for white students, but collectivist values are a better predictor for black students (Komarraju & Cokley, 2008). So it is important not to think of average cross-cultural differences, even in a dimension as influential as individualist-collectivist, as rigidly fixed (Oyserman & Lee, 2008).

Finally, in spite of their differences, cultures have many human concerns and needs in common—for love, attachment, family, work, and religious or communal tradition. Nonetheless, cultural rules are what, *on average*, make Swedes different from Bedouins and Cambodians different from Italians. The traits that we value, our sense of self versus community, and our notions of the right way to behave—all key aspects of personality—begin with the culture in which we are raised.

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## Quick Quiz

**At the moment, you live in a culture that values the importance of quizzes.**

1. Cultures whose members regard the "self" as a collection of stable personality traits are (individualist/collectivist).
2. Which cultural practice tends to foster the traits of helpfulness and altruism? (a) Every family member "does his or her own thing," (b) parents insist that children obey, (c) children contribute to the family welfare, (d) parents remind children often about the importance of being helpful.
3. Why, according to one theory, do men in the American South and West respond more aggressively to perceived insults than other American men do?

**Answers:**

1. Individualist 2. c 3. These men come from regions in which economies based on herding gave rise to cultures of honor, requiring males to be vigilant and aggressive toward potential threats.



## YOU are about to learn...

- how humanist approaches to personality differ from psychodynamic and genetic ones.
- the contributions of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Rollo May to understanding our inner lives.
- how psychological scientists evaluate humanist views.

## The Inner Experience

A final way to look at personality starts from each person's own point of view, from the inside out. Biology may hand us temperamental dispositions that benefit or limit us, the environment may deal us some tough or fortunate experiences, our parents may treat us as we would or would not have

wished. But the sum total of our personality is how we, individually, weave all of these elements together into a *life narrative*, the story that each of us develops to explain ourselves and make meaning of our experiences (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 2008; McAdams & Pals, 2006; Sarbin, 1997).

## Humanist Approaches

One such approach to personality comes from **humanist psychology**, which was launched as a movement in the early 1960s. The movement's chief leaders—Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), Carl Rogers (1902–1987), and Rollo May (1909–1994)—argued that it was time to replace psychoanalysis and behaviorism with a “third force” in psychology, one that would draw a fuller picture of human potential and personality. Psychologists who take a humanist approach to personality emphasize our uniquely human capacity to determine our own actions and futures.

**Abraham Maslow** The trouble with psychology, said Maslow (1970, 1971), was that it had ignored many of the positive aspects of life, such as joy, laughter, love, happiness, and *peak experiences*, rare moments of rapture caused by the attainment of excellence or the experience of beauty. The traits that Maslow thought most important to personality were not the Big Five, but rather the qualities of the *self-actualized person*, someone who strives for a life that is meaningful, challenging, and satisfying.

For Maslow, personality development could be viewed as a gradual progression toward self-actualization. Most psychologists, he argued, had a lopsided view of human nature, a result of their emphasis on studying emotional problems and negative traits such as neuroticism or insecurity. As Maslow (1971) wrote, “When you select out for careful study very fine and healthy people, strong people, creative people . . . then you get a very different view of mankind. You are asking how tall can people grow, what can a human being become?”

**Carl Rogers** As a clinician, Carl Rogers (1951, 1961) was interested not only in why some people cannot function well but also in what he called the “fully functioning individual.” How you behave, he said, depends on your subjective reality, not on the external reality around you. Fully functioning people experience *congruence*, or harmony, between the image they project to others and their true feelings and wishes. They are trusting, warm,

and open, rather than defensive or intolerant. Their beliefs about themselves are realistic.

To become fully functioning people, Rogers maintained, we all need **unconditional positive regard**, love and support for the people we are, without strings (conditions) attached. This doesn't mean that Winifred should be allowed to kick her brother when she is angry with him or that Wilbur may throw his dinner out the window because he doesn't like pot roast. In these cases, a parent can correct the child's behavior without withdrawing love from the child. The child can learn that the behavior, not the child, is what is bad. “House rules are ‘no violence,’ children,” is a very different message from “You are horrible children for behaving so badly.”

Unfortunately, Rogers observed, many children are raised with *conditional* positive regard: “I will love you if you behave well, and I won't love you if you behave badly.” Adults often treat each other this way, too. People treated with conditional regard begin to suppress or deny feelings or actions that they believe are unacceptable to those they love. The result, said Rogers, is incongruence, a sense of being out of touch with your feelings, of not being true to your real self, which in turn produces low self-regard, defensiveness, and unhappiness. A person experiencing incongruence scores high on neuroticism, becoming bitter and negative.

**Rollo May** May shared with the humanists a belief in free will. But he also emphasized some of the inherently difficult and tragic aspects of the human condition, including loneliness, anxiety, and alienation. May brought to American psychology elements of the European philosophy of **existentialism**, which emphasizes such inevitable challenges of existence as the search for the meaning of life, the need to confront death, and the necessity of taking responsibility for our actions.

Free will, wrote May, carries a price in anxiety and despair, which is why so many people try to escape from freedom into narrow certainties and blame others for their misfortunes. For May, our personalities reflect the ways we cope with the struggles to find meaning in existence, to use our freedom wisely, and to face suffering and death bravely. May popularized the humanist idea that we can choose to make the best of ourselves by drawing on inner resources such as love and courage, but he added that we can never escape the harsh realities of life and loss.



You are never too old for self-actualization. Hulda Crooks, shown here at age 91 climbing Mount Fuji, took up mountain climbing at 54. “It's been a great inspiration for me,” she said. “When I come down from the mountain I feel like I can battle in the valley again.” She died at the age of 101.

**humanist psychology** A psychological approach that emphasizes personal growth, resilience, and the achievement of human potential.

**unconditional positive regard** To Carl Rogers, love or support given to another person with no conditions attached.

**existentialism** A philosophical approach that emphasizes the inevitable dilemmas and challenges of human existence.




## Evaluating Humanist Approaches

As with psychodynamic theories, the major scientific criticism of humanist psychology is that many of its assumptions are untestable. Freud looked at humanity and saw destructive drives, selfishness, and lust. Maslow and Rogers looked at humanity and saw cooperation, selflessness, and love. May looked at humanity and saw fear of freedom, loneliness, and the struggle for meaning. These differences, say critics, may tell us more about the observers than about the observed.

Many humanist concepts, although intuitively appealing, are hard to define operationally (see Chapter 1). How can we know whether a person is


self-fulfilled or self-actualized? How can we tell whether a woman's decision to quit her job and become a professional rodeo rider represents an "escape from freedom" or a freely made choice? And what exactly is unconditional positive regard? If it is defined as unquestioned support of a child's efforts at mastering a new skill, or as assurance that the child is loved in spite of his or her mistakes, then it is clearly a good idea. But in the popular culture, it has often been interpreted as an unwillingness ever to say "no" to a child or to offer constructive criticism and set limits, which children need.


Despite such concerns, humanist psychologists have added balance to the study of personality. A contemporary specialty known as *positive psychology* follows in the footsteps of humanism by focusing on the qualities that enable people to be optimistic and resilient in times of stress (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihaly, 2000). Influenced in part by the humanists, psychologists are studying many positive human traits, such as courage, altruism, the motivation to excel, and self-confidence. Developmental psychologists are studying ways to foster children's empathy and creativity. And social psychologists are studying the emotional and behavioral effects of the existential fear of death (Cohen et al., 2009; Pyszczynski, Rothschild, & Abdollahi, 2008).

The humanist and existential views of personality share one central message: We have the power to choose our own destinies, even when fate delivers us into tragedy. Across psychology, this message has fostered an appreciation of resilience in the face of adversity.  **Simulate**

Thinking Critically  
about Testing  
Humanist Ideas



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## Quick Quiz

Exercise free will, as a humanist would advise you to, by choosing to take this quiz.

1. According to Carl Rogers, a man who loves his wife only when she is looking her best is giving her \_\_\_\_\_ positive regard.
2. The humanist who described the importance of having peak experiences was (a) Abraham Maslow, (b) Rollo May, (c) Carl Rogers.
3. A humanist and a Freudian psychoanalyst are arguing about human nature. What underlying assumptions about psychology and human potential are they likely to bring to their discussion? How can they resolve their differences without either-or thinking?

Answers:

1. conditional 2. a 3. The Freudian assumes that human nature is basically selfish and destructive; the humanist assumes that it is basically loving and cooperative. They can resolve this either-or debate by recognizing that human beings have both capacities, and that the situation and culture often determine which capacity is expressed at a given time.

# Psychology in the News **REVISITED**

**H**ow are the dimensions of personality woven together in the case of Michael Jackson, whom his friends, fans, and critics viewed so differently? How might the approaches to personality described in this chapter help us to understand this fascinating man and his unusual life?

A psychodynamic theorist would emphasize Jackson's early years and unconscious motives in accounting for the entertainer's Peter Pan-like cultivation of friendships with children and his creation of a fantasy estate, Neverland Ranch. The eighth of ten siblings in a working-class family, Jackson had a troubled relationship with his father, Joe, who routinely abused him physically and emotionally during rehearsals. In 1993, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Michael said that he would sometimes even vomit when he saw his father. Was his creation of Neverland an unconscious effort to capture a childhood he himself never had? And what about Jackson's increasingly androgynous, indeed feminine, appearance and voice? Psychodynamic theorists would want to understand Jackson's psychosexual development; did he remain fixated at some childhood level, unable to assume adult sexuality?

Psychologists taking a biological view of personality would emphasize the genetic contributions to Jackson's unique talents and his extroversion—his desire to be in the limelight—which were apparent early on. In 1964, when he was only 6 years old, he joined his brothers' band, which became the Jackson 5. By age 8, he was doing lead vocals, and by the time he was 10, the band had signed a contract with Motown Records. Throughout his life, he cultivated publicity, sometimes leaking the sensational stories that circulated about him. He was famous for his flamboyant costumes and occasional sexual choreography, infamously grabbing or touching his crotch in the video for his album *Bad*.

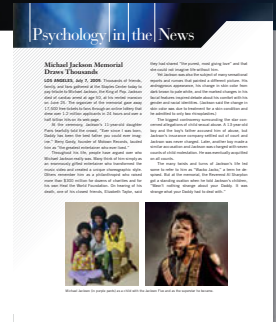
Psychologists who take a learning or environmental perspective would examine situational influences on Jackson's personality, perhaps most powerfully his father's abusiveness. But they would find no inconsistency in the fact that Jackson was an extrovert when performing and, by many accounts, quite shy offstage:

All of us, they would note, display different parts of ourselves publicly depending on the circumstances and whom we are with. Social-cognitive learning theorists would especially emphasize the process of reciprocal determinism: Just as his musical career and blistering fame rewarded and encouraged certain traits and attitudes (such as self-promotion, extravagance, and flashiness), his own traits and attitudes would have attracted him to that world in the first place.

Cultural psychologists might observe that America encourages the kind of constant reinvention of oneself that Jackson was famous for. That culture often values image over reality, transience over permanence, and celebrity over obscurity. It promotes the belief that people can change their bodies, their personalities, and their emotional problems, and that medication or illegal drugs can cure anything that ails us. The culture of celebrity can, however, devour those who are its most successful beneficiaries. Jackson said that he had been able to cope with his worldwide celebrity because of a loving family, strong faith, and supportive friends and fans. But his apparent dependence on powerful prescription drugs, allegedly to help him sleep, and his cosmetic surgeries illuminate a darker corner of the American dream.

Finally, in the humanist view, all of us are free to write and rewrite our life stories and to choose the beliefs and values that guide our lives, and Michael Jackson was no exception. But humanists would also remind us that we do not know anything for sure about Jackson's inner, private self. The private man could have been quite different from his public persona.

Ultimately, we can only speculate about who the "real" Michael Jackson was. Nonetheless, all of us can use the insights of the theorists in this chapter to better understand ourselves and those we care about. Each of us is a mix of genetic influences, learned habits, the pressure of peers, new experiences, cultural norms, unconscious fears and conflicts, and our own private visions of possibility. This mix gives each of us the stamp of our personality, the qualities that make us feel uniquely . . . us.



# Taking Psychology with You

## How to Avoid the “Barnum Effect”

How well does the following paragraph describe you?

*Some of your aspirations tend to be pretty unrealistic. At times you are extroverted, affable, and sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary, and reserved. You pride yourself on being an independent thinker and do not accept others' opinions without satisfactory proof. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety, and you become dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations. At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing.*

When people believe that this description was written just for them, as the result of a personalized horoscope or handwriting analysis, they all say the same thing: “It describes me *exactly!*” Everyone thinks this description is accurate because it is vague enough to apply to almost everyone and it is flattering. Don't we all consider ourselves to be “independent thinkers”?

This is why many psychologists worry about the “Barnum effect” (Snyder & Shenkel, 1975). P. T. Barnum was the great circus showman who said, “There's a sucker born every minute.” He knew that the formula for success was to “have a little something for everybody,” which is just what unscientific personality profiles, horoscopes, and handwriting analysis (graphology) have in common. They have “a little something for everyone” and are therefore nonfalsifiable.

For example, graphologists claim that they can identify your personality traits from the form and distribution of your handwritten letters. Wide spacing between words means you feel isolated and lonely. If your lines drift upward, you are an “uplifting” optimist, and if your lines droop downward, you are a pessimist who feels you are being “dragged down.” If you make large capital *I*'s, you have a large ego.

Graphologists are not the same as handwriting experts, who are trained to determine, say, whether a document is a forgery. Graphologists, like astrologers, usually know little or nothing about the scientific method, how to correct for their biases, or how to empirically test their claims. That is why the many different graphological approaches usually conflict. For example, according to one system, a certain way of crossing *t*'s reveals someone who is vicious and sadistic; according to another, it reveals a practical joker (Beyerstein, 1996).

Whenever graphology *has* been tested empirically, it has failed. A meta-analysis of 200 published studies found no validity or reliability to graphology in predicting work performance, aptitudes, or personality. No school of graphology fared better than any other, and no graphologist was able to perform better than untrained amateurs making guesses from the same writing samples (Dean, 1992; Klimoski, 1992).

If graphology were just an amusing game, no one would worry about it, but unfortunately it can have harmful consequences. Graphologists have been hired by companies to predict a person's leadership ability, attention to detail, willingness to be a good team player, and more. They pass judgment on people's

honesty, generosity, and even supposed criminal tendencies. How would you feel if you were turned down for a job because some graphologist branded you a potential thief on the basis of your alleged “desire-for-possession hooks” on your *S*'s?

If you do not want to be a victim of the Barnum effect, research offers this advice to help you think critically about graphology and its many cousins:

**Beware of all-purpose descriptions that could apply to anyone.** Sometimes you doubt your decisions; who among us has not? Sometimes you feel outgoing and sometimes shy; who does not? Do you “have sexual secrets that you are afraid of confessing”? Just about everybody does.

**Beware of your own selective perceptions.** Most of us are so impressed when an astrologer, psychic, or graphologist gets something right that we overlook all the descriptions that are plain wrong. Be aware of the confirmation bias—the tendency to explain away all the descriptions that don't fit.

**Resist flattery and emotional reasoning.** This is a hard one! It is easy to reject a profile that describes you as selfish or stupid. Watch out for the ones that make you feel good by telling you how wonderful and smart you are, what a great leader you will be, or how modest you are about your exceptional abilities.

If you keep your ability to think critically with you, you won't end up paying hard cash for soft answers or taking a job you dislike because it fits your “personality type.” In other words, you'll have proved Barnum wrong.

# Summary Listen to an audio file of your chapter on [myspychlab.com](https://myspychlab.com)

- *Personality* refers to an individual's distinctive and relatively stable pattern of behavior, motives, thoughts, and emotions. Personality is made up of many different *traits*, characteristics that describe a person across situations.

## Psychodynamic Theories of Personality

- Sigmund Freud was the founder of *psychoanalysis*, which was the first *psychodynamic* theory. Modern psychodynamic theories share an emphasis on unconscious processes and a belief in the formative role of childhood experiences and early unconscious conflicts.
- To Freud, the personality consists of the *id* (the source of sexual energy, which he called the *libido*, and the aggressive instinct); the *ego* (the source of reason); and the *superego* (the source of conscience). *Defense mechanisms* protect the ego from unconscious anxiety. They include, among others, repression, projection, displacement (one form of which is sublimation), regression, and denial.
- Freud believed that personality develops in a series of *psychosexual stages*, with the *phallic (Oedipal) stage* most crucial. During this stage, Freud believed, the *Oedipus complex* occurs, in which the child desires the parent of the other sex and feels rivalry with the same-sex parent. When the Oedipus complex is resolved, the child identifies with the same-sex parent, but females retain a lingering sense of inferiority and “penis envy”—a notion later contested by female psychoanalysts like Clara Thompson and Karen Horney.
- Carl Jung believed that people share a *collective unconscious* that contains universal memories and images, or *archetypes*, such as the *shadow* (evil) and the Earth Mother.
- The *object-relations school* emphasizes the importance of the first two years of life rather than the Oedipal phase; the infant's relationships to important figures, especially the mother, rather than sexual needs and drives; and the problem in male development of breaking away from the mother.
- Psychodynamic approaches have been criticized for violating the principle of falsifiability; for overgeneralizing from atypical patients to everyone; and for basing theories on the unreliable memories and retrospective accounts of adults, which can create an *illusion of causality*. However, some psychodynamic ideas have

received empirical support, including the existence of nonconscious processes and defenses.

## The Modern Study of Personality

- Most popular tests that divide personality into “types” are not valid or reliable. In research, psychologists typically rely on *objective tests (inventories)* to identify and study personality traits and disorders.
- Gordon Allport argued that people have a few *central traits* that are key to their personalities and a greater number of *secondary traits* that are less fundamental. Raymond Cattell used *factor analysis* to identify clusters of traits that he considered the basic components of personality. There is strong evidence, from studies around the world, for the *Big Five* dimensions of personality: extroversion versus introversion, neuroticism (negative emotionality) versus emotional stability, agreeableness versus antagonism, conscientiousness versus impulsiveness, and openness to experience versus resistance to new experience. Although these dimensions are quite stable over time and across circumstances, some of them do change over the life span, reflecting maturational development or common adult responsibilities.

## Genetic Influences on Personality

- The nature–nurture debate is one of the oldest controversies in philosophy and psychology, but it is pretty much over. Today most psychologists recognize that *genes*, the basic units of heredity, account for about half of the variation in human traits, but the environment and experience account for the other half. Genes are made up of elements of *DNA* (deoxyribonucleic acid), but most of our total DNA, called *noncoding DNA*, lies outside the genes and may have greater influence than realized.
- One line of evidence for the biological origins of personality differences comes from studies of many other species, including octopuses, pigs, hyenas, bears, horses, dogs, and all primates, which reveal variation in many of the same characteristic traits that humans have.
- In human beings, individual differences in *temperaments*, such as reactivity, soothability, and positive or negative emotionality, appear to be inborn, emerging early in life and influencing subsequent personality development. Temperamental differences in

extremely reactive and nonreactive children may be due to variations in the responsiveness of the sympathetic nervous system to change and novelty.

- *Behavioral-genetic* data from twin and adoption studies suggest that the *heritability* of many adult personality traits is about .50. Genetic influences create dispositions and set limits on the expression of specific traits. But even traits that are highly heritable are often modified throughout life by circumstances, chance, and learning.

## Environmental Influences on Personality

- People often behave inconsistently in different circumstances when behaviors that are rewarded in one situation are punished or ignored in another. According to *social-cognitive learning theory*, personality results from the interaction of the environment and aspects of the individual, in a pattern of *reciprocal determinism*.
- Behavioral geneticists have found that an important influence on personality is the *nonshared environment*, the unique experiences that each child in a family has.
- Three lines of evidence challenge the popular assumption that parents have the greatest impact on their children's personalities and behavior: (1) Behavioral-genetic studies find that shared family environment has little if any influence on variations in personality; (2) few parents have a consistent child-rearing style over time and with all their children; and (3) even when parents try to be consistent, there may be little relation between what they do and how the children turn out. However, parents can modify their children's temperaments, prevent children at risk of delinquency and crime from choosing a path of antisocial behavior, influence many of their children's values and attitudes, and teach them to be kind and helpful. And, of course, parents profoundly affect the quality of their relationship with their children.
- One major environmental influence on personality comes from a person's peer groups, which can be more powerful than parents. Most children and teenagers behave differently with their parents than with their peers.

## Cultural Influences on Personality

- Many qualities that Western psychologists treat as individual personality traits are heavily influenced by *culture*. People from *individualist cultures* define themselves in different terms than those from *collectivist cultures*, and they perceive their "selves" as more stable across situations. Cultures vary in their norms for many behaviors, such as cleanliness, notions of time, and expectations of helpfulness. Altruistic children tend to come from cultures in which their families

assign them many tasks that contribute to the family's well-being or economic survival.

- Male aggression is not simply a result of male hormones; it is also influenced by the economic requirements of the culture a man grows up in, which in turn shape men's beliefs about when violence is necessary and men's predisposition to respond to perceived insults with violence. Herding economies foster male aggressiveness more than agricultural economies do. Men in *cultures of honor*, including certain regions of the American South and West, are more likely to become angry when they feel insulted and to behave aggressively to restore their sense of honor than are men from other cultures; when they are insulted, their levels of cortisol and testosterone rise quickly, whereas men from other cultures and regions of the United States generally do not show this reaction.
- Cultural theories of personality face the problem of describing broad cultural differences and their influences on personality without promoting stereotypes or overlooking universal human needs.

## The Inner Experience

- *Humanist psychologists* focus on a person's subjective sense of self, the free will to change, and the *life narrative* each person creates. They emphasize human potential and the strengths of human nature, as in Abraham Maslow's concepts of *peak experiences* and *self-actualization*. Carl Rogers stressed the importance of *unconditional positive regard* in creating a fully functioning person. Rollo May brought *existentialism* into psychology, emphasizing some of the inherent challenges of human existence that result from having free will, such as the search for meaning in life.
- Some ideas from humanist psychology are subjective and difficult to measure, but others have fostered research in *positive psychology*, which emphasizes positive aspects of personality such as optimism, hope, and resilience under adversity. Other psychologists are studying the emotional and behavioral effects of the existential fear of death.

## Psychology in the News, Revisited

- Genetic influences, life experiences and learned habits, cultural norms, unconscious fears and conflicts, and our private, inner sense of self all combine in complex ways to create our complex, distinctive personalities.

## Taking Psychology with You

- Critical thinkers can learn to avoid the "Barnum effect"—being a sucker for fake inventories, horoscopes, handwriting analysis, and other pseudoscientific "tests" of personality.

# Key Terms

- personality 39  
 traits 39  
 Sigmund Freud 40  
 psychoanalysis 40  
 psychodynamic theories 40  
 id 40  
 libido 40  
 ego 40  
 superego 40  
 defense mechanisms 41  
 repression 41  
 projection 41  
 displacement and  
 sublimation 41  
 regression 41  
 denial 41  
 psychosexual stages (oral, anal, phallic,  
 latency, genital) 41  
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**Personality** is a distinctive pattern of behavior, mannerisms, thoughts, and emotions that characterizes an individual over time.  
• **Traits:** habitual ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling.

### Psychodynamic Theories of Personality

Psychodynamic theories emphasize unconscious processes, the role of childhood experiences, and unconscious conflicts.

**Sigmund Freud**  
To Freud, personality consists of three systems, which ideally should be in balance.  
• **Id**  
• **Ego**  
• **Superego**  
Defense mechanisms, such as repression, denial, and projection, serve to protect the ego from conflict, but they can distort reality and cause self-defeating behavior.

**Carl Jung**  
Jung believed that all people share a **collective unconscious**, consisting of universal memories and **archetypes**—universal symbols, stories, or human characters representing good, evil, and other mythic qualities.

Psychosexual stages of personality development:  
• Oral  
• Anal  
• Phallic (Oedipal)  
• Latency  
• Genital

**Object-Relations School**  
The **object-relations school** emphasizes the importance of the first two years of life and formative relationships, especially with the mother.

### Evaluating Psychodynamic Theories

These theories are often guilty of three scientific flaws:  
• They violate the principle of falsifiability.  
• They draw universal principles from the experiences of a few atypical patients.  
• They are based on retrospective accounts and fallible memories of patients.  
  
Some psychodynamic concepts have been empirically supported:  
• Unconscious processes  
• Some defense mechanisms (e.g., denial)  
• The mind-body link in creating symptoms of stress

### The Modern Study of Personality

### Measuring Personality Traits

**Core Personality Traits**  
• Many popular personality tests, especially those designed to identify “types,” lack reliability and validity.  
• **Objective tests** (inventories) are standardized questionnaires about needs, values, interests, emotional problems, typical ways of responding to situations, and personality traits.

**Clustering Traits**  
• Raymond B. Cattell used **factor analysis** to identify the core clusters of personality traits.  
• Factor-analytic studies today support the existence of basic personality dimensions, known informally as the Big Five:  
— Extroversion versus introversion  
— Neuroticism versus emotional stability  
— Agreeableness versus antagonism  
— Conscientiousness versus impulsiveness  
— Openness to experience versus resistance to new experience  
  
The Big Five dimensions have been documented around the world, emerging whether people are asked for self-reports or are assessed by others. They are remarkably stable over a lifetime, although neuroticism tends to decrease and conscientiousness tends to increase in young adulthood.

