

Personality: From the Inside Out

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Most often than not, we try to assess the personalities of people as we interact with them. You may say that one friend of yours is calm and warm to everyone, while another is oftentimes cold and indifferent. These informal assessments give us a hint of what personality means, but psychologists view personality such that their ideas are applicable to each and every one of us.



The banner features the Explorable logo (a flask icon) and the text "EXPLORABLE Quiz Time!". Below the logo are three quiz cards: "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2" with a roller skates image, "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2" with a colorful pencil image, and "Quiz: Flags in Europe" with a Ferris wheel image. A "See all quizzes =>" link is located at the bottom right.

Components of Personality

What is personality? Different theories were formulated in order to understand what this complex subject means, but first we have to look at what makes up personality. Simply defined, personality is a network of thoughts, feelings, actions and behavioral patterns that differs one person to another. Although personality can be altered, changes in it are fairly small that most psychologists believe that one's personality persists throughout his lifespan. Here are several important attributes of personality:

1. Personality influences our actions and behaviors. Personality can be a driving force that can cause us to act and react to happenings in our environment.
2. Personality is consistent. The actions and behaviors of a person have a pattern based on his personality. In multiple different but somehow related situations, one would be expected to act in the same or similar manner in response to the situation at hand.
3. Personality is expressed in different ways. Personality is not confined in just actions and behaviors. One's personality can be assessed by taking a closer look at his social interactions, close relationships, as well as the feelings and thoughts that he verbalizes or displays.
4. Personality is both psychological and physiological. While most theorists claim that personality is a mental matter, current research shows that biological or physical needs and mechanisms affect one's personality.

Philosophical Assumptions

The basic philosophical assumptions are the foundations of the personality theories we know today. In general, there are five categories of philosophical assumptions that have been debated by theorists since the early times. They include:

1. Heredity vs. Environment (a.k.a the Nature vs Nurture Debate)

These assumptions ask the question, “Is personality caused by genes or modeled by the environment?” Some psychologists believe that personality is brought about by biological processes, while others say that it is developed over time as a person grows old. However, modern theorists such as Robert Cloninger claim that personality is formed by both genetics and the environment.

2. Freedom vs. Determinism

These assumptions attempts to answer: “Is personality controlled by the person (free will) or Is it beyond human control (predetermination)?” The idea that one’s personality can be changed is due to the belief that man has free will and so he can manage his own personality. On the other hand, some say it goes on until death because personality is brought about by uncontrollable forces.

3. Optimistic vs. Pessimistic

With regards to personality theories, optimism is when people can alter their own personalities while pessimism is when their personalities remain that way throughout their lifespan.

4. Uniqueness vs. Universality

Theorists such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Gordon Allport believed that humans are unique to each other. On the other hand, behaviorists and cognitive theorists like Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget expressed that all of us are of the same universal nature.

5. Active vs. Reactive

Humans are deemed to be active doers of actions, according to humanists and cognitive theorists. In contrast, behaviorists believe that people are reactive to outside stimuli, that is, we passively react to various situations.

Indeed, personality is a complex subject that branches out to many ideologies and philosophies.

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