
UNIT 3 THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

(TYPES AND TRAITS)

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

Personality is an all inclusive concept and includes in it all the traits, tendencies which bring about consistency and dynamism in personality. However before we proceed to explain the structure and dynamics of personality it is necessary that we first understand the nature of different theories propagated or developed to explain personality. In this unit you will be studying all about theories, their importance and significance, you will also know about the various approaches to personality by different theories and the methods to judge whether a theory is valid in all its aspects. Therefore, we will first study the nature of personality theories followed by history of personality theories and so on.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 define the word theory in your own words;
- 1 functions a theory of personality serves;
- 1 discuss the aspect of human behaviour; and
- 1 define different approaches to personality.

3.2 NATURE OF PERSONALITY THEORIES

Now the first question, that arises is, what a personality theory is? Basically a theory is a set of related assumptions which allows formation of testable hypotheses through logical deductive reasoning. It brings about organisation in observations, generates research, provides direction to behaviour and explains consistency in human behaviour.

There would be no need for personality theories if we had been able to understand human behaviour in its entirety. But the fact is otherwise. Therefore different thinkers came out with different explanations to explain why people behave in particular ways and what are the reasons behind it? Thus a theory serves two functions:

- i) Descriptive function and
- ii) Predictive function

3.2.1 Descriptive Functions

A personality theory is descriptive in the sense that it systematically organises behaviours in such a way that it becomes easy to understand them. To put it in other words, it provides a meaningful frame work by integrating and simplifying all that is derived from related sets of events. Let us try to understand this through example,

You might have noticed that children between ages three to four years often show negativism i.e. they behave just the opposite of what they are asked to do or even if they comply with the request they do so with a lot of stubbornness. Parents often complain that their child is not behaving properly and no matter what they do the child does not behave accordingly. Parents are often at a loss to understand this thing. Now if we take help of theory of personality development we come to know that it is normal phenomenon. Every child goes through this phase and all the negativism shown by the child is in fact directed toward developing ego the core structure of personality. By showing negativism the child in fact tests to what extent he can control the world around him or in other words he asserts himself over things. Now we can interpret child's negativism in this light and our perception of the child's behaviour changes immediately.

3.2.2 Predictive Functions

Personality theory not only helps us understand the past and the present but it is useful in making prediction about the future as well. But this is possible only when the concepts propounded by a theory lend themselves to empirical testing for confirmation or disconfirmation. For example, what if we hypothesize that punishment will only aggravate negativism in the child and actually punishment from parents lead to an increase in negativism, our hypothesis stands proved. Now if we hypothesize that once the child crosses the age of five, negativism will automatically recede, and if we find that the child is actually shedding negativism with increase in age, again our hypothesis stands proved.

Examples given above in fact are aimed at explaining what, how and why.

- a) What- is related to deals with the characteristics or traits of the personality and tells how these traits are organised.
- b) How- deals with factors influencing personality. It also investigates into heredity and environment interaction, how heredity and environment shape our personality and what is their relative contribution.

- c) **Why-** It means finding out reasons for behaviour. It is related to the motivational aspect of personality. As I told you in the first unit personality has motivational dimension as well. Motivational dimension guides the behaviour of a person in a particular direction. It provides answer to why a person behaves in a particular manner? and why his behaviour moves in a particular direction? Let us understand this through an example.

You know anxiety is a trait of personality. Suppose a person named Rajesh is anxiety ridden. Now personality theory tries to explain to what extent anxiety characterises Rajesh's personality. How Rajesh came to develop this trait? and why anxiety causes Rajesh to behave in a particular manner? How come two individuals having anxiety behave differently? If you compare Rajesh's behaviour with another person having anxiety you will notice the difference between their behaviours while in the same condition or facing the same situation.

Any sound theory of personality tries to explain these three fundamental questions. It will throw light on the following aspects of personality: viz., structure, process, motives etc.

Structure – The concept of structure refers to comparatively stable aspects of personality. In the context of personality it refers to response, habits, traits and type. Some personality theories use complex structural system having number of components related to each other in different ways. While some personality theories use very simple structure.

Process – This refers to the dynamic motivational concepts of personality. Psychologists have used mainly three types of motivational concepts, namely, pleasure or hedonistic motives, growth or self actualisation motives, and cognitive motives.

Hedonistic motives state that human beings are basically pleasure seeking and avoid tension. This type of motivational theory has two forms (i) first, tension reduction model and (ii) second, incentive model. Tension reduction model postulates that biological needs create tension in the individual and motivate him for action to satisfy these needs and reduce tension. Incentive models stress the end target or incentive. An individual engages in certain type of behaviour because he wants to achieve some specific goal. For example, when we feel hungry all our efforts are getting food and satisfy hunger

Growth or self-actualisation motives postulate that despite all the tensions and stresses individual has the capacity to recognise his inner potentials and grow. For example, Mahatma Gandhi shunned all the sensual pleasures to pursue the core values in his personality i.e. peace and nonviolence. All his campaigns like satyagrah, non-cooperation and civil-disobedience underlined his firm conviction and belief in non-violence and peace.

Cognitive motives stress the need for an individual to understand his environment and make anticipations about it. Everyone has the need to make sense of the world around him therefore, he explores, tries to understand and organise events in a meaningful pattern and accordingly respond to them.

Growth and development – All of us know that no two individuals are identical because every individual passes through a unique and unparalleled process of personality development. Thus any sound theory of personality tries to explain individual differences. Usually these differences are attributed to genetic and environmental determinants. The *nature versus nurture* debates concern the relative importance of an individual's innate qualities ("nature", i.e. nativism, or innatism)

versus personal experiences (“nurture”, i.e. empiricism or behaviourism) in determining or causing individual differences in physical and behavioural traits.

Heredity is the passing of traits to offspring (from its parent or ancestors). Human offspring receives 46 or 23 pairs of chromosomes from parents out of which 23 come from mother and other 23 come from father. Physical characteristics and structures are transmitted to the child through genes contained in chromosomes. Through heredity, variations exhibited by individuals can accumulate and cause a species to evolve. Heredity has been found to play important role in the development of intelligence and temperamental traits.

Biological factors correlating with IQ include ratio of brain weight to body weight and the volume and location of gray matter tissue in the brain. Because intelligence is at least partly dependent on brain structure and the genes shaping brain development, it is argued that genetic engineering can be exploited to enhance intelligence of animals through process of biological uplift. Experiments to this effect on mice have demonstrated superior ability in learning and memory. Besides adoption studies reveal that, by the time adoptive siblings achieve adulthood they are no more similar in IQ than strangers, while twins and full siblings show an IQ correlation of 0.6. Twin studies reinforce this pattern: monozygotic (identical) twins raised separately correlate to 0.74, while fraternal twins raised together correlate only 0.6.

Environment – The word “nurture” include in it all the influences on development arising from prenatal environment, parental care and nurturing, influence of the extended family, and peer experiences. It also includes factors such as media, marketing, and socio-economic status.

Studies reveal that family environmental factors may have an effect upon personality. However, in middle age, intelligence is influenced by life style choices. Among environmental factors culture, family, and peers are important.

Cultural factors also play a role. Culture is a broad term and includes in it all the customs, traditions, folks, fashions, fads and mores. We all are part of one or the other culture. Therefore, cultural effect on personality is bound to take place. Cultural effect is most prominently seen in the way we welcome and greet people. In India when we meet someone, we greet with folded hands and say Namaskar while when Japanese meets someone he bows before and when an American meets someone he either shakes hand or kisses the other person. This apparent difference in welcoming another person is simply because of learning in a culture. Let me cite you an example of how culture affects development of personality traits.

Psychopathology – Any theory of personality while addressing itself to different aspects of personality should also explain psychopathology. Why is it that some people are able to successfully deal with stresses and hazards of life and live normally but some easily get perturbed even by small problems and fall prey to maladjustment. Their personality gets disintegrated.

Behavioural change – A good theory of personality explains not only the concept of normality and abnormality but it also endeavors to explain why and how changes in behaviour of an individual take place over time.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Which of the following a personality theory should not deal?
a) structure b) growth and development c) psychopathology
d) control e) behavioural changes
- 2) Briefly mention what functions a theory of personality serves.
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- 3) What are the predictive functions of theory?
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- 4) What are the important aspects of personality one should consider? Elaborate each of them.
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3.3 JUDGING PERSONALITY THEORY

In the preceding paragraphs we tried to make you understand the basic nature of personality theories. I think it would be proper if we discuss the criteria of judging a theory before we proceed to study different theoretical approaches to personality. It would help you test soundness of a theory when you actually happen to go through it. Following are the criteria laid down by different psychologists (i) Verifiability (ii) Heuristic value (iii) Internal consistency (iv) Parsimony (v) Comprehensiveness (vi) Functional significance. Let us deal in detail with each of these criteria below.

3.3.1 Verifiability

It means whether the concepts postulated by a theory lend themselves to testing by independent investigators. For this to happen it is imperative that concepts embedded in the theory be precisely defined and have logical connection with each other. This allows logical testing of empirical consequences of the theory and all the hypotheses generated by it can be tested.

3.3.2 Heuristic Value

It refers to the extent research is stimulated by a theory. A good theory generates research in two ways – one, descriptive and second, hypotheses testing. Descriptive research is aimed at expanding and elaborating the present theory. In a way it prepares the building blocks of the theory. Hypotheses testing gives a fair estimation of the utility of a theory. When different concepts of a theory do not lend themselves to operational definition, its heuristic value becomes nil.

3.3.3 Internal Consistency

Principles or concepts in a theory should not contradict themselves but should have harmony between them. It is known as internal consistency.

3.3.4 Parsimony

Soundness of a theory is also judged in terms of the concepts required to explain human behaviour. Principle of parsimony states a good theory of personality should use minimum number of concepts to explain human behaviour. A theory requiring different concepts to explain different aspects of behaviour can not be regarded as good. Although, there is no hard and fast rule of parsimony but the number of concepts used be kept reasonably minimum.

3.3.5 Comprehensiveness

It means the diversity and range of events included in a theory, Higher the diversity and range of events the better it is. Comprehensive theory of personality lays emphasis on biological, emotional, cultural, cognitive, social, and cultural factors. Such a theory has the element of wholeness and specialty.

3.3.6 Functional Significance

A theory of personality is judged by its functional value that means to what extent the theory is useful in understanding different aspects of human behaviour. This element of a theory is particularly for the work of clinical psychologists.

3.4 THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

Let us now consider theoretical approaches put forth by different psychologists.

3.4.1 Psychoanalytic Approach

In modern times Sigmund Freud is the first psychologist to put forth the *Psychoanalytic* theory of personality. Freud developed this theory of personality out of his observations of patients over a period of forty years. He had deterministic and pessimistic view of human nature. Psychoanalytic approach can be divided into three parts:

- i) **Structure of personality:** It has two dimensions – topographical and dynamic. Topographical is further subdivided into: a) conscious, b) subconscious; and c) unconscious. **Conscious** includes in it all those experiences and activities which have to do with present. **Subconscious** includes all those experiences, desires, thoughts, feelings which are not available at the level of conscious but can be easily accessed through deliberate effort. For example, if someone ask you the name of the city you lived in during childhood. You will readily recall it. Unconscious represents our sexual, immoral, antisocial and hateful desires which we can't afford to express in our daily life. Therefore such desire are repressed and relegated to unconscious.
- ii) **Dynamic model or dimension** represents those aspects of personality which are instrumental in resolution of mental conflicts arising from basic instincts. It has agents or instruments at its disposal to accomplish this task and these are: a) Id, b) ego and c) superego. **Id** is biological in nature and represents those instincts which are innate, unorganised, sexual and unlawful. It operates on pleasure principle. **Ego**, though develops out of Id, is reality oriented. Ego remains at the driving seat of personality and functions at all three levels i.e. conscious, subconscious and unconscious. **Super Ego** is the moral aspect of personality and operates on idealistic principle. It represents the dos and don'ts of behaviour. It grows out of process of socialisation.

- iii) **Dynamics of personality:** It contains: a) instincts, b) anxiety, and c) mental mechanisms. **Instincts** refer to innate bodily energy or excitation and guide all our behaviour. They are of two types, life instinct or Eros and death instincts or Thanatos. **Anxiety** is an affective, unpleasant state which warns ego of impending danger so that individual can adapt himself to the environment. Freud mentioned three types of anxiety – realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety and moral anxiety. **Mental mechanisms** are activated to protect ego the core of personality. Mental mechanisms are self-deceptive and operate at the level of unconscious. These distort the perception of reality thereby reducing the degree of anxiety.
- iv) **Development of personality:** Freud delineated five stages of personality development. These stages are: a) Oral stage, b) Anal stage, c) Phallic stage, d) Latency stage, and e) Genital stage.

3.4.2 Trait Approach

Trait approach tries to explain personality on the basis of certain characteristics. These traits are used to explain the why of behaviour and consistency in behaviour. Allport and Cattell are the two main proponents of trait approach. Allport mentioned two types of traits namely; common traits and personal traits. **Common traits** are those found in majority of persons of a culture while **personal traits** are specific to a person and not found in other members of a culture. Allport further divided personal traits into three categories – a) cardinal dispositions, it has overwhelming influence on the behaviour of person and is manifested in all the activities a person does. For example, peace and non-violence were cardinal traits of Mahatma Gandhi. His entire life is woven around these traits, b) central disposition, these are of much importance but do not parallel cardinal traits. For example, some people are very social and fun loving. Central traits may number five to ten in a person, c) secondary traits, though prominent in a person's behaviour they do not help much in explaining the basic nature of a person. For example, hair style, eating habits or dressing style of a person.

Another important trait theory is given by Cattell. He mentioned two types of traits namely; source traits and surface traits. *Source traits* underlie the personality and are not reflected in day to day interaction of a person. They are observable only when we try to organise surface traits. For example, unselfishness, humour and gregariousness taken together point to friendliness (a source trait) in the personality of a person. *Surface traits* are observable characteristics of a person. For example, cheerfulness, integrity may easily be discerned in the behaviour of a person.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Write down criteria for evaluation of personality theory.
 - a)..... b).....
 - c)..... d).....
 - e)..... f).....

3.4.3 Constitutional Approach

This approach tries to explain personality in terms of physical constitution of a person and the related temperament. Sheldon and Krestchmer are the two pioneers of this approach. Sheldon on the basis of physical structure classified people in three personality types: a) endomorphic, such persons are fatty, round and short heighted.

They are happy-go-lucky and social by nature, b) mesomorphy, they have a well built body, their muscles are strong and shapely. They are assertive, tough minded, and risk taking by nature, c) ectomorphy, persons of this type are long, slender and thin. they solitude loving, do not approach people as they are shy and reluctant.

Kretschmer classified people into four types: a) pyknic, these are short heighted fat people and enjoy mixing with people, are found of eating and drinking, b) asthenic type, such persons are tall and thin with underdeveloped muscles. By nature they are irritable, shirk away from responsibility. These people are often lost in daydreaming, c) athletic type, they have well developed muscles and good physique. They are neither short nor very tall. These people manifest a balanced temperament and adjust well with environment, d) dysplastic type, this category include those people who manifest a mix of the characteristics found in above three types.

3.4.4 Life-span Approach

This approach explains personality in terms of changes in behaviour that take place throughout life i.e. from birth to death. Personality is explained in terms of solutions to problems arising during the turning points or crisis periods at each of the eight stages in which life has been divided. Erickson mentioned eight psychosocial stages of personality; infancy, early childhood, play age, school stage, adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and maturity. Erickson laid emphasis on holism, environmentalism, and changeability in human nature. He stressed the development of Ego in his theory.

3.4.5 Humanistic Approach

This theory revolves round the subjective experiences of a person. It states that each person has a unique frame of reference which develops out of his experiences with the environment. This frame of reference develops as the person tries to make sense out of things and events in his environment. Further that this frame of reference determines how a person perceives the world around him. Thus perceptual attitude is central to the development of personality, for this reason this approach is also known as phenomenological. According to this point of view human beings are positive by nature and individuals strive for growth, in order to self actualise themselves. Maslow and Rogers are prominent humanistic psychologists. Maslow gave the growth theory of personality.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What are the various approaches to personality psychology?
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- 2) How do humanistic theories differ from that of Freud' theory of personality development?
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3) Match the following:

- | | |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| a) Freud | a) Trait approach |
| b) Erickson | b) Psychoanalytic approach |
| c) Maslow | c) Constitutional Approach |
| d) Sheldon | d) Life-span approach |
| e) Cattell | e) Humanistic approach |

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied the concept of theory of personality and what function it serves. Any theory has basically two functions. First, it tries to describe the phenomenon with which it deals and secondly it tries to predict that phenomenon in future. Thus a personality theory attempts to describe the what, why and how of human behaviour. It also tries to predict how a person will behave in a given situation. We also studied what aspects of behaviour a good personality theory should address itself to. This was followed by brief discussion on how to judge the soundness of a personality theory. Then we studied different approaches or theories as put forth by different psychologists. We studied psychoanalytic approach of Freud, trait approaches of Allport and Cattell, constitutional approach of Sheldon and Kretschmer, Erickson's life-span approach or theory of psycho-social stages and Maslow's humanistic approach.

3.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define the word 'Personality' in your own words? What functions serves by the theory of personality?
- 2) How would you evaluate the soundness of a theory of personality? Discuss in detail.
- 3) Describe the psychological approach to personality development. How does Erikson's approach from that of Freud?

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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