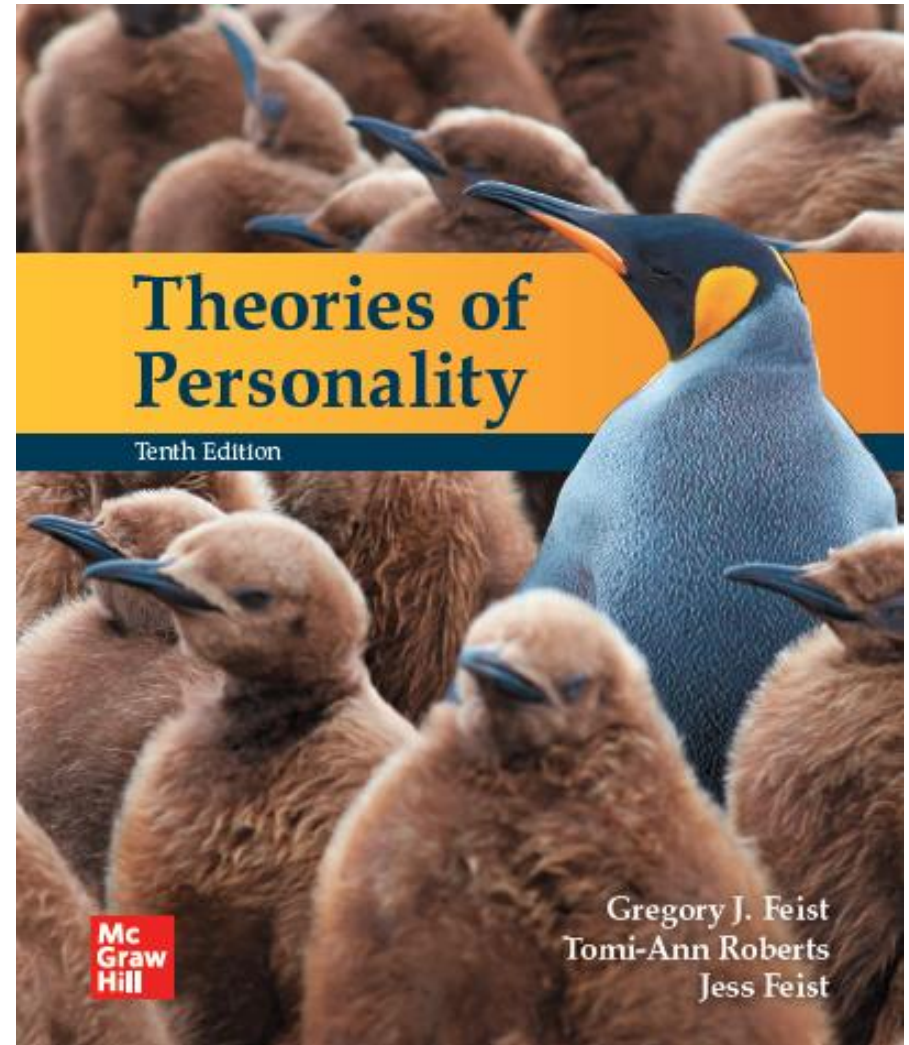


Introduction to Personality Theory

Chapter 1



INTRODUCTION

Do humans have a basic nature?

More than 100 years ago, however, Sigmund Freud began to combine philosophical speculations with a primitive scientific method.

Freud was the first to develop a truly modern theory of personality, based mostly on his clinical observations. He developed a “Grand Theory,” to explain all personality for all people.

The general trend over the course of the 20th century was to base theories more and more on scientific observations rather than on clinical ones. Both sources, however, are valid foundations for theories of personality.

Chapter Outline

What is personality?

What is a theory?

- Theory defined.
- Theory and its relatives.
- Why different theories?
- Theorists' personalities and their theories of personality.
- What makes a theory useful?

Dimensions for a concept of humanity.

Research in personality theory.

I. What Is Personality?

Most agree that the term “personality” originated from the Latin word **persona** (a theatrical mask worn by Roman actors in Greek dramas).

No single definition of personality.

Personality is a pattern of relatively permanent traits and unique characteristics that give both consistency and individuality to a person’s behavior (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008).

Traits contribute to individual differences in behavior, consistency of behavior over time, and stability of behavior across situations.

Characteristics are unique qualities of an individual that include attributes such as temperament, physique, and intelligence.

What Is a Theory?

The word “theory” has the dubious distinction of being one of the most misused and misunderstood words in the English language.

In science, theories are tools used to generate research and organize observations, but neither “truth” nor “fact” has a place in scientific terminology.

A scientific **theory** is a set of related assumptions that allows scientists to use logical deductive reasoning to formulate testable hypotheses.

Theory and Its Relatives ¹

People sometimes confuse theory with philosophy, or speculation, or hypothesis, or taxonomy.

Philosophy.

- Broader than theory.
- Theory relates most closely to **epistemology** (the theory of knowledge), because it is a tool used by scientists in their pursuit of knowledge.

Speculation. (A 'speculation' is just that, a 'guess' that might be applicable to an observed phenomenon. It has no proof, but if it does, then it forms into a theory.)

- the forming of a theory or conjecture without firm evidence
- Tied to empirical data and **science**.

Science is a branch of study concerned with the observation and classification of data and with the verification of general laws through the testing of hypotheses.

Theory and Its Relatives ²

Hypothesis.

- Specific guess that can be tested using the scientific method.
- A good theory is capable of generating many hypotheses.

Taxonomy. (the branch of science concerned with classification)

- Classification of things according to their natural relationships.
- Taxonomies are essential for the development of science because without classification of data science could not grow.

Why Different Theories?

Theorists have different personal backgrounds. They make speculations from a particular point of view.

- Childhood experiences.
- Interpersonal relationships.

Different philosophical orientations.

Unique ways of looking at the world.

Data chosen to observe are different.

D. Perspectives in Theories of Personality

Human personality is so complex that many different perspectives have developed on how to best explain them.

Beginning with Freud, **psychoanalytic and psychodynamic** approaches focused on the importance of early childhood experiences and on relationships with parents as guiding forces that shape personality development.

The primary assumption of the **humanistic** (currently known as “positive psychology”) approach is that people strive toward meaning, growth, well-being, happiness, and psychological health.

Dispositional theorists argue that the unique and long-term tendencies to behave in particular ways are the essence of one’s personality. These unique dispositions, such as extraversion or anxiety, are called traits.

D. Perspectives in Theories of Personality

Behavior, thoughts, feelings, and personality are influenced by differences in basic genetic, epigenetic, and neurological systems among individuals. The reason some people have different traits, dispositions, and ways of thinking stems from differences in their genotype and central nervous system (**brain structures and neurochemistry**).

All **behaviors** are learned through association and/or its consequences (whether it is reinforced or punished). To shape desired behaviors, people must understand and then establish the conditions that bring about those particular behaviors.

The **cognitive** perspective argues that how people think about themselves and other people, as well as the assumptions they make and the strategies they use for solving problems, are the keys to understanding differences among people.

Theorists' Personalities and Their Theories of Personality

Psychology of science. (a subdiscipline of psychology)

- Studies both science and the behavior of scientists.
- Investigates the impact of an individual scientist's psychological processes and personal characteristics on the development of her or his scientific theories and research.

The personalities and psychology of different theorists influence the kinds of theories that they develop.

What Makes a Theory Useful: Criteria for Evaluating a Theory

A useful theory:

- **Generates research.** (two different kinds of research)
 1. Descriptive research, which can expand an existing theory, is concerned with the measurement, labeling, and categorization of the units employed in theory building.
 2. Hypothesis testing, leads to an indirect verification of the usefulness of the theory.
- **Is falsifiable.** (must be evaluated on its ability to be confirmed or disconfirmed)
- **Organizes data.** (Without some organization or classification, research findings would remain isolated and meaningless.)
- **Guides action.** (guide the practitioner over the rough course of day-to-day problems.)
- **Is internally consistent.** (use concepts and terms that have been clearly and operationally defined)
- **Is parsimonious.** (the simplest model/theory with the least assumptions and variables but with greatest explanatory power)

Dimensions for a Concept of Humanity

Personality theories differ on basic issues concerning the nature of humanity. Each personality theory reflects its author's assumptions about humanity.

- Determinism versus free choice.
- Pessimism versus optimism.
- **Causality** versus **teleology**. (causality holds that behavior is a function of past experiences, whereas teleology is an explanation of behavior in terms of future goals or purposes.)
- Conscious versus unconscious determinants of behavior.
- Biological versus social influences on personality.
- Uniqueness versus similarities.

Research in Personality Theory ¹

Theories and research data have a cyclic relationship:

- Theory gives meaning to data.
- Data result from experimental research designed to test hypotheses generated by the theory.

Systematic observations.

- Ensures predictions are consistent and accurate.

To improve their ability to predict, personality psychologists have developed a number of assessment techniques, including personality inventories. For these instruments to be useful they must be both reliable and valid.

Research in Personality Theory ²

Two empirical criteria for instruments.

- **Reliability.** (Consistency of measurement.)
- **Validity.** (is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure)
 - Construct validity. (the extent to which your test or measure accurately assesses what it's supposed to)
 - Convergent. (how closely a test is related with other tests that measure the same or similar constructs)
 - Divergent. [demonstrating that the construct you are interested in (e.g., anger) is different from other constructs that might be present in your study (e.g., depression)]
 - Discriminant. (the extent to which a test is not related to other tests that measure different constructs.)
 - Predictive validity. (the ability of a test or other measurement to predict a future outcome.)



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