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Perspectives on Personality

Charles S. Carver Michael F. Scheier

Seventh Edition

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drawal system involves (in part) the right prefrontal cortex. The threat system seems to represent the biological basis for the trait of neuroticism. Some researchers suggest that the BAS represents the biological basis for extraversion.

Many people now believe it's useful to assume that another biological system is responsible for variations in impulsiveness and sensation seeking (the tendency to seek out novel, complex, and exciting stimuli). Sensation seeking relates to Eysenck's psychoticism dimension and Tellegen's constraint dimension, and both relate to the temperament of effortful control. Variation in these qualities may be grounded in differences in the functions that cause people to take into account other people and long-term goals.

Another aspect of the biological view on personality focuses on the influences of hormones on behavior. Exposure to male hormones before birth can cause people years later to choose more aggressive responses to conflict and can increase girls' preference for boys' toys. Testosterone in adults relates to dominance behavior, sometimes expressed in antisocial ways. Testosterone also fluctuates with the context, increasing with challenges and victories and decreasing with failures.

An emerging area of work examines the possibility that another hormone, called *oxytocin*, is important in human social behavior. Oxytocin appears to relate to female responses to stress, termed a *tend-and-befriend response*. The roots of this response may be in the attachment system, and it may relate to social bonding more generally.

The biological process approach to personality suggests it may be possible to assess personality through biological functions. Although the attempt to do this is in its infancy, some researchers believe recordings of brain activity—particularly fMRIs—hold great promise for the future.

With regard to problems in behavior, high levels of threat sensitivity activity promote disorders involving anxiety. Either a high threat response or a low approach response may contribute to depression. High approach–low avoidance can yield symptoms of antisocial personality, which also relates to impulsive sensation seeking and testosterone. This orientation to personality suggests that therapy based, in part, on medication is a means to bring about behavioral change. The idea is that medication can influence the underlying biological system, thereby altering the person's behavior and subjective experience.

• GLOSSARY •

Anabolic steroids Chemicals that mimic the body's tendency to rebuild muscle tissues.

Antisocial personality A person who displays impulsive action with little thought to consequences.

Avoidance or **withdrawal system** The part of the brain that regulates responses to punishment.

Behavioral approach system (BAS) The part of the brain that regulates pursuit of incentives.

Dopamine A neurotransmitter believed to be especially important to approach regulation.

Electroencephalogram (EEG) A record of overall electrical activity in higher regions of the brain.

Functional MRI (fMRI) Use of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to create a picture of activity inside the brain in different mental states.

GABA A substance, low levels of which appear to be linked to anxiety disorders.

Impulsive unsocialized sensation seeking (IUSS) A trait involving the capacity to inhibit behavior in the service of social adaptation.

Incentives Things that people desire.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) A picture of activity inside the brain based on the brain's electromagnetic energy.

Monamine oxidase (MAO) A substance that helps regulate several neurotransmitters and seems to be involved in constraint over impulses.

Neurotransmitter A chemical involved in sending messages along nerve pathways.

Norepinephrine A neurotransmitter that some researchers believe is important in anxiety responses.

Oxytocin A hormone that appears to be important in social bonding.

Pharmacotherapy A therapy based on use of medication.

Positron emission tomography (PET) A picture of activity in the brain based on the brain's metabolism.

Sensation seeking The tendency to seek out varied, unusual, and exciting stimuli.

Serotonin A neurotransmitter that some researchers believe is involved in anxiety and others believe is involved in constraint over impulses.

Testosterone A male sex hormone that influences a wide range of behaviors.

The Psychoanalytic Perspective

Dan and Jamie are talking about a club they'd been to last night, where one of their friends had gotten totally drunk–something she's done weekly for the past year. At that moment, Robin rounds the corner, practically running into them.

"Hey Robin, you recovered from last night?" Jamie asks.

"What are you talking about?" replies Robin.

"Come on, Robin." Dan throws in. "Aren't you concerned about how much you've been drinking?"

Robin looks offended. "Look, guys, I don't have a clue what you're talking about."

WHEN YOU look at your actions, do you see them for what they really are? Or have you distorted them to yourself for some reason? Most of us probably think we're aware of what we do and why. Accidents may happen, but accidents are random.

There's a perspective on personality, though, that sharply challenges this view. It sees behavior as determined partly by inner forces that are outside your awareness and control. Accidents? Not likely. What seems an accident, you've usually done on purpose—you just aren't *aware* of the purpose.

This approach to personality is called *psychoanalysis*. Psychoanalysis originated in the writings of an Austrian physician named Sigmund Freud. His impact on personality psychology was huge. His view emerged just as behavioral science was getting its start (his theory evolved from 1885 to 1940). Because it came to prominence before other views of personality had been widely circulated, many people think of Freud as the father of personality psychology.

Basic Themes

One theme underlying Freud's view, which gives rise to the term *psychodynamic*, is the idea that personality is a set of processes that are always in motion. Personality is a dynamo—or a bubbling spring. Forces emerge that can be channeled, modified, or transformed. Personality is not one process but several, which sometimes work against each other—competing or wrestling for control over the person's behavior. The idea that pressures within the personality can *conflict* with each other is another theme that's prominent in the psychoanalytic view.

The idea that personality is filled with conflict brings up another theme: defense as a key aspect of human functioning. The psychoanalytic view assumes that everyone experiences threats about aspects of himself or herself. Maybe you have desires you think are shameful; maybe you've done things you regret; maybe you feel unworthy as a human being. Whatever most threatens you, your defensive processes keep it from overpowering you. This idea of continual defense is an important aspect of psychoanalytic thought.

Yet another theme in psychoanalytic theory is that human experience is suffused with qualities of lust and aggression, sexuality and death. These ideas link Freud to evolutionary theory (Ritvo, 1990) and serve as a reminder that humans are—first of all—animals whose purpose in life is reproduction. The extent to which Freud emphasized the role of sexuality was very unusual at the time, however, and many found it shocking.

The psychoanalytic perspective on personality is extremely metaphorical. It does not rely on a single metaphor but multiple metaphors. Freud was a physician, and the idea of biological processes underlying mental processes often appeared in his writing. His concepts of life and death instincts resemble the dual processes of metabolic functioning—continually tearing down and building up. Freud also used many other metaphors. Sometimes he compared the mind to a sociopolitical system, making reference to censors, economics, compromises, and repression. Sometimes he turned to physics, treating personality as an energy system or the competition among forces as hydraulic systems. His fascination with metaphor was consistent with his view of personality. Freud's fascination with symbol and metaphor is also seen in the theory's content. He came to believe that human behavior itself is highly symbolic. People's acts are rarely quite what they seem to be. Instead, they symbolize other more hidden qualities.

Psychoanalytic theory is very complex. Underlying the complexity, however, is a fairly small number of principles (Kahn, 2002). The theory can be confusing because its concepts are deeply interwoven. Thus, it's hard to talk about any aspect of the theory separate from other aspects. Perhaps the best place to start, though, is Freud's view of how the mind is organized, a view that is often termed his **topographical model** of mind.

The Topographical Model of Mind

Many people assume the mind has two regions. One holds conscious experience: the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors you're aware of right now. The other contains memories, now outside awareness but able to come to awareness easily. Drawing on ideas of other theorists of his time, Freud added a third region. Taken together, the three form what Freud viewed as the mind's topography—its surface configuration.

Freud used the term **conscious** much as we do today: to refer to the part of the mind that holds what you're now aware of. The part of the mind representing ordinary memory he called **preconscious**. Things in the preconscious can be brought to awareness easily. For example, when you think of your phone number or the last movie you saw, you're bringing that information from the preconscious to conscious.

Freud used the term **unconscious** in a way different from its everyday use. He used it to mean a part of the mind that's not directly accessible to awareness. Freud saw the unconscious as the source of desires and as a repository for urges, feelings, and ideas that are tied to anxiety, conflict, or pain (Rhawn, 1980). Yet despite being stored away in the unconscious, these things aren't gone. They exert a continuing influence on later actions and conscious experience.

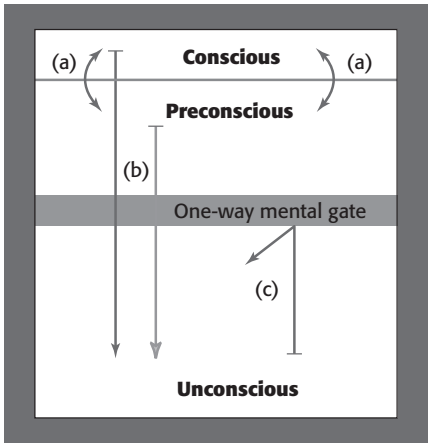

FIGURE 1
Graphic representation of Freud's topographical model of the mind. (A) Material can pass easily back and forth between the conscious and preconscious portions of the mind. (B) Material can also move from the conscious and preconscious into the unconscious. But once material is in the unconscious, the person is prevented from having conscious access to it because (C) a mental gate prevents retrieval.

Box 1 Ego Processes and Delay of Gratification

A key function of the ego is to delay gratification of impulses and urges until a later time. Delay of gratification is a mark of a mature personality. It's also a major goal of socialization. To become full and productive members of society, children must learn to wait for rewards (work now but be paid later). Inability to delay gratification predicts use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana among high school students (Wulfert, Block, Santa Ana, Rodriguez, & Colsman, 2002) and may play a role in development of criminal behavior.

Delay of gratification has been studied from a variety of angles (in fact, it comes up several more times in this book). Most of the research was prompted by ideas other than psychoanalytic theory, but the findings are relevant to psychodynamic processes. In most studies of this phenomenon, children are given the following choice: They can have a smaller, less desired reward now, or they can wait for a while and then get a larger, more desired reward. A focus of this research is on determinants of delay (for reviews, see Mischel, 1966, 1974). It's harder for children to delay when the desired object is right in front of them (Mischel & Ebbesen, 1970). Delay is easier if the children can mentally transform the situation to make it seem as though the object isn't really there—for example, to imagine it is only "a color picture in their head" (Mischel & Baker, 1975; Moore, Mischel, & Zeiss, 1976). More generally, delay is easiest when children distract themselves, shifting attention away from the desired reward (Mischel, Ebbesen, & Zeiss, 1973). In effect, the ego tricks the id by getting it involved in something else.

A second line of research on delay of gratification concerns personality correlates of the ability to delay. Children who are better able to delay are more concerned with achievement and social responsibility (Mischel, 1961), fitting the idea that they have a well-defined ego. The basis for delay also differs slightly from boys to girls (Funder, Block, & Block, 1983). Among boys, it's closely related to the ability to control emotional impulses, to concentrate, and to be deliberate in action. This fits the idea that delay of gratification is an ego function, aimed at control over id impulse expression. Delay among girls, in contrast, is more related to intelligence, resourcefulness, and competence, suggesting that they recognize delay as being the situationally appropriate response.

In this view, the mind is like an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg is the conscious part of the mind. The much larger part—the part below the water line—is outside awareness. Some of it (the part you can see through the water) is the preconscious. The vast majority of it, however (the part you can't see), is the unconscious. Although the conscious and preconscious both influence behavior, Freud saw them as less important than the unconscious, He believed the unconscious is where the core operations of personality take place.

The three levels of consciousness form the topographical model of the mind (see Figure 1). Material (thought, feelings, desires) passes easily from conscious to preconscious and back. Material from both of these can slip into the unconscious. Unconscious material, however, can't be brought voluntarily to awareness because of forces that keep it hidden. These three regions of the mind are the theater in which the dynamics of personality are played out.

Aspects of Personality: The Structural Model

Freud (1962/1923) also developed a **structural model** of personality. He saw personality as having three aspects, which interact to create the complexity of behavior. They aren't physical entities but are perhaps best thought of as labels for three aspects of functioning (Grigsby & Stevens, 2000). We know them as the id, ego, and superego.

Id

The **id** is the original component of personality, present at birth. The *id* (the Latin word meaning "it") is all the inherited, instinctive, primitive aspects of personality. The id functions entirely in the unconscious. It's closely tied to basic biological processes,