The Psych Series

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To my family, for showing me the value of strong bonds and character.—GA

To Zdenka Premuzic, who is responsible for the good parts of my personality.—TCP
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People’s interest in understanding people is universal. Students choose to study psychology because they want to know more about who they are, and why they behave the way they do. Personality psychology answers these questions because it concerns the nature of human nature. It tells us how a person will act in different situations and why. It also tells us what a person is likely to do in the future. Finally, personality reveals whether and to what degree people change.

While many personality books have been written, there are no concise books that address this topic from a scientific but jargon-free way. Most books on personality fall into one of two categories: academic textbooks or pop-psychology books. The former are usually too complex for a lay audience and too long to read. The latter fail to discuss recent scientific findings about the nature of personality. This book attempts to bridge both categories.

Indeed, *Personality 101* has been written in an attempt to make cutting-edge research in personality accessible to a wide audience in a compact book. It is a book that tells the story about the differences and similarities between people, and the causes and consequences of these differences. This story is based on more than a century of research and thousands of scientific studies. It encompasses state-of-the-art investigations and the most widely accepted theories and facts in the field. It reveals to
the reader the current state of affairs in personality psychology and the anticipated future directions of this field.

Finally, we hope to challenge some of our readers’ preconceptions about people. Personality is often the subject of people’s conversations—it is used to describe friends, partners, and work colleagues—but lay beliefs about personality are often in stark contrast with the research evidence. Whatever your purpose for reading this book, we hope that it will make you a bit more knowledgeable in this area and encourage you to read more about it. To this end, we have included an extensive bibliography.
We would like to thank Lauren Carter for casting her eagle-eyes over our first draft and fixing it with a machine-like efficiency and rigor. We also thank Reece Akhtar for his creative energy and enthusiastic contributions to Chapters 6 and 7. A third thanks goes to Kate Telford for her editorial support. Finally, we would like to thank the maestros Adrian Furnham and Robert Hogan, who, with their writings, conversations, and personalities, have shaped our views on personality for some time now.
What is personality and why should we study it? What can we learn about human nature by studying personality? These questions are fundamental to anyone interested in this subject, and especially those who are not. Robert Hogan, the personality psychologist, defined personality as the area of psychology that is concerned with “the nature of human nature” (Hogan, 2007, p. 1). In that sense, we could say that personality is one of the most essential fields of inquiry in psychology. In line with this, a great amount of theoretical and empirical work has been done in this area and the study of personality is now one of the broadest research areas in psychology, with links to neuroscience and clinical, educational, and work psychology (to mention only a few). In this section, we provide some background...
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on the historical as well as current “big” theories of personality, that is, the major paradigms that have dominated the field for the past century (Chapter 1). We also discuss where personality comes from and how it develops throughout the course of life (Chapter 2). Finally, we look at how psychologists have measured and are currently measuring personality and how accurate this assessment is (Chapter 3).
What Is Personality and Why Be Interested?

Our attempt to understand personality is driven by two main goals: (a) We are interested in predicting behavior, specifically, what different people are likely to do and (b) we are interested in explaining why people do the things they do (as opposed to something else) and why different people act in different ways. In its broadest sense, “personality” is a generic answer to both questions. People do what they do because of certain singularities or characteristics of their psychological profile (if you want, you could replace “personality” by these two words), and their profiles are only accurate to the extent that they enable us to predict what they will do. In that sense, our attempts to understand and conceptualize theories of
personality mirror our desire to understand ourselves and others around us. Indeed, personality is essential to explaining who we are and how others see us, how we relate to others within different environments, and why our idea of others (who they are) remains pretty much unchanged throughout time. Thus, personality is highly consequential: You may think of it as a dominant force underlying the dynamics of social behavior and affecting the laws of history (Hogan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). Personality is a core determinant of individual differences in everyday behaviors; it affects our educational and occupational success, our health and longevity, our marital status and relationship satisfaction, and even our eating and sleeping preferences (see Chapter 4). Understanding one’s own and others’ personality is therefore important because it enables us to make sense of the world in which we live, as well as to predict the behavior and actions of others.

Individual differences in personality have been of great interest to scholars since the time of Aristotle and Plato. There are many views of personality, and many ways in which it can be conceptualized and even measured. Typically, personality psychologists have studied normal behavior or the patterns of thought and emotionality that are found in 90% of the population. However, a great deal of what we know about normal personality has derived from our understanding of abnormal or clinical behaviors (e.g., depression, schizophrenia, and anxiety disorders). The last section in this chapter discusses the difference between what psychologists broadly refer to as “normal” and what they regard as abnormal or clinical/mental illness. Most of this book will focus on the normal behavior and attempt to illustrate how most people differ from each other. If you are interested in mental disorders, you should probably consult specific books on the subject, such as Abnormal Psychology (Kring, Davison, Neale, & Johnson, 2007), Anxiety 101 (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010), and Obesity 101 (Rossen & Rossen, 2011).
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GRAND THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

The Psychodynamic Approach to Personality and Freud

If one looks for an Elvis among personality psychologists, Freud (1856–1939) would be the one. There has, in fact, been nobody as influential as Freud in the history of psychology: He is the most widely cited psychologist of all times (Haggbloom et al., 2002) and one of the most widely cited social scientists (if not the most). He is the first psychologist most people can name anywhere in the world, and, in some cases, the only one; he is responsible for popularizing the view that personality psychologists can read the secrets in other people’s minds, giving psychology a somewhat unscientific and obscure status among other sciences. Although Freud’s influence on the modern science of personality is beyond dispute, the fact that his method for treating psychological disorders has long been discredited by the scientific community of clinical psychologists and psychiatrists has made Freud an unpopular and often neglected figure in personality research. For instance, our U.K. and U.S. students would major in psychology without ever reading anything about Freud if we didn’t force them to do so (because our colleagues would never even recommend that they read Freud). You can surely criticize Elvis too, but would you teach the history of rock ‘n’ roll without mentioning him?

So what is Freud’s main legacy? For starters, his psychoanalytic theory is one of the most comprehensive theories of human behavior, as far reaching as Darwin’s evolutionary theory. While Darwin based his theory on his observations of other species and nature, Freud’s theory of the mind was the result of his clinical observations (of people with rather obscure mental disorders). Freud saw himself as an archeologist of the mind and was never shy to draw from metaphysics, poetry, and literature when it came to explaining why people think the way they think and act the way they act. Second, Freud’s preference
for complexity meant he provided one of the most cryptic and intriguing accounts of human nature; yet he still managed to make it relatively clear to most readers, and, moreover, tap into somewhat far-fetched but still believable explanations of behavior. As Oscar Wilde said, “I can believe anything so long as it is unbelievable” (Wilde, 2003). Freud is responsible for making most other psychological theories, and personality is no exception, seem rather dull. His intriguing account of human behavior is rather like a mysterious sci-fi novel where nothing is what it seems; and who wants to watch reality TV after a great sci-fi film? Finally, Freud talked about some of the most important themes of human life: ambition, sex, and power. Oddly, most psychologists appear to have forgotten that these things rule the world, especially “positive psychology.”

Freud’s comprehensive theory of personality has many distinct components making it difficult to integrate into a unitary model, especially in the short space of this book. Nevertheless, it is generally useful to divide these components into three models. The most important feature of the first model is the unconsciousness. Freud argued that our real motives and desires are unconscious or hidden from conscious awareness; we think we do things because of x, but, in fact, it is y or z that is driving us. So, one of the goals of psychoanalysis is to uncover the real motives underlying our behavior, via therapy, in a way that is not too traumatic (because, as psychoanalysis argues, there is a psychological benefit in repressing those unpleasant real motives). This makes Freud’s personality theory very different from modern theories: To Freud, the you that you know is hardly worth knowing because you made it up (Hogan & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). Today, most personality research focuses on self-reports and takes these statements as more or less valid indicators of your personality, but these are just conscious fabrications masking real unconscious motives for Freud.

Freud’s second model suggests that the self can be thought of in terms of three mental structures, namely the id, the ego, and the superego. The id is closely linked to instinctual drives
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that are beneath our conscious awareness and irrational. It is like a wild animal or rock-’n’-roll child inside us pushing us to do naughty things (“naughty” because civilization aims to suppress them). The superego, on the other hand, is the internalized moral conscience and the reason why, unless you are a psychopath, you feel guilty when you do the things that you enjoy but most societies condemn, albeit hypocritically at times. Finally, the ego is our conscious state and the agent that “negotiates” between the pleasure-seeking impulses of the id and the moral constraints of the superego. The ego is thus in permanent or “dynamic” (this is where psychodynamic comes from) struggle to manage the pleasure-seeking id, and obey the voice of societal rules and restrictions posed by the superego.

According to Freud, adult personality reflects the id, ego, and superego struggles in childhood. It is what emerges from those never-ending conflicts or from how you deal with the conflicting forces governing your mind. For instance, if the superego dominates in childhood, the person may become rule-bound, conservative, and rigid as an adult; if the superego is too weak, the person may become a psychopath and suffer disorders of moral conduct, and so forth. The only issue with Freud is that he was focusing too much on clinical symptoms, which he saw as a physical or somatic attempt to deal with these inner churns. For example, a woman who is unable to come to terms with her sexual fantasies (for religious or moral reasons) may feel anxious when in the presence of attractive men, even though she may be unaware of the causes of her anxieties, and so forth. One of Freud’s genius ideas was to treat many normal behaviors as symptoms, highlighting various manifestations of psychopathology in everyday life (this is the title of a famous book he wrote). This is why slips of the tongue became Freudian slips and where dreams become the “royal road to the unconscious” (Freud, 1900, p. 613).

Personality also reflects an individual’s sexual development—Freud also uses the term “sexuality” to refer to pleasurable childish experiences rather than just adult or genital
sexuality. Events and reactions to somewhat universal stages of psychosexual development interact to determine one’s adult character. More specifically, Freud believed that most humans go through four critical psychosexual stages in their lives: oral, anal, phallic, and genital. Most stages involve biological changes. The first physical stage, the oral stage, involves the biological predisposition to suck (an innate reflex). The anal stage involves control of muscles including excretion. The phallic stage focuses on the genitalia as the erogenous zone. And the genital stage involves the biological surge of sexual energy in puberty. All these stages are also followed by psychological developments. For instance, each physical change also changes parents’ behavior toward the child, particularly in terms of what they allow, prohibit, or demand. Physical changes mean that a child is first nursed and then weaned. It means that it is diapered and then toilet-trained. When passing through each of these stages, the child’s former ways of getting pleasure are supplanted. This causes frustration and conflict.

According to Freud, conflicts in these stages during childhood have substantial impact on people’s personalities. For instance, an important conflict during the anal stage involves toilet training, with struggles over the parent’s demand that the child control its defecation according to rules. These conflicts, if not resolved correctly, can lead to various reactions, such as the child inhibiting rather than relaxing its bowels. This pattern then becomes general in adulthood, such as becoming compulsively clean or orderly; hence, the term “anal” is used to refer to obsessional personalities (perfectionists, or people with a cleaning fetish). On the whole then, personality may, according to Freud, be organized around the themes of the id, ego, and superego and conflicts during the stages of psychosexual development.

Despite its popularity and intriguing nature, however, the psychodynamic theory has been widely criticized by mainstream psychologists, especially since the 1950s. This partly reflects the ambitious, bold, and all-encompassing nature of the
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theory, combined with its reliance on tautological and nonfalsifiable claims. Some theoretical criticisms have focused on the limited scope of the sexual drive theory to explain human motivation. Others involve the unreliability of the inferences drawn from psychoanalytic theory. A final criticism relates to the fact that even when it is tested, the theory has often met very little empirical evidence in its support. For instance, studies that have examined the effect of various events in the psychosexual stages on later personality find no evidence to support the claim that differences in feeding or toilet training in childhood have any long-term effects on personality (Beloff, 1957). Moreover, Freud’s view was that almost everybody in the world is neurotic (that was the best case scenario for him) and he ignored important individual differences in emotional adjustment, as well as other major personality traits. In many ways, the phenomena he was trying to explain are unrepresentative of human behavior, even when some of his explanations applied also to more universal human behaviors.

So, Freud’s legacy is sort of mixed. Psychodynamic theory has received very little backing from personality psychologists, as well as mainstream psychologists, in general. Despite its theoretical and empirical limitations, however, the theory has had an important impact on the field and should therefore not be ignored. Indeed, it would be erroneous to brush aside psychoanalytic theory as a group of crazy ideas about human nature, not the least because it concerns a wider “chunk” of human nature than most current personality theories. While many of Freud’s specific observations have failed to receive experimental support, the more generic concepts he put forward have mostly stood the test of time, and their influence beyond the academic community is unrivaled by other psychological concepts. There is, for example, much evidence for the existence of unconscious mental processes, as well as conflicts between these processes and conscious cognition (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). Perhaps the major problem here is that the number of Freud’s critics far exceeds the number of his readers, not least because of the huge
volume of Freud’s work. We hope that this very brief overview of his personality theory may have encouraged some of you to pay more attention to his work or, at least, refrain from criticizing him until you do!

**Behaviorism**

During the mid-20th century, behaviorism emerged as a dominant paradigm for understanding human behavior, including personality. Indeed, this paradigm would dominate the entire field of psychology for several decades. As the name suggests, behaviorism is an attempt to reduce most psychological explanations to our understanding of observable behavioral events. As such, it is pretty much the opposite of psychoanalysis or psychodynamic theory, which concerns itself with unobservable mental constructs. In fact, some behaviorists went as far as to avoid any discussion of nonobservable entities, such as the mind or thought, hoping that this strategy would make psychology a science as robust as the natural sciences (biology, chemistry, etc.). Behaviorism’s answer to the Freudian id, ego, and superego is sheer observable behavior, such as a dog salivating or a child running away from a rat. In its most radical form, behaviorism postulated that in order to become a proper science, psychology needed to focus entirely on observable behavior. This is when the science of the mind became the science of behavior.

Early pioneers of behaviorism were E. L. Thorndike (1874–1949) and John Watson (1878–1958). However, the major developments in this field are often credited to B. F. Skinner (1904–1990). Indeed, while Freud may be the most famous of all psychologists, some argue that Skinner was the one who made the greatest contribution to the discipline (Korn, Davis, & Davis, 1991), at least in the United States. He is also the second or third most famous psychologist of all time (after Freud and Bandura, or just before him).

Before we discuss the behavioristic view of personality, it is important to illustrate two important facts: First, behaviorism
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is as much a philosophy of science or “epistemology” as a specific theory in this field. Second, it was not intended to be a theory of personality per se, but rather a theory of human (and animal) behavior. However due to space limitations here, we will focus only on the salient behaviorist arguments and their implications for personality theory.

The first aim of behaviorists such as Watson and Skinner was to make psychology a “respectable” science, exempt from the troubles of metaphysical or pseudoscientific concepts (i.e., anything that cannot be physically sensed or empirically examined). This can only be done, they argued, by studying what we can observe, and nothing else. Thus, environmental stimuli and observable effects became the main targets of psychological studies for behaviorists. Referring to inner “mental states” is neither useful nor necessary. As Skinner (1971) famously put it,

We can follow the path taken by physics and biology by turning directly to the relation between behavior and the environment and neglecting supposed mediating states of mind. Physics did not advance by looking more closely at the jubilance of a falling body, or biology by looking at the nature of vital spirits, and we do not need to try to discover what personalities, states of mind, feelings, traits of character, plans, purposes, intentions, or the other prerequisites of autonomous man really are in order to get on with a scientific analysis of behavior. (p. 15)

Thus, according to behaviorists, we should stop asking “what is it about this person that makes him or her act the way they do,” and start asking “what in the environment has made this person act the way they do.” In this way, they shifted the source of behavior from the mind, and the person, to the environment: something we can physically observe. The environment can be the here and now—such as the temperature affecting what clothes you wear. However, more often it refers to past experiences that have led to learning (the conditioned behavior). In classical conditioning, a dog automatically
salivates on the sound of a doorbell because it has “learned” (been conditioned) to associate the doorbell with the arrival of food. In operant conditioning, learning occurs through rewards and punishments. Behavior that was rewarded is more likely to occur in the future, and behavior that was punished is less likely to occur. If you were rewarded for being outspoken in social occasions in the past, you will be more likely to be outspoken during these occasions in the future. If you weren’t rewarded, or were punished for being outspoken in social occasions in the past, then you are less likely to be outspoken during these occasions in the future.

Thus, according to behaviorists, all current behavior is a function of the present environment, and of the patterns of reinforcements in the person’s past. Personality would then simply constitute the sum of all learned associations, though strictly speaking behaviorists wouldn’t use the word personality as it refers to mental structures (such as the id, ego, and superego or traits) that govern behavior. Skinner argued that such constant or stable structures are illusionary; if the environment changes, so will behavior. If behavior can potentially change depending on the environment, there is no room (or need) for any “inner” structures to influence this outcome.

We should note that Skinner did not deny the existence of inner states such as thoughts and feelings. However, he argued that even these were the consequence of the person’s life history, that is, the environment he or she has encountered. Thus, individual differences in what appears to be, or what we call, personality are simply individual differences in people’s life histories.

Skinner’s theory of human behavior—often referred to as radical behaviorism—soon expanded into a philosophical and political system. This line of behaviorism proposed that “everything important in psychology . . . can be investigated in essence through the continued experimental and theoretical analysis of the determiners of rat behavior at a choice point in a maze” (Tolman, 1938, p. 34). Research based on behaviorist principles
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had great successes in achieving precise experimental control. Behaviorism’s commitment to the scientific method has left a great mark on psychology as a discipline. Its learning principles have also had a highly important impact in several applied settings, such as in clinical and organizational contexts.

Despite its important legacy, however, the constrained behaviorist approach to explaining human behavior was eventually found to be unsustainable. Critics pointed out that behaviorism cannot account for learning that occurs in the absence of reinforcements simply through observation. Neither is it possible, they proposed, to predict future behavior without referring to inner states, such as expectancies, beliefs, and feelings. As Hempel (1966) noted, “in order to characterize behavioral patterns, propensities, or capacities, we need not only a suitable behavioristic vocabulary, but psychological terms as well” (p. 110). Thus, often it is one’s belief about potential reinforcements, not the reinforcements themselves, that determine behavior.

These so-called moderate behaviorist approaches resurrected unobservable variables, such as memories, emotions, and perceptions, in personality to expand the theoretical and explanatory scope of behaviorism. Somewhat ironically, behaviorism, the discipline that aimed to abolish inner mental states from psychological analysis, therefore led the way to the paradigm of cognitive psychology and social cognitive theory, which put the study of unobservable, internal, mental constructs at center stage. The social cognitive theory of personality was largely based on this paradigm.

Social Cognitive Theory

Although the social cognitive theory of personality has its origins in the radical behaviorist tradition, it emerged in clear opposition to it. Psychologists endorsing this approach share the behaviorist view that learning has a key part in personality formation. However, they depart from behavioristic views
in their focus on mental representations (unobservable constructs), such as motivation, personal agency, and self-efficacy. Indeed, these concepts are the key themes in social cognitive theory, which therefore contrasts with behaviorists’ position about the environment as the sole or primary determinant of behavior. Rather, social cognitive theorists argue that, unlike animals, human beings have unique cognitive capacities and that the study of nonhuman species will provide only limited information about human nature. As humans, we can reflect on our past, interpret the present, plan and anticipate the future, and, ultimately, decide how to behave. These are all different “cognitive processes,” and ignoring them would mean throwing away the most important issues about human behavior. In effect, the social cognitive paradigm put psychology back in its original path of investigating “the mind,” even if behavior still remained an important observable variable in psychological studies. Importantly, the agentic causes of behavior shifted from the environment to “inside the person” or the human mind. This was an important paradigmatic shift in the history of psychology—and personality was no exception.

The great German philosopher Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) believed that the evolution of ideas (and theories) occurs in cycles, where a new theory emerges in refutation of a previous theory, until a third theory can integrate both—this is what philosophers usually refer to as dialectics. Thus, we could say that social cognitive theory synthesizes elements of both psychodynamics (with its focus on mental representations or cognitions, albeit conscious rather than unconscious ones) and behaviorism (with its focus on experience and learning as the main causes of the cognitions that drive human behaviors). Therefore, we could think of social cognitive theory as a compromise between both previous paradigms, paying attention to both internal and external factors. As Albert Bandura (1925–the present), the leading figure and in some ways founder of the social cognitive movement, describes it, causality is a two-way street, where individuals are affected by the environment and experience, but their
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experiences and environments are also shaped by them (e.g., their minds, thoughts, and needs; Bandura, 1986).

This reciprocal determinism can be illustrated by many everyday life examples. For instance, imagine that you find yourself in a party where you only know one person. You want to make a good impression and don’t want to look awkward; so you smile, make jokes, and try to interact with other guests. In this scenario, how do we decide what is the cause of your behavior? We could say that it is the environment, as other guests led you to behave in a specific way. So, you behave in a way that is adaptive and somehow required by the environment. On the other hand, we could say that you interpreted the situation in this way. That’s right, you believed that you needed to make a good impression and you believed that behaving differently would be awkward. These interpretations are features of your personality. What’s more, your behavior of smiling and particular way of interacting with others has affected the people you interact with. They smile back, share their stories and introduce you to others. Finally, and as a consequence of this, your successful interactions alter your mood and confidence, that is, your belief about your ability to interact with others in social events. The belief may well be based on experience, but that experience was also preceded by an initial self-belief (which may have come from previous experiences!). This “catch-22” or chicken-and-egg approach to causality illustrates the complexity of understanding human personality according to social cognitive theory. But what we need to emphasize is that Bandura and colleagues did a lot to rescue personality and psychology from the empty realm of behaviorism, where people were seen as mindless beings who are alive to respond to changes in the environment (just like fish or squirrels).

So, how do social cognitive theorists describe the structure of personality? In essence, they contend that key cognitions or beliefs are acquired over the course of an individual’s life and entail different ways of seeing the world, thinking about it, and
interacting with it. While many such structural concepts exist, four are particularly noteworthy.

The first concerns *competencies and skills*, things that a person can actually do, like the ability to climb a mountain or cheer up a heartbroken friend (these two are obviously unrelated). The second is *expectancies*, that is, beliefs about the likely consequences of actions, the likely actions of other people, the likelihood of succeeding in a particular task, and so on. If you believe that you are capable of passing an exam, and that revising will increase the likelihood that you will pass, you are more likely to revise, which would improve your performance on the exam. Conversely, if you think you will fail, even if you study, you will probably avoid studying and, in turn, fail. This is where Bandura claims that beliefs are self-fulfilling (as Henry Ford said, whether you think you can do it or not, you are right).

The third process concerns *subjective values*, how much a person desires or dreads an outcome that he or she believes the behavior will produce. Thus, if in addition to your expectations about passing the exam you also strongly value academic success, you are more likely to revise for it. This is why we pay people for doing things they are perfectly able to do, because they don’t really care (for most people, this is the meaning of “work” or a job). The final concept concerns *goals*, that is, mental representations of the goals that our actions pursue. Goals are what enable us to regulate and direct our behavior. They contribute to our capacity to exert control over our lives. If you set difficult but achievable goals and you make these goals specific, your behavior will be more persistent and more directed than if you set easy and vague goals (Latham, Ganegoda, & Locke, 2011).

According to social cognitive theory, these are some key cognitive processes along which personalities can vary. But how does this differ from other structural theories, such as psychodynamic and trait theory (see sections The Psychodynamic Approach to Personality and Freud and The Trait Approach)? According to social cognitive theorists, it does so in two important ways. First, unlike other personality theories, which suggest broad or “context-free”
structures, these cognitive processes are proposed to be highly situation-specific. For instance, one important expectancy construct is perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), a person's belief concerning his or her ability to perform the behaviors needed to achieve desired outcomes. Unlike other broad constructs (e.g., psychodynamic motives or personality “traits”), people may differ substantially in their self-efficacy perceptions across different situations. For instance, you may have a low sense of self-efficacy for getting a high grade on the math exam but a high sense of self-efficacy for getting a date on the weekend.

The second important distinction between trait or motivational structures and cognitive processes is flexibility, that is, the capacity to change. As mentioned above, according to social cognitive theorists, most cognitive processes are acquired through learning. In true behaviorist fashion, they acknowledge that many behaviors are learned through classical and operant conditioning. However, they contrast with behaviorism in that they believe the majority of learning occurs through social interaction and observation of the social world, what they call “modeling,” even in the absence of reinforcements. You may be familiar with Bandura’s famous study on the Bobo dolls (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961) (if not, you can look it up on YouTube). The reason this study was so influential is that it highlighted that learning can occur without conditioning or reinforcement such that children who simply observe an adult hit an inflatable doll somehow “learned” to play with guns and hit other (noninflatable) children. Bandura’s studies could not be explained by behaviorism, because something else was clearly happening inside the mind of the kids for them to modify their behavior without conditioning or specific instructions to do so.

Furthermore, unlike other theories that see personality as fixed, social cognitivists assert that people can and do change throughout their life span. People who are lacking in skill or belief can engage in new interactions and new observations of the world and thereby acquire new skills, beliefs, and ways of
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seeing things. Your confidence in your ability to get a date on the weekend will be higher if you had recently got a date. If you get another date, it will be even higher the next time you are out. Thus, people not only vary in their competencies and beliefs from one domain to another, they also have the capacity to change their skill and beliefs in any given domain. As we will see in the next section (and more in the next chapter), however, this view of a flexible and context dependent personality is not shared by all. Indeed, the degree to which personality changes from situation to situation and over time has been the topic of numerous heated debates and decades of research. We examine some of these debates and research in detail in the next section.

DISPOSITIONAL APPROACHES TO PERSONALITY

The Trait Approach

In the previous section, we reviewed some of the major theories of personality. Each of these theories has informed our understanding about the nature of personality. Psychodynamic theory has enlightened us about unconscious motivational processes, behaviorism about the role of the environment, and the social cognitive theory about the role of cognitions, in shaping our behavior and, thus, personalities. Despite their unquestionable legacy, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the theories rather scarcely reflect the way most people would refer to, or view, personality today. If you, for example, asked a person to describe their best friend’s character, you would probably not expect a response stating that their best friend has strong repressed sexual impulses of which they are unaware, or that they start cheering and moving rapidly to the sound of *Winds of Change*, or that their mere belief that they can win a marathon will make them win it.
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In contrast, most people simply describe others by listing some adjectives, such as kind, talkative, cheerful, and reliable—this is the common sense or layperson’s approach to psychological profiling, and dispositional approaches are not much more complex than that (except for the use of advanced statistics to demonstrate that the correct choice of adjectives has been made). Indeed, people commonly describe others and themselves by using words that reflect specific personal attributes. In dating sites, for instance, people describe their physical attributes, such as tall, blonde, female, and so on, but also commonly include words that reflect personality attributes, such as friendly, loving, and kind (in addition to socioeconomic and material attributes, of course, such as homeowner, rich, etc.). What they look for in a potential partner will similarly include not only attributes of a person’s physicality but also personality (e.g., looking for a tall, dark male, and someone who is outgoing, talkative, ambitious, etc.). Thus, people seem to view such attributes, or what psychologists refer to as traits, as central to personality.

Likewise, many psychologists believe that traits are an essential aspect of personality. Importantly, they believe that traits are also the most appropriate unit of analysis in the study of personality. This may seem obvious; however, note that, in contrast to this, the theories reviewed in the previous sections rarely make reference to the notion of traits. Indeed, some of the concepts proposed in these theories actually contradict this notion. Consequently, the trait theory of personality and the trait approach is considered a separate research field in its own right.

What Is a Trait?

What exactly is a trait? Simply put, a trait is a consistent pattern in the way a person behaves, thinks, or feels. If you describe someone as “nice,” you have already made the assumption of consistency. Consistency has two elements: (a) consistency
across situations and (b) consistency over a period of time. So when you refer to someone as “nice,” you don’t usually mean that they are nice only in specific circumstances, say, in parties, or that they were nice to you yesterday; you usually think of them as being nice in general (e.g., in parties, when alone, with friends and family, etc.) and having been so over a significant period of time (i.e., weeks, months, or years). Of course, they may not always be equally nice, but when they are not, you would probably think there are justified reasons for their behavior, as the person is usually nice. As we all know, even the nicest person may become frustrated or argumentative if somebody insulted him or her, or his or her loved ones. So, describing someone with certain traits means that they are more likely than the average person to behave in those trait-like ways most of the time.

Psychologists usually refer to this “consistency approach” as the dispositional view of personality. This reflects the fact that people seem predisposed to acting in these consistent ways. Thus, in contrast to theories that argue that people are primarily influenced by previous life experiences and the environment they are currently in, dispositional theories suggest that people’s personalities remain stable across time and space. Accordingly, trait theories advocate that despite all the changes people experience throughout their lives, there seems to be some consistency in their characters. A person may change several schools, make new friends, move to a different city or even country, marry, divorce, and so on and yet people will still be able to tell who he or she really is, and they will be able to tell when the person is acting uncharacteristically. Thus, this consistency found in a person’s personality lays the foundations to the trait theory.

The Trait Universe
Two other essential aspects of the trait approach are description and classification. That is, traits allow us to describe how individuals differ from one another, and thus classify them
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accordingly. For instance, how would you describe the difference between two of your best friends in terms of their personality? As in dating sites, you would most probably use different trait words. For instance, you might say that Sanchez is ambitious, determined, and hardworking, whereas Jack is laid-back, fun-loving, and careless. You could also use the same words to describe both. You might say that Jack is not as ambitious, determined, and hardworking as Sanchez, or that Sanchez is not very fun-loving, and generally, very careful. By using various trait terms, therefore, you are able to describe your friends, as well as differentiate between them. Being able to differentiate between people’s personalities (e.g., who is trustworthy or untrustworthy, kind or aggressive, argumentative or agreeable) is, needless to say, essential for the decisions we make and thus our functioning. Such “classifications” allow us to predict people’s behavior and to alter our own accordingly.

Indeed, classification is an essential first step in any scientific endeavor. Chemistry has its periodic table of elements, zoology has its taxonomy of biological species, and physics has its classification of elementary particles. These are classification systems, or taxonomies, that researchers use to differentiate between the units under study. For instance, biologists recognize that creatures differ in a multitude of ways—in their size, color, in the absence or the presence of a skeleton, and so on—and need to differentiate between these creatures and classify them based of a specified taxonomy. Psychological traits have a similar function; they allow us to differentiate one person from another.

However, one important question here is how many trait terms do we need in order to be able differentiate between people? How many trait terms would you need in order to fully describe your friends—or at least to give us a good idea of what they are like (say so that we could predict their behavior)? How many traits do we need to ascribe to Jack and Sanchez to be able to differentiate between them? Do we need 2? 10? 50? 100? As
you can probably imagine, one could use an incredibly large number of trait terms. And according to some psychologists, it is necessary to do so because every individual will have a unique set of traits; no two people can be described by the same traits. This view, known as the ideographic view of personality, may initially sound intuitive, but is it really so? Consider for a moment how many trait terms you use to describe a person (probably only a few). Beyond practical reasons, could it be that only a few trait terms are needed because they can in essence give us enough information about the person? That is, might it be that a few trait terms already are capturing most of the information that many of the other trait terms could provide?

Consider this scenario: If you describe someone as very kind, would saying that he is also friendly add much to our understanding of what this person is like? There is clearly a conceptual distinction between being kind and friendly, but we also know that people who are one are also usually the other. We would be hard pressed to find a person who is very kind but not friendly. Accordingly, we would probably take it for granted that if the person is very kind they are likely also to be friendly, and not really feel the need to use the term “friendly” to describe or understand the person further. Perhaps, we would neither need to use trait terms such as generous, altruistic, aggressive, or offensive. We would probably take it for granted that if a person is very kind they would also likely to be generous and altruistic, and not aggressive or offensive. The reason for this is simple: We know intuitively that some traits and the behaviors they represent generally go together—they co-occur. A person who likes going to parties and meeting people is generally also talkative. A person who is methodical with planning and organizing usually doesn’t like being late to class or meetings. This may sound straightforward, but it is an important piece of information. Why? The fact that certain behaviors (traits) go together may in itself suggest that these behaviors are all indicative of some more fundamental, or “basic,” traits.
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To make this clear, consider a person who has long legs, long arms, long fingers, long feet, and a long torso. If we were asked to describe this person, would we need to use all these traits terms to do so? No. Why? Because we know that these traits usually go together—they co-occur. The reason they co-occur is because they are all indicators of a more fundamental trait: height! If you were trying to set your friend up with another person, you would probably tell them whether the person was tall or short. You wouldn’t tell your friend that this person has long arms and fingers and a long torso (even if you may tell them about the long legs—though this is beyond the point). Your friend would know intuitively that a tall person probably has long legs, long arms, long fingers, and so on.

This is precisely why the information about the co-occurrence of these personality traits is so important. Might it be that, just as with physical traits such as height, certain personality traits co-occur because of some more fundamental, or “basic,” traits? Given that unlike physical traits, personality traits are not observable, the answer to this question is not straightforward. However, according to trait theorists of personality, they do! Specifically, according to trait theory, behaviors and the traits used to describe them can be organized into a hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy would be simple responses that individuals may display in any given situation, such as a student finishing an essay on time. However, these responses are not completely random. Individuals will display a similar pattern of responses across situations and over time; for instance, the student may consistently finish her essays on time. Such patterns of responses can be seen as general habits. Furthermore, individuals will also differ in the groups of habits that they possess; for instance, the student may consistently finish other assignments and tasks on time, be on time for class, and be generally organized. According to trait psychologists, these groups of habits are indicators of some more fundamental traits (just as height is an indicator of long legs, arms, fingers, etc.). These traits, they argue, can be described as basic predispositions to
act in particular ways. According to this state-of-the-art view of traits, every human being fundamentally differs only in such predispositions or what psychologists call basic traits. This view is called the nomothetic view of personality.

We will review evidence regarding this position throughout the book; however, at this point, we simply want you to focus on what it would mean if trait theories were correct. That is, if personality traits co-occur because of the existence of some more fundamental or basic traits, then

1. Can we identify these basic traits? And if so, how?
2. How many basic traits might there be?

**Identifying the Basic Structure of Personality.** As mentioned before, given that we cannot observe personality traits as we can observe length of fingers, legs, torso, and so on, the job of identifying such traits seems rather difficult. Nevertheless, psychologists have developed numerous successful methods to deal with this problem. The first of these is a statistical method, and it deals with establishing a classification, or taxonomy, of trait descriptors. In other words, it helps us to make sense out of the plethora of trait descriptors that are used to describe people. As we mentioned before, we often know intuitively which traits tend to go together. However, to identify taxonomy of basic personality traits, we cannot simply rely on intuition. We need to have precise and objective measures. This is where a method called factor analysis enters the scene. Factor analysis is a statistical tool for finding patterns of associations (co-occurrence) among a large number of variables. It does what we do intuitively, but in a statistical manner.

To demonstrate this in simple terms, imagine two variables that generally go together, such as height and weight. If we find out that you are very tall, then we could also assume that you are likely to be above average in weight, because height and weight are usually associated in this way (i.e., even if there are exceptions such as tall skinny, or heavy short, people, on average this
would be the relationship). In statistical terms, the degree of association between two variables is called a “correlation.” In personality research, we could, for instance, say that there is a correlation between being organized and being punctual (or a negative correlation between being organized and being late). Thus, instead of relying on intuition, we could simply measure statistically whether these traits co-occur. Of course, if we only have two variables, we need only a calculation of the correlation coefficient. However, to classify hundreds of trait terms, we would need hundreds, or thousands, of correlations. The function of factor analysis, therefore, is to find some general patterns, or factors, within a group of correlations comprising a large number of traits. Thus, sticking with the example a few paragraphs back, a researcher may find positive correlations between measures of kindness, generosity, and altruism, and positive correlations between offensiveness and aggressiveness. The researcher may also find that kindness, generosity, and altruism negatively correlate with offensiveness and aggressiveness (because we would not expect people who are kind and altruistic to also be aggressive and offensive). If researchers over time and a number of studies find that these traits consistently cluster together (correlate), then it would be possible to conclude that there is a unifying source that leads to these correlations. This unifying source is what trait psychologists would call a basic trait.

As you can imagine, factor analysis is an extremely useful tool for identifying co-occurrences between traits and, therefore, for uncovering a taxonomy of personality. And while there are several other methods psychologists use to establish which factors are basic (and we will discuss these in later chapters), to most trait theorists, the factors that are identified through factor analytic studies are, in essence, the basic structures of personality.

The Lexical Hypothesis. The assumption that basic traits can be uncovered through factor analysis itself derives from what is known as the lexical hypothesis. According to the
lexical hypothesis, historically, the most important and socially relevant behaviors that people display will eventually become encoded into language. If certain adjectives we use to describe people (e.g., trustworthy, loyal, helpful) have remained in the language decade after decade, it is probably because they were necessary for describing behaviors that were important to describe. Terms that were not required, or described insignificant behaviors, would presumably have been dropped out of common usage. Thus, according to the lexical hypothesis, a systematic examination of trait adjectives might give us clues about individual differences whose description has been important enough to withstand the test of time (Goldberg, 1990).

The Structure of Personality: 16 Personality Factors. Partly based on this hypothesis, the first attempt to uncover the traits that constitute the full spectrum of personality was made by Allport and Odbert (1936). To do this, Allport and Odbert patiently worked their way through the English dictionary, which contained about 55,000 words. The researchers counted as many as 18,000 words describing aspects by which individuals could be compared. About one quarter of these (4,500) described personality characteristics (the others referred to various physical characteristics, cognitive abilities or talents, and transient states such as moods). This was of course still an enormous amount of information to make sense of. Allport himself had an ideographic view of personality (i.e., he believed that each person is unlike any other individual), and, as a result, did not attempt to uncover a more fundamental structure beyond the 4,500 trait descriptors.

The first person accredited with this endeavor is Raymond Cattell (1943). Cattell’s starting point was similar to that of Allport and Odbert. Indeed, he used their initial list of traits as a foundation for his subsequent analysis. However, similar to many other trait theorists, he relied on the idea that there are hierarchical relations among trait concepts. Specifically, he believed that there is a distinction between surface traits
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(superficial, everyday behaviors that can be observed) and source traits (a smaller number of more basic traits that are internal and the source of the observed co-occurrence among surface traits). Cattell’s ultimate goal was to uncover these underlying basic structures by reducing Allport and Odbert’s lengthy list of (surface) traits. Through several laborious steps, including eliminating synonyms and antonyms and difficult or uncommon words (based on his own judgment), Cattell managed to reduce Allport and Odbert’s list to only 171 trait adjectives. His next step included statistical analysis. First, he administered questionnaires to a large number of participants and had them rate people they knew on each of these 171 trait adjectives. He then made use of statistical techniques including correlational analysis and factor analysis in order to identify the intercorrelations between the 171 traits, and reduce the number further. At the end of a long and complicated process, which included both further additions and omissions of factors, Cattell was left with 16 primary factors. Cattell concluded that based on his analysis, these 16 factors, or traits, represented the basic structure of personality.

Cattell’s efforts to uncover the fundamental dimensions of personality were heroic. Both his theoretical and empirical work have been recognized as the building blocks to our current study and understanding of personality. Nevertheless, in modern personality psychology, his model, which includes 16 personality traits, is no longer at the forefront. The main reason for this is the finding that his 16 factors also correlated with one another. That is, despite the smaller number of traits that had been extracted through factor analysis, many of these still tended to co-occur. To many trait theorists, this indicated that there may in fact exist a simpler, more basic trait structure of personality underlying these 16 factors. This possibility was pursued by many researchers over the years to come. This included one of the giants of 20th-century psychology, Hans Eysenck.
The Structure of Personality: Eysenck’s Gigantic Three.

Eysenck’s theory of personality has a unique place in personality psychology, and some of its major components will be reviewed further in the next chapter. Eysenck, like Cattell, believed that personality is best investigated and measured psychometrically. He also advocated that factor analysis is the most appropriate method of identifying and representing the personality structure. Nevertheless, his approach differed from Cattell’s in some important respects. Specifically, Eysenck believed that factor analysis was only a means of addressing questions concerning the structure of personality and strongly advocated the importance of having a theory in this process. Accordingly, he employed the deductive method of investigation, meaning that he started with a theory and then gathered data that are logically consistent with that theory. We will outline some of these differences in the next chapter; for now, we only need to consider one major difference between Eysenck and Cattell’s data, that is, the number of basic traits extracted.

While Cattell’s factor analysis revealed 16 primary factors to represent the structure of personality, Eysenck found only three (though originally he hypothesized only two). This may seem odd at first, but it has a very simple statistical explanation. Cattell’s primary factors correlated with one another. Eysenck saw it a logical next step to conduct a secondary factor analysis to see whether these factors could be distilled even further to truly independent and uncorrelated traits. In his secondary factor analysis, Eysenck found that, in fact, three factors, completely independent of one another and irreducible to any others, could be extracted. These factors he referred to as “superfactors” and which are often labeled the Gigantic Three were Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Psychoticism. According to Eysenck, these factors could not be reduced any further, and therefore had to represent the most basic structure of personality.

Three traits may initially strike you as a small number to capture all the uniqueness of any one individual’s personality. However, as noted above, the classification of basic traits
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defines a conceptual space into which many trait terms can be fitted. Think of it as analogous to the color solid, which accommodates all possible colors on the basis of just three dimensions—brightness, hue, and saturation. Like the color solid, Eysenck’s three dimensions allow for an infinite variety in the personalities of different people. With such a taxonomy, however, each of those personalities can be described in a comfortably economical way.

So what do Eysenck’s Gigantic Three traits actually represent? The first trait that Eysenck called Neuroticism refers to an individual’s level of emotionality and tendency to worry and be moody, touchy, and anxious. Thus, the Neuroticism/emotional stability trait is a continuum of upset and distress. People high on Neuroticism are generally anxious, stressed, pessimistic, and fearful and tend to have lower self-esteem. Conversely, people who are low on Neuroticism are emotionally stable, calm, and optimistic.

The second trait that Eysenck called Extraversion assesses the degree to which individuals show a tendency to be talkative, outgoing, and energetic. Thus, the Extraversion/introversion factor represents a continuum of sociability, liveliness, and dominance. Extraverts tend to enjoy the company of others and express their feelings and emotions; they are energetic, optimistic, outgoing, and confident. Conversely, introverts (low Extraversion scorers) are resistant to interpersonal contact, reserved, and quiet; they tend to be shy and lack confidence.

Finally, Psychoticism (which was introduced much later by Eysenck) refers to an individual’s level of conformity, aggressiveness, and feelings for others. High Psychoticism describes emotionally cruel, risk-taking, impulsive, and sensation-seeking individuals. They are sociopathic, which means they show little respect for social norms, and are psychologically unattached to others. Conversely, low Psychoticism (known as tender-mindedness) describes caring, responsible, and socially driven individuals more likely to conform to given rules than to defy them.
The Structure of Personality: The Big Five. If personality psychology were to advance from a preliminary classification of traits to the prediction of real-world outcomes and other psychological constructs, it would be essential to establish a consensus concerning the number and nature of traits that are necessary to describe the basic psychological differences between individuals. While both Cattell and Eysenck have made notorious contributions in this respect, the system that appears to have won the vote of most differential psychologists is the Five Factor Model, also referred to as the Big Five personality traits.

Like Cattell’s 16 Personality Factors, and Eysenck’s Gigantic Three, the Big Five personality framework is based on factor analytic evidence. And like the models presented above, it originated from the lexical hypothesis, that is, the assumption that the major dimensions of individual differences can be derived from the total number of descriptors in any language system. So what is different about the Five Factor Model? The answer is straightforward: a large body of research evidence.

The decades following Cattell’s initial attempts to consolidate a lexical-based personality model largely consisted of trait psychologists’ search for a taxonomy of personality that could represent the fundamental and truly independent trait dimensions. A now only widely quoted study conducted by Norman (1967), which drew upon earlier research conducted by Allport, Cattell, Tupes and Christal (1961/1992) and others, indicated that five factors were both necessary and sufficient to explain the fundamental structure of personality. Norman’s work has since been replicated by a vast number of research studies and several meta-analyses (which estimate the average correlation in hundreds or thousands of studies). The five factors found in these studies have been shown to have good validity and reliability across research studies, varying populations, and spanning several decades. This has led most researchers today to agree on a personality taxonomy that consists of five major personality dimensions. According to the Five Factor taxonomy, the five
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major personality traits or factors are Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, hence the widely used acronyms of NEOAC or OCEAN.

So what do these five factors correspond to? The first two factors of the Big Five, Neuroticism and Extraversion, are nearly identical to the ones proposed by Eysenck and will now be familiar to you. The third factor, Openness to experience, is derived from the ideas of Coan (1974) and represents the tendency to engage in intellectual activities and experience new sensations and ideas. This factor is also referred to as creativity, intellect, and culture (Goldberg, 1993). It comprises the primary facets of fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values. In a general sense, Openness to experience is associated with intellectual curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity, vivid imagination, behavioral flexibility, and unconventional attitudes. People high on Openness to experience tend to be dreamy, imaginative, inventive, and nonconservative in their thoughts and opinions. Poets and artists (and, to some extent, psychologists and psychology students, too) may be regarded as typical examples of high Openness scorers.

A fourth factor, Agreeableness (also known as sociability), refers to friendly, considerate, and modest behavior. Thus Agreeableness is associated with a tendency toward friendliness and nurturance and comprises the subfacets of trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tendermindedness. Agreeable people can thus be described as caring, friendly, warm, and tolerant, and have a general predisposition for prosocial behavior.

Finally, Conscientiousness is associated with proactivity, responsibility, and self-discipline. (Does this apply to you? If you’re reading this book just before your exam, perhaps not!) This factor includes the primary dimensions of competence, order, dutifulness, achievement-striving, self-discipline, and deliberation. Conscientious individuals are best identified by their efficiency, organization, determination, and productivity. No wonder, then, that this personality dimension has been
reported to be significantly associated with various types of performance.

**How Many Factors Should We Use?** As you can see, there are three novel personality traits identified and included in the Big Five taxonomy that are not present—although arguably represented—in the Eysenckian model. Specifically, Eysenck’s idea of Psychoticism would be conceptualized in terms of low Agreeableness, high Openness to experience, and low Conscientiousness (Digman & Inouye, 1986; Goldberg, 1982; McCrae, 1987), but Eysenck considered Openness as an indicator of intelligence or the cognitive aspect of personality rather than of temperament. On the other hand, Eysenck and Eysenck (1985) conceptualized Agreeableness as a combination of low Psychoticism, low Neuroticism, and high Extraversion rather than as a personality dimension in its own right. A large number of studies have empirically examined this relationship. In general, Neuroticism and Extraversion have been found to be overlapping dimensions in both systems, suggesting that the Big Five and Gigantic Three are assessing two pairs of almost identical traits. However, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness tend to correlate only moderately with Psychoticism ($r = -0.45$ and $-0.31$, respectively), and Openness has been found to be uncorrelated with Psychoticism ($r = 0.05$) (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). Thus, the systems seem to differ to some extent in their assessment of traits other than Neuroticism and Extraversion.

At this point, you would be forgiven to think that the existence of a variety of models, which include different number of factors, reflects some arbitrariness in psychologists’ attempts to identify the fundamental structure of personality. However, before you are drawn to such a conclusion, you should consider that three, and at most five, factors are consistently found in studies of this kind. Rarely do researchers find four, six, one, or ten factors. These findings can not be considered statistical artifacts. For instance, in intelligence research with similar statistical methodologies, researchers consistently find a one-factor solution. And as mentioned before, this factor structure is found across a large number of research studies, in various cultures,
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and across genders, and different ages. Thus, whether it is three factors or five may depend on whether a researcher judges that the five factors can be condensed into three. However, researchers rarely dispute the large amount of research evidence that demonstrates the existence of a personality structure that consists of either three or, most notably, five factors.

**Criticism of the Big Five.** Despite its popularity, the Five Factor Model has been criticized for its lack of theoretical explanations for the development and nature of the processes underlying some of its personality factors, in particular Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (see Matthews & Deary, 1998, for a detailed discussion on this topic). This means that, even if the Big Five factors represent an accurate description of individuals, it is not known where differences in these traits arise from.

Another more recent criticism regards the relationship among the Big Five traits. Although the five factors are meant to be orthogonal or unrelated, when Neuroticism is reversed and scored in terms of emotional stability, several studies reported all five traits to be positively and significantly intercorrelated (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). Although these intercorrelations are usually modest, they may suggest that personality could be further simplified to more “basic” underlying traits, perhaps even one general factor. On the other hand, differential psychologists (such as Digman, 1997) have speculated on the possibility that these positive intercorrelations among the Big Five factors may be a reflection of sociably agreeable responding (or “faking good”), as high scores on the Big Five, at least in the United States and Western European countries, are more “desirable” than low scores (remember, this rule only applies when Neuroticism is reversed).

However, the Five Factor Model has shown good validity and reliability, leading most researchers to agree on the existence of five major personality dimensions, as well as the advantages of assessing these dimensions through the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R) (Costa & McCrae, 1985, 1992). Perhaps the
most obvious advantage of this consensus is the agreement itself, which allows researchers to compare and replicate studies on personality and other variables, providing a shared or common instrument to assess personality. Thus the Big Five are the “latitude and longitude” (Ozer & Reise, 1994, p. 361) along which any behavioral aspects can be consensually mapped.

In that sense, the choice of a unique instrument to assess individual differences in personality may be compared to that of a single and universal currency, software, or language, which provides a common ground for the trading and decoding of goods, information, or knowledge. Besides, the advantage of the NEO-PI-R Five Factor Model is that it accounts not only for a lay taxonomy of personality (based on the lexical hypothesis), but also for other established systems, which can be somehow “translated” into the Five Factor system. Thus, findings on other scales may be interpreted in terms of the Big Five personality traits, just as other currencies can be converted into dollars or euros according to a given exchange rate. For example, self-monitoring, or the extent to which an individual evaluates his or her behavior and the way this may be perceived by others (Snyder, 1987), could be largely explained in terms of high Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Neuroticism. On the other hand, authoritarianism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswic, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) may be partly understood as a combination of low Openness and Agreeableness.

**The Person-Situation Controversy**

In introducing our discussion of the trait approach, the first assumption of trait psychology was made clear: Traits are consistent patterns in thoughts, feelings, and behavior, both across situations and over time. Indeed, the large amount of research evidence and the various theories presented in the rest of the section were based on this fundamental assumption of “consistency.” On the one hand this assumption is intuitive. People behave consistently, which is why we consider them to have
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personalities in the first place. On the other hand, intuition also tells us that we don’t act the same way in all situations. For instance, even if you consider yourself shy, you are probably not shy in all situations. You may be shy in some parties but sociable in others. Alternatively, you may generally be withdrawn when you meet new people but always gregarious around your friends. Similarly, acquaintances may consider you agreeable while your friends may say you are very opinionated. You may be lazy in some aspects but hardworking in others.

These statements probably do not baffle you—they seem common sense. However, this very fact raises a fundamental question: How consistent is the hypothesized consistency in the first place? That is, are we actually sociable, agreeable, or conscientious across most situations? Or does our behavior change depending on the situation that we are in (e.g., a friend’s birthday party or a family gathering), the people we are with (close friends or work colleagues), or the role that we have (employee or boy or girl friend)? This question of the relative stability of traits across situations began over 30 years ago and came to be known as the person-situation controversy.

In the 1960s, the so-called situationist movement raised a fundamental attack against the trait theory. At the forefront of this movement was Walter Mischel. In his 1968 book *Personality and Assessment*, Mischel reviewed research evidence from the literature that revealed that people may in reality be behaving much less consistently than trait theories would predict. For instance, in a now classic study concerning children’s honesty, behaviors such as cheating, lying, and stealing were only marginally correlated when assessed in different settings, such as the classroom, at home, or in social settings. The study unambiguously showed that a child that was dishonest in one setting (say cheated in class) was not necessarily dishonest in another (i.e., did not cheat when it came to sports). In fact, the correlations between these behaviors in different settings rarely exceeded .3. Mischel reviewed a number of studies that indeed seemed to show the same pattern of results. Following
his review, Mischel’s conclusion was clear: Evidence clearly showed that behavior is largely determined by the characteristics of the situation and not the characteristics of the person.

Unavoidably, this criticism was a fundamental challenge to the very existence of the field of personality psychology. In its mild form, the argument would suggest that personality is not very important. In its extreme form, it would suggest that personality does not exist.

Unsurprisingly, Mischel’s attack on the trait concept was met by a vigorous counter-reaction from trait psychologists. The reaction took several forms. Some psychologists argued that Mischel was selective in his review of the evidence. Others contested the real-world value of the findings, most of which derived from studies carried out in artificial, or experimental, settings. A third criticism comes from the difficulty in actually determining that a given behavior is a manifestation of a given trait. Burping after a meal may be seen as a sign of disagreeableness or low Conscientiousness in western cultures, but in Korea, it is a polite response. Giving someone the finger and sticking one’s tongue out at the person are different behaviors, but both act to signify consistent intentions (Hogan, 2007).

Importantly, psychologists pointed out that Mischel’s dismissal of the significance of personality traits’ predictive power based on the correlation value of .3 (even if this correlation was not underestimated) is incorrect. According to theorists, a correlation of this size can have substantial practical utility (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Indeed, such effect sizes would be considered very respectable, for instance, in medical practices. One extreme example is the negative correlation of .034 between aspirin consumption and heart attack, which was enough for researchers to conclude that a monumental breakthrough had been made (Rosenthal, 1990).

There is no doubt, however, that the most important counter-argument against Mischel’s claims concerned his very concept of consistency. According to critics, Mischel significantly underestimated the true predictive power of traits because of a
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class. Specifically, they argued that the studies that he reviewed seemed to show low cross-situational consistency because they usually assessed specific behaviors only on single occasions. The above-mentioned study concerning children’s honesty, for instance, would assess the correlation between dishonesty (e.g., cheating) displayed on one occasion (e.g., in class) and dishonesty displayed on another occasion (e.g., in sports). Theoretically, however, traits are meant to predict behavioral tendencies rather than single instances of particular behaviors. If the single occasion of cheating in class was not a reflection of a tendency, but rather reflected a rare incident, then the study did not measure the trait of dishonesty in the first place. Evidently, it is more difficult to predict a single behavior than aggregated behaviors (i.e., tendencies). It would be difficult to predict, for instance, whether a student will be sloppy with his homework, disorganized with his future goals, and often absent from his part-time job, just because he was late to class today. However, if the student was late to most classes (assuming no unavoidable reason existed), this prediction could be made with more confidence. Thus, according to trait theory, to determine whether people behave consistently from one situation to another, the behavior in each situation must be measured not just once, but on a number of occasions.

Of course, such data are difficult of obtain. Thus, the above argument posed by trait theorists was generally regarded a theoretical one. However, research carried out in the last decade has now also provided empirical backing for these claims. This line of research involves asking participants to report their current behavior, thoughts, and feelings multiple times a day for several days. This may include questions such as “During the past hour, how well does ‘talkative’ describe you?” Thus in addition to a standard personality questionnaire score indicating how extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, and so on a person is, researchers obtain how extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, and so on a person actually acts on average across various situations and over an extended period of time. Thus, this provides
clear data on how little or how much behavior actually varies from situation to situation and over time.

Fleeson and Gallagher (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 15 studies employing such an impressive methodology. Their results showed that traits were strongly predictive of everyday trait manifestation in behavior, with correlations between .42 and .56. The authors’ conclusion was unambiguous:

The resulting correlations comfortably surpassed .30 and even .40. This evidence combined with the strong predictions of life outcomes (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006) casts strong doubt on the contention that traits do not predict behavior or that they have a .30 to .40 ceiling. In fact, far from being irrelevant, traits appear to be necessary for a full understanding of behavior, given the large amount of variance in trait manifestation in behavior they predict. (p. 1109)

PERSONALITY DISORDERS: WHEN OUR PERSONALITY IS ABNORMAL

In the previous sections, we talked about various theories of personality, including the dispositional paradigm, which states that there are quantitative differences or variability in the degree to which people display certain personality traits. However, our discussion focused on general or normal behavioral tendencies. A distinct field of psychology that focuses on abnormal behaviors, namely psychopathology or abnormal psychology, also informs our understanding of personality, and shall be examined briefly in this chapter. Given that psychopathology is a huge area of psychology, we shall focus primarily on the specific area of psychopathology that is most relevant in relation to personality, namely, personality disorders. These refer to relatively pervasive maladaptive patterns of behavior, thought,
and emotionality, which interfere with one’s or others’ capacity to love and work. You may think of personality disorders at the crossroads between normal and abnormal personality; people who display them are rarely institutionalized or under treatment, but they behave in ways that are quite disruptive to society.

While personality disorders and other psychopathologies are predominantly examined in clinical settings, in recent years, personality psychologists have become increasingly involved in the attempt to explain the relationship between what is “normal” and “abnormal.” The argument many of these researchers hold is that people with mental illnesses, in particular personality disorders, merely represent extreme departures of normal traits, rather than being categorically different from them. Indeed, personality disorders are defined as “long-standing, pervasive, and inflexible patterns of behavior and inner experience that deviate from the expectations of a person’s culture” (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). As you can see, the definition has clear parallels with that of normal personality, with the lone difference being the deviant nature of the behaviors.

However, despite the growing support in the field of this dimensional view (the view that posits that there is just a thin line between normality and abnormality), in its current form, psychological disorders, including personality disorders, are classified in categorical terms, that is, as either normal or abnormal. In this section, we critically evaluate these views of psychopathology and personality disorders by (a) defining what is meant by abnormality, (b) presenting the most common forms of personality disorders, (c) discussing the origins or causes of these disorders, and (d) looking at if and how they can be treated.

How Do We Know if We Are Normal?

We all know people with eccentric, extreme, or very peculiar personalities. In fact, there are probably some people in the world
who think of you in that way. The behavior of film stars or iconic pop singers also appears disconnected or outright strange (anyone who has watched daytime TV will know what we mean), and if you observe people around you—at a music festival, traveling by train, or walking in the streets—you will surely think that some of them are somewhat unusual, if not abnormal. But how do we judge whether a celebrity’s, a friend’s, or stranger’s behavior is “abnormal”? Put in other words, by what means can we decide whether someone is in need of psychological treatment? This last question is important because it would be fairly easy for anybody liberal to argue that normality is just “in the eye of the beholder” and that we should not impose the label of abnormal or clinically ill on anybody; well, if that were the case, then we would not be able to help people get better.

Before embarking on this effort, we need to first establish what we mean by abnormal behavior. Defining abnormality is not an easy task. There is no single way to determine whether a person’s behavior should be considered abnormal or not. Rather, clinical psychologists use consensual criteria for making this judgment, namely, deviation, suffering, and maladaptiveness (Davison & Neale, 1998).

The first criterion, deviation, refers to the statistical frequency or “oddity” of the behavior in question, with particular reference to social norms (i.e., formal or informal rules that specify how people are expected to behave; Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). If behavior is odd or deviant (i.e., much higher or lower in frequency than one would expect) and violates social norms, then we may consider it abnormal. Having conversations with people who are not present or staring intensely at fellow passengers on a train may qualify as examples of this, because such behavior is uncommon and violates the informal rules of society.

The judgment about oddity, however, as straightforward as it may seem, is not always a simple one to make. The first difficulty comes in trying to decide exactly to what degree behavior should be expressed to be considered abnormal, or
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Socially inappropriate. For instance, how rigid and inflexible does a person need to be, or how many hours a week does he or she need to work to be diagnosable with obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (see the list of symptoms of this disorder below)? Of course, these judgments will be influenced by cultural, religious, and even chronological factors. For instance, a man who does not allow his wife to go to nightclubs may be considered oppressive and unfriendly in some cultures but a good person in others. Similarly, a woman choosing her career before her family would in the 1940s have been viewed by many as psychologically unhealthy, even if this may today seem absurd. Thus, it is clear that we would need to consider more than simply how deviant behavior is. Indeed, even in similar cultures like the United Kingdom and the United States there are important differences in what is expected from people’s everyday or social behaviors: For instance, it is far more acceptable and common to speak to a fellow passenger in the New York underground than in the London “tube” (something that highlights personality differences between the average Londoners and New Yorkers).

The second criterion for conceptualizing abnormality takes into account whether a given behavior is associated with the suffering of the individual (Davison & Neale, 1998). A person’s behavior may be classified as mentally ill if the symptoms cause him or her great distress, physically or psychologically. However, even this definition is not without its limitations because suffering (or distress) is neither necessary nor sufficient to define abnormality. Not all mental illnesses are associated with suffering, and conversely, suffering in most cases does not result from mental illness. For instance, people with schizotypal personality disorder rarely experience strong emotions and seem to display little distress even when criticized or isolated. Conversely, someone could experience an unpleasant amount of anxiety in the presence of real threats (e.g., a soldier at war, a student before an exam, a job applicant before an interview), without being considered abnormal.
A final and critical criterion for defining abnormality is maladaptiveness. Most behaviors that are labeled as abnormal are maladaptive (or dysfunctional) either for the individual or for society. These include behaviors that interfere with a person’s capacity to carry out everyday tasks, such as studying, working, and relating to others. Freud defined normality in terms of the capacity to love and work; we could think of maladaptiveness as anything that impairs these two major life goals (career and relationship success). A common example of maladaptive or disruptive behaviors is of people with personality disorders related to the anxious/fearful cluster of Axis 2 (see below), all of which inhibit the individual in the action and completion of what would normally be regarded as very simple, mundane tasks. Similarly, antisocial behaviors, such as violence, aggression, and inappropriate or inconsiderate use of public space, may be labeled abnormal because they interfere with the well-being of society.

As with the other definitions, however, there are some caveats with regard to the maladaptiveness criterion for defining abnormality. For instance, it is not always easy to decide what, exactly, normal functioning entails. Indeed, even if we think of it in Freud’s terms, there are just too many manifestations of love and work to pick prototypical or ideal examples for them. In fact, few people agree about the degree to which work and love should be balanced; that is, how much time and effort should one devote to his or her career and relationships? In some cultures, it is almost heretic to be an unmarried but professionally successful woman after the age of 30; in others, it is a tragedy if you are not (and this is not because of Sex and the City). So, precisely how much of someone’s studying, work performance, relationship plans, or social functioning should be impaired by symptoms for them to be considered abnormal? Clearly, we are still faced with the elementary problem of identifying cut-off points between normality and abnormality, and still unable to overcome the relativity of the context in this definition.

As can be seen, there are issues with each criterion for defining psychological disorders. These issues are often related to
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the subjectivity involved in making judgments about the criteria. Yet, we must remember that the issues are not necessarily unique to psychological disorders. Indeed, there is a degree of subjectivity also in medical practices and with physical illnesses. That is, we always have to decide when a physical injury or illness is serious (or deviant) enough to require doctors’ help. As with decisions about psychological disorders, this judgment can be influenced by the patient’s subjective feelings of suffering (or beliefs that the injury interferes with everyday life) as much as the observable damage. And as with mental illness, feelings of suffering will be reported in varying degrees by different people; some individuals believe they need professional help even with the most mundane injuries, whereas others refuse to report life-threatening ones.

Thus, despite specific limitations, the above approaches represent useful criteria for defining the boundaries between normal and abnormal behavior. While it may be tempting from a theoretical perspective to ignore these criteria (by claiming, for instance, that abnormality is simply a socially constructed notion), the practical implications of doing so would be unfortunate. As will be seen below, personality disorders are prevalent (they affect an estimated 10% to 15% of the population; Zimmerman & Coryell, 1989) and their disruptive nature is substantial, inhibiting educational, occupational, and interpersonal functioning.

Classifying Personality Disorders

As with normal personality dimensions, classification is a necessary first step toward introducing order into discussions of personality disorders. The two dominant taxonomies for diagnosing mental disorders (in general) are the International Classification of Diseases, Injuries, and Causes of Death (ICD) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The DSM, the latest revision of which is DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), represents the state-of-the-art classification system in the United States and contains a detailed
list of behaviors that must be present, and the time they need to be present in order for a diagnosis to be made.

While the most widely established personality taxonomy argues for five underlying “normal” personality factors, the *DSM-IV* includes a total of 10 different personality disorders. These are, in turn, divided into three different clusters, based on the idea that these disorders are characterized by either odd or eccentric behavior (cluster A), dramatic, emotional, or erratic behavior (cluster B), or anxious or fearful behavior (cluster C).

As mentioned above, despite the dimensional view of personality disorders, the classification of these disorders remains categorical. This, of course, introduces the question of reliability of the diagnoses. With earlier editions of the *DSM*, diagnoses of personality disorders were very unreliable. More recent studies have, however, demonstrated that the inclusion of more specific diagnostic criteria, as well as the use of structured interviews to assess disorders, can markedly improve diagnostic reliability. Nevertheless, in reality, very few clinicians use structured interviews, which means that the interrater reliability of diagnoses is likely to remain relatively low.

In addition to this concern, there are at least three main issues with the categorical view of personality disorders. First, while personality disorders are supposed to be stable over time, about half of the people who are initially diagnosed with a personality disorder do not receive the same personality disorder diagnosis when they are interviewed 1 and 2 years later. Second, these individuals still display some symptoms related to the disorder, just not to a level required for diagnoses, which means that people’s problems with maladaptiveness may remain, even if not to the same extent. Finally, studies show that more than 50% of people diagnosed with a personality disorder meet the diagnostic criteria for another personality disorder, known as comorbidity, which makes it difficult to interpret what actually is the cause of the disorder and which disorder is the cause of the outcome (see Kring et al., 2007).
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Considering these issues, it is not surprising that many mainstream personality researchers as well as clinicians are hoping that the next revision of the *DSM* shifts to a dimensional model of personality disorders. A dimensional approach would handle the comorbidity problem, including many of the reliability problems. Furthermore, several studies, including a meta-analysis, have shown that particular combinations of personality traits can be used to explain each of the 10 personality disorders. For instance, people with histrionic personality disorder tend to be substantially higher on Extraversion, while those with avoidant personality disorder tend to be substantially lower on Extraversion (Saulsman & Page, 2004).

Despite the benefits of a dimensional approach to personality disorders, however, there are some points that need to be considered. First, although a dimensional or *continuum* view of psychopathology may be advantageous, as well as theoretically more accurate, in practice it is still necessary to define a threshold for treatment. Medical doctors, for instance, need to define a threshold for high blood pressure in order to decide when a patient needs treatment, even though blood pressure differs along a continuum. Similarly, clinicians need to have cut-offs to be able to decide when personality scores are high or low enough to meet level for diagnosis. Thus, it may still be impossible to escape the arbitrariness and subjectivity of these judgments, although, admittedly, using cut-offs may be a more useful diagnostic system than the observations of symptoms.

A final key point is that some personality disorders appear to be more than just extremes or significant deviations from the norm. For instance, people with schizotypal personality disorder tend to experience perceptual oddities that others don’t experience even in mild degrees, suggesting that people with these personality disorders may be qualitatively different from other people. Thus, the advantages of the dimensional view should not lead us to underestimate the importance of classifying personality disorders.
What Causes Abnormality?

The question “How do we define abnormality?” has been around a relatively short time compared to the question of “What causes abnormality?” (which is of course paradoxical). While the former question has only formally been addressed since the early 20th century, the latter stretches back to the ancient Chinese, Egyptians, Hebrews, Babylonians, and Greeks. As with most phenomena that seemed beyond human control, such as earthquakes, storms, and changing seasons, people in these ancient times used to attribute “disturbed” behavior to the displeasure of the gods, or the possession of demons (which often led to obscure rituals and treatments such as exorcism and trephination—the cutting of a hole in people’s skulls—to release the evil demons).

The belief that mental disturbances were God’s punishments was, however, rejected by many prominent scholars of Ancient Greece. For instance, Hippocrates (the father of modern medicine c. 460 BC–c. 370 BC) attributed psychological illness to a physiological dysfunction. He argued that mental disorders are diseases of the brain. Conversely, Plato (c. 423 BC–c. 347 BC) contested that disorders should be understood in terms of intrapsychical conflicts. Plato was convinced that mental disorders were “all in the mind.” Today, Hippocrates’s and Plato’s views are referred to as the somatogenic and psychogenic hypotheses of psychopathology and are still the two most dominant approaches to the causes of mental disorders, roughly corresponding to the notorious debate of “nature versus nurture.”

Biological Approaches: Is Mental Illness a “Nature” Issue?

Technological developments in the past 50 years have caused an unprecedented increase in research into the biological causes of psychopathology. Broadly speaking, this area can be divided into the genetic paradigm and the neuroscience paradigm. The genetic paradigm deals with the question of whether certain disorders are heritable, and whether genes are “responsible”
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for abnormal behavior. Through the use of studies examining identical and nonidentical twins (see the next chapter for details), research has shown that genetics clearly has an important part in the etiology of several personality disorders.

The neuroscience paradigm, on the other hand, investigates the biochemical correlates of mental illness, notably the role of neurotransmitters, the structure and function of the brain, and the autonomic nervous system of the mentally ill. While research in this area is advancing fast, all three aspects of the neuroscience paradigm have already been found to play a role in personality disorders.

Psychological Approaches: Is Mental Illness a “Nurture” Issue? While the somatogenic approach focuses primarily on the biological causes of mental illness, the thesis of the psychogenic paradigm is that many mental disorders have a psychological origin. There are three major psychogenic theories of psychopathology, namely, the psychoanalytic, the behaviorist, and the cognitive. We’ll briefly discuss these here.

In the early 20th century, the psychoanalytic theory of abnormal behavior emerged. Its proponent, Sigmund Freud, believed that psychological disorders, including personality disorders, result from various unresolved conflicts and repressed wishes from early childhood. For instance, he argued that obsessive-compulsive personality traits are caused by fixation at the anal stage of psychosexual development (see the section The Psychodynamic Approach to Personality and Freud).

The second major psychological account of mental disorders, the behaviorist account, viewed abnormality as a form of learned (dysfunctional) behavior. According to the behaviorist paradigm, symptoms are merely the consequence of reinforced or punished behaviors; in this case, behaviors that would be seen as dysfunctional or disordered by society. For instance, according to behaviorists, avoidant personality disorder results from learned behavior in childhood, such as being taught to fear people and situations that others would regard as harmless.
In contrast, cognitive theorists argue that psychological disorders are the result of maladaptive perceptions and interpretations of events. For example, people with narcissistic personality disorder are thought to have a fragile self-esteem; however, unlike healthy individuals (with similar issues), they employ maladaptive cognitive biases in order to maintain an inflated self-view. These include overestimating their own attractiveness and ability, incessantly attributing success to their ability rather than to luck, and having a distorted view of how they are viewed by others (e.g., others must be jealous of me). Thus, according to cognitive theorists, the dysfunctional thought patterns cause the disorders.

**An Integrative Approach.** Although the psychogenic and somatogenic approaches offer us valuable information independently of each other, today the most widely accepted theory of psychopathology is an integrative perspective, often referred to as the diathesis-stress model (also known as the vulnerability-stress model) of psychopathology.

According to the diathesis-stress model (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996; Monroe & Simons, 1991), psychological disorders are caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors. In simple terms, this model explains mental illness as a byproduct of inherited vulnerability (diatheses) and stressful life experiences (stress). For instance, Linehan and Heard (1999) argue that borderline personality disorder is caused by a biological predisposition, combined with an invalidating (i.e., disregarded, disrespected, and punished) family environment.

It should be noted that vulnerability (the predisposition or “diathesis”) can have biological origins (at the level of genes, brain structures, neurotransmitters, and hormones) as well as environmental origins such as poverty or severe trauma. However, stressors are always environmental and can include traumatic experiences (such as loss of a loved one), as well as ordinary events (such as being stuck in traffic).
How Can We Treat Abnormality? Treatment of psychological disorders, including personality disorders, can broadly be divided into two approaches: the biological and the psychological. Consistent with the biological perspective, there is a wide array of psychoactive drugs that clinicians can prescribe for their patients. Indeed, the use of psychoactive drugs has increased dramatically in the past two decades. For instance, between 1988 and 2000, antidepressant use among adults nearly tripled (National Center for Health Statistics, 2004), and antipsychotic drugs are now a multibillion-dollar industry (Horne, Weinman, Barber, & Elliott, 2005).

So are these drugs effective? First, it is worth noting that most research examining the effectiveness of drug therapy has focused on the Axis I disorders of the DSM. Nevertheless, the available evidence shows that psychoactive drugs can be effective in the treatment of personality disorders. For instance, antipsychotic drugs (e.g., risperidone) have been found to be effective in the treatment of schizotypal personality disorder (Koenigsberg et al., 2003). A variety of drugs, such as fluoxetine, lithium, olanzapine, and antiseizure medications (you can look all of them up on Wikipedia), appear useful in the treatment of borderline personality disorder (e.g., Hollander et al., 2001); although given that patients with this disorder often abuse drugs, there are limitations to drug therapy for borderline personality disorder.

In addition to medication, several psychological treatments have been shown to be successful in the treatment of personality disorders. For instance, one study showed that brief psychodynamic treatment reduced the symptoms of histrionic personality disorder and disorders in the anxious/fearful cluster (Winston et al., 1994). This type of treatment may involve the therapist attempting to bring to the surface the patient’s specific childhood experiences that have led to current maladaptive perceptions and tendencies, before attempting to alter them. Cognitive behavioral therapists, on the other hand, aim to persuade the patient to see that it is their irrational thinking that lies behind
their problematic behavior. Once the patient accepts that his or her thought processes or common assumptions (known as schemata) about things are causing the dysfunction, various behavioral techniques are offered as support. For instance, social skills training, which is one aspect of behavioral therapy, has been found to be helpful for people with avoidant personality disorder to be more assertive with others (Alden, 1989). Similarly, despite a common belief that psychopathy is nearly impossible to treat, a meta-analysis found positive therapeutic effects of studies employing cognitive behavioral techniques (Salekin, 2002).

Although this line of research is encouraging, three points should be noted in regard to the treatment of personality disorders. First, the use of antipsychotic drugs remains controversial. Drugs do not help everyone and they rarely cure a disease. In addition, they may have unpleasant side effects (in particular, the classic antipsychotics and antimanic medication). Nevertheless, while medications do not cure a disease and cannot treat everyone, they do allow many people to function and adapt to society, sometimes completely. In addition, much of modern medication does not have the side effects of classic drugs.

A second criticism relates to psychotherapy. While existing evidence is promising in regard to this type of treatment, controversy exists about the research standards in this research. In particular, the methodology used in the studies often does not allow for the effects of psychotherapy to be isolated because most of the studies do not include a control group. Thus it is not possible to know whether the improvements were due to treatment, spontaneous natural recovery, placebo effect, or some other factor. On the other hand, psychotherapy has been shown to be effective with many other Axis I disorders, providing some reason for optimism regarding the positive results found in these studies.

A final issue is the notion of stability of personality disorders, which is, of course, incompatible with the idea of treatment. Indeed, many personality disorders may be too ingrained to be changed thoroughly. While it may be unrealistic to expect complete changes to a person’s underlying personality,
therapists can nonetheless find ways to change certain behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts, in order to help people find more adaptive ways of approaching life.

**Some Final Remarks.** In the preceding sections, we have highlighted some of the main definitions or approaches to normality and abnormality. What we wanted to emphasize is that defining normality is not rocket science—there are many ways of doing it and each way has advantages and disadvantages. We also hope we made it clear that there are many more disadvantages than advantages in not defining it (this really is the worst case scenario). To recap: Unless we have certain consensual criteria—even if they are not perfect—we will never be able to provide professionals (clinicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, etc.) with a frame of reference to classify and assess problematic symptoms; this is equivalent to not diagnosing physical illnesses simply because “who are we to claim that someone is ill?” The issue, then, is quite straightforward: Either we agree on some criteria for determining who is normal and who isn’t—and that means classifying behavior—or we just cannot treat people’s problems, which implies not helping them cope with their suffering and disruptive lives.

That said, one clear reminder of the complexities of deciding what is normal and abnormal is the recent idea that even severe forms of mental illness could be understood as deviations of otherwise normal patterns of thought, behavior, and affect. Indeed, the only difference between being paranoid and being somewhat skeptical and difficult to fool is the degree to which the person is right about his or her suspicions and the degree to which those thoughts are uncontrollable and psychologically disturbing. Likewise, feeling extremely anxious or sad may be okay in the context of tragic or dangerous events (and you may be worse off if you are experiencing the opposite emotions in those contexts). Although researchers have still to agree on where exactly the line between abnormality and normality should be drawn, there are certainly many grey areas, which is where we conceptualize personality disorders.
CONCLUSION

We all have an inherent interest in personality. This is because personality essentially is what makes us who we are. It is what differentiates us from other people and what makes us unique. If we all behaved differently across situations and over time, that is, in unpredictable ways, then there would be no such thing as personality. Some theoretical positions indeed argue just that. However, the idea that people differ from one another in their typical ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling is as old as medicine, and most of us intuitively believe in it.

In this chapter, we have presented the most salient psychological theories of personality. They attempt to describe what personality is and how it should be viewed and analyzed. These theories differ, and sometimes substantially so, in their positions. For instance, psychodynamic theory sees personality as dynamic processes and struggles hidden beneath the mask of behavior; something that we cannot access consciously but that governs our thoughts, feelings, and overt behavior. Social cognitive theory, on the other hand, views personality as a set of cognitions—beliefs, expectancies, and goals governing our behavior. These cognitions are very much conscious and in the here and now. It follows that this theory is concerned with how social relationships, learning mechanisms, and cognitive processes jointly contribute to personality and behavior. A notable difference between these two theories is their view on the flexibility, or malleability, of personality. That is, while psychodynamic theory sees personality as essentially fixed from early childhood, social cognitive theory sees personality as flexible and as constantly evolving.

The notion of flexibility is taken even further by the behaviorist theory of personality. According to behaviorists, personality is merely current behavior determined by past experiences and the present context. This means that present and future experiences will also influence (and change) future behavior. This never-ending environment-behavior cycle essentially means that there is no such
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thing as “inner” stable patterns of thought, feelings, or behavior, and therefore no such thing as personality. This stand was also taken by the situationalist movement, which suggested that stability—and therefore personality—is essentially an illusion.

The behaviorist and situational theories in effect dismiss the notion of personality and directly challenge the discipline of personality psychology. Indeed, they even halted the advance of research in this field for several years during the 60s and 70s. However, they have not withstood the test of empirical investigation. Today, the view that there are consistent patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior is well established. Most psychologists in the field also agree that these stable patterns can be categorized into a few “broader” patterns of behavior.

The most widely accepted framework for classifying these patterns—the Big Five—posits five broad (or “basic”) traits. These five traits are sufficient to describe the personality of any person and how he or she differs from others. The vast amount of empirical evidence in its support has persuaded most differential psychologists to conceptualize personality in terms of these five traits. Regardless of whether this framework will continue to be replicated in the future, one thing is clear: The trait approach provides a very clear answer to the question of “how,” that is, how people differ from each other. If personality makes us who we are, then the trait approach to personality is certainly the most useful for telling us who we actually are, and how we differ from others.

NOTE

1We will give you a detailed explanation of correlations in the coming chapters, but for now we should give you a simple account of correlation, which is simply the extent to which two variables, for example, traits and behavior, are related; a correlation of $r = .1$ indicates a perfect association, whereas a correlation of $r = .0$ indicates that there is no association between the variables in question.