

Chapter 2 Section 1 - Personality

Objectives

- **Names** five traits that are used to define personality
- **Identify** two factors that determine how your personality develop
- **Describe** what happens to personality over a timeline

Vocabulary

- Personality
- Psychologist
- Modeling
- Peer Group
- Identity

Describing Personality

Thinking about how people behave at a party. One person may be the “life of the party.” Another person may sit quietly on the couch. Did you ever wonder why people act so differently in the same situation? It is because each person has a unique personality. Your **personality** consists of the behaviors, attitudes, feelings, and ways of thinking that make you an individual. For example, when you are introduced to new people, you may be characteristically outgoing or you may be shy.

Being outgoing or shy are examples of personality traits. So are being reliable, organized, and forgiving. A **psychologist** studies how people think, feel, and behave. Psychologist have described hundreds of personality traits. **Many researchers use five central traits to describe how people behave, relate to others, and react to change. These traits are extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experiences.**

Extroversion This trait describes how much you like being with other people. The labels extrovert and introvert are often used to describe the extremes of this personality trait. An extrovert tends to be outgoing, talkative, and sociable. An introvert tends to be shy, quiet, and reserved. Extroverts tends to seek out other people. Introverts are more comfortable spending time on their own.

Agreeableness This trait describes your tendency to relate to other people in a friendly way. People who are agreeable tend to cooperate with others. They are usually forgiving and good-natured. They assume that other people are honest and trustworthy. People who are disagreeable tend to be suspicious or hostile. They assume that other people are unreliable or ready to take advantage of them.

Conscientiousness This trait describes how responsible and self-disciplined you are. Conscientious people tend to be dependable and make good decisions. They approach tasks in an organized, deliberate, and thorough manner. On the other end of the scale are people who do not think through decisions, are careless, and easily distracted. They may give up on a task or lose interest in the task before the task is completed.

Emotional Stability People who are emotionally stable tend to be relaxed, secure, and calm, even during difficult situations. They tend to focus on the positive side of things. On the other end of the scale are people who are fearful, worried, and angry. They tend to focus on the negative and to expect the worst in most situations.

Openness to Experience People who are open to new experience tend to be curious, imaginative, and creative. They are like to have a wide range of interest and may be less predictable. People who are less open tend to be more predictable and less independent. They are like to do what everyone else is doing.

How Personality Forms

Which has the greater influence on personality—“nature” or “nurture”? Nature refers to traits you are born with, ones you inherit from your parents. Nurture refers to the environment you are raised in and the experience you have during your life. **Personality traits are influenced by a combination of heredity and environment.**

Heredity Why are some infants calm and cheerful while others tend to cry a lot? Why do some babies seem uncomfortable in new surroundings while others seem to thrive? These early differences are evident before birth. For example, some babies kick and move around a lot inside their mothers, while others are relatively quiet. There is evidence that traits such as cheerfulness and shyness are inherited. There is also evidence that talents, such as musical and artistic abilities, can be inherited.

One way that researchers study how heredity influences personality is by studying identical twins. Identical twins come from a single fertilized egg. Thus, they inherit the same traits. The identical twins were separated as infants and raised by different families. When they met as adults they were surprised to discover how many behaviors and interests they share. Identical twins who are raised separately often have similar careers and hobbies. They even like the same type of clothing and food.

Environment Just because you inherit certain tendencies doesn't mean that your personality is set for life when you are born. Heredity is only half the picture. Environment plays an equally important role. Your family, your friends, and your cultural group are important parts of your environment. They all have an influence on your personality.

- **Family** experiences you had as a child helped to shape your personality. Children learn about feelings, attitudes, and appropriate ways to behave from their families. This is called **modeling**. For example, a child may learn to be respectful to older adults by observing a parent's behavior toward grandparents. Children also learn by being rewarded for desirable behaviors and punished for less desirable ones.
- **Friends** Starting in childhood and throughout the teenage years, friends become an increasingly important influence on personality. Teenagers in the United States spend more than half their time with other teens. These friends, who are about the same age and share similar interests are called a **peer group**. If your peer group models healthy behaviors, such as cooperation, the group can have a positive influence on your personality.
- **Culture** Personality traits that are valued in one culture may not be as highly valued in another culture. Some cultures encourage people to be independent while others put a higher value on fitting in with the group. In some cultures, it is normal to show your feelings in public. In other cultures people are expected to be more reserved. When people from different cultures meet, such differences can lead to misunderstandings.