

Johnny depp
personality traits
description essay



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Personality, like most core Psychology subjects, is difficult to define.

Personality is essentially the science of describing and understanding people.

No two people are the same; even identical twins will tell you that they are very different to their identical counterpart. There are some who are anxious and there are those who are risk-takers.

There are some who are carefree while there are those who are highly-strung and there are those who are over-confident while some are just plain shy. It is this issue of differences that are fundamental to the study and examination of personality. Johnny Depp, born June 9th, 1963 in Owensboro, Kentucky - self-proclaimed "barbeque capital of the world" - has led an interesting life filled with the "normal" ups and downs associated with the life of a worldly famous TV/Film Star with a twist. He lived his younger years attempting to become a rock star only to have the hopes of rock and roll success fall apart and his band split up. He then move into acting, trying to become famous that way, only for it to blow up in his face by accidentally becoming a teen pin-up and obsessed by teenage girls everywhere.

In order to destroy this teen idol status, he embarked on a journey through underground filmmaking, taking on eccentric, dark and just plain weird roles. Very slowly, he has been able to prove himself to be part of the elite, nominated for countless Oscars (unable to win one as of yet though) and top billing for some of the biggest "money-spinners" in cinematic history. Over the many years, theorists have tried to find the answers on a number of personality questions: What makes a personality so unique to the individual? What are the origins of a personality? Is personality a psychoanalytical phenomenon, a biological process or perhaps slow learning processes

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developed over the course of your life? These people have developed their own perspectives on personality which each try to describe a person. There are currently 5 personality perspectives being used today in order to describe or explain a person and their personality: Trait perspective, Biological perspective, psychoanalytic perspective, learning perspective and phenomenological perspective on personality. The Trait perspective looks at words that describe someone, or “trait” and theorists using this approach tend to synthesize and formulate these many traits in order to explain and predict behaviour. The Biological and Evolutional perspectives on personality look at whether it is the variations in our biological make-up that cause the personality differences we observe in behaviour.

The phenomenological perspective on personality is a very optimistic approach, focussing on people and their potential in life. Theorists in this perspective see humankind as being self-perfecting, growing and evolving naturally towards “completeness and greater beauty”. Personality from a learning perspective is viewed as an accumulated set of learned tendencies over a lifetime of an individual. Theorists using this learning perspective try to explain that you can mould personality; that it is made into what it is by the events from the unique and individual history of a person. Finally, the psychoanalytic approach on personality offers its own explanation for human behaviour, in that it lies hidden in the unconscious of a person, and is a result of how a person attempts to deal with deep-seeded and often conflicting interests, desires and instincts.

The interesting thing about these different perspectives on personality is that they often overlap with one another. Psychoanalytic perspective can

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overlap with the learning perspective in that the psychoanalytic theorists see the early years of development making a critical contribution to the behaviour or “psyche” of a person. There is also a commonality shared between the evolutionary and phenomenological perspectives. The evolutionary perspective tends to focus on the past evolution of human beings as a species, whereas the phenomenological approach tends to focus on the future potential evolution of human beings. Research also shows indicates that the Big Five has distinct biological substrates thereby linking trait perspective with the biological perspective (DeYoung, Quilty & Peterson, 2007). However this convergence of perspectives is actually productive in that all perspectives by themselves have their disadvantages as well as their advantages.

If all perspectives can coincide with one another, explanations of personality will become so much easier. The psychoanalytic perspective is the most interesting theory of the analysis of an individual and their personality. Initially developed by Freud during the latter half of the 1900s, it deals with, among other things, the irrational and less predictable patterns of behaviour and human thinking, which is what most other theories of personality often leave out and are criticised for it. In understanding Johnny Depp, a psychodynamic perspective best accounts for his personality: as a complete theory, it can explain his behaviour from when he was a child to becoming a famous movie star, integrates other theories into its analysis, such as Evolutionary and Learning perspectives, thus providing a fairly reliable and accurate interpretation of his personality. As a kid, Johnny Depp had a troublesome childhood. His father was continually searching for secure work

in order to support his family, resulting in them moving around a lot, living in motels, shifting from place to place.

This no doubt took a toll on the family, but Johnny took it especially hard. At age 8, although considered a bright and curious boy, he did not take to school rules and began rebelling, at one stage receiving suspension for “ mooning” his gym teacher. By 12, he got into smoking which soon led to drinking and illegal drugs. He lost his virginity at 13 and partook in various misdemeanours such as petty theft and vandalism.

Most perspectives of personality will have their own say as to how Johnny and his personality could have been affected by this childhood. The trait perspective would analyse Depp as an individual who, according to the Big 5 (Fiske, 1949), is highly extroverted, neurotic and open to experience while scoring low in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. A study conducted by Kandel, Davies, Karus and Yamaguchi (1986), found a relationship between personality traits and drug taking in that young children rated as being emotionally unstable, disobedient, aggressive, teasing, fidgety and restlessness were found less than a decade later at age 14 years to be more likely to be using illegal drugs. This may fit Depp and his childhood to a tee, however it does not give an explanation for his behaviour; it merely gives an explanation for his actions. The phenomenological perspective would see this childhood as just a necessary step in the growth of oneself.

That people must face the low points of your life in order to recognise and embrace the highs. The learning perspective on personality will try to explain that it is your early experiences in childhood that will shape the future

personality of an individual in that in this case, he will acknowledge the mistakes he made as he grew up and eventually learn from these mistakes. The psychodynamic theory on the other hand will try to suggest reasons and give an explanation for these outbursts and resistance to conform to social norms, and then provide an analysis for their personality. In this situation, a psychodynamic theorist would suggest that Depp and his need to rebel and do what he pleases is due to his “ Id” complex being far too strong for his “ Ego” to control; the Id functioning in the irrational and emotional part of the mind with the Ego functioning with the rational part of the mind.

He spent his teenage years attempting to become a rock star, adored by fans everywhere that would rock out to his music. After failing at this many times, even relocating to Los Angeles to find success only for it to never come, he accepted an offer to audition for a role in an upcoming Wes Craven movie, and got the part of the boyfriend devoured by a killer bed in “ A Nightmare in Elm Street”. Finding no future in his music career, he continued to act, hoping to get famous that way, receiving small roles until accepting the part of Officer Tom Hanson in teen cop show “ 21, Jump Street”, a role he has since regretted and tried to escape from. The show becoming a rapid success, Depp inadvertently became a teen-idol, worshipped for his looks receiving, on average, 10, 000 letters a month. It was success but at a terrible price and desperate to escape this new-found, but unwanted, pretty-boy image, he took part in two separate movies which would certainly strip away his teen-idol persona: “ Cry Baby”, a John Waters flick noted for being a “ happily disgraceful enterprise”, and in “ Edward Scissorhands”, portraying

the extremely dark, yet surprisingly brilliant titular character taking slashes at his type-cast image, while also proving himself to be a talented actor.

It is interesting to note that after reaching his initial goal of becoming famous and adored by loving fans, Depp found it far different to what he had expected it to be and tried to get rid of this new type-cast by oddly performing in roles degrading his looks which, unexpectedly in turn, proved he was a very talented actor. The psychodynamic theory suggests a reason for this weird turn of events. Johnny Depp, after unwittingly becoming a teen-idol, suffered great anxiety, as we all do as human beings.

Psychological defences are the way we deal with this anxiety, and a few could be responsible for this drastic change of behaviour in Depp and his choice in film roles.

Reaction Formation helps explain why Depp chose roles completely opposite to his high anxiety-causing roles as well as Displacement (moving an impulse from one object to another) and Projection (projecting unwanted impulses to someone else) also giving explanations for removing his anxiety caused by his teen-idol status. Research conducted shows that Defence mechanisms do occur in individuals (Weinberger & Davidson, 1994). It was during a time when Depp began receiving an extraordinary run of movie roles, taking part in movies such as " Benny and Joon", " What's Eating Gilbert Grape? " " Nick of Time" and " Dead Man", that stress got to him and he began to relapse. Depp, now unhappy, began using drugs and alcohol to escape from reality. A troubled Depp initiated an on-off relationship with supermodel Kate Moss, known for rumoured drug-use, and was arrested for trashing a hotel room he was staying at as well as fighting a member of the paparazzi in the same

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year. Both Evolutional and Psychoanalytic perspectives could provide an explanation to this behaviour.

The evolutionary perspective gives insight into the history of humanity and that stress is a common occurrence in people and we all get rid of stress in different ways, positive and negative, but it is the psychodynamic perspective that gives a better explanation of this part of Depp's personality. When highly stressed, people often take a step back in their lives, often regressing to a previous stage in their life in which they felt happier and less stressed out than they do now. The psychodynamic erspective provides explanation to how people regress in times of great stress in accordance to the type of personality you are (Depp having a more Oral personality; he would tend to drink or smoke more or use drugs more often). There is the criticism, however, that the psychodynamic perspective on personality lacks the scientific proof needed to show reliability in the perspective. The phenomenological theory also lacks scientific precision; it in fact prides itself on being non-scientific. This could be said for the psychodynamic perspective also; it lacks scientific proof because the theory does not necessarily rely on science or need it.

Depp managed to clean up his act, is currently involved with Vanessa Paradis, a French actress and singer he met on the set of " The Ninth Gate" and has two children with her. Even though he has not remarried, he believes that having children has changed him for the better, creating a " foundation...

a strong place to stand in life". While filming for ' Sweeney Todd', his daughter suffered a mysterious illness, and production shut down while he spent time with her. He even donated \$1 million to the hospital in response to their successful efforts, paralleling the actions of the character he played in Finding Neverland. Johnny Depp has evolved from a rebellious, rambunctious teenager with a drug and alcohol habit, into a TV icon revered by teenage girls everywhere, into an incredibly successful movie star who, under the stress of stardom, turned to drugs and alcohol once more until getting his act together and making a family, let alone starring in the Pirates of the Caribbean trilogy, one of the most successful franchises in movie history and creating the highly popular and remarkably bizarre character of Captain Jack Sparrow.

Despite the many perspectives on personality out there and the criticisms to it, the psychodynamic approach provides the best explanation to Depp's personality in that it explains and emphasizes the dynamic nature of behaviour, includes childhood experience in the analysis as well as incorporates defence mechanisms and Id/Ego/Superego complex into personality as well. He continues to run from 21, Jump Street to this very day.