

Personality theories

[Psychology](#)



There are many different theorists regarding personality along with many theories. Each of these theories comes about because of different research methods. In this paper I will discuss what is personality? , what psychologists' goals are, and the different types of research along with their strengths and weaknesses. Personality is one of the most theorized and most researched aspects of psychology. To understand personality, one must first understand trait and state. Trait is a relatively permanent individual characteristic, whereas state is a temporary change in one's personality (Heffner, 2002).

The word “ personality” has many different definitions. According to “ American Psychological Association” (2013), “ Personality refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The study of personality focuses on understanding individual differences in particular personality characteristics and understanding how the various parts of a person come together as a whole” (Personality). Personality addresses three issues: human universals (what are universal features of human nature), individual differences (how do people differ from one another), and individual uniqueness (Cervone & Pervin, 2010).

There are four categories that may be used when researching personality; life record data (L-data), observer data (O-data), test data (T-data), and self-report date (S-data). Together these make up LOTS of data. L-data is obtained from a person's life history or public records. O-data is obtained through friends and family members of the person being researched. T-data is obtained from experimental procedures and standardized tests. S-data is obtained by the person through a survey or interview (“ Sources Of

Personality Data,” n. .). By using these methods, psychologists can obtain a complete personality profile on the individual being studied. Three of the most commonly used methods to study personality are case studies, correlational designs, and experimental designs or true experiments. Each method brings about different ways of studying personality and each has their advantages and disadvantages. According to Cervone and Pervin (2010) case studies are an approach to research in which one studies an individual person in great detail.

This strategy commonly is associated with clinical research, although in the past they have been used in part with clinical treatment (Cervone & Pervin, 2010). They focus on how and why questions are asked. Many psychologists believe this method is the only way to capture the complexities of personality. During a case study a psychologist spends time with the individual who is being studied, attempting to discover what is important to that individual's personality. According to Cervone and Pervin (2010), case studies have played an important role in the development of some major theories concerning personality.

Some noticeable strengths regarding case studies are they avoid the laboratory (usually done in a natural setting), studying the full complexity of person-environment relationships, they lead to in-depth study of individual, and contribute to learning important aspects of the individual's life, which may not occur when using experiments or the correlational method. Along with strengths, there are also some weaknesses such as case studies lead to unsystematic observation, they encourage subjective interpretation of data, and they do not establish causal relationships (Cervone & Pervin, 2010).

Correlational research or design is an approach to research in which existing individual differences are measured and related to one another, rather than being manipulated as in experimental research (Cervone & Pervin, 2010). Surveys focus on the questions of who, what, where, how, and how much. Personality questionnaires often focus on the differences among people. Correlational research is used when in-depth information about an individual is not desired or when laboratory experiments cannot be conducted (Cervone & Pervin, 2010).

Unlike a case study, psychologists can study a large number of people using this method. Although a large number of individuals are being studied, researchers are able to study many different personality characteristics (Cervone & Pervin, 2010). Some advantages to using personality tests or questionnaires are as follows: psychologists can study a wide range of variables, study relationships among many variables, and large samples are easily obtained. Some disadvantages are they establish associated relationships rather than casual, reliability and validity cannot be obtained, and individuals are not studied in-depth.

Experimental research or design is an approach to research in which the psychologist manipulates a variable of interest; usually by assigning different research participants, at random, to different experimental conditions (Cervone & Pervin, 2010). This is also known as cause and effect. This is the most scientific form of research. The key feature of a controlled experiment is that participants are assigned at random to an experimental condition. If people in one condition respond differently from people in another, one can

conclude that the variable that was manipulated casually influenced their responses.

Strengths include: psychologists are can manipulate specific variables, record data objectively, and establish cause-effect relationships. Weaknesses include: excludes things that cannot be studied in a laboratory, creates an artificial setting that limits the generality of findings, and fosters demand characteristics and experimenter expectancy effects. According to Cervone and Pervin (2010), there are five goals of a personality theorist; observation that is scientific, theory that is systematic, theory that is testable, theory that is comprehensive, and application: from theory to practice.

There are three key elements when observing: using a large diverse group of people, be objective, and concentrate on specific thinking processes, emotional reactions, and biological systems that contribute to personality functioning (Cervone & Pervin, 2010). By systematic, it is meant that researchers must prove they understand what people are like. By testable, it is meant that ideas must be tested by objective scientific evidence. By comprehensive, it is meant that researchers must address all psychological aspect of the person.

Each theorist from past to present has his or her idea of what method works best for what is being studied. Case studies help from the most in-depth analysis of the individual being studied. Correlational research is used when case studies or experimental research either cannot be used and experimental research is used in cause and effect situations. Though not everyone agrees with all the personality theories, personality has been

studied for hundreds of years and will continue to be studied for many to come.