# Personality Development: Stability and Change

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**ABSTRACT:** Personality development refers to the process by which the organized thought and behavior patterns that make up a person's unique personality emerge over time. Many factors influence personality, including genetics and environment, how we were parented, and societal variables.[1]Perhaps most importantly, it is the ongoing interaction of all these influences that continue to shape personality. Personality involves not only inborn traits but also the development of cognitive and behavioral patterns that influence how we think and act. Temperament is a key part of personality that is determined by inherited traits. Character is an aspect of personality influenced by experience that continues to grow and change throughout life. The following theories focus on several aspects of personality formation—including those that involve cognitive, social, and moral development.

**KEYWORDS:** personality, development, stability, change, theories, factors, inborn, moral, character

## I. INTRODUCTION

Freud's Stages of Psychosexual Development[1]
In his well-known stage theory of psychosexual development, Sigmund Freud suggested that personality develops in stages that are related to specific erogenous zones. These stages are:[2]

- Stage 1: Oral stage (birth to 1 year)
- Stage 2: Anal stage (1 to 3 years)
- Stage 3: Phallic stage (3 to 6 years)
- Stage 4: Latent period (age 6 to puberty)
- Stage 5: Genital stage (puberty to death)

Freud also believed that failure to complete these stages would lead to personality problems in adulthood.Freud not only theorized about how personality developed over the course of childhood, but he also developed a framework for how overall personality is structured.According to Freud, the basic driving force of personality and behavior is known as the libido.[2] This libidinal energy fuels the three components that make up personality: the id, the ego, and the superego.[3]The id is the aspect of personality present at birth. It is the most primal part of the personality and drives people to fulfill their most basic needs and urges.The ego is the aspect of personality charged with controlling the urges of the id and forcing it to behave in realistic ways.The superego is the final aspect of personality to develop and contains all of the ideals, morals, and values imbued by our parents and culture.[3]

According to Freud, these three elements of personality work together to create complex human behaviors. The superego attempts to make the ego behave according to these ideals. The ego must then moderate between the primal needs of the id, the idealistic standards of the superego, and reality.Freud's concept of the id, ego, and superego has gained prominence in popular culture, despite a lack of support and considerable skepticism from many researchers.[4]Erik Erikson's eight-stage theory of human development is another well-known theory in psychology. While it builds on Freud's stages of psychosexual development, Erikson chose to focus on how social relationships impact personality development. The theory also extends beyond childhood to look at development across the entire lifespan.[4]

Erikson's eight stages are:
- Stage 1: Trust versus mistrust (birth to 1 year)
- Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt (1 to 2 years)
- Stage 3: Initiative versus guilt (3 to 5 years)
- Stage 4: Industry versus inferiority (6 to 11 years)
- Stage 5: Identity versus role confusion (12 to 18 years)
- Stage 6: Intimacy versus isolation (19 to 40 years)
- Stage 7: Generativity versus stagnation (41 to 64 years)
- Stage 8: Integrity versus despair (65 years to death)[39]

At each of these stages, people face a crisis in which a task must be mastered. Those who successfully complete that stage emerge with a sense of mastery and well-being. Those who do not resolve the crisis at a particular stage may struggle with those skills for the remainder of their lives.[5]

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development remains one of the most frequently cited in psychology, despite being subject to considerable criticism.[6] While many aspects of his theory have not stood the test of time, the central idea remains important today: Children think differently than adults. According to Piaget, children progress through a series of four stages that are marked by distinctive changes in how they think. And how children think about themselves, others, and the world around them plays an important role in the formation of personality. [6]

Piaget's four stages are:

- Stage 1: Sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years)
- Stage 2: Preoperational stage (2 to 7 years)
- Stage 3: Concrete operational stage (7 to 11 years)
- Stage 4: Formal operational stage (12 years and up)[38]

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg developed a theory of personality development that focused on the growth of moral thought. Building on a two-stage process proposed by Piaget, Kohlberg expanded the theory to include six different stages:

- Stage 1: Obedience and punishment
- Stage 2: Individualism and exchange
- Stage 3: Developing good interpersonal relationships
- Stage 4: Maintaining social order
- Stage 5: Social contract and individual rights
- Stage 6: Universal principles

These stages are separated by levels. Level one is the pre-conventional level, it includes stages one and two, and takes place from birth to 9 years. Level two is the conventional level, it includes stages three and four, and takes place from age 10 to adolescence. Level three is the post-conventional level, it includes stages five and six, and takes place in adulthood.[7]

## II. DISCUSSION

The goal of personality development theories is to explain how we each develop our own unique characteristics and traits. While the list of options could be almost endless, most of these personality traits fall into five basic categories:

- Openness: Level of creativeness and responsiveness to change
- Conscientiousness: Level of organization and attention to detail
- Extraversion: Level of socialness and emotional expressiveness
- Agreeableness: Level of interest in others and cooperativeness
- Neuroticism: Level of emotional stability and moodiness[8]

The "Big 5" is one of the most recognized models of personality and also the most widely used, though some suggest that it isn't comprehensive enough to cover the huge variety of personality traits that one can grow and develop.[9] On a global level, people spend a lot of money on personal development, with this market bringing in more than \$38 billion annually (and expected to grow).[10] If you're interested in making positive changes to your personality, these tips can help:

- Identify your current traits. You won't know where to place your efforts if you don't first identify the personality traits you feel the need to work on. A personality test can provide an assessment of your current traits. Pick one or two traits to work on that you feel would help you grow as a person and focus on them.
- Set a daily personal development goal. Commit to doing at least one thing every day to help develop your personality. This doesn't have to be a big action either. Even baby steps will move you in the right direction.[9]
- Keep a positive mindset. Changing yourself can be difficult, especially if you're working on a part of your personality you've had for a long time. Staying positive along the way helps you pay more attention to the pros versus the cons. It also makes the journey more enjoyable, for you and everyone around you.[37]
- Be confident. When you have something about yourself that you'd like to change, it can be easy to let your perceived imperfection reduce your confidence. Yet, you can be confident and continue to develop your personality in meaningful ways at the same time, giving you the best of both worlds while pursuing personality development.[10]

Stability of personality

Over the course of an individual's lifespan, the stability of their personality has been shown to be variable, although this variability levels out in adulthood. Behavioral genetics can account for the variability experienced across the lifespan. This is highly evident in the transitions between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.[36] From childhood to mid-adolescence, the rate of individual differences in personality increases, primarily due to environmental influences. However, genetic influences play a larger role than environmental influences in adulthood, resulting in fewer individual differences in personality between individuals who share similar genetics. The stability of personality across one's lifespan is further evidenced by a longitudinal study conducted on individuals across the span of fifty years from adolescence through adulthood.[11] The results of this longitudinal study suggested that the personality was malleable, although variations in the level of malleability stabilized in adulthood. A study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology examined personality developing in college students based on the Big Five personality trait domains and facets within those domains. The results suggested that the rank-order stabilities of facets were high, with values greater than .50 (indicating a strong correlation);[35] the results for trait domains were similar to individual facets. High rank-order stability is further evidenced by another study that integrated personality structure, process, and development. This study included previous research that indicated high-order rank stability; it also included research that indicated variation in this stability across periods of the lifespan, such as adolescence and adulthood. The stability and variation of personality is explained by a complex interaction between one's genetics and one's environment.[12]

Heterotypic stability refers to the psychological coherence of an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors across development. Questions about heterotypic stability concern the degree of consistency in underlying personality attributes.[34] The tricky part of studying heterotypic stability is that the underlying psychological attribute

ISSN: 2395-7639

can have different behavioral expressions at different ages. (You may already know that the prefix "hetero" means something like "different" in Greek.) Shyness is a good example of such an attribute because shyness is expressed differently by toddlers and young children than adults. The shy toddler might cling to a caregiver in a crowded setting and burst into tears when separated from this caregiver. The shy adult, on the other hand, may avoid making eye contact with strangers and seem aloof and distant at social gatherings.[33] It would be highly unusual to observe an adult burst into tears in a crowded setting. The observable behaviors typically associated with shyness "look" different at different ages.[13] Researchers can study heterotypic continuity only once they have a theory that specifies the different behavioral manifestations of the psychological attribute at different points in the lifespan. As it stands, there is evidence that attributes such as shyness and aggression exhibit heterotypic stability across the lifespan . Individuals who act shy as children often act shy as adults, but the degree of correspondence is far from perfect because many things can intervene between childhood and adulthood to alter how an individual develops. Nonetheless, the important point is that the patterns of behavior observed in childhood sometimes foreshadow adult personality attributes.[14]

Homotypic stability concerns the amount of similarity in the same observable personality characteristics across time[32]. (The prefix "homo" means something like the "same" in Greek.) For example, researchers might ask whether stress reaction or the tendency to become easily distressed by the normal challenges of life exhibits homotypic stability from age 25 to age 45. The assumption is that this attribute has the same manifestations at these different ages. Researchers make further distinctions between absolute stability and differential stability when considering homotypic stability.[15]

Absolute stability refers to the consistency of the level of the same personality attribute across time. If an individual received a score of 45 on a hypothetical measure of stress reaction at age 20 and at age 40, researchers would conclude there was evidence of absolute stability. Questions about absolute stability can be considered at the group level or the individual level. At the group level, it is common for personality researchers to compare average scores on personality measures for groups of different ages. For example, it is possible to investigate whether the average 40-year-old adult has a lower (or higher) level of stress reaction than the average 20-year-old. The answer to this question would tell researchers something about typical patterns of personality development.[31]It is important to consider absolute stability from both the group and individual perspectives. The individual level is interesting because different people might have different patterns of absolute change over time. One person might report consistently low levels of stress reaction throughout adulthood, whereas another person may report dramatic increases in stress reaction during her 30s and 40s. These different individual patterns can be present even if the overall trend is for a decline in stress reaction with age. Personality psychology is about individual differences and whether an individual's attributes change or remain the same across time might be an important individual difference. Indeed, there are intriguing hints that the rate and direction of change in characteristics such as stress reaction (or neuroticism) predicts mortality.[16]

Differential stability refers to the consistency of a personality attribute in terms of an individual's rank-ordering. A typical question about differential stability might be whether a 20-year-old who is low in stress reaction relative to her same aged peers develops into a 40-year-old who is also low in stress reaction compared to her peers.[30] Differential stability is often interesting because many psychological attributes show average changes across the lifespan. Regardless of average changes with age, however, it is common to assume that more trait-like attributes have a high degree of differential stability. Consider athletic performance as an attribute that may exhibit differential stability. The average 35-year-old is likely to run a 5K race faster than the average 55-year-old. Nonetheless, individuals who are fast relative to their peers in their 30s might also be fast relative to their peers in their 50s. Likewise, even if most people decline on a stress reaction as they age, it is still useful to investigate whether there is consistency over time in their relative standing on this attribute.The Big Five domains include extraversion (attributes such as assertive, confident, independent, outgoing, and sociable), agreeableness (attributes such as cooperative, kind, modest, and trusting), [17] conscientiousness (attributes such as hard working, dutiful, self-controlled, and goal-oriented), neuroticism (attributes such as anxious, tense, moody, and easily angered), and
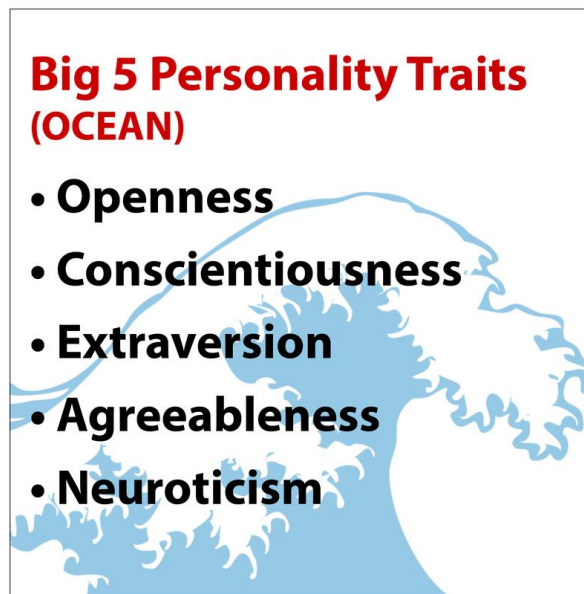
openness (attributes such as artistic, curious, inventive, and open-minded).[29] The Big Five is one of the most common ways of organizing the vast range of personality attributes that seem to distinguish one person from the next. This organizing framework made it possible for scientists to draw broad conclusions from the literature.[18]



## III. RESULTS

Personality stability is the result of the interplay between the individual and her/his environment. Psychologists use the term person–environment transactions to capture the mutually transforming interplay between individuals and their contextual circumstances. Several different types of these transactions have been described by psychological researchers. Active person–environment transactions occur when individuals seek out certain kinds of environments and experiences that are consistent with their personality characteristics. Risk-taking individuals may spend their leisure time very differently than more cautious individuals. Some prefer extreme sports whereas others prefer less intense experiences.[28] Reactive person–environment transactions occur when individuals react differently to the same objective situation because of their personalities. A large social gathering represents a psychologically different context to the highly extraverted person compared with the highly introverted person. Evocative person–environment transactions occur whenever individuals draw out or evoke certain kinds of responses from their social environments because of their personality attributes. A warm and secure individual invites different kinds of responses from peers than a cold and aloof individual.[19]

Individuals sometimes select careers, friends, social clubs, and lifestyles because of their personality attributes. This is the active process of attraction—individuals are attracted to environments because of their personality attributes. Situations that match with our personalities seem to feel "right".[27] On the flipside of this process, gatekeepers, such as employers, admissions officers, and even potential relationship partners, often select individuals because of their personalities. Extraverted and outgoing individuals are likely to make better salespeople than quiet individuals who are uncomfortable with social interactions. All in all, certain individuals are "admitted" by gatekeepers into particular kinds of environments because of their personalities. Likewise, individuals with characteristics that are a bad fit with a particular environment may leave such settings or be asked to leave by gatekeepers. A lazy employee

will not last long at a demanding job. These examples capture the process of attrition (dropping out). The processes of selection and attrition reflect evocative person–environment transactions. Last, individuals can actively manipulate their environments[26] to match their personalities. An outgoing person will find ways to introduce more social interactions into the workday, whereas a shy individual may shun the proverbial water cooler to avoid having contact with others. These four processes of attraction, selection, attrition, and manipulation explain how a kind of matching occurs between personality attributes and environmental conditions for many individuals. This positive matching typically produces personality consistency because the "press" of the situation reinforces the attributes of the person. This observation is at the core of the corresponsive principle of personality development[20] .Preexisting personality attributes and environmental contexts work in concert to promote personality continuity. The idea is that environments often reinforce those personality attributes that were partially responsible for the initial environmental conditions in the first place. For example, ambitious and confident individuals might be attracted to and selected for more demanding jobs . These kinds of jobs often require drive, dedication, and achievement striving thereby accentuating dispositional tendencies toward ambition and confidence. Reactive and evocative person–environment transactions also facilitate personality stability.[25] The overarching idea is that personality attributes shape how individuals respond to situations and shape the kinds of responses individuals elicit from their environments. These responses and reactions can generate self-fulfilling cycles. For example, aggressive individuals seem to interpret ambiguous social cues as threatening (something called a hostile attribution bias or a hostile attribution of intent. Although a number of mechanisms account for personality continuity by generating a match between the individual's characteristics and the environment, personality change or transformation is nonetheless possible. Recall that differential stability is not perfect. The simplest mechanism for producing change is a cornerstone of behaviorism: Patterns of behavior that produce positive consequences (pleasure) are repeated, whereas patterns of behavior that produce negative consequences (pain) will diminish. It is also possible that individuals might change their personality attributes by actively striving to change their behaviors and emotional reactions with help from outsiders. This idea lies at the heart of psychotherapy. [21]As it stands, the conditions that produce lasting personality changes are an active area of research. Personality researchers have historically sought to demonstrate the existence of personality stability, and they are now turning their full attention to the conditions that facilitate personality change.

Insights about personality change are important for creating effective interventions designed to foster positive human development. Finding ways to promote self-control, emotional stability, creativity, and an agreeable disposition would likely lead to improvements for both individuals and society as a whole because these attributes predict a range of consequential life outcomes[22]

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

There are multiple ways to evaluate personality stability. The existing evidence suggests that personality attributes are relatively enduring attributes that show predictable average-level changes across the lifespan.[23] Personality stability is produced by a complicated interplay between individuals and their social settings. Many personality attributes are linked to life experiences in a mutually reinforcing cycle: Personality attributes seem to shape environmental contexts, and those contexts often then accentuate and reinforce those very personality attributes. Even so, personality change or transformation is possible because individuals respond to their environments. Individuals may also want to change their personalities. Personality researchers are now beginning to address important questions about the possibility of lasting personality changes through intervention efforts.[24]

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