

Personality, Emotion and Behaviour

Throughout human history, we have tried to find a way to describe our personality, i.e. to find an answer on what makes us unique in the way we think, feel and act. For example, the ancient Greeks believed that everyone's personality is determined by the way four different humours, some kind of fluids, were balanced within the human body.

Various methods have been invented to assess individual differences. In ancient China for example, if young men wanted to serve the Chinese emperor as an officer they had to pass specific tests including knowledge about Confucianism beliefs, mathematics, and law.

Since then, a lot of effort has been made to improve the methods to measure individual skills, beliefs and drives. This is what contemporary researchers use as methods in order to measure personality...

... Self Report:

A straight-forward way to find out what you think and feel across different situations is to ask directly – this is why various personality questionnaires have been developed. One of the most famous ones is the so-called NEO-PI-R. Its authors, Costa & McCrae, discovered that individual differences in people can be well described using five domains of personality. You can easily memorise them as OCEAN.

These five domains can be found across various cultures. And personality research has been applied to the study of cultural stereotypes.

Most people hold beliefs about personality characteristics typical of members of their own and others' cultures. Terracciano and colleagues (2005) wanted to find out if these beliefs hold true – do cultures really differ in the way their members act and behave? In order to find this out, the researchers assessed personal beliefs in nearly 4000 people from 49 cultures. They also assessed the average personality scores by observer ratings and self-report on the five OCEAN personality domains. When they compared beliefs with the actual personality scores, they found that beliefs about the typical national characteristics were unfounded stereotypes – the beliefs did not match the actual personality assessed by the NEO-PI-R.

This study demonstrates how standardized assessment of personality can be important for overcoming cultural and personal biases and is why personality assessment is more often being used in occupational setting such as on military and job applications.

... Brain activity:

In latest research on personality, scientists from various professions work together to get a more complete picture of what impact personality actually has on human well-being. One recent approach is conducting brain imaging studies of extraversion and neuroticism.

One approach is to identify brain regions that are associated with extraversion and neuroticism, while processing emotions using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). In a recent study from 2002 by Turhan Canli and colleagues, they found a correlation between extraversion and specific brain activity pattern when volunteers were regarding pictures of emotional faces.

The more extraverted somebody tends to be the more active was their “Amygdala”, an almond-shaped neuronal structure in the brain, when viewing happy faces, suggesting that certain brain structures are responsible for our personality

	Personality Domain	High score	Low score
O	Openness to Experience	Curious, broad interests, creative, imaginative	Conventional, down-to-earth, narrow interested, not artistic
C	Conscientiousness	Organised, reliable, hardworking, self-disciplined	Aimless, unreliable, careless, lax
E	Extraversion	Sociable, active, talkative, person-oriented	Reserved, sober, task-oriented, quiet
A	Agreeableness	Soft-hearted, trusting, helpful, forgiving	Cynical, suspicious, uncooperative, ruthless
N	Neuroticism	worrying, nervous, insecure, emotional	Calm, relaxed, unemotional, secure