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Personality across Disciplines: An Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Review

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Abstract

Personality is a central construct for understanding human behavior, identity, and social functioning, yet it remains conceptually diverse and theoretically contested. Over the past century, personality has been examined through multiple disciplinary lenses, including psychology, sociology, neuroscience, anthropology, and philosophy. Each discipline offers distinct assumptions regarding the origins, structure, and expression of personality, resulting in both rich insights and conceptual fragmentation. In response to this complexity, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches have gained increasing prominence, seeking to integrate biological, psychological, social, cultural, and philosophical perspectives while addressing real-world challenges.

This review provides a comprehensive synthesis of contemporary personality research by examining conceptual definitions, historical developments, major theoretical traditions, and methodological approaches across disciplines. Particular attention is given to dominant personality theories including psychoanalytic, trait, behavioral, humanistic, biological, and sociocultural models and to empirically robust trait frameworks such as the Big Five and HEXACO models. The review further explores advances in neuroscience, genetics, and digital methodologies, alongside cross-cultural and anthropological findings that challenge claims of universality.

Beyond theory, the paper highlights the applied relevance of personality research in health, education, and organizational contexts, emphasizing ethical, cultural, and practical considerations in assessment and intervention. By adopting a transdisciplinary perspective, this review argues that personality should be understood as a dynamic, context-sensitive system shaped by interactions among biological dispositions, social environments, cultural meanings, and individual agency. The paper concludes by outlining emerging trends and future directions, underscoring the need for integrative frameworks that can enhance both scientific understanding and societal well-being.

Key Words: *Personality, Interdisciplinary Research, Transdisciplinarity, Big Five, Culture, Neuroscience etc.*

Introduction

Personality has long occupied a central position in efforts to understand what makes individuals distinct yet socially embedded beings. It refers broadly to enduring patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that characterize individuals across time and situations. Despite this apparent simplicity, personality remains one of the most complex and debated constructs in the human sciences. Psychologists, sociologists, neuroscientists, anthropologists, and philosophers have each approached personality with different assumptions, methods, and

explanatory goals, resulting in a field that is both intellectually rich and theoretically fragmented.

Within psychology, personality has traditionally been studied as a system of relatively stable traits, motives, and self-regulatory processes that account for consistent individual differences (McCrae & Costa, 2021). Sociological methods, on the other hand, emphasise the significance of social structures, roles, and institutions in shaping personality and view personality as intimately tied to social context and interaction (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2022). By finding personality differences in brain shape, neural networks, and genetic variety, neuroscientific

methods highlight biological constraints and predispositions (DeYoung, 2020; Allen & DeYoung, 2023). Anthropological research challenges Universalist assumptions by documenting culturally specific patterns of personality expression and socialization, underscoring the influence of cultural meaning systems (Henrich et al., 2020). By addressing issues of agency, moral responsibility, identity, and selfhood that go beyond empirical measurement, philosophical traditions further expand the conversation (Slife & Richardson, 2021).

Historically, these perspectives developed largely in parallel, often with limited dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. As a result, personality research has sometimes been criticized for reductionism, whether biological, psychological, or cultural in nature. Trait-based models, while empirically powerful, have been questioned for their explanatory depth and cultural generalizability, particularly in non-Western and small-scale societies (Gurven et al., 2020). Conversely, purely contextual or constructivist approaches have been criticized for underestimating biological constraints and cross-situational consistency.

In recent decades, growing recognition of these limitations has fueled interest in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to personality. Interdisciplinary research seeks to integrate theories and methods across academic disciplines, while transdisciplinary research goes a step further by engaging non-academic stakeholders and addressing complex societal challenges such as mental health, education, digital identity, and organizational effectiveness (Choi & Pak, 2022). From this perspective, personality is not merely a set of internal traits but a dynamic system emerging from interactions among biological dispositions, psychological processes, social environments, and cultural narratives.

The present review aims to synthesize contemporary personality research through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary lens. Specifically, it (a) examines how personality is conceptualized across disciplines, (b) traces the historical development of major personality theories, (c) compares dominant theoretical models and measurement approaches, and (d) explores applied implications for health, education, and organizational contexts. By integrating diverse perspectives, this paper seeks to advance a more holistic and context-sensitive understanding of personality suited to the complexities of the twenty-first century.

Defining Personality: Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Perspectives

Despite its centrality in the human sciences, personality has resisted a single, universally accepted definition. This lack of consensus reflects the diverse disciplinary traditions that have contributed to its study. Each discipline foregrounds different aspects of human functioning; psychological processes, social structures, biological mechanisms, cultural meanings, or philosophical foundations resulting in complementary yet partial accounts. An interdisciplinary perspective recognizes these differences, while a transdisciplinary approach seeks to integrate them into a more comprehensive understanding of the person.

• Psychological Perspectives

According to McCrae and Costa (2021), personality is commonly described in psychology as persistent patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour that set people apart and exhibit relative consistency over time and in various contexts. Psychological definitions emphasize both stability and organized internal processes, including traits, motives, self-concepts, and regulatory mechanisms. Allport's classic formulation of personality as a "dynamic organization within the individual of psychophysical systems" remains influential because it captures the interaction between biological substrates and psychological processes while allowing for development and change. Contemporary personality psychology continues this tradition by integrating trait models with motivational, affective, and self-regulatory frameworks (DeYoung, 2020).

• Sociological Perspectives

From a sociological standpoint, personality is inseparable from social context. Sociologists conceptualize personality as shaped by social roles, group memberships, institutional arrangements, and power relations. This viewpoint stresses how qualities are manifested, reinforced, or limited by social systems rather than seeing personality as merely an inherent propensity (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2022). Sociological research highlights how social class, gender norms, occupational roles, and cultural expectations influence personality development and expression across the life course. Personality, in this view, emerges through interaction and is continually negotiated within social environments.

• Anthropological Perspectives

Anthropological approaches challenge assumptions of universality by demonstrating that personality traits and their meanings vary across cultures. Cultural anthropologists argue that personality must be understood within locally defined systems of values, norms, and practices. Cross-cultural research has shown that while some dimensions of personality appear widely observable, others are culturally specific or differently organized (Gurven et al., 2020). Studies conducted in small-scale and non-Western societies have questioned whether dominant trait models, such as the Big Five, fully capture personality structure outside industrialized contexts. These findings underscore the importance of cultural meaning systems, socialization practices, and ecological conditions in shaping personality.

• Neuroscientific and Biological Perspectives

Neuroscience conceptualizes personality as grounded in biological systems, including brain structure, neural connectivity, neurotransmitter function, and genetic variation. Certain brain networks involved in reward processing, emotional regulation, and executive control have been linked to individual differences in qualities like extraversion, neuroticism, and conscientiousness (Allen & DeYoung, 2023).

Behavioral genetic studies estimate that approximately 40-60% of variance in major personality traits is heritable, although genetic influences are typically polygenic and

interact dynamically with environmental factors. From a biological perspective, personality reflects probabilistic tendencies rather than fixed determinants.

• Philosophical Perspectives

Philosophical traditions approach personality through questions of selfhood, agency, rationality, and moral responsibility. The focus of philosophical anthropology is on the individual as a value-oriented, meaning-making creature with the capacity for introspection and self-transcendence (Slife & Richardson, 2021). Unlike empirical models that focus on measurable traits, philosophical accounts foreground normative and existential dimensions of personality, including identity, purpose, and ethical agency.

• Toward an Integrative Definition

Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches increasingly conceptualize personality as a **dynamic, multilevel system** arising from interactions among biological dispositions, psychological processes, social relationships, cultural narratives, and individual agency. Rather than privileging a single level of explanation, this integrative view acknowledges that personality is simultaneously embodied, situated, and meaning-laden. Such a framework provides the conceptual foundation for addressing complex real-world challenges in health, education, and social policy.

Historical Development of Personality Research

The study of personality has deep historical roots, extending back to ancient philosophy and medicine. Early thinkers such as Hippocrates and Galen proposed humoral theories linking temperament to bodily fluids, establishing one of the earliest biological models of individual differences. Aristotle's reflections on the soul introduced distinctions among rational, emotional, and appetitive aspects of human nature, foreshadowing later psychological theories.

During the nineteenth century, personality inquiry shifted toward scientific classification, though not always successfully. Approaches such as phrenology and physiognomy attempted to link personality to physical characteristics, reflecting early efforts to systematize individual differences. Although these theories were later discredited, they signaled a growing interest in empirical approaches to personality.

The early twentieth century marked the formal emergence of personality psychology as a distinct field. Psychoanalysis, introduced by Freud, emphasized unconscious processes, early childhood experiences, and intrapsychic conflict. At the same time, trait theorists such as Allport and Cattell sought to identify stable dimensions of personality through lexical analysis and psychometric methods. Behaviorism, led by Skinner, rejected internal constructs in favor of observable behavior shaped by reinforcement.

Mid-twentieth-century developments expanded the field's scope. Humanistic psychologists such as Rogers and Maslow emphasized self-concept, growth, and self-actualization, while Erikson extended psychoanalytic ideas into a lifespan developmental framework. Anthropologists and sociologists simultaneously explored

cultural and structural influences on personality, highlighting socialization and cultural variability.

In the late twentieth century, advances in psychometrics and factor analysis led to the consolidation of trait models, particularly the Big Five. The turn of the twenty-first century brought increasing integration of neuroscience, genetics, and computational methods, alongside renewed interest in culture and context. Contemporary personality research thus reflects a convergence of historical traditions, setting the stage for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary synthesis.

Major Theories of Personality: An Integrative Overview

Personality theories represent systematic attempts to explain the structure, development, and expression of individual differences. Over time, multiple theoretical traditions have emerged, each emphasizing distinct mechanisms and levels of analysis. Rather than viewing these theories as mutually exclusive, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes them as complementary frameworks that illuminate different dimensions of personality.

• Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Theories

Psychoanalytic theory, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, conceptualizes personality as the outcome of dynamic interactions among unconscious drives, internalized moral standards, and reality-oriented processes. Freud's structural model comprising the id, ego, and superego emphasizes conflict, defense mechanisms, and the formative role of early childhood experiences. Subsequent theorists expanded and revised Freud's ideas. Jung introduced the concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes, proposing that personality are shaped not only by personal experience but also by universal symbolic patterns. Adler emphasized social interest and the striving for competence, while Erikson reframed psychodynamic theory within a psychosocial developmental framework spanning the entire lifespan. Although psychodynamic theories have been criticized for limited empirical testability, they continue to influence clinical practice, developmental psychology, and cultural analysis (Luyten et al., 2020).

• Trait Theories

Trait theories conceptualize personality as a constellation of relatively stable dimensions that differentiate individuals. Early trait theorists, such as Allport and Cattell, laid the groundwork for modern dimensional models through lexical analysis and factor-analytic methods. Because of its cross-cultural adaptability and empirical robustness, the Big Five model; conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness has become the most popular trait framework (McCrae & Costa, 2021). The HEXACO model extends this framework by adding Honesty-Humility, capturing traits related to sincerity, fairness, and modesty. Trait models are widely used in research and applied settings, including health, education, and organizational psychology. However, critics argue that trait theories are primarily descriptive and may underrepresent motivational, narrative, and contextual dimensions of personality (Baumert et al., 2022).

Behavioral and Social-Cognitive Approaches

Behavioral theories, most notably those associated with Skinner, conceptualize personality as a repertoire of learned behaviors shaped by reinforcement and punishment. From this perspective, personality does not reside within the individual but emerges from consistent environmental contingencies. Social-cognitive approaches, such as Bandura's social learning theory, incorporate cognitive processes, emphasizing observational learning, self-efficacy, and reciprocal determinism. Mischel's critique of trait consistency led to interactionist models that view behavior as the product of person-situation interactions. Contemporary social-cognitive theories emphasize cognitive-affective processes, goals, and situational cues in shaping personality expression (Cervone & Pervin, 2021).

• Humanistic and Existential Perspectives

Humanistic theories focus on subjective experience, personal meaning, and the innate drive toward growth. Rogers emphasized self-concept, congruence, and unconditional positive regard as foundations of healthy personality development. Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs culminating in self-actualization, characterized by authenticity, creativity, and autonomy. Existential perspectives, influenced by philosophers such as Sartre and Frankl, highlight freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning. While humanistic approaches have been criticized for limited operationalization, they have significantly influenced counseling, education, and positive psychology (Wong, 2020).

• Biological and Neuroscientific Models

Biological theories link personality traits to genetic, neurochemical, and neural mechanisms. Eysenck's PEN model and Gray's reinforcement sensitivity theory represent early efforts to ground personality in brain systems. This strategy has been reinforced by developments in neuroimaging and genetics, which have shown links between characteristics and brain networks related to executive control, reward processing, and emotion regulation (Allen & DeYoung, 2023). Biological models emphasize probabilistic tendencies rather than determinism, recognizing the role of environmental modulation and gene-environment interaction.

• Sociocultural Approaches

Sociocultural theories emphasize the role of culture, socialization, and social structure in shaping personality. Cultural norms, values, and practices influence how traits are expressed, evaluated, and reinforced. Cross-cultural research has demonstrated both similarities and systematic differences in personality structure across societies, challenging assumptions of universality and highlighting cultural specificity (Henrich et al., 2020).

Table 1

Comparative Overview of Major Personality Theories

Theoretical Approach	Core Assumptions	Primary Focus	Strengths	Key Limitations
Psychoanalytic / Psychodynamic	Personality shaped by unconscious processes and early experiences	Intrapsychic conflict, development	Rich clinical insight; developmental depth	Limited empirical testability
Trait Theories (Big Five, HEXACO)	Personality consists of stable, measurable dimensions	Individual differences	Strong empirical support; predictive validity	Limited explanatory depth
Behavioral	Personality as learned behavior	Reinforcement histories	Clear mechanisms; practical interventions	Neglects internal processes
Social-Cognitive	Behavior results from person-situation interaction	Cognition, goals, context	Integrates cognition and environment	Complexity in measurement
Humanistic / Existential	Innate drive toward growth and meaning	Subjective experience	Emphasizes agency and well-being	Limited operationalization
Biological / Neuroscientific	Traits rooted in brain and genetics	Neural and genetic mechanisms	Biological grounding	Risk of reductionism
Sociocultural	Personality shaped by culture and social structure	Socialization, norms	Cultural sensitivity	Reduced focus on individual agency

Trait Models and Personality Measurement

Trait models represent one of the most influential and empirically grounded approaches to personality research. They conceptualize personality as a configuration of relatively stable dimensions that capture consistent patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior. Among these models, the Big Five and HEXACO frameworks have achieved prominence due to their robustness, replicability, and broad applicability across cultures and applied domains.

• The Big Five Model

The Big Five model emerged from decades of lexical and factor-analytic research based on the premise that socially relevant personality characteristics become encoded in

language. The model identifies five broad domains: **Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism**. Each domain encompasses narrower facets that allow for more fine-grained assessment of individual differences (McCrae & Costa, 2021).

Empirical research has demonstrated that the Big Five traits show substantial predictive validity across life outcomes, including academic achievement, occupational performance, health behaviors, and interpersonal relationships (Soto, 2021). For example, conscientiousness consistently predicts job performance and longevity, while neuroticism is associated with vulnerability to stress and mental health difficulties. Extraversion and agreeableness are linked to social functioning, whereas openness is associated with creativity, intellectual engagement, and cultural participation.

Despite its strengths, the Big Five model has been critiqued for its descriptive nature and its reliance on Western lexical traditions. Cross-cultural studies suggest that while the five-factor structure is widely observable, it may not fully capture personality organization in all cultural contexts (Gurven et al., 2020).

• The HEXACO Model

The HEXACO model extends the Big Five framework by introducing a sixth dimension: **Honesty-Humility**. This trait captures individual differences related to sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, and modesty. Proponents argue that Honesty-Humility explains variance in moral behavior, ethical decision-making and antisocial tendencies beyond the Big Five dimensions (Ashton & Lee, 2020).

HEXACO has demonstrated incremental validity in predicting outcomes such as workplace integrity, cooperation, and exploitative behavior. While structurally similar to the Big Five, HEXACO reconfigures agreeableness and emotionality, highlighting the conceptual flexibility of trait models and their capacity for refinement.

• Personality Measurement Approaches

Personality traits are assessed using multiple methodological approaches, each with distinct strengths and limitations:

- **Self-report questionnaires** remain the most widely used method due to their efficiency and capacity to capture subjective experience. Instruments such as the NEO Personality Inventory and HEXACO-PI-R demonstrate strong reliability and validity but are vulnerable to response biases.
- **Observer and informant ratings** provide external perspectives on personality, particularly for observable traits such as extraversion and conscientiousness. Meta-analytic evidence suggests moderate to high convergence with self-reports (Connelly & Ones, 2021).
- **Behavioral and digital measures** represent a growing area of research. Digital footprints derived from social media activity, smartphone usage, and linguistic patterns are increasingly used to infer

personality traits through machine learning techniques (Park et al., 2020).

- **Projective and qualitative methods**, although less prominent in contemporary research, remain relevant in clinical and cultural contexts where narrative and meaning-making are central.

Mixed-method and multi-informant approaches are increasingly advocated to enhance construct validity and reduce method-specific bias.

Table 2

Comparison of the Big Five and HEXACO Personality Models

Dimension	Big Five Domains	HEXACO Domains	Conceptual Focus	Applied Relevance
Openness	Openness to Experience	Openness to Experience	Creativity, curiosity	Education, innovation
Conscientiousness	Conscientiousness	Conscientiousness	Self-regulation, goal pursuit	Work performance, health
Extraversion	Extraversion	Extraversion	Sociability, positive affect	Leadership, teamwork
Agreeableness	Agreeableness	Agreeableness (redefined)	Cooperation, empathy	Social relations
Emotionality	Neuroticism	Emotionality	Stress reactivity, anxiety	Mental health
Moral Dimension	—	Honesty-Humility	Sincerity, fairness	Ethics, integrity

Figure 1

Schematic Representation of the Big Five Personality Model

Figure Description (Textual Schematic): Figure 1 presents a conceptual schematic of the Big Five personality model. At the center lies the construct of *personality*, surrounded by five interconnected domains: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Each domain is linked to representative behavioral tendencies such as creativity (openness), self-discipline (conscientiousness), sociability (extraversion), empathy (agreeableness), and emotional reactivity (neuroticism). The schematic emphasizes both the distinctiveness and interrelatedness of the five trait domains.

Applications of Personality Research in Contemporary Contexts

• Personality and Health

Personality traits are robust predictors of both physical and mental health outcomes. Among the Big Five traits, conscientiousness has emerged as the most consistent

predictor of longevity, healthy behaviors, and adherence to medical regimens (Soto, 2021). Individuals high in conscientiousness are more likely to engage in preventive health behaviors, regulate impulses, and maintain stable lifestyles, which cumulatively reduce health risks over time.

Neuroticism, in contrast, is strongly associated with vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders. Heightened emotional reactivity and maladaptive coping strategies contribute to increased psychological distress and somatic complaints (Allen & DeYoung, 2023). However, recent research suggests that certain facets of neuroticism, such as health-related vigilance, may have adaptive effects under specific conditions.

Biological pathways linking personality and health include stress reactivity, immune functioning, and neuroendocrine regulation, while behavioral pathways involve lifestyle choices and social relationships. Importantly, longitudinal evidence indicates that personality traits can change through interventions such as psychotherapy, mindfulness training, and behavioral modification, highlighting their relevance for health promotion and disease prevention (Roberts et al., 2020).

• Personality in Education

Personality traits play a critical role in educational outcomes, influencing motivation, learning strategies, academic achievement, and socio-emotional development. Conscientiousness consistently predicts academic success across age groups due to its association with persistence, time management, and self-regulated learning. Openness to experience is linked to intellectual curiosity, creativity, and engagement with complex ideas (Soto, 2021).

Educational psychology increasingly recognizes the value of personality-informed teaching practices. Tailoring instructional strategies to students' personality profiles can enhance engagement and reduce dropout risk. For instance, students high in neuroticism may benefit from stress-management interventions, whereas those low in conscientiousness may require structured goal-setting and external supports.

From a transdisciplinary perspective, integrating personality research with educational policy and pedagogy supports holistic student development by addressing cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of learning.

• Personality in Organizational and Work Settings

Personality assessment is widely used in organizational contexts, particularly in employee selection, leadership development, and team composition. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that conscientiousness is the strongest and most consistent predictor of job performance across occupations, followed by emotional stability and, in specific roles, extraversion and agreeableness (Connelly & Ones, 2021).

Personality traits also predict contextual performance, leadership effectiveness, adaptability, and ethical behavior. The HEXACO trait of Honesty-Humility, for example, is especially relevant for predicting workplace integrity and counterproductive behavior (Ashton & Lee, 2020).

Despite its utility, the use of personality testing in organizations raises ethical concerns related to fairness, privacy, and cultural bias. Best practices emphasize transparency, informed consent, and the use of validated instruments within a broader assessment framework.

Ethical, Cultural, and Methodological Considerations

As personality assessment becomes increasingly prevalent, ethical and cultural considerations have gained renewed importance. Ethical practice requires informed consent, confidentiality, and responsible interpretation of results, particularly in high-stakes contexts such as employment, education, and clinical decision-making.

Cultural sensitivity is a central concern, as many personality measures were developed within Western contexts and may not fully capture culturally specific expressions of personality. Cross-cultural research has highlighted differences in trait salience, response styles, and value systems, underscoring the need for culturally adapted instruments and locally grounded validation (Henrich et al., 2020).

Methodologically, reliance on self-report data raises concerns about social desirability bias and limited ecological validity. Emerging digital and computational methods offer new opportunities but introduce ethical challenges related to data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and consent. A transdisciplinary approach encourages collaboration among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and communities to address these issues responsibly.

Transdisciplinary Integration and Future Directions

Transdisciplinary personality research moves beyond disciplinary integration by engaging with real-world problems and societal stakeholders. This approach is particularly valuable in addressing complex challenges such as mental health crises, digital identity formation, and global cultural diversity.

Emerging trends include the use of machine learning to infer personality from digital behavior, increased focus on personality change across the lifespan, and integrative models that combine traits, motivations, narratives, and contextual factors (Baumert et al., 2022). Advances in neuroscience and genetics continue to refine understanding of biological underpinnings, while cultural research challenges assumptions of universality.

The future of personality research lies in embracing complexity rather than reductionism, prioritizing ethical responsibility, and fostering collaboration across disciplines and societal domains.

Conclusion

Personality research has evolved into a vibrant and multifaceted field shaped by contributions from psychology, sociology, neuroscience, anthropology, philosophy, and allied disciplines. Major theoretical traditions; psychoanalytic, trait, behavioral, humanistic, biological, and sociocultural offer complementary perspectives on the enduring patterns that define individual differences. While no single theory provides a complete account, their integration yields a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of personality.

Empirically grounded trait models such as the Big Five and HEXACO have demonstrated strong predictive validity across health, education, and organizational domains. At the same time, cross-cultural and anthropological research has highlighted the limits of universal models, emphasizing the role of cultural meaning systems and social structures. Advances in neuroscience, genetics, and computational methods have deepened understanding of biological foundations while reinforcing the importance of gene-environment interaction.

Transdisciplinary approaches represent a promising pathway forward, enabling the integration of diverse forms of knowledge and aligning personality research with societal needs. By combining theoretical rigor, methodological pluralism, and ethical awareness, personality research can contribute meaningfully to individual well-being, social cohesion, and evidence-based policy. As the field continues to evolve, sustained interdisciplinary dialogue and transdisciplinary collaboration will be essential for realizing the full potential of personality science in the twenty-first century.

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