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Personality Assessment and Maturation

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Overview

Who am I? What kind of person am I? How do I differ from other people? These kinds of questions are of great interest to many people. When persons describe themselves, they are typically referring to certain characteristics, such as “outgoing,” “nervous,” “messy,” “friendly” and “creative.” Exactly these kinds of characteristics define one’s personality.

Personality psychologists, interested in individual differences on the just-mentioned characteristics, have long debated what would be the most appropriate set of characteristics to describe people by. In the last 20 years, there has been a growing consensus on this issue, as a majority of researchers now agree that personality characteristics can be subsumed in five broad traits: the Big Five (Caspi et al. 2005). These five broad factors are Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience (McCrae and Costa 1987).

Extraversion (as opposed to introversion) refers to being dominant, outgoing, and energetic in

interpersonal situations. Extraverted individuals tend to enjoy social attention and experience frequent positive moods. Agreeableness encompasses a wide range of characteristics that are all indicative of an individual’s competence and willingness to maintain positive and reciprocal relationships with others, in other words, pro-social behavioral tendencies. Conscientiousness refers to personal characteristics indicative of behavioral and cognitive control. Conscientious individuals are neat, orderly, and responsible persons, who have little trouble with dividing their attention in an optimal way. Emotional Stability (as opposed to neuroticism) is indicative of a person’s ability to deal with negative emotions in an effective manner. A person with low levels of Emotional Stability is often insecure, has a tendency to experience negative moods, gets frustrated easily, and is commonly anxious. Openness to Experience refers to a person’s style of dealing with new information and opportunities. It comprises aspects such as creativity, imagination, originality, and curiosity.

Personality Development in Adolescence

Adolescence is the period in life in which individuals gradually change from a child to an adult. Along with physical and cognitive changes, role expectations also change substantively. Adolescents become increasingly more independent from their parents, and are expected to take on more responsibility for their tasks. Adolescents will encounter all kinds of experiences that gradually prepare them for adult social life. In this context, adolescents are expected to perform school work in an increasingly independent manner, form interdependent (hence more mature) friendships, explore romantic relations, and encounter their first occupational experiences (e.g., becoming a paperboy/girl or working during the weekends in the local supermarket). Taking up such tasks brings increased social expectations, as individuals are expected to behave in an increasingly more mature manner. For example, when taking on a job, one is expected to show up on time and work in a somewhat neat manner, which are characteristics subsumed under the trait of Conscientiousness. The capability to maintain reciprocal relationships, even with people that one does not necessarily like (a capability subsumed under the trait of Agreeableness) is also important when getting a job,

as one cannot choose one's colleagues. Apart from that, the capability of maintaining reciprocal relationships is, of course, also important for establishing friendships and romantic relations. Several other characteristics are also important for adolescents, such as dealing with setbacks (indicated by Emotional Stability), and convincing others of one's capability by attracting their attention (a capability indicated by Extraversion). These are only a few examples, but one can imagine that the aforementioned capabilities are useful across many contexts. Thus, as social expectations increase, it is likely, or it would at least be beneficial, for an adolescents' personality to change accordingly. In other words, adolescents are expected to exhibit maturation of personality.

To assess personality maturation, personality studies focus on changes in large groups of people. If one gathers information on how the average person changes and on interindividual differences in change, one can ultimately determine whether or not an individual displays problems with regard to their personality. Maturation with regard to personality can take on several forms. First, mean levels of personality traits can change in a population. For example, adolescents can on average become more agreeable with age. Second, differences in personality traits between individuals (i.e., interindividual differences) should become more set with age. In this context, Costa and McCrae (1994) once claimed that interindividual differences would be "set like plaster" by age 30. The extent to which interindividual differences are maintained across time is referred to as rank-order stability. A third aspect of maturation concerns personality profile stability. This profile stability is calculated for every single person in a sample. It indicates the extent to which an individual's standing on all Big Five traits (i.e., a person's personality profile) changes across time. Empirical findings concerning these three indicators of personality maturation will now be described.

Changes in Average Levels of Personality Traits

Results from a large number of studies on mean-level changes (i.e., changes in average trait levels) in personality traits were summarized in a meta-analysis by Roberts et al. (2006). They demonstrated that adolescents become more extraverted and more emotionally stable between ages 10 and 18. Thus, adolescents tend

to become more dominant and less shy in interpersonal situations, as well as less anxious and more able to deal with setbacks in an effective manner. On average, adolescents did not change much with regard to the traits of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience. In addition, Roberts et al. (2006) found that boys and girls tend to display similar patterns of personality change throughout adolescence.

The meta-study by Roberts et al. (2006) was very informative, but because the study focused on changes in personality traits across the life course, it lacked detail with regard to personality change in adolescence. More specifically, no information was provided as to where in adolescence the largest changes in personality traits took place. To obtain a more detailed perspective on how personality traits changed on average in adolescence, Klimstra et al. (2009) assessed personality traits on an annual basis between the ages of 12 and 20. They investigated whether specific periods in adolescence existed in which traits changed more rapidly or more slowly than in other periods. They were also interested in gender differences in the timing of personality change, because girls tend to mature earlier than boys with regard to physical and behavioral characteristics. Thus, they expected girls to mature earlier than boys with regard to personality, which should be reflected by girls reaching high mean levels on personality traits (e.g., reaching adult levels of, for example, Agreeableness) at an earlier age in adolescence.

From the study by Klimstra et al. (2009), it appears that both adolescent boys and girls become more Extraverted, Agreeable, and Open to Experience as they grow older. This indicates that even though adolescents tend to become more dominant and active in interpersonal situations (indicated by increases in Extraversion), they also become more friendly and helpful (indicated by increases in Agreeableness). A basic developmental task of adolescents involves loosening bonds with parents, while exploring how to deal with adult-like social tasks such as work and romantic relations. Their willingness to do so is at least partly reflected by the increases in Openness to Experience found by Klimstra et al. (2009). Both boys and girls exhibited no changes in Conscientiousness.

Apart from findings that applied to both genders, Klimstra et al. (2009) found gender-specific development with regard to Emotional Stability. More specifically, boys became more emotionally stable as they

grew older, while girls' levels of Emotional Stability did not change. Especially for Agreeableness, Klimstra et al. (2009) found the expected gender differences in the timing of personality maturation. Girls reached high levels of Agreeableness at a much earlier age in adolescence compared to boys. Although boys did catch up with girls in late adolescence, girls were about 2 years ahead in their development of Agreeableness. Because Agreeableness is an indicator of the ability to maintain positive relationships with others, and is regarded as an important asset to take up adult tasks like work, marriage, and parenting (e.g., Roberts et al. 2006); it can be concluded that girls exhibit a more mature personality at a younger age than boys do.

Stability of Interindividual Differences in Personality Traits

Regardless of whether the average levels of personality traits change, interindividual differences can be stable or can fluctuate over time (e.g., Roberts et al. 2006; Roberts and DelVecchio 2000). Therefore, it is also important to consider rank-order stability (i.e., the degree to which interindividual differences remain stable across time). An important assumption in personality theory is that differences between individuals on personality traits should be set by age 30 (Costa and McCrae 1994). As childhood is considered to be a time in which individual differences are fluctuating (Roberts and DelVecchio 2000), interindividual differences may become much more stable in adolescence.

In a meta-analysis, summarizing the results of a large number of studies on the rank-order stability of personality traits, Roberts and DelVecchio (2000) showed that this rank-order stability increases slightly throughout adolescence. However, this meta-analysis on rank-order stability (Roberts and DelVecchio 2000) focused on stability and change across the life course, and did not provide detailed information with regard to changes in rank-order stability within adolescence. In addition, Roberts and DelVecchio (2000) indicated that studies taking gender differences into account were rare. Therefore, they were unable to examine gender differences in rank-order stability in specific periods of the life course, such as adolescence. In an attempt to provide a more detailed perspective on stability of interindividual differences in adolescence, Klimstra et al. (2009) examined changes in rank-order stability on a year-to-year basis. They demonstrated that

rank-order stability systematically increased in adolescence, and was almost twice as high in late adolescence compared to early adolescence. As such, they found compelling evidence for interindividual differences in personality traits becoming more set as adolescents grow older. These results imply that if, for example, an adolescent is among the least conscientious individuals at age 12, it is not unlikely that this will not be the case at age 13. However, individuals who are among the least conscientious at age 19 are highly likely to be still among the least conscientious individuals at age 20.

In addition, Klimstra et al. (2009) tested for gender differences, and found that interindividual differences in personality traits were set at an earlier age among girls when compared to boys. As gender differences were still present in late adolescence, interindividual differences were simply more set among girls than among boys throughout the entire period of adolescence.

Stability of Personality Profiles

The focus of mean-level change is on how personality traits change on average, and the focus of rank-order stability is on whether differences between people are retained across time. Both approaches focus on changes of variables and they are therefore referred to as variable-centered approaches. It has been argued that such variable-centered approaches do not capture the true nature of personality, because they provide little information as to how a configuration of traits is organized within an individual person (e.g., Robins et al. 1996). To investigate the true nature of personality, person-centered approaches with a focus on stability and change of a configuration of multiple personality traits within a single person are needed.

One of these person-centered approaches to change and stability of personality is profile stability. Profile stability provides information on the stability of a constellation of traits for every single person in a research sample. To assess profile stability, the intra-individual consistency of the mean scores on personality traits is computed. It is possible, for example, that a person is more agreeable than conscientious, more conscientious than emotionally stable, more emotionally stable than extraverted, and more extraverted than open to experience. The degree to which this pattern of traits within a person remains the same across time indicates that person's profile stability (e.g., Furr

2008; Klimstra et al. 2010b). Thus, profile stability indicates the extent to which, for example, the outgoing and friendly, but messy person is still like that 1 year later.

After calculating profile stability for every person within a research sample by correlating an individual's personality scores at one time point with that person's personality scores at the next time point, a sample mean of profile stability can be calculated. Using this approach, Klimstra et al. (2009) demonstrated that personality profile stability increases substantially throughout adolescence. That is, personality profiles became much more consistently organized as adolescents grew older. Similar to findings with regard to mean-level change and rank-order stability, girls were ahead on boys with regard to changes in profile stability. Girls reached high levels of profile stability approximately 2 years before boys did. As boys did catch up with girls, gender differences in profile stability had almost disappeared by late adolescence. Thus, gender differences in profile stability were also restricted to the timing of development, with girls reaching high levels of profile stability 2 years before boys did.

Distinguishing Among Various Aspects of Profile Stability

It is interesting to find increases in profile stability throughout adolescence, but to truly understand the significance of such increases, it is important to examine what profile stability is related to. A general and empirically supported assertion with regard to profile stability is that it is indicative of psychological health, with individuals with a more stable profile displaying less internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors (e.g., Furr 2008; Klimstra et al. 2010b). However, Furr (2008) asserted that it may not be the stability of a personality profile that is associated with psychological health. Furr (2008) explained this as follows: within a population, mean levels of Big Five traits might be quite stable across two subsequent measurement occasions. In such a case, the norm personality profile (i.e., a profile based on mean-level scores on all Big Five traits) is quite stable across time. When an individual has a personality profile that matches the norm profile at both measurement occasions, he or she would reflect high profile stability. However, in that case it is not clear whether it is the degree to which an individual's personality profile is similar to the norm profile or the

stability of this individual's personality profile that drives the associations with psychological health. Because of this, Furr (2008) asserted that researchers should correct for normativeness of personality profiles (i.e., the degree to which an individual's personality profile matches the norm profile within a population) when examining the effect of personality profile stability. For that purpose, Furr (2008) advocated a distinction between distinctive stability (profile stability corrected for normativeness) and normativeness of personality profiles, and hypothesized that normativeness instead of distinctive stability would be related to psychological health.

Klimstra et al. (2010b) examined Furr's (2008) hypothesis by relating distinctive stability and normativeness to three measures of adjustment (i.e., self-esteem, depression, and delinquency). All in all, the study by Klimstra et al. (2010b) suggests that individuals with a more stable personality profile across time do not necessarily display more self-esteem, less depression, and less delinquency. Instead, it is the degree to which an individual's personality profile matches the average personality profile within a certain population that is related to psychological health. If an individual describes him- or herself more like the "average" person within a population does he or she generally reports more self-esteem, less depression, and less delinquency. A possible reason for these findings has been provided by Roberts et al. (2006), who noted that adolescents are faced with an increasing pressure to adjust to social role expectations as they grow older. If individuals do not live up to social role expectations, they are likely to face withdrawal of social approval. Roberts et al. (2006) described increases in specific personality traits (i.e., Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness) as a move toward greater compliance with social role expectations, but Klimstra et al. (2010b) asserted that a more normative personality profile could reflect a similar mechanism. Thus, individuals with a personality profile that adheres to social expectations are more likely to elicit social approval. Because social approval equals positive feedback, individuals with a more normative profile receive more positive feedback, and hence reflect higher levels of psychological adjustment. However, this explanation is only based on theoretical assertions and needs to be empirically confirmed in future studies on the normativeness of personality profiles. In summary, the study

by Klimstra et al. (2010b) suggests that it is not the stability of personality that is indicative of adjustment, but the degree to which an individual's profile matches the personality profile of the "average" individual within a particular population.

It is not yet clear to what psychological concept distinctive stability is related. However, when the authors of the current contribution reanalyzed the data from the study by Klimstra et al. (2009) using distinctive profile stability instead of overall profile stability, distinctive profile stability was found to increase in a similar way as overall profile stability. In addition, girls also reached higher levels of distinctive profile stability at an earlier age when compared to boys. These findings suggest that although distinctive profile stability is not indicative of adjustment (Klimstra et al. 2010b), it could still be indicative of a maturation process.

Personality Types: Distinguishing Among Resilients, Undercontrollers, and Overcontrollers

By now, three ways of approaching research on adolescent personality development have been discussed. First discussion has been on two widely used variable-centered change indices (i.e., mean-level change and rank-order stability). Second, research focusing on one set of person-centered approaches to personality, namely profile stability, distinctive stability, and normativeness has been described. Although these person-centered approaches to personality provide very interesting information on the development of adolescent personality, the most prominent person-centered approach to adolescent personality is Block and Block's (1980) typological approach.

Block and Block (1980) distinguished three replicable personality types: Resilients, Undercontrollers, and Overcontrollers. They distinguished these types based on the amount of ego-control and ego-resiliency. Ego-control is indicative of a person's ability to deal with his or her impulses, whereas ego-resiliency signifies an individual's ability to modify levels of ego-control as a function of changing environmental demands. Resilients have high levels of ego-resiliency, and are therefore able to flexibly adjust levels of ego-control to changing environmental and situational demands. Both Overcontrollers and Undercontrollers have low levels of ego-resiliency, which causes them to have relatively stable levels of ego-control.

In Overcontrollers, levels of ego-control are excessively high, which means that Overcontrollers contain their impulses, and display high levels of inhibition with regard to action and affect. Undercontrollers have excessively low levels of ego-control, resulting in an inability to delay gratification, and a tendency to respond immediately and impulsively to environmental triggers (Block and Block 1980).

Variable-centered approaches to personality in general, and the Big Five approach in particular, have long outnumbered studies following Block and Block's (1980) typological (i.e., person-centered) approach. Robins et al. (1996) sparked a renewed interest in Block and Block's Resilients, Undercontrollers, and Overcontrollers, by showing that these types have distinguishable Big Five personality profiles. Thus, their study can be perceived as an attempt to integrate Block and Block's (1980) person-centered approach with the variable-centered Big Five approach. Specifically, Robins et al. (1996) showed that Resilients had the highest scores on the Big Five traits Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience, and Extraversion, while they displayed above-average scores on Agreeableness. On Agreeableness, Overcontrollers had the highest scores. Overcontrollers had the lowest scores on Extraversion and Emotional Stability. On Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience, Undercontrollers had the lowest scores.

To underscore the validity of the personality types, Robins et al. (1996) proceeded to examine the psychological correlates of having a specific personality profile. They showed that Resilients displayed few internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors. Internalizing problems were far more prevalent among Overcontrollers than among Resilients and Undercontrollers, whereas externalizing problems were much more prevalent among Undercontrollers than among the other two personality types. In sum, Resilients, Undercontrollers, and Overcontrollers are three clearly distinguishable personality types, both with regard to their specific personality profiles and with regard to the type of problem behaviors they tend to display. Robins et al. (1996) used indicators of levels of ego-resiliency and ego-control to classify individuals into one of the three personality types, but because they demonstrated that the types have specific Big Five profiles, several subsequent studies (e.g., Akse et al. 2007) extracted personality types directly from

Big Five data. For this purpose, they applied cluster analysis to Big Five ratings (see, for example, Akse et al. 2007, for an explanation of this technique).

If individuals are followed longitudinally (i.e., across more than one measurement occasion), it is also possible to examine stability and change of personality type membership. In such studies, an individual's personality type is determined on each measurement occasion, and it is assessed whether a person who is assigned to one personality type on a particular measurement occasion, is assigned to the same personality type on the subsequent measurement occasion. Using this approach, it is, for example, possible to examine how many adolescents that are classified as Resilients at age 13 are also classified as Resilients at age 14.

Akse et al. (2007) examined stability and change in personality type membership during adolescence and found that 56.9% maintained their membership to the same personality type over 2 years. The remaining 43.1% changed from one type to another. Therefore, they concluded that personality type membership was only moderately stable across time. In order to test the meaningfulness of changes in personality type membership, Akse et al. (2007) also examined whether anxiety disorder symptoms changed accordingly. They demonstrated that this was indeed the case, as transitions from Resilients (i.e., typically characterized by low levels of anxiety) to Overcontrollers (i.e., typically characterized by high levels of anxiety) were accompanied by increases in anxiety disorder symptoms, whereas transitions from Overcontrollers to Resilients were associated with decreases in anxiety. Thus, as individuals' personality types change, their levels of problem behavior tend to change accordingly. As such, the findings by Akse et al. (2007) underscore the importance of considering changes in adolescent personality type membership.

By studying longitudinal transitions between personality types, Akse et al. (2007) provided a developmental perspective on Block and Block's (1980) personality typology. However, studying transitions between types is only one way to provide a developmental perspective on Resilients, Undercontrollers, and Overcontrollers. Moreover, the transition approach has several problems. For example, minimal changes on one Big Five trait can cause a transition from one type to another, because boundaries between

personality types are arbitrary and fuzzy. Furthermore, patterns of normative development (i.e., universal developmental trends that apply to a vast majority of individuals in a population, such as becoming more friendly, conscientious, and emotionally stable with age) are lost in type-transition approaches, as transitions from one type to another could actually be caused by normative changes in the Big Five traits that underlie the types. For those reasons, it has been argued that personality types should reflect the way personality types manifest themselves during longer periods in the life course. Thus, a strong case has been made for the study of types of personality *development* (i.e., types based on mean levels and changes in personality traits) instead of just types of personality (i.e., types solely based on mean levels of personality traits).

Following these recommendations, Klimstra et al. (2010a) searched for a developmental typology of adolescent personality, employing five annual wave longitudinal data. Using statistical techniques that classified individuals into types based on their mean levels and growth on the Big Five traits, they were able to show that Block and Block's (1980) Resilients, Undercontrollers, and Overcontrollers also appeared as developmental personality types. With regard to changes, Klimstra et al. (2010a) found that all three types became more friendly on average. When compared to Overcontrollers, Resilients became more outgoing and open to experience across time. Being outgoing and open-minded can be beneficial when one is seeking friends or even a romantic partner. As such, Overcontrollers seemed to move toward a less advantageous personality profile when compared to Resilients. Undercontrollers retained their position as the least friendly, conscientious, and open individuals.

The developmental types derived by Klimstra et al. (2010a) were also related to problem behavior in a similar way as types from studies that did not take change into account were. Thus, Resilients displayed low levels of problem behavior, Overcontrollers were characterized by relatively high levels of internalizing problem behavior (i.e., depression), and Undercontrollers exhibited relatively high levels of externalizing problem behavior (i.e., delinquency). Overall, Klimstra et al. (2010a) demonstrated that Resilients, Undercontrollers, and Overcontrollers manifest themselves somewhat differently, but remain clearly distinguishable from one another across adolescence.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, the most prominent approaches to personality assessment and maturation have been discussed. It has been explained that there has been a growing consensus on how personality should be assessed, as a majority of researchers agree that the Big Five personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience) provide an adequate framework to subsume the higher order structure of personality with. It was discussed that change and stability of personality can be examined in several ways, using both variable-centered approaches and person-centered approaches. Whereas variable-centered approaches (i.e., mean-level change and rank-order stability) focus on change and stability of variables in samples comprising multiple individuals, person-centered approaches (i.e., profile stability, distinctive stability, normativeness, and personality types) focus on change and stability of a constellation of traits within a single person. As was shown in this essay, both approaches have provided valuable information about the nature of personality in adolescence.

Although this essay demonstrates that quite a lot is already known about maturation of personality in adolescence, there is still much to be learned. Klimstra et al. (2009) demonstrated that girls tend to be approximately 2 years ahead on boys with regard to personality development, and noted that similar differences have been found in the timing of pubertal development and brain maturation. As such, future studies should explore linkages between these three indicators of adolescent development. A relatively unexplored aspect of personality is normativeness. Klimstra et al. (2010b) showed that individuals with a personality profile that is more like the profile of the “average” person within a sample (i.e., a more normative profile), tend to display higher levels of adjustment than individuals with a less normative profile. An interesting endeavor would be to empirically verify why a more normative personality profile is associated with more positive adjustment. Researchers could, for example, examine whether individuals who describe their own personality in a way that diverges from how the “average” individual describe his or her personality also perceive themselves to be different when they compare themselves to an “average” person. There are also numerous alternatives left in the study of personality types. Throughout the last decade,

biological (e.g., cortisol, blood pressure, DNA) and neuropsychological (e.g., brain imaging, performance on cognitive tasks) measures became available for an increasing number of researchers. Future research could employ these tools to trace back the biological and neuropsychological correlates of personality.

In conclusion, the knowledge on personality maturation in adolescence has increased substantively, especially in the last decade. Because the basics of the course of adolescent personality maturation are now known, the time has come to move beyond descriptions of change and stability and move toward a more thorough understanding of the mechanisms behind these processes.

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Personality Disorders

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The basic features of personality disorders have been articulated by the two leading diagnostic manuals, the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10), which is published by the World Health Organization (1992), and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), published by the American Psychiatric Association (2000). Both systems present similar disorders (sometimes with different titles) that are associated with individuals' severe disturbances in behavioral tendencies that usually involve several areas of personality but almost universally associate with considerable personal and social disruption. Importantly, these disorders are inflexible and pervasive across many situations, an inflexibility and pervasiveness mainly due to their being ego-syntonic (that is, consistent with their sense of self) and perceived as appropriate by them. Given the pervasive way that these disorders affect individuals, they can be traced back to adolescence, especially late adolescence but sometimes even early childhood, but they are deemed more appropriately labeled if they are used to describe individuals after late adolescence.

The DSM-IV-TR illustratively articulates a framework for the basic features of personality disorders. The manual groups personality disorders into three clusters based on their descriptive similarities. Cluster A contains disorders deemed odd or eccentric: Paranoid personality disorder (characterized by irrational suspicions and mistrust of others), schizoid personality disorder (characterized by lack of

interest in social relationships), and schizotypal personality disorder (characterized by odd behavior or thinking). Cluster B contains disorders deemed dramatic, emotional, or erratic: Antisocial personality disorder (characterized by pervasive disregard for the law and the rights of others), borderline personality disorder (characterized by "black and white" thinking, instability in relationships, self-image, identity, and behavior), histrionic personality disorder (characterized by pervasive attention-seeking behavior including inappropriate sexual seductiveness and shallow or exaggerated emotions), and narcissistic personality disorder (characterized by pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and a lack of empathy). Cluster C contains disorders marked by anxiety or fearfulness: Avoidant personality disorder (characterized by social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, extreme sensitivity to negative evaluation, and avoidance of social interaction), dependent personality disorder (characterized by pervasive psychological dependence on others), and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (characterized by rigid conformity to rules, moral codes, and excessive orderliness). Although these broad clusters of disorders have been identified, it is important to note that they continue to be researched and that their conceptualizations continue to adapt to advances in research.

Importantly, although the above terms for describing disorders have now become well-known, controversy marks this part of the DSM. Most notably, researchers and theoreticians argue that these personality disorders exist more on a continuum of normal to abnormal rather than as discrete categories (Widiger and Samuel 2005). In addition, much research does indeed reveal significant overlaps among key categories within personality disorders and with other disorders as well, which can lead to different disorder diagnoses given to the same individual (for a review, see Clark 2007). These controversies are separate from other important ones that view the concept of personality disorder itself as unnecessarily stigmatizing and inappropriate ways to deal with groups of individuals who, for example, may have been victimized (Shaw and Proctor 2005).

Under the DSM framework, personality disorders exist if there are deviant patterns in behaviors or inner experiences in at least two of four areas. The first deficiency involves impulse control, which would be