
I. MEANING OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Man is a social-cultural being and society is both natural and necessary for man. It is difficult for men to live in isolation. They always live in various groups and associations. As members of these groups, they act and behave in a certain manner. The behaviour of each individual is affected by the behaviour of others. This interaction is the essence of social life. Behaviour systems grow out of interaction. Without interaction there would be no social or group life. Mere physical proximity of individuals does not unite them into a group or social unit. It is only when they mix with one another—play or talk together to realise a common end or even compete or conflict with one another, that associative life exists. Thus, interaction is the basic ingredient of social relationships. Society is rooted in inter-action.

- *Green* defines social interaction as “the mutual influences that individuals and groups have on one another in their attempts to solve problems and in their striving towards goals.”

- According to *Dawson and Gettys*, “Social interaction is a process whereby men interpenetrate the minds of each other.”

- In the words of *Gist*, “Social interaction is the reciprocal influence human beings exert on each other through interstimulation and response.”

- According to *Eldredge and Merrill* “Social interaction is the general process whereby two or more persons are in meaningful contact as a result of which their behaviour is modified, however slightly.”

The two essential conditions of social interaction are : (1) Social Contact and (2) Communication. Social contact differs from physical or bodily contact. Social contact can be established through the medium of radio, letters, telephones and other media of communication even between people who are separated by thousands of miles. Of course, social contact is strengthened by physical contact. According to *Gillin and Gillin* “Social contact is the first phase of interaction.”

Social contacts can be positive as well as negative. They are positive when they lead to benevolence, cooperation, mutual understanding and assimilation. They are negative if they create hatred, jealousy and conflict.

Social contacts are established through the medium of some sense organ. An object causes communication within that sense organ. Hence, the means of communication are essential adjuncts of social contact. Such means are language, script, gestures, symbols, radio, telephone, post and telegraph services, newspapers etc. Human interaction is essentially communicative interaction.

Man is not born a person. At birth he is an infant possessing the potentiality of becoming a person. After birth he associates with other human beings and comes under the influence of their culture. As a result of a variety of experiences and social influences he becomes a person and comes to possess a personality. Our interest in this chapter is to sketch the nature of personality and to show the role of culture and social experience in the formation of personality disorganisation. Since socialisation plays the most important part in the development of personality and we have discussed it already, the present discussion, therefore, can only be brief.

I. MEANING OF PERSONALITY

The term personality is derived from the Latin word "persona" which means a mask. "Personality is a ... patterned body of habits, traits, attitudes and ideas of an individual, as these are organised externally into roles and statuses, and as they relate internally to motivation, goals, and various aspects of selfhood."¹

—K. Young

"A person's pattern of habits, attitudes, and traits which determine his adjustment to his environment."²

—G.W. Allport

"The characteristic organisation of the individual's habits, attitudes, values, emotional characteristics ... which imparts consistency to the behaviour of the individual."

—Herbert A. Bloch

"Personality is the sum of a person's values (the objects of his striving, such as ideas, prestige, power and sex) plus his non-physical traits (his habitual ways of acting and reacting)."³

—Arnold W. Green

Personality embraces the total "organised aggregate of psychological processes and status pertaining to the individual."

—Linton

"The term personality refers to the habits, attitudes, and other social traits that are characteristic of a given individual's behaviour."⁴

—Lundberg and others

"The integration of the socio-psychological behaviour of the human being, represented by habits of action and feeling, attitudes and opinions."⁵

—Ogburn

"Personality is the totality of behaviour of an individual with a given tendency system interacting with a sequence of situations."⁶

—Young

On the basis of these definitions it may be said there are two main approaches to the study of personality :

II. DETERMINANTS OF PERSONALITY

Personality is a result of the combination of **five factors**, *i.e.*, physical environment, heredity, culture, particular mental factor and experiences. Here we discuss each factor determining personality separately.

(1) **Personality and Environment.** Above we described the influence of physical environment on culture and pointed out that geographical environment sometimes determines cultural variability. That the Eskimos have a culture different from that of the Indians is due to the fact that the former have a geography different from the

latter. Man comes to form ideas and attitudes according to the physical environment he lives in. To the extent that the physical environment determines cultural development and to the extent that culture in turn determines personality, a relationship between personality and environment becomes clear.

Thus, climate and topography determine to a great extent the physical and mental traits of a people, but it cannot be said that they alone determine human behaviour. Most kinds of personality are found in every kind of culture. Proponents of geographic determinism oversimplify the human personality and so their interpretations are to be accepted only after close scrutiny.

(2) **Heredity and Personality.** Heredity is another factor determining human personality. Some of the similarities in man's personality are said to be due to his common heredity. Every human group inherits the same general set of biological needs and capacities. These common needs and capacities explain some of our similarities in personality. Man originates from the union of male and female germ cells into a single cell which is formed at the moment of conception. He tends to resemble his parents in physical appearance and intelligence. The nervous system, the organic drives and the ductless glands have a great bearing upon personality. They determine whether an individual will be vigorous or feeble, energetic or lethargic, idiot or intelligent, coward or courageous.

A man with a good physical structure and health generally possess an attractive personality. A man of poor health, pigmy size and ugly physical features develops inferiority complex. The growth of his personality is checked. Rejected and hated by the society he may turn out to be a thief, dacoit, or drunkard. It is also probable that he may become a leader, or a genius like Socrates and Napoleon. Likewise the nervous system and glandular system may affect the personality of an individual. The nervous system affects the intelligence and talent of the individual. The hormones affect the growth of personality. Too many or too less of hormones are harmful. Some men are over-patient, overzealous, overactive and overexcited while others are lazy, inactive, and weak. The reason may be secretion of more hormones in the first case and less hormones in the latter case. For a normal personality there should be a balanced secretion of hormones.

Heredity may affect personality in another way, *i.e.*, indirectly. If boys in a society prefer slim girls as their companion, such girls will receive greater attention of the society providing them thereby more opportunities to develop their personality. According to Allport, Gordon, W. no feature of personality is devoid of hereditary influence.

However, heredity does not mould human personality alone and unaided. "For the present, we can only assume that there are genes for normal personality traits just as there are genes for other aspects of human make-up and functioning. Where in members of the same family, in a similar environment, we can see great differences in personality; we may ascribe these in part at least to differences in gene contributions. We can also guess that some of the family similarities in personality are genetically influenced. Of course, there are some traits which seem to be more directly affected by heredity than others. Manual skills, intelligence and sensory discriminations are some of the abilities which appear more highly developed in some family lines than others. Experience determines the way these materials will be used. An individual may be energetic because of his heredity, but whether he is active on his own belief or on behalf of others is a matter of his training. If personality is a direct consequence of heredity tendencies or traits then all the sons and daughters of the same parents brought up in the same environment should have identical personalities or at least personalities that are very much alike.

(3) **Personality and Culture.** There can be little doubt that culture largely determines the types of personality that will predominate in the particular group. According to some thinkers, personality is the subjective aspect of culture. They regard personality and culture as two sides of the same coin. Spiro has observed, "The development of personality and the acquisition of culture are not different processes, but one and the same learning process. Personality is an individual aspect of culture, while culture is a collective aspect of personality." Each culture produces its special type or types of personality. Their studies have demonstrated that each culture tends to create and is supported by a "basic personality type". The basic personality type found among most of the members of a specific society is the result not of instincts or inherent "drives" but of the culturally similar early childhood experiences.¹¹ The child is born not in a vacuum but in a cultural context which affects his mental make-up, habits and attitudes. A given cultural environment sets its participant members off from other human beings operating under different cultural environments. According to Frank, "culture is a coercive influence dominating the individual and moulding his personality by virtue of the ideas, conceptions and beliefs which had brought to bear on him through communal life." The culture provides the raw material of which the individual makes his life. The traditions, customs, mores, religion, institutions, moral and social standards of a group affect

the personality of the group members. From the moment of birth, the child is treated in ways which shape his personality. Every culture exerts a series of general influences upon the individuals who grow up under it.

Ogburn as we noted above, divided culture into "material" and "non-material". According to him, both material and non-material culture have a bearing on personality. As for the connection between the non-material culture and personality, language affords an instructive example. Since language is the essential medium through which the individual obtains his information and his attitudes, therefore, it is the principal vehicle for the development of personality. Another illustration of the influence of culture on personality is the relationship of men and women. In the earlier period when farming was the principal business, women generally had no occupations outside the home, and naturally, therefore, they were economically dependent upon their fathers or husbands. Obedience was a natural consequence of such conditions. But today hundreds of women work outside the homes and earn salaries. They enjoy equal rights with men and are not so dependent upon them as they were in the past. Attitude of independence instead of obedience has today become a trait of women's personality.

The personality of the Hindus in India differs greatly from that of Englishmen. Why? The answer is "a different Hindu culture". The Hindu culture lays emphasis not on material and worldly things, but on things spiritual and religious. In every Hindu family there is a religious environment. The mother gets up early in the morning, takes bath and spends an hour in meditation. When the children get up, they go and touch the feet of their parents and bow before the family Gods or Goddesses. The Hindu child from the very birth begins to acquire a religious and philosophical personality built on the "inner life".

From the various illustrations cited so far it is thus clear that culture greatly moulds personality. Personality traits differ within any culture, some people in any culture are more aggressive than others, some are more submissive, kind and competitive. Personality is not totally determined by culture, it is only one determinant among others.

(4) *Personality and Particular Experiences.* Personality is also determined by another factor, namely, the particular and unique experiences. There are two types of experiences one, those that stem from continuous association with one's group, second, those that arise suddenly and are not likely to recur. The type of people who meet the child daily has a major influence on his personality. The personality of parents does more to affect a child's personality. If the parents are kind, tolerant of boyish pranks, interested in athletics and anxious to encourage their child's separate interests the child will have a different experience and there shall be different influence on his personality than the one when the parents are unkind; quick tempered and arbitrary. In the home is fashioned the style of personality that will by and large characterise the individual throughout his life.

Group influences are relatively greater in early childhood. This is the period when the relationships of the child with his mother, father and siblings affect profoundly the organisation of his drives and emotions, the deeper and unconscious aspects of his personality. The basic personality structure that is formed during this period is difficult to change. Whether a person becomes a leader, a coward, an imitator, whether he feels inferior or superior, whether he becomes altruistic or egoistic depends upon the kind of interaction he has with others. To his organic needs are added what are called "sociogenic" needs which are highly important motivating forces in personality.

How the idea of self develops in the child is an important study. The self does not exist at birth but begins to arise as the child learns something of the world of sensation about him. He comes to learn of what belongs to him and takes pride in his possessions. He learns that parts of his body belong to him. He becomes acquainted with his name and paternity and comes to distinguish himself from others. The praise and blame he receives from others account in large measure for his conduct.

Our view of self conception is usually based on the opinion of others about us. It does not, however, mean that we value all opinions about our conduct equally. In short, our early experiences are very important in the formation of our personality. It is in early life that the foundations of personality are laid.

Why are the children brought up in the same family differ from one another in their personality, even though they have had the same experiences? The point is that they have not had the same experiences. Some experiences are similar while others are different. Each child enters a different family unit. One is the first born, he is the only child until the arrival of the second. The parents do not treat all their children exactly alike. The children enter different play groups, have different teachers and meet different incidents. They do not share all incidents and experiences. Each person's experience is unique as no body else perfectly duplicates it. Thus, each child has unique experiences exactly duplicated by no one and, therefore, grows a different personality.