**Introduction**

As mentioned earlier, the present chapter will briefly describe only a few of the theories of personality which are relevant to the practice of professional social work. After having gone through the preceding units, you must have realized by now that the term personality has many meanings. It is a reasonably distinct sub field of psychology that comprises theory, research and assessment about personality. However, even within psychology there is disagreement about the meaning of the term. In fact, there are as many different meanings of the term personality as there are psychologists who have tried to define it.

In this chapter, we would try to gain understanding of the views offered by Carl Rogers who looks at personality in terms of self – an organized, permanent, subjectively perceived entity, which is at the very heart of all our experiences.

We would also study Erik Erikson who is of the view that life proceeds in terms of a series of psycho social crises, which he termed as developmental milestones or stages. A person’s personality is a function of the outcome of the way such crises are resolved.

Abraham Maslow’s humanistic theory would also be touched upon, which explains human behaviour in
terms of individual’s tendency to seek personal goals. In this system, as one’s desire is satisfied, another surfaces to take its place. When a person satisfies this one, still another clamours for satisfaction.

B.F. Skinner is yet another prolific psychologist who has provided the foundation for a science of behaviour based on the premise that nearly all our behaviour is directly governed by environmental contingencies of reinforcement. That is, much of our behaviour is either learned or modified by the process of learning.

But none the less, the most fundamental conception of human personality has been that of Sigmund Freud. He is considered as the father of psychoanalytic thought. He described the structure of personality as composed of three elements the id, ego and super ego. You would study his theory in detail in another unit.

**Erik Erikson: A Psychosocial Theory of Personality**

In order to understand how Erik Erikson has worked to elaborate and extend the structure of psychoanalysis and how he has reformulated its principles for understanding the modern world, one has to first understand the concept of psychoanalysis as given by Sigmund Freud. It is because Erikson himself, persistently maintained that his contributions to the understanding of human development are nothing more than a systematic extension of Freud’s conception of psychosexual development.

Erikson actually has attempted to bridge the gap between Freudian theory of psycho sexual development and present day knowledge about the role of social factors in personality development.
Though he is committed to the biological and sexual foundations of personality like Freud, yet he expanded or socialized Freud’s schedule of development by introducing eight stages of development. He emphasizes the importance of interaction between biological and social factors in the development of personality. The stages are shown in Fig.-1.

Let us now learn about Erikson’s theoretical formulations by considering the various stages in human life.

1) **Infancy: Basic Trust Versus Mistrust-Hope**

The first psychosocial stage in the Eriksonian scheme corresponds to Freud’s Oral stage and it extends through approximately the first year of life. The earliest basic trust is established during this stage and it is demonstrated by the infant in the capacity to sleep peacefully, to take nourishment comfortably and to excrete relaxfully. Each day as his wakeful hours increase, the infant becomes more familiar with sensual experiences. Situations of comfort and people responsible for these comforts become familiar and identifiable to him.

Through the continuity, consistency and sameness of these experiences with others, the infant learns to rely on them and to trust them. Simultaneously, if the parents display a divergent pattern of these experiences, may be in the ways of caring for the infant or in their role as the parents or demonstrate a conflicting value system, it creates an atmosphere of ambiguity for the infant, resulting in feelings of mistrust.

*Hope* is the first psychosocial strength or virtue, which is gained by the infant from successful resolution of
the Trust-versus-Mistrust conflict, during this stage.

2) **Early Childhood: Autonomy Versus Shame and Doubt**

This period coincides with Freud’s Anal stage and roughly spans the second and third years of life. During this stage, the child learns what is expected of her, what the child’s obligations and privileges are and what limitations are placed upon her. The child’s striving for new and activity-oriented experiences places a demand for self-control as well as a demand for the acceptance of control from others. A sense of self-control provides the child with a lasting feeling of autonomy, good will and pride; however, a sense of loss of self control can cause a lasting feeling of shame and doubt in him.

The virtue of *will* emerges during this stage. Will is the ever-increasing psychosocial strength to make free-choices, to decide and to exercise self-restraint. The child learns from itself and from others what is expected and what is not. Will is responsible for the child’s gradual acceptance of lawfulness and necessity.

3) **Play Age: Initiative Versus Guilt**

This period corresponds to Freud’s Phallic stage extending roughly from age four to entry into formal school. This is when the child’s social world challenges her to be active, to master new skills, and to win approval by being productive. This is the age when child’s facility for language and motor skills make possible associations with the peers and older children and thus allow participation in a variety of social games. During this stage a child begins to feel that he or she is counted as a person and that life has a purpose for him. It is an age of initiative, an age of
expanding mastery and responsibility. Autonomy combines with initiative to give the child a quality of pursuing, planning and determination of achieving tasks and goals. However, a feeling of guilt may haunt him if his goals and tasks are not accomplished.

Fig. : Erikson's chart of the eight stages of psychosocial development. (Adapted from Childhood and Society, by Erik H. Erikson, 1963 a.p. 273)

**Purpose** is the virtue or the main psychosocial strength that emerges during this stage. The child’s major activity during this stage is playing. The virtue of purpose results from play, explorations, attempts, failures, and experimentation with toys. The child learns what the purpose of things and begins to
understand, the connection between the inner and outer world. Thus an imaginative and uninhibited play is vital for the child's development.

4) **School Age: Industry Versus Inferiority**

This period corresponds to the Latency Period in Freudian theory and extends from about 6 to 11 years of age. Here for the first time the child is expected to learn the rudimentary skills of culture like reading, writing, cooperating with others etc. via formal education. This period is associated with the child's increased power of reasoning and self discipline, as well as the ability to relate to peers according to prescribed rules. During this period, the child develops a sense of industry when it begins to understand the technology of his culture through attending school. That is to say that his work includes many and varied forms such as attending school, doing chores at home, assuming responsibility, studying music, learning manual skills as well as participating in skillful games and sports. The hazard of this stage is that the child may develop a sense of inferiority or incompetence if she is unable to master the tasks that are undertaken or that are set for it by her teachers and parents.

The virtue of *competence* emerges during this stage as one applies oneself to work and to completing tasks.

5) **Adolescence: Identity Versus Role Confusion**

This period is regarded as highly significant in the individual's psychosocial development. Now he is not a child and not yet an adult. This period extends roughly from 12 or 13 years to about 20 years of age. During this age, the adolescent is confronted with various social demands and role changes that are essential for meeting the challenges of adulthood. It
is the time for making vocational plans. He becomes aware of his inherent characteristics such as his likes and dislikes, anticipated goals of future and the strength and purpose to control one’s own destiny. It is during this period that one defines what one is at present and what one wants to be in future. Because of the transition from childhood to adulthood, the adolescent during this stage of identity formation is likely to suffer more deeply than ever before or ever again from a confusion of roles or identity confusion. This state can cause one to feel isolated, empty, anxious or indecisive. The adolescents may feel that society is pushing them to make decisions, thus they may become even more resistant. The adolescent’s behaviour is inconsistent and unpredictable during this chaotic state. During this period one may also develop a negative identity, a sense of possessing a set of potentially bad or unworthy characteristics.

During this stage the virtue of *fidelity* develops. Although now sexually mature and in many ways responsible, he or she is not yet adequately prepared to become a parent. On one hand, one is expected to assimilate oneself into an adult pattern of life while on the other hand, one is denied the sexual freedom of an adult. The behaviour shuttles back and forth. During this difficult period, the youth seeks inner knowledge and understanding of himself or herself and attempts to formulate a set of values. The particular set of values that emerges is what Erikson called fidelity. Fidelity is the foundation upon which a continuous sense of identity is formed.

6) **Young Adulthood : Intimacy Versus Isolation**

This stage marks the formal beginning of adult life. This is generally the period when a person becomes involved in courtship, marriage and early family life.
It extends from late adolescence until adulthood i.e. from 20 years to roughly 24 years. Now the person is ready for social as well as sexual intimacy with another person. Now he orients himself or herself toward, “settling down” in life. This is the time when one requires someone to love and to have sexual relations and with whom one can share a trusting relationship.

The hazard of this stage is isolation, which is the avoidance of relationships because one is unwilling to commit to intimacy. The virtue of love comes into being during this stage. In addition to the romantic and erotic qualities, Erikson regards love as the ability to commit oneself to others, showing an attitude of care, respect and responsibility.

7) Middle Adulthood: Generativity Versus Stagnation

This period corresponds to the middle years of life i.e. from 25 years to 65 years of age. Generativity occurs when a person begins to show concern not only for the welfare of the upcoming generation but also for the nature of the society in which that generation will live and work. Main concerns are the generating of progeny, products, ideas and so forth. When generativity is weak or not given expression, the personality takes on a sense of stagnation. The virtue of care develops during this stage which is expressed in one’s concern for others.

8) Maturity: Integrity Versus Despair

This stage can best be described as a state which is reached by one after having taken care of things and people, products and ideas, and having adapted to the experiences of successes and failures of life. There is a definite shift in a person’s attention from future to past life. This is a time often beset with numerous
demands such as adjustment to deteriorating physical strength and health, to retirement and reduced income, to the death of spouse and close friends, and the need to establish new affiliations with one’s age group. This stage is marked by the summation, integration and evaluation of all the preceding stages of human development. The essential counterpart of integrity is despair over a series of unfulfilled opportunities and missed directions of individual's life cycle. He or she may realize that it is far too late to start all over again. He or she has a hidden fear of death, a feeling of irrevocable failure and an incessant preoccupation with what might have been.

Wisdom is the virtue that develops out of the encounter of integrity and despair. Erikson believes that only during old age does true maturity and a practical sense of “the wisdom of the ages” come into being.

**Carl Rogers: A Phenomenological Theory of Personality**

Carl Rogers’ self-theory of personality is primarily based on his approach known as *client-centred therapy*. He stresses the importance of individual who determines his own fate. There are two basic concepts that are regarded as the basis upon which his whole theory rests. These are (a) the organism and (b) the self.

The organism is the centre of all experiences that keeps taking place within the individual at a particular moment. These experiences include everything potentially available to one’s awareness that is going on within the organism at that moment. The totality of these experiences constitutes the *phenomenal field*. The phenomenal field is not identical with the field
of consciousness. At a given moment, it is made up of conscious or symbolized and unconscious or unsymbolized experiences. The phenomenal field is individual's frame of reference that can only be known to the person only. According to Rogers behaviour of a person depends upon the phenomenal field (which is the subjective reality) and not upon the external conditions. An individual's perceptions and experiences constitute not only his or her own reality but also form the basis of his or her actions. One responds to events in accordance with how one perceives and interprets them.

For example, a thirsty person lost in the desert will run as eagerly to a pool of water that is a mirage as to a real pool. Similarly two persons observing an identical set of events may later recall two very different outcomes, which is often the case with eye witness accounts of the unidentified flying objects and traffic accidents etc. Thus a person tends to check his or her symbolized experiences against that of the world outside in his own way. This testing of reality provides one with dependable knowledge of the world so that one is able to behave realistically. However, some experiences may remain untested or are inadequately tested, which may cause one to behave unrealistically. Apparently the person, therefore, must have some conception of an external reality, otherwise he or she could not perform the act of testing an inner picture of reality against an outer one.

Let us explain this a little further with the help of another example. Suppose a person wishes to put salt in his food and in front of him are two identical jars, one that contains salt and the other containing pepper. The person believes that the jar with larger holes in
its lid contains salt but not being quite sure of it, he keeps the contents in the jar on his hand. If the particles are white rather than black, he becomes sure that it is salt. A cautious person may, even after that, put a little on his tongue, believing that it may not be white pepper, instead of salt. Thus, the point to be noted here is that one is testing his or her ideas against a variety of sensory data. The test consists of checking less certain information against more direct knowledge. In this case the final test is taste that defines it to be salt. Out of the process of perceiving experiences, attaching meanings to them and testing them with the outside reality, there emerges a portion of the phenomenal field which gradually becomes differentiated and is called self. The self can best be thought of as the concept of I, me and myself. In addition to this concept of self (also called real self) there is an ideal self which represents what one thinks one ought to be and would like to be. The ideal self represents the self-concept that the individual would like to possess. It is quite close to the notion of superego in Freudian theory.

The significance of these concepts of organism and self becomes more clear in Rogers’ discussion of congruence and incongruence between the self as perceived and the actual experiences of the organism. When the symbolized or conscious experiences that constitute the self faithfully mirror the experiences of the organism, the person is said to be adjusted, mature, and fully functioning. While on the other hand, if there is no congruence with the experiences of self and organism, the individual feels threatened and anxious. Such a person behaves defensively and is rigid.
Thus we see that Roger’s theory puts emphasis on the continuity of growth. The person continuously strives to develop a self. He incorporates only those experiences into his frame of reference which he thinks are appropriate for him and rejects those which are not appropriate. Therefore personality development, in Rogerian scheme there is a reciprocal relationship between the ways a person views his experiences and his actual social and inter-personal experiences.

**Abraham Maslow: A Humanistic Theory of Personality**

Maslow was a humanist who believed that man can work out a better world for mankind as well as for himself. His approach to understand human personality is different from behaviourism as given by B.F. Skinner (discussed later) and psychoanalysis. He depicted human being as a “wanting animal” who rarely reaches a state of complete satisfaction. It is characteristic of human life that people almost always desire something. If one desire is satisfied, another surfaces and so on. Maslow consistently argued that lower order needs must at least be satisfied before an individual can become aware of the higher order needs. He proposed that in general, human desires/needs are innate and they are arranged in a hierarchy. He developed his own system of needs and categorized them into two categories.

a) Deficit Needs and
b) Growth Needs

The deficit needs include sex, sleep, protection from extreme temperature and sensory stimulation. These needs are most basic, powerful and obvious of all human beings for their physical survival. In the second
category come the needs for safety, needs of belongingness and love, the esteem needs and the need for self-actualization.

Now let’s examine each of Maslow’s need categories in a little detail, in accordance of their order i.e. from lower to higher.

1) **Physiological Needs:** As pointed out earlier these are directly concerned with the biological maintenance of the organism and must be gratified at some minimal level. An individual who fails to satisfy this set of basic needs won’t be able to move upwards to satisfy the higher level needs. For instance, a chronically hungry person will never strive to compose music or join politics or construct theories to build a new world order. Without a doubt, the physiological needs are crucial to the understanding of human behaviour. Many autobiographies and experiments chronicled in the history show the devastating effects on behaviour produced by lack of food or water. For example, in the Nazi concentration camps of World War II, it was common for prisoners subjected to prolonged deprivation and torture, to relinquish their moral standards and steal food from each other.

2) **Safety Needs:** When the physiological needs are successfully fulfilled then safety needs become the dominant force in the personality of the individual. Safety needs are many and are mainly concerned with maintaining order and security. The primary motivating force here is to ensure a reasonable degree of certainty, order, structure and predictability in one’s environment. Maslow suggested that these needs are most readily observed in infants and young children because of
their relative helplessness and dependence on adults. For example, children, respond fearfully if they are suddenly dropped or startled by loud noise or flashing lights. Eventually education and experience neutralize such dangers.

Nonetheless, the safety needs also exert active influence beyond the stage of childhood. The preference for a job with security and financial protection, having a bank account, purchasing a building/house and investment in insurance or medical facilities or unemployment or old age may be regarded as motivated by making the future safe.

3) **Belongingness and Love Needs:** These needs institute the third ladder in the Maslow’s scheme of human needs and emerge only when the first ladder and second ladder needs are satisfied. These needs emphasize the basic psychological nature of human beings to identify with group life. These are the needs of making intimate relationships with other members of society, being an accepted member of an organization and to have a family. In the absence of group membership, a person will have a feeling of loneliness, social ostracism, friendlessness and rejection. Maslow rejected the Freudian notion that love and affection are derived from sexual instincts. He was of the view that love is not synonymous to sex but a mature love involves healthy loving relationship between two persons. Being loved and accepted is instrumental to healthy feelings of worth. Not being loved generates futility, emptiness and hostility.

4) **Self-Esteem Needs:** When one’s needs for being loved and loving others have been reasonably
satisfied, the need for self-esteem emerges. These needs are divided into two groups: (a) Self-respect, self-regard and self-evaluation

(b) Esteem and respect from others. The first group includes such things as desire for competence, confidence, personal strength, adequacy, achievement, independence and freedom. An individual needs to know that he or she is worth while – capable of mastering tasks and challenges in life. The second group includes prestige, recognition, acceptance, attention, status, fame, reputation and appreciation. In this case, people need to be appreciated for what they can do, i.e. they must experience feelings of worth because their competence is recognized and valued by significant others.
5) **Self-Actualization Needs:** Finally, if all the foregoing needs are sufficiently satisfied, the need for self-actualization comes to the fore. Maslow characterized self-actualization as the desire to become everything that one is capable of becoming. One wants to attain perfection. It is to reach the peak of one’s potential. Self actualization is only possible if the basic needs at lower levels are met to the degree that they neither distract nor consume all the available energy. The person should not be worried about his or her survival needs. He or she should feel satisfied with his/her social relations in family, society and job.

Thus we need to keep in mind that Maslow’s needs occur in an order. One seeks self-esteem only after one’s love and belongingness needs are satisfied. And one seeks love only when he or she feels secure and safe. On the opposite side of it, one quickly goes back to a lower level from the upper level, if the needs of lower level are suddenly jeopardized. For example, let us consider a lady who, thinking her love needs are in good order, busies herself with becoming a business tycoon. Suddenly and unexpectedly, her husband leaves her. In such a situation, what she does is that she casts aside all aspects of self-esteem (in this case business) and becomes consumed in an effort to regain her husband i.e. to satisfy her love needs. Once this relationship is restored or a suitable alternative developed, she is free to concern herself with the business world.

**B.F. Skinner: A Behaviouristic-Learning Theoretical Approach to Personality**

Before turning to Skinner’s theory, it may be useful to contrast its general qualities with those of the
theories considered earlier. Each of the theory covered earlier has placed considered emphasis on structural concepts. Sigmund Freud (You would study in another unit) used structural concepts such as id, ego, and super ego; Erikson used concepts like the developmental milestones; Roger used concepts such as self and ideal self and Maslow’s emphasis is on the basic needs of human beings for explaining their behaviour.

Skinner’s approach famously called behavioural approach to personality places considerable emphasis on the concepts of process and situational specificity. In summary, because the theory is based on assumptions that are different from other theories, the formal properties of this theory are different from those already studied.

The basis of Skinner’s operant conditioning process is that behaviour is controlled through the manipulations of rewards and punishments in the environment. The key structural unit for the behavioural approach is the response. The nature of a response may range from a simple reflex like salivation to food to a complex piece of behaviour like solution to an arithmetic sum. In Skinnerian scheme, the response represents an external, observable piece of behaviour that can be related to environmental events. There is a distinction between responses elicited by known stimuli and the response that can not be associated with any stimuli. The responses in the later category are emitted by the organism and they are in the biological nature. For example, the dog walks, runs; the bird flies; the monkey somersaults and swings from tree to tree; the human baby smiles, cries and babbles. Such responses are called operants. Skinner was of the view that stimuli in the environment do not force the organism
Theories of Personality

The essence of operant conditioning relies on the fact that, all other things being equal, reinforced behaviour tends to be repeated. The concept of reinforcement occupies a key role in Skinner’s theory. According to Skinner a reinforcer is an event (stimulus) that follows a response and increases the probability of its occurrence. If a dog is picking up a ball, which is a piece of operant behaviour, and the response is followed by a reinforcer such as a pat or any other reward, the probability of dog’s picking the ball is increased. Thus, a reinforcer strengthens the behaviour it follows. According to Skinner, while some stimuli appear to be reinforcing the behaviour of all animals certain stimuli serve as reinforcers for some animals only. It is important to note here that a reinforcer is defined by its effect on behaviour i.e. an increase in the probability of a response and is not defined just theoretically. Quite often, it is difficult to know precisely what will serve as a reinforcer for behaviour, as it may vary from individual to individual or from organism to organism.

So the focus of this approach is on the qualities of responses and their relationship to the rates and the time-intervals at which they are reinforced. The time and rate relationships of reinforcers is also referred to as schedules of reinforcement. To study these time-rate relationships, Skinner developed a simple apparatus, commonly known as Skinner’s box. In this box, few stimuli and behaviours/responses (like a rat’s pressing a bar or a pigeon pecking a disc) are observed in an objective way. It is here that one can best
observe the elementary laws of behaviour. According to Skinner, behaviour can be best understood when it is controlled. Behaviour can be controlled through the choice of responses that are reinforced and the rate at which they are reinforced. The schedules of reinforcement can be used on a particular time interval or a particular response interval. In a time interval schedule, the reinforcement appears after a certain period, say one minute, regardless of the number of responses made by the organism. That is to say that after every one minute, the rat or the pigeon in the Box gets food. In response interval schedule, also referred to as response ratio schedule, reinforcement appears after a certain number of responses having been made. That is, when the rat after pressing the bar ten times in the box gets food.

Thus reinforcements need not be given after every response, but can instead be given only on certain occasions. The reinforcements can be given on a regular or a fixed basis – always at a certain number of responses, or they can be given on a variable basis – sometimes after a minute and sometimes after two minutes, or sometimes after a few responses and sometimes after many responses.

Like this, the complex behaviour is shaped through a process of successive approximations. That is, complex behaviours are developed by reinforcing pieces of behaviour that resemble the final form of behaviour one wants to practice. Let us explain it with the help of an example.

Suppose we wish to shape behaviour of an untrained pigeon in the Skinner Box to make him learn to peck at a particular disc. We may do the shaping of the behaviour of the bird through a process of successive approximations. That is, instead of waiting until the
pigeon makes a full and correct pecking response, we would first reinforce some bit of the pigeon’s behaviour that resembles the final form of pecking at the disc. Therefore, we would give the pigeon reinforcement when he merely turns slightly in the direction of the disc. Once a definite tendency to turn toward the disc establishes, we would hold further reinforcement until the pigeon makes a definite movement toward the disc. It is done by reinforcing those responses that make the pigeon come closer and closer to the disc and then those responses that bring his beak near the disc. Like this, we would finally be able to induce the pigeon to peck the disc.

In a similar way, complex behaviours in humans may be developed through the process of successive approximation. While most of the emphasis in such type of learning is on the use of positive reinforcement such as food, money or praise, Skinner also emphasizes the importance of negative inforcers. A positive reinforcer serves to strengthen or maintain the response whereas negative reinforcers are those unpleasant stimuli which the learner will readily terminate if given the opportunity to do so. For example, criticism, disapproval and condemnation by the peer group are viewed as negative reinforcers. A negative reinforcer sometimes is confused with a punisher but the two are different. While a negative reinforcer precedes the response and forces its occurrence to terminate the unpleasant condition, the punishment follows the response and decreases the likelihood of the recurrence of the response. For example, if disapproval or condemnation follows immediately after the behaviour, punishment has taken place whereas if disapproval or scolding is directed at an individual in an effort to force behaviour to occur, and the resultant behaviour terminates this condition of
scolding and disapproval, then negative reinforcement is said to have been used.

Thus we see that, as the Skinner’s theory is most concerned with behavioural change, learning and modification, it is most relevant to application in the area of personality development.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, you have been familiarized with the overview of four personality theories given by Erikson, Rogers, Maslow and Skinner.

Erikson has outlined a sequence of eight stages in the human life cycle. Each stage is accompanied by a crisis, that is, a turning point in the individual’s life that arises from physiological maturation and social demands made upon the person at that stage. Each psychosocial crisis includes both a positive and a negative component. The successful resolution of each crisis is associated with a psychosocial strength or virtue.

The self is the most important construct in Roger’s theory of personality. The self is a differentiated portion of individual’s phenomenal or perceptual field—the totality of experiences. The self consists of the conscious perceptions and values of the “I” and “me”. The ideal self represents the self-concept that the individual would most like to possess. A person is said to be adjusted, mature and fully functioning when the conscious experiences that constitutes the self, mirrors the experiences of the organism. That is to say that to be adjusted, there should be a match between the subjective reality (the phenomenal field) and the external reality (the world as it is). While the opposite
of it (incongruence between self and organism) makes an individual feel threatened and anxious.

Abraham Maslow’s theory of personality is based on a hierarchy of needs. The needs at lowest ladders of hierarchy which are most compelling are the physiological needs followed by needs for safety. The third set of needs are the belongings and love needs. The esteem needs representing our needs for self-esteem and for esteem from others are at the fourth level of this hierarchy. The highest level needs in Maslow’s scheme are the needs for self-actualization.

B. F. Skinner’s view of the growth and development of human personality lay emphasis on the schedules of reinforcement. Reinforcements can be negative as well as positive. Through the judicious use of reinforcers, final form of behaviour can be produced, as is done by the animal trainers. The theory is based on the assumption that human behaviour can be manipulated through the environmental conditions.

References

