



Assessing Identity in Children and Adolescents

Paulina F. Kernberg, MD

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Incidence Adults

Estimates range as high as 10 to 11% of the general population (Weissman 1993) and 50% of those receiving psychotherapeutic treatment (Merikangas and Weissman 1986) -- suffer from impairments attributable to one or more personality disorders



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Incidence Youth

- ▶ Longitudinally evaluated 733 youngsters from randomly selected families
- ▶ Age range from 9 - 19 years
- ▶ 31.2% met criteria for a moderate personality disorder
- ▶ 17.2% were at a severe level

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**ASSESSING DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS:
DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY**

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Borderline Personality Disorder

- Argues a lot (3)
- Complains of loneliness (12)
- Cruelty, bullying, or meanness to others (16)
- Deliberately harms self or attempts suicide (18)
- Destroys his or her own things
- Feels or complains that no one loves him or her
- Impulsive or acts without thinking (41)
- Physically attacks other people (57)
- Screams a lot (68)
- Sudden changes in mood or feelings (87)
- Talks about killing self (91)
- Temper tantrums or hot temper (95)

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NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER

- Bragging and boasting (7)
- Disobedient at home (22)
- Disobedient at school (23)
- Feels he or she has to be perfect (32)
- Showing off or clowning (74)

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Antisocial Personality Disorder

- Cruel to animals (15)
- Cruelty, bullying, or meanness to others (16)
- Destroys things belonging to his or her family or others (21)
- Doesn't seem to feel guilty after misbehaving (26)
- Gets in many fights (37)
- Impulsive or acts without thinking (41)
- Lying or cheating (43)
- Runs away from home (67)
- Sets fires (72)
- Steals at home (81)
- Steals outside the home (82)
- Threatens people (97)
- Truancy, skips school (101)
- Vandalism (106)



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Histrionic Personality Disorders

- Demands a lot of attention (19)
- Interaction with others is often characterized by inappropriate sexually seductive or provocative behavior (73)



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Paranoid Personality Disorder

- Easily jealous (27)
- Feels others are out to get him or her (34)
- Secretive, keeps things to himself or herself (69)
- Suspicious (89)

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Schizoid Personality Disorder

- Would rather be alone than with others (22)
- Doesn't get along with other kids (25)
- Strange behaviors (84)
- Withdrawn, doesn't get involved with others (111)
- Strange ideas (85)



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Avoidant Personality Disorder

- Fears he or she might think or do something bad (31)
- Self-conscious or easily embarrassed (71)
- Shy or timid (75)

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General Personality Disorder Traits

- Feels worthless or inferior (35)
- Gets hurt a lot, accident prone (36)
- Gets teased a lot (38)
- Hangs around with others who get in trouble (39)
- Nervous, high strung, or tense (45)
- Not liked by other kids (48)
- Too fearful or anxious (50)
- Poorly coordinated or clumsy (62)
- Prefers being with older kids (63)
- Prefers being with younger kids (64)
- Sulks a lot (88)
- Talks too much (93)
- Teases lot (94)
- Thinks about sex too much (96)
- Worries (112)

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**Assessing Structural
Characteristics**

Identity



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Components of Identity

Akhtar and Samuel (1996)

- A realistic body image
- Subjective self-sameness
- Consistent attitudes and behaviors
- Temporal continuity
- Authenticity
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Superego or conscience

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Identity Crisis and Identity Diffusion

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The Personality Assessment Interview (PAI)

M. Selzer,
P. Kernberg, B. Finkelstein et al (1987)

Demonstrates personality function in a focused way in terms of these variables: self- and object- representations, cognition, affects, reflective capacity or observing ego, and empathy with the interviewer

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Neurotic Personality Organization

- Cognition
- Affect
- Self-Representation
- Object-Representation
- Ego- or Self-Reflectiveness
- Empathy

DSM IV:

Avoidant PD

Dependent PD

Non DSM IV:

Obsessive Compulsive PD

Hysterical PD

Passive-Aggressive PD

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Borderline Personality Organization

- Cognition
- Affect
- Self-Representation
- Object-Representation
- Ego- or Self-Reflectiveness
- Empathy

DSM IV:
Histrionic PD
Borderline PD
Narcissistic PD
Antisocial PD
Schizoid PD

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Assessing Defense Mechanisms



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Cluster One

- Adaptation
- Anticipation
- Problem-Solving
- Suppression
- Sublimation
- Altruism
- Affiliation
- Identification
- Humor



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Cluster Two

- Intellectualization
- Rationalization
- Isolation
- Doing and Undoing
- Negation
- Reaction-Formation
- Repression
- Projection
- Introjection
- Regression
- Somatization
- Turning Aggression Against the Self
- Avoidance



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Cluster Three

- Denial
- Splitting
- Projective Identification
- Primitive Idealization
- Primitive Devaluation
- Omnipotent Control
- Identification with the Aggressor



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Cluster Four

- Dedifferentiation
- Constriction
- De-animation
- Dispersal
- Dismantling
- Autistic Encapsulation
- Fusion
- Freezing
- Hypochondriasis
- Reversal of Affect

P. F. Kernberg
(1994)

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**Assessing Structural
Characteristics:
Psychological Testing**

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Reality Testing

This variable is extraordinarily stable. For example, repeated testing finds the same form level (Exner 1995). Thus low form level by an elementary school-age child indicates impaired reality testing, and the perceptual inaccuracy or vagueness of his response should not be attributed merely to his being a child. This finding is consistent with the finding that loose associations do not occur in normal children over 7 years of age

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**Assessing Structural
Characteristics**

Identity

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ASSESSING IDENTITY IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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