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HPS307 Exam Revision

Topic 1 – Theory and research into Personality

Definition of Personality

- ‘the psychological structures underlying consistent patterns in thoughts, feelings and behaviours’
- Various different definitions depending on the theory
- All the theories have the aim of explaining the consistent thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals.

Value of Theory

- It is useful to study personality is to gain insight into important aspects of behaviour
- If you understand some process or outcome, you have greater ability to intervene and change that process or outcome
- In the context of personality psychology, if you have expert understanding of human behaviour, you can help a person change in a way that is more effective than a non-expert
- If you understand why someone is depressed, you can treat that depression

Studying Personality

- A majority of psychologists argue that a scientific approach is the most effective way to develop knowledge in personality psychology.
 - Very simplistically, this involves using systematic, objective (i.e., free from bias) observation to test propositions derived from theory.
 - In cases where the evidence (from systematic observation) supports the theory, confidence in the validity of the theory is strengthened.
 - In cases where the evidence does not support the prediction derived from the theory, the theory is rejected (or reasonably modified to better explain existing data)
- The majority of researchers pursue the study of behaviour in a scientific way.
- From this, it follows that the practice of psychology is evidenced-based.
 - That is, behaviour change techniques used (e.g., to treat depression) are developed based on theoretical understanding of behaviour (e.g., depression).
 - Furthermore, these techniques themselves are systematically tested to make sure they are actually effective
- There is not universal agreement that a scientific approach is the best or only way to study people.

Consistency in Behaviour

- Evidence indicates that people can display all three types of consistency in their behaviour, thus a good personality theory should be able to explain all three types.

Cross-situational consistency:

- When behaviour is consistent across various situations
- For example: a person may be grumpy and disagreeable across many situations (at work, at home, etc.)

Within-situation consistency:

- Behaviour is consistent within a situation but inconsistent across situations
- For example, a person is fearful in relation to horror movies but otherwise is not fearful

Longitudinal consistency

- Patterns of behaviour are stable over time (regardless of whether they are consistent across situations or just within situations)

Why so many theories?

- Theories may work well, but not in all relevant contexts
- Some theories may work quite well (i.e., are supported by data) in some contexts but not so well in other contexts.
- Evidence can be contradictory or mixed
- People prefer different kinds of evidence
- People are biased

Aims of personality theories

- To explain consistent patterns in thoughts, feelings and behaviours and individual differences in these patterns

Nature of empirical evidence underlying various theories

Case Study

- Produces an in-depth yield of information about a small number of cases.
- Best suited to cases that are uncommon or cannot be induced due to ethical reasons.
- Tends to inform what other studies can be conducted because the information is provided by few individuals that external validity (generalisability) is restricted
- Causality is hard to establish
- Experimenter bias can come into play

Correlational Study

- Used to investigate relationships between variables
- Because there is no manipulation of the variables, the direction of the relationship (causality) is unable to be determined.
- External validity is better than in case studies but it's at cost of less detail generated per individual

Experiment

- Used to establish the direction of a relationship (causality) because it involves manipulating variables and examining the consequences.
- Provides best external validity of all designs
- The artificiality of experiments can alter participant's behaviour
- Experimenter bias can alter results

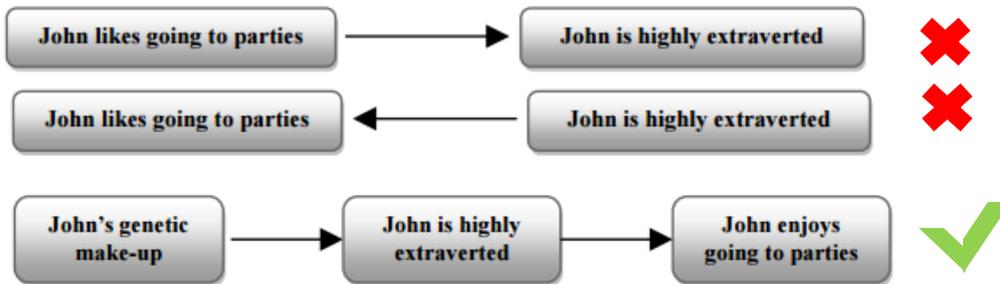
Topic 2 - The Five Factor Model of Personality

Trait concept

- A trait refers to consistent patterns in the way unique individuals think, feel and behave
- Important concepts to remember:
 - traits are used to describe consistent patterns in behaviour
 - traits describe unique patterns of behaviour.
- Trait theory explains that two individuals differ not in terms of their fundamental traits (i.e., their personalities are both defined by the trait introversion-extraversion), but in terms of the level of the trait they possess (i.e., the first person is more extraverted than the second).

Importance of a biological basis in trait explanations of personality

- Trait theorists such as Costa and McCrae believe that trait theory can provide an explanation for behaviour.
- According to this logic, a person is not neurotic because they are anxious; instead, they are anxious because they are neurotic.
- They suggest that biological factors explain the occurrence of traits.



Fundamental lexical hypothesis

- The approach of trait theorists relies on an assumption called the fundamental lexical hypothesis
- The approach to determining the fundamental personality traits by analyzing language.
- The specific traits are taken from natural language. Thus, the researchers are assuming that the key information about underlying personality traits is actually present in natural language
- Given the importance of these individual differences, they have been encoded into language
- Therefore, one way to understand the fundamental traits of people is to analyse their language

Big Five personality traits

Openness (to new experience)

- Low = conventional, narrow interests, unartistic, ridged
- High = untraditional, curious, original

Conscientiousness

- Is about goal-directed behaviour and impulse control
- Low = unreliable, hedonistic, aimless, lazy

- High = organised, reliable, hard-working, ambitious, punctual

Extraversion

- Degree to which person desires stimulation and interpersonal interaction
- Low = reserved, retiring, quiet
- High = sociable, active

Agreeableness

- Low = rude, suspicious, uncooperative, manipulative
- High = trusting, helpful, forgiving, soft-hearted, gullible

Neuroticism (emotional stability)

- Low = calm, relaxed, secure, self-satisfied
- High = worrying, nervous, insecure, hypochondriacal

Methods used by trait theorists to establish and measure the traits

- Trait theorists build their theory in an empirical fashion.
- First, they find all the labels present in everyday language people use to describe personality
- Then, they place all these into a questionnaire and have people rate their personality using these terms.
- Then perform a factor analysis to work out which terms are related and can be grouped into more fundamental traits.

Experimental findings regarding stability of traits

Cross-cultural stability

- Testing is difficult due to translation
- There is some degree of consistency across cultures (especially in terms of extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness) but there also seems to be considerable variation (especially in terms of neuroticism and openness).

Over-time stability

- Personality is more stable over short periods of time than over long periods of time
- Personality is more stable in adulthood than childhood
- There is evidence of trait stability, but there are individual differences in the extent to which this is true
- There is evidence of general stability, but, the potential for the environment to change is yet to be determined

Cross-situational stability

- Testing the extent to which people's behaviour is consistent across situations is complicated by a number of conceptual and methodological issues
 - Hard to define consistency
 - Some situations constrain behaviour
 - E.g., quiet in church
- Findings indicate that there is some consistency but it is not all that high

