

Personality 7122

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Criteria of Good Psychological Theories:

- Description: be able to simplify, identify, clarify issues addressed
- Explanation: how and why behaviour occurs (understanding behaviour)
- Empirical validity: theory must fit scientific method; generate hypothesis, operationalize concepts and statistically analyse theory to generate prediction
- Testable concepts: able to be tested/replicated
- Comprehensiveness: theory is able to explain a wide range of behaviours
- Parsimony: includes fewest concepts; those necessary to explain behaviour
- Heuristic Value: theory stimulates research/interest in the area
- Applied Value: offer new perspectives or a different approach to the problem, has practical usefulness

Personality = consistent behaviour patterns and intrapersonal processes originating within the individual

- Consistent behaviour patterns = individual differences
- Intrapersonal processes = emotional, motivation and cognitive processes

Reliability: how reproducible an effect/outcome is, measure via test/retest, internal consistency (items on a test measure same concept) or inter-rater reliability.

Validity: face, congruent (convergent- associated with other factors of construct; concurrent – associated with other standardised measures of construct), discriminant, predictive.

Explaining Aggression from the 6 perspectives: (each contributes a different approach/viewpoint)

- Psychoanalysis: unconscious death instinct produces aggression, or if we are blocked from achieving goals
- Trait: aggression is a personality characteristic and will be stable across childhood and adulthood
- Biological: genetic predisposition to act aggressively and influence of hormones (testosterone) and neurotransmitters (evolutionary theory suggests it is adaptive for survival)
- Humanistic: aggression arises when basic needs are not met (sign of frustration)
- Behavioural: people learn aggression (it is rewarded by power)
- Cognitive: aggressive people process information differently and are more attentive to aggressive content (see acts as potentially threatening and therefore act violently)

Explaining Depression from the 6 perspectives:

- Psychoanalytic: anger turned inward
- Trait: some individuals are prone to depression
- Biological: inherit genetic susceptibility to depression (more likely to react to stressful-events with depression)
- Humanistic: those who suffer depression failed to create a good sense of self-esteem/self-worth
- Behavioural: results from lack of positive reinforcers and learned helplessness
- Cognitive: depression results from perceived inability to control events

Important factors in all theories:

Genetic vs. Environmental influence: extent personality is a result of inherited predisposition (biological perspective) or shaped by the environment (behaviourist/social learning, humanistic, cognitive)

Conscious vs. Unconscious determinants of behaviour: extent people are aware of the cause of their behaviour: psychoanalysis = unaware; humanistic/trait/cognitive = aware (since these theories rely on self-report they assume people can identify/report behaviour)

Free-will vs. Determinism: extent people decide their own fate (humanistic) or is behaviour determined by forces out of individual control (radical behaviourists/psychoanalysts) – trait, cognitive and biological in the middle

Trait Theory

Types = type of person/category you belong to (only one)

Traits = distinguishing qualities/characteristics of a person - can have several varying traits, range on a continuum

Types described by Ancient Greeks: *Galen* and *Hippocrates*

Choleric (yellow) = irritable/temperamental

Melancholic (black) = depressed

Sanguine (blood) = optimistic/happy

Phlegmatic (phlegm) = calm/apathetic

Sullaway's Theory of birth order and *type*:

- First born = identify with parents
- Second born = increased deviance and less identification with parents (more innovative and less rigid)

Sheldon determines personality through body type: (theory weak in empirical methodology and over simplistic)

- Mesomorphic = courageous, muscular
- Ectomorphic = thin, long, fragile
- Endomorphic = round, relaxed

Assumptions of trait perspective:

- Personality characteristics are relatively stable across time and situations
- Assessing traits indicates/helps predict behaviour
- Traits are normally distributed across the population

Features of trait theory:

- NOT to predict behaviour but assess overall link between traits and population
- Describe rather than predict
- No associated school of psychotherapy
- Academic-based theory
- Factor Analysis used to identify the core traits comprising basic dimensions of personality

Different Psychologists identified a number of core traits:

Gordon Allport (1921): believed in individuality and uniqueness – all people have consistent personalities

- Found 17953 personality-describing adjectives (**4500** that were observable and permanent)
- Amount of traits makes this theory hard to assess

Nomothetic approach = assumes all people can be described along a single dimension according to their level of a trait (compare common traits between individuals)

Idiographic approach = identify the unique combination of traits that best describes the personality of a single individual (central traits)

Distinguished between different types of traits –

- Cardinal = have strong impact on behaviour, single trait dominating personality (rare)
- Central = 5-10 traits which best describe some-ones personality (self knowledge important to identify central traits)
- Secondary = not core to personality; more likes and dislikes (less applicable)

Cattell (1949): 16

- Language is the key to personality
- Narrowed down *Allport's* 4500 traits to 171 traits and 16 personality factors (source traits)
- Source traits are basic traits forming human personality
- Used factor analysis/behavioural data (empirical analysis) to determine personality factors
- 16PF = outgoing-reserved, intelligent, stable-emotive, assertive-humble, happy, conscientiousness, shy-venturous, tough-tender etc. (source traits contributing to the big-5)
- Used 3 methods to gather information: *Q-data* = questionnaires; *L-data* = life data (school records); *T-data* = test data (observational accounts)

Costa and McCrae (1980): 5

- The big-5 trait theory (OCEAN) – 5 superordinate traits supported by research
- Measured using NEO-PIR (NEO-IPIP is reduced version, available online)
- Receive score for each trait and facet scores give indication of other factors of personality
- *Ashton* and *Lee* suggested a sixth factor: honesty/humility – considered important in non-English speaking cultures
- 'Openness' is controversial as it is more involved with intellect rather than personality
- Issues with measuring the big-5: self report inventory can be bias (inbuilt validity scale using negatively worded questions and reverse scores can test if responses are fake)

Openness to experience (high scorers are intelligent, creative, innovative)

Includes: imagination, artistic interest, emotionality, adventurousness, intellect, liberalism

Conscientiousness (self discipline and control: high scorers are dependable, organised, responsible) – predicts job success

Includes: self-efficacy, orderliness, dutifulness, achievement-striving, self-discipline, cautiousness

Extraversion (sociability: high scorers are energetic, enthusiastic, social, dominant)

Includes: friendliness, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement, cheerfulness

Agreeableness (high scorers are friendly, co-operative, trusting)

Includes: trust, morality, altruism, cooperation, modesty, sympathy

Neuroticism (emotional stability: high scorers are nervous, tense, moody)

Includes: anxiety, anger, depression, self-consciousness, immoderation, vulnerability

Eysenck (1960): 3

- Biological model
- Factors = extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism (tendency for psychotic behaviour/thoughts)
- Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) measures factors

Murray (1938): 27

- Psychoanalytic approach
- Believed in a need for potentiality/readiness to respond to an event under certain conditions
- Assumption = behaviour is driven by an internal state of dis-equilibrium (lack of something drives you to act)
- 'needs' are basic elements of personality

Distinguishes between: (secondary needs more important for determining personality than primary)

- Primary (viscerogenic) needs = food, water, air, sex, comfort
- Secondary (psychogenic) needs = achievement, dominance, affiliation, nurturance, rejection etc. (27 in total)

Needs are arranged in hierarchal order (depending on how they merge with other needs and situation)

- 'press' = stronger needs are expressed as intense behaviour – override weaker needs

Measured via Thematic Apperception Test – measures:

- power: dominance/control indicated by insecurity
- affiliation: friendship/belonging (if high affiliation, will have high extraversion)
- achievement motivation: desire to do things well/accomplishment/success

People with high achievement motivation

- are not risk takers as they avoid failure
- enjoy tasks with personal responsibility
- less likely to have *top* jobs, as they do not like to rely on others
- take responsibility and ownership for success

Success can be attributed to:

- Stability: stable concepts (intelligence/study ethic) or unstable (luck/easy topic)

- Locus: internal (structured time well and controlled outcome) or external (easy questions/environment controlled outcome)
- Control: whether we controlled the outcome of success (high motivation is achievement due to our control, but being from a wealthy family is achievement out of our control)
- Outcome: positive (usually attributed to internal/controllable attributes) and negative (usually attributed to external or uncontrollable factors)

Changing attributions can be one way to improve achievement motivation

Performance-achievement motivation = succeed to demonstrate accomplishment, outcome driven (getting a good mark)

Mastery-achievement motivation = succeed to develop mastery, sense of understanding and comprehension, process driven

- Mastery achievement linked with long-term retention and success

Approach = reach for success; Avoidance = escape failure

CRITIQUE:

Strengths

- Description – simplifies personality into a few traits, indicates how individuals are alike
- Testable concepts – traits can be operationalized/quantified using factor analysis
- Parsimony – includes only a few concepts (Ashton & Lee argue it is too parsimonious and sixth trait of humility/honesty should be included)
- Heuristic value – stimulated research and many different theories (examining traits is a major part of personality research)
- Applied value – practical, used to assess individuals for jobs (limited as there is no associated school of psychotherapy)

Limitations

- Testable concepts – reliance on self-report raises issues of bias, acquiescence, social desirability
- Explanation – does not explain how or why personality is the way it is (no theory about development), can be over-interpreted
- Empirical validity – trait theory does not always predict behaviour well

Walter Mischel argued personality is too varied over situations to allow accurate measurement of individual differences (person-situation debate) – supported by low correlation between traits and behaviour, only 10% of behaviour could be explained by a trait (theorists argue theory is aimed at recognising patterns in behaviour)