

Personality

Overview

- Definition: Personality is the characteristic way of thinking feeling and acting that makes the person an individual
- Makes people who they are
- Personality is more than temperament
- Temperament: Physical and heredity parts of personality such as sensitivity, emotion and irritability
- Problems in later life can be traced to difficult temperament in infancy and how this influences behaviour through childhood

Trait theories

- Personality traits describe the stable forms of behaviour in any and every situation
- They can be used to predict the future
- It has moved beyond the early type approaches (Sheldon in the 1940's)
- It now categorises people using more than one dimension and therefore can better capture a person's individuality
- Trait theories largely differ from each other on the number of dimensions that are considered to be important
- Eysenck (1991-1997) (chapter 7) considered that there were 3 main dimensions of personality (extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism)
 - Extraversion: active and outgoing; Introversion: passive and calm
 - Neuroticism: Emotional instability, restless and anxious; Emotional stability: calmness and relaxed manner
 - Psychoticism: Recklessness or disregard for common sense
- Costa and McCrae (1999)
 - 5 main dimensions: extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness (known as the "Big Five")
- Michael Ashton and Lee Kibeom (2007)
 - Added 6th factor (honest-humility)
- Each of these theories describe the possible combinations of characteristics and how they predict behaviour

The Big Five Factors in personality- Trait theory

1) Openness to experience:

- Down to earth; Imaginative
- Uncreative; Creative
- Conventional; Original
- Unadventurous; Daring

2) Conscientiousness

- Negligent; Conscientious
- Lazy; Hardworking
- Disorganised; Well organised
- Late; Punctual

3) Extraversion

- Loner; Joiner
- Quiet; talkative
- Passive; Active
- Reserved; Affectionate

- 4) Agreeableness
 - Suspicious; Trusting
 - Critical; Lenient
 - Ruthless; Soft-hearted
 - Irritable; Good-natured

- 5) Neuroticism (emotional instability)
 - Calm; Anxious
 - Secure; Insecure
 - Unemotional; Emotional
 - Vulnerable; Hardy

Consistency and continuity of traits

- A claim of all trait theories is that personality traits are stable and enduring characteristics
- There is considerable research evidence to indicate that once adulthood is reached, personality is largely stable - But what age does personality stabilise?

Helle Pullman and Colleagues (2006)

- Helle Pullman and her colleagues (2006) conducted longitudinal research over a two-year period with Estonian adolescents from 12-18 to look at several aspects of personality stability:
 - 1) Rank order stability: Does a person who scores high or low on a particular trait compared with his or her peers remain high or low relative to peers, even if the whole group changes?
 - 2) Mean-level consistency: Are there any changes in mean scores on each of the traits for each age group?
 - 3) Individual continuity: Do the personality traits of individual participants remain stable over time

- Using the NEO Five-factorial Inventory, a measure of the Big Five personality factors, Pullman and her colleagues found the 'mean levels of personality traits were similar to adults from the same population'
- They found 'modest change in the mean-level' of the trait scores on three of the five dimensions and no change on the other two:
 - Level of openness increased and levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness decreased between the ages of 12-18

- 'Mean-level stability' can occur because most of the groups remain stable, approx 80% in each age group reported their personality traits in a consistent manner over the two years of the study, this indicates that adolescents are similar to young adults in the stability of their personality traits at an individual level

- By the age of 16 adolescents in their sample had reached the rank-order stability typical of young adults, e.g if a person started high on extraversion relative to the group, he or she usually stayed high.
- Does the fact that we report our personality in consistent ways mean that we express our personality consistently across all situations?, e.g If we report a high on conscientiousness and agreeableness then does that mean that we will behave in a cheerful and helpful way regardless of the company we are in?
 - Research indicates that this may not be the case!

Walter Mischel (1984)

- Found that conscientiousness in college students could only be predicted with a moderate degree of success. Students who were conscientious on one occasion (e.g being in class on time) were not always the same on another occasion such as handing assignments on time
- Mischel found that scores on personality tests only mildly predicted behaviour, it is unfair to expect personality traits to predict behaviour on every occasion as other factors come into play

- When behaviour is averaged over several occasions it is likely that the person who scores a high on conscientiousness will act in a more conscientious way than one who scores low.

Costa and McCrae Contributions and Limitations

- Contributions:
 - Provides useful descriptions of personality and its structure
 - Provided foundation for development of valid/reliable personality assessment devices (personality tests)
 - Devices can be used in vocation selection
 - Diagnostic testing for personality disorders
- Limitations:
 - Leads to acceptance of oversimplified classifications and descriptions of people (labelling people)
 - Classification method does not account for individual differences
 - Underestimates the ways in which specific situations and socio-cultural factors influence personality and human behaviour

Humanistic theories of personality

- Humanistic theories arose in the 1960's in the United States, the centre of the theory is the belief that "people are born good and that they try to reach their potential throughout their lives"
- Personality results from people striving to achieve their potential

Maslow (1908-1970)

- We must first have our most basic needs for food, water and shelter met before we will try to meet our higher needs
- Once lower level needs are met we try to satisfy increasingly high level needs
- At the top of this hierarchy is the needs for self-actualisation which is the need to live up our highest unique potential
- His theory stated people who have achieved self-actualisation shared the same characteristics of being open and self aware, secure in who they are, able to enjoy deep relationships and tackle problems without worrying about others' opinions.
- According to Maslow, our basic physiological needs must be met before we can move up the hierarchy to meet the need for personal safety. If we achieve a sense of security we are then motivated to love and be loved. When our need for love and belongingness is met, esteem becomes important, that is the needs to respect yourself

Maslow & Self-Actualisation

- Self-actualisation: The process of fulfilling our potential
- Studied healthy, creative people
 - Abe Lincoln, Tom Jefferson and Eleanor Roosevelt
- Self-aware and self-accepting
- Open and spontaneous
- Loving and caring
- Problem-centred not self-centred

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

- People are held back from achieving self actualisation if they are dominated by their lower needs and are therefore unable to move up the hierarchy
- Self actualist: Realising one's potential
- Esteem: Self esteem, approval from others
- Love needs: Acceptance, friendship
- Safety/security: Feeling safe, out of danger
- Physiological: Food, water, shelter



Carl Rogers (1902-1987)

- Shared much of Maslow's thinking; He believed that people are born good and with potential for enormous growth like the seed of a big tree (Rogers, 1961)
- Important people in our lives help us grow by providing genuineness, acceptance and empathy, which are like sun, water and nutrients for a tree- necessary conditions for growth
- A person who is genuine is honest and open with us and does not put on a front

- An accepting person is prepared to take us as we are, with all our shortcomings, we do not have to change or improve to be valued or accepted (Rogers called this type of acceptance "unconditional positive regard")
- A person who shows us empathy, the 3rd condition for growth, is when they try to see the world from our perspective and understand how we feel
- Rogers considered that we needed to experience these conditions from significant people in our lives in order to feel free to make changes we want to make in ourselves- to grow and to self-actualise

- Central to Roger's theory was the concept of self or personal identity
- A well adjusted personality= A good match between our ideal self (the person we want to be), our self-image (the person we think we are) and our true self (the person we really are). (e.g we value kindness and think of ourselves as a kind person, we need to act with kindness and compassion)
- The greater the gap between our ideal self, self-image and behaviour, the more likely we feel anxious and stressed
- Scott and O'Hara (1993) supported this belief- they found that students whose ideal and self-image were discrepant were anxious and depressed compared with students whose ideal and self-images were a better (closer) match

Self- Report: Q-sort

- Humanistic theories use a self-report called Q-sort stack of cards on which are printed statement such as: I try hard to please others, If i put my mind to it I can do anything, Success is important to me etc
- Rogers used these cards to see if there was a match between ideal self and self-image
- Self image: He would ask clients to arrange statements from those most like you to those least like you
- Ideal Self: Arrange cards from what you would like to be like, to what you would least like to be like
- Rogers considered that a well-adjusted personality would arrange the cards in similar orders
- Q-sort provides insight into a person's insight but has limitations:
- It depends on the sorter of the cards being prepared to be honest and open and to share what he or she really believes with the psychologist

- Contributions:
- Big impact in areas ranging from counselling through to education and child rearing

- Criticisms:
- Vagueness of some of the concepts (e.g self-actualisation, some suggest that Maslow's description of the characteristics he found in his heroes are simply a list of values, e.g someone who admired Winston Churchill might consider that single-mindedness and motivation to achieve were characteristics of the self-actualised person)
- The humanistic approach is too optimistic and faults to take into account human capacity for evil (Rogers replied to this criticism by saying that he has never known an individual who, when provided with the conditions needed for growth, has chose the 'cruel or destructive path'- Rogers, 1981, In Myers, 2007)

Limitations & Contributions- Humanistic Approach

- Limitation:
- Scientific theories starts with the assumptions about that nature of humanity (e.g not all people agree that we are all motivated by need and striving for potential)

- Hard to test scientifically as based on clinical observation= Subject to bias
 - How can we actually measure theory= How can you measure self actualisation?
 - Based on belief that all humans are inherently good
 - Criticised for unrealistic view of the world as it does not recognise human capacity to be negative and pessimistic
 - Does not provide an explanation for aggressive behaviour such as assault or murder
 - Theories are subjective (personalised) and non-scientific, cannot be measured using scientific method
- Contribution:
- The theory provides a structure for understanding individual differences
 - Can lead to specific predictions that can be tested (however the theory as a whole cannot be tested)
 - Humanistic psychology has been influential in psychodynamic therapy, education, parenting and business because the theory is based on "Motivation"
 - Rogers has been a major influence in the scientific study of personality- Rogers would take recordings of sessions and attempt methods of classifying, grouping and analysing data, he also would monitor changes during therapy (noting improvement of change in patient)
 - Important contribution of personality by focusing on the positive dimensions of personality
 - Gives a complete picture of how a person develops, but not accurate
 - Provides explanation for the development of an unhealthy personality
 - Approach used in counselling (teaching client to help themselves)

Contemporary type theories and their uses

Personality & Health

- Personality type: People who have the same cluster of characteristics
 - Contemporary type theories: Used in settings as diverse as health and business
 - Meyer Friedman: a cardiologist who developed a well-known type personality
 - This theory was driven by empire research designed to find out what type of person was susceptible to heart attacks
- Their research led them to propose that there are basically two personality types:
- Type A: Are ambitious, competitive, pushy, highly motivated, busy and impatient. They are easily irritated and frustrated and can become angry
 - Type B: More easy going, low levels of time-urgency, competitiveness and hostility

Friedman and Rosenman (1974)

- Carried out a longitudinal study, following 3524 men aged between 35 and 59 years over a period of 8 and a half years, at the start they interviewed each participant about his work and eating habits noting the manner of speaking and behaviour
 - On the basis of this information, they classified the men as having either type A or type B personality
 - By the end of the study 257 men suffered heart attacks, 69% of these were Type A
 - Not one pure type B suffered heart attack (the most laid-back of all)
 - Researchers asked if these findings were reliable? Could they be repeated? If the relationship between personality type and heart disease was reliable, then what aspect of the Type A personality was critical? Was it the competitiveness? The time-consciousness? Or the anger?
- One study indicates that only some components of the Type A personality put a person at risk of heart disease, (which was the negative emotion of hostility- "Reactive anger") The major factor in the link between the Type A personality and heart attacks (Myerter, 2001)
- It is suggested that Type A people respond more quickly and strongly to stress than Type B's. This results in increased blood pressure and heart rate which causes wear and tear on the cardiovascular system

- Milligan and colleagues (1997) found that people with Type A personalities have less healthy eating habits, get involved in more accidents and drink more alcohol, which suggests the link between personality type and health may be an indirect one.
- Researchers examined the relationships between prognosis in cutaneous malignant melanoma and a wide range of variables (situational, physical and psychosocial) and have proposed a "Type C personality" (Temoshok et al, 1985)
- They found that while a delay in seeking medical attention had the strongest relationship with prognosis, there were other factors that constituted a Type C personality that were also significantly related
- Type C: passive, bald, helpless and appealing
- Temoshok and Dreher (1992) suggested that bottled up emotions weakened a person's immune system and made them prone to cancer
- An Australian team (Price et al, 2001) with a very large sample of women with breast cancer found no relationship between development of cancer and personality type
- There is a range of factors including the type of cancer that must be considered when examining links between personality type and cancer

Personality & Business

- Psychologists and human resources personnel working large businesses and organisations have, over the last 10-20 years, increased the use of personality measures to try to determine an individual's suitability for a particular job and the compatibility within teams
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers and McCauley, 1985) is a popular tool
- MBTI was developed by Katherine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers to identify personality preferences
- Test: 126 forced-choice questions such as; at parties do you prefer to a) talk to someone you know, b) meet someone new
- The Myers-Briggs model is based on preferences that relate to four areas:
 - 1) Where do you primarily prefer to direct your energy? Extraversion (E): preference to the outer world or, Introversion (I): preference to the inner world
 - 2) How do you prefer to process your information? Intuition (N): Seeing relationships through insight or, Sensing (S): gaining information through the 5 senses.
 - 3) How do you prefer to make decisions? Thinking (T): Objective information, analytical approach or, Feeling (F) through basing decisions on what you believe to be important in life
 - 4) How do you prefer to organise your life? Judging (J): planned, stable and well organised or, Perceiving (P): 'Go with the flow'
- When four preferences are put together they produce 16 personality types

Social Cognitive theory

- Some psychologists consider that personality by itself does not determine behaviour even if it is stable it only influences behaviour
- Behaviour occurs in a context such as home, work or school
- Bandura and Mischel have taken this point of view- they are both social cognitive theorists.

Albert Bandura

- Bandura: a psychologist in action (was born in 1925 and has contributed to many fields of psychology (page 243)
- Bandura (1911-1986) explained human behaviour as being a result of the interaction between behaviours, cognitive factors and environmental factors which he called "reciprocal determinism"
- He noted in his studies of observational learning that we not only watch the actions of others, we watch the consequences of those actions, the rules and standards that apply to our behaviour in specific situations and the ways in which people regulate their own behaviour
- Environmental influences are important but so are conscious, self-generated goals and standards that influence our thoughts, feelings and actions

- “Reciprocal determinism”: Each factor influences the other factor and is influenced by the other factors
- Bandura was interested in applying his ideas to classroom learning- his theory would predict that learning would be shaped by factors in the environment i.e. reinforcements, but student’s own thoughts and belief about themselves and their interpretation of what goes on in the classroom would also influence their behaviour
- So students who think they are bad at maths and that they will be ridiculed if they ask a question would be unlikely to ask for help
- These ideas were further developed in Bandura’s notion of “Self-efficacy”
- Self-efficacy: The degree to which you are sure of your own ability and capability to manage and to be effective in meeting the demands of particular situations
- According to Bandura; Our cognitive skills abilities and attitudes, guides how we perceive, evaluate and control our behaviour We acquire a strong sense of self-efficacy by mastering new skills and meeting challenges in specific situations, it develops i early childhood as we develop and master skills (e.g walking, writing and riding a bicycle evolves over the lifespan as we meet new tasks and experiences)
- People fail at tasks if they have the necessary skills because they do not believe in themselves
- Common activities where self-belief is necessary is scuba diving (when you can already swim), climbing heights such as Sydney harbour bridge
- Self doubt can impede successful achievements
- When we succeed in a task our self-efficacy is enhanced

Walter Mischel

- Walter Mischel (Mischel and Shoda, 1998), is another theorist who has tried to take into account social cognitive factors when considering personality and its impact on behaviour
- Cognitive part of theory: People’s behaviour in a situation is affected by their perception of a situation and their thoughts about the likely consequences of behaving in a particular way
- He tried to reconcile within a single framework both trait and social cognitive approaches to explain human behaviour
- He considered that this was necessary to deal with apparent inconsistencies in personality in varying situations e.g why a person who seems confident in one situation might appear shy and anxious in another
- There has been productive research that has attempted to reconcile them. Bolger and his colleagues (Bolger 1990; Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995 in Mischel & Shoda, 1998) found that neuroticism (a Big Five trait) affects reactions to stress through both exposure and reactivity to stressful events such as conflicts with others
- Social cognitive theory is well-grounded in scientific research and its concepts have been empirically tested (unlike concepts in psychoanalytic and humanistic theories)
- Social cognitive theory has been very influential due to its wide applicability and robust theory
- Limitation: Some say that it ignores unconscious influences on behaviour and therefore not as rich as humanistic theories that study the whole person including the unconscious elements and irrational behaviour
- Limitation: Social cognitive theory does not explain learning and the influence of beliefs on the self, and how these affect and are affected by particular situations

Some critics say that it doesn't take into account unconscious thoughts and feelings and not all social learning is observable.