Introduction/Evaluating Theories of Personality

Chapter 1

What is Personality?
• Introduction, outline, and approach
  – A place to start

What is a theory of Personality?
• Answer a question with a question
Theories of Personality

What is a theory?
- Set of abstract concepts developed about facts
- Explanatory
- Theories reflect underlying cultural assumptions/backgrounds
- Micro vs. Macro Theories

Scope of Theory

Top/Down versus Bottom/Up
- Top/Down: The theory began with an idea and then went searching for facts
  - Deductive Reasoning (narrow, seeks to collect observations to "confirm" a hypothesis)
- Bottom/Up: The theory arose from the logical organization of once seemingly disparate facts
  - Inductive Reasoning (exploratory, characterizes early research)

Evaluation of Personality Theories

Philosophical
- Greek: philein (love) sophia (wisdom)
- Focus on how to live "the good life"

Scientific
- Latin: scire (to know) methods to acquire knowledge

Artistic (practical applications)
- How we use these theories in day-to-day life
Philosophical Assumptions

- Freedom versus determinism
- Heredity versus environment
- Uniqueness versus universality
- Proactive versus reactive
- Optimistic versus pessimistic

Table 1.1 Some Basic Philosophical Assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>IS NEUTRAL OR BELIEFS OR SYMPTOMS OF BOTH VIEWS</th>
<th>STRONGLY DISAGREE</th>
<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FREEDOM</td>
<td>People basically have control over their own behavior and understand the motives behind their behavior.</td>
<td>The behavior of people is basically determined by internal or external forces over which they have little, if any, control.</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEREDITY</td>
<td>Inherited and inherited characteristics have the most important influence in a person's behavior.</td>
<td>Environment has the most important influence on a person's behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIQUENESS</td>
<td>Each individual is unique and cannot be compared with others.</td>
<td>People are basically very similar in nature.</td>
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<td>PROACTIVE</td>
<td>Human beings primarily act on their own initiative.</td>
<td>Human beings primarily react to stimuli from the outside world.</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPTIMISTIC</td>
<td>Significant change in personality and behavior can occur throughout the course of a lifetime.</td>
<td>A person's personality and behavior are essentially stable and unchanging.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PESSIMISTIC</td>
<td></td>
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Evaluating Philosophical Assumptions

Evaluating a theory
• How coherent is the theory?
• How relevant is the theory?
• How comprehensive is the theory?
• How compelling is the theory?
Coherence
- Clear, logical, and consistent
- Fundamental contradictions?
- May be incomplete

Relevance
- Must have a bearing on our concept of reality
- Philosophy influenced by scientific knowledge

Comprehensiveness
- Does the theory cover what it claims?
- Superficial?

Compellingness
- Convincing? Do you buy it?

Scientific Assumptions
Paradigm (Thomas Kuhn, 1962)
- Model or concept of the world that is shared by members of the community
  - Shifts over time — The Atom
- Influences our perceptions & actions

Scientific Terminology
Objective Data
- "I see a person."
- Data through observation

Subjective Data
- "I see a person."
- Data through experience

Consensual Validation
- Repeated observations to arrive at agreement
Scientific Terminology

Operational Definitions
• Specifies what behaviors we include in a definition
• What do we mean when we say depression?

Scientific Constructs
• Hypothetical entities postulated to explain what we observe

Constructs: Examples

Trait
• A tendency or predisposition to respond in a certain way
• Descriptors of a person
  – Emotional characteristics, introversion vs. extroversion, Big Five

Self
• Psychological processes that govern an individual’s behavior
• Permits prediction of what a person will do in a given situation
Evaluating Scientific Statements

- Verifiability (empirical observation)
- Open to falsification
  - Claims are always tentative
- Compatibility with other data
- Predictive power
- Parsimony
- Usefulness

Applications

Assessment
- Psychometric tests
- Projective tests

Research
- Psychometric
- Clinical
- Experimental

Psychotherapy
- Scholarly
- Ethical
- Curative

Fundamentals of Assessment

Standardization
- Uniform administration of the test
- Same conditions, settings, etc.

Objectivity
- Double-blind, placebo controlled
- Multiple choice format
Fundamentals of Assessment

Reliability
• Consistency of scores over time
• “Clustering”

Validity
• The test measures what it was intended to measure
• Do Intelligence tests really measure IQ?
• Or is it some proxy of IQ?

Research

Clinical Approach
• Clinical observation
• Asking questions, interviewing
• Case histories

Research

Psychometric Approach
• Based on mathematical techniques

Correlational Studies
• Compare the relationship of two or more variables
• Correlations range from -1 to +1
• Correlation does not imply causation
Research (cont’d)

Experimental Approach

- Effects of the Independent Variable on the Dependent Variable (IV→DV)
- Random selection from the population
- Random assignment to condition
- Apply some experimental manipulation to see its effects on some outcome
- Medical trials are experiments

Psychotherapy

Scholarly

- Means of understanding self/human nature

Ethical

- Helping individual change, improve, & grow
- Improve quality of life

Curative

- Replacing troublesome behaviors/symptoms with more suitable behaviors
So, what is personality?
Characteristic pattern of thought, emotion, and behavior, together with psychological mechanisms—hidden or not—behind those patterns.

My definition of Personality
The part of ourselves that someone else can get to know.