Introduction/Evaluating Theories of Personality

Chapter 1

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

(p. 24)
- 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
Freedom
- Do we have free will?
- Do we have control over our actions, behavior, destinies?
- Do we understand our basic behavioral motivations?

Determinism
- Are we the product of internal or external forces acting on us?
- We have no control, everything is decided.

Heredity
- Is our personality derived from inborn, genetic factors?

Environment
- Does the environment influence our behavior?

Uniqueness
- Are we each unique individuals?
- Like snowflakes, no two are alike.
- Makes it hard to compare...

Universality
- Are we all basically the same in nature?
- We generally do the same things, think the same thoughts.

Proactive
- Do we act on our own initiative?
- Do we initiate activity?

Reactive
- Do we simply react to stimuli presented to us?

Optimistic
- Is personality pliable and flexible?
- Can we change, improve?
- Does our understanding of personality allow us to develop psychological therapies?
- John Locke (tabula rasa)

Pessimistic
- Is our personality more set in stone?
- Can’t teach an old dog new tricks
- Thomas Hobbes (Leviathan)

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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?

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 (cont.)

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
Constructs: Examples

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
- Usefullness

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 (cont.)

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

What is Personality?

SAT by GPA
Correlation = 1.0

SAT by GPA
Correlation = -1.0

SAT by GPA
Correlation = 0.0

Research (cont.)

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.