Introduction/Evaluating Theories of Personality

Chapter 1
Personality

- Introduction, outline, and approach
  - A place to start
- 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
(p. 24)

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

- Scientific
  - Latin: scire (to know) \( \rightarrow \) 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
Freedom

- Do we have free will?
- Do we have control over our actions, behavior, destinies?
- Do we understand our basic behavioral motivations?

Vs.

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?

Vs.

Environment

- Does the environment influence our behavior?
Uniqueness
- Are we each unique individuals?
- Like snowflakes, no two are alike.
- Makes it hard to compare...
  Vs.

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?

Vs.

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*)

Vs.

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?
- **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 (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
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
What is Personality?

SAT by GPA

Correlation = -1.0

GPA2

SAT
What is Personality?

SAT by GPA

Correlation = 0.0
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.