Chapter One

Introduction to personality psychology

I. What is meant by personality??

- What do you think???



Introduction

DO YOU FIND THESE QUESTIONS INTERESTING?

- **Why we are all different from each other?**
- **Where do these differences come from?**
- **How can we best measure and organize these differences?**
- **What do people want?**
- **How would I be different if I had grown up in a different culture? With a different gender/race/social class?**

- **EXAMPLES OF POPULAR USES OF THE WORD**

  Typical uses:

  ‘He has a good *personality*’ (social skills)

  ‘She has a lot of *personality*’ (social impact)

  ‘He has a neurotic *personality*’ (strongest quality)

•ORIGIN OF THE WORD

Greek word ‘persona’ (mask): character represented in a play



….. but what is personality anyway?

Jane and Alex both are college students taking an intro course in psychology. Their instructor returns the first midterm in class where both have received a D

Jane seems distressed and upset. She approaches the instructor, sweats as she talks, her hands shake, she whispers an apology, she is at the edge of tears. She spends most of the rest of the day alone in her dormitory, cuts classes, and writes a long entry in her diary.

Alex rushes out of the classroom and quickly starts to joke about the course and the instructor. He goes on his activities for the day (sports and social meetings) without thinking much about the grade. Later he decides to drop the psychology class.

- **Each of us is *unique***

- **We are not unique in random ways**

- **That thread of consistency within each of us is personality!**

Non-technical definition of personality:

A person's general style of

Technical definition of personality:

"Dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysiological systems that determine his/her characteristic pattern of behavior, thoughts, and feelings" (Gordon Allport)

-Dynamic -->active
-Organization -->system, rather than an accumulation of charact.
-Psychophysical -->mental and physiological
-Determine -->causal force (influences what we do)
-Characteristic -->unique and typical
-Pattern -->consistent style
-Behaviors, etc -->multidimensional

WHAT IS PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY?

Scientific study of personality processes and individual differences

Most personality psychologists carry out research, make assessments, and develop theories.

Ultimate goal? … understanding of individuals

Human's intra- and inter-personal behavior is determined by a super-complex network of proximal and distal causes which are very hard to tease apart.

FOUR MAJOR ELEMENTS OF PERSONALITY

- **MOTIVES**
- **COGNITIONS**
- **TRAITS (& TEMPERAMENT)**
- **CONTEXT**

How do these four elements work?

- *Developmental* sequence: from temperament to cognitions

- They all *interact* in predicting behavior

- Researchers tend to *focus on one or two* at the time (focus of convenience).

Personality as a *homeostatic system*

>traits (default, baseline)
>cognitions (information to operate the machine)
>motives (directionality, tasks)
>context (outside pressures)

…..when the machine breaks down or losses homeostasis we have a problem! (feelings of depression, anxiety, adjustment problems)

TWO BASIC METHODS IN PERSONALITY

- ***Idiographic*:** person centered; studies the within-subject organization of personality (eg. case study)

- ***Nomothetic*:** variable centered; studies relations between variables for the general population (eg. correlational methods)

---> Pre-scientific methods? Physiognomy and phrenology

The two major components of the personality pattern are -

1) The core, the concept of self

2) The spokes of the wheel, the traits that are held together and influenced by the core.

- The real self-concept is the concept people have of who and what they are, it is a mirror image, determined largely by their roles, the relationship with other and what they believe the reactions of others to them are.
- The ideal self-concept is the picture, people hold of what they would like to be.

The two major components….

- Each kind of self-concept has a physical and a psychological aspect.
- The physical aspect is composed of concepts, individual have of their appearance, their sex appropriateness, the importance of their bodies in relation to their behavior and the prestige their bodies give them in the eyes of others.
- The psychological aspect is composed of concepts individual have of their abilities and disabilities, their worth, and their relationship with others.
- At first, these two aspects are separate; and they gradually fuse as childhood progresses

II. Describing personality

A. **Differences between people**:

Approaches to describing individual differences:

--Type approach

--Trait approach

--Factors approach

1. **Type approach**

- -personality appears in a limited # of distinct categories.

- According to this view, a person will belong to only one category.

- A small number of categories are used to describe everyone.
- Are qualitative!!!

Types: examples

- Political – “liberals” & “conservatives”
- Jung– “introverts” & “extroverts”
- May be useful on a simple level of analysis.

2. **Trait approach:**

- Traits are characteristics used to distinguish one individual from another (consistent over time).

- We can measure how much (from low to high) a person possesses a given trait (shyness, extraversion). Are quantitative!!

- There are many traits to describe a single person.

3. **Factor approach**-

- Similar to trait approach, except that factors are broader categories for describe personality than traits.

- A small # of factors can be used to describe everyone.

B. **Nomothetic vs. Idiographic**

- The **nomothetic** approach– we compare one person with another.

- Groups of individuals are studied relative to others on the same concepts (traits).

- Approach measures individual differences among others.

The idiographic approach-studies one individual at a time, without making comparisons to others.

- This method focuses on an individual case.

Consistency of personality

- One theory is that an individual's behavior may be consistent across changing situations.

- However, Mischel argued that research failed to support this assumption.

- The situation may or may not play a greater role in determining behavior

III. Personality Dynamics

- What are mechanisms by which personality is expressed?
- Focuses on the motivations underlying why behavior occurs.
- Includes individuals' adaptation or adjustment to the demands of life.

A. Adaptation & Adjustment

- How we adapt & adjust to situations & events is based on our personality.

B. Cognitive Processes:

- Our thought processes (cognitions, beliefs) play a large role in the formation & expression of our personality.

- Unconscious thoughts or beliefs have an influence on our behaviors (Zajonc's Mere- Exposure Effect).

C. Culture:

- When examining the concept of personality development, formation, & expression, cultural influences need to be examined.

Goal of personality psychology

- Explain whole people
- In this mission, idea is to combine subfields of psychology into an integrated whole
- Mission impossible – very difficult to look at everything at once and still maintain a scientific approach

Mission Impossible/Need to focus efforts

Personality psychologists must focus their efforts:

1. Trait approach = how people differ psychologically from one another. Focus on personality traits.
2. Psychoanalytic approach = focus on unconscious mind and internal conflict
3. Biological = address physiology, inheritance, and evolution and relate these to personality

Basic Perspectives on Personality continued

4. Humanistic/phenomenological approach = focus on conscious experience, focus on growth, spirituality, and self-fulfillment
5. Behaviorist/learning – focus on science of learning, impact of rewards, punishment
6. Cognitive approach – emphasizes human thought, draws from modern cognitive psychology
7. Interactionist perspective – emphasizes that we are different in different situations; situation and person interact

Focus – What each perspective does best

- Approaches often complement each other rather than compete

- Toaster analogy: a device that does one thing well is unlikely to do other things well

Themes and Issues

1. Awareness/unconscious
2. Concept of self
3. Unique vs. general laws
    - Nomothetic
    - idiographic
4. Person vs. situation
5. Philosophical view of people
6. Past, present, future
7. Feelings, thoughts, behavior

Approaches to theory building

Two levels of information that personality theorists are interested in:

1. Individual level – what are individual people like? What are (this person's) characteristics?
2. General level – general laws that apply to all people

Approaches to theory building

Deductive approach – works from the "top" down

- generate basic laws about people
- Make deductions about what individual people will be like based on those laws
- Example: Freud – developed theory first

Approaches to theory building

Inductive approach – reasoning based on a “bottom-up” approach.

- Collect data about people first
- Develop the theory based on the data
- Example: Five Factor trait model

Approaches to theory building

Borrow and learn from related disciplines

- Use concepts that are known in other fields and apply to personality psychology
- Example: PET scans allow us to learn about brain function and structure. Pers. theory must be consistent with this.

Approaches to theory building

Most modern theories involve all of these approaches.

Best theories meet scientific criteria for a theory:

1. Comprehensive
2. Parsimonious
3. Testable
4. Productive – leads to new ideas & research

The Psychobiological approach

- **The Psychobiological approach** (the perspective that personality is determined by biological factors).
- temperament -- a person's characteristic emotional state, first apparent in early infancy and possibly inborn.

fundamental philosophical assumptions on which theorists disagree

- 1. **Freedom versus determinism** This is the question whether humans have control over their own behavior and understand the motives behind it or if their behavior is causally determined by forces beyond their control. Behavior is categorized as being either unconscious, environmental, or biological by various theories.

fundamental philosophical....

- 2. **Heredity versus environment** Personality is thought to be determined largely either by genetics and biology, or by environment and experiences. Contemporary research suggests that most personality traits are based on the joint influence of genetics and environment. One of the forerunners in this arena is C. Robert Cloninger, who pioneered the Temperament and Character model.

fundamental philosophical....

- 3. **Uniqueness versus universality** This question discusses the extent of each human's individuality (uniqueness) or similarity in nature (universality). Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers were all advocates of the uniqueness of individuals. Behaviorists and cognitive theorists, in contrast, emphasize the importance of universal principles, such as reinforcement and self-efficacy.

fundamental philosophical....

- 4. **Active versus reactive**
  This question explores whether humans primarily act through individual initiative (active) or through outside stimuli. Traditional behavioral theorists typically believed that humans are passively shaped by their environments, whereas humanistic and cognitive theorists believe that humans are more active in their role. Most modern theorists agree that both are important, with aggregate behavior being primarily determined by traits and situational factors being the primary predictor of behavior in the short term.

fundamental philosophical....

- 5. **Optimistic versus pessimistic** Personality theories differ with regard to whether humans are integral in the changing of their own personalities. Theories that place a great deal of emphasis on learning are often more optimistic than those that do not.