Contemporary Research on Personality

Module 46

Personality

The Trait Perspective

- Exploring Traits
- Assessing Traits
- The Big Five Factors
- Evaluating the Trait Perspective
Personality

The Social-Cognitive Perspective
- Reciprocal Influences
- Personal Control
- Internal Versus External Locus of Control
- Learned Helplessness Versus Personal Control

Optimism Versus Pessimism
- Assessing Behavior in Situations
- Evaluating the Social-Cognitive Perspective

Exploring the Self
- The Benefits of Self-Esteem
- Culture and Self-Esteem
- Self-Serving Bias
The Trait Perspective

An individual’s unique constellation of durable dispositions and consistent ways of behaving (traits) constitutes his personality.

**Examples of Traits**
- Honest
- Dependable
- Moody
- Impulsive

Allport & Odbert (1936), identified 18,000 words representing traits.

OBJECTIVE 46-1 | Describe the trait and perspective’s contribution to personality research.

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Personality Type

Personality types, assessed by measures like the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, consist of a number of traits, e.g., Feeling type personality is sympathetic, appreciative and tactful.

- Sympathetic
- Appreciative
- Tactful

Feeling Type Personality

OBJECTIVE 46-2 | Describe some of the ways psychologists have attempted to compile a list of basic personality traits.

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Exploring Traits

Factor analysis is a statistical approach used to describe and relate personality traits.

Cattell used this approach to develop the 16 Personality Factor (16PF) inventory.

Raymond Cattell (1905-1998)

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Factor Analysis

Cattell found that large groups of traits could be reduced down to 16 core personality traits based on statistical correlations.

Personality Dimensions

Hans and Sybil Eysenck suggested that personality could be reduced down to two polar dimensions, extraversion-introversion and emotional stability-instability.

Assessing Traits

Personality inventories are questionnaires (often with true-false or agree-disagree items) designed to gauge a wide range of feelings and behaviors assessing several traits at once.

OBJECTIVE 46-3 Explain how psychologists use personality inventories to assess traits, and discuss the most widely used of these inventories.
MMPI

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is the most widely researched and clinically used of all personality tests originally developed to identify emotional disorders.

MMPI was developed by empirically testing a pool of items and then selecting those that discriminated between diagnostic groups.

MMPI Test Profile

The Big Five Factors

Today’s trait researchers believe that Eysencks’ personality dimensions are too narrow and Cattell’s 16PF too large. So a middle range (five factors) of traits does a better job of assessment.

- Conscientiousness
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism
- Openness
- Extraversion

Objective 46-4: Identify the Big Five personality factors, and discuss some of the strengths of this approach to studying personality.
Endpoints

THE "BIG FIVE" PERSONALITY FACTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait Dimension</th>
<th>Endpoints of the Dimension</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Tender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism (emotional stability vs. instability)</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Imaginative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>Sociable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from McCrae & Costa (1985, p. 11). 10

Questions about the Big Five

1. How stable are these traits?  
   Quite stable in adulthood. Though change over development.

2. How heritable are they?  
   Fifty percent or so for each trait.

3. How about other cultures?  
   These traits are common across cultures.

4. Predict other personal attributes?  
   Yes. Conscientious people are morning types, and extraverted evening types.

Evaluating the Trait Perspective

The Person-Situation Controversy

Walter Mischel (1968, 1984, 2004) points that traits may be enduring but the resulting behavior in different situations is different. Thus traits are not good predictors of behaviors.

OBJECTIVE 46-5 | Summarize the person-situation controversy, and explain its importance as a commentary on the trait perspective.
The Person-Situation Controversy

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The Person-Situation Controversy

Traits are socially significant and influence our health, thinking and performance (Gosling et al., 2000).

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Consistency of Expressive Style

Expressive styles in speaking, gestures demonstrate trait consistency.

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OBJECTIVE 46-6 | Explain why psychologists are interested in the consistency of the trait expressiveness.
Social-Cognitive Perspective

Bandura (1986, 2001, 2005) believes that personality is the result of an interaction that takes place between a person and his social context.

Albert Bandura

Reciprocal Influences

The three factors, behavior, cognition and environment are interlocking determinants of each other.

Reciprocal Influences

Individuals & Environments

Specific ways how individuals and environments interact.

Different people choose different environments.

The school you attend, the music you listen to, are partly based on your dispositions.

Our personalities shape how we react to events.

Anxious people react to situations differently than calm people.

Our personalities shape situations.

How we view and treat people influences how they treat us.

OBJECTIVE 46-7: Describe the social-cognitive perspective, and explain how reciprocal determinism illustrates that perspective.
Behavior

Behavior emerges from an interplay of external and internal influences.

Personal Control

Social-cognitive psychologists emphasize our sense of personal control – whether we control the environment or the environment controls us.

External locus of control refers to the perception that chance or outside forces beyond our personal control determine our fate.

Internal locus of control refers to the perception that we can control our own fate.

Learned Helplessness

When unable to avoid repeated aversive events an animal or human learns hopelessness.

OBJECTIVE 46-8! Discuss the effects of a perception of internal or external control, and describe the concept of learned helplessness.
Optimism vs. Pessimism

An optimistic or pessimistic attributional style – is your way of explaining positive or negative events.

Positive psychology aims to discover and promote conditions that enable individuals and communities to thrive.

Assessing Behavior in Situations

Social-cognitive psychologists observe people in realistic and simulated situations because they have found that the best way to predict behavior of others is in similar situations.

Evaluating the Social-Cognitive Perspective

Critics say that social-cognitive psychologists pay a lot of attention to the situation and pay less attention to the individual, his unconscious mind, his emotions and his genetics.

OBJECTIVE 46-9 | Discuss the link between performance and optimistic or pessimistic attributional styles, and contrast positive psychology with humanistic psychology.

OBJECTIVE 46-10 | Explain why social-cognitive researchers assess behavior in realistic situations.

OBJECTIVE 46-11 | Summarize the criticisms of the social-cognitive perspective.
Positive Psychology and Humanistic Psychology
Positve psychology like humanistic psychology attempts to foster human fulfillment. Positive psychology in addition seeks positive subjective well-being, positive character and positive social groups.

Exploring the Self
Research on the self has a long history, because the self organizes thinking, feelings and actions and is a critical part of our personality.

1. Research has focused on the different selves we possess – some we dream and others we dread.
2. Research on how we overestimate our concern that others evaluate our appearance, performance and blunders (spot-light effect).

Benefits of Self-Esteem
Maslow and Rogers argued that a successful life results from a healthy self-image (self-esteem). There are two reasons why low self-esteem results in personal problems.

1. When self-esteem is deflated, we views our self and others critically.
2. Low self esteem reflects reality – our failure in meeting challenges or surmounting difficulties.

OBJECTIVE 46-12 | Explain why psychology has generated so much research on the self, and give three examples of current research on the self.

OBJECTIVE 46-13 | Give two alternative explanations for the positive correlation between low self-esteem and personal problems.
Culture & Self-Esteem

People maintain their self-esteem even with a low status by valuing things they achieve and comparing themselves with people with the similar positions.

Self-Serving Bias

We accept responsibility for good deeds and successes than for bad deeds and failures. **Defensive self-esteem** is fragile and egotistic whereas **secure self-esteem** is less fragile and less dependent on external evaluation.

OBJECTIVE 46-14 | Discuss some ways in which people maintain their self-esteem under conditions of discrimination or low status.

OBJECTIVE 46-15 | Discuss some evidence for self-serving bias, and contrast defensive and secure self-esteem.