

Psyc 2400 Psychology of Personality
Notes for 8-27 and 8-29

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Definition of Personality

- An individual's characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior, together with the psychological mechanisms—hidden or not—behind those patterns.
- "psychological mechanisms"-lots of theories
 - Freud: unconscious forces
 - Kelly: constructs, framing situation
 - Skinner: nope, nothing hidden

The Things Personality Psychologists Study

- Psychological triad: the combination of how people think, feel, and behave
- Overlap with clinical psychology
 - Normal vs. extreme patterns of personality
 - Both needed to understand the whole person
- The whole person
 - How all other areas of psychology come together

The Goal of Personality Psychology

- Explain the whole person in his or her daily environment
 - However, it is impossible to account for everything at the same time
- One way to explain people:

The Trait Approach

- Informal ways we describe each other
 - Arrogant? Shy? Trustworthy?
 - Lots more, e.g., trait names from the dictionary
- Lots of formal definitions
 - Raymond Cattell: Trait: "tendencies towards certain types of reactions, basic structural units of the personality"
 - Your textbook: "a relatively stable and long-lasting attribute of personality"

Anderson: Traits=your personal **LEGO**® pieces

Two Points to Keep in Mind

1. Trait research is empirical
 - Mostly correlational
 - Emphasizes accurate measurement of traits
2. Trait approach focuses on individual differences
 - Strength: assesses and attempts to understand how people differ

- Weakness: neglects aspects of personality common to most people

The Measurement of Individual Differences

- “Every man is in certain respects (a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, (c) like no other man” (Kluckhohn & Murray, 1961, p. 53, as cited in Funder, 2010, p. 115)
 - Trait approach focuses on the second level
 - Traits are the building blocks of personality

People Are Inconsistent

- Personality traits are not the only factors that control behavior
 - Situations are also important
- Do traits exist?
- Is everybody basically the same and behavior changes according to the situation?

The Person-Situation Debate: Three Issues

1. Does the personality of an individual transcend the immediate situation and provide a consistent guide to his or her actions, or is what a person does utterly dependent on the situation at that time? – situation does matter
2. Are common, ordinary intuitions about people fundamentally flawed or basically correct? – pretty intuitive, good at reading each other.. haven't proved situation more important than personality
3. Why do psychologists continue to argue about the consistency of personality when the basic empirical questions were settled long ago? – keep fighting over this because it has a lot to do with personal values

The Person-Situation Debate: How the Situationists would argue:

- There is an upper limit to how well one can predict what a person will do based on any measurement of that person's personality, and this upper limit is a small one.
- Situations are more important than personality traits in determining behavior
- View of human nature
 - People are free to do whatever they want
 - Everybody is equal, and differences are a function of the situation (bad personality= bad outcome)

The Person-Situation Debate: The Situationist Arguments

- The professional practice of personality assessment is a waste of time, and everyday intuitions about people are fundamentally flawed.
- Zimbardo experiment is a demonstration of this!

The First Situationist Argument: Predictability

- Personality is not a good predictor of behavior

- Mischel (1968 lit review): behavior is too inconsistent across situations for individual differences to be characterized by traits. Looked at:
 - Ability of trait judgments to predict behavior
 - Using past behavior to predict future behavior
 - Correlations weren't particularly strong (.30, .40)
 - About 9 and 16% predictability respectively
 - Therefore, who cares?

Person Response to the First Situationist Argument: Predictability

- Short, Unfair, selective literature review by Mischel
 - Studies with poor methodology
- Too many of the studies were in the lab
- Should focus on behavioral trends in prediction
- correlation not as bad as it sounds—could predict with as much as 70% accuracy how a person would behave (see p. 119)

The Second Situationist Argument: Situationism

- Behavior is determined by situations, not personality

Person Response to the Second Situationist Argument: Situationism

- Can't assume that "not a personality variable" means "definitely a situational variable"
 - Another personality variable you didn't measure?
- Situationists haven't done much formal measuring
 - Not nearly as much as predicting from traits
 - Lots of assuming going on

The Third Situationist Argument: Person Perceptions are Erroneous

- The professional practice of personality assessment is a waste of time and everyday intuitions about people are fundamentally flawed.
- Responses
 - The effects of personality on behavior are large enough to be perceived accurately.
 - The importance of traits is reflected in our language

Personality and Life

- "Personality is important on more than just theoretical grounds" (p. 127).
- Personality affects and predicts important life outcomes.
- Seem self-evident? Why are we still arguing?

Persons and Situations

- Persons, situations, and values
 - Situationism's view of human nature