

Theories of Personality :

Trait and Factor Models



Outline

TERMS

TRAIT THEORIES

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- CATTELL
- EYSENCK
- MCCRAE AND COSTA'S FIVE FACTOR MODEL
- HEXACO SIX FACTOR MODEL

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STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF TRAIT THEORIES

Personality



Definition : Enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself that are exhibited in a wide range of social and personal contexts.

It is the dynamic organization of the psychobiological systems by which a person shapes and adapts in a unique way to changing internal and external environments.

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- Trait : It is a neuropsychic structure having the capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent, and to initiate and guide equivalent (meaningfully consistent) forms of adaptive and expressive behaviour.
 - Temperament: It is the general style and emotional tone of behaviour.
 - Character: It is the social and cultural contributions to personality.
 - Personality disorder: It is an enduring pattern of inner experience and behaviour that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture.

Traits



- To understand traits let us consider the example of a shy person. It is not necessary that that a person acts this way on all occasions and the persons behavior may become atypical because of changes in the environment, pressures from other people, and internal conflicts.
- A person who is guided by the trait of shyness will often behave in such consistent ways as preferring to be alone, not having much to say to other people, and not looking at people when she does talk to them, however she may be more outgoing in a favourable environment.

Traits



- He may converse with a relative because his parents expect him to be polite, and he may risk talking to an attractive stranger because, at least for that moment his shyness has been overcome by the need for love.
- However, these are exceptions as his typical behaviour will be that of shyness.
- A trait (such as shyness) is more general than a habit (like regularly avoiding eye contact when talking to someone) and these traits are often interrelated.

Trait Theories

- Trait theories describe **the conscious and concrete aspects of personality in straightforward terms** such as “**friendliness**” or “**ambitiousness**” and they place less emphasis on the unconscious and abstract explanations of human behaviour.
- **They are also based on empirical research rather than clinical observation.**

Trait Theories

- Gordon W Allport originated **trait theory in response to what he regarded as Freud's excessive emphasis on hidden motives and meanings.**
- Personality is an **organizing force** within **the individual that determines characteristic patterns of behaviour** and these patterns of behaviour take the form of traits, such as friendliness and ambitiousness.
- The unconscious and defence mechanisms are important only in unhealthy personalities.

- **Raymond B Cattell** used the **statistical technique of factor analysis** to determine **which of the thousands of traits are most important** and **concluded that there were sixteen major personality traits**, some of which support Freudian constructs and the unconscious.
- **Hans J. Eysenck** sought to **make trait theory more explanatory** by **relating traits to physiological and social causes** and **three traits emerged from his factor analytical research** which were introversion-extroversion, neuroticism-stability, and psychoticism.
- Another group of researchers found **five traits which emerged significantly from their factor analytical research** which were Introversion–extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, and the formulated theory was known as “ **Big Five Theory** “

Allport's types of traits

- **Allport** initially proposed two types of traits which were **common traits** [traits shared by a number of people such as members of the same culture] and **individual traits** which are unique to a person.
- **Secondary traits** are the traits that exert relatively weak effects on behaviour. They may be so inconspicuous that only a close friend would notice evidence of them [e.g – preference in food or music]
- **Cardinal traits** are so pervasive and influential that they touch almost every aspect of a person's life. Allport described it as a ruling passion, a powerful force that dominates behavior. [e.g sadism and chauvinism]

- **Central traits** are the themes that best describe our behaviour. These are the characteristics we would mention when discussing a friend's personality. [e.g – aggressiveness, self-pity, cynicism] .
- Allport realized that some confusion could result from calling all these phenomena as traits and he later revised his terminology. He relabelled common traits - traits and individual traits - personal dispositions. Our personal dispositions do not all have the same intensity or significance. They may be cardinal traits, central traits, or secondary traits

Cattell's structure based system.

- Cattell began by examining 4500 trait names found in the English language by Allport and reduced them down by eliminating synonyms to 171.
- He came up with concept of 3 distinguished types of traits, namely Dynamic, ability and temperament traits.
- Also less distinguished traits namely surface and source traits.
- **Surface traits are personality characteristics that correlate with one another but do not constitute a factor because they are not determined by a single source** [e.g – anxiety, irrational fear and indecision combine to form the surface trait labelled as anxiety.



- **Source traits** which are of greater importance, are unitary personality factors which are more stable and **permanent** and each source trait gives rise to some aspect of behaviour.
- Catell identified 16 such source traits and presented them in a bipolar form in which the characteristics were expressed in words which were likely to be used in everyday conversation. **These factors are best known in the form of an objective personality test – Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire.**

Factor	low score	high score
Warmth	cold, selfish	supportive, comforting
Intellect	instinctive, unstable	cerebral, analytical
Emotional Stability	irritable, moody	level headed, calm
Aggressiveness	modest, docile	controlling, tough
Liveliness	somber, restrained	wild, fun loving
Dutifulness	untraditional, rebellious	conforming, traditional
Social Assertiveness	shy, withdrawn	uninhibited, bold
Sensitivity	coarse, tough	touchy, soft
Paranoia	trusting, easy going	wary, suspicious
Abstractness	practical, regular	strange, imaginative
Introversion	open, friendly	private, quiet
Anxiety	confident, self assured	fearful, self-doubting
Openmindedness	closeminded, set-in-ways	curious, exploratory
Independence	outgoing, social	loner, craves solitude
Perfectionism	disorganized, messy	orderly, thorough
Tension	relaxed, cool	stressed, unsatisfied

Dynamic traits




- Cattell described dynamic traits as the traits which were concerned with motivation and referred to inborn traits [instinct and drive] as ‘**Ergs**’ [Anger, Appeal, Hunger, Disgust, Security].
- While **erg** is an inborn constitutional trait, a **sentiment** is a source trait which is derived from external social and physical influence [Environment]
- Sentiment focuses on important aspects of life such as person’s community, religion or hobby.

Attitude (Learned)	Possible Sentiments (Learned)	Erg (Innate)
Want stronger system of national defence	Patriotism and love of country Preference for one political party	Security
Want danger of death reduced	Favor the funding of medical research	Security

Eysenck's 3 super-factor model

- **Eysenck** agreed with Cattell that personality is composed of traits, or factors, derived by the factor-analytic method.
- He used factor analysis to uncover personality traits, he supplemented the method with personality tests and experimental studies that considered a wide range of variables.
- The result of his research with his wife resulted in a personality theory that was based on 3 dimensions or **'Super-factors'** namely – Extraversion vs introversion, neuroticism vs emotional stability and psychoticism vs impulse control.


- **Extraversion** - Eysenck was interested in how extraverts and introverts might differ biologically and genetically. He found that extraverts have a lower base level of cortical arousal than introverts do. Because the cortical arousal levels for extraverts are low, they need, and actively seek, excitement and stimulation. In contrast, introverts shy away from excitement and stimulation because their cortical arousal levels are already high
- **Neuroticism** - Eysenck said that in neurotics, the sympathetic nervous system overreacts even to mild stressors, resulting in chronic hypersensitivity and this condition leads to heightened emotionality in response to almost any difficult situation.


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- **Psychoticism** – People who scored high in psychoticism were found to be cruel, hostile and insensitive to the needs and feelings of others and paradoxically could also be highly creative. The person high in psychoticism, for example, showing hostile and aggressive behaviors, may become emotionally disturbed, or exhibit criminal tendencies, or channel the aggressive traits into a socially acceptable enterprise such as coaching college football.

- Eysenck noted that the dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism have been recognized as basic elements of personality since the time of the ancient Greek philosophers and also suggested that formulations of the same dimensions could be found on nearly every personality assessment device ever developed.
- He also conducted considerable research on intelligence. **Although he did not list intelligence as a personality dimension, he considered it an important influence on personality. He noted that a person with an IQ of 120 is likely to have a more complex and multidimensional personality than is a person with an IQ of 80.**
- To Eysenck, traits and dimensions were **determined primarily by heredity, although the research evidence shows a stronger genetic component for extraversion and neuroticism than for psychoticism.**

Robert McCrae and Paul Costa: The Five-Factor Model


- Robert McCrae and Paul Costa expressed dissatisfaction with both Cattell's and Eysenck's theories by suggesting that the former has too many factors and the latter has too few dimensions.
- They embarked on an extensive research program that identified five so-called robust or Big Five factors which were neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.
- The factors were confirmed through a variety of assessment techniques including self ratings, objective tests, and observers' reports. The researchers then developed a personality test, the NEO Personality Inventory, using an acronym derived from the initials of the first three factors.

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- A similarity can be seen between the extraversion and neuroticism factors of McCrae and Costa and the extraversion and neuroticism dimensions proposed by Eysenck.
 - Furthermore, agreeableness and conscientiousness in the McCrae-Costa model may represent the low end of Eysenck's psychoticism dimension (impulse control).
 - Openness shows a high positive correlation with intelligence.
 - Their studies have found that four of the five factors show a stronger hereditary component: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness. Agreeableness was found to have a stronger environmental component

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- The five factors proposed were detected in children as well as adults and Longitudinal research studying the same people over a 6-year period demonstrated a high level of stability for all five traits.
 - All five factors showed good emotional as well as behavioural co relates in adults as well as children even on a cross cultural basis.
 - The evidence is clear from studies of a wide range of emotions and behaviours that the five-factor model of personality has a **high predictive value** and is the most commonly used tool.

Michael Ashton and Kibeom Lee: HEXACO: The Six-Factor Model

- Ashton and Lee (2007, 2009) have proposed a six-factor model of personality. Two of the factors—extraversion and conscientiousness—are similar to those found in the five-factor model; the other four differ in various degrees from the earlier work and are unique to this model of personality.
- The six factors or dimensions [HEXACO] are – Honesty, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to experience.

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- The dimensions of this six-factor model can be assessed by two self-report inventories: the 100-item HEXACO Personality Inventory, Revised, or the 60-item HEXACO-60. Both have been shown to be valid and reliable tests.
 - The factors have been documented in several different cultures including Dutch, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Polish, Greek, Croatian, Turkish, and Filipino and Research is ongoing to determine the behavioral and emotional correlates of the six-factor model.

Criticism

- Allport denied the importance of the first few years of life to a degree that most modern psychologists regarded as excessive. His contention that all forms of psychopathology differ in kind from healthy behavior, rather than in degree, is also highly unusual and extremely questionable.
- Henry Muller, a personality theorist emphasized about the lack of importance of the pleasure principle and the **lack of attention paid to the unconscious mind** by allport.
- Allport's theory has been **criticized** for **a lack of explanatory power, circular reasoning, not being able to explain why we behave differently in different situations, focusing only on the surface of personality.**

Criticism

- Cattell's research suggests that one-third of personality is genetically determined; the rest is determined by environmental influences and **does not suggest any ultimate life goals.**
- Many studies showed that the 16PF as well as the five factor models could be faked if the person viewed himself in a more favourable light.
- Despite Cattell's legitimate claim that factor analysis is an objective, precise technique, critics note that the opportunity exists for subjectivity to affect the outcome due to the massive amount of data which is involved. **This criticism does not suggest inherent weaknesses in Cattell's theory but that there is potential for subjective error in the factoranalytic approach**

Criticism



- Eysenck's theory was **criticised for not being comprehensive enough** due to stress placed only on 3 dimensions of personality.
- A frequently made criticism is that the **five-factor model is that it is not based on any underlying theory**; it is merely an empirical finding that certain descriptors cluster together under factor analysis. This means that while these five factors do exist, the underlying causes behind them are unknown.

Strengths of Trait Theories:

- The biggest strength of trait theories **lies in it's reliance on statistical or objective data.** Unlike other theories, the subjectivity of the or personal experience of the theorist plays no role in trait theory [Freud's relationship with his mother, Adler's childhood illness, Jung's belief in mythology]
- Trait theory **provides an easy to understand information regarding a person's personality, interaction and belief about the self and world.**
- Understanding traits allows us to compare people and to determine which trait allows a person to do better in academics, sports, relationships etc.

Weakness of trait theories.

- Trait theories are **poor predictors of future behaviour**, as we may be able to say if a person falls on the high or low end of a specific trait, but may fail to address a person's state [temporary way of interacting or dealing with others]
- Because **they are based on statistics rather than theory, they provide no explanation of personality development** and **reliance on statistics is considered to be both the biggest strength as well as the biggest weakness.**
- Because trait theories do little to offer ideas about trait development , they also provide no guidance in changing of negative aspects of a trait and without understanding how a trait develops it is very difficult to change it.

References



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THE END

