PERSONALITY

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DEFINING PERSONALITY

By personality, we refer to the complexity of psychological systems that contribute to unity and continuity in the individual's conduct and experience, both as it is expressed and as it is perceived by that individual and others (Boyles, Matthews and Saklofske, 2008).

Few definitions given by some prominent personality psychologists are listed below:
"That which permits a prediction of what a person will do in a given situation" – Raymon B. Cattell (1950)
"The most adequate conceptualisation of a person's behaviour in all its detail" – David McClelland (1951)
"A person's unique pattern of traits" – I. P. Guilford (1959)
"The dynamic organisation within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characterize each individual enduringly" – Walter Mischel (1999)
"Personality represents those characteristics of the person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving" – Lawrence A. Pervin and Oliver P. John (2001)
"Personality refers to an individual's characteristic pattern of thought, emotions, and behaviour, together with the psychological mechanisms – hidden or not – behind those patterns" – David C. Funder (2001)
Traits of personality "are classified by the adaptive problems they were designed to solve and.....traits evolve as a function of the adaptive problems faced by the organism over evolutionary time" – Figueredo et.al (2005)

Note that each definition expresses a common concern for using personality to help predict and explain people's behaviour. Developing a definition of personality that is accepted by everyone studying personality does seem difficult. But it is useful to identify certain features common to most of these definitions.

Uniqueness of the individual:

Most definitions of personality include some statement about the uniqueness of an individual's personality. This uniqueness can be explained from various theoretical viewpoints held by different personality psychologists. A *biological* viewpoint, with its emphasis on genetics and physiological processes, might consider differences in bodily processes, might consider differences in bodily processes (e.g., hormonal levels and brain functioning). A *dispositional trait* viewpoint might assert that certain human qualities are stable even as they are displayed across diverse settings (e.g., being conscientious at work and while hiking in the mountains). A *learning* viewpoint, with its emphasis on the effect of experience on behaviour, might consider distinctive reinforcement patterns (e.g., extraversion being rewarded). A *cognitive* viewpoint would emphasize individual differences in the interpretation of environmental cues and the behavioural expectations and consequences associated with these cues (e.g., being cooperative at work but aggressive when playing tennis). *Phenomenological* viewpoint might emphasize subjective experience and self-determination (e.g., your career as an expression of your passion for protecting the environment). An *evolutionary* viewpoint would emphasize the adaptive significance of certain personality characteristics (e.g., aggressive behaviour serves as protection of territory and food sources). A *cross-cultural* viewpoint might highlight the impact of societal norms and local customs on the expression of individual differences. And a *Freudian* viewpoint, with its focus on internal forces, might emphasize early childhood experiences (e.g., parent-child interactions). But regardless of the theoretical viewpoint or perspective, any definition of explanation of personality should take into account that each person is unique.

Consistency/Uniformity of behaviour:

Personality psychologists generally assume some degree of continuity in an individual's personality. As a result, another feature common to most definitions of personality is a concern for the consistency of behaviour across time and situations. For example, by assuming consistency across time, personality psychologists can link high-risk behaviour in high school (e.g., riding a motorcycle) with a decision in adulthood to enter a high-risk occupations (e.g., becoming a police officer). By assuming consistency across situations, researchers can link the competitive nature of a tennis player with the desire to be the top sales representative in his or her company. If behavioural consistency did not exist, studying personality would make little sense.

Emphasizing behavioural consistency does not mean an individual's personality never changes. Concerns with the consistency of behaviour are at the heart of some of the most controversial debates in personality psychology. The degree if behavioural consistency is influences by the extent to which situational factors, as well as one's personality, determine thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

Content and process of Personality:
In the words of highly regarded personality psychologist Gordon W. Allport, "Personality is something that does something" (1937, p.48). By *is* something, Allport refers to the *content* of personality. Each major personality theory discussed in this book offers a somewhat different explanation of the basic content of the human personality. By *does* something, Allport refers to the *process* of personality, the dynamic nature by which the contents of the personality influence the individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.
The content and process features of personality are interrelated. Across time and situations, the basic makeup of the human personality directly influences how the personality operates, for example, some personality psychologists assume that various traits make up the basic content of the human personality and also influence behaviour. They would explain the aggressive style of the officer tyrant across a variety of situations as resulting from a personality that contains a combination of the traits of aggressiveness and hostility. They would attribute variations in the uniqueness and behavioural consistency of other office workers to other numerous combinations of personality traits.

Combing common features to formulate a definition of personality is significant, because it determines how a personality psychologist views the development, measurement, and modification of the human personality. Thus, a definition of personality is far more than simply a series of words.

Common features of definitions of personality (Carducci, 2009, p.6)

Common Features	Examples	Research Issues
Uniqueness of the Individual: Each person is different.	While Joe responses to receiving a "D" on his history test by reviewing the quality of his class notes, Sam dealt with his "D" by going to a local pub to "drown" his misery.	What is the nature of this uniqueness (e.g., unique combinations of traits or genes or different learning histories)?
Uniformity of Behaviour: Behaviour of the individual is consistent over time and across situations.	Rosemary is very friendly toward her fellow employees at work and her guests at the parties she gives.	To what extent do situational and personality factors interact to determine our behaviour?
Content and Processes: Personality consists of something that influences behaviour.	Because Mary has failed her French test, she also expects to fail her psychology test and, therefore, does not study for it that night.	How do our expectations in one situation influence our behaviour in others?

In short, our behaviour in any given situation is usually a complex function of both or personality (the stable internal factors that make us unique individuals) *and* situational factors in the world around us. This *Interactionist perspective* is the one currently accepted by most psychologists.

Buss (1984) stated that although there has been much debate about the definition of personality, two major themes have pervaded nearly all efforts at grand personality theorizing: human nature and individual differences. The former comprised the common characteristics of humans – the shared motives, goals, and psychological mechanisms that are either universal or nearly universal. Proposed species-typical motives range from the sexual

and aggressive instincts postulated by Freud to the motives to get along and get ahead postulated by Hogan (1983). A proper conceptualisation of human nature, however, is much larger than the forces that impel people out of bed in the morning and motivate them in their daily quests. Human nature also includes the species-typical ways in which humans make decisions (e.g., selection of mates and habitats), the ways in which humans respond to environmental stimuli (e.g., fears of snakes and heights are more typical than fears of cars or electrical outlets), and even the ways in which people influence and manipulate the world around them. However, the latter identifies that individuals differ in an infinite number of ways that either go un-noticed or are not sufficiently noteworthy to warrant much discussion. Some individuals have belly buttons turned out. Some leas with their left foot, others prefer brunettes. One key function of personality theory is to identify the most important ways in which individuals differ from among the infinite dimensions of possible difference.
(Barone, Hersen & Van Hasselt, 1998).

Despite the many definitions of the term, investigators generally agree that personality is the dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations, and behaviours in various situations. It can also be thought of as a psychological construct – a complex abstraction that encompasses the person’s unique genetic background (except in the case of identical twins) and learning history, and the ways in which these factors influence his or her responses to various environments or situations. Thus, many investigators regard the study of personality as primarily the scientific analysis of individual differences that help to account for why and how people react uniquely, and often creatively, to various environmental or situational demands. The primary focus of interest in the discipline is on the creation of theories that offer explanations for each individual’s unique ways of responding to his ir her physical, social, and cultural environments. These explanations then lead to predictions that are tested and buttressed by empirical evidence. Such theories increase our understanding of individuals and help us to predict their actions accurately (Ryckman, 2008).

PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL VIEWS

No psychologist or personality theorist can avoid being a philosopher of sorts, all sciences, but particularly the “hypercomplex” social sciences (Wilson, 1999), are influences by philosophy. The very act of theorizing, or thinking about what we see, which all people – not only personality theorists – do, entails making certain philosophical assumptions about the world and human nature. These basic philosophical assumptions profoundly influence the way in which we perceive the world and theorize about it (Carducci, 2009). The term philosophy comes from the Greek *Philein*, “to love”, and *Sophia*, “wisdom”; it means the love or pursuit of wisdom. Wisdom denotes not merely knowing about something but knowing what ought to be done and how to do it. As philosophers, we make assumptions and judgements about the good life and how to live it (Engler, 2009).

CHRONOLOGY OF PERSONALITY THEORISTS

Understanding of personality study, like understanding an individual, includes not only abstract analysis and categorization, but also narration of a history.

SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF PERSONALITY

The study of personality, however, is so diverse that one can define it only with alternative, seemingly unrelated statements: personality as the integrated functioning of psychological components, personality as individuals’ differing dispositions, and personality as processes involved in integrated functioning. More basic than the definition of *personality* is the question, how do we understand the diversity of the field of personality? To answer it, we need to venture into the philosophy and history of science (Barone et. al., 1998).

Logical empiricism (originally called logical positivism) is a philosophy of science that has been taught to generations of psychology students. It portrays research as having been derived from theory, data gathering as

being free of theoretical bias, and knowledge as being cumulative and ever converging on truth (Toulmin & Leary, 1985/1992). An alternative understanding of science was posited almost a century ago by John Dewey and William James, early philosopher-psychologists. In their philosophy, called *pragmatism*, inquiry is prompted by an unresolved concern, knowledge is the current best solution to that concern or problem, and the value of knowledge is demonstrated in outcomes made possible by its predictions. Thus, a subject matter may be approached in very different ways and the resulting knowledge may be incommensurable (i.e., non-comparable). The recent postpositivist philosophies of science make most of the same points, although the terms and emphasis may be different. In Kuhnian terms, inquiry in personality can be construed as being in a pre-paradigmatic phase, which occurs in young fields before there is agreement on basic questions, definitions, and research paradigm. The study of personality is not a simple story of a subject, instead, it is a complex story of how multiple traditions, schools, and theories have emerged in response to different questions and have coexisted – whether indifferently, hostility, or synergistically (Barone et. al., 1998).

Personality Assessment: The Measurement of Personality

Personality assessment refers to the development and use of techniques to accurately and consistently measure different aspects of personality. Personality assessment is a vital link to the other major aspects of personality psychology. Following are some ways researchers use personality assessment techniques:

Testing various personality theories (e.g., test anxiety, extraversion vs. Introversion).

Measuring developmental changes in personality (e.g., moral reasoning) from childhood to adulthood.

Evaluating the effectiveness of various psychotherapies (e.g., a stress-reduction workshop).

(Carducci, 2009)

As scientists, personality theorists seek to develop a workable set of hypotheses, or tentative assumptions that will help us understand human behaviour. Scientists confirm their hypotheses by testing them according to generally agreed-upon methods. Since reports that are concerned with subjective phenomena are much more difficult to validate, some psychologists have tended to ignore them and invest their efforts in extrospective or objective findings. John Watson recommended that in as much as our thoughts, feelings, and wishes cannot be directly observed by another person, the psychologist should ignore them and concentrate on overt behaviours. Few psychologists today would agree with this extreme position. Most personality theorists emphasize that we need to be concerned with both subjective and objective data in order to understand behaviour.

When a number of different instances of observation coincide, the scientist may make a generalization. A scientific (or empirical) generalization is a conclusion that something is true about many or all of the members of a certain class. Suppose the author wanted to test the statement “All aggressive people are controlling.” The evidence for this statement could be a number of facts about individual members of the class. Author could observe this aggressive person, that aggressive person, and other aggressive persons. If all of them are also controlling, the author might conclude that all aggressive people are controlling, even though the author may have not examined each and every aggressive person. The scientist also uses definitions, statements that are true because of the way in which we have agreed to use words. Some words are easy to define clearly and precisely. Other words are harder to define and subject to more disagreement. To resolve this problem, the social scientist frequently tries to develop operational definitions, an operational definition specifies which behaviours are included in the concept. “Stress” might be operationally defined in terms of the rate of one’s heartbeat and extent of one’s perspiration as measured by polygraph apparatuses, which translate such bodily changes into printed record. The value of operational definitions lies in giving us a common ground of reference.

The most important statements in science are based on scientific constructs. A scientist uses scientific constructs, which are imaginary in hypothetical and cannot be seen with the naked eye or even with sophisticated optical equipment, in order to explain what we observe. The difficulty of not being directly observable does not imply nonexistence, rather it has provided for continual progress toward an understanding of what may be real. IQ is an

imaginary construct that is used to explain certain behaviours, one's likelihood for academic success. Many of our concepts in science, in fact almost all of the important ones, cannot be directly seen; we can know them only through their effects (Engler, 2009).

Personality psychologists use the scientific approach to study individual differences because they believe it is the most effective way to gather accurate information about personality functioning. They also hope that such knowledge can be used to benefit people. In the final analysis, psychologists are convinced that a scientific orientation will lead us more directly and surely to beneficial, accurate information than will orientations that rely almost exclusively on rational speculation, mysticism, intuition, or common sense. Their conviction does not mean that those alternative ways of knowing have no value and can never be used to help us understand human behaviour (Ryckman, 2008).

TESTING THE THEORIES: RESEARCH METHODS

Since we are referring to theories of personality, the question is "What is a theory?" The term *Theory* comes from the Greek work *theoria*, which refers to the act of viewing, contemplating, or thinking about something. A Theory is a set of abstract concepts developed about a group of facts or events in order to explain them. A theory of personality, therefore, is an organized system of beliefs that helps us to understand human nature (Engler, 2009; Ryckman, 2008). In general terms, science is an enterprise concerned with the description, explanation, prediction, and control of events. The outcome of all the efforts by countless investigators is the accumulation of systematized knowledge based on the observation of phenomena or events (Ryckman, 2008).

EVALUATING PERSONALITY THEORIES

The following criteria may be used to determine how successfully theories functions as a philosophy and as a science:
First you need to determine which assertions function as philosophical assumptions and which functions as scientific statements. Philosophical assumptions are based on a vision of ultimate reality, whereas scientific statements are based on empirical observation.
Then, ask how well the philosophical assumptions fulfil the criteria of philosophy. The following criteria can be used to evaluate the assumptions you identify:
Coherence: is the philosophical position clear, logical, and consistent?
Relevance: Does the theory deal with issues that are important and meaningful to us today?
Comprehensiveness: Does the theory encompass a wide array of phenomena, inclusively covering aspects of the subject it claims to deal with?
Compellingness: Does it convince you?

Then, ask how well the scientific statements fulfil the criteria of science. The following criteria can be used to evaluate scientific statements:
Verifiability: Are the statements ultimately based on empirical observation, and does the theory clearly specify how they can be confirmed and refuted?
Compatibility: Does the theory build on, and is it consistent with, other well-established information?
Predictive power: How successful has the theory been in generating new ideas and research?
Simplicity: Does the theory adequately account for the complexity of material in the most economical way?
Usefulness: Does the theory provide useful information to assist us in living in the everyday world?

What makes for a good personality assessment? The most important criterion is validity, the quality of measuring what a construct is supposed to measure. Reliability, or consistency of scores over time, is also important, Objectivity, or the avoidance of subjective bias, is also prized in assessment (Engler, 2009).

A variety of research techniques or procedures are available to investigators. We will focus on three major methods of empirical testing: the experimental method, correlation method, and case-study method (Ryckman, 2008).

Correlational Method: much of the research in personality psychology is correlational in nature; that is, it seeks to determine if there are relations between two variables. For example, is there a relation between hyper-competitiveness and modesty (a lack of pretentiousness)? The correlational method expressed the direction and size of the relationship by a statistical device called the correlation coefficient (also known as Pearson's product-moment coefficient).

Case-Study Method: The intensive study of an individual's life over a long period of time is called a case history, or case study. Such studies are frequently used in clinical and medical settings to provide descriptions and explanations of a person's actions and experiences, as well as a prescription for the treatment of the individual's problems. Personality studies using the experimental method examine average or typical differences between individuals, whereas the case-study procedure provides a rich – that is, complex and integrated – view of the romantic love. The reason is that science is generally interested in accumulating knowledge that is organized and integrated, and explains the interrelationships among a variety of phenomena.

Precision and testability: Besides being comprehensive, a good theory should contain constructs that are clearly and explicitly defined. Scientists want explanations that are stated in clear language. Besides having constructs that are clearly defined, a good theory should also contain relational statements or propositions that are consistent and logically related to one another. It is generally recognized that consistent and logically related to one another. It is generally recognized that investigators may rely heavily on analogies and metaphors in the early stages of theorizing, as an aid to thought – examples include Carl Jung's *shadow*, which lurks in the darkness of the collective unconscious, and Freud's treatment of the ego as a battlefield where mortal combat takes place between the forces of the id and superego – but in the final analysis these may create inconsistencies and ambiguities that hamper understanding. An adequate scientific theory should meet the criterion of precision.
Not only must the constructs and relational statements in the theory be defined precisely, but the hypotheses containing them must be capable of being studied empirically; that is, they must be linked at some point with external reality. The link between conceptualization and observation is accomplished by means of operational definitions. In brief, a good theory is also judged by the testability of its hypotheses.

Parsimony: A good theory should be parsimonious, or economical; that is, the theory should contain only those constructs relational statements, and assumptions necessary for the explanation of the phenomena within its domain. The inclusion of unnecessary constructs or assumptions can lead an investigator to waste great amounts of effort studying meaningless relationships. A theory that contains more constructs and assumptions than necessary fails to meet the test of parsimony. Conversely, however, the parsimony criterion cannot be met simply by minimizing the number of constructs and assumptions. Such a theory would be too simplistic and would not do justice to the complexity of the phenomena. Instead, a theory is parsimonious only if it adequately accounts for the complexity of the phenomena.

Empirical validity: A good theory must have empirical validity; that is, it must have data that supports it. Empirical validity is determined by testing hypotheses – that is, by making observations to determine if the investigator's predictions are accurate. Of course, establishing the theory's empirical validity is far from easy.

Heuristic Value: A good theory has heuristic value, in that it stimulates and provokes investigators to do further theorizing and research, the heuristic value of theories may spring from several sources. For example, a theory may arouse researchers' intellectual curiosity; in seeking answers to the questions it raises, they pursue new paths that may prove enlightening and useful. With the subsequent collection of large amounts of disconfirming data, researchers may seek to revise it in order to increase its predictive accuracy.

Applied value: Finally, a good theory has applied value; that is it leads to new approaches to the solution of peoples' problems. This criterion is not universally endorsed by scientists, especially by those who work in experimental psychology.
(Ryckman, 2008)

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