Personality Notes

PSYC 370

Start

January 21, 2025

Author

Paul Beggs
BeggsPA@Hendrix.edu

Instructor

Prof. Sarah Root, Ph.D.

End

May 14, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 7

THE TRAIT APPROACH

Somatotype	Character	Shape
Endomorph [viscerotonic]	Relaxed, sociable, tolerant, comfort-loving, peaceful	Plump, buxom, developed visceral structure
Mesomorph [somatotonic]	Adventurous, assertive, aggressive, vigorous, dominant	Muscular, large-boned, hard, rectangular, strong
Ectomorph [cerebrotonic]	Quiet, sensitive, restrained, introverted, fragile	Thin, fragile, delicate, fine-boned

Table 7.1: Sheldon's Somatotypes

Trait: Categorizes people according to degree to which they manifest a particular characteristic.

Trait theory assumptions:

1. Characteristics are relatively stable over time.
2. Characteristics are relatively stable across situations.

7.1 Gordon Allport

7.1.1 Nomothetic vs. Idiographic Approaches

- *Nomothetic*:
  - All people can be described along a single dimension according to their level of, for example, assertiveness or anxiety.
  - Each person in a study using the nomothetic approach is tested to see how his or her score for the given trait compares with the scores of other participants.
  - These traits are called *common traits* because they are shared by everyone.
- *Idiographic*:
  - Focuses on the unique characteristics of an individual.
  - If you ask most people to list the traits that describe them, they will list a number of traits that are unique to them. These traits are called *central traits*.
- Allport says the best way to know someone is by identifying their central traits.

- He proposed that occasionally, a single trait will dominate a person's life and shape almost everything they do. This trait is called a *cardinal trait*.
  - For example, consider someone who is Machiavellian.

7.2 Henry Murray

- Greatly influenced by Carl Jung.
- Theory includes a blend of psycholoanalytic and trait approaches.
- *Personology*: The study of the whole person.
  - Basic elements of personality are driven by psychogenic needs.
  - Identified 27 needs.
    - Behavior is influenced by the level of importance of each need.
    - Example: Achievement and affiliation needs.

7.3 Raymond Cattell

- Devoted time to identifying personality traits through statistical analysis. That is, factor analysis.
- *Factor analysis*: A statistical technique that identifies clusters of related items on a test.
- Consists of 16 personality traits:

1. Warm
2. Abstract thinker
3. Emotionally stable
4. Dominant
5. Enthusiastic
6. Conscientious
7. Bold
8. Tender-minded
9. Suspicious
10. Imaginative
11. Shrewd
12. Apprehensive
13. Experimenting
14. Self-sufficient
15. Controlled
16. Tense

7.4 The Big Five

- *Neuroticism*: Degree of emotional instability or stability.
- *Extraversion*: Degree of sociability or social introversion.

- *Openness*: Degree of intellectual curiosity or creativity.
- *Agreeableness*: Degree of friendliness or hostility.
- *Conscientiousness*: Degree of organization or impulsiveness.

Factor	Characteristics
Openness	Imaginative vs. practical; preference for variety vs. routine; independent vs. conforming
Conscientiousness	Organized vs. disorganized; careful vs. careless; disciplined vs. impulsive
Extraversion	Sociable vs. retiring; fun-loving vs. sober; affectionate vs. reserved
Agreeableness	Softhearted vs. ruthless; trusting vs. suspicious; helpful vs. uncooperative
Neuroticism	Worried vs. calm; insecure vs. secure; self-pitying vs. self-satisfied

Table 7.2: The Big Five Personality Factors

7.5 Strengths and Weaknesses

- *Strengths*:
  - Provides a comprehensive framework for understanding personality.
  - Has been supported by a large body of research.
  - Has been used to predict a wide range of behaviors.
- *Weaknesses*:
  - Does not explain:
    - **How** or **why** traits develop.
    - **How** traits interact with each other.
    - **How** traits are influenced by the environment.
  - Has the chance for people to fake being good or bad. This is called *social desirability*.

7.6 Summary

1. The trait approach assumes we can identify individual differences in behaviors that are relatively stable across situations and over time. Trait theorists are usually not concerned with any one person's behavior but rather with describing behavior typical of people at certain points along a trait continuum.

2. Gordon Allport was the first acknowledged trait theorist. Among his contributions were the notions of central and secondary traits, nomothetic versus idiographic research, and descriptions of the self. Henry Murray identified psychogenic needs as the basic elements of personality. According to Murray, a need will affect behavior depending on where it lies on a person's need hierarchy and the kind of situation the person is in.

3. Raymond Cattell was interested in identifying the basic structure of personality. He used a statistical procedure called factor analysis to determine how many basic traits make up human personality. More recent research provides consistent evidence that personality is structured along five basic dimensions. Although questions remain, the evidence to date tends to support the five-factor model.

4. An enduring controversy in personality concerns the relative importance of traits compared to situational determinants of behavior. Critics have charged that traits do not predict behavior well and that there is little evidence for cross-situational consistency. Trait advocates have answered that if traits and behaviors are measured correctly, a significant relationship can be found. In addition, they maintain that the amount of behavior variance explained by traits is considerable and important.

5. The development of the five-factor model renewed interest in the relationship between personality and job performance. Although several of the Big Five dimensions are related to performance in the business world, many studies indicate that Conscientiousness may be the best predictor of performance.

6. Trait researchers typically rely on self-report assessment procedures in their work. One of the most commonly used self-report inventories is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. Test users need to be aware of problems inherent in self-report inventories. These include faking, carelessness and sabotage, and response tendencies.

CHAPTER 8

THE TRAIT APPROACH (RELEVANT RESEARCH)

8.1 Type A Personality

8.1.1 How the Researchers Define the Topic

- Type A personality is characterized by competitiveness, high drive, strong sense of urgency, and strong desire to achieve goals. Also tends to be highly organized, proactive, and strongly motivated by their goals.
- Health research has shown that Type A individuals may be at higher risk for stress-related illnesses due to their high drive and competitiveness. This can also lead to conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, and other stress-related health issues.

One major component, the "toxic component," of a Type A individual is the likelihood to respond to frustrating situations with anger and hostility. Type A is found to be a good predictor of heart disease, likely due to this "toxic component."

8.1.2 Study on Hostility and High Blood Pressure

- Men wore blood pressure monitors all day and logged their activities and moods.
- Male participants high in hostility had higher blood pressure levels when interacting with others, whereas low-hostility individuals had no such reaction.
    - This was attributed to highly hostile individuals finding their conversations annoying or frustrating.
- Female participants showed no significant reaction.
    - Researchers suggested this could be because women, in general, prefer social interaction more than men.

8.1.3 Additional Insights

- Type A people typically outperform Type B in achievement settings due to their higher drive, higher set goals, and attraction to competition. Some Type A individuals even perform better when they know they have competition than when they are not competing.
- The effects of hostility on the health of Type A individuals vary by culture.
- Type A individuals are less likely than Type B individuals to relinquish control of a task, even to someone more qualified. (Strube, Berry, & Moergen, 1985)

8.2 Social Anxiety

8.2.1 How Researchers Define Social Anxiety

Social Anxiety is related to social interactions or anticipated social interactions. It is a trait in which individuals experience anxiety during social encounters or in anticipation of them.

Symptoms may include:

- Increased physiological arousal
- Inability to concentrate
- Feelings of nervousness

8.2.2 Study on Social Anxiety and Conversation Length (1987)

Researchers hypothesized that socially anxious individuals attempt to control others' impressions by keeping conversations short and non-threatening. They examined how personal stories varied when participants believed they would be evaluated versus when the stories were inconsequential.

- Socially anxious participants in the evaluation group told shorter and less revealing stories than non-shy/socially anxious participants and those in the non-evaluation group.

8.2.3 Additional Insights

- Most researchers today use the terms social anxiety and shyness synonymously, as there are high correlations between scales measuring these constructs.
- Social anxiety is distinct from introversion. Introverts prefer solitude, whereas socially anxious individuals dislike their shyness. A 1977 study by Pilkonis found that:
  - Two-thirds of shy individuals considered their shyness a real problem.
  - One-quarter expressed willingness to seek professional help to overcome it.
- Socially anxious individuals tend to believe they are less liked, fear rejection, and become self-conscious, which can lead to actual social rejection.
- 'Evaluation apprehension' is considered a key cause of social anxiety. To manage this fear, individuals:
  - Avoid social encounters.
  - Reduce interaction through avoiding eye contact, keeping conversations short, and limiting personal disclosures.
- Therapy for social anxiety often focuses on improving individuals' confidence in their ability to make a good impression.

8.2.4 Cultural Considerations in Social Anxiety (Morrison & Heimberg, 2013)

- Culture influences social anxiety symptoms and diagnosis.
- Some cultures, such as Korea and Japan, have unique social anxiety-related syndromes.
- Social norms, gender roles, shame, and embarrassment contribute to the development of social anxiety symptoms, with varying emphasis across cultures.

8.3 Emotions

8.3.1 How Researchers Define Emotions

Emotions are complex psychological and physiological states involving subjective experiences, physiological responses, and behavioral expressions. They influence decision-making, social interactions, and well-being.

8.3.2 Study on Negative Affect and Health (Smith, Wallston, & Dwyer, 1995)

- Studied rheumatoid arthritis patients categorized by high or low negative affect.
- High-negative-affect patients reported more symptoms and also had objectively worse physical health.

8.3.3 Additional Insights

- Expressing emotions improves personal and relational well-being. (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005)
- Positive and negative affects correlate with Big Five personality traits.
- Emotional expressiveness varies between individuals and is stable over time.

8.3.4 Discussion Questions

- Why is understanding emotions important in studying personality?
- Are positive and negative affects independent or opposites?

8.4 Optimism and Pessimism

8.4.1 Definitions

- Optimism: Tendency to see the positive in situations.

- Pessimism: Tendency to focus on the negative aspects of situations.

8.4.2 Study on Optimism in Marital Well-Being (Neff & Geers, 2013)

- Newlyweds completed self-report questionnaires on optimism, neuroticism, and marital satisfaction.
- Couples participated in videotaped discussions on marital strife.
- Follow-up occurred at 6 and 12 months.
- Results:
  - Optimistic spouses used more constructive problem-solving.
  - They experienced fewer declines in marital well-being over time.

8.4.3 Additional Studies

- Optimistic patients in cardiac rehabilitation followed treatment plans more successfully. (Shepperd, Maroto, & Phert, 1996)
- Optimistic spouses of Alzheimer's patients experienced less stress and depression. (Hooker, Monahan, Shifren, & Hutchinson, 1992)

8.4.4 General Insights

- Optimism and pessimism shape overall life outlook rather than just reactions to specific events.
- Optimism varies across cultures (higher in individualistic cultures).
- Optimism is linked to better health, including stronger immune function.

8.4.5 Discussion Questions

- What advantages do optimists have over pessimists?
- How do cultural differences shape optimism and pessimism?
- Why do optimists tend to be healthier?

CHAPTER 8

THE BIOLOGICAL APPROACH

8.1 Hysenck

- *Introversion-extraversion*
- *Stability-neuroticism*
- Later added a third: *psychoticism* - People on the high end of psychoticism are egocentric, aggressive, and cold.

8.2 Nature Vs. Nurture

- If we can't realistically (or ethically) assign people to specific genes or environments, how can we test whether traits are caused by genetics or environment?
- Twin studies: Compare identical twins to fraternal twins. If identical twins are more similar, then the trait is genetic.

8.2.1 Temperament

- *Temperament* – Evidence of differing personalities in infancy.
  - Multiple models for temperaments.
  - Temperament and environmental influences.

8.2.2 Evolutionary Psych and Personality

- Traits that have survived up to this point are theorized to be adaptive. That is, aids survival and passing on of genes.
- Criticisms of this theory say that it is too easy to come up with an explanation for any trait.

8.3 Assessing Biological Contributors to Personality

- How can we assess someone's personality biologically?
  - DNA sequencing
  - Neuroimaging (fMRI and PET scans)
  - Heart rate, respiration, galvanic skin response

- Hormone levels
- Neurotransmitters
- Brain lesions
- EEG
- Twin studies
- And many more...