NOBA

Personality Assessment

Instructor Manual

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This module, *Personality Assessment*, provides a basic overview to the assessment of personality. It discusses objective personality tests (based on both self-report and informant ratings), projective and implicit tests, and behavioral/performance measures. It describes the basic features of each method, as well as reviewing the strengths, weaknesses, and overall validity of each approach.

Learning Objectives

- Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)

  - Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1)

  - Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains (1.2)

  - Describe applications of psychology (1.3)

  - Demonstrate psychology information Literacy (2.2)

  - Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving (2.3)

  - Build and enhance interpersonal relationships (3.3)

  - Interact effectively with others (4.3)

  - Apply psychological content and skills to career goals (5.1)

  - Exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation (5.2)

- Content Specific Learning Objectives: Personality Assessment

- Appreciate the diversity of methods that are used to measure personality characteristics.

- Understand the logic, strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

- Gain a better sense of the overall validity and range of applications of personality tests.

Abstract

This module provides a basic overview to the assessment of personality. It discusses objective personality tests (based on both self-report and informant ratings), projective and implicit tests, and behavioral/performance measures. It describes the basic features of each method, as well as reviewing the strengths, weaknesses, and overall validity of each approach.

Class Design Recommendations

This module can be taught in a single class period or less, with the unit as a whole taking 1-2 class periods. Please also refer to the Noba PowerPoint slides that compliment this outline.

1st class period (20 min – 30 min):

- Overview

  - How do we measure someone's personality?

- Objective tests

  - Self-Report ratings
  - Informant ratings
  - Advantages & Disadvantages

- Projective & Implicit Tests

  - Projective

    - Rorschach Inkblot Test
    - Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

- Implicit
- Advantages & Disadvantages

• Behavioral and Performance Measures

- Behavioral Observation
- Advantages & Disadvantages

Module Outline

Researchers have adopted a wide range of approaches to measure important personality characteristics

Objective Tests

• Definition

- Objective tests involve administering a standard set of items, each of which is answered using a limited set of response options. Responses to these items then are scored in a standardized, predetermined way. It must be emphasized that the term "objective" refers to the method that is used to score a person's responses, rather than to the responses themselves.

• Self-report measures

- Asks people to describe themselves. This approach has two advantages. First, self-raters have access to an unparalleled wealth of information. Second, it is the simplest, easiest, and most cost-effective approach to assessing personality.

- The items included in self-report measures may consist of single words, short phrases, or complete sentences.

- Self-report personality tests show impressive validity in relation to a wide range of important outcomes. However, it is clear that this method is limited in a number of ways. First, raters may be motivated to present themselves in an overly favorable, socially

desirable way or may demonstrate self-enhancement bias. Third, self-ratings are subject to the reference group effect.

- Informant ratings

  - Other Ways of Classifying Objective Tests

    - Comprehensiveness: Extent to which an instrument seeks to assess personality in a reasonably comprehensive manner (e.g., assessing a single core attribute vs. omnibus inventories to measure personality in a reasonably comprehensive manner).

    - Breadth of the target characteristic: Personality characteristics can be classified at different levels of breadth or generality. Some are designed to assess only the broad, general traits. Some are designed primarily to assess a large number of more specific characteristics. Finally, some inventories are explicitly designed to provide coverage of both general and specific trait characteristics.

Projective and Implicit Tests

- Projective Tests

  - Based on the belief that important thoughts, feelings, and motives operate outside of conscious awareness. Two prominent examples of projective tests are the Rorschach Inkblot Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The former asks respondents to interpret symmetrical blots of ink, whereas the latter asks them to generate stories about a series of pictures.

  - Disadvantages: tend to be somewhat cumbersome and labor intensive to administer. The biggest challenge has been to develop a reliable and valid scheme to score the responses (validity of the Rorschach is controversial; better validity for the TAT).

- Implicit Tests

  - Based on the assumption that people form automatic or implicit associations between certain concepts based on their previous experience and behavior. Although validity evidence for these measures still is relatively sparse, the results to date are encouraging.

Behavioral and Performance Measures

- Direct samples of behavior.

- Advantages: because behavior is sampled directly, this approach is not subject to the types of response biases; allows people to be studied in their daily lives and in their natural environments, thereby avoiding the artificiality of other methods; only approach that actually assesses what people do, as opposed to what they think or feel.

- Disadvantages: more cumbersome and labor intensive; data that then need to be scored in a reliable and valid way; relatively small samples of behavior that may provide a somewhat distorted view of a person's true characteristics

Conclusion

- No single method of assessing personality is perfect or infallible; each of the major methods has both strengths and limitations. By using a diversity of approaches, researchers can overcome the limitations of any single method and develop a more complete and integrative view of personality.

DIFFICULT TERMS

- Validity

- Reliability

- Reference group effect

- Sibling contrast effect

- Implicit motives

- Projective hypothesis

- High stakes testing

- Self-enhancement bias

- Letter of recommendation effect

- Honeymoon effect

Lecture Frameworks

Overview

You've already set up the concept of personality, now your job is to explain how psychologists *assess* personality. That is, how do we know if we are extraverted, neurotic, or agreeable? These are questions you can ask your students. Before taking the Big 5 assessment (assuming you assigned it to them from Module 1), how did they know what their personality was? Was that a valid or reliable source of information?

- Discussion/Warm-Up Activity: Online Personality Assessments

  - One fun way to start this module is to take one of those silly internet personality quizzes (see activities/demonstrations, below). If you have ever been on Facebook (which the majority of your students have an account), you know there are COUNTLESS quizzes like this (e.g.,What your breakfast cereal says about you! What Game of Thrones character are you? What does your favorite ice cream say about you?).

  - However, as fun as these quizzes are... do they really measure personality (a great question to ask your students). You obviously know the answer (while entertaining, they are not valid or reliable measures), so you can use that as a transition... if these quizzes don't measure personality, then how do we assess personality?

  - See Activities/Demonstrations for instructions

- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:

  - To introduce Personality Assessments. Once you've set up the idea that measuring personality *properly* is important (and not just any quiz on the internet), you can talk about some of the theoretical orientations that explain different approaches to measuring personality.

  - To talk about the implementation of Objective Tests. Objective test coverage represents the largest portion of this presentation: Now that students know we need valid/reliable measures and a quick background on theoretical orientations, you can begin to provide them with some examples of tests that are used by psychologists to assess personality. First, you can go over the most common: objective tests. You can talk about self-report and informant ratings, and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

    - Of course, one of the disadvantages of self-report measures is the idea of self-serving

bias. One fun way to talk about why self-serving bias is problematic is to use a few self-reflections items that have students compare themselves to others. Some of these might include: I have above average intelligence, My appearance is at least slightly above average, I am more motivated than the average person, etc. This is best done with an electronic polling system like i-clickers (students are more likely to be honest). What you will notice is that almost all students rate themselves as above average. Once they see how *everyone* rates themselves as smart, attractive, and motivated (well, almost everyone), they can easily understand how such personal bias "contaminates" self-ratings.

- ■ Another possibility for demonstrating the concepts of objective testing is having students talk about the Big 5 assessment they took (from the first module in this unit).

○ To talk about Projective Tests and how they are used in psychoanalysis. After reviewing objective assessments, you can talk about a more controversial approach to personality tests: projective and implicit assessments. You might consider re-iterating the different orientations to personality from the beginning of this module (humanistic vs. the unconscious approach of psychodynamic). Therefore, the projective assessments align with the psychodynamic approach and merit discussion.

- ■ To begin, you can start with a basic definition of projective tests. You can the follow-up by showing them a few of the (published) Rorschach inkblots or pictures from the TAT.

- ■ One fun way to incorporate a small activity is to put one of the pictures from the TAT before you tell them about it. Give them a minute or two to think about what is happening in the picture (perhaps have them jot down a few notes). Once you've given them some to experience the TAT firsthand, you can start talking about its properties. When you start talking about advantages/disadvantages and reliability/validity, you can have them brainstorm based on their own experience.

○ Overall, the goal here is to highlight the differences between objective and subjective assessments, especially as they relate to reliability and validity (as well as practical concerns, such as time spent, amount of data, etc.).

- Activity: Looking at the TAT

○ If you want to show them how the TAT generates different responses, check out http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/psych212h/tat.machine.94.html. The top of the page has the stimulus picture, and the rest of the page is a collection of responses from individuals (who interpret the picture very differently from one another).

- ○ Last, you can present the IAT (implicit attitudes test). This is a newer, computer based assessment that measures reaction time. The advantage of IAT is that it cannot be faked and so is useful for picking up subtle biases.

- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:

  - ○ To talk about Behavioral and Performance Measures. Finally, you can end your discussion on personality assessment with behavioral and performance measures. You can give them lots of examples (mentioned in the powerpoint slides).

- Activity: Big 5 Personality Assessment Reflections

  - ○ After all of the discussion about personality traits (the first module in this unit) and personality assessment (this module), the students have a lot of information to process. Therefore, you might consider doing an in-class activity that encourages students to synthesize and apply what they have learned. One such activity could be a reflection activity regarding the assessments they took and what they have learned. See Activities/ Demonstrations (below) for instructions

Activities & Demonstrations

Internet Personality Assessment: In-Class Demonstration

This activity should be done at the beginning of this module. This activity is designed to illustrate the importance of reliability and validity in personality assessment.

- Time: 2-5 minutes (depending on the quiz you pick)
- Materials: Online personality quiz (see below for suggestions and links)
- Directions:

  - ○ Begin class by taking this quiz (this is ideal if you take it on the computer and project your computer screen so students can see you take the quiz). Go through the quiz and answer each question (so make you select a quiz that you are comfortable taking. They are pretty silly, so that shouldn't be too hard).

- Once done with the quiz, make sure students can see the results (e.g., You are kind, curious, and hardworking. Therefore, your ideal state to live in is Colorado).

- After you show them the results, engage them in discussion about the quiz. Is this quiz an accurate assessment of personality? Why or why not? Is it subject to a person's mood or emotional state? How might that influence results?

- You can then use the discussion above (which leads to the conclusion that these "fun" internet quizzes are just that: fun but no substance), to transition into personality assessment and the importance of valid and reliable measures.

- Some potential quizzes you could use:

  - Which Game of Thrones character are you?

    - http://www.buzzfeed.com/robinedds/which-game-of-thrones-character-are-you

  - Which presidential first lady are you?

    - http://www.buzzfeed.com/yezminvillarreal/which-presidential-first-lady-are-you

  - Which Pixar hero are you?

    - http://www.zimbio.com/quiz/ogMYw3S5qg4/Which+Pixar+Hero+Are+You

  - Which 'Mad Men' character are you?

    - http://www.zimbio.com/quiz/e-0aG7qfzlq/Mad+Men+Character

  - Which Dr. Seuss character are you?

    - http://www.zimbio.com/quiz/UfTioZKdgqd/Dr+Seuss+Character

- Twist

  - You could assign one of these quizzes to your students outside of class as well (maybe they complete both the Big 5 research assessment as well as one of these internet quizzes).

Personality Profile (Part II): In Class Activity

This in-class mini-writing is designed to help students evaluate the different possibilities for personality assessment. This activity is based on the completion of Part I (described above in the activities/demonstrations section of Module One).

- Time: 10 - 15 minutes

- Materials: Pen and paper.

- Directions:

  - Students should have already completed a Big 5 personality inventory (see Part I in the first module).

  - Student should evaluate the assessment they completed (there might be two assessments if you assigned them an internet quiz from the activity above).

  - Some example prompts:

    - How accurate were your results? Why do you think that is?

    - Would you results have been different if a friend or family member evaluated your personality?

    - Why might researchers want to collect personality data using similar assessments? Why might they want to use different assessments (projective, implicit, or behavioral observations)?

    - What makes the research assessment more valid than the internet quiz? (if you assigned both)

Additional Activities

Fernald, P. S., & Fernald, L. (2008). The Sentence Completion Test: Assessing personality. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 196-200). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This is an excellent vehicle for discussing the nature and application of personality testing. Students are exposed to a real test in an engaging yet safe and ethical way. Advance

preparation is minimal, and no prior knowledge of psychology is necessary. The activity is appropriate for classes of any size.

Kerber, K. W. (2008). What is personality? A personal appraisal. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.) , *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 193-195). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This activity helps students identify and examine their implicit personality theories and makes personality theories concrete and understandable. Advance preparation is minimal, and the activity is appropriate for classes of all sizes. This can be done in-class or outside of class with a writing assignment.

Leck, K. (2006). Teaching personality theories using popular music. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33 (1), 34-36. doi:10.1207/s15328023top3301_8

- Previously, psychology instructors have used popular music to illustrate psychological concepts in the classroom. In this study, students enrolled in a personality theories class heard 13 popular songs that demonstrated various concepts. Students then selected and analyzed their own songs that contained elements of personality theories. Test grades and student evaluations of the demonstration provided support for the use of this activity for teaching personality theories

Miserandino, M. (2007). Heeeere's Johnny: A case study in the five factor model of personality. *Teaching of Psychology*, 34(1), 37-40. doi:10.1080/00986280709336648

- Students used the Five Factor Model of personality to analyze the personality of entertainer Johnny Carson through his The New York Times obituary. Students evaluated this assignment highly: A majority indicated that the assignment was interesting, enjoyable, and useful in helping them to understand and apply the Five Factor Model, and all agreed that the assignment was thought-provoking.

Russo, N. (2008). Personality tests. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.), Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology (pp. 203-207). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This activity illustrates what is often called the Barnum effect in personality testing, that is, an individual's tendency to believe in the validity of personality descriptions that are vague enough to apply to virtually everyone. This activity can be used in any size class and involves all the students in the class. It requires about 10 minutes in one class period and 20 to 30 minutes in a subsequent class.

Evidence-Based Teaching

Dollinger, S. J. (2004). Predicting Personality-Behavior Relations: A Teaching Activity. *Teaching of Psychology,* 31(1), 48-5.

- This article presents an activity using in-class personality inventories and a behavior checklist to generate discussion items for a class activity later in the semester. Specifically, students attempt to predict Personality X Behavior correlations based on the class's self-reports and then learn the outcomes for their predictions. The activity allows instructors (a) to deepen and apply students' understanding of the 5-factor model of personality (or any other traits used); (b) to explain Type I and Type II errors and the contingent nature of research; (c) to clarify the nature of correlation, particularly negative correlations; and (d) to explore students' implicit personality theories. Students seemed to value the activity on the 8 occasions of its use and 2 formal evaluations.

Kaplan, S. A., Stachowski, A. A., & Bradley-Geist, J. C. (2012). A classroom activity to demonstrate self-other agreement in personality judgments. *Teaching of Psychology*, 39(3), 213-216. doi:10.1177/0098628312450441

- This article describes a classroom activity to demonstrate (dis)agreement in personality judgments, using an exercise derived from Watson's research on the accuracy of rating strangers' personalities. On the first day of class, undergraduate students in psychology courses rated their own personality and the personality of a classmate, using items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). Across five samples, self-other correlations were strong for extraversion but varied for the other four traits. Comparisons with control groups on relevant test items provided preliminary evidence that the exercise promotes learning of relevant material.

Miserandino, M. (2006). I Scream, You Scream: Teaching Validity and Reliability Via the Ice Cream Personality Test. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(4), 265-268.

- This exercise uses the Internet-based "Ice Cream Personality Test" to help undergraduates understand the principles of personality testing including reliability, validity, Barnum statements, and generalizability. Results indicated that the Ice Cream Personality Test, although great fun, lacked reliability and validity. Students found this exercise enjoyable, useful, thought provoking, and apt to make them skeptical about personality tests they might encounter on the Internet or elsewhere.

Paddock, J. R., Terranova, S., & Giles, L. (2001). SASB goes Hollywood: Teaching personality theories through movies. *Teaching of Psychology*, 28(2), 117-120.

- In this article the authors describe a technique for teaching personality theories to undergraduate psychology students. The method shows students segments from feature films that illustrate key concepts. They present qualitative and quantitative data supporting the utility of this teaching technique.

Suggestions from the Society for Teaching's Introductory Psychology Primer

Leder, S. (2013). Personality. In S.E. Afful, J. J. Good, J. Keeley, S. Leder, & J. J. Stiegler-Balfour (Eds.). Introductory Psychology teaching primer: A guide for new teachers of Psych 101. Retrieved from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology web site: http://teachpsych.org/e-books/intro2013/index.php

POSSIBLE ACITVITIES (In Class)

Design Your Own Personality Test:

- Students should work together to generate a list of what they deem to be the most important personality variables. Then, ask them to develop items to assess these different constructs. Students can administer their test to volunteers and then analyze the results of their study. This helps to provide students with hands-on experience related to generating theories, creating assessment items, conducting research, and examining data.

Act Out Your Favorite Defense Mechanism

- After learning about Freud's defense mechanisms, students should be split into small groups and asked to select a defense mechanism to demonstrate to the class. Classmates can use their knowledge to determine what is being acting out. Having students perform should help to break the uniformity of a lecture class and be a fun way to help student distinguish concepts that may otherwise blend together and/or be difficult to distinguish.

- For a variation on this activity, see: Inman, M. L. (2000). Defense Mechanism Miniskits. Published in M. Bolt's Instructor's Manual that accompanies David Myers, Introduction to Psychology, (6th Ed.). New York: Worth Publishers. http://www.macmillanhighered.com/resources/1429244364/IRM/PDF/Bolt AP TRB10.pdf

Uncover Your Unconscious:

- Present students with sample depictions of projective assessments, such as the Rorschach Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Have students report their gutlevel feelings. Then, have students assess themselves and their classmates using Freud's model of personality. Learning about these concepts from a personal vantage point should allow for more meaningful acquisition of knowledge, and students tend to find this interesting and fun. The diverse responses should also help to identify some of the flaws with the psychoanalytic theory, including the inability to prove or disprove claims.

- For an ink blot generator and other useful tools see: http://www.makingthemodernworld.org.uk/learning_modules/psychology/02.TU.04/?section=13

Participate in Online Personality Inventory:

- Have students examine their own personality traits by completing an online questionnaire. This activity will allow students first-hand experience with the items that comprise empirically-sound, previously established inventories, as well as allow them to apply relevant findings to their understanding of their own personality. Used in combination with projective measures of personality, this activity should provide a nice contrast between the different forms of assessment.

- Sample online personality inventories can be found at: http://www.personalitytest.org.uk/ for the Big Five, and for the NEO-FFM see: http://www.class.uidaho.edu/psyc310/lessons/lesson03/lesson03-1_homework.htm

Zodiac Signs and Personality:

- Students are given a list of personality descriptions based on astrology and zodiac signs. They then have to choose which one best describes them. The class discussion focuses on the difference between empirically tested theories of personality and zodiac signs. A discussion of the Barnum effect and illusory correlation help students understand the theoretical basis for personality inventories. http://www.teachpsychscience.org/pdf/316-

201165139AM_1.PDF

POSSIBLE ACITVITIES (Out of Class)

Reflection Paper

- Have students apply the concepts presented in class to someone they have experience with outside of the classroom. Ask students to analyze the personality characteristics of a popular television character, a family member, friend, or explain a celebrity's public behavior in terms of their specific traits. This helps to make concepts from class more relevant and relatable to their lives outside of the classroom. For videos of interesting characters to use as subjects for the reflection papers, see http://www.clipsforclass.com/personality

Practice Quiz

- Students can test their understanding and comprehension of Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality by participating in this online quiz. Feedback is immediately administered. This is a quick and easy supplemental review of concepts to assure students are grasping the finer details of Freud's theory and are prepared for upcoming examinations
- http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/persquizfreud.htm

Links to ToPIX Materials

Activities, demonstrations, handouts, etc.:
http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981026/Personality%20in%20the%20Classroom

Current events/ news:
http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/23137146/Personality%20in%20the%20News

Video/audio:
http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981025/Personality%20Videos

Teaching Topics

Teaching The Most Important Course
https://nobaproject.com/documents/1_Teaching_The_Most_Important_Course.pdf

Content Coverage
https://nobaproject.com/documents/2_Content_Coverage.pdf

Motivating Students
https://nobaproject.com/documents/3_Motivating_Students_Tips.pdf

Engaging Large Classes
https://nobaproject.com/documents/4_Engaging_Large_Classes.pdf

Assessment Learning
https://nobaproject.com/documents/5_Assessment_Learning.pdf

Teaching Biological Psychology
https://nobaproject.com/documents/6_Teaching_Bio_Psych.pdf

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at https://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/276/Personality%2-0Assessment.ppt?1416599097.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award- winning university teachers.

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