

CHAPTER 4

THE TRAIT PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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Trait Psychology: Problems and Prospects

Summary

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The trait approach begins with the assumption that personality consists of stable inner qualities, which are reflected in behavior. Types are discontinuous categories of personalities, with each person falling into one category or another. This concept is no longer prominent in personality psychology. Traits are continuous dimensions of variability, along which any person can be placed. Most trait approaches are *nomothetic*, emphasizing how people differ but assuming that the trait dimensions are the same for everyone. An *idiographic* approach emphasizes uniqueness and treats some dimensions as unique to specific persons.

Factor analysis is a tool used by many trait psychologists. Factor analysis tells what items (or ratings, etc.) go together. Further, the more variability in ratings a factor accounts for, the more important the factor. Factor analysis also lets you tell which observations do and don't reflect a factor well, thus helping refine scales.

An important question in trait psychology is what traits are basic and important. Some believe we must let reality tell us the structure of personality. Others believe we must start with a theory. Several theoretical views have been developed, including one that emphasizes traits that have a long history in ideas about personality (extraversion and

neuroticism) and one that emphasizes traits that are relevant to social interaction (the interpersonal circle).

Many now favor the idea that there are five major factors in personality. Evidence for that view is strong, and the five factors have a reasonable fit to aspects of preexisting models of personality structure. There is disagreement about the precise nature of the five factors, but commonly used labels for them are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotionality, and openness. Recent research has examined how these traits relate to behaviors and experiences in people's lives.

The usefulness of the trait concept was questioned by the finding that people's behavior often wasn't well predicted from trait self-reports. This led some to doubt whether traits actually influence behavior. *Situationism*, the idea that behavior is controlled primarily by situational influences, proved wrong. *Interactionism* holds that personality and situations interact in several ways to determine behavior. For example, some situations permit or even elicit individual differences, whereas other situations don't. People also choose which situations to enter, and then they influence the nature of situations by their own actions. Indeed, people also vary in how consistent they are, and they often know whether they're consistent or not.

The idea that the influence of traits on behavior is dependent on situations has expanded into a broader view of personality structure, in which traits are individualized linkages between situations and actions. This view accounts for stability over time within the person as well as for variability across situations. This view of the nature of traits provides a sense of process for trait models.

Personality assessment from the viewpoint of trait psychology is a matter of developing a personality profile of the person being assessed, a description of where the person falls on all the dimensions being measured by the inventory. To these psychologists, the profile holds the key to understanding the person's uniqueness.

Regarding problems in behavior, trait theorists say that some problems result from having a trait that is intrinsically problematic, such as *psychoticism* or *neuroticism*. Other kinds of problems stem from having an extreme position on some trait dimension. Interest in the relation between personality disorder and the *five-factor model* is growing. The interactionist position suggests the following possibility (termed a *diathesis-stress model*): Certain dispositions may create a susceptibility to some kind of problem, but the problem occurs only under certain conditions, usually involving stress. Therapeutic behavior change, from the trait perspective, may mean changing how a trait is reflected in behavior, because a person's traits are not easily altered. Alternatively, it may mean avoiding situations in which the problem behavior arises.

KEY TERMS

Behavioral signature: The pattern of situation–behavior links the person has established over experiences in some specific domain.

Diathesis-stress model: Theory holding that a vulnerability plus stress creates problems in behavior.

Extravert: A person who is outgoing and prefers social and exciting activities.

Factor: A dimension that underlies a set of interrelated measures, such as items on a self-report inventory.

Factor analysis: A statistical procedure used to find basic dimensions underlying a set of measures.

Factor loading: A correlation between a single measure and the factor to which it is being related.

Idiographic: Pertaining to an approach that focuses on an individual person's uniqueness.

Interactionism: The idea that situations and personality interact to determine behavior.

Interpersonal circle: Personality patterns deriving from varying levels of dominance and love.

Introvert: A person who prefers solitary activities.

Lexical criterion: An index of the importance of a trait based on the number of words that refer to it.

Nomothetic: Pertaining to an approach that focuses on norms and on variations among persons.

Second-order factor: A factor that emerges from a factor analysis performed on a set of previously found factors.

Situationism: The idea that situations are the primary determinants of behavior.

Traits: Continuous dimensions of personality on which people vary.

Types: Distinct and discontinuous categories of persons.

TEST ITEMS

Multiple Choice

- (d/52) 1. The trait approach to personality makes the point that:
- people's dispositions are relatively inconsistent across situations.
 - people's dispositions are relatively inconsistent across time.
 - one person's pattern of dispositional qualities is much like the next person's.
 - none of the above
- (a/52) 2. The idea that people are different in important ways goes back to at least:
- 400 BC.
 - 200 AD.
 - 1800 AD.
 - 1880 AD.
- (a/52) 3. In typologies proposed by Hippocrates and Galen, sanguine people were thought to be:
- optimistic.
 - irritable.
 - depressed.
 - calm.
- (c/52) 4. Which of the following is not one of the four personality categories proposed by Hippocrates and Galen?
- (choleric) irritable
 - (sanguine) optimistic
 - (malcontent) unhappy
 - (phlegmatic) calm
- (c/52) 5. _____ categorized people as either introverts or extraverts.
- Hippocrates
 - Galen
 - Carl Jung
 - none of the above
- (b/52) 6. How are traits and typologies different from one another?
- Traits refer to the whole person whereas typologies refer to specific aspects of the person.
 - Traits are seen as varying on a continuum whereas typologies put people in distinct categories.
 - Traits are changeable whereas typologies are fixed.
 - They are not different; traits and typologies are two words for the same phenomenon.

- (b/52) 7. Unlike type approaches, trait approaches treat differences between people:
- a. as less stable.
 - b. as quantitative.
 - c. as qualitative.
 - d. in terms of aggregations.
- (a/52) 8. The idea that traits exist and have the same meaning in everyone is consistent with the _____ approach to personality.
- a. nomothetic
 - b. commonality
 - c. idiographic
 - d. implicit
- (c/52) 9. The idiographic view emphasizes that:
- a. most people have many things in common.
 - b. when two people both possess a trait, that tends to mean the same thing.
 - c. a trait may be possessed by only one person.
 - d. none of the above
- (c/55) 10. Factor analysis:
- a. provides a way to analyze qualitative data.
 - b. is useful only when dealing with self-reports.
 - c. represents a technique for identifying underlying dimensions.
 - d. directs you to collect data of a certain type.
- (a/55) 11. The dimensions that emerge from a factor analysis are called:
- a. factors.
 - b. loadings.
 - c. extractions.
 - d. analyses.
- (a/55) 12. Which of the following statements about factor analysis is NOT true?
- a. Factor analysis can only be used with self-report data.
 - b. Labeling the factors extracted from factor analysis is a subjective process.
 - c. In factor analysis items can load on several factors.
 - d. None of the above; all of the statements are true.

- (d/55) 13. Which of the following statements about factor analysis is true?
- a. It increases the number of traits psychologists can use to describe personality.
 - b. It provides a basis for arguing that most all traits are equally important in describing personality.
 - c. Its use had dropped off since the advent of computers..
 - d. It assists in the development of assessment devices.
- (c/56) 14. Cattell's approach to understanding personality can best be described as:
- a. theoretical.
 - b. rational.
 - c. empirical.
 - d. psychoanalytic.
- (d/56) 15. Cattell used the _____ criterion for his factor analysis of personality dimensions.
- a. rational
 - b. commonsense
 - c. ubiquity
 - d. lexical
- (b/56) 16. Cattell's empirical work resulted in a personality scale which is called the:
- a. Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory.
 - b. 16PF.
 - c. Source Trait Inventory.
 - d. MCMI.
- (a/56) 17. Unlike Cattell's approach to studying personality, Eysenck's approach:
- a. was rooted in theory.
 - b. disregarded the observation of reality.
 - c. disregarded the use of factor analysis.
 - d. none of the above
- (c/57) 18. According to Eysenck's categorization a melancholic (depressed) person would be considered:
- a. extraverted and low in neuroticism.
 - b. extraverted and high in neuroticism.
 - c. introverted and high in neuroticism.
 - d. introverted and low in neuroticism.

- (b/59) 19. Second-order factoring is used to determine:
- a. if the results from one factor analysis can be repeated.
 - b. whether the factors that emerge from an initial factor analysis form factors (i.e., correlate in clusters).
 - c. if factors determined in an initial factor analysis can be broken down further.
 - d. all of the above
- (d/59) 20. Which of Eysenck's concepts has received less attention than the others?
- a. extraversion
 - b. neuroticism
 - c. introversion
 - d. psychoticism
- (c/59) 21. Factors derived from factor analysis may themselves be interrelated. When such factors are themselves factor analyzed, the resulting factors are called:
- a. basic factors.
 - b. primary factors.
 - c. second-order factors.
 - d. cardinal factors.
- (a/59) 22. Eysenck believes that his two type dimensions of personality relate to qualities of:
- a. the nervous system.
 - b. interpersonal interaction.
 - c. early childhood experiences.
 - d. social learning experiences.
- (b/59) 23. A third dimension identified by Eysenck, that reflects a predisposition toward disorders involving detachment from others, hostility, manipulateness, and impulsiveness is:
- a. sociopathy.
 - b. psychoticism.
 - c. schizophrenia.
 - d. Eysenck only identified two dimensions.
- (a/59) 24. Eysenck believed that:
- a. extraversion and neuroticism have roots in nervous system functioning.
 - b. there are four dimensions underlying behavior.
 - c. there is one dimension underlying behavior.
 - d. extraversion and introversion are the top two dimensions in the hierarchy forming personality.

- (a/59) 25. Wiggins's perspective emphasized _____ aspects of personality.
- a. interpersonal
 - b. internal
 - c. behavioral
 - d. cognitive
- (c/59) 26. Wiggins proposed two trait dimensions basic to human values. These dimensions are:
- a. passion and power.
 - b. power and achievement.
 - c. dominance and love.
 - d. intelligence and affect.
- (d/59) 27. Wiggins proposed a set of eight psychological patterns which he called the:
- a. type-trait model.
 - b. value-meaning model.
 - c. eight-factor model.
 - d. interpersonal circle.
- (c/60) 28. A person who is high on the dimension of love and high on the dimension of dominance would most likely be considered:
- a. unassuming.
 - b. introverted.
 - c. extraverted.
 - d. arrogant.
- (b/60) 29. The emerging consensus among researchers is that there are _____ basic personality traits.
- a. 3
 - b. 5
 - c. 10
 - d. 25
- (a/61) 30. Which of the following is one reason why there is a fair amount of disagreement as to what the five dimensions of personality are?
- a. Different factors emerge depending on the measures included in a study.
 - b. Different factors emerge in different cultures.
 - c. Personality measures have low test-retest reliability.
 - d. all of the above

- (c/61) 31. Which of the following is the basic personality trait characterized by assertiveness, open expression of impulses, and confident assurance?
- a. conscientiousness
 - b. dominance
 - c. extraversion
 - d. confidence
- (d/63) 32. *Conscientiousness* reflects:
- a. purposeful striving toward goals.
 - b. persistence.
 - c. planning.
 - d. all of the above
- (b/63) 33. Some researchers prefer to use the term _____ for qualities Cattell labeled as *culture*.
- a. sociability
 - b. intellect
 - c. eagerness
 - d. enthusiasm
- (b/63) 34. The largest disagreement about a label for one of the personality factors deals with:
- a. extraversion.
 - b. openness to experience.
 - c. conscientiousness.
 - d. neuroticism.
- (b/63) 35. Adolescents high in agreeableness are:
- a. more likely to express an interest in joining fraternities/sororities.
 - b. less likely to be victimized by peers.
 - c. less likely to receive social support from family members.
 - d. less likely to value tradition.
- (a/64) 36. Extraversion is related to valuing:
- a. achievement.
 - b. tradition.
 - c. benevolence.
 - d. all of the above

- (c/65) 37. Openness to experience is related to all of the following EXCEPT:
- a. greater sexual satisfaction in marriage.
 - b. artistic expression.
 - c. fewer prior arrests among prisoners.
 - d. more favorable inter-racial attitudes.
- (c/65) 38. It has been argued that Eysenck's dimension of *psychoticism* is a blend of:
- a. extraversion and agreeableness.
 - b. neuroticism and agreeableness.
 - c. agreeableness and conscientiousness.
 - d. neuroticism and conscientiousness.
- (a/67) 39. Zuckerman disagrees with the traditional five-factor view in that he:
- a. proposed an alternative five factors.
 - b. argued that there were more than five factors.
 - c. argued that there were fewer than five factors.
 - d. none of the above; he endorses the traditional five factors
- (b/68) 40. Compared to lower-level traits, superordinate traits seem to provide:
- a. more predictive power.
 - b. less predictive power.
 - c. about the same amount of predictive power.
 - d. a more confusing depiction of the structure of personality.
- (b/68) 41. Mischel argued that traits are:
- a. strong predictors of behavior.
 - b. modest predictors of behavior.
 - c. unrelated to behavior.
 - d. only strongly predictive of behavior when biology is accounted for.
- (c/68) 42. Psychologists were surprised when it was reported that the correlation coefficients between trait self-reports and actual behavior were around:
- a. 0.0
 - b. 0.1
 - c. 0.3
 - d. 0.6

- (d/69) 43. The idea that situational variables are more important than personality variables in determining how people act is termed:
- a. environmentalism.
 - b. interactionism.
 - c. Mischelianism.
 - d. situationism.
- (a/69) 44. _____ is the idea that traits and situations jointly provide a complete account of behavior.
- a. Interactionism
 - b. Trait-situationism
 - c. Person-environment duality
 - d. none of the above
- (b/69) 45. The idea that personality can best be explained by considering the combination of settings and people is called:
- a. environmentalism.
 - b. interactionism.
 - c. trait behaviorism.
 - d. situationism.
- (b/70) 46. When a situation and a trait are examined in the same study there are _____ systematic sources of influence on behavior.
- a. four
 - b. three
 - c. exactly two
 - d. none of the above
- (a/71) 47. A university campus is a _____ situation, whereas an army boot camp is a _____ situation.
- a. weak; strong
 - b. strong; weak
 - c. poorly defined; clearly defined
 - d. constrained; unconstrained
- (c/71) 48. Situations in which individual differences can be expressed easily are termed:
- a. malleable situations.
 - b. strong situations.
 - c. weak situations.
 - d. expressive situations.

- (a/71) 49. The analysis of variance model derived from lab research has the problem of neglecting the idea that:
- a. people actively choose the situations they want to enter.
 - b. situations elicit different responses from different people.
 - c. people behave similarly across different situations.
 - d. all of the above
- (c/72) 50. The fact that people often use verbal “hedges” when describing someone's personality indicates that they:
- a. are less confident in their judgments than are psychologists.
 - b. don't really know other people.
 - c. believe that traits may be reflected in only particular kinds of situations.
 - d. don't believe that personality is related to behavior.
- (c/72) 51. According to Mischel and Shoda, traits are best characterized as:
- a. freestanding tendencies to act.
 - b. having very little relation to behavior.
 - c. patterns of links between situation and action.
 - d. none of the above
- (b/73) 52. A behavioral signature is:
- a. an individual's characteristic way of acting across situations.
 - b. an individual's pattern of situation-behavior links.
 - c. the effect of an individual's behavior on the people around them.
 - d. none of the above
- (c/75) 53. Traits are most often assessed through:
- a. projective assessment.
 - b. interviewing.
 - c. self-reports.
 - d. behavioral observations.
- (b/75-77) 54. Nomothemic trait theorists believe all of the following EXCEPT that:
- a. all people have a unique combination of trait levels.
 - b. given traits do not interact with one another.
 - c. any particular trait dimension is the same from one person to another.
 - d. knowing a person's profile gives a sense of what the person is like and how they will behave in a variety of situations.

- (b/77) 55. The attempt to understand psychopathology from a trait perspective is largely an attempt to:
- a. understand the underlying dynamics of the individual.
 - b. determine indicators that are associated with a given class of problems.
 - c. look at biological vulnerabilities or susceptibilities.
 - d. none of the above
- (a/77) 56. Recent research has indicated that _____ personality disorders are represented within the five-factor model.
- a. all
 - b. most
 - c. very few
 - d. no
- (d/78) 57. From an interactionist perspective, susceptibility to a particular personality problem means that:
- a. one has the problem.
 - b. one has family members with the problem.
 - c. there is nothing one can do to avoid developing the problem.
 - d. the problem occurs more easily for one person than for another.
- (b/78) 58. A vulnerability to a particular psychological problem is known as a:
- a. nomothetic.
 - b. diathesis.
 - c. behavioral signature.
 - d. idiograph.
- (d/79) 59. The trait approach has been criticized because it:
- a. has little to say about intrapersonal functioning.
 - b. doesn't offer explanations for why people behave as they do.
 - c. often relies on circular explanations to explain causality.
 - d. all of the above

True and False

- (T/52) 1. A key theme of the dispositional perspective is the idea that people behave consistently.
- (F/52) 2. A key theme of the dispositional perspective is that people are remarkably similar to one another.
- (T/52) 3. The primary difference between trait and type theorists is that trait theorists believe people vary along a continuum whereas type theorists believe people are categorically different.

- (T/52) 4. Hippocrates believed that phlegmatic people tended to be calm.
- (F/52) 5. Hippocrates embellished upon Galen's ideas.
- (T/52) 6. Jung divides people into the categories of introverts and extraverts.
- (T/52) 7. According to Jung, extraverts seek out other people when they encounter stress.
- (T/52) 8. *Types* are categories of membership that are qualitative in nature.
- (F/52) 9. The idiographic view holds that everyone stands somewhere on each trait that exists, but that the traits exist in the same way in every person.
- (F/52) 10. According to the nomothetic view, a given trait may exist for only one person in the world.
- (T/55) 11. *Factor analysis* is merely a complex way of looking at correlations of variables.
- (F/55) 12. Factor naming is a highly objective process.
- (T/55) 13. Distilling to a smaller set of factors is known as *factor extraction*.
- (F/55) 14. Factor analysis takes a small number of traits and increases them to a larger number of specific traits.
- (T/56) 15. Cattell believes that the traits underlying human behavior must be determined empirically rather than theoretically.
- (F/56) 16. In his own research, Cattell determined that there were three underlying personality factors.
- (F/56) 17. Eysenck agreed with Cattell that an empirical starting point is the best means of developing a personality theory.
- (T/57) 18. In an extravert, high neuroticism is associated with excitability and aggressiveness.
- (T/58) 19. Eysenck used factor analysis to develop and refine the EPQ measure.
- (T/59) 20. Wiggins developed the interpersonal circle and proposed eight patterns of personality.
- (F/59) 21. Wiggins's two basic dimensions of personality were *dominance* and *neuroticism*.
- (T/60) 22. There is an emerging consensus in personality psychology that there are five basic personality factors.
- (F/61) 23. There is a fair amount of agreement as to what the five basic dimensions of personality are.

- (T/61) 24. There is considerable variation in what researchers include in the factor of *extraversion*.
- (F/62) 25. The core defining feature of *neuroticism* is shyness.
- (F/62) 26. Among the "big five" factors, the largest disagreement relates to the *neuroticism* factor.
- (T/63) 27. Conscientiousness in part reflects qualities such as planning, persistence, and purposeful striving toward goals.
- (F/64) 28. Extraversion is related to the desire for fewer children.
- (T/65) 29. People high in conscientiousness tend to live longer.
- (F/65) 30. Openness to experience is linked to lower sexual satisfaction in marriage.
- (F/66) 31. Tellegen has defended the five-factor model against critics who believe there are fewer factors.
- (T/67) 32. Some researchers have suggested that there is a sixth supertrait called *honesty-humility*.
- (T/68) 33. Some researchers have concluded that lower-level personality traits are better predictors of behaviors than are superordinate traits.
- (T/68) 34. According to Mischel, there is a relatively modest relationship between self-reports and the ability to predict behavior.
- (F/68) 35. *Situationism* is the idea that personality traits and situations interact with each other to influence behavior.
- (F/69) 36. Funder and Ozer have shown that when it comes to predicting behavior, situations tend to have more than twice the predictive power as personality.
- (T/70) 37. If researchers study situations and traits simultaneously, they may find three sources of influence on behavior.
- (F/71) 38. "Strong" situations are ones in which there is an easy expression of personality differences.
- (T/72) 39. The fact that self-reports are not highly correlated with behavior may merely reflect the fact that multiple factors influence behavior in a given situation.
- (T/72) 40. Current research suggests Mischel's concern about the low correlation between personality traits and behavior may not be as big a problem as he believed.
- (F/72) 41. According to Mischel and Shoda, traits are freestanding tendencies to act.
- (F/52) 42. Gordon Allport argued that people who have traits tend to have those traits aroused in all situations.
- (T/73) 43. *Behavioral signatures* are patterns of links people have formed between situations and behaviors across time and experience.
- (F/76) 44. Trait theorists believe that traits act alone and do not interact with one another.
- (T/77) 45. The trait approach, when applied to psychopathology, is largely an attempt to categorize it.

- (T/77) 46. All personality disorders are represented within the five-factor model.
- (F/78) 47. The diathesis-stress model looks exclusively at behavior problems as arising from conflicts expressed early in childhood.
- (F/79) 48. The trait approach is optimistic about people's ability to change themselves.
- (T/79) 49. The trait approach has been criticized for saying little about how personality works.
- (T/80) 50. The trait concept has retained a place in the vocabulary of personality psychologists.

Short Essay

- (52) 1. Discuss the major difference between *types* and *traits*.

TYPES: Categories of membership that are distinct or discontinuous.

TRAITS: People differ on continuous variables. They differ in amounts of various qualities, i.e., the basic differences between people are quantitative, rather than qualitative.

- (52-53) 2. How does the *nomothetic approach* to personality differ from the *idiographic approach*?

NOMOTHETIC: Assumes that traits exist and have the same psychological meaning in everyone; people differ only in their relative standing on the traits.

IDIOGRAPHIC (similar to idiosyncrasy): Emphasizes that each person is unique, suggesting that some traits are possessed by only one person. Sometimes it is impossible to compare people because everyone is, in effect, on a different scale.

- (54) 3. Describe the major steps in factor analysis.

(1) Collect data. (2) Determine correlation of every item with every other item. (3) Factor extraction: reduce correlation matrix to smaller number of underlying dimensions (factors). (4) Factor loadings: correlations between each individual item and each factor. (5) Label the factors.

- (56-59) 4. Describe the major differences between Cattell's and Eysenck's approach to the identification of important personality traits.

Cattell believed that traits must be determined empirically. Cattell collected many different types of data, including lexical data, self-report questionnaire data, observer ratings, and objective behavioral data. He factor analyzed these various kinds of data and found that 16 dimensions constituted the primary traits in personality. In contrast, Eysenck believed that theorists should begin with well-developed ideas about the underlying variables they believe to be the most important, and then set out to measure these variables well. Eysenck based his ideas on the four types proposed by Hippocrates and Galen. He argued that these four types could be created by combining high and low levels of two supertraits, called *introversion-extraversion* and *emotionality-stability*.

- (56) 5. Describe the major difference between Cattell's and Eysenck's approaches to developing measures of personality.

Cattell used an empirical approach in which he collected ratings on a variety of trait words, factor analyzed them, and then named the factors that emerged.

Eysenck started with well-developed ideas about which measures to include, factor analyzed them, and then named the factors that emerged.

- (61-63) 6. Identify three of the "big five" personality traits and briefly define/describe each.

(1) **EXTRAVERSION**: Assertiveness, open expression of impulses; dominance and confident assurance; sociability. (2) **AGREEABLENESS**: Warm and likeable (vs. cold); docile compliance; nurturance; emotional supportiveness. (3) **CONSCIENTIOUSNESS**: Will (to achieve). (4) **NEUROTICISM**: Experience of anxiety; emotional disorganization. (5) **INTELLECT**: Culture; openness to experience.

- (65-66) 7. Explain how the five-factor model of personality relates to Eysenck's theory.

(1) The five-factor model's *extraversion* and *neuroticism* relate to Eysenck's *extraversion* and *emotional stability*, respectively. Further, the five-factor model's *agreeableness* relates to Eysenck's *psychoticism*. (2) The five factors have been characterized as superordinate traits that incorporate narrower traits within them, sharing Eysenck's assumption that the important traits are supertraits that are, in turn, composed of more specific traits.

- (68-71) 8. What is the basic difference between the *situationist* view and the *interactionist* view?

SITUATIONIST: Situational variables matter more than personality variables in determining how people act.

INTERACTIONIST: Personality traits and situations interact to influence behavior.

(78) 9. Briefly discuss the implications of interactionism for understanding personality problems.

The basic idea in interactionism is that individual differences are important in some situations but not in others. Think of traits as a vulnerability or susceptibility to a particular problem, i.e., the problem occurs more easily for one person than another. In terms of interactionism, there are situations where susceptibility matters, and others where it does not.

(79-80) 10. Identify three major criticism of the trait approach.

First, the trait approach has been criticized for having little to say about how personality works (intrapersonal functioning). Second, trait theories often resort to circular explanations to deal with causality. Forth, the trait approach has been criticized for being somewhat arbitrary about what personality dimensions are important to measure. Finally, the trait approach is criticized because, unlike what is assumed by trait theories, people's behavior does not always display consistency.

CLASS DEMONSTRATION 4-1

Purpose: To demonstrate how trait descriptions can vary as a function of who's being described.

Exercise: Have students create personality descriptions of two people using trait adjectives. One description should be of a person they know well, and the other of a person they know only slightly.

Results: No need to hand in the work. Simply have students reflect on several facets of the descriptions they generated to get an idea of how they use traits in different ways to conceptualize people. Dimensions that you might want to draw students' attention to include how the two descriptions differ in terms of the number of traits used, the pervasiveness of the traits, and valence of the traits. It might also be interesting to discuss how easy or hard it was to generate the traits. Presumably, the descriptions should have been relatively easy to generate, even for the target whom the students knew only slightly, suggesting that a "trait lexicon" is readily available for use by most people.

TEST YOURSELF 4-1

Source: Buss, D. M., & Craik, K. H. (1980). The frequency concept of disposition: Dominance and prototypically dominant acts. *Journal of Personality*, 48, 379-392.

Description of Scale: This scale contains lists of acts that were developed by Buss and Craik (1980) to measure act frequencies. Students are asked to indicate the frequency of certain behaviors that they engaged in during the past month. Responses for each behavior may range from *not at all*, *rarely*, *sometimes*, or *often* engaging in that behavior during the period. Items consist of different acts such as dominance, e.g., "I talked a lot at a meeting." or "I made decisions without consulting other people who were involved in them." Higher scores reflect greater dispositional dominance. The idea that underlies this assessment technique is that a trait is really a propensity to engage in a category of actions. The category may be very broad (for the trait of dominance, for instance), or it may be more narrow (for the trait of studiousness). In addition, some acts within the category are extremely good indicators of the trait (e.g., giving orders to someone, for dominance), whereas other acts are poorer indicators of the trait (e.g., not admitting that someone else's argument was right).

Saying that a person has a high level of some disposition means that the person is relatively likely to engage in acts pertaining to that category. This may mean that the person is especially likely to engage in acts that are extremely good members of the category, or it may mean a more general tendency to do the various actions that define the category. Saying that a person has a low level of that disposition means that the person does not engage in those acts very often.

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