CHAPTER 8: TRAIT ASPECTS OF PERSONALITY

Chapter 8 provides a comprehensive overview of trait approaches to personality, from the early work of Jung, Allport, and Cattell through significant discussion of the modern “Big Five” dimensions. Personality types, motives, skills, and emotional expressiveness are also given significant attention. Since this is an area of both important past theory and active current research, special care is taken to organize material carefully while providing a complete overview of trait aspects of personality.

Students are generally somewhat familiar with trait approaches and are fascinated to learn how to be more scientific and analytic in their understandings of themselves and others. Many of these issues are taken up again in Chapter 10, when we discuss person-situation interaction aspects of personality.

Possible Lecture Outline

1. Early History of Trait Approaches
   1. Hippocrates described four bodily “humors” (sanguine [blood], melancholic [black bile], choleric [yellow bile], phlegmatic [phlegm]) to explain temperament.
   2. Theophrastus created “character sketches” that we still recognize today; the “Penurious Man”.
   3. Forward-thinking individuals like Darwin, Galton, and Freud, along with the development of statistical techniques, set the stage for modern trait theory.
2. Beginnings of the Modern Trait Approach
   1. Jung’s use of the terms “introversion” and “extraversion” and his concepts of “sensing-intuiting,” “judging-perceiving,” and “thinking-feeling” set in motion the modern study of personality traits.
   2. Cattell used factor analysis to derive “traits” from Allport’s list of personality adjectives; based on his analyses, he argued that there are 16 basic personality traits.
      1. Cattell coined the terms Q-data (questionnaire data), T-data (test data), and L-data (life data) to describe the various types of information one should have to adequately measure personality.
   3. Allport identified thousands of personality adjectives in the English language as a means of understanding personality—the lexical approach
      1. Was very aware of human complexity (and no fan of the behaviorists or Cattell)
      2. Allport simplified or defined personality in terms of functional equivalence; traits that groups of individuals shared he called “common traits.”
      3. Allport argued the importance of an idiographic approach to personality. He looked at people’s “personal dispositions”; the most powerful of these he termed “cardinal dispositions.”
      4. Nuclear quality: describing personal dispositions in terms of a person’s unique goals, motives or styles
3. The Big Five
   1. Over the past four decades, a vast body of research has converged on the idea that five dimensions are adequate for describing personality in a broad, general sense.
      1. The “Big Five” are extroversion, agreeableness, openness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness.
         1. Perhaps the agreement with regard to five broad traits is due to the implicit personality theories of the raters (that is, what we see and don’t see may be biased in ways we don’t recognize).
      2. Note that the Big Five are general categories—even Big Five proponents recognize they are not sufficient to fully explain personality (for example, six facets make up each Big Five dimension).
      3. The Big Five have been shown to be useful in applied contexts—for example, these five traits can predict individuals’ career pathways.
      4. The Big Five have been found cross-culturally, yet caution should be taken in interpreting these findings. In *very* different cultures, these similarities diminish.
   2. Not all theorists think five is the correct number of dimensions.
      1. Cattell continues to assert that there are 16 basic personality dimensions. He suggested that some psychologists simply did not want to remember 16 different dimensions at the same time!
      2. Eysenck believed all characteristics derive from only three basic traits (which are based on biological systems): extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism.
         1. While researchers continue to try to understand whether there is a biological basis for Eysenck’s personality traits, evidence is still not conclusive.
4. Other Ways of Looking at Personality
   1. Types: the idea that there are discrete categories of people
      1. An example of types is Type A or Type B personality (both of which are addressed more fully in Chapter 12).
   2. Motives: internal psycho-biological forces that help induce particular behavior patterns
      1. Murray describes these motives as “needs” (nAch, nPow, nAff, etc.).
      2. Cantor describes these motives as “life tasks.”
      3. Emmons calls them “personal strivings.”
   3. Expressive style: individual patterns in gesturing, body incline, voice cues, etc.
      1. Emotional expressiveness (the ease with which people’s emotions are “read” from behavior) involves intensity, expansiveness, animation, and dynamism in both verbal and nonverbal behaviors.
      2. Expressive style is related to various personality traits, including extraversion and dominance.

Classroom Activities, Discussion Topics, and Projects

* + - 1. Have students work in pairs to rate various popular figures (sports stars, movie actors, etc.) on each of the Big Five dimensions. See how well pairs of students agree. Discuss what information was used to make the ratings. Discuss whether it might have been helpful to have more categories (for instance, 16), or whether they could have narrowed it to three broad categories.
      2. Discuss the trait of “openness” or “intellect.” What does it really capture? Why has it been more difficult than the others to define?
      3. Have students graphically profile someone high vs. low on each of the Big Five dimensions as follows: A) Divide the class into five groups and assign each group a trait. B) Each group will be given two large pieces of butcher paper and a felt-tipped pen. C) Instruct the groups to use one of the sheets of paper for someone high and the other for someone low on their trait; they should write this identification at the top of the paper. D) Have the groups work together to create six “quotations” or statements on each piece of paper; each statement should embody as completely as possible one of the facets of that trait. For example, on the “high Conscientiousness” sheet, one might find comments such as “I am very good at my job” (competence) and “It’s important to me to have a clean house” (order). E) When students have completed their work, have the groups present their illustrations to the class. Alternatively, this may be presented as a quiz game to the class (let the class identify what the broad trait is and name each of the facets themselves).
      4. Ask students to think of their best friend and to write a paragraph or two describing this person. Then have them review their description in terms of a given trait model to see how many times they used trait-based language without even thinking about it. Highlight how we have a tendency to see personality in terms of traits, perhaps more than in any other instinctive way.

1. Have students try to map Cattell’s 16 personality factors and Eysenck’s three personality traits onto the Big Five dimensions. Discuss areas where the fit is good and areas that don’t correspond as well.
2. Have some students engage in some behaviors that reveal something about their expressive style (e.g., dance, jump, lecture, write) in front of the class; have the other students try to infer something about personality. Discuss issues of reliability and validity.
3. Have the class complete a measure of the Big Five (measures of the Big Five traits are available on the Internet at: http://ipip.ori.org/ipip/index.htm). Discuss students’ results on the measure. Were people surprised by any of their findings?
4. Have the class discuss their feelings about first impressions and their abilities to judge people’s personalities without knowing them well. Do students feel they are good judges of personality? Do they notice that their perceptions of others’ personalities change as they get to know them better? Integrate information from the text about zero-acquaintance, the visibility of particular traits (especially extroversion and conscientiousness), and the accuracy of personality judgments. Given the research in this area, is “love at first sight” possible?
5. Have the class discuss examples of individuals who might be high on Murray’s needs (e.g., the need for achievement, affiliation, and power). In what occupational settings might people high in each need be successful or unsuccessful? The text provides examples of some occupations that are compatible with these different needs (e.g., the need for achievement is conducive to doing well in business and the need for power may prompt an individual to become a politician), but what about other occupations such as teacher, doctor, nurse, engineer, social worker, lawyer, police officer, fire fighter, professor, and parent?
6. Using the “Sharpen Your Thinking” box in this chapter as a starting point, have students debate the importance of personality versus other factors in choosing political candidates to support. What does the public normally learn about the personality of a candidate, and how do we acquire that information? Should there be some alternative, systematic way of getting candidate information so that voters can make better-educated choices?

Recommended Outside Readings

Allport, G. W. (1961). *Pattern and growth in personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Allport, G. W. (1966). Traits revisited. *American Psychologist*, *21*, 1–10.

Eysenck, H. J., & Rachman, S. (1965). *The causes and cures of neurosis*. San Diego, CA: Robert R. Knapp.

Guilford, J. P. (1959). *Personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

John, O. P. (1990). The “Big Five” factor taxonomy: Dimensions of personality in the natural language and in questionnaires. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*. New York: Guilford.

Jung, C. G. (1924). *Psychological types*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Loevinger, J. (1987). The psychometric approach: Traits. In *Paradigms of personality* (pp. 93–120). New York: W.H. Freeman.

McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1990). *Personality in adulthood*. New York: Guilford Press.

McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (2008). The Five-Factor Theory of Personality. In O. P. John R. W. Robins, & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Mischel, W. (1968). *Personality and assessment*. New York: Wiley.

Nyborg, H. (Ed.). (1997). *The scientific study of human nature: Tribute to Hans J. Eysenck at eighty*. New York: Elsevier Science.

Smith, C. P., Atkinson, J. W., McClelland, D. C., & Veroff, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Motivation and personality: Handbook of thematic content analysis.*

Films / Videos

*Giftedness: With Ups and Downs*. (1990). 28 minutes. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/22448734>. Looks at two gifted children who were frustrated in school and even thought to have disorders due to their misbehavior. Discusses the inability of many schools to deal with unusually bright or gifted children. (Subtitles.)

*Gordon Allport*. (1966). 50 minutes. <https://www.academicvideostore.com/video/gordon-allport> or <http://mediasales.psu.edu/Items.aspx?search=allport>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/519859053>. This archival material presents Gordon Allport himself explaining key aspects of his trait-based theory of personality and makes comparisons with other theoretical approaches to personality.

*Hans Eysenck*. (1970). 32 minutes. <http://mediasales.psu.edu/Details.aspx?itemNo=33814>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/159940714>. A presentation by Eysenck himself of his theory of personality types. Includes a description of factor analysis as a methodology.

*Shyness*. (1987). 29 minutes. <https://www.academicvideostore.com/video/shyness-0>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/41945072>. Phillip Zimbardo discusses techniques which help some people to overcome shyness, a “trait” that many people share and which, when severe, can be quite a handicap.

*Personality Traits.* (2001). 30 minutes. <https://www.academicvideostore.com/video/personality-traits>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/49289777> . An examination of trait theories and the measurement of traits. Contrasts the Big Five model with both three-factor and 16-factor approaches

*Dr. Raymond Cattell*. (1966). 50 minutes each part. <http://mediasales.psu.edu/Items.aspx?search=cattell>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/229452779>. In a two-part interview format, Raymond Cattell discusses his statistical approach to the study of personality traits. He explains his technique of factor analysis and his division of traits into 16 source traits, and compares his theory of personality with other theories.