

## Personality

Intro Psychology  
Georgia Tech  
Instructor: Dr. Bruce Walker

## Personality

- What is it?
  - Traits - “the way that a person is”
  - Behavioral consistency
- Can it be measured? (reliability)
- Does it really predict behavior? (validity)

## Measurement

- Assessments can be structured or unstructured
  - Structured - long list of questions answered by the person.
  - MMPI - Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory - 550 questions directed at 10 scales (subtests) each measuring a different aspect of personality

## MMPI

- Items on this test were selected because the item distinguished between “normal” and hospitalized psychiatric patients
- Assumption is that psychiatric patients were just extreme examples of a continuum of different personality types.

## MMPI

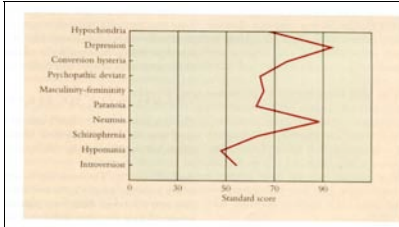
- Examples
  - Depression - “I often feel that life is not worth living”
  - Paranoia - “Several people are following me everywhere”
  - Schizophrenia - “I seem to hear things that other people cannot hear”
  - Psychopathic deviance - “I often was in trouble in school although I did not understand for what reasons.”

## MMPI

- How do you know that people are responding truthfully?
  - includes items where truthful answers are known but people intentionally lying might answer differently
  - “I sometimes gossip with other people”
  - If too many of these are answered “incorrectly” then the test results can be flagged as invalid.

## MMPI

- Result of test is a profile that reveals the components of one's personality (supposedly)



## How do we know that we're actually measuring personality?

- Predictive validity
  - Does a high score on “extroversion” actually predict the person's behavior at a party?
  - Generally the predictive validity of personality measures is lousy.
  - Correlation between “extroversion” and # of people talked to at party .2 to .3

## How do we know that we're actually measuring personality?

- Construct validity
  - But, if we look at the general pattern of relationships, the scales do show a some consistent relationship with the construct (e.g., extroversion)

## How do we know that we're actually measuring personality?

- Construct validity
  - Psychopathic deviance (MMPI subscale)
    - shallow emotional ties, disregard for social mores, failure to consider potential dangers and consequences of their own actions
    - High PD's rated “least responsible” by classmates, more likely to be involved in drunk driving accidents

## Unstructured personality tests

- Projective techniques - present ambiguous stimulus and individual will “project” some kind of structure that reflects underlying psychological characteristics

## Unstructured personality tests

- Free association
- Rorschach Inkblot tests
- Thematic Apperception Test
- Lousy validity, poor reliability, little increment over other methods.

## Situation versus traits

- Mischel - measures of supposedly stable traits seem to have little ability to predict behavior across different situations ( $r=+.3$ )
  - Honesty measures may predict probability of cheating on a test, but not probability of cheating at home, at work, etc.
  - Situations seem to drive behavior more than an internal characteristic of the individual.

## Situation versus traits

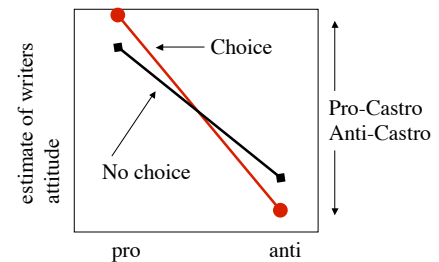
- Fundamental attribution error
  - If a person's behavior is really dependent on the situation, why does "personality" seem so intuitively appealing?
  - People consistently attribute behavior of a person to "disposition" rather than to the context.

## Situation versus traits

- Fundamental attribution error
  - Example: People are given essays to read that argue either a pro-Castro or an anti-Castro position regarding Cuba.
  - People then asked to assess the writer's opinion on Castro
  - Half of the people are told that position was freely selected by author, Half told that their position was assigned.

## Situation versus traits

- Fundamental attribution error (Jones & Harris, 1967)



## Situation versus traits

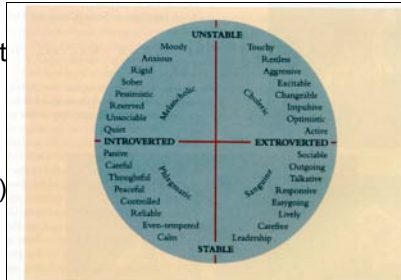
- Taken to an extreme, Mischel might be suggesting that there is no such thing as "personality"
- but... the controversy has been about consistency over situation
- Consistency over time is fairly high - ratings of "dependability" of males in high school correlate  $+ .55$  with ratings by different judges, 10 years later.

## Situation versus traits

- Problem is one of "sample size". We need to see a person act in many different situations
- Person by environment interactions

## Theoretical descriptions of personality

- Eysenck's 2 dimensional Trait Theory
- Neuroticism (Stable-unstable)
- Extroversion - Introversion



16.4 Eysenck's two-dimensional classification of personality Two dimensions of personality—neuroticism/emotional stability and extroversion/introversion—define a space into which various trait terms may be fitted. Eysenck pointed out that the four quadrants of this space seem to fit Hippocrates's temperaments: introverted and stable, phlegmatic; introverted and unstable, melancholic; extroverted and stable, sanguine; extroverted and unstable, choleric. (After Eysenck and Rachman, 1965)

- Norman's "Big Five" factors

TABLE 16.3 THE "BIG FIVE" TAXONOMY OF PERSONALITY TRAITS	
Factor names	Scale dimensions
Extroversion	Talkative/Silent Frank, open/Secretive Adventurous/Cautious Sociable/Reclusive
Agreeableness	Good-natured/Irritable Not jealous/Jealous Mild, gentle/Headstrong Cooperative/Negativistic
Conscientiousness	Fussy, tidy/Careless Responsible/Undependable Scrupulous/Unscrupulous Persevering/Quitting, fickle
Neuroticism	Poised/Nervous, tense Calm/Anxious Composed/Excitable Not hypochondriacal/Hypochondriacal
Openness to Experience	Artistically sensitive/Artistically insensitive Intellectual/Unreflective, narrow Polished, refined/Crude, boorish Imaginative/Simple, direct

SOURCE: Adapted from Norman, 1963.

## Where does personality come from?

- Hereditary component
  - Twin studies - correlation of .5 between identical twins on scales of Neuroticism (but note that identical twins are also treated very similarly)
  - Disposition of adopted children correlated with biological parents (+.3) but not adoptive parents (+.05)

## Introversion/Extroversion

- Eysenck - introverts are more reactive to stimuli than are extroverts
- Bullock & Gilliland (1993) - measured evoked brain potentials to auditory clicks, introverts show larger response than extroverts

## Introversion/Extroversion

- Introverts and Extroverts seek similar levels of arousal
- It takes less stimulation for introverts to reach optimal levels of arousal, thus preference for quieter activities

## Introversion/Extroversion

- Introverts and Extroverts seek similar levels of arousal
- Note that this can be reinforcing: less social activity, less practice socializing, social activities become even more arousing.  
(of course, there are limits...)

## Social learning approach to personality development

- Albert Bandura, Stanford University

- What is the influence of others' behavior during development?



## Social learning approach to personality development

- Classic study
  - What is the influence of the behavior that you are exposed to on your own behavior?
  - This study triggered the TV violence debate
  - 36 boys, 36 girls, mean age 4.5 years
  - Viewed a video of an adult beating up a bobo doll or just playing with the doll

## Social learning approach to personality development

- Classic study
  - Children after viewing the video
  - Children shown the "beating up bobo" video were more aggressive, imitated the aggressive behavior and did a considerable amount of "novel" violent behavior.



## Social learning approach to personality development

- Classic study
  - Children after viewing the video
  - Children shown "playing with bobo" video played with doll but did very little imitation of modeled behavior.



## Social learning approach to personality development

- Classic study
  - Boys were more aggressive after watching Male on video, girls more when watching a Female.



## Social learning approach to personality development

- Considerable evidence that exposure to behaviors (not just violent) exerts a strong influence on children's behavior
- Such behaviors may set the stage for behavioral patterns later in life.