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
• 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
• 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

- 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)

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

• 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

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

- 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

- 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
  - Note that this can be reinforcing: less social activity, less practice socializing, social activities become even more arousing.
    (of course, there are limits...)

- Norman’s “Big Five” factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor name</th>
<th>Scale dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extroversion</td>
<td>Tactfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Consideration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Achievement, Dependability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to Experience</td>
<td>Artistic, Social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note: Adapted from Norman, 1963.
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.