Contemporary Perspectives on Personality

Module 35

David Myers, Exploring Psychology: Eighth Edition in Modules

Getting you to think about the qualities you may see in yourself:

**Traits: Stable components of personality**
- Dimensions and factors
- Assessing traits: MMPI
- The 5 “CANOE” factors
- The impact of traits on situations & vice versa

**Social-Cognitive influences on personality**
- Reciprocal Determinism among thoughts, social situation, behavior
- Internal vs. external locus of control
- Optimism and positive psychology

**The Self:**
Spotlight effect, Self-Esteem, Self-serving bias,
Trait Theory of Personality

- Gordon Allport decided that Freud overvalued unconscious motives and undervalued our real, observable personality styles/traits.

Trait: **An enduring quality that makes a person tend to act a certain way.**

Examples?

**Trait theory of personality:** That we are made up of a collection of traits, behavioral predispositions that can be identified and measured, traits that differ from person to person.

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Exploring Traits

- Each personality is uniquely made up of multiple traits.
- Allport & Odbert (1936), identified almost 18,000 words representing traits

- Trait factors
  - Outgoing
  - Social
  - Fun-loving
  - Friendly
The Big Five Factors

- Five factors:
  - Openness … job changes
  - Conscientiousness … marital fidelity
  - Extroversion … look people in the eye, more sexual partners
  - Agreeableness…
  - Neuroticism

- Five factors not five types
- people vary along two dimensions

### The “Big Five”/C.A.N.O.E. Personality Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorganized</th>
<th>Conscientiousness</th>
<th>Neat</th>
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<td>Careless</td>
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<td>Ruthless</td>
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<td>Uncooperative</td>
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<td>Helpful</td>
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<td>Calm</td>
<td>Neuroticism (emotional stability instability)</td>
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<td>Anxious</td>
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<td>Secure</td>
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<td>Insecure</td>
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<td>Self-satisfied</td>
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<td>Self-pitying</td>
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<td>Practical</td>
<td>Openness</td>
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<td>Imaginative</td>
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<td>Prefers routine</td>
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<td>Prefers variety</td>
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<td>Conforming</td>
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<td>Independent</td>
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<td>Retiring</td>
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<td>Sober</td>
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<td>Reserved</td>
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<td>Affectionate</td>
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4. A person who is careless and disorganized most clearly ranks low on the Big Five trait dimension of
A neuroticism.
B extraversion.
C openness.
D conscientiousness.

Questions about Traits
These topics are the subject of ongoing research:

**Stability:** One’s distinctive mix of traits doesn’t change much over the lifespan. However, everyone in adulthood becomes:
- More conscientious and agreeable, and
- Less extraverted, neurotic/unstable, and less open (imaginative, flexible).

**Predictive value:** Levels of success in work and relationships relates to traits such as openness and conscientiousness.

**Heritability:** For most traits, genes account for 50% of the variation among individuals.
Change vs. Consistency: Shifts with Age

Over years of development, we change interests, attitudes, roles, jobs, relationships; we develop skills, maturity. Do traits stay stable through all this change?

The evidence shows that it takes time for personality to stabilize. Traits do change, but less and less so over time. We change less, become more consistent.

Assessing Traits

• Personality inventories are questionnaires (often with true-false or agree-disagree items) designed to gauge a wide range of feelings and behaviors assessing several traits at once.

• The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is the most widely researched and clinically used of all personality tests.
Person-Situation Controversy

- Trait theory assumes that we have traits that are a function of personality, not situation.
- There is evidence that some traits are linked to roles and to personas we use in different cultures, environments.

The Person-Situation Controversy

Walter Mischel (1968, 1984, 2004) points out that people do not act with predictable consistency.

( unfamiliar, formal vs. Familiar, informal situations)

This inconsistency makes personality tests weak predictors of behaviors.

However, people’s average outgoingness, happiness, or carelessness over many situations is predictable.
5. Arguments as to whether people's behavior is more strongly influenced by temporary external influences or by enduring inner influences best characterize the

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<td>B</td>
<td>person-situation controversy.</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>self-serving bias.</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>biopsychosocial approach.</td>
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Studies of college students' conscientiousness revealed only a modest relationship between a student being conscientious on one occasion and being similarly conscientious on another occasion. This should make psychologists more cautious about overestimating the impact of ________ on behavior.

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The Social-Cognitive Perspective

- Personality is the result of an interaction between a person and their social context
- Social: learn through observing and modeling
- Cognitive: mental processes include paying attention, interpretation...

Social-Cognitive Perspective

Albert Bandura believes that Personality is:
The result of an interaction that takes place between a person and their social context, involving how we think about ourselves and our situations.
Questions raised in this perspective:

- How do we interpret and respond to external events? How do those responses shape us?
- How do our memories, expectations, schemas, influence our behavior patterns?
- How do the personality and social environment mutually influence each other?
Reciprocal Influences in Becoming
“The Kind of Person Who Does Rock Climbing”

**Reciprocal:** a back and forth influence, with no primary cause

**Example:** a tendency to enjoy risky behavior affects choice of friends, who in turn may encourage rock climbing, which may lead to identifying with the activity.

Reciprocal Influences

Specific ways in which individuals and environments interact

- Different people choose different environments. friends, activities, books, websites…
- Our personalities shape how we interpret and react to events.
- Our personalities shape situations.

We are both the products and architects of our environment.
According to Bandura, reciprocal determinism involves multidirectional influences among

A) thoughts, emotions, and actions.
B) behaviors, internal personal factors, and environmental events.
C) extraversion, openness, and neuroticism.
D) self-concept, self-serving bias, and self-esteem.

Because Greta is an extravert, she frequently goes to parties where she is encouraged to laugh and socialize with her friends. Because Jim is an introvert, he frequently spends weekends in the library where it's easy to quietly reflect and study. Greta and Jim best illustrate what is meant by

A an external locus of control.
B reciprocal determinism.
C the self-serving bias.
The Biopsychosocial Approach to the Study of Personality
Behavior emerges from an interplay of external and internal influences.

An integrated understanding of Tara's consistent cheerfulness in terms of her supportive peer relationships, her calm temperament, and her perceived internal locus of control best illustrates

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<td>Freud</td>
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<td>Adler, Horney, Jung</td>
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<td>Humanistic</td>
<td>Rogers, Maslow</td>
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<td>Trait</td>
<td>Allport, Eysenck, McCrae, Costa</td>
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<td>Social-Cognitive</td>
<td>Bandura</td>
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Exploring the Self, Viewing the Self

- Research in personality includes the topic of a person’s sense of self.
- Topics of research include self-esteem, self-awareness, self-monitoring, self-control.
- The field has refined a definition of “self” as the core of personality, the organizer and reservoir of our thoughts, feelings, actions, choices, attitudes.

Topics for our study of people’s sense of self:
- The Spotlight Effect (self-consciousness)
- Self-esteem, low and high, benefits and risks
- Self-Serving Bias
- Narcissism
Exploring the Self

Research studies how we overestimate the extent to which others evaluate our appearance, performance, and blunders (spotlight effect).

Self-Consciousness: The Spotlight Effect

**Experiment:** Students put on Barry Manilow T-shirts before entering a room with other students. (Manilow was not even cool “back in the day.”)

**Result:** The students thought others would notice the T-shirt, assumed people were looking at them, when this was not the case; they greatly overestimated the extent to which the spotlight was on them.

**The spotlight effect:** assuming that people are have attention focused on you when they actually may not be noticing you.

**Lesson:** People don’t notice our errors, quirks, features, and shirts as much as we think they do.
Benefits of Self-Esteem

How we feel about ourselves is important. High self-esteem – a feeling of self-worth – has benefits like better sleep, more persistence at difficult tasks, and being less shy, anxious, and lonely.

But, low self-esteem also has effects, such as becoming overly critical of others when your own sense of self has been deflated.

Self-Serving Bias

Self-serving bias – our readiness to perceive ourselves favorably.

We take responsibility for good deeds and successes more than for bad deeds and failures. Most people see themselves as better than average.
Self-Serving Bias

We all generally tend to think we are above average.

This bias can help defend our self-esteem, as it does for the people in this wheel.

Jacinda failed her last history midterm. Which of the following conclusions would be most representative of a self-serving bias on Jacinda's part?

| A) “I really didn’t prepare well enough for that test.” |
| B) “I wasn’t concentrating as hard as I should have during the test.” |
| C) “I lack ability in history.” |
| D) “I think the test questions were ambiguous and confusing.” |
Self-Focus and Narcissism

- Since 1980, song lyrics have become more focused on the self, both gratification and self-praise.
- Empathy scores and skills are decreasing, being lost; people increasingly don’t bother trying to see things from the perspective of others.
- There is a rise in narcissism (self-absorption, self-gratification, inflated but fragile self-worth).
- Narcissists see themselves as having a special place in the world.
- Danger, especially in narcissism: When self-esteem is threatened, it can trigger defensive aggression.
- Preventing this aggressive defense of self-esteem: not raising self-esteem, but reinforcing it, having people state their own values and qualities.