

PYSC 333: Psychology of Personality

Session 4– Trait Theory of Personality- Part 1

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Session Overview

- Traits refer to that part of the individual's behavior which remains fairly constant, even across different situations
- Although there are a number of trait theorists, they all subscribe to some common assumptions
- This session provides information on the trait definition of personality as well as the basic assumptions of trait theorists
- It will also provide information on Gordon Allport's trait theory of personality discussing, types of traits, how personality develops, and an evaluation of his theory

Session Goals and Objectives

At the end of this session, you should be able to

- Define the trait perspective of personality
- Outline the basic assumptions of trait theories
- Describe Gordon Allport's theory of personality
- Discuss the types of traits Allport identified
- Outline Allport's stages of personality development
- Evaluate Allport's trait theory

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Trait theory
- Gordon W. Allport (1897-1967)
 - Types of traits
 - Personality development
 - Evaluating Allport's theory

Reading List

- Carducci, B. J. (2009). *The Psychology of personality* (2nd ed.). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd (Ch 7)
- Schultz, D. P., & Schultz, S. E. (2005). *Theories of personality*. Belmont: Wadsworth. (Ch 9)

Topic One

TRAIT THEORY

Trait Theory of Personality

- According to Canver & Schier (1996) (in Bernstein et al., 2000), trait theorists view personality as:
- *a combination of stable internal characteristics that people display consistently over time and across situations*

Trait Theory of Personality

- Well-known trait theorists are
 - ❑ Gordon W. Allport
 - ❑ Raymond B. Cattell
 - ❑ Hans J. Eysenck

Trait Theory of Personality

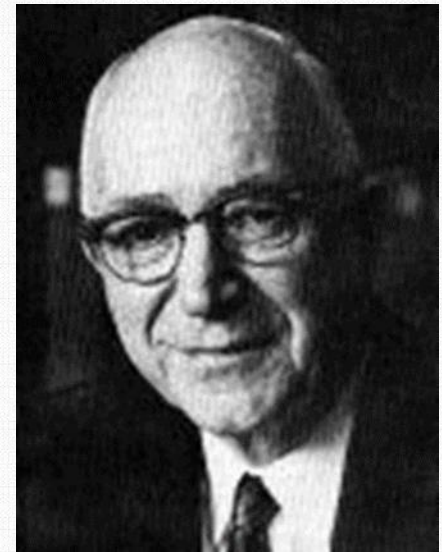
- They differ in their views, but have two basic assumptions
- 1. Individual differences in the traits that people possess
- 2. Behaviour exhibited is consistent across situations

Trait Theory of Personality

- Categorization of traits started with
- Hippocrates
- William Sheldon
- Much later, the trait approach began with Gordon Allport and Raymond Cattell

Topic Two

GORDON W. ALLPORT



Gordon W. Allport (1897- 1967)

- Allport disagreed with Freud in several ways:
- 1. That unconscious forces determine the personality of normal adults
- 2. That our past determined our future

Gordon W. Allport (1897- 1967)

- 3. That personality is universal rather than unique
- 4. That normal and abnormal personalities are on a continuum

Gordon W. Allport (1897- 1967)

- *“Personality is a dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determines his characteristics, behaviour and thought” (Allport 1961, p. 28)*

Gordon W. Allport (1897- 1967)

- Thus, personality is:
- *Dynamic organization*- constantly changing and growing in an orderly manner
- *Psychophysical systems*- is made up of the mind and body working together as one
- *That determines*- traits determine behaviour
- *Characteristics, behaviour and thought*- expresses individual uniqueness

Gordon W. Allport (1897- 1967)

- 1. Traits are real rather than a theoretical construct, they exist within an individual
- 2. Traits determine behaviour or cause behaviour
- 3. Traits represent different characteristics but they are interrelated- e.g. aggressiveness and hostility are different but they overlap
- 4. Traits vary with situations

Gordon W. Allport (1897- 1967)

- In his work, Allport emphasized the uniqueness of personality
- Researchers should study individual cases rather than similarities or generalities of large groups of people (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)

Topic Three

TYPES OF TRAITS

Types of traits

- Initially, Allport distinguished between two types of traits, common and individual traits
- 1. Common traits– basic traits that are seen to some degree in all individuals e.g. aggression
- They are traits shared in varying degrees by a number of people such as members of a culture

Types of traits

- 2. Individual traits – These are unique to an individual and creates a personalized style of behaviour
- Later Allport renamed individual traits as “personal dispositions” and common traits as “traits” (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)

Types of traits

- Allport distinguished 3 different types of personal dispositions to emphasize individuals' unique variations
- a. Cardinal Traits – represents the most significant and dominating features of an individual's personality (Carducci, 2009, Schultz & Schultz, 2005)
- E.g.- a person power-hungry will be driven solely by that need for control
- Note that not everyone possess cardinal traits

Types of traits

- b. Central Traits– A more common trait possessed by every individual that best describes their behaviour
- E.g. honest, sociable, affectionate, etc.
- These are less pervasive and less dominant than cardinal traits
- The major characteristics of a person's personality
- E.g.- Recommendation letter ~~describe~~ (describes) of a person's central traits

Types of traits

- C. Secondary Traits- these traits are limited to an individual's behaviour
- They are less consistent than cardinal and central traits
- Express themselves in specific situations and circumstances

Types of traits

- To study common traits, Allport proposed the *nomothetic approach* which compares individuals or groups of individuals on specific common traits
- To study personal dispositions, Allport proposed the *idiographic approach*- i.e. detailed study of an individual in different ways in different situations

Topic Four

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Personality development

- Allport used the term *proprium* to describe all aspects of a person's personality
- According to Cohler (1993) (in Carducci, 2009), the proprium helps an individual define a sense of self

Personality development

- According to Allport, the proprium develops over seven stages from infancy through to adolescence
- At the onset before the proprium begins to emerge, the infant has no awareness of self and acts on reflex (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)
- He called infants “*unsocialized horrors*” because they are selfish, impatient, pleasure seeking, dependent etc.

Stages of development

- 1. Bodily self (Age 1)- At birth, the infant cannot separate “me” from everything else
- By age one, the bodily self develops as they become conscious, what Allport called “bodily me”

Personality development

- 2. Self-identify (Age 2)– One's identity of the self continues at this stage
- Children learn their names and are able to differentiate themselves from other people
- 3. Self Esteem (Age 3)- Self-esteem develops when children realise that they can manipulate their environment and accomplish things on their own

Stages of development

- 4. Self-extension (Age 4 to 6)- The child becomes aware that he/she can exist beyond his/her physical self
- 5. Self-Image- (Age 4 to 6): The child's self- image develops as he/she develops actual and idealize images of him/ herself through interactions with parents (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)

Stages of development

- 6. Self as a rational copier (Age 6-12 years)-
- The child begins to apply reason and logic to solve everyday problems
- 7. Propriate striving –(Age 12 onward)-
- The adolescent begins to develop plans and set goals for the future
- If the individual is not able to do so, his/ her sense of self or propriate remains incomplete

Stages of development

- According to Allport, by adulthood, the individual functions autonomously, independent of childhood motives
- They function rationally in the present
- During these stages, interactions with parents is vital- especially the infant-mother (or caregiver) interactions

Stages of development

- If the child is given sufficient affection and security,
- *Proprium development will be steady and the child will obtain positive psychological growth* (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)
- *Childhood motives will develop into the autonomous appropriate striving of adulthood* (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)

Stages of development

- Personal dispositions will form, resulting in a mature emotionally healthy adult (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)
- However, if the child's need for affection and security are not provided, the proprium will not mature properly (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)

Stages of development

- Psychological growth is inhibited as the child becomes insecure, demanding, and aggressive, jealous and self-centred
- The individual becomes a neurotic adult who functions at the level of childhood drives

Stages of development

- Traits and personal dispositions are unable to develop and personality is still undifferentiated as it was during infancy (Schultz & Schultz, 2005)
- Thus,
- “*The adult personality grows out of childhood drives but it is not dominated or determined by childhood drives*” (Schultz and Schultz, 2005)

Stages of development

- Allport called the energy and motivational source behind the proprium as functional autonomy
- Read about functional autonomy

Topic Five

EVALUATING ALLPORT'S THEORY

Evaluating Allport's theory

Strength of Allport's theory

- 1. Allport demonstrated versatility in research as he used different methodologies in his study of personality (Carducci, 2009)
- 2. Laid emphasis on the “person” in personality
- One of the first theorist to study the uniqueness of the individual (Carducci, 2009)

Evaluating Allport's theory

Limitations

- 1. Allport placed too much emphasis on the uniqueness of personality
- This some argue, is inconsistent with the scientific approach to the study of personality

Evaluating Allport's theory

- 2. Allport focused on emotionally healthy adults and ignored neurotic and psychotic adults
- 3. His critics pointed out that there was no evidence of the location of personality traits in the brain or other parts of the body

Evaluating Allport's theory

- 4. Allport's proposed discontinuity of personality development from the past to the present was also criticized
- He ignored the relationship between personality development in childhood and in adulthood (Carducci, 2009)- he saw them as separate

END OF SESSION 4- Part 1

References

- Bernstein D. A., Clarke-Stewart A., Penner L. A., Roy E. J., Wickens C. D. (2000). *Psychology* (5th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Carducci, B. J. (2009). *The Psychology of personality* (2nd ed.). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd
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