

Further reading

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personal construct theory

Personal construct theory was presented by Kelly (1955) as an alternative to existing psychological theories. Its basic philosophical assumption, constructive alternativism, asserts that all interpretations of the world are replaceable. People are regarded as operating like scientists, formulating hypotheses, testing these out, and revising those which are invalidated. This process involves the development of a hierarchical system of bipolar personal constructs (e.g. 'kind-unkind'), not all of which have verbal labels. Each construct offers a choice, in that an element of the individual's experience may be construed at one of its poles, the other, or neither, and Kelly considered that people make those choices which most facilitate the anticipation of events. Although there are commonalities between people's construing, particularly within the same culture, each individual's construct system is unique. The essence of all intimate relationships is the construal of another person's construction processes.

Personal construct theory views the person holistically, rejecting distinctions between cognition, conation and affect. Emotion is viewed as the awareness of a transition in construing. In threat, this transition is in core constructs, those central to one's identity. Guilt is the awareness of behaving in a way which is discrepant with one's core role, the constructions determining one's characteristic ways of interacting with others. Anxiety is the awareness that one's constructs do not equip one to anticipate events. Aggression is the active elaboration of construing, while hostility is the attempt to extort evidence for a prediction rather than revising it when invalidated. Other strategies used to cope with invalidation and inconsistencies in construing include constricting one's world to exclude unpredictable events, and, conversely, dilating in an attempt to develop a way of construing the new experiences which one confronts. One may also loosen construing, making one's predictions less precise, or tighten, and more clearly define these predictions. The optimally functioning person is characterized by interplay of such strategies while formulating and revising constructions. However, in psychological disorder the person continues to employ a certain construction despite consistent invalidation. Personal construct psychotherapy therefore aims to facilitate reconstruction.

As well as its extensive clinical applications (Winter 1992), the theory has been employed in numerous other areas, including educational (Pope and Keen

1981) and business (Jankowicz 1990) settings. A particularly popular technique derived from it is the repertory grid, a method of assessment of construing.

Although there have been attempts at integration of personal construct theory with alternative approaches, it contrasts with most other theories, particularly those with reductionist and mechanistic assumptions. However, it has been regarded as exemplifying an approach termed constructivism (Mahoney 1988), the influence of which has permeated numerous areas of psychology as well as other fields.

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See also: personality; personality assessment.

personality

Personality (from the Latin *persona*, an actor's mask) is an ill-defined concept embracing the entire constellation of psychological characteristics that differentiate people from one another. There is no consensus on its precise definition: in 1937 Gordon W. Allport quoted more than fifty distinct definitions, and the list has grown considerably since then. The underlying assumptions common to all definitions are that people have more or less stable patterns of behaviour across certain situations, and that these behaviour patterns differ from one person to the next. Whereas most areas of psychological research are concerned with universal aspects of behaviour and mental experience, the study of personality focuses specifically on individual differences.

The earliest personality theory of note, uncertainly attributed to Hippocrates (c.400 BC) and Galen (AD c.170) and widely accepted throughout the Middle Ages, is the doctrine of the four temperaments. People can be classified into four personality types according to the balance of humours or fluids in their bodies. Optimistic people are governed by blood (*sanguis*),

depressive people by black bile (*melas chole*), short-tempered people by yellow bile (*chole*) and apathetic people by phlegm (*phlegma*). The physiological basis of this theory collapsed during the Renaissance with advances in biological knowledge, but the underlying typology survived in some modern personality theories.

The first systematic investigation of individual differences using modern empirical methods was Francis Galton's study of intelligence in England in 1884. A more reliable method of measuring intelligence, developed by the French psychologists Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon in 1905, stimulated research into other kinds of individual differences. Work on intelligence continued to flourish independently and is still (illogically) excluded from most academic discussions of personality.

The simplest personality theories focus on single traits or characteristics. Among the most extensively researched of the single-trait theories are those concerned with authoritarianism, field dependence, and locus of control.

Field dependence is a personality trait, first identified by Witkin in 1949, associated with the way in which people perceive themselves in relation to the environment. A field dependent person is strongly influenced by the environment and tends to assimilate information non-selectively; a field independent person, in contrast, is more reliant on internally generated cues and more discriminating in the use of external information. The trait was originally investigated with the rod and frame test, in which the subject, seated in a darkened room, tries to adjust a luminous rod to the vertical position within a tilted rectangular frame. Field dependent people are unduly influenced by the tilted frame, whereas field independent people are more able to discount the frame and concentrate on internal gravitational cues in judging the vertical. Researchers later developed more convenient measures of field dependence, notably the paper-and-pencil embedded figures test, which involves the identification of simple geometric figures embedded in larger, more complex diagrams. Scores on these tests are predictive of behaviour across a wide range of situations. Witkin and Goodenough (1977) concluded from the voluminous published research that field independent people are especially adept at certain forms of logical thinking, tend to gravitate towards occupations such as engineering, architecture, science teaching and experimental psychology, and are often regarded by others as ambitious, inconsiderate and opportunistic. Field dependent people excel at interpersonal relations and are generally considered to be popular, friendly, warm and sensitive; they are most usefully employed in such occupations as social work, elementary school teaching

and clinical psychology. Field dependence generally declines with age, and women are more field dependent, on average, than men.

Locus of control is a personality trait first described by Phares (1957) and incorporated by Rotter (1966) into his social learning theory. It indicates the degree to which people consider their lives to be under their own personal control. It is measured on a continuum from *internal* to *external* by means of questionnaires constructed by Rotter and others. People whose locus of control is internal tend to believe that they are largely responsible for their own destinies, whereas those whose locus is external tend to attribute their successes and failures to the influence of other people and uncontrollable chance events. According to Rotter and his followers, a person's locus of control affects the way that person will perceive most situations and influences behaviour in predictable ways. Research has consistently shown that people whose locus of control is internal, as compared to those whose locus is external, are more likely to adopt health-promoting activities such as weight-watching, giving up smoking, visiting dentists regularly, and taking exercise; they are relatively resistant to social influence and persuasion, and are generally better adjusted and less anxious than those whose locus of control is external. Mental disorders such as schizophrenia and depression are generally associated with external locus of control.

More ambitious multi-trait theories of personality are intended to account for human personality as a whole rather than just one aspect of it. Their aim is to identify the constellation of fundamental traits that constitute the structure of personality, and to explain differences between people according to their location on these dimensions. Allport and Odbert (1936) found 4,500 words denoting personality traits in a standard English dictionary. The first task of any multi-trait theory is to identify the most important of these, taking into account the considerable overlap between them. A statistical technique designed for this purpose, called factor analysis, reduces the measured correlations between a large number of traits to a relatively small number of dimensions or factors. These primary factors, which will generally be found to correlate with one another, can then be reduced to a still smaller number of higher-order factors. This is analogous to reducing the multitude of distinguishable shades of colour to the three dimensions of hue, saturation and brightness, which suffice to explain all the differences. The most influential multi-trait theories are those of Raymond B. Cattell, who has concentrated mainly on primary factors, and Hans J. Eysenck, who prefers higher-order factors.

Cattell's theory (Cattell and Kline 1977), which he outlined in the 1940s and elaborated over the

succeeding decades, is based on 171 traits that are intended to encompass the entire sphere of personality. They represent the list of dictionary traits after the elimination of synonyms and the addition of a handful of technical terms. Factor analytic studies of ratings and questionnaires reduced the list to sixteen primary factors or source traits, measured by a standardized paper-and-pencil test called the Sixteen Personality Factor (16PF) questionnaire. They include easily recognizable characteristics such as intelligence, excitability, submissiveness/dominance and forthrightness/shrewdness, together with several others for which Cattell invented neologisms, such as *sizia*, *threcta* and *zeppia*.

An important aspect of personality in Cattell's theory, in addition to the temperament and ability factors that determine *how* people behave, is the analysis of motivational factors determining *why* they behave as they do. According to the theory, the ultimate sources of motivation, called *ergs*, are biologically based and culturally universal factors such as food-seeking, mating, gregariousness and acquisitiveness. The means by which they are satisfied are called *sentiments*; these are culturally variable and include such activities as sport, religion and work. Five *ergs* and five *sentiments* are measured by the Motivational Analysis Test (MAT). Factor analysis has revealed three basic dimensions of motivation, corresponding roughly to Freud's *id*, *ego* and *superego*. If a person is motivated to read a particular book, for example, this may be because of impulsive desire (*id* interest), rational choice (*ego* interest) or a sense of obligation (*superego* interest).

Eysenck's (1967) theory, which he has developed steadily since the 1940s, is simpler than Cattell's, partly because it is based on higher-order factors. The three major factors or dimensions of personality in this theory are extraversion (E), neuroticism (N) and psychoticism (P). They are measured by standardized scales such as the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ). Traits associated with the extraversion factor are sociability, friendliness, enjoyment of excitement, talkativeness, impulsiveness, cheerfulness, activity and spontaneity. Traits associated with neuroticism include worrying, moodiness, tenseness, nervousness and anxiety. Psychoticism involves feelings of persecution, irrational thinking, a liking for very strong physical sensations, inhumane cruelty and lack of empathy.

According to Eysenck's theory, the location of a person on these three independent factors explains a great deal about that person's everyday behaviour. The theory also accounts for psychological disorders. Low E, high N and low P, for example, is suggestive of obsessional neurosis; high E, high N and low P points to hysteria; low E, low N and high P is characteristic

of schizophrenia; and so on. Most people, of course, fall somewhere between the extremes on all three scales. Eysenck believes that the three factors are biologically based and largely hereditary, and he has devoted a great deal of attention to their possible locations in the brain and central nervous system.

One of Eysenck's most controversial applications of his theory is to the explanation of crime and antisocial behaviour (Eysenck 1977). He has argued that extreme extraversion, associated with a low level of arousal in the reticular formation of the brain stem, results in weak susceptibility to conditioning, which in turn leads to inadequate socialization and conscience development. Added to this, low arousal produces sensation-seeking behaviour. For both reasons, Eysenck believes, a great deal of criminal and antisocial behaviour is explicable in terms of the biologically based and largely hereditary extraversion factor in his personality theory.

The most important controversy in the field of personality, initiated by Mischel (1968), centres on the issue of consistency. Mischel summarized an impressive array of evidence that seemed to cast doubt on one of the underlying assumptions of all personality theories – that people display more or less stable patterns of behaviour across situations. He drew particular attention to the low correlations between personality test scores and behaviour, and concluded that behaviour can be more reliably predicted from past behaviour than from personality test scores. This suggestion implies that behaviour is merely predictive of itself, and that theories of personality are futile, at least for predicting behaviour. Mischel recommended that personality research should be abandoned in favour of the investigation of situational factors that influence behaviour.

The situationist (or contextualist) critique of personality generated a considerable amount of debate and research, much of it appearing to refute Mischel's arguments and evidence. The debate is unresolved, but the views of most authorities since the mid-1970s have tended towards interactionism. According to this view, human behaviour is dependent partly on internal personality factors, partly on external situational factors, and partly on interactions (in the statistical sense) between personality and situational factors.

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See also: *personal construct theory; personality assessment.*

personality, psychopathic *see* psychopathic personality

personality assessment

There is little agreement among psychologists concerning the meaning of personality. However, one definition which underpins this article is that personality is the sum of an individual's attributes. The task of personality assessment is, therefore, to measure these attributes.

There are two basic approaches to the measurement of personality – the nomothetic and the idiographic. The former is concerned with the measurement of traits that are to be found in more or less degree among all individuals; the latter seeks to measure that which is specific to the individual concerned. Cutting across the nomothetic and idiographic distinction are the different methods of personality measurement. There are three basic methods which we shall discuss separately, together with some more general procedures which are, sometimes unwisely, used in personality assessment. The three types of personality tests are inventories or questionnaires, projective techniques and objective tests. Good measurement demands of tests high reliability (the capability of giving the same scores to individuals on repeated testing, and also internal consistency) and high validity (that is, the test clearly measures what it claims to measure). In addition to these methods, it is possible to use interviews, rating scales, semantic differentials and repertory grids, although these are not common in personality assessment.

Personality inventories or questionnaires consist of items, phrases or sentences about behaviour, to which subjects have to respond Yes/No, True/False, Like/Dislike, for

example. The items are selected by two methods. In the first, criterion keying, items are selected if they can discriminate one group from another, for instance, schizophrenics from normals. A well-known test thus constructed is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). The second method uses factor analysis to select the items. Factor analysis is a statistical technique which can evaluate dimensions underlying correlations (in this case between test items). Thus a factor analytic test, *ipso facto*, measures a dimension. The best-known examples of these are Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factor (16PF) questionnaire, the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) and the Personality Inventories constructed by Guilford. Personality inventories are reliable and reasonably valid, and have been found useful in industrial and educational psychology for guidance and selection. From these nomothetic tests two variables stand clear: extraversion and anxiety.

Projective techniques generally consist of ambiguous stimuli to which subjects have to respond more or less freely. There is much argument over their reliability and validity. These are essentially idiographic techniques; the Rorschach test, consisting of series of inkblots, is perhaps the most famous example.

Objective tests are a development in personality assessment stemming mainly from Cattell. They are defined as tests which can be objectively scored and whose purpose cannot be guessed, thus making them highly useful in selection. However, as yet there is little evidence concerning the validity of these nomothetic measures and thus they are definitely at the experimental stage only. Typical tests are: the fidgetometer (a chair which measures movement, for example, during an interview), the slow line drawing test, hand-writing pressure test and a balloon-blowing measure.

Finally, rating scales and interviews and other methods (as mentioned above) are usually shown to be lacking in both reliability and validity. Personality tests are much to be preferred, allowing quantification for applied and research purposes.

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See also: *personal construct theory; personality; projective methods.*

personnel management *see* human resource management