

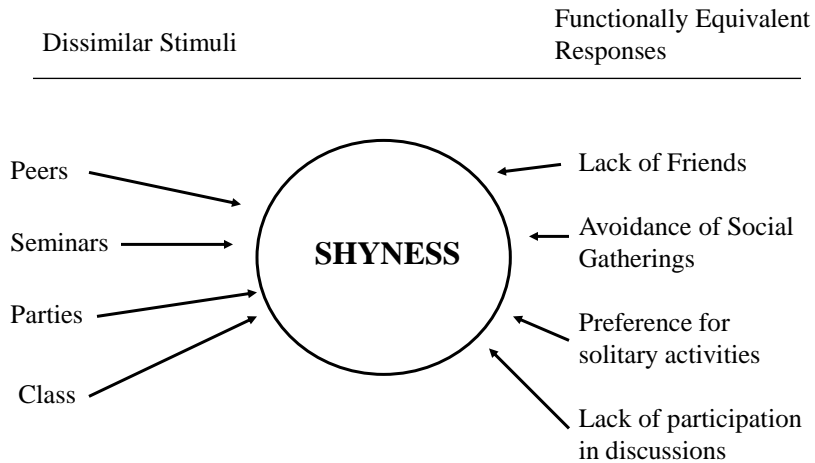
Trait Approach to Personality

- Consistent reaction patterns of an individual can be predicted from knowing person's personality traits
- **Trait:** basic limited set of adjective dimensions which describe and scale individuals
- 18,000 adjectives (Allport)

Personological Trait Theory

- Basic Assumptions:
 - Emphasize individual differences in characteristics that are stable across time and situation
 - Emphasize measurement of these traits through tests
 - We do not see "traits", we *infer* them from consistencies in people's behavior.
 - Trait's manifest themselves in a variety of functionally equivalent responses.

A Trait in Action



Gordon Allport (1897-1967)

- Born in Montezuma, IN
- Characterized family life as marked by trust and affection with a strong emphasis on the virtue of hard work.
- He was very scholarly from an early age
- Did not get along well with peers.
- Received his undergraduate degree in Psychology and then taught English and Sociology for a year in Turkey.

- In 1919 he received a fellowship for graduate study at Harvard.
- Before returning to the US he stopped in Vienna and arranged a meeting with Freud.
- This meeting taught him that psychologists often were too concerned with the psyche and the unconscious and that they might understand people better if they paid more attention to their conscious motives.
- Allport completed his Ph.D. at Harvard in two years.
- He was one of the first to study traits; “a maverick” in the field
- His early work was not accepted.

Gordon Allport

- Defined Personality as:
- “The dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behaviors and thoughts”-organization within an individual
- Each person has unique key qualities
- Emphasized traits-Freud emphasized instinctual drives

- A trait is an internal structure that renders many stimuli functionally equivalent and can guide equivalent forms of adaptive and expressive behavior.
- Regularities in thoughts, feelings & actions arise:
 - because individual views many situations and stimuli in same way
 - Many of individual's behaviors are similar in meaning-functionally equivalent

Common Traits

- Categories for classifying groups of individuals
- All people in a given culture has that trait, to varying degrees.
- We compare *how* much of it different people have.
- Allport discounted its value in understanding personality
 - “No two person's ever have precisely the same trait.”

Personal Dispositions

- Trait-a generalized neuropsychic structure peculiar to an individual
- No two personalities are alike
- **Idiographic** methods take into account each person's uniqueness e.g.: interviews, behavioral observations, flexible self-reports-identifies the differences between people-takes into account each persons personal disposition

Common vs. Individual Traits

- Common Traits
 - Categories for classifying groups of people on a particular dimension.
 - Limited usefulness in understanding people
- Individual Traits (Personal Dispositions)
 - Unique characteristics of the person.
 - Only way to really make advances in understanding personality
- Allport's approach has been criticized as unrealistic.
- Most research focuses on Common Traits

Pervasiveness of Traits

- Cardinal Traits
 - Characteristics that are so pervasive they dominate nearly every aspect of a person's life.
 - “Master motives, ruling passions, eminent traits”
 - This is rare. Most people do not possess a cardinal trait.
 - When they do, they often become the prototype for that disposition.
 - I.E. “Machiavellian”, or “Christ-like”

Pervasiveness of Traits

- Central Traits
 - Characteristics that summarize a person's personality
 - A person has several central traits
 - A central trait controls many behaviors
 - I.E. “Shyness” from previous slide

Pervasiveness of Traits

- Secondary Traits
 - Describe ways in which a person is consistent, but do not affect personality very much
 - Peripheral to the person
 - Person preferences
 - “less conspicuous, less generalized, less consistent, and less often called into play than central traits”

Personality Development

- Functional Autonomy
 - traits become independent of their origins in childhood
 - Childhood might be root of the trait or tendency but do not continue to influence the tendency in adulthood
 - It is not necessary to unearth where tendency or trait which dominates a person's life originated in order to help person deal with the troubling tendency

Personality Development

- Unity of the Personality
 - Unitas Multiplex: integration of diverse elements of personality
 - The Proprium: theoretical concept of “self” or “ego”
 - “a sense of what is peculiarly ours, including all aspects of personality that make for inward unity”

Stages of Development of Self

- 1. Bodily Sense of Self (1st year)
 - Sensory information provides an “anchor” for our self-awareness.
- 2. Self-Identity (1 or 2- 4 or 5)
 - Sense of existence as a separate person
- 3. Ego Enhancement or Self-Esteem (2-3)
 - Sense of pride or shame depending achievement
 - Testing the limits of the environment
- 4. Ego-extension (3-4 or 4-6)
 - Identify with personal possessions.
 - With maturity this shifts to loved ones and later to ideal causes and loyalties.

- 5. Self-Image (4-6)
 - Learned expectations of the roles we are expected to enact
 - Aspirations for the future we seek to attain
- 6. Rational Agent (6-12)
 - Engage in reflective thought, problem solving
- 7. Propriate Striving (12 +)
 - “ego-involved” behavior, characterized by the unification of personality in pursuit of major life goals
- 8. The Knower (adult)
 - Integration of the previous seven aspects of proprium
 - Unified personality