

## Chapter 5

# **Personality Dispositions Over Time: Stability, Change, and Coherence**

## **Conceptual Issues**

- Personality Development
- Stability
- Change
- Coherence

## What Is Personality Development?

- Personality development: Continuities, consistencies, stabilities in people over time, and the way in which people change over time

## Three Key Forms of Stability

- Rank order stability: Maintenance of an individual position's within group
- Mean level stability: Constancy of level in population
- Personality coherence: Maintaining rank order relative to others but changing in the manifestations of trait

## Personality Change: Two Defining Qualities

- Internal: Changes are internal to a person, not changes in the external surrounding
- Enduring: Changes are enduring over time, not temporary

## Three Levels of Analysis

- Population level: Changes or constancies that apply more or less to everyone
- Group differences level: Changes or constancies that affect different groups differently
- Individual difference level: e.g., Can we predict who is at risk for psychological disturbance later in life based in earlier measures of personality?

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Stability of Temperaments During Infancy

- Temperament: Individual differences that emerge very early in life, are heritable, and involved behaviors are linked with emotionality
- As assessed by caregivers, temperament factors include activity level, smiling and laughter, fear, distress to limitations, soothability, and the duration of orienting

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Stability of Temperaments During Infancy

- Research points to the following conclusions
  - Stable individual differences emerge early in life, where they can be assessed by observers
  - For most temperament variables, there are moderate levels of stability over time during the first year of life

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Stability of Temperaments During Infancy

- Research points to the following conclusions
  - Stability of temperament is higher over short intervals of time than over long intervals of time
  - Level of stability of temperament increases as infants mature

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Stability During Childhood

- Longitudinal study: Investigation of same group of individuals over time
- Block and Block Longitudinal Study: Study of 100 children assessed at three, four, five, seven, and 11 years

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Stability During Childhood

- One study using Block and Block Longitudinal Study: Individual differences in activity level
  - Activity level assessed in two ways: Using actometer and independent assessments of behavior and personality provided by teachers
  - Stability coefficients: Correlations between same measures obtained at two different points in time (test-retest reliability)

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Stability During Childhood

- Validity coefficients: Coefficients between different measures of the same trait at the same time
- Actometer measurements of activity level had positive validity coefficients with teacher measurements of activity level: Thus, activity level in childhood can be validly assessed with measures

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Stability During Childhood

- Activity level measurements are all positively correlated with measures of activity level taken at later ages: Activity level shows moderate stability during childhood
- Size of correlations decreases as the time interval between different testings increases

# Personality Stability Over Time

- Stability of childhood aggression
  - Individual differences in aggression emerge early in life, by three years
  - Individuals retain rank order stability on aggression over many years
  - Stability coefficients decline as interval between two times of measurement increases

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Rank Order Stability in Adulthood

- Across different self-report measures of personality, conducted by different investigators, over differing time intervals (3 to 30 years), broad personality traits show moderate to high levels of stability
- Average correlations across traits, scales, and time intervals is about  $+.65$

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Rank Order Stability in Adulthood

- Stability also found using spouse-report and peer-report
- Personality consistency tends to increase in stepwise fashion with increasing age—personality appears to become more and more “set in plaster” with age



# Personality Stability Over Time

## Mean Level Stability in Adulthood

- “Big five” personality factors show a consistent mean level stability over time
- Especially after 50, very little change in the average level

# Personality Stability Over Time

## Mean Level Stability in Adulthood

- Small but consistent changes, especially the during 20s
  - Openness, extraversion, neuroticism decline with age until 50
  - Conscientiousness and agreeableness show gradual increase with time

## **Personality Changes Across Cohorts: Women's Assertiveness in Response to Changes in Social Status and Roles**

- Cohort effects: changes (for example, in personality) over time that are attributable to living in different time periods rather than to “true” change
- Research by Jean Twenge

## **Personality Coherence Over Time**

- Marital Stability, Marital Satisfaction, and Divorce (Kelly and Conley, 1987)
  - Longitudinal study of 300 couples from engagements in 1930s to 1980s
  - During first testing session in 1930s, friends rated each participant's personality on many dimensions

## Personality Coherence Over Time

- Marital Stability, Marital Satisfaction, and Divorce (Kelly and Conley, 1987)
  - Three aspects of personality strongly predicted marital dissatisfaction and divorce
    - Husband's neuroticism
    - Husband's impulsivity
    - Wife's Neuroticism

## Personality Coherence Over Time

- Alcoholism and Emotional Disturbance
  - In a longitudinal study of men, high neuroticism predicted the later development of alcoholism and emotional disturbance
  - Alcoholic men had lower impulse control scores than men with emotional disturbance

## Personality Coherence Over Time

- Adult Outcomes of Children with Temper Tantrums (Caspi, 1987)
  - Longitudinal study spanning 40 years
  - Men who, as children, had frequent and severe temper tantrums achieved lower levels of education, lower occupational status at their first job, changed jobs frequently, and had erratic work patterns

## Personality Coherence Over Time

- Adult Outcomes of Children with Temper Tantrums (Caspi, 1987)
  - If in the military, men who had temper tantrums as children achieved lower military rank than peers

## Personality Coherence Over Time

- Prediction of Personality Change
  - Can we predict who is likely to change in personality and who is likely to remain the same?

## Personality Coherence Over Time

- Prediction of Personality Change
  - Caspi and Herbener (1990) studied middle-aged couples over an 11-year period, in 1970 and again in 1981
  - Researchers asked: Is the choice of marriage partner a cause of personality stability or change?

## Personality Coherence Over Time

- Prediction of Personality Change
  - People married to a spouse highly similar to themselves showed most personality stability
  - People married to a spouse least similar to themselves showed most personality change

## Summary and Evaluation

- Personality development is the study of both the continuities and changes in personality over time
- Strong evidence for personality rank order stability over time

## Summary and Evaluation

- Personality also changes in predictable ways, sometimes in different ways for men and women
- Personality also shows evidence for coherence over time