

TRAIT THEORY: ALLPORT AND CATTELL

In psychology, trait theory (also called dispositional theory) is an approach to the study of human personality. Trait theorists are primarily interested in the measurement of traits, which can be defined as habitual patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion. Traits are aspects of personality that are relatively stable over time, differ across individuals (e.g. some people are outgoing whereas others are not), are relatively consistent over situations, and influence behavior. Traits are in contrast to states, which are more transitory dispositions.

Allport contributed to the trait theory of personality, and is known as a "trait" psychologist. He did not believe that people can be classified according to a small number of trait dimensions, maintaining that each person is unique and distinguished by peculiar traits. In one of Allport's own articles, *Concepts of Trait and Personality* (1927), Allport states that traits are "habits possessed of social significance" and become very predictable, traits are a unit of personality. Allport states that the personality of a person is the single most unique thing about a person.

Allport's three-level hierarchy of traits are:

1. Cardinal Trait - These traits are rare but is the trait that dominate and shape a person's behavior. These are the ruling passions/obsessions, such as a need for money, fame etc.

2. Central Trait - These traits are general characteristics found in some degree in every person. These are the basic building blocks that shape most of our behavior although they are not as overwhelming as cardinal traits. They influence but do not determine behavior. An example of a central trait would be honesty.

3. Secondary Trait - These traits are the bottom tier of the hierarchy and are not as apparent as central traits. Secondary traits are characteristics seen only in certain circumstances (such as particular likes or dislikes that a very close friend may know). They must be included to provide a complete picture of human complexity.

The following personality trait list describes some of the descriptive terms used for each of the 16 personality dimensions described by Cattell:

1. Abstractedness: Imaginative versus practical
2. Apprehension: Worried versus confident
3. Dominance: Forceful versus submissive
4. Emotional stability: Calm versus high-strung
5. Liveliness: Spontaneous versus restrained
6. Openness to change: Flexible versus attached to the familiar
7. Perfectionism: Controlled versus undisciplined
8. Privatness: Discreet versus open
9. Reasoning: Abstract versus concrete
10. Rule-consciousness: Conforming versus non-conforming
11. Self-reliance: Self-sufficient versus dependent
12. Sensitivity: Tender-hearted versus tough-minded
13. Social boldness: Uninhibited versus shy
14. Tension: Inpatient versus relaxed
15. Vigilance: Suspicious versus trusting
16. Warmth: Outgoing versus reserved

4. Freedom of choice—they are not restricted by incongruence and are able to make a wide range of choices more fluently. They believe that they play a role in determining their own behavior and so feel responsible for their own behavior.

5. Higher levels of creativity—they will be more creative in the way they adapt to their own circumstances without feeling a need to conform.

6. Reliability and constructiveness—they can be trusted to act constructively. Even aggressive needs will be matched and balanced by intrinsic goodness in congruent individuals.

7. A rich full life—they will experience joy and pain, love and heartbreak, fear and courage more intensely.

Criticisms of Rogers' Theories

Like Maslow's theories, Rogers' were criticized for the lack of empirical evidence used in research. The holistic approach of humanism allows for a great deal of variation but does not identify enough constant variables to be researched with true accuracy. Psychologists also worry that such an extreme focus on the subjective experience of the individual does little to explain or appreciate the impact of society on personality development.

LEARNING THEORY APPROACHES: SKINNER

Learning theory describes how students receive, process, and retain knowledge during learning.

Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904 – 1990) was an American psychologist, behaviorist, author, inventor, and social philosopher.

Skinner developed behavior analysis, especially the philosophy of radical behaviorism, and founded the experimental analysis of behavior, a school of experimental research psychology. He also used operant conditioning to strengthen behavior, considering the rate of response to be the most effective measure of response strength. To study operant conditioning, he invented the operant conditioning chamber (aka the Skinner Box), and to measure rate he invented the cumulative recorder.

Skinner referred to his approach to the study of behavior as radical behaviorism. This philosophy of behavioral science assumes that behavior is a consequence of environmental histories of reinforcement.

Respondent behaviors are elicited by stimuli, and may be modified through respondent conditioning, often called classical (or Pavlovian) conditioning, in which a neutral stimulus is paired with an eliciting stimulus. Such behaviors may be measured by their latency or strength.

Operant behaviors are 'emitted,' meaning that initially they are not induced by any particular stimulus. They are strengthened through operant conditioning (aka instrumental conditioning), in which the occurrence of a response yields a reinforcer. Such behaviors may be measured by their rate.