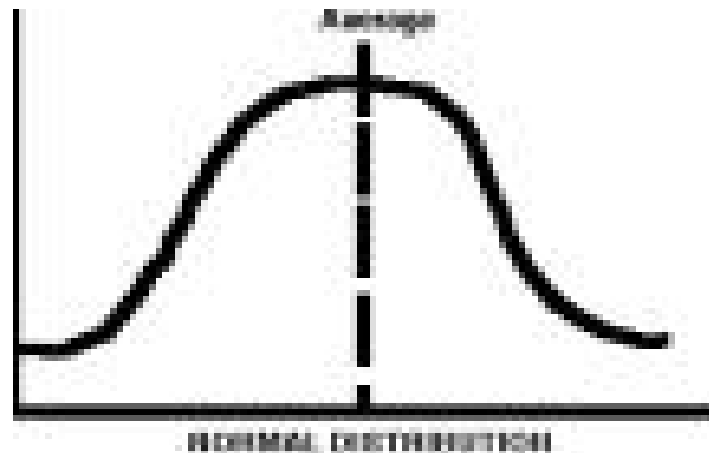# Trait Approach

- What is a trait?

  – Consistent patterns in the way that people think, act, and feel

- Basic views shared by trait theorists:

  1. Traits are fundamental building blocks of personality

  2. Can be organized

Trait Continuum

- Wide range of behaviors can be represented on trait continuum
  - E.g. achievement motivation: highly driven and persistent on one end, indifference and no drive at all on the other extreme
- Each person can be placed somewhere on continuum
  - More or less aggressive, more or less friendly, etc.
- Scores will have a normal distribution (fewer people score in the extreme on any trait)

NORMAL DISTRIBUTION

Key Assumptions

1. Stability
   - ◆ Over time
   - ◆ Across situations

2. Individual Differences
   - ◆ Strength of traits
   - ◆ amount of trait
   - ◆ number of traits that stand out

Approaches to studying traits

1. Many-trait approach

2. Single trait approach

3. Essential trait approach

Many-trait approach

- Look at many traits at once. Try to determine which traits correlate with certain behaviors

- Addresses personality factors that may underlie a particular behavior

- Examples: delay of gratification, drug and alcohol use, aggression in adulthood, etc.
    - Young children (age 4) rated as emotionally labile, aggressive, restless, disobedient, and susceptible to stress were found to be more likely to use drugs at age 14 than those that were low on these characteristics

Single-trait approach

- Looks closely at a single trait
- Tries to understand origin and consequences of that trait
  - Examples: self-monitoring, conscientiousness
  - Authoritarianism:
    - Studied following WWII, at heart of racial prejudice and willingness to follow orders
    - Respect toward authority, interested in power, cynical, inflexible
    - Origins: child-rearing practices, learned attitudes, genetic predisposition, early childhood experiences

1 = strongly disagree,   5 = agree a little
2 = mostly disagree,   6 = agree mostly
3 = disagree a little,   7 = agree strongly
4 = no opinion

1. It is essential for learning or effective work that our teachers or bosses outline in detail what is to be done and how to do it.

2. One of the most important things children should learn is when to disobey authorities.

3. People ought to pay more attention to new ideas, even if they seem to go against the grain of American life.

4. Most people don't realize how much our lives our controlled by plots hatched in secret places.

1 = strongly disagree,   5 = agree a little
2 = mostly disagree,   6 = agree mostly
3 = disagree a little,   7 = agree strongly
4 = no opinion

5. Most of our social problems could be solved if we somehow got rid of the immoral, crooked, and feebleminded people.

6. Human nature being what it is, there will always be war and conflict.

(7) It is highly unlikely that astrology will ever be able to explain anything.

(8) What youth needs most is strict discipline, rugged determination, and the will to work and fight for family and country.

(9) No weakness or difficulty can hold us back if we have enough willpower

(10) If it weren't for the rebellious ideas of youth, there would be less progress in the world.

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11. Most honest people admit to themselves that they have sometimes hated their parents.

12. Books and movies ought to give a more realistic picture of life, even if they show that evil sometimes triumphs over good.

13. Every person should have complete faith in a supernatural power whose decision s/he obeys without question.

14. The artist and the professor are probably more important to society than the business person and the manufacturer.

15. The findings of science may some day show that many of our most cherished beliefs are wrong.

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16. An urge to jump from high places is probably the result of unhappy personal experiences rather than anything inborn.

17. Nowadays more and more people are prying into matters that should remain personal and private.

18. In spite of what we read about the wild sex lives of people in important places, the real story is about the same in any group of people.

19. No sane, normal, decent person could ever think of hurting a close friend or relative.

20. Sex crimes, such as rape and attacks on children, deserve more than mere imprisonment; such criminals ought to be publicly whipped or worse.

Scoring

- 8-
  - Items #2, 7,11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18

  - Compute total

  - Average 100 to 120
  - Over 120 authoritarian

- *Conventionalism:* Rigid adherence to conventional, middle-class values.
- *Authoritarian Submission:* Submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the ingroup.

- *Authoritarian Aggression:* Tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values.
- *Anti-intraception:* Opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, the tender-minded.

- *Superstition and Stereotypy:* The belief in mystical determinants of the individual's fate; the disposition to think in rigid categories.

- *Power and "Toughness":* Preoccupation with the dominance-submission, strong-weak, leader-follower dimension; identification with power figures; overemphasis upon the conventionalized attributes of the ego; exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness.

- *Destructiveness and Cynicism:* Generalized hostility, vilification of the human.

- *Projectivity:* The disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outwards of unconscious emotional impulses.

- *Sex:* Exaggerated concern with sexual "goings-on."

Essential trait approach

- Reduce all traits into those that are most essential or most important

- Figure out which traits are needed to accurately describe people and understand their behavior

- Examples: Eysenck, Big Five, Murray's needs

Hans Eysenck's (1916 – 1997) Biological Typology

- 3 major individual differences dimensions

- Based in biology

- Wanted to integrate theory and research

Eysenck

- Started with theory (vs. Cattell)
- Used theory to make predictions
- Used experimental tasks to examine theories
 - Deductive approach

Eysenck

Believed all people could be described based on 3 supertraits:

1. introversion/extraversion: continuum of sociability, dominance, liveliness

2. Stability/neuroticism: continuum of upset and distress

3. Impulse control/psychoticism: continuum of attachment toward others and socially appropriate interactions

Raymond Cattell (1905 – 1998)

- Let reality reveal itself

- Developed one of broadest, most comprehensive theories

- Relied heavily on factor analysis
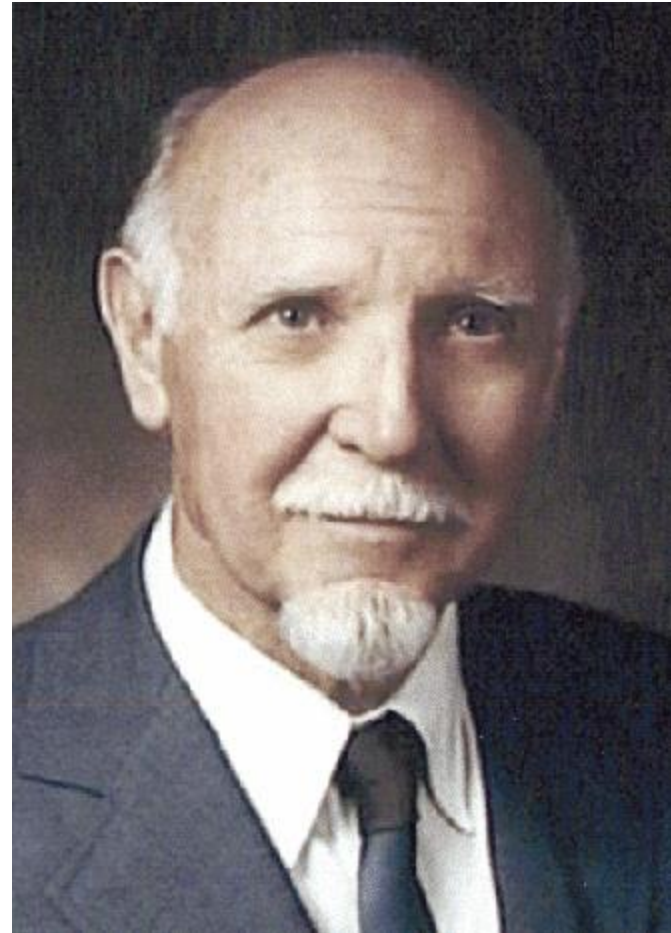
Cattell

- ## What traits make up personality?
  - – We should not impose our own preconceptions
  - – Need to determine empirically
    - Took all trait words 4500 words
    - Removed synonyms, 171 trait words
    - Collected ratings on these words
    - Used factor analysis to reduce

Cattell - methods

- Emphasized need for a variety of converging data
- Wanted to try to capture same traits in a variety of different ways
  - Q-data: self-report measures (questionnaires)
  - T-data: test situation (observations)
  - L-data: life data from records

Cattell's 16 PF

- **Abstractedness** imaginative versus practical
- **Apprehension** insecure versus complacent
- **Dominance** aggressive versus passive
- **Emotional Stability** calm and stable versus high-strung
- **Liveliness** enthusiastic versus serious
- **Openness to Change** liberal versus traditional
- **Perfectionism** compulsive and controlled versus indifferent
- **Privateness** pretentious versus unpretentious
- **Reasoning** abstract versus concrete
- **Rule Consciousness** moralistic versus free-thinking
- **Self-Reliance** leader versus follower
- **Sensitivity** sensitive versus tough-minded
- **Social Boldness** uninhibited versus timid
- **Tension** driven and tense versus relaxed and easy going
- **Vigilance** suspicious versus accepting
- **Warmth** open and warmhearted versus aloof and critical

Cattell's 16 PF

- Practical applications
  - Used in marriage counseling
  - Career counseling

- On-line test and results

  http://similarminds.com/cattell-16-factor.html

Not everyone agreed!

- Allport thought Cattell had it all wrong.

- Be able to identify differences in their theories and approach

Gordon Allport (1897 – 1967)

- Used ideographic approach

- Influential methodologist as well as theorist

- Developed "individual differences" psychology

Allport

- Highlights of theory:

  1. Personality is dynamic. Adult motivation (growth, coherence, creativity) is different than children's motivations (tension reduction).

  2. A few traits can explain most behavior.

  3. Healthy personality is as important as neurosis.

  4. Conscious values shape personality.

Allport – Structure of Personality

- Traits
  - Traits are building blocks

  - They occur in combinations. Each person's combo. makes them unique.

  - Organized hierarchically based on how much they influence behavior.

  - Common traits and personal traits

Common traits

- Traits that we share due to common biological and cultural heritages

- Roughly comparable among people

- What makes us the same

Structure of <u>Personal</u> Traits

- Most people can identify 5 to 10 traits that describe themselves best.
- What makes us different from others

1. <u>Central traits</u> – traits that drive most behavior; are most descriptive

2. <u>Cardinal traits</u> – an occasional pervasive and dominant trait

    e.g. Mother Teresa – kindness and compassion

3. <u>Secondary dispositions</u> – not among the most important, but may influence some behavior

Allport cont'

- Proprium = organizing structure of personality; one' self; the core
    - Responsible for self-esteem
    - Self-identity
    - Self-image
    - Begins developing in infancy and continues through adolescence

Allport

- Functional autonomy =
  - Our motives become independent of their childhood origins
  - Probably a reaction to Freud; Allport didn't agree that childhood experiences continue to influence us so strongly as adults
  - E.g. child cleans room to please parent.
  - As adult, values being neat and tidy.

Method

- Idiographic Methods
  - Take into account each person's uniqueness
  - Behavioral observations
  - Flexible self-reports
  - Interviews
  - Q-sorts

  takes into account each person's personal dispositions; people have different traits

- In contrast to the <u>nomothetic</u> approach – people have different amounts of a trait, but they all have the same finite set of traits (e.g. Big Five)

Allport

- But still have to reduce the thousands of possible traits in some way

- <u>Functional equivalence</u>
  - Individuals have many behaviors that are similar in meaning
  - Individuals view many stimuli in a similar way
  - i.e. these things are "functionally equivalent"

activity

- Compare the views of Eysenck, Allport, and Cattell
  - What did they agree on?
  - Where their differences
  - Consider conception of traits, structure of personality, and methods

Research related to introversion/extraversoin

- Furnham & Bradley (1997)

- Cambell & Hawley (1982)

- Landraum (1992), Bullock & Gilliland (1993)

In-class application

- Based on what you know about yourself, are you an introvert or an extravert?

- Given your classification, what types of study conditions are likely to maximize your academic performance?

- Does this match with how you currently study?

List the three best things about:

You

1.

2.

3.

Your best friend

1.

2.

3.

Take personality test

- Link is on website

- http://www.personalitytest.net/ipip/ipipneo1.htm

- Two versions
  - Original version is longer and more reliable (why??), takes about 30-40 minutes
  - Newer version is shorter but less reliable, takes about 20 minutes

- Recommend that you take on computer where you can print