

Personality Development

1

Theory characteristics

- **Trait** theories emphasize **differences** across individuals but **similarities** across situations
- **Stage** theories emphasize **similarities** across individuals and **changes** across life situations
- **Life-events** frameworks emphasize **differences** across **both** individuals and situations

2

Levels of Analysis and Personality Research

- **Dispositional traits** are aspects of personality that are consistent across contexts and can be compared along a continuum
- **Personal concerns** reflect life stage
- **Life narratives** provide self-concept

3

The Case for Stability: The Five-Factor Model

- Consists of five independent dimensions of personality
 - Neuroticism
 - Extraversion
 - Openness to experience
 - Agreeableness
 - Conscientiousness

4

Neuroticism: 6 facets

- Anxiety
- Hostility
- Self-consciousness
- Depression
- Impulsiveness
- Vulnerability

5

Extraversion: 6 facets

- Interpersonal traits
 - Warmth
 - Gregariousness
 - Assertiveness
- Temperamental traits
 - Activity
 - Excitement seeking
 - Positive emotions

6

Openness to Experience: 6 facets / areas

- Fantasy
- Aesthetics
- Action
- Ideas
- Values
- Occupational choice

7

Agreeableness (Opposite of Antagonism): are NOT

- Skeptical
- Mistrustful
- Callous
- Unsympathetic
- Stubborn
- Rude
- Skillful manipulators
- Aggressive go-getters

8

Conscientiousness

- Hardworking
- Ambitious
- Energetic
- Scrupulous
- Persevering
- Desirous to make something of themselves

9

What is the Evidence for Trait Stability?

- Using the GZTS (n=114), Costa and McCrae found:
 - Over a 12-year period, 10 personality traits measured by GZTS remained stable
 - Other studies similar to the GZTS found equivalent results—however, in the very old, suspiciousness and sensitivity increased

10

Other studies have shown evidence for personality changes

1. Certain traits, (self-confidence, cognitive development, outgoingness, and dependability) show some changes in the 30 to 40 year period
2. Neuroticism may increase and extraversion may decrease as we grow older
3. Using modern computer methods of data collection, one study (n=130,000) found none of the Big Five traits remained stable after age 30
4. The Berkeley studies of longitudinal ages 40 to 70 identified gender differences
 - For women, lifestyle in young adulthood was best predictor of life satisfaction in old age
 - For men, personality was the better predictor of life satisfaction in old age

11

Critiques of the 5-Factor Model

- Block (1995) takes issue with the methodology that uses laypeople to specify personality descriptors that were used to create the terms of the Five-Factor Model
- McAdams (1996, 1999) points out that any model of dispositional traits says nothing about the core or essential aspects of human nature
- The fundamental notion of stability versus change in personality must be addressed through varied perspectives and methods

12

Conclusions about Dispositional Traits

- The idea that personality traits stop changing at age 30 does not have uniform support
- A partial resolution can be found by looking at how the research was conducted
- It could be that, generally speaking, personality traits tend to be stable when data are averaged over large groups of people
- But looking at specific aspects of personality in specific kinds of people, there may be less stability and more change

13

What's Different about Personal Concerns?

- Personal concerns
 - Are explicitly contextual in contrast to dispositional traits
 - Are narrative descriptions that rely on life circumstances
 - Change over time
- One "has" personality traits, but "does" behaviors that are important in everyday life

14

Jung's Theory

- Emphasizes that each aspect of a person's personality must be in balance with all the others, such as, introversion-extroversion and masculinity-femininity.
- Jung was the first theorist to discuss personality development during adulthood. He invented the notion of midlife crisis.
- Jung argued that people move toward integrating these dimensions as they age, with midlife being an especially important period.

15

Erikson's psycho-social theory

- built upon Freud's biological psychosexual stages
- focus on the importance of culture through psychosocial development.
- Epigenetic principle = development is influenced by a universal genetic plan
- stages center on **emotional crises** stemming from biological and social expectations
- earlier crises need to be resolved satisfactorily for the successful resolution of later crises

16

Erikson's 8 stages

- trust vs. mistrust → **hope**
- autonomy vs. shame and doubt → **will**
- initiative vs. guilt → **purpose**
- industry vs. inferiority → **competence**
- identity vs. identity confusion → **fidelity**
- intimacy vs. isolation → **love**
- generativity vs. stagnation → **care**
- ego integrity vs. despair → **wisdom**

17

Clarifications and Extensions of Erikson's Theory: Logan

- Logan argues that the eight stages are really a cycle that repeats
 - trust → achievement → wholeness
- Slater (2003) expands on Logan's reasoning on the central crisis of generativity versus stagnation and includes struggles between
 - Pride and embarrassment
 - Responsibility and ambivalence
 - Career productivity and inadequacy
 - Parenthood and self-absorption

18

Clarifications and Extensions of Erikson's Theory: Van Geert

- Van Geert proposes that the rules by which people move from one stage to the next may be related to cognitive development
 - First, there is an inward orientation to the self that is gradually replaced by an outward orientation
 - Second, we move from using very general categories in understanding the world to using more specific ones
 - Third, we move from operating with limited ideas of social and emotional experiences to more inclusive ideas

19

Clarifications and Extensions of Erikson's Theory: Korte

- Erikson's generativity versus stagnation stage has received most of the attention in adult research
- Korte has extended this stage to include five types of generativity
 - Biological and parental
 - Technical
 - Cultural
 - Agentic
 - Communal

20

The McAdams Model

- shows how generativity results from:
 - Complex interconnections between societal and inner forces
 - Thus, creating a concern for the next generation and a belief in the goodness of the human enterprise

21

Loevinger's Theory

- Loevinger has proposed the most comprehensive attempt at integrating cognitive and ego development and extension of Erikson's theory
 - Ego development results from dynamic interactions between the person and the environment
 - Eight stages – six in adulthood (see Table 10.2)
 - Four areas of importance in ego development
 1. Character development
 2. Interpersonal style
 3. Conscious preoccupations
 4. Cognitive style

22

Theories Based on Life Transitions

- Among the most popular theories of adult personality development
- Based on the idea that adults go through a series of life transitions, or passages
 - However, few of these theories have substantial databases, and none are based on representative samples
- Life transitions tend to overestimate the commonality of age-linked transitions

23

In Search of the Midlife Crisis

- A key idea in life transition theories is midlife crisis
 - The idea that at middle age we take a good look at ourselves in the hopes of achieving a better understanding of who we are
 - Many adults face difficult issues and make behavioral changes
- However, very little data supports the claim that people inevitably experience a crisis in middle age
 - Most experience both gains and losses, positives and negatives
- This transition may be better characterized as a midlife correction, reevaluating roles and dreams

24

Conclusions about Personal Concerns

- Evidence supports a sharp change in personal concerns as adults age, in contrast to stability in dispositional traits
- Change is not always specific to an age, but is dependent on many factors
- There is a need for more research in this area

25

The Life-events Approach

- Chronological age itself does not influence adult personality
- Personality is
 - dependent upon historical and personal circumstances
 - guided by changes in our social clock
 - related to coping and adaptation ability

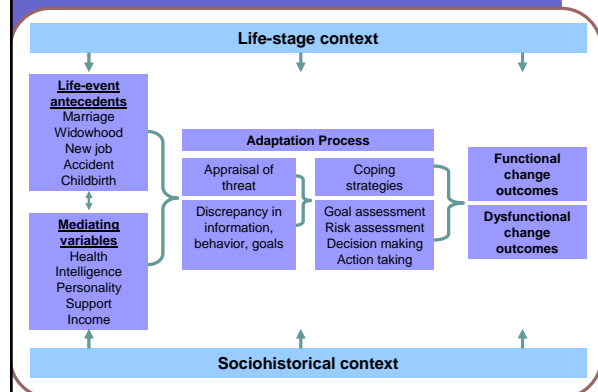
26

Life-events factors

- Antecedent Life-Event Stressors
 - Positive and negative life events are stressful
 - marriage, widowhood, new job, accident, birth of a child, etc.
- Mediating Factors
 - Internal: health, intelligence
 - External: salary, social support
- Adaptation Process
 - Appraisal of threat and coping strategies
 - Impact depends on personal & historical timing
- Consequent Outcomes
 - Adaptive → functional change
 - Maladaptive → dysfunctional change

27

Life-events Framework



Theory characteristics

- **Trait** theories emphasize **differences** across individuals but **similarities** across situations
- **Stage** theories emphasize **similarities** across individuals and **changes** across life situations
- **Life-events** frameworks emphasize **differences** across **both** individuals and situations

30

McAdams's Life-story Model

- Argues that people create a **life story**, an internalized narrative with a beginning, middle, and an anticipated ending
- 7 essential features
 - Narrative tone
 - Image
 - Theme
 - Ideological setting
 - Nuclear episodes
 - Character
 - An ending
- Adults reformulate their life stories throughout adulthood at the conscious and unconscious levels

31

Whitbourne's Identity Theory

- People build conceptions of how their lives should proceed
- They create a unified sense of their past, present, and future, the **life-span construct**
- Identity changes over time via Piaget's concepts of assimilation and accommodation
- 2 parts
 - A **scenario** which includes future expectations or a game plan for one's life; it is strongly related to age norms
 - A **life story** or personal narrative history that organizes past events into a coherent sequence

32

Self-Concept

- The organized, coherent, integrated pattern of self-perceptions that includes self-esteem and self-image
 - In a 14-year longitudinal study, self-concept was found to be stable and to influence interpretation of life events
- Kegan
 - Self-concepts across adulthood are related to the cognitive-developmental level
 - Proposes six stages of development which correspond to levels of cognitive development
 - Emphasizes that self-concept and personality does not occur in a vacuum

33

Possible Selves

- Created by projecting yourself into the future and thinking about what you would like to become, and what you are afraid of becoming
- Age differences have been observed in both hoped-for and feared selves
 - YA and MA report family issues as most important (also work)
 - MA and OA report personal issues to be most important
 - All groups included physical aspects as part of their most feared selves
 - Interestingly, YA and MA see themselves as improving in the future, while OA do not

34

Positive Psychology

- **Positive psychology** is the study of ordinary human strengths and virtues
- **Positive emotions** make people accepting of a wider range of possible actions
- How does this relate to what we know about:
 - Postformal thinking? Wisdom? Morality?
- The Nun Studies
 - Nuns who expressed positive emotions in written essays lived longer than others
 - Quality of life is higher for nuns expressing positive emotions

35

Subjective Well-Being

- = evaluation of life as pleasant with few pains and problems; happiness; life satisfaction
- What predicts well-being?
 - *Not related to:*
 - **age:** as high as in any other age group, across cultures
 - "**ease**" of life: executive positions, repetitive jobs, and passive activities are not correlated
 - *Related to:*
 - **stability:** people who are happy when young tend to remain happy as they age
 - strong **social networks**
 - self-rated **health**

36

Optimism versus pessimism

- Optimism is associated with: health, longer life, achievement, goal-directedness, positive mood, success in many areas, and happiness
- Reducing pessimism improves mental health, but pessimism can sometimes be adaptive.
 - Some people use defensive pessimism as a way of protecting themselves from adverse outcomes
 - Pessimism can lead to social support and reassurance which fosters improved in mental health

37