Trait Perspective
Hans and Sybil Eysenck

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Background—History

- **Hans Jürgen Eysenck**
  - born March 4, 1916, in Berlin, Germany
  - moved to England in 1930s because opposed Nazi party
  - 1940 received PhD from the Department of Psychology at University College London
  - 1947 wrote book *Dimensions of Personality*
  - professor of psychology at the Institute of Psychiatry (part of King’s College London) 1955-1983
  - died of brain tumor September 4, 1997
studied personality using method of factor analysis, a statistical technique introduced by Charles Spearman

believed in two main personality factors, which he described in *Dimensions of Personality*
- neuroticism (N)—the tendency to express negative emotions
- extraversion (E)—the tendency to enjoy positive events, especially social ones

thought differences in individuals’ behavior determined by relative prevalence of neuroticism and extraversion
- high N and high E—choleric type
- high N and low E—melancholic type
- low N and high E—sanguine type
- low N and low E—phlegmatic type

studies determined that personality is organized in a hierarchy consisting of types, traits, habitual responses, and specific responses
Theory/Terms

- theory based primarily on physiology and genetics—interested in temperament
  - temperament—the aspect of personality that exists from birth
- divided personality into two biologically-based categories of temperament:
  - Extraversion/Introversion
    - extraversion characterized by being outgoing, talkative, and in need of external stimulation
    - Eysenck's arousal theory of extraversion—everybody has certain optimal level of arousal at which he/she performs best
      - extraverts chronically under-aroused and need external stimulation to bring them up to an optimal level of performance
      - introverts chronically over-aroused and need peace and quiet to bring them to an optimal level of performance
  - Neuroticism/Stability
    - neuroticism or emotionality characterized by high levels of negative affect such as depression and anxiety
    - neuroticism based on activation thresholds in the part of the brain responsible for the fight-or-flight response
      - activation can be measured by heart rate, blood pressure, cold hands, sweating, and muscular tension
      - neurotic people, who have low activation thresholds and are unable to control their emotional reactions, experience negative affect in the face of minor stressors
      - emotionally stable people, who have high activation thresholds and good emotional control...
• the two dimensions (axes), extraversion-introversion and emotional stability-instability, define four quadrants:
  • **stable extraverts** *(sanguine qualities such as outgoing, talkative, responsive, easygoing, lively, carefree, good leaders)*
  • **unstable extraverts** *(choleric qualities such as touchy, restless, excitable, changeable, impulsive, irresponsible)*
  • **stable introverts** *(phlegmatic qualities such as calm, even-tempered, reliable, controlled, peaceful, thoughtful, careful, passive)*
  • **unstable introverts** *(melancholic qualities such as quiet, reserved, pessimistic, sober, rigid, anxious, moody)*

• further research demonstrated the need for a third category of temperament:
  • **Psychoticism/Socialization**
    • psychoticism associated with aggression and liability to have a psychotic episode
    • Eysenck suggested that psychoticism associated with higher levels of testosterone
Table describing traits associated with the three temperaments in Eysenck's model of personality:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychoticism</th>
<th>Extraversion</th>
<th>Neuroticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aggressive</td>
<td>sociable</td>
<td>anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assertive</td>
<td>irresponsible</td>
<td>depressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>egocentric</td>
<td>dominant</td>
<td>guilt feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unsympathetic</td>
<td>lack of reflection</td>
<td>low self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manipulative</td>
<td>sensation-seeking</td>
<td>tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achievement-oriented</td>
<td>impulsive</td>
<td>moody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dogmatic</td>
<td>risk taking</td>
<td>hypochondriac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>expressive</td>
<td>lack of autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tough minded</td>
<td>active</td>
<td>obsessive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Character Analysis/Terms

- **Lester Burnham**
  - previously **stable extravert**—lived a lively and carefree life
  - becomes **unstable extrovert** as wife and job wear him down—becomes restless, impulsive, and irresponsible
    - examples: buys dream car, gets a job with "as little responsibility as possible," and attempts to copulate with his daughter's best friend
- **Carolyn Burnham**
  - **unstable introvert**
    - tries to appear stable by projecting an image of peacefulness (playing quiet jazz music at dinner) and outward serenity
    - actually is anxious and moody
    - characteristics polarize as the movie progresses—becomes more outwardly confident while further deteriorating internally
      - example: repeats "I will not be a victim," while in car holding gun
- **Jane Burnham**
  - **unstable introvert**
    - pessimistic view of life, quiet and sober in most social situations
    - example of pessimism: scene in which Ricky is filming her and asking if she...
Character Analysis/Terms

- **Ricky Fitz**
  - **stable introvert**
    - even-tempered, controlled, and reliable (although some think he seems crazy)—has great control over his emotions
    - example: scene in which his father beats him and kicks him out of the house—Ricky gets angry but stays more collected than most people would

- **Colonel Frank Fitz**
  - **unstable introvert**
    - rigid and moody
    - example: beats wife and son and constantly makes homophobic statements
      - fear of people finding out that he is gay makes him over-aroused, so making these statements and abusing the people around him gives him serenity
Character Analysis/Terms

• Angela
  • unstable extrovert
    • comes off as outgoing, perfect, blond teenager, but actually insecure, restless, and irresponsible
    • examples of impulsivity: tries to insult Jane, declares that they are not friends anymore, then tries to have sex with Jane's father

• Buddy
  • stable extrovert
    • knows exactly how to take advantage of unstable women
    • outgoing, talkative, carefree, and projects an image of leadership and power
      • these qualities are attractive, especially to those who lack them, like Carolyn
Healthy/Unhealthy Personality

• emphasis on describing traits as opposed to explaining behavior, so not too concerned with healthy vs. unhealthy personality
• all personality types are equal
• healthy to understand one’s personality so can put oneself in positions to succeed
• though some traits (emotional instability, neuroticism) are unhealthy
Detailed Character Analysis

- Angela Hayes
  - extravert, acts confident
  - favorite world is external—prefers to concentrate on social interactions rather than occupy herself with internal reflection
  - trait psychologists use Big Five factors to describe personality (development on Eysenck’s three factors of psychoticism, extraversion, neuroticism)
  - each of Big Five factors exists along continuum, describe personality by where the subject falls along continuum
    - Angela’s Big Five factors:
      - emotional stability: emotionally unstable
      - extraversion: extraverted
      - openness: open
      - agreeableness: disagreeable (only concerned with her own desires)
      - conscientiousness: unconscientious (doesn’t think about consequences of her actions on others)
Detailed Character Analysis

- Angela Hayes (continued)
  - personality doesn’t develop throughout movie—trait perspective focused on enduring personality characteristics
  - debate about whether behavior is a result of personality or specific environment
  - trait psychologists assert that, while the situation does influence behavior, a person’s traits remain largely consistent throughout his/her life and in varying situations
    - scores of individual’s personality tests taken seven years apart correlate fairly well, especially in older subjects
  - Angela’s consistent extraverted and bold behavior in different situations (with Angela, Ricky, Lester) supports trait perspective
Detailed Character Analysis

- Angela Hayes (continued)
  - trait perspective not focused on explaining behavior
  - biologically, extraverts have low brain arousal, which causes them to seek external stimulation, and a less active frontal lobe
    - frontal lobe not involved in making decision to flirt with Lester—not thinking about implications of her actions on Jane, Lester, herself, Carolyn, and everyone else