Allports and cattells use and theory

Psychology

Allport's and Cattell's use of trait theory Institute Introduction Trait theory approaches the of personality from the perspective of understanding different traits. Trait theory analyzes personality structure through measuring, identifying and categorizing the differences and similarities in personality traits or characteristics. According to the theory, human personality is made up of a number of dispositions or broad traits. These are the traits people refer to when describing another person as kind, even-tempered or outgoing. A trait is a stable and enduring characteristic which drive individuals to behave in a particular manner.

Unlike other theories used to explain individual personalities such as humanistic theories and psychoanalytic theory developed by Sigmund Freud, trait theory focuses on the differences between people. Each individual had traits that are unique to them which combine and interact with each other to form a personality unique to every individual (De Pauw & Mervielde, 2010).

Discussion

Trait theory has been used by several psychologists with the aim of understanding people better. Work on the trait theory started in 1930 when Gordon Allport went through the dictionary and identified over 4000 words used as traits to tell the difference between people. According to Allport, each individual has a set of unique traits not shared by anyone else and stresses personality uniqueness. Though there are traits that may be shared, for example between twins and other siblings, there will be traits that are completely unique which Allport defines as personal dispositions. Personal dispositions are unique and few in number (Robbins, 2007).

Using the 4000 words used to describe personality, Allport grouped them into three main categories. The first group comprises of cardinal traits which

dominate an individual's life with some known specifically for that trait. For example descriptive terms like Machiavellian, Christ-like or narcissism are traits identified in an individual and stand out that the individual is known for the trait. These were traits so pronounced in an individual that they are synonymously used when referring to them. Cardinal traits are rare, develop and are revealed later in life (Jaušovec et al, 2006).

Central traits are used by Allport to refer to general characteristics forming the basic foundation of an individual. While central traits may not be as dominating as the cardinal traits, they are the general characteristics used to describe other people. They include terms such as honest, intelligent or anxious. Secondary traits are dispositions that are not always apparent and only manifest under special circumstances for example anxiety when speaking in front of people in a huge group or impatience when waiting in line (Jaušovec et al, 2006).

Raymond Cattell takes a somewhat different approach to the trait theory. Cattell developed the theory as established by Allport and came up with fewer words that can be used to describe personality. Allport came up with thousands of words that describe personality. From this list, Cattell derived 171 words used to describe personality. He further made a distinction between source traits and surface traits. He came up with 35 surface traits by clustering correlated traits such as honest-dishonest, wise-foolish, affectionate-cold (Plotnik & Kouyoumjian, 2011.

Using the factor analysis, Cattell was able to identify closely related terms hence reducing the number of personality traits to just 16. These 16 traits form the source traits which form the basis for human personality. Some of these traits include dominance v. submissiveness, cheerfulness v. depressed

or tender v. mindedness. In addition, Cattel developed sixteen personality factor questionnaires (16PF) a tool that is widely used for personality assessment (Plotnik & Kouyoumjian, 2011).

Conclusion

Allport and Cattell use of the traits theory is similar. First, both extracted their personality traits from the dictionary and agreed that each individual's personality is unique. While Allport identified 4000 traits, the list was too long hence difficult to use. Cattell worked on this list and reduced it to a manageable number of 16. Secondly, both psychoanalysts identify the source or cardinal traits that form the basis for an individual's personality. The source or cardinal traits determine how an individual leads their life and every other word that will be used to describe them. The two also use the trait theory to come up with secondary traits that are general characteristics used to describe an individual. In conclusion, the two use the trait theory for the same purpose. This is especially true since Cattell worked to improve on the already developed list by Allport. For this to happen, they must have approach the matter from the same perspective.

References

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