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Discuss how trait theories of personality account for individual differences in behaviour.

Trait theories of personality explain individual differences by stating that a trait is usually steady over the course of a person's life (Maltby et al., 2017). This then influences how an individual would react and behave in certain situations. Sometimes they can react differently, but it is commonly steady throughout their lifetime and is believed that there is something common internally (Maltby et al., 2017). The trait theories observed in this essay will be the five-factor model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) which uses five traits to explain personality (Maltby et al., 2017). The other theory being looked at is HEXACO this is developed on from the five-factor model adding in the trait of honesty-humility (Ashton et al., 2014). Also, considering Hans Eysenck theory in relation to biology (Maltby et al., 2017). Personality is defined as in psychology as the "characteristics, or the qualities typical of that individual" (Maltby et al., 2017, p. 32). Behaviour is defined as how a human acts particularly towards another person (Oxford Languages, 2025). An example of a trait is neuroticism it suggests that someone with high levels of this trait experience mood swings. Whereas someone with a low score demonstrate a more stable mood. Though everyone can experience sadness over their life as it is a normal emotion (Maltby et al., 2017).

The first trait theory being considered is the five-factor model (FFM) is combined of five traits these being extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. This trait theory looks at measuring levels of each trait to see what an individual scores on each (Soto & Jackson, 2020). To study these traits in a person a self-assessment test is normally conducted where an individual gives a rating on the level they agree with the statement provided (Ashton et al., 2014). This has been assessed by using the big five inventory (Sleep et al.,

2020). Corr and Matthews (2020) stated a weakness of this kind of test is that the questions given could not be understood by some individuals taking the test. Others may not be able to rate themselves negatively. This therefore causes some inaccurate results (Corr & Matthews, 2020). Many psychologists that focus on personality agree that the FFM helps to capture the most important areas of an individual's personality (Soto & Jackson, 2020). Neuroticism tends to be one of the traits closely looked at within a clinical setting. High levels of neuroticism usually indicate a person is more prone to sadness and anxiety. It is also commonly known as emotional instability in people with high levels and are also more prone to mental illnesses (Widiger, 2016). In terms of behaviour Soto and Jackson (2020) suggest that people with high levels of agreeableness tend to behave in a kind manner towards others. Whereas individuals with low levels act cold. This suggests that people with the high levels of agreeableness are more friendly individuals (Soto & Jackson, 2020). Individuals who have high levels of conscientiousness are well organised this suggest that they are more likely to start a task within a good time frame such as an essay (Soto & Jackson, 2020). Golberg (1993 as cited in Maltby et al., 2017) did a comparison of Eysenck theory and the five-factor model concluding that neuroticism and extraversion are quite similar traits. Widiger (2016) states that the strength of the FFM is that it is not based on theoretical. He notes that while it does have "theoretical models" that it is mainly neutral. Therefore, allowing flexibility and other psychological approaches to be used to explain it (Widiger, 2016).

The next trait theory being looked at is HEXACO this trait theory includes the traits honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience. Each trait accounting for a letter in the name (Ashton et

al., 2014). This theory is still highly adopted in trait theory now. Specifically, being used for many vocational areas like in the political field and in religion (Ashton et al., 2014). The structure of this trait theory largely relates to the five-factor model. However, the traits honesty-humility, agreeableness and emotionality are not the same as the FFM. It had aimed to capture traits that were not seen in that model (Ashton et al., 2014). An example of trait theory in relation to behaviour is that someone who has a high level of extraversion is expected to be outgoing and enjoy being in social settings though they can be comfortable being quiet in a social situation. Extroverts are more likely to want to socialise with friends. This therefore shows that behaviour linked to extraversion is that an individual is more comfortable engaging with others in a social setting than someone with lower levels (Zettler et al., 2020). The added trait of honesty-humility allows a broader perspective of traits to quite cover in the FFM. These being that on the high-end level an individual displays trait of being genuine and not boastful. This suggests that they tend to put others above themselves. Someone with lower levels indicates that they are more willing to exploit others for their own gain (Zettler et al., 2020). Zettler et al (2020) mentions environmental behaviour where an individual with high levels of this trait is more likely to help to improve the environment around them even if it negatively affects themselves. The strengths of this trait theory are it adds on traits that are not looked at throughout the FFM giving a deeper view on someone's individual behaviour (Zettler et al., 2020). Zettler et al (2020) found a weakness of this theory is that it lacks large empirical studies.

Hans Eysenck was one of the most influential figures in the 20th century for personality and individual differences (Boyle et al., 2016). His look on explaining trait theories for personality was them having a biological basis to personality (Boyle et al., 2016). He wanted to explain this by combining parts of experimental psychology with

different ways of measuring individual differences (Revelle, 2016). Hans Eysenck had three super traits he used these being extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism (Maltby et al., 2017). Maltby et al (2017) discusses how Hans Eysenck explains behaviour through personality. He states that by watching an individual interacting with a friend you can begin to see how their personality is based on how they behave. If someone is enjoying interacting with their friend, he states that you can assume that person has the trait seen as sociability (Maltby et al., 2017). To test personality traits, he used questionnaires where an individual would answer based on their self (Boyle et al., 2016). He believed that personality traits had a biological basis. These traits coming from the conceptual nervous system (Matthews & Gilliland, 1999).

To explain different reasons of how In the Greek times physicians like Hippocrates believed that the four humours accounted for personality. These being black bile, phlegm, blood and yellow bile. They believed that an excess of them would cause differences in personality in relation to behaviour (Ashton, 2007). Biological reasons are seen throughout trait theories like Hans Eysenck theory (Boyle et al., 2016). However, some psychologists believe that traits of personality can be from neurotransmitters this is where our behaviours could come from. It is also suggested that individual traits of personality could come from the brain structure and hormones (Ashton, 2007).

Overall, trait theories of personality can help to explain why individuals have different personalities and how this effect the way they behave. However, there are some limitations to this. For example, in the five-factor theory model as the

assessments are questions/statements that a person must rate how much they agree on this statement. It can become inaccurate as some people may not know what the statement means or they think of themselves highly and cannot give themselves a bad rating. Therefore, this does not necessarily show a person true personality as it comes from some biases (Corr & Matthews, 2020). Although there are these weaknesses, trait theories are still a good way at understanding individual's unique personalities through ideas on different levels of each trait (Zettler et al., 2020). There are many types of trait theories and ways of measuring personality (Maltby et al., 2017). Throughout this essay the trait theories of the five-factor model (Costa & McCrae, 1992), HEXACO and Hans Eysenck three traits theory have been discussed and the strengths and weaknesses of each. The traits in each theory can explain why an individual acts differently. For example, in the HEXACO model with higher levels of extraversion they are more likely to be outgoing and enjoy spending time with friends and others than individuals with low levels. This shows that it can help account for different behaviours (Zettler et al., 2020).

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