

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

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Traits are the building block of who we are individually, how we express ourselves and connect with others and how we differ from one person to the next. Personality itself is defined by the individual ways in which a person thinks, feels and acts across circumstances over a long period of time. Traits make up a large component of these patterns. Trait theories themselves aim to distinguish the basic behaviours that a person exhibits and classify them into the basic traits we have observed over time. In psychology, this is important as it allows us to understand and predict a person's behaviour. Psychologists use a variety of methods to measure this and many trait theories to do so have been proposed throughout psychological research. The aim of this essay is to discuss two trait theories, the Big Five introduced by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae and the Sixteen Personality Factor Model by Raymond Cattell and examine how these theories account for and measure individual differences in personality and behaviour.

One of the most well-known and arguably most influential trait theory is the Big 5, established by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae in the 1990's. The Big 5 concludes that there are five broad measurements that personality and behaviour is understood which are: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism otherwise commonly known in the acronym OCEAN. Each of these traits can be classified by definition and measured. Openness is seen as an individual's openness to experience and how this may reveal how creative or curious a person is or welcoming to novelty. Conscientiousness is a person's desire or tendency to complete tasks well and how attentive a person is to certain circumstances. Extraversion looks at how much a person enjoys being with others. Agreeableness is focused around one's ability to connect with others and is associated with a person's warmth and kindness towards others. Lastly Neuroticism is how emotionally stable and self-conscious you are. These

traits can influence how a person thinks, feels and portrays themselves day-to-day and how they react in situations.

The Big Five is measured typically by a person completing “the Big Five Inventory” which is a survey that measures each of these five characteristics on a scale. The survey proposes numerous statements and questions, and the recipient must answer how much they agree or disagree with the statements. Depending on how much a person agrees or disagrees will confirm how high they fall on each characteristic. For example, those with high extraversion are typically talkative, very sociable and gain energy from being around others, therefore if you tend to strongly agree with statements around enjoying interacting with others and being talkative, chances are you will be evaluated as a person with high extraversion.

Overall, it has been showed to predict behaviour well however does not account for everything and it is argued that we must look beyond the five characteristics to understand people on a deeper level.

Another trait theory which has made its highlight in understanding behaviour is the Sixteen Personality Factor proposed by Raymond Cattell. This, unlike the big five looks at a trait which accounts for personality. This identifies the following: warmth, apprehensiveness, dominance, sensitivity, reasoning, emotional stability, liveliness, risk consciousness, social boldness, vigilance, abstractness, openness to change, self-reliance, privateness, perfectionism and tension. The difference with Cattell’s method is it gives a much more detailed profile of a person’s traits. Cattell designed this method through factor analysis. By examining Allports (a Psychologist known for his research in personality) list of common and distinguishable and reducing them down through their commonality, he was able to use the ones in which are shared upon many in the population to form the 16 personalities we see mainly everyday.

These are measured on a scale from high to low not a dichotomous level of either absent or present. Unlike The Big Five, the Cattell’s Sixteen Personality Factor is measured by completing a survey in which a person must respond to statements regarding how much they agree or disagree. The results will tell you where you land on the measurement ranging between the highest and lowest you can be on each scale. A low score is 4 or below whereas a high score is 7 or above

Overall, this trait theory has tested high in its validity through research although some do criticise it for being too broad. Nonetheless, this trait theory is still used for the purpose of assessing personality and in other areas such as career development.

When comparing both the the Big Five and Sixteen personality Factor we see that although they share many characteristics there are most certainly distinct differences.

Overall, the Big Five has been more robust in its scientific evidence and validity . Studies have shown that across various cultures, the Big Five Theory is supported and recognised to show differences in individual behaviour. For example, neuroticism seems to vary in geographical regions whereby there are more or less social stressors .However, the 16 personality Factor in comparison does not uphold its strength in scientific validity. Studies have shown that results vary much more when people retake the test and this may lead to a lack of confidence in their understanding of a persons personality .Where the 16 personality factor has also been critiqued for being too broad whereas the Big 5 has only accounted for 45% of differences in individual behaviours. As for their specific similarities, they are alike in their measurements of each trait theory and are both critiqued for being too broad although Cattell may be critiqued more so than Costa and McCraes model

In conclusion, both the Big Five personality Factor and the Sixteen personality factor are both valid in their identification of personality traits and how these account for differences in behaviour . The Big Five may be more accepted globally as it accounts for the basic traits we see worldwide and can be important to help us understand ourselves and each other. Furthermore, due to its more robust data we can have more confidence in its ability to identify traits and predict individual behaviour. Nevertheless, Cattell's model provides a more detailed picture of an individual so that we can understand ourselves and each other in more depth. Although they may both differ it can certainly be said that they have made major contributions to our insight of trait theories and how they account for differences in individual behaviour

Readings

[Exploring the Big Five Personality Test: What It Reveals About You - Good Health Psych | Psychiatric Services for Adults, And Adolescents In NYC](#)

[Cattell's 16 Personality Factors](#)

[Allport's Trait Theory: Foundations of Modern Personality Psychology • Psychology Town](#)

[Whole Trait Theory - ScienceDirect](#)

[Big 5 Personality Traits: The 5-Factor Model of Personality](#)

[Personality and performance: moving beyond the Big 5 - ScienceDirect](#)