

NEW APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF PERSONALITY IN CULTURE

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to analyse different approaches of personality with special focus on how personality traits and culture interact to shape the behaviour of individuals. It claims that the basic tendencies representing universal personality traits are not culturally variable. However, it also highlights that culture has an important influence on personality development and expression.

Keywords

personality, traits, culture, behaviour, universality

Összefoglalás

Ezen tanulmány célja, hogy elemezze a személyiség meghatározására irányuló teóriákat, különös hangsúlyt fektetve a személyiség és a kultúra egymásra való hatására, mely hozzájárul az egyén viselkedésének formálásához. Hangsúlyozza az alapvető tendenciákat képviselő univerzális személyiségjegyek kulturális stabilitását. Ugyanakkor azt is kiemeli, hogy a kultúra jelentős befolyást gyakorol a személyiség fejlődésére és kifejezőmódjára.

Kulcsszavak

személyiség, tulajdonságok, kultúra, viselkedés, univerzalitás

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Introduction: A Bridge between Personality, Social Psychology and Culture

Research in personality and research in social psychology have been directed by opposing views of human nature, with personality psychologists consistently looking for the influence of differences between individuals in their traits or dispositions, and social psychologists categorically seeking for the impact of the situational and interpersonal context in which individuals find themselves. Social psychologists accentuate the dynamism of situations to influence social behaviour, whereas personality psychologists claim that situations are selected and arranged by individuals, and individuals are inspired in their selection and choices of situations by their own personalities. Personality psychology also points out that individuals' traits or dispositions are sources of regularities in their behaviour, thus, for example, individuals with extraverted dispositions tend to behave in approachable and sociable manner across situations and over time. Whereas social psychology highlights that the regularities that prevail in situations foster and enhance regularities in behaviour.

The interactionist perspective on the linkages between individuals and situations provides the foundation for a bridge between personality and social psychology. This interrelatedness was highlighted by Lewin (1951) whose theory concentrated on the concept of the interdependent reactions of the individual and the environment. He described personality as a product of the historical development of the interaction between the individual (a physiological organism) and the environment. Lewin's concept of life span emphasised the enduring interaction of inner and outer forces, such as personal needs, values, and attitudes, as well as environmental conditions, which together regulate an individual's behaviour within a particular setting. Lewin considered behaviour as being dependent on both the characteristics of the individual and the environment, and thus, he profoundly contributed to the importance of linking personality to social psychology.

LeVine (1973) pointed out that the basic elements of a framework for studies of culture and personality include the ecology, environments, history, maintenance system, the interindividual system (or socialisation processes), innate behaviours (e.g. need activation), learned behaviours (e.g. conformity), and the projective system (e.g. myth, religion). He claimed that personality refers to individual differences reproduced in innate and learned behaviours, as well as behaviours within the projective system. Thus, personality is the sum of innate and learned behaviours, and the behaviours that are part of the projective systems. It echoes the million years of biological and cultural evolution, the socialisation experiences, and the impact of recent and historical events. Boyd and Richerson (1985) defined culture as the sum of the maintenance system, the environments, and the interindividual system. Thus, this framework clearly manifests that culture and personality are strongly interrelated.

Diverse Perspectives on Personality

Personality psychology focuses on the dynamic and organised set of characteristics that individuals possess that uniquely influences their cognitions, affects, motivations, and behaviours. The four main goals of personality psychology are constructed firstly to establish the basic ways individuals differ from each other, and to help them find out who they are and where they fit in; secondly to identify the internal processes and structures that link various parts of the individual together; thirdly to interpret why individuals differ from each other, i.e. to analyse mechanisms and processes that regulate differences between individuals, and explain how these differences become manifest in their behaviour, and what consequences personality differences have for the lives of individuals; and fourthly to provide justification for interventions to enhance individuals' lives.

The pursuit of these goals has led to a far-reaching and ample variety of perspectives or schemes on individuals. These multiple schemes include, for example, McAdams' (1994)

three levels of personality, and Snyder and Ickes's (1985) three strategies for identifying and analysing consistency.

The three-tiered conceptual framework by McAdams conceptualises human personality via a developing pattern of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and constructive life narratives. The first level of personality describes individual tendencies formed in gene-environment interaction throughout the individual's development. This level contains temperament, personality traits, and personality dispositions that describe the underlying and extensive differences between individuals (i.e. how individuals act and react). Characteristic adaptations are descriptions of personal desires, life tasks, and coping strategies that are associated with specific times, situations, and social roles (i.e. what individuals want, value, and how they cope). Thus, this tier is characterised by motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental adaptations that have a close connection with the individual's life context. Whereas dispositional traits generally describe what an individual is like, characteristic adaptations represent situation-related psychological processes. The so-called narrative identity reproduces the individual's past life and shapes a future. It is a psychological foundation of the self that is strongly formed by the surrounding culture, contextual factors, and social relations. Culture guides what kinds of stories are available and how to express those (Tompos 2014). By creating life stories, an individual integrates dispositional traits, life tasks, and goals, and composes a conceivable life story.

McAdams and Pals (2006) argue that there are three ways in which culture influences personality. Firstly, culture can have a moderate influence on individual displays of behaviour within certain contexts and environments. Secondly, culture can also have a strong impact on the individual's characteristic adaptations, simply because motives, goals, self-image, and life experiences are shaped by the culture in which the individual lives. For example, cultures seen as individualist focus on the promotion of the individual's own goals and desires, while cultures seen as collectivist focus on the individual being part of that culture's wider goals and desires. Thirdly, culture reveals its deepest and most profound influence on life stories, i.e. it provides a menu of themes, images, and plots for the psychosocial construction of the narrative identity. This construction moves personality from broad dispositional traits and specific responses to characteristic adaptations to the challenge of making meaning out of one's life in a complex world. Culture influences the development of traits, adaptations, and life narratives in different ways: by providing display rules for the phenotypic expression of trait tendencies, by influencing the context and timing of characteristic adaptations, and by providing narrative forms out of which individuals make meaning of their own lives.

Snyder and Ickes (1985) reviewed three major perspectives on the role of personality in social behaviour: the dispositionalist (traits determine behaviour); the situationalist (social situation determines behaviour); and the interactionist (behaviour is determined by both personality and situations). They endorsed a dynamic version of the interactional strategy and emphasised the importance of situations when individuals interact. They argued that individuals select situations that favour the expression of their personality traits, and that feedback from the situations often leads to a sequence of modifications in the expression of the trait.

Dispositional and Factor-based Theories of Personality

The oldest and most incessant approach to personality focuses on the contributions of dispositional theorists who highlight the significance of long-term characteristics in personality, while acknowledging that traits blend with the environment to form behaviour. Gordon Allport (1937) was a dispositional theorist who stressed the complexity of personality and the need for an interdisciplinary approach to it. He noted that traits were relatively perpetual dispositions; they influenced the frequency and intensity of actions and experiences;

and they could be expressive or coping. He highlighted that far from being static entities, traits were dynamic organisers of behaviour in transaction with environmental circumstances. His concept of personality as a dynamic organisation stresses that although personality consists of an orderly system of components, the system is in a constant state of change and personal growth. Thus, each experience that is encountered alters or fortifies the individual's personality. Allport claimed that personality is psychophysical in nature and therefore, personality consists of an integration of the mind (such as feelings, ideas, and thoughts) and the body (such as hormones and the nervous system). Furthermore, he considered personality as the determinant of behaviour, and emphasised that it functions as a compelling and directive function in the individual's adaptive and expressive thoughts and behaviour. Allport's discussion of traits influenced a line of dispositional approaches to personality that culminated in the work of Raymond Cattell and Hans Eysenck.

Allport distinguished between common traits and personal dispositions. A common trait is a hypothetical construct that is used to compare individuals within a given culture. Allport claims that individuals in any given culture tend to develop along similar modes or lines of adjustment. For example, in a competitive society, most individuals develop a level of assertiveness that can be compared with the level of assertiveness in others. A personal disposition is like a trait, a general determining characteristic, but it is typical to the individual who has it. Whereas common traits place individuals into comparable categories, personal dispositions more precisely depict an individual's uniqueness.

Allport conducted considerable research on expressive behaviour, i.e. behaviour expressing personality traits. Such behaviour is spontaneous and reflects the basic aspects of personality. Expressive behaviour is also difficult to change, has no specific purpose, and is usually manifested without the individual's awareness. He also identified coping behaviour, which is directed towards specific purposes, and is consciously planned and carried out. Coping behaviour is determined by needs motivated by the situation and is directed towards bringing about some change in the individual's environment. To explain the difference between expressive and coping behaviours, Allport offered the example of public speaking. The speaker communicates with the audience on two levels. The formal, planned level (coping behaviour) includes the speech content. The informal, unplanned level (expressive behaviour) consists of the speaker's movements, gestures, and vocal inflections, which express elements of his personality. Allport linked expressive behaviours such as facial expressions, vocal inflections, idiosyncronic gestures and mannerism to personality traits. Research has shown that basic aspects of personality are considerably revealed by facial expressions. For example, neuroticism reveals itself in looks of anger, contempt, and fear. Agreeableness shows laughter, whereas conscientiousness is marked by expressions of embarrassment including, for example, a tightly controlled smile, and an averted gaze.

Raymond Cattell's study of personality was to anticipate what individuals would do or how an individual would behave in response to a given stimulus situation. Cattell (1957) believed that the exploration of traits would help understand the structure and function of personality. He distinguished between surface traits and source traits. Surface traits are clusters of overt behaviour responses that appear to go together, such as adherence, honesty, self-discipline, and graciousness. Source traits have a straightforward structural influence on personality and thus determine the way individuals behave. Cattell identified sixteen basic source traits that are considered to be the building blocks of personality. His theory of personality has led to the development of sets of factors which are used to measure and examine the differences and relationships among people in diverse environments and contexts. Cattell believed that variations among cultural groups (for example, weather Americans are more extraverted than the British and less so than the Canadians) can be specified and quantified and thus contribute to anticipating behaviour and developing

appropriate responses. Cattell's theory has also had considerable influence on occupational psychology, since it provides personality testing procedures to reveal information to individuals on the kinds of occupations that might be compatible with their interest and abilities. Furthermore, his tests help make decisions about the placement of individuals in jobs suited to their talent and personalities.

Eysenck agreed with Cattell that factor analysis could assist in discovering the structure of human personality. However, he supplemented the method with personality tests and experimental studies that considered a wide range of variables. The Eysenck Personality Inventory in 1963 required twelve years of research and twenty factor analyses. His theory is based on three dimensions, defined as combinations of traits or factors. The three personality dimensions include extraversion versus introversion, neuroticism versus emotional stability, and psychoticism versus impulse control. Cross-cultural research demonstrates that Eysenck's three personality dimensions have been found consistently in more than thirty-five nations, including the United States, England, Japan, and Sweden. Eysenck (1970) defined personality as a more or less stable and enduring organisation of an individual's character, temperament, intellect, and physique which determines his unique adjustment to the environment. He viewed personality as hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy are specific responses, behaviours that can be observed. The next level is that of habitual responses, clusters of specific behaviours that characteristically recur in similar circumstances. Above this there are more generalised traits, clusters of related habitual responses such as Cattell's source traits. At the top of the hierarchy, related clusters of traits make up broad dimensions, or basic types, such as extraversion and introversion. Eysenck's research focused on the identification of these superfactors. Although environmental factors have a significant role to play, Eysenck believed that individual differences in the three major superfactors are primarily due to genetic determinants.

Eysenck confirmed the strong genetic basis of the primary personality in two ways: firstly, the same three personality orientations are found universally in different national groups; secondly, these traits show stability within given individuals over long periods of time. Eysenck noted that individuals differ in the degree to which they learn the rules of society. He proposed that, for example, introverts learn the rules more quickly and efficiently than do extraverts. Eysenck believed that the basis for these differences is genetic. He pointed out that introverts have chronically higher cortical arousal than extraverts. Despite the genetic basis of personality, Eysenck acknowledged the fact that personality development responds to socialisation. He rejected the view that, if hereditary is so important, modification of behaviour is impossible. Eysenck explained that predispositions for an individual to behave in a certain manner are genetically determined, however, these tendencies to respond are modified by environmental influences.

The Five-factor Model of Personality

Today, one of the most significant trait approaches in cross-cultural research is the five-factor model, which is built around five distinct and basic personality dimensions that appear to be universal for all human beings. The five dimensions of personality by Costa and McCrae (1985) include neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. This model encompasses all major dimensions of personality, and thus supersedes older trait models like Eysenck's.

The five-factor model is an interpretation of the big five factors. Historically, the big five arose out of two different attempts to identify basic factors of personality. One was the study of language, which led to a descriptive model of personality traits that has been replicated across different languages. The other was the factor analysis of personality

questionnaires about dispositional biological traits that are substantially inherited, which led to an explanatory hypothesis, the five-factor model.

Costa and McCrae's five-factor theory seeks to provide an overview of the functioning of an individual throughout his lifespan. Based on this theory, the core components of the personality system include basic tendencies, characteristic adaptations, objective biography, self-concept, and external influences. Basic tendencies refer to genetics, physical characteristics (e.g. age, race, gender), cognitive capacities (e.g. perceptual styles, general intelligence), physiological drives (e.g. need for oxygen, food), focal vulnerabilities (e.g. alcoholism-proneness), and personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness). These tendencies may be inherited, imprinted by early experience, or modified by disease or psychological intervention, but at any given period in the individual's life, they define the individual's potential and direction. Characteristic adaptations refer to learned behaviours (e.g. habits, daily routines), and interpersonal adaptations (e.g. social roles, relationships) which result from the interaction of the individual and the environment. The self-concept consists of knowledge, views, and evaluations of the self.

Kluckhohn and Murray (1953) claimed that the objective biography (e.g. overt behaviours, streams of consciousness, professional careers) refers to everything that an individual feels, thinks, says, and does from the start to the finish of his life. External influences include developmental influences (e.g. parent-child relations, education), the microenvironment (e.g. culture, historical era), and the macroenvironment (e.g. situational constraints, social cues, punishments). The ongoing functioning of the individual in creating adaptations and expressing them in thoughts, feelings, and behaviours is regulated by universal cognitive, affective, and volitional mechanisms which include perception, learning, planning, and choosing. Costa and McCrae's model is a distinction between basic tendencies and characteristic adaptations. Basic tendencies are biologically based, universal, and stable. Characteristic adaptations leading to specific behaviours arise out of the interaction of basic tendencies and external influences. These can vary throughout lifespan and across cultures. Thus an individual's basic tendency for openness is biologically rooted and stable, but how an individual expresses it can change over time.

The big five personality traits have been linked, for example, to work motivation and personality traits. Intrinsic motivation is associated with meaningfulness of work, autonomy, and responsibility, while extrinsic motivation is associated with job security benefits, and relationships with colleagues. Individuals who are high in openness to experience tend to seek jobs with intrinsic motivation. Extraversion is associated with an approach temperament and extrinsic motivation that generally responds to rewards, reinforcement, or feedback. Individuals high on neuroticism tend to move away from negative stimuli and respond to extrinsic motivation, stressing the importance of earning money more than job satisfaction. Openness has been associated with intrinsic motivation and the need for high-quality working conditions in creative fields that guarantee potential for growth, and autonomy. Conscientiousness has been connected with intrinsic motivation as well, whereas agreeableness is the only trait that has not been strongly linked with work motivation, although employers regard it as a highly desirable trait in employees.

The evolutionary approach highlights the universality of the five-factor model. It considers traits, such as conscientiousness (or the degree of persistence, control, motivation), neuroticism (or the degree of vulnerability to stress) and the other components of the five-factor model, as stable variations in systems that serve critical adaptive functions. This approach claims that, for example, conscientiousness may help individuals monitor the environment for dangers, and to persevere in task that are not intrinsically rewarding. MacDonald (1988) stated that the evolutionary approach suggests that individuals possess

evolved motive dispositions or needs, which are serviced by a universal set of personality dispositions that help individuals achieve their affective goals by managing personal and environmental resources. This resource management leads to concerns and tasks, which in turn lead to specific behaviours through which individuals achieve the goals specified by the evolved motive disposition.

Conclusion: Integration of Universal and Indigenous Approaches to Personality

Indigenous personalities are conceptualisations of personality developed in a particular culture that are specific only to that culture. Berry (1999) examined three indigenous personality concepts (the African, the Japanese, and the Korean), each of which was fundamentally different from Western concepts, which were based on the universality of personality traits. For example the African model views personality as consisting of three layers, each presenting a different aspect of the individual. The first layer, found at the core of the individual and personality, embodies a spiritual principle; the second layer involves a psychological vitality principle; the third layer a physiological vitality principle. The body forms the outer framework that houses all the three layers of the individual. The indigenous approach claims that it makes no sense to consider personality as a universal construct; instead, it makes more sense to understand each culture's personalities as they exist and have developed within that culture.

Work on indigenous personalities has led to the cultural indigenous perspective to personality. This approach sees culture and personality not as separate entities, but as a mutually constituted system in which each creates and maintains the other. This perspective is rooted in culture-specific perspectives of personality, and suggests that personalities are dependent on the cultures in which they exist, and reject the notion of universality. Thus, the challenge for the future is to benefit from a blending of universal (etic) approaches with emic (indigenous) approaches to personality.

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