Comparison & Uniqueness – The Individual and the Group

Idiographic and nomothetic

By examining what makes them unique? IDIOGRAPHIC

By comparing them to others? NOMOTHETIC

Different impulses animate these traditions

Idiographic

* aims not to reduce descriptors to broad dimensions
* but to get more at subtleties; to get at the uniqueness of people

Nomothetic

* Usually aims to assess traits to compare an individual’s score to a group mean
* To assess traits in this manner we use self-report questionnaires
* People answer based on their frame of reference

The Idiographic Approach

“An approach or style within social research that focuses on specific elements, individuals, events, entities and situations, documents and works of culture or of art and concentrates on what is particular to these.”

Chris Wharton (2006)

* Mapping the signature, the unique descriptors of a person
* The contexts in which they excel and those in which they are uncomfortable
* Persistent patterns of trying
* Conflicts
* Significant life events that define them

How particular traits are:

- expressed

- structured

- combined

In a particular individual

Relevant to:

* What goes on within a personality
* What the context brings to personality
* Structures that arise from places other than statistics
* If-then contingencies
* The Idiographic Approach
* Court reports
* Case studies
* Predicting behaviour in new situations
* Predicting the likelihood of recidivism or of kindness

The Nomothetic Approach

“research that highlights regularities and repeatable elements of form or behaviour as part of larger processes or patterns concerned with general laws and theories.

Chris Wharton (2006)

* broad band measures of personality
* the five factor model, EPQ & MPQ
* traits derived on inductive basis from factor analysis which simplifies large data structures
* statistics provide the structure
* Comparing the individual to aggregate scores
* Has its place

Averaging across a group

Winter suggests:

aggregated data or average scores based on groups of people can never provide an adequate basis for understanding and predicting the behaviour of individual persons.

What gets left out if you just compare a person’s score to the mean?

Miss out on:

* understanding the pattern & organization for that unique person
* an account of the development of personality
* how the different components of the system interact
* how context shapes experience

Much left out by contemporary trait models

* motives
* degree of insight
* intra-psychic conflict, procrastination,
* evaluation of oneself
* reactive attempts to change expression of temperament
* dynamic adaption to environment
* the individual
* Idiographic Theorists
* believe in the science of the individual person

Runyan (1983) outlines possible forms such a science might take:

* Searching for individualized traits particular to a given person
* identifying central themes in an individual life
* describing the patterning or organisation of variables within a single case
* exploring causal relationships among variables
* making predictions about a single case on the basis of trends or patterns

Allport (1936)

* Together with Odbert, went through the 1925 edition of Webster’s New International Dictionary and compiled a list of every word in the English language that might describe personality or personal behaviour
* 4504 words referring to enduring, public aspects of personality
* Even more words now
* What does one do with 4504 words to describe personality?
* Are there really that many separate traits?
* How do you boil this list down if you don’t use a nomothetic approach?

Allport (1936)

Not about positing basic traits or a certain number of basic traits

Rather, it is about the patterning and structuring of traits that are there

Most people can be adequately characterised by the right five to ten trait words or phrases

Allport & the case of Jenny (via Winter)

1946 – Allport publishes selections and abridgements from a series of letters written during 1926-1937

Penned by Jenny Masterson – 58 year-old widow at the beginning of the correspondence

Written to ‘Glenn’ and his wife ‘Isabel’ who were college roommates of her son ‘Ross’

1965 – Allport republishes letters in a book – “tell the story of a mother-son relationship and trace the course of a life beset by frustration and defeat” (Allport, 1965, p. v in Winter)

Jenny’s extreme possessiveness of son – periodic suspicions, recriminations, and hatred of any women in his life

But wait . . . .

Glenn = Gordon Allport!

Isabel = Allport’s wife Ada!

Jenny’s son was Allport and Ada’s college roommate!

Ross unexpectedly died from an infection in 1929 – “Jenny’s hostility and suspicion turn into full-fledged paranoia, [while] the more benign qualities seem to diminish” (Allport, 1965, p. 156 in Winter)

Allport’s take on Jenny . . .

1931 – Jenny applied to be admitted to a church-sponsored home for elderly women in NYC

Allport wrote a supporting letter of recommendation

“Striking and remarkable woman . . . a fascinating and appealing personality”:

* Self-denial almost defies description
* Highly cultivated, intelligent and aesthetic
* Devotion and frugality . . . commendable pride and utter integrity
* Superb manager of slender income
* Character is unquestionable . . . kindness to others
* Held aloof from intimate contacts . . . always helpful and generous
* Appreciative of any genuine manifestations of human kindness
* Critical of hypocrisy
* Austere philosophy of life
* Appreciative of beauty
* Vivid personality . . . part of Irish inheritance
* Great fortitude and courage
* Independence and solitude
* Bright, kind, conversational, and appreciative
* Requires dignity and mutual respect
* Quick to resent patronage or injustice

Human Observers

Allport asked 36 people to read published letters between Jenny and Glenn

then list the essential characteristics of Jenny as they saw them

combined list for judges was 198 traits (average of 5.5 per judge)

overlap meant that Allport could combine them into 8 clusters (all bar 13 of the traits fitted)

Computer analyses

Paige (1964, 1966) analysed letters by computer

classified important words on the basis of 83 broad categories "tags" (on basis of pre-existing dictionary)

Computer analysis

looked for co-occurrence of words across the entire set of letters

eg when Jenny uses the word POSSESS, what other tags did she use at the same time?

Paige used factor analysis to identify clusters of tags that occurred together in Jenny's letters

Possessiveness

He labelled as possessiveness the tags that arose:

Possess

attempt,

Ross along with

money talk

What did the co-occurrence show?

Reflected Jenny's "attempts to bind Ross to her by legal and financial means" (1966, p. 444).

Subjectivity & Objectivity

While the label “possessiveness” is his subjective decision, the co-occurrence of the tags in her letters is a matter of objective fact.

Computers & Humans

Did their ratings agree?

The computer & the observers have a fairly high level of agreement

What the computer got that the human observers missed

Sexuality: human observers missed it/were not prepared to report it

Sexuality themes:

- her often romantic description of her activities with her son

- her disgust at his 'immoral relations' with women

- her vicarious enjoyment of affection via her contact with Allport's family

Summary –

unlike merely comparing a person’s score to the mean…

An idiographic process allows you to look for unique or unusual combinations of adjectives within a broad trait cluster

Eg. Self-centredness combined with possessiveness = martyr complex (not true martyrdom)

Unity thema – resentment and defeat

How representative are the data?

letters are only a partial window in to a person

Gordon Allport selected which to analyse

careful not to ignore the background features (a widow, without family, or money, social security, medicare or welfare)

danger in seeing as part of personality something that is true of the situation

Walter Mischel example

Scientific Credentials of the Idiographic Approach

Conrad (1932)

Asked three teachers to rate 30 school kids on the basis of 210 traits

->only .50 overlap

Selecting which traits apply

When Conrad asked the teachers to asterisk any that were of 'central or dominating importance in the child's personality'

Quite different results…

For traits identified in this way, the overlap was nearly perfect at .95

Implication for the idiographic method

Can achieve scientific reliability

get inter-observer reliability which is an important requirement of science

Motives - definition

A particular motive is:

a relatively stable disposition to experience relatively more rapid arousal of that motive, by a relatively broader class of motive-related stimuli to a relatively greater height

…thus motives are dispositionally stable and motivationally contingent. (Winter, 1998 Psych Review).

That is - they are always part of your personality

But they have to be triggered to show

A broad array of things may trigger them

Motives vs. traits

Winter says

motives involve wishes, desires or goals that are often unconscious

whereas

traits channel or direct the way in which particular motives are expressed in particular actions throughout the life course

Winter, D.G., John, O.P., Stewart A.J. & Klohnen, E.C. (1998). Traits and Motives: Towards an Integration of Two Traditions in Personality Research, Psychological Review, 105 (2), 230-250.

Implicit & Explicit motivational systems

McClelland, Koestner & Weinberger (1989)

distinguished a i) traditional, strongly affect-associated implicit motivational system from ii) an explicit model of motivation based on cognition.

Motives

That drive what you do [implicit]

That drive what you say [explicit]

Explicit Motives

Self-concepts,

values and

personal goals

People may not be aware of their explicit motives

because their goal-related cognitions are actually schemas constructed around vivid memories or idealised self-conceptions.

OR

people may defend against knowledge of their true motives.

Implicit Motives

McClelland (1985) suggested that implicit motives embody highly generalized preferences derived from emotional experiences between the individual and his or her environment during early, pre-lingual socialization processes.

Tracking the unique, conflicted, implicit parts of personality

Even harder to introspect and self-report on our implicit motives

Implicit motives represent latent behavioural dispositions that lack symbolic representation

We can know our goals, but it is quite hard to assess our implicit motives…

If people can’t report on them, how can we assess them?

…as motives clearly express themselves in an individual’s fantasies, they are best measured by fantasy-based methods that attempt to measure motives indirectly.

Many studies have used the TAT-type picture story tests to examine the implicit system of human motivation.

Morgan & Murray’s (1935) Thematic Apperception Test [TAT]

What motives are coded for in the TAT?

Need for achievement -Nach,

Need for affiliation -Naff,

Need for power –Npower

Nach

Nachievement

– “a concern for excellence, for doing a good job or a better job – a ‘personal best’” (Winter, 1996, p. 140)

Coding Nach

Nach is coded for any expression indicating:

repeated mention of excellence or high standards along with obstacles

action to overcome obstacles

positive and negative anticipations

Naff

Naffiliation

– a concern for establishing maintaining or restoring a positive, affective relationship with another person or group of people and a concern for warm and close relations with others (Heyns, Veroff & Atkinson, 1958).

Coding Naff

Naff is coded for any expression indicating:

positive feelings towards others, activities of affiliation,

friendly, nurturant acts,

or sadness about the disruption of a relationship.

Npower

Npower

– one’s desire to influence or have an effect on the behaviour or emotions of other people (Winter, 1973)

Coding Npower

Npower is coded for:

responses indicating the effect, control or influence that a person or social institution has on another person, group or the world at large

(e.g. the forceful determination of behaviour, the provision of assistance or impressive display).

Socialisation

Socialisation differs across individuals & across cultures

therefore there are individual differences in motive characteristics and also differences between cultures

Hofer & Chasiotis (2004) – marked differences in cue strengths when a TAT-type-picture story was administered to German and Zambian adolescents

The typological approach

Rather than rich variety of the idiographic approach,

the typological approach:

- reduces the range of terms

to a number of fundamental trait dimensions,

according to a system of categories.

Typologies

Typologies are formal and based on explicit theories

Freud - too much or too little pleasure

-> fixation at a libidinal stage

Oral, Anal and Phallic

Oral - gullible, sucker, gourmand

Anal - emphasis on; control/defiance, time & place gave rise to traits of orderliness, stubbornness & parsimony or stinginess

Freud’s (1916) three character types:

Erotic: People who feel themselves to be exceptions

Narcissistic: Those who are wrecked by success

Obsessional: Criminals from a sense of guilt

NB: this was NOT his general theory of criminality but an unusual variant.

Jack Block

Block's longitudinal study -> typology of persons based on their

a) level of ego control (restraint of impulses & emotions)

b) ego resiliency (capacity to be calm under stress)

Jane Loevinger

Ego development

from conformity

to a more fully individuated stance

essential task of ego is synthesis and integration

as it carries this out, the ego develops in series of stages

Jane Loevinger

Assesses ego development using sentence-completion stems. A great method that combines the best of idiographic and nomothetic possibilities:

“Raising a family . . .”

“When a child won’t join in group activities . . .”

Jung

classic example of the typological approach

saw the source of motivation as an asexual life energy which could be predominantly diverted out towards the world [extraversion], or within [introversion]

What makes up a person’s type for Jung?

Two elements:

Attitude: extraversion or introversion

Dominant psychological function: thinking, feeling, sensing or intuiting

Jung’s Theoretical Method

Rational a priori grounds rather than empirical (inductive)

Some empirical components though:

his empirical clinical work certainly informed his theory.

Principle of Compensation

If one attitude dominated a person's conscious functioning, the other type would dominate unconscious functioning

Within-type differences

Many different ways of being extraverted or introverted depending on which psychological function predominates in a person

Thinking

Making conceptual connections among the images and ideas that float through consciousness

For Jung:

Thinking extravert – focused on facts and ‘objective’ data e.g. Darwin

Thinking introvert – facts are a starting point, ‘pure’ thought is of interest e.g. Kant – convinced of his own correctness and makes little effort to communicate, teach or win approval for his ideas.

Feeling

Immediate emotional reactions & valuing of objects

Feeling extravert - in synchrony with external world, enjoys crowds and popular culture

Feeling introvert - feelings oriented around an inner life e.g. Emily Dickinson

Rational Functions

Both thinking and feeling are rational functions (for Jung) because they involve:

active mental participation or effort &

judgements about pleasure or pain

Irrational Functions

Sensing & intuiting are irrational functions, for Jung, because they do not involve active judgement.

Sensing

Operation of the senses, & apprehension of the external world

Sensing extraverts: Oriented towards sensations that arise from external world & lots of them, or quite discerning arrays of them.

Sensing introverts: Focused on sensations within

Sensing

Monet & Van Gogh

Intuiting

Thought not dependent entirely on external evocation.  Jung called it 'perception by the unconscious', rapid, non-conscious reception of small cues.

Intuiting extraverts – a skilled player just 'knows' what will work - feel for the stock market

Intuiting introverts – able to comprehend directly (for Jung) the archetypes, or symbolic residues of accumulated human experience

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

Your type linked with differences in:

medical specialty,

conversational topic and emphasis (Thorne, 1987),

recollection for personal or interpersonal details

(Thinking Introvert - facts, Feeling extrovert - personal details, Carlson, 1980),

Type linked with

Emotional memories

extraverts have more interpersonally focussed memories

feeling types more vivid memories

sensing types stick with observable facts

intuiting types go well beyond easily observable facts.

Helson (1982)

viewed Jungian types as 3 different ways that people process information

E-I: objective or subjective focus on information

T-F: information evaluated by logical or emotional standards

S-I: info is either literal or symbolic

Considered literary criticism approaches:

Proportion of appreciation vs. elucidation reflective of dominant function in critic

Appreciation – F

Elucidation – T

Both – I

Neither – S

Shows that the Jungian functions can be assessed indirectly through the language people use in speaking and writing.