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# **PSY1102**

# **Introduction to Applied Psychology**

## **Class 14**

## **Personality**

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# Agenda for today

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1. Social-cognitive perspective on personality
2. Reciprocal influences
3. Personal control
4. Assessing behaviour in situations
5. Evaluating the social-cognitive perspective
6. Exploring the Self
7. Benefits of self-esteem
8. Self-serving bias
9. Review of personality

# 1. Social-cognitive perspective on personality

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- So far, we have considered the psychoanalytic perspective, the humanistic perspective, and the trait perspective on personality.
- All of these, plus the social-cognitive perspective to be addressed next, are attempts to find a theoretical framework to describe and characterise the complexity of the human personality.

# 1. Social-cognitive perspective: history

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- The social-cognitive perspective was started by Albert Bandura in the 1980s.
- The trait perspective looks at personality traits. By contrast, the social-cognitive perspective acknowledges the existence of traits, but emphasises their interaction with situational effects.
- The social-cognitive perspective looks at learned behaviours. There are two components:
  - We learn the behaviours by observing other people (hence “social”) and modelling our behaviour after them.
  - However, we also take account of the situation and our thoughts (“cognitive”) about the situation can affect our behaviour.

# 1. Social-cognitive perspective vs. behaviourism

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- The behaviourist perspective (Watson and Skinner) posits that we are simply a black box that processes a stimulus and emits a response. Cognitive processes, which are not directly observable, are irrelevant in the behaviourist view.
- By contrast, the social-cognitive perspective acknowledges that as thinking organisms we are not simply pawns to be moved by environmental stimuli; rather, our response to environmental stimulation is modulated by cognitive processes such as memories, schemas, and expectations.

## 2. Reciprocal influences

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- According to Bandura, the interaction between the person and the environment is reciprocal determinism.
- That is, it's *not* the case that one thing drives the others. Rather, several factors – behaviour, environmental influences, and internal factors – are in an interlocking relationship with each other.
- The book gives one example. Here's another: Your study habits (past behaviour) influence your work style (driven by internal factors), which influences whether or not you'll go to a friend's party (environmental influence) the night before an exam.
- The bottom line: although we are influenced by our environment, we also help create this environment.

## 2a. Reciprocal influences: choosing environments

Different people choose different environments.

- Why do some people live in the city and others in the country?
- Why do some people party and others sit home and read?
- Why do some people have a cell phone and others don't?
- Why do some people go to Las Vegas for a holiday while others go on a solitary wilderness trek?
- In all of these cases, and more, you choose the environment you prefer, and this environment shapes you.

## 2b. Reciprocal influences: personalities

Our personalities shape how we interpret and react to events.

- As noted in the textbook (p. 577), anxious people pick up on situations that may be threatening.
- As a consequence, they see the world as threatening. In turn, this shapes their behaviour.

“Several Canadians have been assaulted or killed in Mexico in the past few years, so I’m going somewhere else on my holiday.”

- Others may look at the death rate of Canadian tourists in Mexico vs. the corresponding death rate in the US, or they may trade off the risk of death in Mexico against the benefits of visiting Mexico, conducting a more dispassionate analysis.



## 2c. Reciprocal influences: personalities and situations

Our personalities help create situations to which we react.

- How we view other people, and how we treat them, influences how they actually treat us.
- Just as we pick up on supposed cues from other people (e.g., a “suspicious” glance), they pick up on our reaction and on other behaviours we exhibit.
- Example: Obama and Pakistan.

## 2d. Reciprocal influences: biopsychology

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- Recall the nature-nurture discussion and the mind-body issue.
- Both of these deal with internal factors – in one case the internal factor is genetic make-up, and in the other case it's the physical body that our mind is, in a sense, wedded to).
- Both also deal with external that shape our personalities (or mind).

## 2d. Reciprocal influences: biopsychology (cont'd.)

- Figure 13.7 in the textbook (p. 578) identifies biological influences, psychological influences, and socio-cultural influences on personality.

### Biological influences

- Genetically determined temperament
- Autonomic nervous system reactivity
- Brain activity

### Psychological influences

- Learned responses
- Unconscious thought processes
- Expectations and interpretations

### Socio-cultural influences

- Childhood experiences
- Situational influence
- Cultural expectations
- Social support

Personality



### 3. Personal control and locus of control

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- A central tenet of the social-cognitive perspective is personal control: To what extent do we see ourselves as *controlling* out environment versus *being controlled* by it?
- In addressing this topic, we consider the locus of control – in other words, where control is located.
  - People with internal locus of control sense that they are in charge of their actions and their fate.
  - By contrast, people with external locus of control feel that outside forces control what happens to them.
- People with internal locus of control achieve more, have better health, feel less depressed, and act more independently than do “externals”.

### 3. Personal control and self-control

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- Self-control is the ability to control impulses and delay gratification.
- As noted in the text, self-control – as in, for example, planning your day and then sticking to the plan – is associated with less depression, better grades, social success.
- Self-control does not come without cost. Like any activity, it requires energy, and it is possible to deplete self-control by exercising will power.
- It is also possible to train oneself to exert greater will power. If you lead a disciplined life, it may be easier to quit smoking (for example) than if you don't routinely exert will power in other areas.

### 3. Personal control and learned helplessness

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- Another aspect of personal control is the extent to which we feel helpless. Feelings of helplessness are likely associated with external locus of control.
- Beginning in the 1970s, Martin Seligman investigated learned helplessness in other species.
  - Subjects were subjected to unavoidable shocks.
  - Later, placed in a situation where they could avoid aversive stimuli, they failed to do so, apparently having learned to, in effect, give up.
  - By contrast, animals who could act to avoid the first round of shocks continued to avoid shocks in the second situation.
- Learned helplessness is the apparent hopelessness and passive resignation learned when unable to avoid repeated aversive events.

### 3. Personal control and learned helplessness (cont'd.)

- Consider situations where people are made to feel helpless:
  - Prisons
  - Oppressive workplaces
  - Dictatorial governments
  - Abusive relationships
  - Adverse relationships between government and Aboriginal bands
  - Prejudicial societies
  - Childhood
  - Nursing homes
  - Authoritarian classrooms
- Evidence suggests that in any of these situations, giving the individual control, even over minor choices, stimulates feelings of pride and empowerment, making people more involved.
- However, too much freedom can be counterproductive.
  - In the former Soviet bloc, many people want a return to a less free society where the state makes decisions on their behalf.

### 3. Personal control and optimism vs. pessimism

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- Is your outlook optimistic or pessimistic?
- Have you ever given up on something, saying something like, “I’m no good at this” or “I can’t do this”?
  - This attributional style – attributing control to an external source – can be self-perpetuating.
- Sometimes, what is needed is a new perspective:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB6DSKJZ1T4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB6DSKJZ1T4)

Facing challenges in the classroom, in the home, in managerial situations at work, and in intimate relationships.



### 3. Optimism vs. pessimism (continued)

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- Optimists outlive pessimists and have fewer illnesses, perhaps because a feeling of control is associated with a stronger immune system.
- Optimistic romantic partners engage constructively.

Love doesn't leave your life a mess  
Love doesn't leave you powerless  
- *Love Doesn't Hurt*, Lynn Miles

- However, excessive optimism can be counterproductive.
  - “My grandfather smoked 20 packs a day and lived to 200.”
  - “No problem – I’m gonna ace that exam.”
  - “Mission accomplished.”
- To avoid being blind to one’s own incompetence, seek input from others, not from yourself.

## 4. Assessing behaviour in situations

What underlying principle guides social-cognitive psychologists in their assessment of people's behaviour and beliefs?

- Recall that the social-cognitive approach examines how people interact with situations.
- One of the implications of this approach is that instead of using written tests to evaluate someone, a situational approach is used in which the person must play a role.
  - Don't tell me – show me what you can do and how you'd do it.
- The logic of this approach is that the person's existing (and past) behaviour patterns are a better predictor of situational behaviour than other measures such as tests or interviewer assessments.
- In other words, put the person in a situation and observe the behaviour.

## 5. Evaluating the social-cognitive perspective

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- The social-cognitive perspective emphasises that behaviour occurs in a context where the situation is affected by, and affects, individuals.
- One criticism is that the approach may over-value the situation and under-value the traits of the person.
- By contrast, we cannot ignore the personal attributes that can influence or determine the global reaction of the person to a situation.
  - Workplace example: appearance of colleague, style of dress, etc.

## 6. Exploring the Self

Are we helped or hindered by high self-esteem?

- The Self, which disappeared under Behaviourism, has reappeared as central to personality.
- According to Markus, we can have more than one self. Different selves reflect our goals and fears. Moreover, these selves can help identify goals and help guide our behaviour towards these goals.
- The spotlight effect leads us to believe that other people notice aspects about us that, in fact, they do not notice.
  - In other words, other people are not as aware of our “charms” or “faults” as we think they are. We’re not as prominent on the radar screens of other people as we might think!

## 7. Benefits of self-esteem

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- Self-esteem is defined as one's feelings of self-worth and is related to how we feel about ourselves.
- People with good self-esteem tend to be happier, less prone to conform to pressures, less anxious or lonely, and are more persistent at difficult tasks.
  - “This may be tough, but it's not as tough as doing my thesis.”
- Moreover, self-esteem has been reported to predict employment, salary, and job satisfaction a decade later.
- Low self-esteem is associated with increased racial prejudice, critical comments about others, and self-inflation.
  - Consider the history of the rise of National Socialism (Nazism) in post-World War I Germany.
  - Is there a message here for social policies?

## 8. Self-serving bias

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- As noted in the textbook, people perceive themselves favourably.
  - People accept more responsibility for good deeds than for bad, and for successes than for failures.
  - Most people perceive themselves as better than average, although there are cultural differences. (Consider predictions of decile performance.)
- A major concern with the self-serving bias is that because we clearly do not evaluate ourselves objectively, we can tend to blame others for things that are attributable to us. This can have catastrophic consequences, ranging from marital discord to genocide.

## 9. Review of personality

- We considered four major approaches:
  - Psychoanalytic (Freud, Jung, Adler, Horney)
  - Humanist (Maslow, Rogers)
  - Trait (Allport, Eysenck)
  - Social-cognitive (Bandura, Seligman)
- Some things to be familiar with:
  - Id, Ego, Superego, Unconscious, collective unconscious, psychosexual stages, fixation, defence mechanisms
  - Hierarchy of needs, self-actualization, person-centred, self-concept
  - Personal control, situations, locus of control, self-esteem, optimism, learned helplessness, self-serving bias
  - Assessment tools, including Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Rorschach inkblot test, Myers-Briggs, MMPI, Eysenck Personality Inventory, Big Five factors

## Summary: Class 14

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