

Psychology of Personality and Individual Differences: Theory and Applications

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Week 4

Lecture 7: The concept of traits and the person-situation debate

I welcome you all to Module 4. Module 4 is about the trait perspective of personality. So, this module will talk about a particular theoretical perspective in personality psychology, which is called the trait perspective. Today's lecture is Lecture Number 7. Overall, it is the 7th lecture and the first lecture of Module 4.

So, today, we will be discussing the concept of traits and the person-situation debate. So, it is more like an introduction to the trait perspective. More specific theories we will talk about in the upcoming lectures. So, before we talk about today's lecture, let me briefly recap the last lecture, Lecture 6. Lecture 6 was part of Module 3, which was about the biopsychological perspective of personality, where we tried to understand the impact of biological aspects on human personality, including the diverse aspects of human physiology, the body, and genes, and how they contribute to human personality.

The last lecture was explicitly aimed at understanding how evolutionary theories could explain personality psychology, which is part of the biological perspective. So, in that context, we talked about the principles of natural selection and sexual selection and how they become the foundation for explaining various behaviours or why certain behaviours prevail in a species. We talked about multiple principles of evolutionary psychology, like the principles of domain specificity, the tenets of numerosness, and the principles of functionality, and how these principles are embedded in the concept or explanation of evolutionary psychology. More specifically, we also discussed two fundamental theories of evolutionary psychology, which are connected to the explanation of human personality. One was Buss's theory of personality and adaptation, and another one was life history theory.

So, we discussed the details of these two theories and tried to understand how evolutionary psychology can explain human personality. So, today, we will be talking about the concept of traits, mainly the introduction to the concept of traits. In that context, we will discuss Gordon Allport's trait psychology or his idea of trait psychology. We will also talk about how we can identify traits and the different methodological procedures by which we can

identify the traits in human beings. And lastly, we will be talking about a very famous debate in psychology, which is called the person-situation debate, particularly in the context of personality.

So, let us start today's lecture. So, when we talk about traits, it's a term that laypeople also use a lot of the time when we try to understand the characteristics of a person and explain the nature of another person or our personality by using specific characteristics. So, traits, in general, we try to understand what kind of person one is from a very layman's perspective. What are the characteristics of a person? What makes one person different from another person?

So, people have different characteristics, different tendencies, different temperaments, and so on. So, let us see how psychology more technically defines the concept of a trait. So, trait psychology plays a vital role in the theories of personality or the field of personality. Because if you ask a layperson, they understand the personality concept from the trait perspective only. So, trait personality has a lot of impact on the human understanding of human personality.

There are many other theories that we will be talking about. But you see, even laypeople understand or have a lot of concepts about trait theories. So, in that sense, it is much more, you know, in the prevalent mindset of human beings. So, in psychology, many psychologists believe that traits are the most effective unit for describing personalities. Trait psychology is one of the best or best ways to describe human personality from a theoretical perspective.

And how these traits are organised within an individual defines his personality. Now, how do you define a trait? So, a trait defines personality, but what is a trait? So, when we talk about a trait, there can be many ways to describe it. So, it refers to a characteristic's way of behaving, thinking, or feeling. Such as someone may be friendly, rigid, anxious, and so on. So, characteristic ways of specific mental characteristics. There are very definitive ways people have particular characteristics. So, that is one way of defining traits.

Specific ways you think, specific ways you express your emotions or feel, which may also get expressed in your behaviour, you know. So, very characteristic ways people can be defined, you know. This person is very friendly; for example, when we say. So, it is a very characteristic way a person behaves in a particular situation. Or this person is very anxious when we say we are talking in terms of a specific trait that this person most of the time seems to be expressing anxiety, which can be expressed in the thought processes, emotions,

as well as behaviours. Another way of defining a trait is, you know, which is the same thing, it refers to consistent patterns of behaviour, thought, and emotion that are relatively stable over time and across situations. So whatever ways or patterns we have regarding thought processes, feelings, and behaviours, they should be consistent, not like today you show a pattern, and tomorrow you show another pattern. We cannot say that is a trait because that can be very situational and temporary. When we say something is a trait, it has to be consistently shown in that person's behaviour in different situations and periods. So, that is the idea of a trait.

So, it refers to consistent patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and emotions that are relatively stable over time and across situations. So, stability is also an essential part. So basically, a trait defines what kind of person one is. A trait distinguishes one person from another. So, when we talk about traits, there are many things we need to understand.

So, we will see some of the characteristics of traits. There are many ideas associated with the concept of traits. Let us clarify the different aspects of traits. So, traits have many factors. We discussed now that these are relatively enduring characteristics of a person that distinguish it from a transient state. So, these are relatively enduring. So, if I say this is a person's trait, it is enduring.

So, it remains for a long time. So, it does not mean that if I say this person is friendly, that person will remain pleasant for a long time. It is not that today this person is showing friendliness and suddenly becomes unfriendly after one week. Then, that is not a trait. That is because of certain situational things the person showed those kinds of behaviours.

So, if I describe somebody as anxious or friendly, it is an enduring characteristic that will remain for a long time. This becomes the pattern of that person, the characteristic of that person. It is not a temporary thing. Traits can change, obviously, but these are not rapidly changing things. Traits can also change, but it may take a lot of time. But overall, these are relatively stable attributes of a person. We can never say that traits will never change. It is not like that. There can also be dynamic aspects to it, but they don't change so often.

So, that is how the word relative is used. These are relatively consistent or permanent or enduring patterns. So, this is one of the aspects of the trait. Second, a trait represents the patterns of behaviour, thinking, or feeling that are relatively consistent across various situations. So, one thing is when you say enduring, it is across time.

So, time-wise, they will be enduring. So, the trait will be expressed for a long time. So that is enduring in terms of time. But traits, when you say something as a trait, are also consistent across situations. So that is also another important thing. So relatively consistent. So, remember this term: relatively consistent. We can never say anything absolutely in human behaviour because nothing is absolute. Anything can change. But when you say relatively, it means in comparison, you know, in a general sense, they are very long-term patterns.

So, that is the idea of being relatively consistent across various situations. So, if somebody is, let us say, anxious, then that anxious behaviour will be expressed in multiple situations. Not just one situation. So, if somebody is just nervous, let us say, while performing something on the stage, and he is not anxious in any other situation, then we cannot say this is a trait. This may be because of that situation that the person is showing anxiety, but in different situations, he is very stable and calm. We cannot say anxiousness is a trait of that person.

But suppose a person shows anxiety in a lot of situations, on the stage, in the classroom, or any other social situation. In that case, we say in various situations the person is showing this behaviour, then it is a part of his personality or trait. So, it has to be consistent across multiple situations. Third, a trait is how people differ from one another. So, we can use a trait to differentiate people from one another. So, it is a kind of variable.

It changes from person to person. So, traits differ. One person may have a high level of this trait. Another person may have a low level of this trait. So, we can characterise people or distinguish people using a trait because it is a variable.

It changes from person to person. Not everybody has the same trait patterns. So, we can distinguish one person from another. So, I can say that person X is friendly, or another person is unfriendly. So, we can determine based on a trait.

So, friendliness is a trait where one is high on this, and another is low on this. So, we can distinguish people, characterise people, and explain people's behaviour using this trait and distinguish people from one another. So, different individuals will exhibit various levels of this trait. People may show greater or lesser shyness, friendliness, anxiety, etc. So, that means this is a significant way to differentiate people from one another.

So, in layperson's terms, we use different trait descriptions to characterise people. And say this person is like this, that person is like that. And like this, we make specific images of a

person. And we distinguish, you know, someone is better or not so better in terms of so many of these characterisations. Mostly, we use different kinds of trait terms. The fourth is that traits are dispositions, meaning they are a probabilistic tendency a person has.

In specific ways, in particular situations. So, when somebody has a disposition, there is a high probability that the person will behave like this. It is never 100 per cent that the person will be like this all the time, but it gives you a high probability. If suppose, he has a particular trait with a high probability, we can say this person is likely to behave like this in a situation. This is a kind of disposition that is within the person. Those characteristics are inbuilt in that person because of specific reasons.

Which could be biological, or which could be environmental reasons. So, it gives you specific probabilistic ways of explaining behaviour that this person is more likely to behave like this in a situation if you know that trait of a person. So, for example... Now, here is a, let us say, a trait of aggressiveness.

A person with this trait is likely to act aggressively in certain situations. So, a person who is aggressive as a trait may be able to express aggressiveness in various situations, mainly when provoked in provocative situations. So, they might let us say, react aggressively if cut off in traffic but remain calm in another provocative situation like work. So, people can often suppress the trait also because the problem is not right to express that. So, an aggressive person may not express aggression all the time because, let us say, in the workplace, he may suppress the aggression even though he may feel like behaving aggressively.

However, because this situation is incorrect, people may often suppress certain trade tendencies. But the overall tendencies of that person will remain like that. So, this shows that aggressiveness is a tendency that increases the likelihood of aggressive behaviour in specific contexts, mainly when the situation permits it more. However, it is not always necessary that the trait will be expressed in all conditions. The fifth one is that traits vary in their generality.

So, not all traits are equal regarding their impact on human behaviour. So, there are different categories of traits, which we will keep learning about in the upcoming lectures. So, some traits are narrow in their impact on our lives. Some traits are more general and have a more significant impact on our lives. So, their impact may differ.

Some traits have a narrow impact, meaning they only affect tiny areas of life. Some traits will impact a variety of places in our lives. So, their influence is much more pervasive. For example, traits vary in their generality; the difference between, let us say, a trait of punctuality and conscientiousness.

So, when we talk about punctuality, it is more of a narrow expression in its behaviour. So, punctuality is a narrow trait relevant mainly to situations where time management is involved, so only in cases where time management is required, punctuality as a trait is only applicable there. So, to what extent can you, you know, arrive and do the task on time, showing your punctuality level, but it is mainly in the context of time management only, so this impact is in narrow situations. So conscientiousness, on the other hand, is a trait that has a vast effect. It is a general characteristic that can express itself in various aspects of our lives. It is a broader term affecting many areas, including work performance, organisation, reliability, etc.

So, it is about how structured you are, how reliable you are, how organised you are. So, that pattern of behaviour is called conscientiousness, and it can impact various aspects of our lives. So, some traits could be very general, and some could be very narrow in their approach. So, this is just another example of how a trait can have a high level of expression and maybe a narrower expression of the same trait.

So, let us say extroversion is a trait, which means how outgoing a person is. If somebody is very outgoing, very social, and always wants to meet people and make friends. So that's the nature of extroverted people. So, extroversion has many other sub-aspects to it. So, one aspect could be sociability and sensation seeking.

Sensation seeking may have many other characteristics like physical sensation seeking. Somebody may have sexual sensation seeking. The physical may have more specific examples, like parachute jumping. So, the idea is the different traits one has. Some aspects of the trait could be at a more general level and can be divided into more specific, more situation-specific traits which are narrower and so on.

Now, when we talk about trait theory, we can never discuss trait theory without mentioning Gordon Allport, who was one of the first people to talk about traits. Or use the term or popularise the term personality. And he kind of, you know, has had a lot of impact on trait psychology. So, let us see some of the ideas of trait concepts that Gordon Allport proposes. Now, Allport is one of the first psychologists to produce a list of words.

So, initially, this whole concept of traits started with mentioning or coming to a certain number of traits to describe human beings. For that, he and his colleague Oddbird, in 1936, began with the dictionary, which mentions people's characteristics. Every dictionary you know is encoded in the language. Here, it's the English language. So, they started with the dictionary and tried to find out.

The different words that describe human beings. Which could be trait-like descriptions. So, they identified about 18,000 words from the dictionary, which are trait-like descriptions. Using these words in the English language, we can describe human beings.

Then, they found that many words within these 18,000 words. They are kind of synonyms, and so on. So, they merged some of them. Ultimately, they came to—4500 personality trait descriptions in the natural language of English from the dictionary analysis and so on.

So, Allport also published the first psychology textbook on personality traits called *Personality Traits: Their Classification and Measurement* in 1921. He is also believed to have taught the first course on personality in the United States in 1924. So, his contribution is immense in the field of personality as well as trait psychology. So, this list has been later used by many other people and researchers. This 4500 list was the names of traits from the natural language, mainly English.

This list was used by many other researchers later on, and they refined it more and more. We will see how modern theories reduce this number to a minimal number of traits that can be used to describe human beings. So, Allport said there are three categories of traits according to Allport. Some traits are called cardinal traits, some are called central traits, and some are called secondary traits.

So, he said traits could be of different categories. This description of traits here is mainly based on general liberty. The impact of traits on life, on human life. So, in terms of generalizability or the effect of traits. So, when we talk about cardinal traits, cardinal traits are those traits that are very dominant and shape an individual's entire behaviour.

They are rare and often develop later in life. So, if somebody has a cardinal trait, that means this trait will be very dominant, and it will impact almost every aspect of that person's life. So, it is nearly this whole life a person can be described using one trait; that will be a cardinal trait. Not everybody has cardinal traits; very few people may have them, and they mainly develop later in life. One example of a cardinal trait here is, let's say, people like

Mother Teresa, where altruism, helping people, or religious service was the only thing their life mission had.

That was the only mission of their life. So, every aspect of their life was designed for only these activities. Helping people or religious services, and so on. So, that is the cardinal trait of that person. Not everybody may have such kinds of traits.

But cardinal traits are very dominant, and you can define the entire individuality of a person using those traits. The next is central traits. So, these are, again, essential traits of a person, the general characteristics of a person that form the basic foundation of a personality. So, these are critical central characteristics of a person. And they may not have the impact of a cardinal trait, but they are still essential.

So, they are not as dominant as cardinal traits but still significant and pervasive in a person's life. Now, central traits, most of us, everybody has central characteristics, you know. Some of the traits will be very important and very prominent in the life of every individual, you know. Like, you know, characteristics of somebody may be described using words like honesty, sociability, shyness, etc. Most of us have many central traits, which are very pervasive characteristics of a person.

The last one is secondary traits. These are more specific traits, narrow traits. That influences behaviour only in particular situations. So, they are less consistent and less influential than central traits. So central characteristics are not as pervasive as central traits, but they only influence behaviour in specific situations.

So, these are very situational traits. For example, a person might be generally relaxed but anxious when speaking in public. So, anxiety in public speaking could be a secondary trait. It is not like every aspect of that person's life is not anxious or he is not worried. So, it is a very situation-specific trait.

So basically, this whole concept of cardinal, central, and secondary traits. It is based on the impact of the trait. So cardinal trait has the highest impact, the central trait comes next, and the secondary trait comes last. So, it is all about the effects of the trait. So, we may have cardinal traits, central traits, and secondary traits.

Many people may not have cardinal traits, but most have central and secondary characteristics. So, this is one concept that Allport talked about. Allport also spoke about an individual's uniqueness. Every individual has unique patterns or they have unique

characteristics, unique traits, and so on. So, Allport emphasised the uniqueness of the individual.

He believed that each person's personality is a unique combination of traits. We all have different characteristics, but the combination of the factors is very distinctive for each individual. The same trait may be present in many individuals, but how these traits combine and form uniqueness is something unique about every individual. Understanding these traits requires an idiographic approach focusing on individual cases rather than a generalised population. So, to understand the uniqueness of the individual, we need to study that person more in-depth and, more specifically, focus on that person.

So that will give us more access to the uniqueness and to understand the unique aspect of the person. So, Allport's work was crucial in understanding traits and laid the foundation for many other later theories. So, his theory was one of the first foundational works. From his work, many different theories further refined the ideas of traits and theories around the traits. So, we will see some of the more refined theories in the following lecture.

Now, the next question is, how can we identify traits? How do researchers conclude that these are the traits of human beings and so on? What is the methodology to identify traits? So, in that context, researchers mostly use three approaches to identify and discover human beings' significant characteristics. One approach is called the lexical approach, the second is the statistical approach, and the third is the theoretical approach.

So, these are the three primary ways we can identify human traits or conduct research in trait psychology. So, let us see each of these one by one. So, the lexical approach, when we say lexical approach, is based on the words used in natural language. So, we cannot communicate with other people in every language without using traits. So, the traits are built into the languages, all the languages of human beings.

Take any language; we describe human beings, and to describe human beings, we need to use trait words. So, traits are built into the languages. So, the lexical approach is that approach that focuses on what kind of words are used in the language, to what extent they are used, what the frequency of their use is, and so on. From that, they extract significant traits in that particular language, which is how they extrapolate traits from the language and use them to describe human beings.

So, language provides the foundation from which traits are extracted. Because every language has trait words that evolve to describe and talk to others, describe human beings,

and so on. So, the lexical approach is based on that. So, the linguistic approach is basically that they try to identify essential personality traits from languages, which leads to the lexical hypothesis, which says that all-important individual differences have become encoded within the natural language.

So, whatever way we can describe human beings and differentiate one individual from another, it has to be there in the language because we are using those words. So, if you think of any description, it must be in the language; otherwise, how do you know it? It is there in the language. The only thing we need to do is identify and extract it. So, that is the lexical hypothesis.

So, over time, people noticed essential differences among individuals and created words to describe these traits, such as someone being dominant, creative, reliable, unreliable, and so on. These exist because we see patterns in people and invent words to describe them. So, every natural language will have those words, and we can use or extract them to identify traits. So, these trait terms become widely used within the group.

As we invent more and more characteristics of human beings, more and more words are used. This is how a language becomes more and more complex. And they help describe and communicate about people. In contrast, terms that are not useful fail to become part of a language. If specific terms are not that useful in describing human beings, slowly, those words are used less and less, and people then do not remember them.

So, many words in every language are not in everyday use; they are not part of common discussions about human beings. They are rarely used. So, we will see some examples. So, one of the first psychologists to compile the list is Gordon Allport. We talked about it.

As we said, he started with the lexical approach only from the English dictionary. He started looking at the trait terms from 18000, then from 18000, he further reduced it to 4500 words. So, the first psychologist, one of the first psychologists who did this lexical approach, is Gordon Allport only, whom we discussed about just now. So, together with his colleague, he identified, as we said, 18000 words, then Reduced it to 4500 and so on. So, this lexical hypothesis has some key ideas.

Three are very important. One of the ideas is that the frequency of use of these terms or words that describe traits corresponds to their importance. So, the more we use a word in the common language, the more critical it is. Because the more used word means it is essential in describing human beings. So, we are using it more and more.

So, the words we use more and more in our language means it reflects that it is more important. That is why we are using it more. So, it is more helpful in terms of describing people. So, that is the one idea. Second, the number of words describing each trait indicates its significance in human personality.

So, if we have more words for a particular trait, that means it also reflects the significance of that trait. Because of the same trait, we invented many words with specific nuances. So, that shows this is very important in that particular culture, population, or linguistic group. So, the number of words describing a trait also signifies importance. Critical individual differences should have corresponding terms in multiple languages.

So, if a trait is essential, it should be present in many languages. It is only locally crucial if you have a description only in one language and the same description or word is not present in any other language. It is not essential universally or across different cultures. Cross-cultural significance or universality is reflected when the same trait descriptions are present in different or multiple languages—some of the examples we can give here.

For example, if you see the English dictionary, the Oxford dictionary. Honest has, let us say, this is a kind of description. This number of words may keep changing with the modern type of description. So, this is a description. We take from the 2010 edition, where honest has about 31 synonyms, suggesting it is more important than some words like aberrant, which have no synonyms. So that means Honest, which has 31 synonyms, means people are inventing many new words to describe this word, so that means honesty as a trait is very important in the mind of human beings, particularly English language speakers. So, that is why the language has invented many ways to describe it. In the context of cross-cultural universality or cross-cultural use of words, individual differences must have corresponding multiple languages, showing it has cross-cultural universality.

Some researchers like Goldberg state that the more critical an individual difference is, the more languages will have it in human transactions. So, if something is significant regarding human nature or characteristics, it should be encoded in different languages and cultures, not just one culture or one language. So, traits that are universally recognised across cultures are likely universally important. So, if specific characteristics are present in every language, they are essential across cultures. In contrast, traits with terms only in a few languages may be locally relevant and unsuitable for a universal personality taxonomy.

It is only locally relevant if something is local or in one language. Suppose some traits are present in every language. In that case, that means they are universally important, for

example, in some tribes of Venezuela, such as the Yanomamo Indian tribes, basically tribes of Venezuela. So, they have specific terms like Inokai and non-Inokai. So, they use these two terms to describe men based on their status from killing another man.

So, by killing another man, they have a specific status word for men. So, they use a word like Inokai. Now, these kinds of words are not available in any other language. This concept is very critical in their culture because they have that kind of culture of killing other people, and maybe it has a specific attached significance to it. It is essential to their culture but absent in many mainstream languages and cultures, so this particular trait is only important locally for that specific tribe. It is not found in other cultures, so it is not universally applicable. This shows that language reflects a lot of things. So, this lexical strategy has effectively identified significant individual differences.

So, we cannot neglect this language part because it gives a lot of important information, and the human mindset and characteristics are built into the languages. The lexical approach is undoubtedly critical, but when we do research, the linguistic approach is not good enough. It can be a starting point.

People use many other approaches to identify traits, which are more empirical and research-oriented. So this includes approaches like the statistical and theoretical approaches to identifying traits. So, let us see what these are. So, the statistical approach identifies traits based on specific statistical analyses. So, a particular mathematical analysis is done, and essential characteristics are determined from the research data.

So, how is it done? So, in a statistical approach, the personality traits are identified. They use various statistical methods to categorise different dimensions of human personality and how it is done. So, for example, let us say you start gathering data for research; you collect data in the research process. So, researchers collect data by asking many people; they will ask different characteristic trait-related questions, let us say.

Their behaviour, thoughts, feelings, which describe them, and so on. So, you collect data from many people about different descriptions of themselves. These questionnaires may often have statements like, 'I enjoy meeting new people.' 'I often feel anxious.' These are all trait-like statements.

So, then they report about themselves whether it is valid for them or not. Whether they agree or disagree, and so on. So, like this, the questionnaire is used to collect data from

many people. Then, you analyse the patterns within the responses. So, let us say you take data from 1000 people, but 1000 people have many varieties of traits.

So, you cannot make any conclusions until you find a pattern within that data. So, analysing patterns is fundamental. So, once the data is collected, researchers use statistical techniques. Now, you have 1000 data points, but you cannot just sit and look at 1000 data points and make patterns by just thinking about it. So, many statistical tools are available to find out the patterns.

One such statistical technique is factor analysis, combining items or similar responses. So, they will find patterns and collect similar responses in different groups. So, distinct clusters of reactions. So, the five responses may be very similar. And they can be clustered into one group. Rather than five different groups. So, it gives you a pattern.

So, factor analysis does that clustering part of it. For example, people who say They enjoy meeting new people might also say they like being the centre of attention. So, let us say this is a pattern. Most people who say they enjoy meeting people also say that they like being the centre of attention, let us say.

So, that means it is part of the same trait. So, there is a pattern image. So, factor analysis can collect all such similar things into one cluster. And say this is a particular trait. So, these patterns can be analysed using statistics by feeding them in, you know, by researching using specific mathematical tools.

So, nowadays we have software to use very simply; you know, feed the data into the software. They will very quickly give you those patterns and so on. So, you analyse the patterns, and then once you analyse them, you can identify the traits. Whatever clusters emerge, you can name them and see the patterns. So, these groups of related statements are called factors or traits.

Each factor represents a different aspect of personality. For example, statements about enjoying social interaction might be labelled as extroversion. So, the term extroversion became the name of a trait because it includes many statements related to being outgoing, meeting people, sociability, and so on. So, another group of statements could cluster together and become something called neuroticism, which is about anxiety, emotional stability, and so on.

So, these patterns emerge from statistical analysis, and those patterns can be named to identify traits. So, this is more of a research-oriented approach. The lexical approach is

from the language you derive, the statistical tool you research, collect data, and from data, you find out the patterns using statistics. The last one is the theoretical approach.

So, the theoretical approach is basically when some researchers develop specific theories and, based on those theories, they propose particular personality characteristics. So here, for example, we are showing Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Based on his observations of people, he developed a theory, and this theory says people could be like this: oral personality, anal personality, and so on, based on his theories. So, like this, this personality description came from a theory. So, it is a theory-driven idea.

So, the theoretical approach starts with a theory, and then the theory determines the types of people you know. So, it is predetermined from the theories. So, the theoretical approach tries to identify critical dimensions of individual differences from the theory. Here the starting point is predetermined theories, which say what kind of personalities are there because the theory has already been developed from research. So, that is the idea of the theoretical approach.

As I said, one of the examples is Freud's theory; based on his observation, he develops specific personality descriptions like oral personality, anal personality, and so on. It is based on his theory. It is not like other theories have not talked about them. So, like this, you know, many theories have specific ideas about personality traits that come from their research, and we can find those traits based on those theories and so on. But here, the problem is that your description of traits has strengths and limitations.

Strength comes from the nature of the theory itself. If the theory is perfect, then your description may be more accurate, even better. If your theory has weaknesses and problems, your description of traits will also have those weaknesses and problems. So, because it is theory-driven, the description of traits is as good as the theory. If the theory is good, the description will be good.

If the theory is not that good, the description will also be not that good. So, in practice and research, psychologists use a combination of all these approaches to identify traits: lexical approach, statistical approach, and theoretical approach. Whatever suits them, according to the situation, people use different approaches. Every approach has its strengths and limitations.

Now, when you talk about traits, one essential thing is that many people say there is a debate in the field of traits and personality psychology, which is called the person-situation

debate. Whether there is such a thing as a consistent trait that describes human beings or human behaviour is just a product of the situation itself. That you go into a problem, and because of the situation, you behave in specific ways. Are traits good enough descriptions for human personality, or should we focus on situational descriptions of people? So, there are people on both sides of the debate.

So, let us see briefly what this debate is about, particularly in the context of personality traits and descriptions. So, this debate is about the central discussion of this debate, which is about what determines human behaviour. More significantly, which one is more significant? Inherent personality traits or situations? Which one is more important in deciding personality? Is it the trait inherent within the person? Which may be biological, which may be genetic, whatever it is. Or is it the situation that determines the behaviour? So that is the debate.

So, let us see both sides of the debate. Now, the person side of the debate says there is a consistent trait, and the person is very; there is an enduring pattern within the person, which is the trait side of the debate. It says the behaviour is significantly influenced by the person's trait, leading to remembering the word significantly; they are not saying absolutely. Significantly means it is influenced by the person's trait, leading to consistent actions with some flexibility with situational adjustment. So, the person side of the argument says the trait is the more dominant factor in determining a person's personality.

They are not denying there can be situational influences, but that is less important. So that's the idea of the person's argument. So, this stability of the person in terms of specific traits, there is a stable trait within the person, allowing meaningful descriptions of individuals in terms of their general characteristics. It gives us flexibility in a straightforward way to describe people. If nobody has any traits, then there is no pattern in human beings, so how do you address people?

If there is no stability in terms of description, you know. So, the person, every person, will change, then if, let us say, we cannot find anything stable within the person, then the person has no substance. So, in every situation, the person will be a new person. So, it does not make much sense according to the person's argument. So, this stability allows a meaningful description of individuals.

For instance, someone frequently displaying extroverted behaviour can be labelled as extroverted. So, what is the problem with it? If somebody is usually outgoing, we can describe that person as extroverted. Using a trait description because it is a stable pattern.

So, therefore, the scientific study of personality contributes by examining individual differences here, identifying traits, understanding their correlations, predicting life outcomes and so on.

That is the idea of this person's side of the argument. The situation side of the argument focuses on the situation as more important. This behaviour is more dominantly or predominantly determined by the immediate situation, resulting in significant variability in how individuals act across different conditions. So here they focus more on the problem being a more dominant factor in determining behaviour or the characteristics of the person rather than the stable internal characteristics or traits. For instance, someone who displays extroverted behaviour at a party may behave introverted at a seminar.

So, they say it is because of the situation, no? Because at the party, the problem was like this. The person was very extroverted and talked to people and so on. The same person may be very introverted in another situation, like a seminar. So, they are saying the problem is more dominant in this case.

So, this variability within individuals according to the situation shows that people exhibit variable behaviour in different situations. That reduces the importance of traits. So, they say traits are unimportant, and there is no need to describe people using traits. The problem can be defined in much better ways. So, describing someone as extroverted becomes meaningless if they alternate between introverted and extroverted behaviour.

This argument is not quite right because when we say something is a trait, it generally remains across situations. But they are arguing that people keep changing based on the situation, so what is the importance of traits and so on. They have some specific evidence in certain situations. So, therefore, in this context, psychologists are encouraged to focus on understanding the processes through which individuals perceive or react to situations. How people respond to different situations is their personality according to the situation.

Not a consistent trait that determines behaviour. A third group of people, called interactionists, is emerging, who combine both aspects. It is more of a compromise situation known as interactionism. They merge elements from both arguments, the person and the situational argument. So, it acknowledges the primary influence of the problem.

But again, this interaction is about people. Again, their importance is more on the situation than the trait. It advocates how an individual might respond to changing circumstances.

So, they said there is a personality. The pattern of a person and how they react to these situations will give specific personality characteristics.

But there is no need to explain using fixed traits within the person. People may have specific patterns of response to different situations. That will give them personality characteristics. But we need not use straightforward words as a description according to this one. But again, say so: there is a situational influence, and there is a pattern of individual differences in how they respond to the situation.

So, that is an interactionist view. So, they say personality also exists and suggests that it manifests in differences between individuals in their reactions to situations rather than consistent traits. So, that response pattern will determine the person rather than a consistent trait within the individual. So, kind of they made a kind of middle path and so on. So, interactionists argue that personality consists of these individualised patterns of responses.

So, one of the most significant names that come up in the interactionist approach is Walter Mischel. He did a lot of research, tried to justify this interactionist approach, and gave more importance to the situational approach. So, let us see what his arguments are. So, in the 1960s, Mischel reignited this whole interest debate of the person-situation debate. Contrary to the popular prevailing belief that behaviour is consistent across situations, Mischel argued that behaviour varies significantly depending on the context.

So, he says the situation in the context is more important. And he tried to generate some data according to that. He questioned the validity of predicting an individual's actions based on their traits. He said... There is no need to use traits to predict human behaviour.

For instance, he pointed out that individual differences may cause different individuals to exhibit fear and anxiety in distinct situations, such as speaking in public or being on a mountain peak. So, let us say these are the two situations: speaking in public and being on a mountain peak. Many people will exhibit fear and anxiety. So, can we then say these people have an anxious trait? No, because the situation is such that, you know, everybody will experience—or most people will experience—a certain sense of anxiety and fear in certain situations.

So, this is the impact of the situation causing that behaviour. Everybody responds to this situation in a specific, fearful manner. That does not mean they have a fearful trait. However, the focus is more on the situational impact. So, according to Mischel, these

variations defy the notion of a general trait of fear and anxiety explaining behaviour across situations.

So, he said there is no need for such trait descriptions. Mischel's arguments in the person-situation debates primarily examined the statistical correlations between personality and behaviour. So, a lot of research was done where they measured certain traits, let us say extroversion, and they measured the people's behaviour, like how outgoing they are, how social they are, and then they found correlations between them. So, if you have a trait and if you show specific behaviour.

So there has to be a positive correlation according to the traits. So, if you are an extrovert, you should be more social. So, the correlation between social behaviour and extroversion should be positive and strongly correlated. So, like this, a lot of research has already been done and is still going on, where they find correlations between personality and behaviour, and they try to see how consistent the behaviour is across different situations. So, Mischel found a lot of this data, extracted it, and made many arguments about it.

For example, he used the correlation coefficient to assess the strength of this relationship. So, the correlation coefficient shows the relationship between two things. So, if you have A and B, there are two things. So, let us say these two are correlated; there is a correlation. Now, this correlation can be in many ways.

If, in some cases, A increases, B also increases. So, that means they are positively correlated. So, if this increases, the other also increases. So, that means there is a positive correlation. If it is a perfect correlation, then the correlation coefficient is 1.

So, there is a positive correlation. So, this is +1. There can be another possibility: if A increases, B decreases. That means an opposite pattern of relationship. But if whenever A increases, B decreases.

So, that means there is a negative correlation. So, negative correlation, if it is a perfect negative correlation, it will be -1. Now, in between +1 and -1, there can be many numbers. Let us say 0.5, 0.6, 0.7, whatever it is: 0.8 and 0.9, all kinds of correlation coefficients.

The closer it is to one, the higher the strength; if it is positive plus, it is positive. If it is minus, then it is negative. So, they try to find, for example, very similar.

If let us say, one is extroverted as a variable and behaviour is, let us say, number of friends, whatever it is. So, let us say that as extrovertedness increases, the number of friends also

increases. So, that is a positive correlation. If it is perfect, every time extrovertedness increases by 1 unit, the number of friends also increases, then it will be plus 1. Or let us say there is a positive correlation between, let us say, 0.3, 0.4, whatever it is.

It is positive, which means there is some positive correlation, but it is not perfect. So, like this, there can be many things. So, he used this kind of correlation coefficient data to make his argument. In most studies, he found the correlation between traits and behaviour at that time was about 0.30.

So, it is a positive correlation. So, traits explain behaviour; there is a connection. But the strength is not very high. 0.3 is moderate, so its strength is higher if closer to 1. If it is 0.4, that is much stronger. If it is 0.5, it is much stronger. 0.6, 0.7, 0.8, 0.9, and then finally 1. So, the correlation is weak if it is further away from 1.

So, 0.3, according to him, is very moderate and kind of towards the lower side of the correlation. And he said this straight-end correlation with the behaviour. Most studies are around 0.3 or 0.4, which is moderate but not very strong. So, accordingly, Mischel argued that it is not very meaningful to talk about personality traits as they are unreliable predictors of situations. So that was his argument. Now, many other trait theories made counterarguments to whatever argument he made. Let us see what the counterarguments in favour of traits are.

So, Mischel's critics said significant reflection, meaning those who criticise his ideas. It prompted a lot of reflection from other trait psychologists. Two key issues were addressed to address his criticism of traits. One is that Mischel's argument operates under the assumptions of a rigid and simplistic model of personality, where traits directly determine behaviour. So Mischel was arguing as if a trait is directly predicting behaviour. So, every trait means if you have this trait, it will 100% get reflected in behaviour like this.

So, he was making assumptions that were not true, and trait theories were not making such assumptions. Second, Mischel mostly talked about a correlation coefficient of 0.30. And he said this is not very significant. So, Mischel's critics said this could be significant in many contexts. So, we will see how they argued.

So, let us address these two issues they gave as a counterargument to Mischel's argument. So, traits predicting behaviour, as Mischel says, are not direct predictors. And personality trait theories never said they are always direct predictors of behaviours. Personality psychologists argue that there is no reason to expect the traits or other aspects of personality

will be straightforward predictors of behaviours. Personality is complicated, and behaviour is partly dependent on the situation.

It impacts behaviour, but not all the time 100% gets reflected in the behaviour. Many times, it may be suppressed also because of the situation. So Mischel's argument doesn't, you know, hold valid in many contexts; his argument is not valid in many situations. For example, feelings of inferiority may lead an individual to behave in a superior manner. So, it is possible; some theories say that people with an inferiority complex will act in opposite ways.

They will behave with a superiority complex to compensate for their inferiority complex. But actually, their trait is an inferiority complex. To cover that, they will behave just opposite to what they are. Just because, so if you find a correlation between the trait and behaviour, you will see there is not a much stronger correlation. Because the person has an inferiority complex, but behaviour shows they are displaying a superiority complex.

So, it is possible many times you know the trait is suppressed. So, not every situation trait can directly lead to a straightforward expression of such behaviours. Second is even Allport, the first of the founding researchers in the field of personality. He acknowledged the variability of behaviour and proposed the existence of constant aspects of individuality.

There is a constant trait, and alongside, there is a changing part of behaviour, which is, you know, which can change a little bit here and there based on the situation. So, Allport argued that consistency arises because individuals perceive many situations similarly. Because of the personality and consistency of the trait, people respond to different situations in specific ways. Now, how is this response coming?

It is coming from the trait itself. So, you cannot deny the trait simply because you know the people are not showing consistent behaviour in every situation. Additionally, many of the individual's behaviours may share an ordinary underlying meaning, making them functionally equivalent. So, for example, a person with racist tendencies may exhibit different behaviours in various situations, but the trait is racist tendencies. But these behaviours may stem from the same structure of personality, that is, racism.

This suggests that despite surface-level variability, even the person may be racist inside and may not be expressing it all the time. But that doesn't mean that the trait is not there. So, like this, just arguing that the trait is not expressed in the behaviour directly invalidates

the trait. That is not true. The argument is you know the trait may be there, and it may not always be expressed as behaviour in every situation.

Second, what Mischel argued about 0.30 as a correlation coefficient is insignificant. Many psychologists say that statistically speaking, such a correlation might seem modest regarding prediction. This effect could be significant in real-life scenarios—even 0.30, 0.40 correlation. For example, in many other contexts, such as the impact of dietary cholesterol intake on mortality risk, the effectiveness of airbags in reducing automobile death rates, or the influence of greenhouse gases on global warming, if you see, the correlations are minimal.

In these situations, correlations are about 0.30 and 0.40 correlation. But these effects are significant. Simply because it is 0.30, you cannot neglect them. That universal knowledge is essential and worthy of attention. So, statistically, some value in real life, its significance could be very high.

So, simply saying 0.30 is not significant and that straight traits are not necessary is not a valid argument. So, from this perspective, personality traits perform pretty well in predicting behaviour. So, whose perspective may, if you see the significance of it, even 0.30, 0.40 correlation is critical. So, Mischel's argument may not hold here. Moreover, when considering certain traits that may be particularly useful for understanding specific behaviours or situations, the predictive power of personality traits can be further enhanced by understanding the various aspects of it.

So, we cannot dismiss traits as irrelevant predictors of behaviour based on a correlation coefficient, which may overlook many practical significances of a trait in real-life situations. Furthermore, the argument that personality lacks value because it is not strongly correlated with behaviour across various situations implies they are only prioritising situations and not giving importance to the trait. They are only focusing on the situation. The importance of the trait is completely negated. But research also shows the influence of situations on behaviour.

Mischel argued that traits' influence on behaviour is only 0.30 and non-significant. However, most research shows the situation's impact on behaviour correlation is also the same. We find that situations are not necessarily better predictors either. Many studies in social psychology that manipulate the situation also yield an effect size or correlation coefficient of around 0.30. So, in that sense, the situation should also not be necessary.

So statistically, only looking at a value and saying this is not significant does not make it, you know, the argument. Because of the situation and the impact of the problem, the correlation coefficient is also the same. So, if you see all these arguments, the trait has its validity. However, many critics have argued and given more importance to the situational effect.

And the trait theory is never saying that, you know, the situation is not essential. However, an underlying trait gives stability to that person's characteristics. And this trait impacts how that person responds to those situations. That gives him the personality characteristics. So, you cannot say there are no traits, and only the problem is essential, you know, that at least the empirical evidence and the logical argument don't go in that direction.

So, traits have their importance and validity, and they give us a lot of, you know, kind of, you know, easier ways to explain human behaviour. So, theoretically, they also make a lot of sense; empirically, they also show a lot of significance in predicting behaviours. So, all these debates go on in the academic circle and only enhance the research evidence. So, we cannot just, you know, say one side is invalid and completely invalid; no, nothing is entirely invalid.

So, this argument, these debates, actually enhance the findings. So, with this, I stop here. So, this was the first lecture on trades, where we talked about the basic idea of trade and how the person-situation debate gives more refinement to the concept of trades. With this, I stop here. In the following lecture, we will be talking about more specific theories.

Thank you.