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Personality and Individual Differences

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Personality and Individual Differences

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According to Dollard and Miller (1950), habits are influenced by drives, which are *unconscious processes*. They agreed with Freudian theory which suggested that unconscious processes helped to shape people's behaviour, but conceptualised them differently. They argued that drives are located within the unconscious for a number of reasons, including the following:

- They develop before we can talk and we are therefore unable to *label* them or the cues which stimulate them.
- The drives we acquire and their cues are not given a label in the society to which we belong.
- The drives or their cues are repressed, to make it difficult to recall to conscious thought.

Dollard and Miller's theory also suggests:

- We inherit drives (called **primary drives**), which are physiological and help to ensure our survival.
 - Satisfying these drives (such as hunger or thirst) is a powerful reinforcement and helps to develop patterns of behaviour. The reinforcements to these drives are referred to as **primary reinforcers**, and typically take the form of food, water, rest, etc.
- **Secondary drives** develop to help us cope with our primary drives (which are largely unobservable) and are satisfied by **secondary reinforcers**, which take the form of events that were originally neutral but have come to hold a specific value to the individual.
 - Secondary reinforcers can come in many forms, including money, hugging, specific smells which remind an individual of a positive event, and so on.

Dollard and Miller (1950) suggested that there are four parts to learning habits:

- the *drive*, which initiates the whole process;
- *cues* to act;
- the individual's *response* to the cue; and
- the *reinforcement* of the response.

Cues were treated as both innate and capable of being learnt; any stimulus could serve as a cue and determine the responses that emerged. Dollard and Miller believed that responses and reinforcements form a hierarchy and vary according to the probability of occurrence. Learning has the effect of adjusting this hierarchy; an initially strong probability of occurrence can become weak as a result of learning.

It is important to note that drives were not viewed as directional – they merely alert an individual that action is required, but do not direct *what* that action should be.

Dollard and Miller (1941) were also interested in what happened if we were frustrated in our attempts to satisfy our drives. They proposed four conflicts which an individual might face:

- 1 **Approach–approach conflict** – having to choose between two equally desirable, yet incompatible goals.
- 2 **Avoidance–avoidance conflict** – having to choose between two equally undesirable goals.
- 3 **Approach–avoidance conflict** – having one goal which is partly desirable and partly undesirable.
- 4 **Double approach–avoidance conflict** – having to choose between many goals which are both desirable and undesirable.

The essential concern of Dollard and Miller was with the learning process rather than with personality, and so the authors did not attempt to characterise it overtly. The authors' attention was to those conditions that *facilitated* personality development.

Tolman's expectancy-value theory

Tolman's work gave considerably greater emphasis to cognitive *processes* over stimulus–response connections. He introduced the notion of **cognitive maps** as mental representations acquired from experience (Tolman, 1948). There was also an emphasis on motivation in the achievement of goals. From this perspective, insufficient attention had been given to beliefs, the striving towards goals and the expression of attitudes. Tolman considered that these factors played a part in 'purposeful behaviour'. Whilst the author was still concerned with objective behaviour as opposed to conscious experience, this approach recognises the relationship of behaviour to goals. Tolman believed that:

- 'Striving' to achieve a goal acts as a stimulus; an impetus for action.
- Behaviour is organised around the purposes we establish for it.

In order to explain the complexity of behaviour associated with broader rather than narrower and specific behaviours:

- Tolman introduced 'associated perception', suggesting that cognitions from different learning environments may be combined to create more generalised beliefs.
- He suggested that generalised beliefs influence behaviour over a wider field.
- He suggested that personality and social maladjustments could be thought of in terms of cognitive maps which had become 'narrowed' owing to motivations which exerted too much strain on an individual or the experience of extreme frustrations in attempting to achieve goals (Tolman, 1948).

Lewin advanced Tolman's thinking further by reference to goals. In the publication on level of aspiration, Lewin et al. (1944) used the term 'valence' to reflect emphasis given to expectancies and values. The concept introduced positive (direct towards) and negative (retreat from) behaviour. Lewin et al.'s (1944) study addressed individuals' compulsions to goals and also allowed for assessment of task difficulty.

Test your knowledge

- 1 What were the intervening variables that Hull used to explain behaviour and why are they important to personality?
- 2 According to Dollard and Miller's stimulus–response theory, what happens when we achieve satisfaction of our goals and what happens when we don't? How does this impact on our understanding of personality?
- 3 How did Tolman explain complex behaviour and how does this inform our understanding of personality?



Sample question

Problem-based learning

Aversion therapy has been used with alcoholics by associating its use with negative feelings, i.e. introduction of drugs, which produce nausea. Would you consider this to be a permanent solution for an individual with an alcohol addiction? What would this suggest to you about personality change?

Points to consider

- Some theorists, such as Dollard and Miller (1941, 1950), focused first on psychopathological behaviour and used insights from this to hypothesise about 'normal' behaviour and development. The implications of this should be considered.
- A number of neo-behaviourist theories (e.g. Hull) were still based on research findings from animal studies. It is not clear whether the learning mechanisms demonstrated by animals are applicable to human learning (e.g. in complex social situations).
- Many early learning theorists sought to identify universal and general laws underpinning learning (and, by default, personality), which conflicts with the aims of the main Individual Differences theories of personality.
- Ultimately, the inclusion of drives, inner thoughts, anxiety and reinforcements encouraged a growth in the consideration of cognitive aspects and led to the development of **social learning theories** of personality.

Social learning and social-cognitive personality psychology

Rotter, Bandura and Mischel are the three theorists most strongly associated with the social-cognitive learning approach to personality. Their theories placed greater emphasis on both cognitive processes and situational context.

Rotter's locus of control

Rotter attempted a synthesis of behaviourism and personality theory by replacing the notion of the drive as motivator, with the notion of *goal seeking*. Rotter's approach differs from that of dispositional trait theories because it does not treat personality as an internal phenomenon *independent* of the environment.

There are four main components to Rotter's theory:

- 1 *Expectancy*: the subjective assessment that a particular behaviour leads to a favourable outcome or reinforcement (based on past experience).
- 2 *Reinforcement value*: the subjective value we attach to the outcomes of our behaviour. If we desire them highly then they are said to have high reinforcement value.
- 3 *Behavioural potential*: the possibility that a particular behaviour will occur in a situation. The actual behaviour chosen in any one situation is that which has the highest potential to be exhibited. *Behavioural potential* increases with *expectancy* and also increases with *reinforcement value*. This is expressed as:
$$BP = f(E \text{ \& } RV)$$
- 4 *Psychological situation*: the concepts of expectancy, reinforcement value and behavioural potential rely on the situational influence on personality. However, Rotter's notion of *situation* constituted a subjective interpretation of environment, as opposed to an objective formulation independent of person perspective.

Specific expectancy, generalised expectancy and locus of control

Rotter presented two forms of expectancies: broad and abstract; and narrow and concrete. The narrower the expectancy, the more precise the behavioural prediction possible. However, Rotter suggested that broad classifications are easier to use in terms of generally *explaining* the behaviour.

Rotter identified a particular form of **generalised expectancy** for the control of favourable outcomes which he called **locus of control**. Locus of control is formed on a scale reaching from an internal to an external pole:

- High **internal locus of control** arises when individuals see that the outcomes of a behaviour/event are the result of their own actions. An example would be where the explanation for an employee achieving a promotion is seen as the consequence of their hard work.
- An **external locus of control** arises in those situations where individuals believe the explanations arise from the actions of others or events that are not of their own making, e.g. where a promoted employee has achieved her situation through 'luck'.

Rotter believed that individuals would demonstrate stable individual differences when faced with the same situation, and a test was produced which reliably

measured the extent to which an individual possessed an internal or an external locus of control (Rotter, 1966). The test consisted of 23 pairs of contrasting general statements, and seeking selection of one from the pair. An example is given below:

- A Getting a good job depends upon being in the right place at the right time.
- B The candidates most successful in job applications are those who have good qualifications and experience and prepare themselves well for the interview.

Test your knowledge

- 1 With what concept did Rotter replace the notion of drive in the early behavioural theories?
- 2 Specify the relationships between behavioural potential and (a) expectancy and (b) reinforcement value.
- 3 From examining Rotter's theory, what do you think is the theoretical justification for cognitive behavioural therapy?

KEY STUDY

Psychological aspects to situation

Phares and Rotter (1956) devised a study demonstrating that students' perceptions of subject interests changed depending upon the class groups to which they were attached. Three lists each of six reinforcements were presented to groups of students, who were asked to rank them in order of their preferences. Six were related to a manual skill, i.e. woodwork; six were related to academic skills, i.e. Maths test results; and six were concerned with a sport performance result, i.e. physical competition. Students were asked to rank them in each of three conditions: a carpentry workshop; a classroom; and a gym. It was shown that the ranks (reinforcement value to the students) varied according to the situation in which they found themselves.

Further reading

Topic	Key reading
Underlying theory and limitations of the construct of 'locus of control'.	Rotter, J. (1975). Some problems and misconceptions related to the construct of internal versus external control of reinforcement, <i>Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology</i> 43(1), 56–67.
Contributions of Rotter's 'locus of control' variable to psychological theory.	Rotter, J. (1990). Internal versus external locus of control, <i>American Psychologist</i> , 45(4), 489–93.
Application of the 'locus of control' concept.	Crothers, L., Kanyongo, G., Kolbert, J., Lipinski, J., Kachmar, S. & Koch, G. (2010). Job stress and locus of control in teachers: Comparisons between samples from the United States and Zimbabwe, <i>International Review of Education</i> , 56(5–6), 651–69.



Sample question

Problem-based learning

Individuals who are considerably overweight are often advised by doctors to begin diets and yet many of those who start give up. If we were to use questionnaires to measure Rotter's expectancy and reinforcement value for a group of individuals, what would you expect to find concerning correspondence of the findings with successful and less successful dieters?

Bandura's social learning theory

Bandura's social learning theory can be understood through the concepts of **observational learning**, **vicarious reinforcement**, **reciprocal determinism** and **self-efficacy**. These concepts constituted what Bandura considered to be a unified theoretical framework for the analysis of thought and behavioural change (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's social learning theory was different from many of the theories which preceded it because it viewed the forces controlling behaviour as more equally distributed between internal and external stimuli.

Observational learning and vicarious reinforcement

Bandura believed that the simple notion of reinforcement could not account for more complex behaviours and that people are capable of learning the benefits of reinforcements without needing personal and direct experience of them. In Bandura's theory, merely observing the effects of other people's experiences (i.e. vicariously) would be sufficient to serve as reinforcement: a process he termed **observational learning**.

Bandura called the overall process of social learning **modelling**.

KEY STUDY

The 'Bobo' study

Bandura conducted a study (1965) to show that reinforcements administered to a participant-model influenced the performance of groups of observing children. A film was shown to children, in which a plastic 'Bobo' doll was subjected to four different verbal and physically aggressive behaviours. Bandura predicted that the presence or absence of rewards would influence imitation by the groups of observing children. One group saw the participant-model rewarded for aggression. A second group saw the participant experience reprimanded for the behaviour. A third group was a control with no consequences. The findings demonstrated that the children's observation of punishment for the aggressive acts performed resulted in fewer aggressive acts when they were given later opportunities to carry them out.

Observational learning as a four-stage process

Bandura considered observational learning as a four-stage process, in which each stage was treated as a necessary condition for modelling (Bandura, 1971, 1977):