

Psychology of Personality and Individual Differences: Theory and Applications

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Week 12

Lecture 31: Personality and interpersonal relationships

So, I welcome you all to the last lecture of this course and the last lecture of this module also. So, we are in the last module, which is Module 12, and this is the fourth lecture of this module. Overall, this is lecture number 31, and it is the last lecture of this course, So, in today's lecture, we will be talking about how personality can help us understand interpersonal relationships, and how personality theories or understanding can be used in the context of interpersonal relationships. So, before we talk about today's lecture, let me give you a recap of the last lecture that is lecture number 30.

So, in the last lecture, we talked about how personality theories or concepts can be used in the context of the workplace, in the context of businesses, in the context of career choices, and so on. So, in that context, we discussed how personality can give a lot of insights and understanding about employee performance and success. We discussed various traits that are important in the context of employee performance. We also discussed how personality can give us insight into the success of leadership.

What traits make a good leader and what traits make a bad leader. We also discussed how personality can be used to understand occupational fitness, which basically means what kind of personality is suitable for what kind of job. So, there has to be a match between that, and that match helps in terms of increasing success and satisfaction, and so on. So, these are some of the concepts that we discussed in the last lecture.

So in the today's lecture we will be talking about the application of personality in the context of interpersonal relationship. We will be talk more specifically about traits that promote good relationship, and the traits that prevent or undermine relationship, meaning the traits which are bad for relationships. So these are the two main things that will be discussed in this lecture and at the end we will be summarize the journey of this course. So this is the outline of today's lecture.

Interpersonal relationship Is something which is very important in human life because we are social animals and we are related to different individuals in our life and so relationships are a significant source of support. They give us security, they give us

amusement and pleasure. They also cause stress and complications. So it is the relationship that is a source of all the positive things in our life.

Relationship can also become source of lot of problems and stresses of our life. This is something that all of us have experienced. The experience depends on what kind of relationship you have with different individuals. So depending on the quality of relationship, this relationship can become a source of positivity or it can become a source of negativity. So the variation in relationship success among individual is significant.

Closely related to this is the concept of personality traits and processes. The kind of traits or characteristics we have as individuals determines to a large extent the quality of our relationships. So some people naturally have more successful relationships than others because of certain traits or qualities. So in the upcoming slides, we will be talking about some of these traits which are positive in terms of promoting good relationships and some traits which undermine good relationships.

Now let us see what are the traits that promote good relationships. So when we are talking about traits, basically we are talking about personality traits. Research studies have extensively used the Big Five traits to study the traits which promote good relationships. So Big Five traits keep coming up again and again in our discussions because when we talk about personal characteristics, this is the trait theory that is the best in terms of describing characteristics with the highest research support.

So people try to summarize the results from that perspective. So people who score high on extroversion and agreeableness among the Big Five traits tend to have more and better relationships with others. Some research shows these traits can act as social deal-makers. So extroversion as a trait—people who talk to others, go out a little, and have a tendency to meet and connect with people. Agreeableness is a trait which we have discussed in detail earlier.

It is a trait which describes people who seek harmony in relationships, avoid conflicts, and are more agreeable. Research shows these two traits are kind of deal-makers in terms of relationships. People with these traits have much better quality relationships. Extroverts are generally socially active, meeting more people and engaging in more activities than introverts. Agreeable individuals are easy to get along with.

They not only avoid disputes but are also skilled at preventing and diffusing conflicts when they arise. So generally, they avoid conflicts as much as possible and don't get into

unnecessary conflicts in the relationship. They seek more harmony in the relationship. So these two qualities are a very good combination, or people with these two qualities generally have better quality relationships.

Studies also focus on traits associated with generally likeability that is traits which are liked by people. Some of the studies that were done show people generally rated communal traits very high. Communal traits are traits which help connect with people, such as being warm and trustworthy and are more likely to be liked. Some surveys show these traits and traits of warmth and trustworthiness generally something that is liked by people in general surveys. Conversely, those perceived as devious, moody, or irritable are less favored in relationships. So, these are like deal-breakers in a sense. People generally do not like such relationships or like to be associated with these people.

People with a lot of moody, irritable characteristics are less liked. Additional research indicates that broad traits like extroversion, sociability, and low shyness predict both the number of friends and the level of agreement or conflict in relationships. So again, extroversion and sociability, which are both basically connected to each other, and low shyness also, because people who are extroverted are generally low in shyness.

People who are introverted may be a little shyer than people who aren't. So these traits predict the number of friends and the number of conflicts or lack thereof; all these are kind of predicted by this. Moreover, traits such as low negative emotions and emotionality mean low neuroticism—that is basically low neuroticism. High positive emotionality and good self-control—these are also generally predictive of successful relationships.

So people who have more positive emotions, you know are generally happy and in a better mood. People who have more self-control in terms of controlling emotions, managing emotions, and those kinds of things are found to have better relationships; these traits predict better relationships. So these are all research findings that show which traits predict what kind and quality of relationships. So these are some of the traits that are very important in predicting good relationships.

Now, in the context of certain traits which undermine relationships, these are the traits that are very bad or generally disliked in relationships. The traits that predict unsuccessful relationships or failure to develop relationships are generally the opposite of the traits we have discussed. So, generally, the traits that promote positive relationships—traits opposite to those—will obviously be detrimental to relationships. For example, introverts

and disagreeable individuals typically experience less success in social and dating contexts.

Now, it is not that introverted people are bad or anything like that. It is generally in the context of relationships that extroversion is many times a preferred trait. That doesn't mean introverts don't have relationships and other things. It is only in comparison.

So, introverts and disagreeable individuals—which is the opposite of agreeableness—typically experience less success in some contexts, like social and dating contexts. Some studies also indicate that. Some traits are particularly detrimental, such as deal-breakers in romantic relationships. Traits like untrustworthiness and anger issues are significant factors that can almost single-handedly sabotage romantic relationships, and so on. In certain specific relationships, qualities like untrustworthiness and anger issues could be very detrimental. Now, this is generally understandable, as behaviors like untrustworthiness and anger issues could manifest themselves in terms of cheating and deception.

Emotional or physical abuse—all of this can damage or destroy relationships, often leading to the end of a relationship and so on. So this is something very commonsensical, and research shows that. Now, another trait which can generally be very detrimental in relationships is something called dispositional contempt. Contempt is a trait. When it becomes part of personality, that means generally the person is like this.

So dispositional contempt refers to a personality trait characterized by a tendency to habitually look down on or feel disdain toward others. So these are the people who have a habit or habitual tendency to look down on others. Or generally, there is a sense of disdain for others. So they will generally prefer to put people down. And feel a sense of, you know, like they themselves are superior.

So that is the sense of contempt—a general sense of, you know, sometimes people can show contempt for certain individuals because of certain behaviors. But dispositional contempt is something where they will generally look down on others. So that is called dispositional contempt. So, a tendency to habitually look down on others and feel disdain toward others. So some people are like this, you know.

So that is called a trait of dispositional contempt. Now, individuals high on this trait of dispositional contempt are very prone to seeing others as inferior. They always look down on others, which means they see them as inferior, incompetent, unworthy, and they

often experience a sense of superiority. So this comes from the sense of superiority that they look down on others. Some people have this tendency even though they may not have really achieved anything great or something like that.

But you know, they will have a sense of superiority and they will look down on others. So this trait can manifest as scorn, disrespect, or moral judgment towards other people, and this could generally be the manifestation of this trait. So individuals who score high on this tend to exhibit this cold, arrogant, and disagreeable behavior while also appearing emotionally fragile and insecure. One of the scales used to measure this trait is called the Dispositional Contempt Scale. It uses items like, 'I often feel contempt for others', 'I often feel like others are wasting my time'. So these people can also look very emotionally fragile and insecure because their sense of superiority is just based on their own ideas or hypothetical, you know, imaginary ideas. So their sense of self-esteem itself is very fragile and insecure. Generally, men typically score higher on this trait than women. Some of the research shows there is some kind of gender difference here.

Older people score less on this as compared to younger ones. So younger people generally are more likely to score high on this trait than older ones. As people become older they generally become milder. People who score high on this trait generally experience dissatisfaction in the relationship.

People with this trait generally experience dissatisfaction in the relationship, and their partners feel similarly unhappy and less committed because this dispositional content will manifest itself in all types of conflicts and all types of insecurities. Moreover, other people are obviously not going to feel comfortable in the presence of individuals who constantly look down on others. So such people find it difficult to maintain relationships and so on. So the trait of dispositional contempt is associated with significant negative impact on relationships. The presence of such a trait in a partner often leads to a strained relationship and raises questions about why this relationship persists despite the evident dissatisfaction. So generally it causes lot of strain in the relationship. Another trait which also is generally very problematic in the context of relationship is rejection sensitivity. It is a trait linked to relationship issue though it is not essentially a deal breaker. People with high rejection sensitivity, individuals with high on rejection sensitivity tend to react intensely to perceived signs of rejection or disinterest from their partners.

So with people with very high sensitivity to rejection, if they see a little bit of some sign, if they perceive some sign of rejection or some kind of disinterest from the partner or whoever is in the relationship, they become highly sensitive about it and they react very

strongly and intensely. Even the mildest form of symptoms of rejection or disinterest from their partner can throw them off. So that is called rejection sensitivity. People high on this react very aggressively or very strongly to any sign that shows some kind of disinterest or perceived sign of rejection with a lot of emotional reactions.

So when discussing relationship problems, even minor expressions of irritation or disinterest can trigger feelings of being rejected, leading to anxious or panicked responses. They cannot tolerate that, you know, so that sensitivity is too strong. This heightened sensitivity can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. The partner's reaction to the heightened anxiety or panic can often lead to actual rejection. Because the reaction pattern is so strong that it can kind of start a chain of events which can ultimately actually lead to actual rejection, which might have started without any real cause.

Thus, it increases the issue of confirming the individual's fear of rejection. So because of their fear of rejection, they engage in certain behaviors which further enhance the problems and can ultimately actually lead to real rejection. So it is a self-fulfilling prophecy kind of thing that happens. So this rejection sensitivity is activated by indications, even ambiguous ones, that rejection might be imminent. A little bit ambiguous where there is no reality, some kind of sign which they perceive can lead to all kinds of emotional behavior.

Even when there is no such sign, during those early positive phases of relationship, individual with high rejection sensitivity may exhibit lot of caring and supportive behaviors. Now this trait can cause a person to appear kind of paradoxical because sometime this person is very good, they will show a lot of kindness and care and at the same time become very uncaring, abusive and when they feel they are going to be rejected. All kinds of confused combination could be possible for people with high rejection sensitivity. So when there is no sign they will show extreme care and love and affection and when with the slightest sign of rejection they can become abusive and they can become highly aggressive and so on.

So these people can exhibit several traits which are opposite to each other. So this variability can raise questions of who is right, who is the real person in this. This person is combination of both of this actually. The answer is both aspects are of the same underlying reason because the person himself has a high sensitivity of rejection. That is leading to all this opposite spectrum of behavior.

Although the behavior might seem inconsistent, it is actually connected to the one underlying reason that is sensitivity to rejection. Another important issue in the relationship context where trait can play a very important role is compatibility. Now the idea that compatibility is a key to successful relationships is both supported and challenged. Now let us see how this is. Now similarity in traits such as agreeableness, emotional stability and mild extroversions can enhance relationship quality.

So if people are similar in traits, let us say both are high in agreeableness, both are emotionally stable, and both are extroverted in nature. So generally, when people with such qualities there is a sense of compatibility, and it enhances relationship quality and so on. Generally, most of the people fall into these average traits. Most of the people you see, on average, the majority of human beings, fall into these traits, on average, a little bit here and there. There may be differences, but generally people fall score an average score in all of these traits.

So generally individuals are fairly normal in these respects and more likely to get along. Even if there are little bit differences here and there, generally people fall in the average category. So, generally people get along with each other. So, there is some kind of compatibility inherently. However, when traits are very statistically unusual traits, when people have some unusual traits like a high level of disagreeableness or rejection sensitivity or a high level of dispositional contempt, these are generally not exhibited by most people; these are some exceptionally unusual traits that can lead to relationship problems. Pairing individuals with such traits can create many more problems than actually solving them. Now, compatibility means similar people meeting, but if people with these unusual traits meet, this is never going to work out because both have problematic traits, and pairing similar such people will only create or multiply the problem.

So when we say compatibility issue in traits, people with similar traits do better. This is true for those average normal traits. But when people have unusual traits which are problematic traits if you meet two people with those traits, it is not going to work out because both have problematic traits, and it will multiply only the problems. So this can lead to relationship problems. Pairing individuals with such traits may actually increase the issues rather than resolving them. So, regarding compatibility, we should understand who is being paired with whom. So, not everybody can be similar; but, you know, similar people make better relationships.

Thus, finding someone with a personality similar to one's own can be beneficial in terms of statistically average traits. The key consideration must be whether the person is normal or not, whether the person is within those average traits or not. For most people, this

consideration aligns that seeking similarity is a crucial factor, but the person has to be emotionally stable, behaviorally stable, rather than only having similar traits. So just focusing on similarity of traits may not work in all contexts. The traits have to be within the average and normal traits then only it will work out in terms of compatibility; otherwise, it may not work. Those unusual traits—you cannot match people with unusual traits even though they may be similar. So these are a few things about how personality traits can actually contribute to relationships or contribute to better relationships or some traits which can create problems in relationships. So this is how some personality traits can contribute to interpersonal relationships. These are some of the things that are related to the application of personality in different contexts. In this Module 12, we focused on understanding personality traits, concepts, or theories in different domains of applications like physical health, mental health, the workplace, and then relationships. Personality, which is very clear in all these lectures, has lots of applications in all these domains of life. So this is what Module 12 was all about, and this was the last module. With this, we completed Module 12, and also this course ends here.

So there is no more lecture here. Before I just sign off, let me give you a brief recap of the journey that we had in this course. So, to summarize what we have discussed in this course, this journey included 12 modules, each with a specific focus in mind, specific concepts in mind. In the first module, we gave an introduction to personality psychology. We introduced the meaning of personality. We discussed how it is defined from the discipline of psychology and how it is different from the layman's perspective. We discussed all of these basic concepts.

We gave an overview and we also discussed what is the research method that is used in the field of personality psychology in order to derive information. So we discussed all these things in the module 1. In the module 2 we discussed personality assessment where we said that personality assessment is very important and significant and it has lot of applications. We introduced this idea of personality assessment; we also discuss specific methods about how it can be done. So this was the module 2, in the module 3 onwards we discussed talking about different theories and perspectives in personality psychology. Personality psychology has a wide range of theories and all theories are in the different domains.

So in the module 3 we started talking about those domains and dimensions of personality theories. So we started with biopsychological perspective where we discussed how personality can be understood from the biological perspective, from how genetics contribute to personality, how body physiology contribute to personality. So these are

some of the things that we discussed in the module 3. In the module 4 we talked about trait perspectives and its application, something we have discussed in module 12 too.

So have we discussed different trait theories like Cattell's 16 personality factors, Big Five models and many other theories which come under trait theories. We also elaborated on the person-situation debate which is very important debate in the field of personality.

Module 5 was about psychoanalysis. Particularly we focused only on Sigmund Freud's Theory of psychoanalysis. We did not specifically discuss Neo-Freudians and other figures from the tradition of psychoanalysis. So, we discussed the basic concepts, structure of personality, and the therapeutic implications of psychoanalysis in that module. Module 6 was about behaviorism and the learning perspective, how it contributes to personality and how personality can be explained from the behavioral perspective. So, we discussed classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and so on.

Module 7 was about the humanistic perspective. So, we discussed personality and how it can be understood from the humanistic perspective, where we covered Abraham Maslow's theory of need hierarchy and Carl Rogers' theory. In Module 8, we discussed the cognitive and social cognitive perspective, where we covered theories like Kelly's personal construct theory. We discussed the social cognitive learning theory of Bandura and Mischel. We also discussed some minor cognitive theories, like explanatory style and internal-external locus of control, and so on.

Module 9 was about the social and cultural perspective on personality. How personality can be understood from the socio-cultural perspective. In that context, we discussed gender and personality and how culture and personality are linked.

In Module 10, we discussed personality development and change. We addressed the issue of whether personality can change as we progress in life or to what extent personality traits are stable. These are the issues we discussed in this particular module, along with some associated theories. Module 11 was about developing positive personality traits. This is also very important and interesting in terms of application, as certain personality traits have a significant positive impact on human life.

We tried to understand some of these traits, including character strengths, resilience, empathy, and kindness, and how to develop them, as discussed in this module. The last module we discussed and just finished is about specific applications of personality psychology. In that context, we discussed how personality psychology theories and

concepts can be used to understand physical health, mental health, workplace dynamics, and interpersonal relationships. These are some of the topics we covered throughout this course.

I hope this understanding has enhanced our knowledge about human nature. The main important question is: which approach is right? We have discussed multiple approaches to personality theories. One question that arises is: which one is the best approach? Which one is the best?

Now, if you look at all these theories, you can understand this. All of these theories are looking at personality from a particular lens or particular perspective. So, they are all looking at personality, but from different perspectives or different angles, which are all important and relevant. The goal of personality psychology is personality. If you look at personality psychology, it aims to understand the whole person with all the relevant aspects, which is the ultimate goal of personality psychology. Now, this goal is to some extent fulfilled, and obviously, every discipline is growing. When we combine all these theories together and try to explain personality, then we have lots of diverse knowledge about personality.

However, this goal is impractical if you look at or try to seek only one grand theory that explains everything, every facet of personality. Because the scope is too overwhelming. Because human beings are too complex. Too many aspects are associated with their behavior.

So, we cannot, you know, it is not possible to propose one grand theory that includes everything. It is impractical and not possible. So, our goal of understanding the whole person to some extent is fulfilled if we combine all these theories and try to understand human personality from all these perspectives. So that is why personality theory actually could never come up with one grand theory, and it is not possible because of the overwhelming scope of it.

So, that is why personality psychology adopts focused approaches or different perspectives to understand personality, like the trait approach, biological approach, psychoanalytic approach, humanistic approach, and so on, which we discussed in different modules, learning, and cognitive approach. So if you see, all of these approaches are limited in their focus; they have certain limitations and certain strengths, and they focus on only specific questions and variables. They try to avoid the confusion

that would arise if they attempt to address every aspect because it is not possible; if they try to address every aspect, they will not be able to do justice to it.

So they only focus on particular aspects and try to use only specific questions and variables. Therefore, there is no one grand theory in the context of personality that can address all the dimensions, and it is not required or practical either. So I hope this theory has enhanced your knowledge about yourself and understanding others. It will help us to understand ourselves and others, which is the whole goal of personality. We, as human beings, are interested in understanding the personalities of others, and we keep predicting that all the time. I hope this particular course will enhance that knowledge and provide more authentic and scientific understanding of personality. So it will enhance your self-awareness, and I hope a lot of these concepts can be applied to your life.

So thank you for being part of this course, and I wish you all the best in your future endeavors. Thank you.