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Theories Paper - Personality Theory

### **Introduction:**

This paper is to reflect my knowledge and understanding of some of the theories we have discussed in our Personality Theory class. We have and use personality theories in psychology to gain a better understanding of ourselves and the people around us. It gives us greater insight into behavior, emotions and thoughts that can be conscious or unconscious. We can utilize these theories to correct “bad” behavior and reinforce “good” behavior such as B.F. Skinner’s operant conditioning suggests.

I have chosen to talk about the theories of George Kelly, Arthur Staats and B.F. Skinner to analyze my personality.

1-George Kelly was born in 1905 to a religious family on a farm in Kansas. Although he originally studied engineering in school, he switched to education for his degree. While in graduate school he was more interested in sociology and how it related to labor relations and the world around him. This turned his attention to the theories of psychology. He vehemently opposed Freud’s “nonsense” theories (which suggested the libido motivated our thoughts) and was determined to research his own. Throughout his teaching career he offered free counseling to his students in his clinic, which in turn provided him subjects to test his theories. After taking over and leading the clinical training program at Ohio State University, he published his first theory called The Psychology of Personal Constructs.

Kelly focused on the individual and how they differ in personal constructs or how they view the world and apply it to experience. From these constructs emotions and behavior follows. In these personal constructs we make observations and predictions to anticipate what will happen in our lives.

I would like to use the example of my past marriage. When my last marriage ended, I was able to devise a construct of what marriage meant and what it required to be successful. I learned and accepted my bad behavior in that marriage and applied the opposite to my current marriage. Things such as being more in control of my emotional response to difficult situations. For example, my immediate reaction in the middle of an argument with my ex-husband was to remove myself from the situation and leave the house. My construct for difficult situations was either to keep my emotions in or to flee. Because I had learned from previous interactions that became volatile, my construct was “this is threatening” to both of us. Because of Kelly’s construction corollary, I made a prediction about future events based on similar happenings in the past. In turn, this choice to leave difficult situations became one of my core constructs, which is central to my personal identity. I became less about fight and more about flight anytime any situation, involving anyone in my life, became too stressful or difficult to navigate.

On the other side of the coin when I chose to hold feelings or emotions in and not express them, I became ill. Kelly calls this preverbal construct, which is described as un verbalized and unconscious anticipations not expressed in language. I had bouts of depression, stomach aches, headaches, body aches and eventually severe hives over my entire body. These cropped up when I didn’t verbalize my feelings or emotions around a serious subject.

2-Arthur Staats was born in New York in 1924, the youngest of four children raised by a Jewish mother after his father died when he was three months old. He also was heavily influenced by his uncle and sister's progressive literature and discussions as he grew up. This helped him develop an interest in social-economic affairs. After serving in the war and being interested in many areas he always had a need for analysis within his life. He applied this curiosity and analysis to graduating with a PhD in clinical psychology while taking a degree in general experimental psychology.

Although his theories are primarily steeped in behaviorism, his approach was a bit different. While at Arizona State University he began studying human-oriented behaviorism, which provided the basis for cognitive behavior therapy, behavioral assessment, personality and personality measurement. One of his most known contributions to behaviorism is the time-out procedure for children. He reasoned that by taking the child out of the environment where the undesired behavior is happening, the behavior would diminish or was eliminated.

I have personally used this technique with my five year old on many occasions. When I remove my son from a situation where he is misbehaving, such as throwing toys or drawing on the wall and I put him in a different room, he has time to take a breath and disengage. It actually calms him down and refocuses his energy and attention to something else.

Staats also proposed the three basic behavioral repertoires, which are learned behaviors fundamental to later learning of more complex behavior. These include language-cognitive (speech, reading, thinking), emotional-motivational (punishment and reward, depression,

religious values) and sensory-motor (feeding, toilet training, social skills).

I use the example of completing my school work in the emotional-motivational repertoire. Within in this behavior we are conditioned that we will be punished or rewarded depending on the outcome. As a result of of this learning, people approach pleasant stimuli and avoid unpleasant stimuli. If I don't complete my schoolwork on time or at all, I won't pass the class. Therefore, this delays my degree and moves me further away from graduation.

3-B.F. Skinner was born in 1904 in Pennsylvania to a happy childhood full of inventions and devices he created. After a failed attempt at writing a novel he graduated from Harvard in Psychology.

Skinner believed that personality and behavior was not caused by forces within an individual but was more of a scientific explanation outside of the person. He is most known for his operant conditioning idea, that behavior is determined by the environmental outcomes contingent on the behavior. Somewhat similar to Staats emotional-motivational repertoire, operant conditioning is the selection of behavior through its consequence.

I use the example of how I parent my child when he makes mistakes or I want to reinforce good behaviors. My son is in kindergarten and is practicing writing his letters and numbers. In order to reinforce this positive behavior, I give him praise, high fives and sometimes for completing a big assignment, a treat. Because these responses are immediate, I practice continuous reinforcement because they also fade quickly as well.

In conclusion, upon reflection of looking at these theories and how they relate to my everyday life, I am able to understand not only why I make the decisions I do but what drives my motivation as well. I was most interested in understanding the emotional-motivation piece in Staat's theory. I struggle with clinical depression and having some insight into the emotional responses I have to certain stimuli is quite enlightening. Why I have developed learned fears over the years and how to potentially catch the signs before I react, will be beneficial for me to utilize in the future.

I do agree with certain parts of the theories but not fully all of them. I believe there are so many aspects to behavior, emotions and biological influence, these theories only focus on one particular aspect and typically dismissing the others.

I think using these theories or at least pieces of it is extremely helpful with my personal and professional life. Personally, I can use these theories to explain why I react to loved ones in a negative way and alternative paths to change those behaviors. From a professional angle, I work in recruiting and assess candidates behavior on a daily basis. These theories give me basis for evaluations and communication techniques my team can use to determine candidate fit.