

# Personality

What makes us who we are?

## **Psychology 305A: Lecture 13**

**Wrap up Self-Esteem  
Person/Situation Debate**

**MAYBE Begin Biological Approach** <sup>1</sup>

# Class Updates

- Exam on Friday
  - Self-Esteem
  - Traits, Trait taxonomies
  - Personality change and development
  - Person-Situation Debate
  - [possibly beginning of biological approach, depending how far we get today]
  - Chapters 3, 4, 5, 14
- ALL MC – bring a No. 2 pencil
- For questions, see me after class
- Next week: Genetics & Physio approaches <sup>2</sup>

**20/20 video**

# What did they mean by “high self-esteem” in the 20/20 video?

- Noise-blasting study
  - People high in NARCISSISM, not self-esteem, became aggressive after ego threat
  - Test was NPI
- High self-esteem isn't problematic; but narcissism can be!

# Self-Esteem Programs for Kids: Positive Illusions

- Are we creating a generation of narcissists?
- “I know I am good because everyone keeps telling me so.”
- Origins of narcissism
  - Unrealistic, idealized positive feedback
  - Positive feedback without actual accomplishments

# Can Positive Illusions Be Harmful?

- “Threatened egotism”: Inflated pride is easily wounded
- High self-esteem has a “dark side”
  - New York Times
- Media reports of adolescent killers suggest that killers felt humiliated by peers, suffered from wounded pride and powerlessness
- Shame-rage spiral; shame may be brought on by excessive pride

# What's the Process?

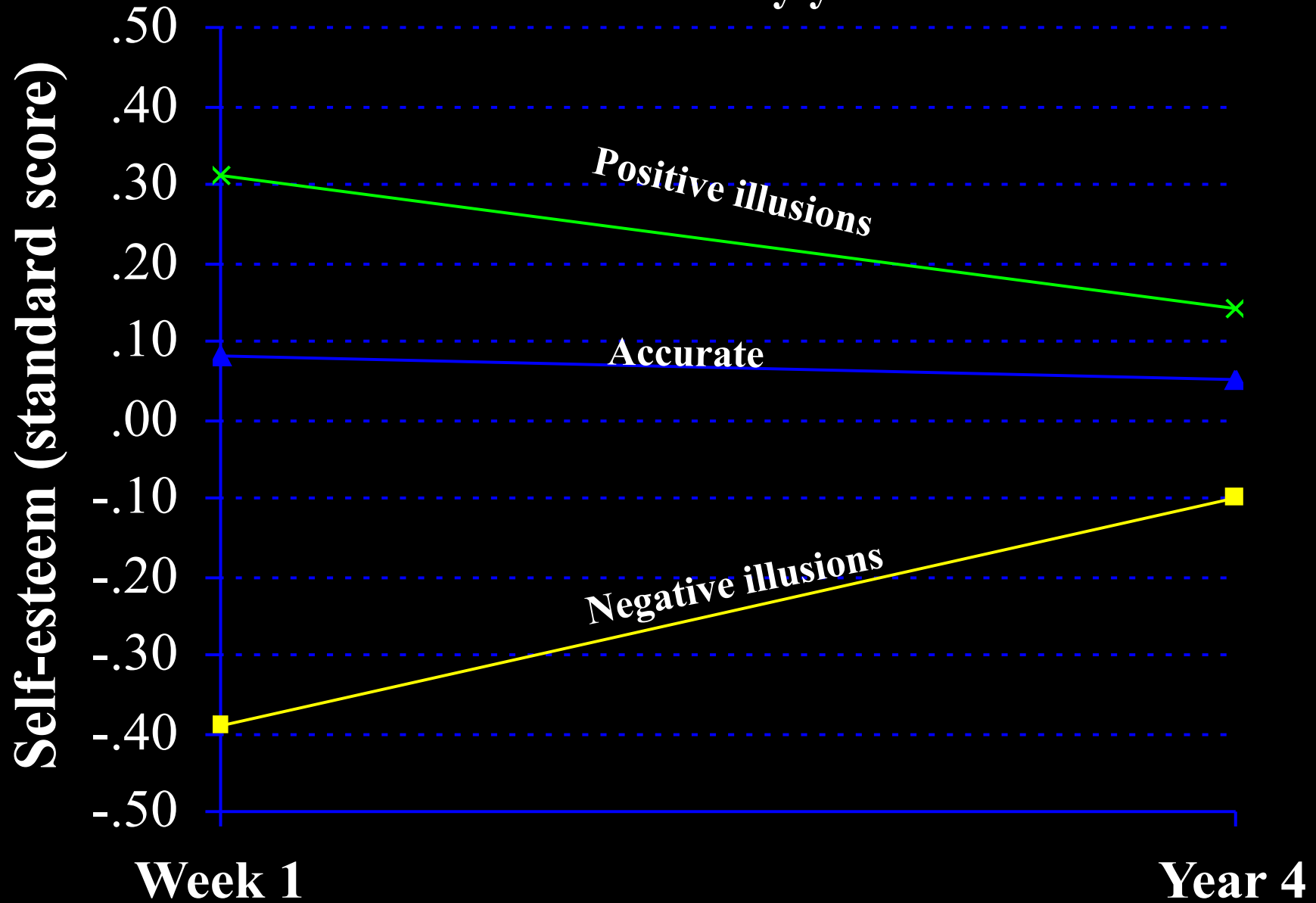
- When we are insulted and humiliated, we feel shame – a painful emotion that we want to avoid feeling at all costs
- Narcissists are so dependent on their inflated high self-esteem, they externalize blame
  - Convert shame into anger, expressed as aggression

# What about positive illusions in undergrads?

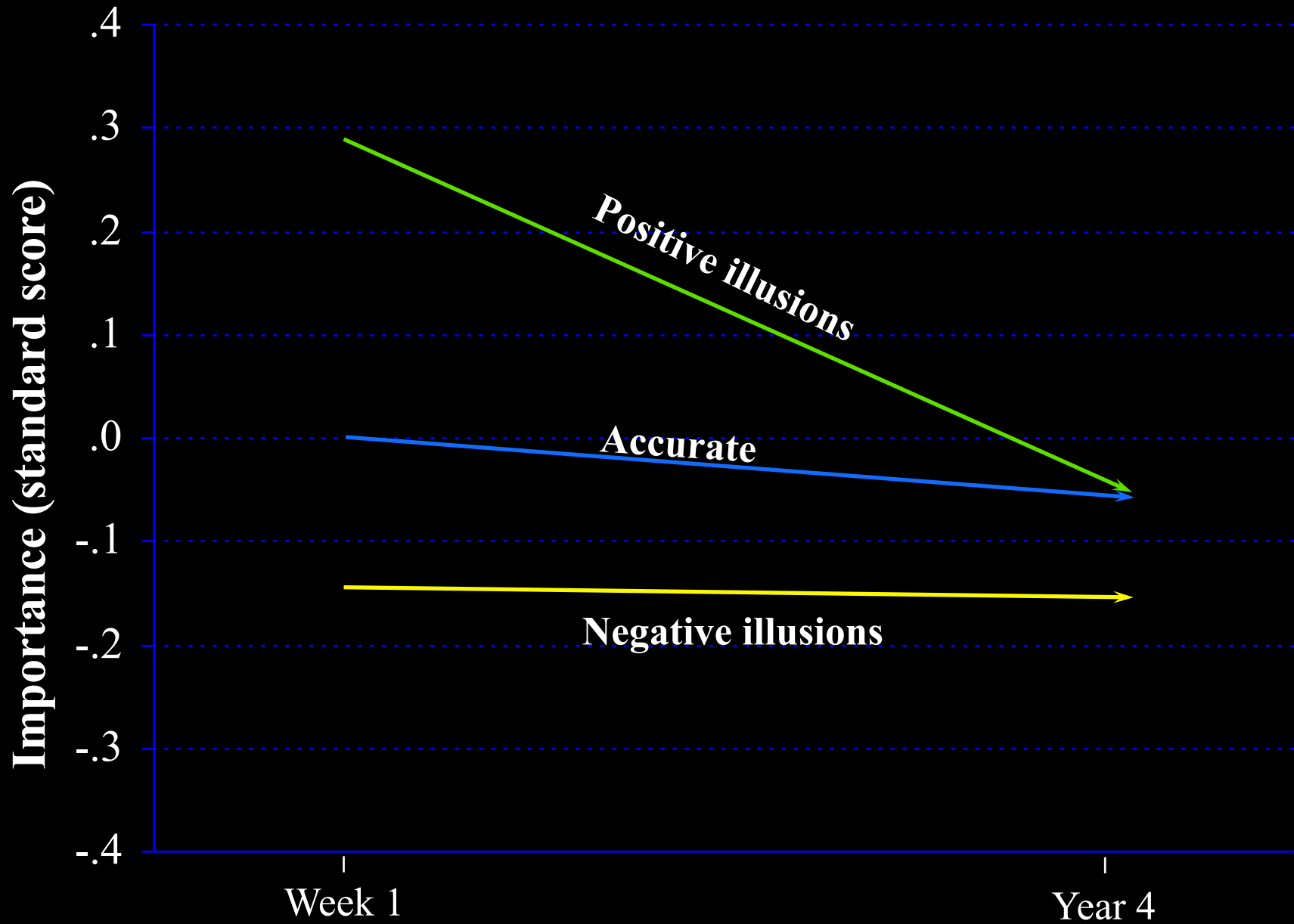
- Research study identified students who entered university with overly positive beliefs about their academic ability (i.e., positive illusions)
- Compared to students with more accurate beliefs, students with positive illusions:
  - Generally happier but less happy over the course of college
  - Did not perform better in school, despite thinking they would
  - More likely to disengage from school (e.g., say “grades are not important to me”)
  - More likely to drop out of university



# POSITIVE ILLUSIONS AND SELF-ESTEEM CHANGE Across University years



# IMPORTANCE OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT



# Research suggests... Positive Illusions are a “Mixed Blessing”

- In the short term, positive illusions are associated with:
  - Psychological well-being and self-esteem
  - Better performance on experimental tasks
- In the long term, positive illusions are associated with:
  - Decreasing levels of well-being and self-esteem
  - Disengagement from school and increased likelihood of dropping out
  - Being less liked by one’s peers
  - Higher levels of aggression

# Developing a Trait Taxonomy

## Part 3

- Theoretical Approach
  - Think about how many traits *should* matter, based on some pre-articulated theory

# Two Facet Theory

- **Authentic pride**
  - Promotes social investments
  - Fosters genuine self-esteem
- **Hubristic pride**
  - Related to aggression, hostility
  - Narcissism
- **If findings from conceptual study and factor analysis study converge with theoretical perspective, then we've probably found the structure of pride**

# **Theoretical and Measurement Issues in Trait Research: Person-Situation Debate**

# Personality's Response

## 1. Personality traits predict behavior, but over the long-term

- Your level of Extraversion is
  - a good predictor of the total number of times you will go to parties this quarter
  - but, a weak predictor of whether you will go to a party this Friday night
- Like batting average; seasonal weather
- To predict behaviors, use *aggregation*
  - Averaging/summing together a set of behaviors

# Personality's Response

2. Broad traits predict broad behaviors,  
narrow traits predict narrow behaviors
  - Conscientiousness → academic performance
  - Punctuality → showing up to class on time



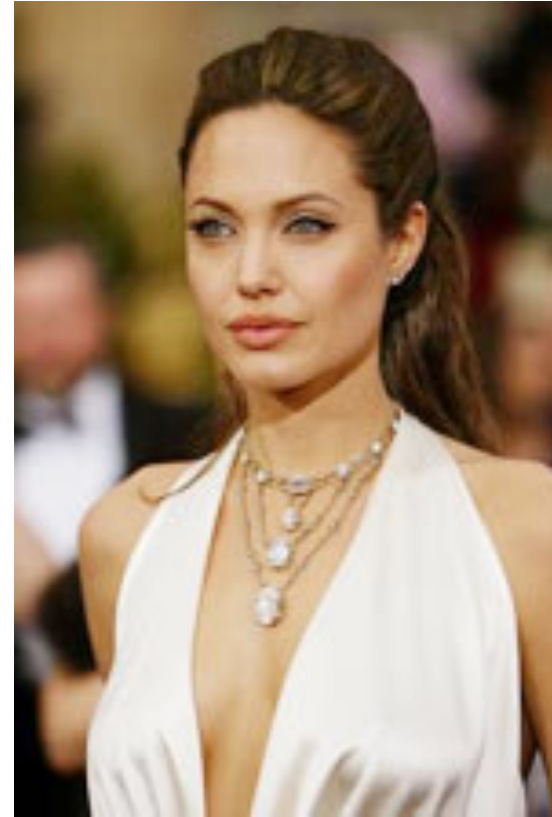
# Personality's Response

3. People may differ in how they behave across situations, but are consistent relative to other people

# Brad and Angelina



Moderate Extraversion



High Extraversion

# Brad and Angelina in Different Situations

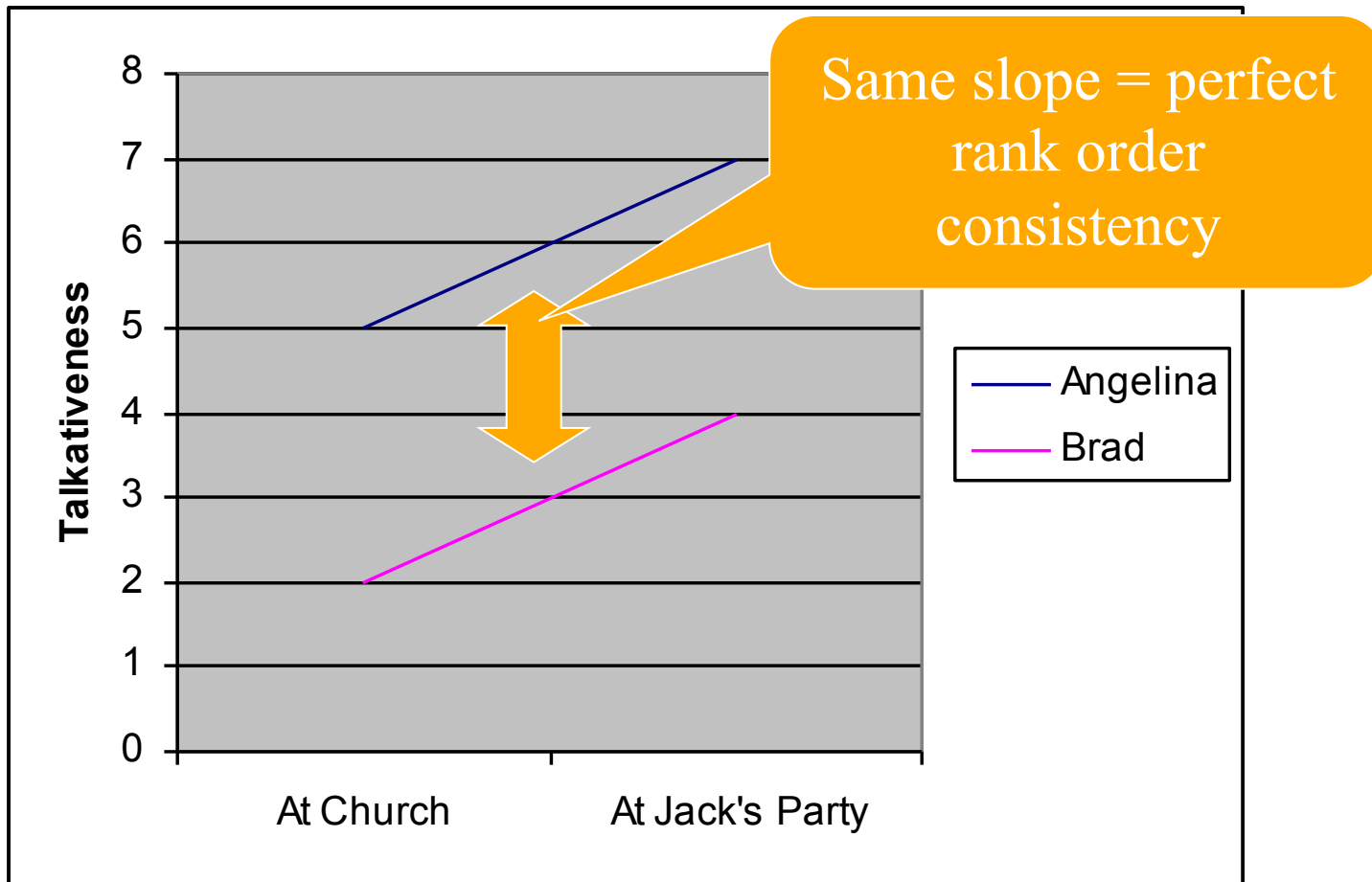
- At Church



- At Jack's party



# Rank-order consistency



# Personality's Response

## 4. Personality traits are stable over long periods of time

- The degree to which a person is shy, organized, creative, friendly, etc. tends to be consistent from week to week, year to year, and even across the entire lifespan

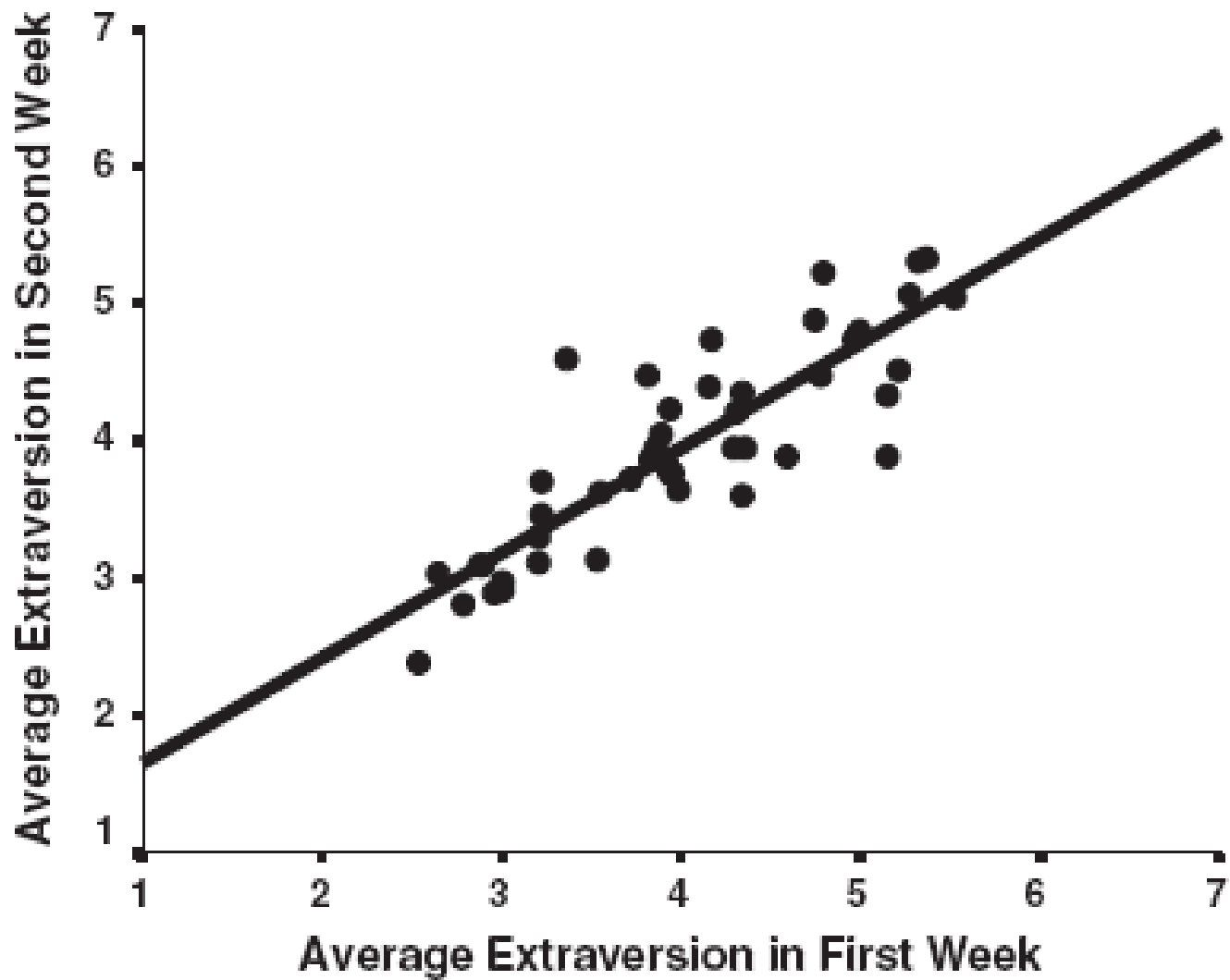


Fig. 3. Stability in behavior over time. Each point in this graph represents one person's average level of extraversion in 2 different weeks. How people act on average in one week is highly similar to how they act on average in another week.

# Adult Personality is Linked to Child Temperament

## Temperament

### Dimension

Activity level

Sociability

Emotional reactivity

Attention level

Orienting sensitivity

## Big Five

### Dimension

Extraversion

Extraversion, Agreeableness

Neuroticism

Conscientiousness

Openness

# **Resolution of Person-Situation Debate: Interactionism**

- Both personality and situation are important predictors of behavior



# So how do we know which matters, when?

- **Situational characteristics** are better predictors of behavior
  - when situation is strong—with a **high** level of constraint
- **Personality traits** are better predictors of behavior
  - when situation is weak—with a **low** level of constraint

- **Degree of constraint**

**High**

people likely to show little  
variation in behavior  
(situation most important)

**Low**

people likely to show most  
variation in behavior  
(personality most important)



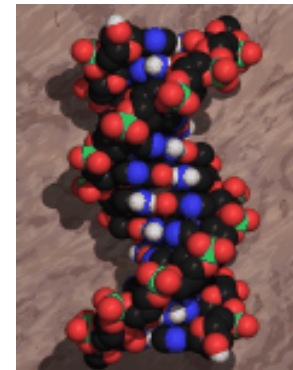
- **Situation**

- Church
- Job interview
- Elevator
- Family dinner
- Class
- Movies
- Restroom
- Bus
- Date
- Bar
- Football game
- Dorm lounge
- Park
- Own room

# **Biological Approach to Personality**

# Biological Perspective and Personality: Basic Assumptions

- Personality traits:
  - Reflect physiological differences
  - Are largely genetically determined
  - Are rooted in our evolutionary history

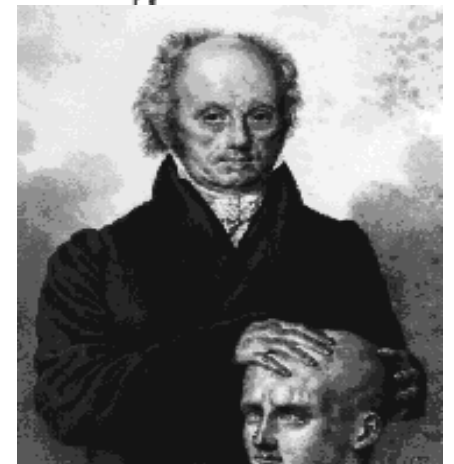
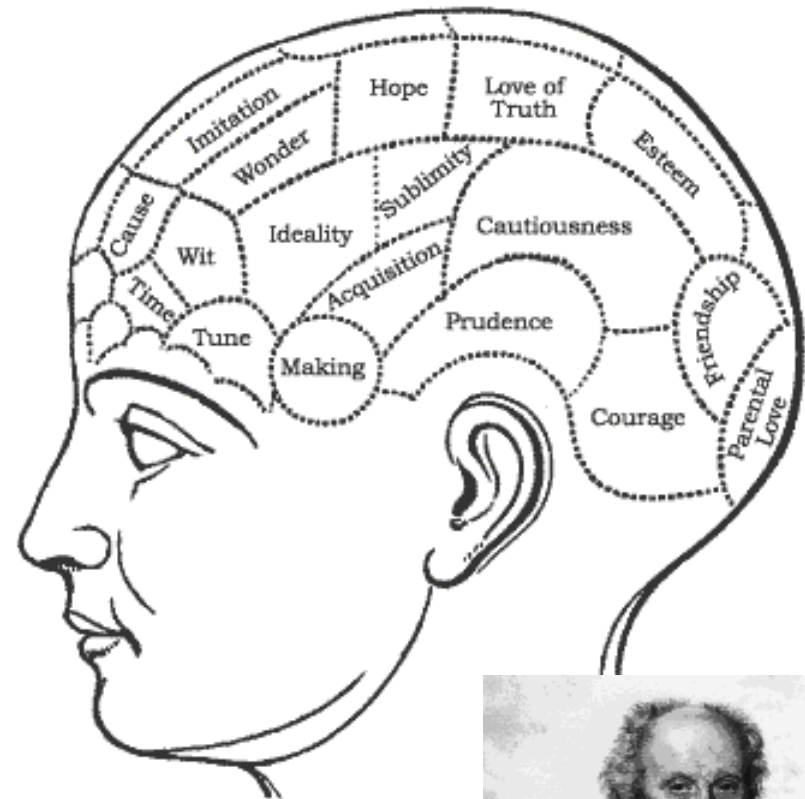


# Pre-Scientific Approach: Phrenology

Regions of the brain are associated with certain functions (e.g., sloping forehead = criminal prone)

Modern view:

- 1) it's in the brain, not the head
- 2) it's not that specific



# Galen's four humors

**GALEN:** Ancient Greek physician (C.130-200 A.D.)

Thought personality was a reflection of the four humors (fluids) that (he thought) make up our bodies.

**Yellow Bile** - bad temper, irritability (Choleric)

**Black Bile** - gloomy, pessimistic (Melancholic)

**Phlegm** - sluggish, non-excitabile (Phlegmatic)

**Blood** - cheerful, passionate (Sanguine)

If one of these fluids was dominant, the personality associated with that fluid would be observed

# Next Class

- Exam 3
- Next Week: Biological Approach
  - Monday: Genetics
  - Read Larsen & Buss Chapter 6