Personality, Individual Differences and Intelligence

Fifth Edition

John Maltby
Liz Day
Ann Macaskill

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Personality, Individual Differences and Intelligence

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John Maltby
University of Leicester
Liz Day
Sheffield Hallam University
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For Liz

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Companion website

For open-access **student resources** specifically written to complement this textbook and support your learning, including three additional web-only chapters, please visit **go.pearson.com/uk/he/resources**

Lecturer resources

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Professor John Maltby is at the University of Leicester. He has over 200 publications in the area of personality and individual differences, psychometrics, and well-being.

Dr Liz Day is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Sheffield Hallam University. She has over 60 publications in the area of individual differences. She also trained as a Clinical Hypnotherapist.

Professor Ann Macaskill is at Sheffield Hallam University and is a Chartered Health Psychologist and trained in cognitive behaviour therapy. She has over 100 publications, with current research in individual differences, health and well-being.

PREFACE

Introduction

How would you describe your personality? Are you outgoing? Do you make friends easily? Do you worry too much? Think of two or three words that best describe how you generally behave, think and feel. How would you describe your general level of intelligence? Are you particularly good at some things and not so good at others?

Now think of your brothers or sisters (if you have them). Compared to everyone else you know, how similar are your brothers and sisters to your personality and level of intelligence? How like your parents are you? Are you more like your mother or your father? Would you say you and your friends have similar personalities, or very different ones?

Do you respond to situations in the same way that your family and friends respond? Do you hold similar views about the world, or very different ones? When it comes to general approaches to life, how different are you to everyone around you? Do you generally have a happy disposition or find life difficult a lot of the time? Can you name people who are similar in your approach to life, and people who are very different? In psychology, personality, individual differences and intelligence are all topics that examine how people are similar and how they differ in their behaviour, the way they think and how they feel. In this text we provide an overview of major theories, methods, research findings and debates in personality, individual differences and intelligence. Although the areas of personality, individual differences and intelligence cover a multitude of subjects, ranging from psychophysiology to socially learnt behaviour, you will see how these three main topics come together by using several similar approaches.

Our aim is to cover the topic areas that meet the requirements of the British Psychological Society qualifying exam and the Quality Assurance Agency Benchmarks for Psychology under their heading of 'Individual Differences'. The contents of this examination help to define the curriculum that is taught in psychology undergraduate degrees accredited by the British Psychological Society. With the British Psychological Society and Quality Assurance Agency Benchmarks for Psychology curriculum requirements in mind, this text also covers aspects of the history of various theories and approaches. This information will be useful for courses that teach history of psychology in an integrated fashion within specific modules.

Consequently, the overall aim of the text is to include substantial coverage of personality, individual differences and intelligence, as well as their integration that is applicable to United Kingdom/European students. We have discussed historical material and viewpoints as well as including contemporary and newer debates to make the material accessible and interesting to read.

We have written text with the novice in mind, and we guide you through the material, from the foundations to the more advanced material, so you can constantly build on previously acquired knowledge and build up a critical understanding of each topic.

To help you do this, we include opportunities to reflect on the material and test your own understanding.

Structure of the text

While writing this text, we consulted over 30 academics in the United Kingdom and Europe over what it should cover. We now know that people have many different ideas about what constitutes personality, intelligence and individual differences. We know that some courses teach all three topics as an Individual Differences course. Other courses see large distinctions between the different areas covered; for example, personality and intelligence. With this in mind, we have not assumed that there is a typical route through the text. Instead, we have sought to make the material in each chapter self-contained so that it may be taught separately. That said, you can divide the text's contents in the following three ways: parts, levels and themes.

Parts of the text

The first way that this text is organised is into three parts: (1) personality, (2) intelligence and (3) further debates and applications in individual differences. It is easy to see how these three sections might be taught separately as topic areas. Each part also has its own introduction, which serves as a guide and helps you structure your learning.

Part 1: Personality

The aim of this part is to provide a parsimonious account of personality theories and approaches to individual differences. We cover the major schools of psychology (psychoanalytic, learning, cognitive, humanistic, trait theorists and biological). Theories are set in a historical context and issues and debates are highlighted, always bearing in mind the key questions that the theories are designed to address. Topics covered include the nature of human beings, the basis of human motivation, the generation of emotions and cognitions and conceptions of psychological health and illness within the various models. Where appropriate, clinical applications of the various theories are also examined, not only to complement your learning in abnormal psychology but also to appeal to those of you with an interest in clinical psychology. Consistent criteria are used throughout to help you to evaluate, compare and contrast the various theoretical approaches. By the end of Part 1, readers will have a theoretical and a research-based appreciation of the sources of individual differences in behaviour, thinking and feeling.

Part 2: Intelligence

This part of the text covers theory, research, measurement and the application of intelligence. This is a controversial area of psychology, where there is a lot of debate. Indeed, you may already have some feelings about theories and measurement of intelligence. For example, what is your view of intelligence tests? If you haven't a view now, you will have by the end of Part 2. We have given full consideration to the theories and controversies in the topic of intelligence, and we highlight classical and modern approaches to how intelligence is defined, debated and applied, all within the historical context of intelligence.

Part 3: Further debates and applications in individual differences

The aim of this part is to cover a series of subjects that are commonly covered in the personality and individual differences journals, but much less so in personality and individual differences textbooks. The rationale for the topics chosen is to draw on influential subjects in individual differences that are contemporary and that we know excite students.

Individual differences in optimism, irrational beliefs, social anxiety, personal relationships, health, well-being and the social attitudes are important when applied in the individual differences literature to explain a wealth of human behaviours, feelings, thinking and reactions. These include explanations of our mental health, how we succeed and fail in interpersonal relationships and how we understand the social world. We have also structured these chapters to develop your 'individual differences' thinking by drawing on different aspects of theory and methodology. For example, in the optimism chapter we will show you how it is useful to unfold a single concept to allow a number of different considerations. In the irrational beliefs chapter we will present the central idea of irrational beliefs and show you how to assess the strength of this concept through to a conclusion by exploring how well it applies to a number of situations. In the social anxiety chapter, we consider two subject areas (shyness and embarrassment) and show you how sometimes it is useful to provide a general context to ideas. In the interpersonal relationships chapter, we show you how useful it can be to take a series of topics and try to link them together, so that you can present an overall process and identify recurring themes.

Level of study

The second way that this text is organised is through level of study. We are aware that some psychology courses teach different topic areas in personality, intelligence and individual differences in different years (ranging from first year to final year). Therefore, we have organised each of the three parts of the text so that the later chapters in each part may be considered as more advanced topics of study. In this way, there is a developmental progression in the learning. This also means that the text should be useful across all the years of your degree.

- **Personality** – This topic area is presented mainly in historical order. Therefore, you will see how approaches and theories in individuals have developed over time. In this part you can compare the classical psychoanalytic, learning, cognitive and humanistic approaches (Chapters 2–6) to understanding the self with modern-day humanistic, trait and biological approaches (Chapters 7–9) in individual differences.
- **Intelligence** – In this topic area the development of learning focuses on a historical overview but is also a comparison in terms of the complexity of arguments. We contrast everyday notions of intelligence and a historical overview of classical and modern theories and applications of intelligence (Chapters 10–12) with controversial and modern-day considerations and applications of intelligence (Chapters 13–15).
- Further debates and applications in individual differences – In this topic area the development is based on the number of subjects covered in the chapter. Therefore, the chapters that look at single concepts, such as optimism and irrational beliefs (Chapters 16 and 17), compare with the chapters that look at several topic areas surrounding social anxiety, interpersonal relationships and social attitudes and health well-being (Chapters 18–22).

Themes within the text

The main themes within the text reflect the British Psychological Society qualifying exam. In line with the exam, we have outlined the assumptions, evidence and main approaches to emotion, motivation, the self and personality and abnormal development. We consider the psychoanalytic, behavioural, cultural, social learning, social-cognitive, radical behaviourist, humanistic-existential, phenomenological, lexical-trait, neo-Darwinist, biological and behavioural genetic approaches to personality. These approaches can be found definitively in Chapters 1–9, but topics covering biological, cognitive and social learning aspects to emotion, motivation, the self, personality and abnormal development are also covered in Chapters 16, 17 and 18.

The influence of genetic, biological, environmental and cultural factors on individual differences, as well as the temporal and situational consistency of individual differences, is addressed throughout the text from Chapter 1 to Chapter 23. The controversies and debates regarding the interaction of genetic, environmental and cultural factors on personality and intelligence are focused on in Chapters 8 and 13.

The influence of personality, intelligence and individual differences on other behaviours, including health, education, culture, relationships, occupational choice and competency, again, is a focus throughout the text from Chapters 1 to 23. For specific examples, you may want to concentrate on Chapters 5 and 6 as well as Chapters 12 through to 23.

The history of mental and psychological testing, the nature of intelligence, contemporary approaches to intelligence and their implications for educational and social policy are covered in Chapters 10–15.

We would also like to draw your attention to other themes that might reflect emerging interests of students in individual differences and provide the basis of material for option modules. For example, those interested in following a theme on well-being might focus on the latter part of the book (Chapters 16–22) in addition to the chapters covering Freud (Chapter 2), Jung, Adler and Horney (Chapter 3), Ellis (Chapter 5), humanistic psychology (Chapter 6) and self-determination theory (Chapter 6). Those interested in statistical applications in psychology would be able to show the uses of factor analysis in intelligence testing (Chapter 11), meta-analysis and effect sizes in comparing sex differences in intelligence (Chapter 14) and the use of psychometrics in developing psychological tests (Chapter 23). Those interested in developing a positive psychology theme should note that there is material on theories within humanistic psychology (Chapter 6), self-determination theory (Chapter 6), wisdom and creativity (Chapter 15), optimism and hope (Chapter 16), love (Chapter 19), forgiveness (Chapter 19), positive aspects of religiosity (Chapter 20), subjective and psychological well-being (Chapter 21) and positive psychology and health (Chapter 22).

Finally, for this third edition of the text, there are some changes and additions since the last edition. As the literature is constantly updating, we have revised all chapters to include recent and key papers. We have also provided substantial new sections in the biologically focused chapters (Chapters 8 and 9), outlining the adaptive personality and behavioural ecology and debates around the general factor of personality, and introduced some further discussion (e.g. the Dickens/Flynn Model) around the Flynn effect (covered in Chapter 12).

Additionally, in each chapter we have referred the reader to related discussions in other areas of the text.

Features of the text

There are features to the text, including within-chapter features and supplementary material provided on a website.

Within-chapter features

Each chapter has these features:

- **Key themes**, so you know the general areas that are covered in each chapter.
- Clear chapter objectives, put in the form of **learning outcomes**, so you can check that you have covered all the major areas.
- A series called **Stop and think** that asks you to think about the areas a little more, or gives you some further information to think about. These features are provided to spur you on and to start thinking critically about the area you have just read.
- **Profiles** that outline biographies of key thinkers or researchers in the topic area, so you get to know more about these psychologists.
- A number of chapters feature **Career focus** interviews, which explore the roles of different psychologists, such as clinical psychologist, neuropsychologist and organisational psychologist, and ask how skills and knowledge learned when studying personality and individual differences apply in these areas.
- **Summary** boxes at the end of each chapter to outline the main points that you should take forward.
- **Discussion questions** containing material that might be suitable for discussion or seminar work.
- **Essay questions** that address the core material in the chapter, allowing you to test your own knowledge and practise essays in the area.

- **Going further** material via key texts, journals and established web resources. This is to get you reading more around the topic areas.
- References to **film and literature** that reflect some of the ideas explored in the chapter.
- **Connecting up** points that references material elsewhere in the text that links with the themes explored in the chapter.

Personality, Individual Differences and Intelligence Companion Website (go.pearson.com/uk/he/resources)

In addition to the features integrated into the text, there is also a variety of valuable resources on the website for both students and lecturers.

The Companion Website for students includes:

- **Multiple choice questions** – You will be able to access over 200 multiple choice questions so you can test your knowledge of the topics covered in the book.
- **Essay questions** – In addition to those in the text there are over 100 essay questions covering a range of topics so you can practise for your essay and examination assessment.
- **Advanced reading** – There are over 20 additional topic areas and recent readings that can be used to supplement or advance your study and act as a source for ideas for your independent projects.

For lecturers there are:

- **PowerPoint slides** – These slides contain details of the main areas and figures provided in each chapter.

Also online are three supplementary chapters. These provide a framework for many of the academic and technical terms that are commonly used in the text and should be used as reference material to support your learning. One might expect to find a chapter early in the text outlining these terms; however, we found that it distracted from the content. We also didn't wish to dictate certain areas of study if the lecturer did not feel they were needed or taught these aspects in different ways.

The three chapters are on the following topics:

- **Academic argument (Chapter 24)** – In this chapter we discuss acceptable and unacceptable forms of academic argument. At points within the text, you will come across academic arguments that form the basis of discussion and debate in chapters. So this chapter on academic argument can be helpful to you to appreciate many aspects of the debate fully. There are many controversies and arguments in personality, individual differences and intelligence, and it is important that you are able to use argument effectively. This chapter can be used to inform what constitutes effective and valid argument and what comprises poor argument. It will also give you advice on the key ideas in critical thinking that can be used to improve your academic work.
- **Statistical analysis (Chapter 25)** – This chapter describes the statistical ideas that lie behind simple inferential statistics (i.e. correlations and *t*-tests); multivariate statistics, such as factor analysis and multiple regression; and advanced considerations in statistics, including meta-analysis and effect size. This material is needed because throughout the text we use statistical terms and concepts to outline, illustrate and support the topics we discuss. The use of statistical terms is common in psychology, and through your research methods and statistics classes you will already be aware of, or become familiar with, many of the terms we mention. However, there may be some statistical concepts with which you are less familiar. Whatever your knowledge or experience of statistical terms, we have included some supplementary material that will give you an easy understanding of many of the statistical terms to build your confidence with using these concepts in the material.
- **Ethics (Chapter 26)** – This chapter deals with ethics. Several times in the text, we touch on issues of ethics; for example, when considering psychoanalytic and humanistic personality or psychology or psychological testing in education and the workplace. This chapter, which outlines ethical guidelines alongside those suggested for research participants by the British Psychological Society, might prove useful in supplementing these discussions.

All these chapters refer to core academic skills or approaches in psychology. You might want to read through these chapters or you might like to use them as a resource that you can draw upon when required.

Final prefatorial comments

When we first started this text we thought that the topics of personality, individual differences and intelligence were important in modern-day psychology. Today we are convinced that they are crucial. Not only do they serve modern-day psychology well, but the past and the future of psychology are bound up in these three areas. No other topic area in psychology has provided so many commonly used concepts and applications to psychology. No other

area of psychology can provide such controversy and emotion (for example, IQ testing, socially defined race differences in intelligence) while also providing such simple and eloquent answers to complicated questions (for example, the five-factor model of personality). Most of all, no other area starts with the construction of the first intelligence test and invention of statistical tests, dabbles in the psycho-physiological properties of the brain and finishes by explaining how we love and forgive.

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Our thanks to Steven Muncer for the continued use of the 'Stop and Think' section in Chapter 23. We also thank Rajvinder Lally for allowing our continued use of the concept and early work on the academic vindictiveness that is used in Chapter 23. For this edition, we would like to acknowledge the work of Radhika Joshi and Tamara Gheorghes for some very helpful literature reviews.

John Maltby
Liz Day
Ann Macaskill

PART 1

Personality and Individual Differences

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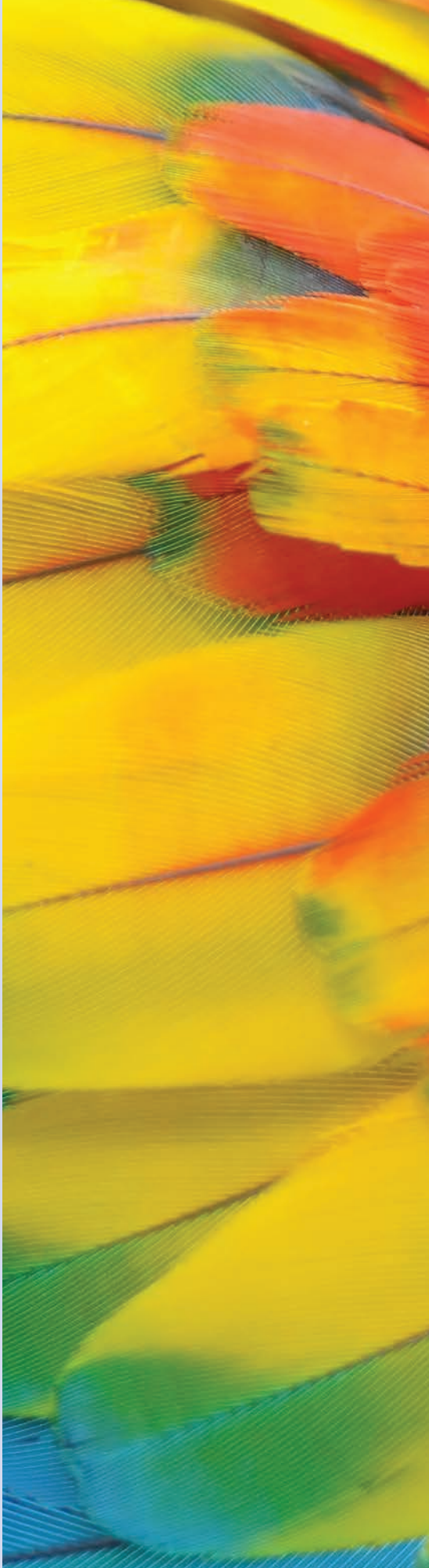

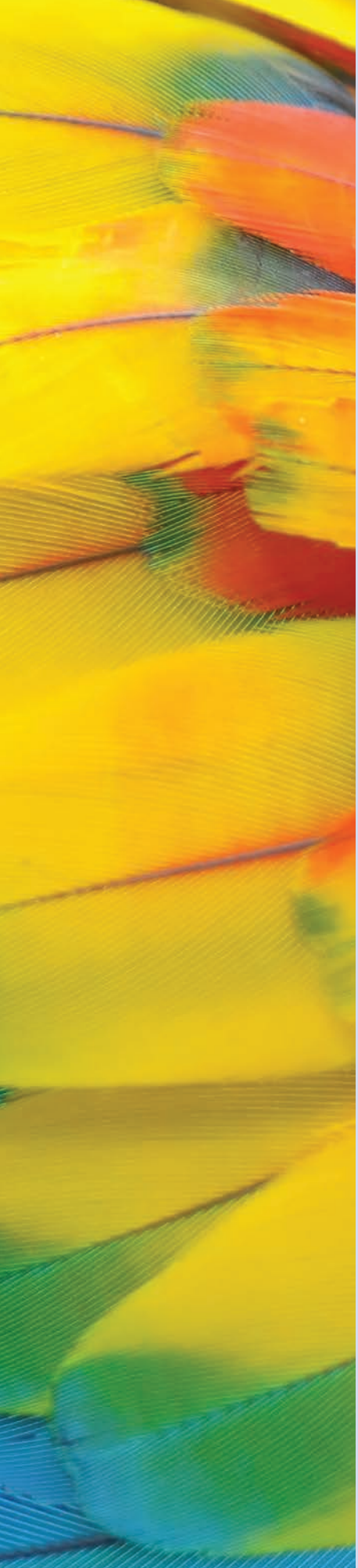

CHAPTER 1
Personality Theory in Context

Key themes

- Nature of personality
- Implicit personality theories
- Definitions of personality
- Aims of studying personality
- Approaches to studying personality
- Describing personality
- Distinctions made in personality research
- Measurement issues
- Strands of theorising
- Reading critically and evaluating theory

Learning outcomes

After studying this discussion you should:

- Appreciate why psychologists study personality
- Be aware of a variety of definitions of personality
- Understand the components of psychological definitions of personality
- Have developed an understanding of the historical roots of personality theory
- Understand the major questions that personality theories aim to address
- Understand the criteria that can be used to evaluate personality theories

Introduction

One of us recently overheard two female students who were discussing the merits of their friend's boyfriend. One student concluded, 'I don't know what she sees in him; he has no personality whatsoever.' The other agreed vehemently with this statement. What is this poor guy actually like? This is not an unusual comment, and you may have used it yourself. Can an individual have no personality? How do you visualise someone who is described as having 'no personality'? Take a minute to think about it. We tried this out on a group of students and asked them what they thought someone was like who could be described as having no personality. They easily produced descriptions such as quiet, not a lot of fun, unassuming, geeky, not very sociable, no sense of humour and dull. A few students even suggested that such people are unhappy looking, and others suggested that they dress in dull clothes.

Clearly the description of 'no personality' does not literally mean that the individual does not have personal characteristics of the type that we normally think of as being part of a person's personality; rather, it implies a certain sort of person. This then raises the issue of what we mean by personality. Firstly, following from our example, we will begin by looking at how non-psychologists, as opposed to psychologists, deal with personality. Then we will explore what psychologists mean by personality. At that point, some of the complexities of the topic area will become apparent.

Source: rawpixel/123RF

General population perspectives: implicit personality theories

It is clear from the opening example that describing someone as having 'no personality' conveys meaning to most people; and, for our students at least, there was a fairly good consensus about exactly what it meant. This is an example of what psychologists call **implicit personality theories**. These are intuitively based theories of human behaviour that we all construct to help us to understand both others and ourselves. We hear descriptions of individuals and we observe people going about their business, chatting with us and with others, and then we use this information to help us decide what sort of person we think they are. Most of the time we are not even consciously aware that we are doing this; it happens so frequently that it becomes an automatic response. In this way, we are all psychologists collecting data based on our observations of social situations. Human beings seem to have a natural curiosity about why people behave as they do. We use our observations to construct our implicit personality theories. These implicit theories are then used to explain behaviour.

For example, what about the student in your seminar group who never contributes to the discussion? Is it because of shyness, stupidity or laziness? How would you decide?

We make observations and then we infer cause and effect. We see the student in the bar surrounded by a large group of people, obviously the centre of attention, chatting and laughing; and we may conclude that this person is not shy. Sometimes we discuss it with our friends to compare their observations with ours. Someone may tell you that the silent seminar student won a business sponsorship to come to university. You may conclude that this rules out stupidity as a motivator for their behaviour. Are they lazy? Perhaps we think they are too arrogant to join in the discussion, that they find the level of debate beneath them intellectually. Therefore, we may have them down as either lazy or arrogant, and we look for confirmation in their subsequent behaviour in seminars. In this way, we make what are called causal inferences about behaviour. This means we assume that people behave the way they do because of the sort of people they are; it is down to their personality. Most people find it difficult to identify how they make these judgements. Think about how you do it if you find this hard to believe.

Problems with implicit theories

Judging what other people are like is a skill that is valued. Think how often you hear people saying, 'I am a good judge of character'. We all like to think that we know about people, and most of the time our implicit theories of personality appear to work quite well in our everyday life – however, they are flawed in several ways. You may notice that we said implicit theories *appear* to work well, but a major difficulty with them is that we seldom have the opportunity to check them out properly. We decide to share our flat with Sarah and not Joanne, and therefore we never have the opportunity to see if Joanne is a good flatmate. If it turns out that we get along well with Sarah as a flatmate, we congratulate ourselves on being a good judge of character. Joanne might have been even better, but we will never know. In this way, our evaluation of the situation is flawed.

Implicit theories are also based on casual and non-random observations of individuals. By this, we mean that they are not based on observations of behaviour that have been systematically selected to portray accurately how that person spends his or her life. Instead, we have chance observations of other people. We can see this from the student seminar example. With most people, we sample only a tiny fraction of their behaviour; yet, based on this, we have to make decisions about whether we are going to pursue a friendship with them, give them a job or go out of our way to avoid them in future. If we decide not to pursue further contact with the individual, that is usually the end of the story. Implicit theories are not scientific theories of personality. Exactly what constitutes a scientific theory will be discussed later in the chapter. However, it should be clear from these examples that some more reliable way of understanding individual behaviour and classifying people would be useful. Psychologists have set out to do this; and, as we shall see, they have developed a range of theories, all attempting to meet this need.

How is personality defined?

Psychologists need to be very clear about exactly what they are studying and define it precisely if they are going to measure it effectively. One difficulty that frequently arises is that many of the words used by psychologists are already part of our everyday language or have been adopted into normal language use. However, it is still important to consider what the public (as opposed to psychologists) think that a term means so that accurate communication can occur. In most instances public, or lay, definitions tend to be very wide and not specific enough for psychologists to use for research purposes to define precisely what they are examining. However, lay definitions provide a good starting point for developing psychological definitions.

Lay definitions of personality

Lay definitions of personality frequently involve value judgements in terms of the social attractiveness of individuals. Sometimes the emphasis is on aspects of the individual's physical appearance, perhaps with some comments on their social style. This view produces the following personality description: 'Richard is tall and fairly attractive, but never has much to say for himself although he can be very funny with people he knows well.' Such definitions are essentially evaluations of individuals and include relative judgements, in this instance about height and attractiveness. This definition also includes some judgements about how Richard interacts with others: 'never has much to say for himself although he can be very funny with people he knows well'. The elements of descriptions or judgements made about the person when they are in social settings are common elements. These lay definitions are commonly linked to the implicit personality theories that we discussed earlier. Sometimes they include elements of folklore within particular cultures. This may be an assumed match between a physical attribute and a personality attribute. Common examples are that people with red hair also have fiery tempers or that fat people are jolly.

From lay definitions of personality, it seems that personality is judged in a social context; that is, it has elements about how well people get on with others and their style of interacting as well as comments on their appearance. Does this mean that our personality is apparent only in social situations? This is obviously not the case. When people are

alone, they still display individual differences in terms of how they cope with solitude and their attitude towards it. For most people their personality is an integral part of their being, which exists whether they are alone or with others.

Psychological definitions of personality

Psychological definitions of personality differ from lay definitions in that they define personality in terms of characteristics, or the qualities typical of that individual. Gordon Allport, a prominent early figure in personality psychology, popularised the term 'personality' and provided a definition in 1961. He defined personality as 'a dynamic organisation, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create the person's characteristic patterns of behaviour, thoughts and feelings' (Allport, 1961, p. 11).

This dense definition requires some unpacking. *Dynamic organisation, inside the person* refers to a process that is continually adjusting, adapting to the experiences we have, changes in our lives, ageing and the like. In other words, personality is conceptualised as being an active, responsive system. It is conceptualised as being organised in some sort of internal structural system, the details of which are not yet quite clear – although hypotheses abound, as you will see in later chapters. *Psychophysical systems* refer to the inclusion of both our minds and our bodies in what we refer to as personality. In somewhat crude terms, the psychological elements in the mind interact with the body sometimes in complex ways to produce behaviour. *The person's characteristic patterns* suggest that something relatively stable is being produced that becomes typical of that individual. The implied stability is important; without it, all attempts at measuring personality would be futile. *Behaviour, thoughts and feelings* refer to the fact that personality is a central component influencing, and being discernible in, a wide range of human experiences and activities.

While this is only one of a multitude of definitions, it includes some important elements and is reasonably comprehensive. Personality theorists are still struggling to produce a universally acceptable definition of personality. Part of the problem arises from the concept being so wide, which makes it difficult to conceptualise succinctly. It has to embrace and account for individual differences between people, their genetic inheritance and the internal processing that occurs within individuals, leading them to behave in the ways that are characteristic of them. Despite the lack of a single agreed-upon definition, some agreement has emerged about what constitutes personality. There is consensus that the term 'personality', as now used, describes a **psychological construct**; that is, a mental concept that influences behaviour via the mind–body interaction. As an understanding of what constitutes a psychological construct and how it is identified is important for your understanding of psychological theory, a fuller description is given in 'Stop and think: Defining and testing psychological constructs'.

The aims of studying personality

Psychologists are interested in what people are like, why they behave as they do and how they became that way. Underlying these apparently simple issues are more profound questions about human beings as a species, as we shall see when we address these issues later in this text. To put it in more academic language, personality theorists seek to explain the **motivational basis** of behaviour. Why do individuals behave as they do? What gets us up every morning? Why are you studying for a degree? Basically, personality theorists have to address the question of what drives our behaviour. This question of motivation necessarily touches on crucial issues about the *basic nature* of human beings. Do we behave in certain ways because we have little choice? As a species, are we innately aggressive and self-destructive? What are the basic human drives? Some personality theorists, such as the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (Chapter 2), adopt the view that human nature is essentially, innately self-destructive and aggressive. Other theorists such as Carl Rogers, an American who is often seen as one of the founding figures of counselling psychology (Chapter 6), see human nature as being benign. Rogers claims that human beings are driven by positive motives towards growth and self-acceptance. We shall explore this in more detail later and see that there is a range of views. The quality of human nature, however, is a fundamental question that has to be addressed by personality theorists. Are we benign or malevolent as a species? As yet there appears to be no definitive answer.

As well as addressing issues of human motivation and the nature of human beings, personality theorists aim to *provide descriptions or categorisations of how individuals behave*. This is addressed in different ways, but the aim is to understand why individuals behave as they do. Implicit here is some level of acceptance in most, but not all, theories that there is a finite range of possible behaviour and that some patterns of behaviour are shared by individuals with similar personalities. Hence types or categories of personalities are outlined as part of many theories. Linked to the idea of classifying types of personality is the issue of **measuring personality**.

Closely linked to this question of what people are like is the issue of how they become that way. Theories pay different attention to this issue, with some theoretical approaches encompassing detailed **developmental theories** while others are much more schematic in their treatment of how personality develops. Within developmental theories there are diverse views about the age at which personality becomes

Stop and think

Defining and testing psychological constructs

Psychological constructs refer to concepts that are not directly observable but are hypothesised to be influential in determining or explaining behaviour. We do not directly observe personality, for example, but our theory is that personality plays an important role in determining behaviour. Our observations are of behaviour; and from these observations, we infer that the individual has a certain personality characteristic or type of personality. In this way personality is a psychological construct. To determine that a particular phenomenon is a psychological construct and not merely a chance observation, it is necessary to demonstrate that it can be reliably measured and is relatively stable across time, among other things.

Lee J. Cronbach (1916–2001), Professor of Education at Stanford University in the United States, spent most of his long career examining issues related to the identification and measurement of psychological concepts. In 1955 he published, with Paul Meehl, what has come to be seen as a classic seminal paper in psychology. The authors propose a method for establishing the validity of psychological constructs in personality tests. Paul Meehl (1920–2003) was a Professor of Psychology at the University of Minnesota in the United States and, like Lee Cronbach, he was concerned with investigating how reliably psychologists could predict behaviour. The joint paper by Cronbach and Meehl is heavily quoted within the psychological literature. The following are the authors' three essential steps for establishing the validity of a psychological construct.

- Describe the characteristics that make up the construct and suggest how they may be related to each other based on some underlying theoretical speculation. For example, take the construct of extraversion. Extraverted individuals are described as being outgoing, friendly and warm. These are all characteristics that are hypothesised to promote social interaction. The theoretical speculation is that extraverts like and need higher levels of social interaction.
- Ways of measuring the suggested characteristics of the construct are then developed. For our example this would involve developing measures of 'outgoingness', friendliness and warmth.
- Finally, the hypothesised relationships are tested. In our example we would expect to find that individuals who scored highly on outgoingness also scored highly on friendliness and warmth and that these individuals all liked interacting with other people. Finding these relationships would result in a valid concept. Cronbach and Meehl were keen to emphasise that establishing the validity of psychological concepts is an ongoing process that may have to be revisited as our knowledge within psychology expands.

fixed. Is your personality fixed at age 2, or is it age 5 or older, or is change always possible?

There are diverse views on this aspect. Even within some of the clinically derived theories, like the psychoanalytic ones that see personality development as occurring in early childhood, change is considered to be possible but is assumed to be difficult to achieve. Some theorists, as you will see, suggest that interventions such as psychotherapy or counselling can facilitate this change. Conceptualising therapeutic interventions in this way makes it easier to understand why so many personality theories have been produced by psychologists and psychotherapists who are in clinical practice. Their interest is in understanding individuals so that interventions to assist in behaviour change can be developed.

Closely related to the development of personality is the issue of **heritability versus environment**. Is personality development determined more by genetic inheritance or environmental influences, or is it some sort of interactional effect? Theories differ, as we shall see in this text, in terms of the role they give to each, and some theories do not really address this issue. Trait theorists and biological theorists tend to have more to say on genetic influences on personality.

Personality theory developed within psychology originally to help us understand mental illness and abnormal behaviour. We will examine the details of this effort later, when different theorists are presented. At this point it is enough to know that to study and classify the experiences of psychologically disturbed people, it is necessary to have a concept of what is normal in human behaviour. Without some idea of what constitutes the normal range of human behaviour, it is impossible to make judgements about what is abnormal. From this early work, it soon became apparent that there are huge individual differences in human behaviour and we will return to this later. However, some of the early personality theorists began to see that there are patterns in human behaviour and that it is possible to classify types of human personality. This led to the measurement of personality and the development of personality questionnaires. This will be examined in detail in later chapters. As you are now aware, psychologists

- Explain the motivational basis of behaviour
- Ascertain the basic nature of human beings
- Provide descriptions/categorisations of how individuals behave
- Measure personality
- Understand how personality develops
- Foster a deeper understanding of human beings to assist in the development of interventions to facilitate behaviour change
- Assess the effects of heredity versus environment

Figure 1.1 Summary of the aims of studying personality.

have many reasons for studying personality; we have summarised these aims in Figure 1.1 to help you remember them.

What we have not yet considered is where the term 'personality' originated. In many courses, historical aspects of psychology are addressed within individual modules. To facilitate this approach, we will include some relevant material such as the history of core terms.

The source of the term 'personality'

The word 'personality' derives from the Latin *persona*, meaning 'mask' (Kassin, 2003). It was the famous, pioneering, American psychologist Gordon Allport who popularised the term with the publication in 1937 of *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*. Prior to this a variety of terms, such as 'character' or 'temperament', were commonly used. Allport carried out a survey of the ways in which the concept of personality has been defined; he identified over 50 different ways. These varied from lay common sense understandings to sociological, philosophical, ethical and legal definitions. Allport argued that many of the existing terms were value-laden in the way that they were used. Examples would be a description of a woman of good character or a man of bad character. Within a particular cultural setting, this description would take on a specific meaning that was generally shared. Allport felt it was necessary to develop a consensus on the use of a word that would describe individual uniqueness without implying an evaluation of that uniqueness. As a result of Allport's influence, 'personality' increasingly became the term used across the discipline to describe individual differences. A few theorists, mainly psychometricians, used the label of 'individual differences', and this usage continues to some extent. Psychometricians are concerned with the development of good, accurate measures of individual differences. In these instances of 'individual differences', it is frequently really an abbreviated form of 'individual differences in personality' or variables related to personality. You will already be getting the idea that there are a

Is it important to understand the basic nature of human beings?
Source: Shutterstock

variety of approaches to studying and researching personality; we will now look at some of them.

Approaches to studying personality: idiographic versus nomothetic

An important distinction made by Allport in his early work on personality was between **idiographic** and **nomothetic** approaches to personality. The idiographic approach focuses on the individual and describes the personality variables within that individual. The term comes from the ancient Greek *idios*, meaning 'private or personal'. Theorists, who adopt this approach in the main, are only interested in studying individuals one at a time. They see each person as having a unique personality structure. Differences between individuals are seen to be much greater than the similarities. The possible differences are infinite. Idiographic approaches produce a *unique understanding* of that individual's personality.

The single case study method is generally the research method of choice for idiographic approaches to personality theorising. The aim is to develop an in-depth understanding of a single individual. For example, Freud used the idiographic approach to study his patients. He developed a detailed description of each patient based on his observations of that patient during treatment. He would make notes on the patient after each treatment session, reviewing and revising his previous notes as his knowledge of the patient increased. He then wrote up the session notes as a clinical case study describing that particular patient.

Idiographic approaches mainly use qualitative research methodologies, such as interviews, diaries, therapeutic sessions or narratives, to collect data on an individual. Some personality theorists do not go beyond this focus on the individual, as they truly consider each person to be unique and deny the existence of types of personality. Others will make some generalisations about human behaviour based on studying a number of case studies. They may observe from a series of case studies that there are similarities in the way that some individuals behave. Freud, for example, produced his personality theory based on his observations of dozens of patient case studies. The clinical case study approach has been used mainly by idiographic personality researchers.

In contrast, the nomothetic approach comes from the ancient Greek term for '*law*' and is based on the assumption that there exists a finite set of variables that can be used to describe human personality. The aim is to identify these personality variables or traits that occur consistently across groups of people. Each individual can then be located within this set of variables. By studying large groups of people on a particular variable, we can establish the average levels of that variable in particular age groups, or in men and women, and in this way produce group averages – generally called **norms** for variables. Individuals can then be described as being above or below the average or norm on a particular variable. Thus, when a friend who is very outgoing and friendly is rated as being an extravert on a personality test, it means that her score was higher than the average on the variable called extraversion. The variable 'extraversion' is measured by asking questions about how sociable and assertive she is. This approach, while acknowledging that each person will possess different degrees of particular personality traits, concentrates on the similarities in human personality. One aim of the nomothetic approach is to identify a universal set of variables that will underpin the basic structure of human personality. We will visit this concept in considerably more detail when we look at trait theorists (Chapter 7).

There are advantages and drawbacks to each approach, and we have summarised these in Figure 1.2.

There is a long-standing debate about the relative merits of idiographic versus nomothetic approaches; it applies to many subject areas within psychology, not just to personality theorising. A common issue for students, however, is remembering which is which. You may find it useful to remember '**I**' for **I**diographic and **I**ndividual.

Two celebrated personality researchers, Charles Carver and Michael Scheier, have discussed this issue at some length. Carver and Scheier (2000) argue that within personality theorising, the distinction between idiographic and nomothetic is not clear-cut. They argue that psychologists adopting the nomothetic approach still accept the uniqueness of individuals. However, they do not accept that there is an infinite number of personality variables. They see that there is an underlying common structure of personality with an associated finite number of personality variables. The uniqueness of the individual comes from their particular mix of variables from the finite set. It is how these personality variables are combined that makes each individual unique. Some idiographic researchers also go beyond the focus purely on the individual. They collect sets of case studies, for example, and then identify common themes across these case studies. In this way, they can generate theories and make predictions that can be tested, often by using nomothetic approaches.

Describing personality

Individuals are described as having certain degrees of happiness, activity, assertiveness, neurosis, warmth, impulsiveness and so on. Physical descriptions, unlike lay definitions, are rarely included in psychological definitions. The focus is on identifying psychological as opposed to physical characteristics on which people differ. These characteristics are measured in specific populations, and the mean (average) levels of occurrence are calculated. This might be done

Feature	Idiographic	Nomothetic
Strategy	Emphasises the uniqueness of individuals	Focuses on similarities between groups of individuals. Individuals are unique only in the way their traits combine
Goal	To develop an in-depth understanding of the individual	To identify the basic structure of personality and the minimum number of traits required to describe personality universally
Research methodology	Qualitative methodologies to produce case studies mainly. Some generalisation across series of case studies is possible	Quantitative methods to: • explore the structures of personality • produce measures of personality • explore the relationships between variables across groups
Data collection	Interviews, diaries, narratives, treatment of session data	Self-report personality questionnaires
Advantages	Depth of understanding of the individual	Discovery of general principles that have a predictive function
Disadvantages	Can be difficult to make generalisations from the data	Can lead to a fairly superficial understanding of any one person. Training needed to analyse personality profiles accurately

Figure 1.2 Comparison of idiographic and nomothetic approaches to the study of personality.

separately for men and women and for different age groups. A study might, for example, give a mean level of anxiety separately for men and women aged between 20 and 29, another for men and women aged between 30 and 39 and so on. These calculations give the **population norms** for that particular characteristic.

Population norms represent the mean scores that particular groups of individuals score on a specific test. For example, they allow you to compare the test score on anxiety for a woman between ages 20 and 29 with the mean levels for her age group of women. You can then conclude that her anxiety score was either above or below the average for her age group as well as comparing her with other individuals in your sample. This information gives profiles of individual differences that are then frequently used to define types of personalities. As we shall see (Chapter 7), trait theorists frequently develop population norms.

Distinctions and assertions in personality research

Personality is perceived to be a relatively stable, enduring, important aspect of the self. People may act differently in different situations, but personality will have a major influence on their behaviour. For example, someone who is classified as being extravert will behave in a more outgoing fashion than a person who is introverted, regardless of the social situation. The differences in social behaviour between the two will be observable whether they are at a party or a funeral tea. Personality characteristics in this way are thought to exert a relatively consistent influence on behaviour in different situations. Personality characteristics in this way are **enduring** across different social contexts.

While it is accepted that individuals can and do change over time, there is a contention that personality is **relatively stable** over time. People may learn from their mistakes and change their behaviour; but the more profound the change, the longer it generally takes. Changing aspects of ourselves is typically not easy, as counsellors and therapists will attest. It tends to take considerable time and effort for individuals to change aspects of themselves, if indeed they are successful. Expert help is frequently needed from counsellors or therapists before change is achieved.

Related to this contention is the fact that *not all differences between individuals are considered to be equally important* by personality theorists. The English language allows us to make fine distinctions between individuals. Another contribution made by Gordon Allport was to identify the number of words in an English dictionary that describe areas where individual differences are possible. In 1936, Allport and his colleague Odbert listed 18,000 such words, suggesting that over 4,500 of these appeared to describe aspects of personality. Of course, many of these were synonyms. Psychologists, through their research over time, have identified the personality characteristics that can be reliably assessed, where differences make most impact on behaviour and are most consistent over time. These are considered to be the *important* personality characteristics, and they are listed in Figure 1.3. The figure includes what are considered to be the major structures of personality and the main subdivisions within each. Observant readers may note that the first letters of major structures make up the