

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 chapter 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: Corbis/Scott Barrow

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 my 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 times, 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; but 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 our implicit personality theories that we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Sometimes they include elements of folklore within particular cultures. It 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 they are 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 book. 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

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, amongst 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.

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 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 book, 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. However, some of the early personality theorists began to see that there are patterns in human behaviour

- 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.

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



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

Source: Digital Vision, Rob van Petten

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 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

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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● explore the structures of personality; ● produce measures of personality; ● explore the relationships between variables across groups.
Data collection	Interviews, diaries, narratives, treatment 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.

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 in 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 Idiographic and Individual.

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 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 in 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 will, 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. Allport and his colleague Odbert in 1936 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 word ‘OCEAN’, a useful mnemonic. You will learn more about these characteristics and the structure of personality later in Chapter 7.



Figure 1.3 Major and subdivisions of personality that can be reliably assessed.

Personality theorists make a further distinction between the overt, **observable** aspects of personality and the **unobservable** aspects of personality such as thoughts, memories and dreams. This distinction was mentioned earlier. The psychoanalytic theoretical school goes further, making a distinction between the **conscious** and **unconscious** aspects of personality. Specific drives or mechanisms of which the individual is unaware are thought to be influential in determining personality. From specific examples of behaviour or habitual styles of behaving, the existence of these personality characteristics in the individual are inferred. For example, the young woman who always seems to have boyfriends who are very much older than her would be described, in Freudian terms, as being motivated by an unconscious wish for a father figure – or at least the properties in a boyfriend that she associates with father figures. She wants someone to look after her. In terms of her personality, she is seen to be lacking in independence. In this way some theories focus much more on the unobservable influences of personality, as will become apparent as you progress through the book.

A further distinction is often made between what is called the individual's **private persona** and their **public persona**. The private persona is conceptualised as being the 'real' inner person, while the public persona is the way that the individual presents themselves to the outside world. Measures of personality and theoretical explanations are considered to define the persona. That is, they describe the kind of person that the individual really is, despite the social pressures on them to behave in particular ways in various social settings. It is this social pressure that involves the public persona. Personality goes beyond physical

appearance and behaviour (public persona) and refers to what we see as the essence of the individual.

Effects of personality versus situational effects

This is an appropriate point to alert you to a lack of consensus among psychologists about the concept of personality. Some social psychologists, especially social deconstructionists, claim that it is the situation that largely dictates how we behave, whereas personality theorists argue that individual personality plays a crucial role in shaping our behaviour whatever the situation. Individuals do behave differently in different situations. We may be confident and outgoing in some situations and less sure of ourselves and more retiring in other situations, but it is not simply the situation that influences our behaviour. Even in what are described as highly socially proscribed situations – that is, situations where the behavioural choices open to individuals are limited as there are rules that have to be followed – individual differences in behaviour can be observed. A good example here is a student graduation ceremony.

The university largely dictates the dress code, and students are instructed to follow well-rehearsed procedures. They mount the platform when their name is called, cross the platform, shake hands with the university chancellor and so on. There seems to be little opportunity for individual differences in behaviour to emerge, but emerge they do. One student rushes eagerly onto the platform, turns to the audience and waves at her family and friends, smiles at the chancellor and acknowledges the staff on the stage. The next student hesitantly mounts the stage, keeps



Though we know we are all unique, personality suggests we share common characteristics.

Source: Alamy Images

his head down and scuttles across the stage, barely stopping to shake the chancellor's hand and so on. We observe the first student to be outgoing, confident, someone who enjoys the limelight. The second student is seen as less confident, shy and somewhat anxious in social situations. These differences in behaviour even in such a highly structured situation are seen to be due to differences in the personalities of the two individuals. Most psychologists would accept that most behaviour results from an interaction between the effects of personality and the dictates of the situation. We will return to this debate in some detail in Chapter 4, when we consider the work of Walter Mischel.

Measurement issues

The methods of measuring important personality characteristics have to be reliable. This is obviously important if you are going to use personality tests to assess individuals for training or further education or as a tool to aid staff recruitment in an organisation. With the organisational example, you need to identify which factors are relevant to performance within the specific organisational context, whether these can be consistently and reliably measured, and whether they are relatively enduring over time. It is not a simple exercise, as the example on occupational testing in Stop and think: Occupational testing demonstrates. We shall return to issues of assessment later in the book, as it is a critical area for psychologists to get right.

Strands of personality theorising

There are two distinct strands to theorising about personality, stemming from the original research on the topic. The first is the clinical strand that has developed from studies of the mentally ill. The second is the individual differences strand, focusing initially on documenting differences. Later this approach led to the statistical analyses of individual differences.

The clinical approach and its history

Freud is frequently credited as the founding father of the clinical strand of personality theory. However, interest in studying human personality predates Freud. The Ancient Greeks produced the first recorded discourses on human personality characteristics in the fourth century BC. Some of the major contributions from these philosophers are described in Stop and think: Personality theorising of the Ancient Greeks (see page 13).

This early work was based largely on philosophers' reflections on their own behaviour and thought processes, the method of introspection outlined in the Stop and think box. Philosophers continued to speculate on human nature and man's relationship with God throughout the Middle Ages.

In terms of the *psychological* study of personality, it was in the clinical area that the first developments occurred. As a result of the scientific revolution of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, great advances in our knowledge of physiology occurred with parallel advances in medicine.

There was enormous interest in the study of what was described as madness, and different treatment methods were being tried.

Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), a Viennese physician, developed a treatment based initially on the power of magnets. He believed that all living beings have a magnetic fluid flowing through them and that from time to time the flow gets disturbed. Blockages of the flow could be apparent in physical or mental illnesses. Applying magnets to different parts of the body, Mesmer claimed, would unblock the flow and return the individual to good health. Later, while still using magnets, Mesmer claimed that some individuals have greater natural magnetism than others and that this magnetism itself could be used to cure other people. He treated people in groups in a dimly lit, carpeted room. His patients held hands in a circle around a tub of magnetised water, called a *baquet*. Mesmer, wearing a long cloak, would enter the room dramatically waving a sword. He claimed that his animal magnetism was enough to cure his patients. Many patients reported that his treatment worked. What we now know is that Mesmer was using the drama of the setting, and his own powers of suggestion, in complex ways to *psychologically* influence his patients. This was, in fact, a forerunner of hypnosis, and Mesmer is seen

as an important figure in the history of hypnosis. To him we owe the term ‘mesmerised’. He also acknowledged that there were individual differences in animal magnetism as well as in the ability of individuals to be mesmerised.

In the course of these developments in mental illness, a new, more technical language of mind began to develop. The physiologists and the medics, by labelling the phenomena they were identifying, began to create some of what later became the language of psychology as we know it today. They also created the culture that made the scientific study of the human mind increasingly acceptable and even desirable.

The developments in mental health also created a demand to know more about how to define individuals so that they could be managed better in institutional settings such as mental asylums and prisons. It is from this tradition that Freud and the psychoanalytic school emerged. We will continue with this strand of theorising in the next chapter.

Individual differences’ emphasis on personality and its history

The developments in medicine linked to the scientific revolution again provided the impetus for research on individual differences in personality. A Swiss priest called

Stop and think



Occupational testing

Many organisations now use psychometric testing as part of employee selection. The underlying principles are simple. If we know the demands made by a job in terms of personality and abilities, then we can test individuals and match them against the job requirements. It is estimated that somewhere between 50 and 70 per cent of companies use some form of testing to select their employees. Testing should help to improve job selection, but there are dangers. Consider the following example.

An old private hospital is being closed down. Patients are being transferred to a new purpose-built private hospital nearby. Unfortunately, there are not enough jobs in the new hospital for all the nurses at the old hospital to be offered employment. A senior manager is asked to decide which nurses should be offered jobs in the new hospital and which will be made redundant. In order to ensure a fair process, and recruitment of the best staff, he decides to use psychometric testing. He himself has recently undergone psychometric testing when he was promoted. He locates a test on the Internet that claims to measure positive emotions, assertiveness, warmth, activity level and gregariousness. These seem to him to be admirable qualities for nurses. Administering the test proves to be complex, but as he

lives quite near the hospital, he drops in on several mornings. He manages to test the night-shift workers when they finish their shift and the day workers just before they start their shift. A few staff have been missed, however, so he sends them the questionnaire to complete at home and return to him by post.

Based on their high scores on the questionnaire, some nurses are offered jobs in the new hospital and others are made redundant. Some of the redundancy nurses then raise the issue with their union, which seeks advice from an occupational psychologist and a lawyer. Complaints are made on the grounds that the manager is not a trained tester, the test is extremely inappropriate as it does not assess the required characteristics, and the testing conditions were different for different nurses. Some nurses were tested when tired, at the end of a night shift, while other tests were administered at the start of the shift. Other nurses received the test by post and completed it unsupervised.

The hospital also has no idea whether they have chosen to retain the most able staff. The test that the manager used is a measure of the personality trait of extraversion, and its relevance to the role of nurse has not been established. The repercussions from badly conceived personality testing can be very serious.

Stop and think



Personality theorising of the Ancient Greeks

The Ancient Greek philosopher and teacher Aristotle (384–23 BC) was the first person to write about individual differences in character and how these relate to behaviour. He suggested that personality characteristics, such as modesty, vanity and cowardice determined how moral or immoral individuals were.

A student of Aristotle's called Theophrastus (371–287 BC) went further in his description of personality characteristics by describing 30 personality types.

One of the Greek Stoic philosophers, Epictetus (AD 55–135), wrote extensively on the characteristics and actions that lead to achieving a happy life. He wrote about the importance of characteristics like imperturbability, not having a passionate nature, being motivated by virtue not vice and so on. He was very interested in how human beings become upset, and he concluded that 'Men are disturbed not by things, but by their perception of things'. This quotation is still relevant in current clinical personality theorising, as we shall see.

Johann Casper Lavater, working in the second half of the eighteenth century, described a theory linking facial features with character traits. He termed his theory **physiognomy**. He made some detailed predictions, including 'as are the lips so is the character' and 'the more the chin, the more the man'. Dr Gall, a Viennese physician, further developed Lavater's ideas. During the 1790s Dr Gall carried out research in the hospitals and mental asylums in Vienna, where he developed what he called **craniology** (later labelled **phrenology**). The theory hypothesised that different human functions were located in different structures within the brain. It was suggested that the relative size of these structures or areas was reflected in the shape of the cranium. Gall claimed that an individual's character could be determined from the shape of their cranium.

This can be conceptualised as the first personality theory of the scientific revolution, although the term 'personality' was not yet in vogue. The theory became extremely popular in Victorian England. There were many public lectures and demonstrations, which served to introduce many sections of British society to these new psychological ideas about character differences. However, developments in physiology did not lend support to phrenology; although the approach remained popular for a long time, especially with the public. The British Phrenological Society was only disbanded in 1967, due to a lack of interest.

The major advance in psychological research in individual differences was due to the work of Francis Galton at the end of the nineteenth century; his work is outlined in the Profile box on page 14. Galton is acknowledged as being the founder of research on individual differences. He developed a range of measures of intelligence, aptitudes and attitudes and most crucially the statistical techniques that could be used to analyse this data. Galton also developed the first questionnaires and outlined statistical methods for ensuring their reliability. By collecting very large data sets from general population samples, he produced standard-

ised normative values for a range of measures. Galton's work provided the statistical tools of analysis that allowed the scientific investigation and analysis of individual differences. From this early work, the modern study of individual differences developed.

These two historical strands of personality research continue to be reflected in current approaches to personality. The range of personality theories can seem confusing as well as lacking much sense of developmental continuity, but awareness of this division between clinically derived theories and more statistically based research on individual differences in personality is helpful in categorising theories.

A further consequence arising from the early influence of medicine on the development of psychology is the focus on the individual. The clinically derived theories, as we have seen, used mainly individual case study methods as the basis for theory development. Hand in hand with theory development went the development of treatments. This encouraged concentration on the individual. Capitalist Western societies also tend to encourage this individualistic perspective. It is often difficult for those who have grown up within a Western culture to conceptualise societies where there is not a preoccupation with the individual and their psyche. This focus on the individual and individual needs largely continues today in psychology. It is for this reason that sociologists frequently criticise psychologists for ignoring the social context within which individuals function. This focus on individualism is prevalent in the development of personality theory.

Studying personality as a personal experience

As we mentioned earlier, in studying personality we are interested in what people are like, why they behave as they do and how they became that way. Our first point of comparison in this study will be ourselves. Does what theorist A writes ring true in our experience of life? Students

Profile



Francis Galton

Francis Galton was born in Birmingham in 1822, into an affluent middle-class family. He trained initially as a doctor in Birmingham and London and then went on to Cambridge University for further study. He excelled in many areas, spending some years as an explorer in Africa and developing an interest in anthropology as well as geography. Next he developed an interest in meteorology which he maintained throughout his life. He introduced graphical charts for mapping the weather, a forerunner of the system still in use today, and introduced the term 'anticyclone'. He also published research on genetics, developing statistical techniques which he then applied to the

study of individual differences. To him we owe percentiles, median, quartiles and other methods of measuring and describing the distribution of data. He invented the correlational method, which is frequently used to explore the relationships between characteristics in personality research. From this he developed regression analysis, which is used to explore the relationships between personality variables in more detail.

He applied the principles of measurement to a variety of areas, carrying out groundbreaking work on developing a system of fingerprinting and fingerprint recognition.

commonly tell me that they really like the theory of Jung or that Adler makes so much sense to them or that they don't like a particular theory. While it is important to point out that psychology is about testing theories, not intuitively being attracted to or disliking particular theories, it is helpful to think about what is happening in these situations.

Many textbooks, including this one, include biographical details about the theorists they cover, to provide insights into that theorist's own developmental experiences. You may wonder why this is relevant, as generally when you are writing essays for your lecturers, you are told not to include biographical detail. However, if you think about the processes involved in theory development, then biographical material about the author of the theory is relevant to our understanding of that theory. Within psychology, personality theorists are researching themselves at the same time as they are collecting data from others. One of the first judgements likely to be made is whether the theory fits one's own experience. By examining the biographies of each theorist, it is often possible to see why they have chosen to study particular characteristics.

The same thing seems to happen when individuals are introduced to a new personality theorist. We tend to judge whether a theory makes sense, at least initially, by assessing whether it fits our experience. A good example of this response occurs when students are introduced to the psychoanalyst Alfred Adler's theorising about birth order. Basically, Adler suggests that first-born children are different from second-born children, who are different from the third child and so on, for the family dynamics change as each new child is added. We will examine this idea in detail in Chapter 3. When students first meet this theory, the instructor frequently hears references to whether it fits with their experience. You may learn quite a lot about yourself by noting your initial responses to each theory after you first read it. Reflecting on the theorists who initially appeal to us can help us to explore our

implicit theories of personality that were discussed in the introduction to this chapter. It is this possibility of reflecting on your own and others' life experiences that makes personality theory a fascinating area of study. You may well find that your explanations for behaviour will change or expand. Remember that theories of personality are attempting to answer the 'why' of behaviour. As you assimilate different theories, you are actually increasing your knowledge of the possible causes of behaviour. This is what social psychologists term causal attribution. Your pool of causal attributions for particular behaviours will be much larger. (See Stop and think: Reflective exercise on causal attribution.)

The inclusion of many psychological concepts derived from personality theory in our everyday language attests to the success of personality theorists in identifying and labelling these common experiences.

Reading critically and evaluating theories

To get the most out of studying personality, you have to be able to move on from the position where you initially like or dislike a theory, in terms of whether it fits your personal experience. You must be able to distance yourself from the theory. Having a set of criteria against which you can judge the theory will allow you to do this. Knowing how to evaluate theories also allows you to become a critical reader as you are absorbing the information about each theory. It also makes it much easier to compare and contrast theories, as you are clear about the criteria to use. By adopting this approach, you are far less likely to fall into the trap of producing purely descriptive essays on personality theories.

Evaluation of personality theory raises particular difficulties compared with most other areas of psychology. One

Stop and think



Reflective exercise on causal attribution

Your flatmate forgets to send his mother a mother's day card and claims it was a genuine lapse in memory. You may think the genuine mistake unlikely given all the publicity about mother's day and the fact that all the rest of you were sending cards. Your flatmate claims to have a good relationship with his mother.

How do you explain his behaviour?

Keep a record of your answers, and repeat this exercise once you have finished your personality course. You are likely to find that your list of possible causes has grown considerably.

reason for the difficulties is that much of the literature on personality does not include critical appraisal of the work being presented. Individual theorists or their followers have produced books describing their approaches. These are often very interesting to read, particularly if they come from the clinical tradition and include lots of case material. Convincing arguments are made which appear to be supported by the case study material presented. It all seems to make perfect sense. You can feel unable to challenge such apparent expertise and may not know where to start. Textbooks on personality theory are also often of little help, as they frequently present personality theories in chronological order with little evaluation of any of the theories. You read the first theory and it seems to make sense; but so does the second theory, and the third and so on.

The traditional approach to evaluating theory by examining the weight of research evidence to support it is often difficult in the area of personality. Many influential concepts that have emerged from personality theorising have not been evaluated, often because the concepts are difficult to accurately define and measure. Where research evidence is available to support or refute aspects of the theories presented in this text, guidance through this literature will be given. However, when it comes to evaluating personality theories as totalities, research evidence is sadly lacking. In what follows, we present some of the general criteria that can be used to evaluate theories.

It is useful to begin by thinking about what a theory aims to do, as this can then help us to specify the basic criteria that a theory of personality should satisfy (Figure 1.4). These criteria are outlined here in no particular order of importance as evaluation will inevitably be influenced by the nature of the theory being evaluated, and different criteria may assume greater or lesser importance.

- **Description** – A theory should bring order into the complexity of behaviours that have been observed and/or measured. It should help to simplify, identify and clarify the important issues that need to be addressed.
- **Explanation** – A theory should help in understanding the 'why' of behaviour. Does the theory provide a convincing explanation of typical commonly observed instances of that category of behaviour? Does the theory

explain how and why individual differences in commonly observed instances of behaviour occur?

- **Empirical validity** – A good theory will generate predictions so that it can be empirically tested and shown to be valid. Can it predict future events or behaviour in particular situations?
- **Testable concepts** – Linked to prediction is the question of whether the concepts included within the theory can be *operationalised* so that they can be tested. By 'operationalised', we mean can the concept be defined precisely enough to enable it to be reliably measured? As you will discover in succeeding chapters, some key concepts in personality theories have proved to be difficult if not impossible to operationalise as they are poorly defined.
- **Comprehensiveness** – A good theory should be able to encompass and explain a wide variety of both normal and abnormal behaviour. However, due to the huge variety of human behaviour, it is unlikely that a personality theory will emerge that can explain all behaviour. In this respect, decisions have to be made about the importance of behaviour so that the limits are set. Making decisions about what constitutes important behaviour does of course necessitate value judgements being made, and ethical issues could well arise about the nature of the decisions made. What tends to happen in practice is that a consensus emerges within researchers, and it is often supported by statistical judgements about how common a particular behaviour is.
- **Parsimony** – A good theory should be economical in terms of the number of explanatory concepts it includes. All concepts included should be demonstrated to be necessary to explain the phenomena under study. A theory may also be too parsimonious if too few concepts are included to adequately explain the data.
- **Heuristic value** – A good theory stimulates interest and research in an area. This criterion does need to be qualified, however. Sometimes, as we saw with mesmerism, a theory may create enormous interest but have little scientific substance. Occasionally a theory may be so inadequate that it also stimulates a great deal of research, as investigators are eager to refute it. This happened with research in America in the 1970s and 1980s on race and intelligence. The psychologist A. R. Jensen (1973)

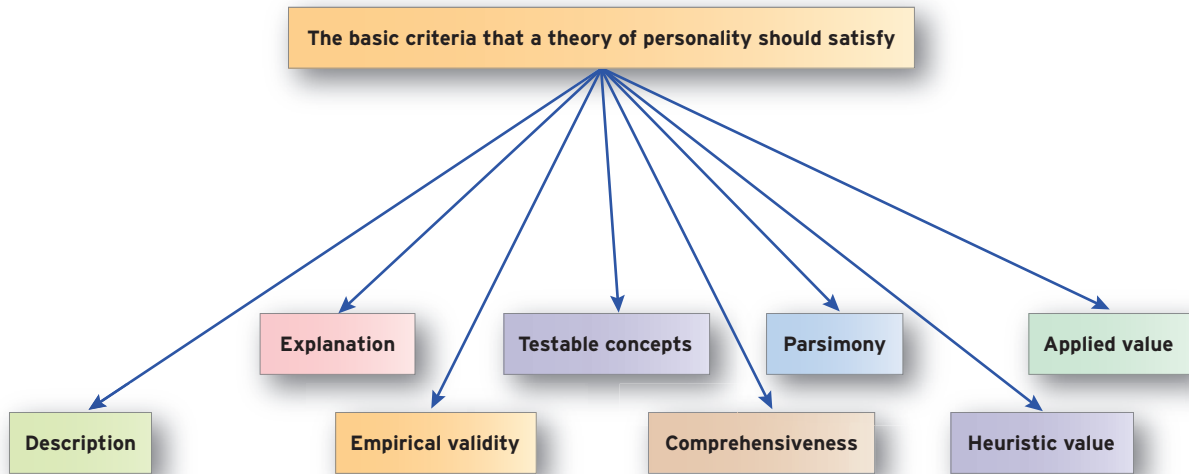


Figure 1.4 The basic criteria that a theory of personality should satisfy.

suggested that there was a genetic difference in intelligence between black African Americans and white Americans. Other psychologists were keen to refute what appeared to be a racist position, and this response stimulated a great deal of research.

- **Applied value** – This criterion sets the theory in a wider context. Under this criterion, the practical usefulness of a theory is judged. Does it lead to beneficial changes in the environment, for example, or better control of unwanted behaviours? Or, does it provide a qualitative leap in knowledge in a particular area? Does the theory lead to new approaches to solving problems? For example, the greater understanding of the mentally ill that came from the work of Freud and others was influential in bringing about changes in the conditions under which mental patients were treated. Prior to that, mental patients were locked away from society, usually on the outskirts of towns, where they were kept in appalling conditions. In many such places, the public could pay to enter and observe the behaviour of the ‘insane’. With better understanding of the mentally ill came calls for more humane treatment; the reform movement created much better environments for patients in mental asylums. These were brighter buildings with proper provision for the needs of patients, and activities and entertainments were laid on for them. Freud’s work also led to new treatments and introduced new ideas, as we shall see in the next chapter.

One proviso is perhaps necessary in relation to the evaluation of theories and comparisons of theories. Not all parts of each theory may be equally valid. Various theories may provide convincing explanations of parts of the totality of personality, which makes comparisons and evaluations of

competing theories difficult. For these reasons, disputes among theorists may also be difficult to resolve. For example, if we revisit Mesmer’s theory, it would be false to say that his work was of no value as it proved to be a forerunner of hypnosis. The magnetised water and the idea of animal magnetism appear to have been unsupported by any evidence and of no value. However, Mesmer himself, in the way that he presented himself and in his charismatic charm, did have an effect on individuals. He made them more suggestible. By displaying that human beings could be psychologically influenced and could be put into trancelike states, he provided the spur for others to explore this phenomenon more systematically. From this further study, hypnosis has emerged.

Evaluations of personality theory also need to consider the philosophical view of human beings inherent in any theory. Does the theory conceptualise human beings as aggressive and destructive by nature, or as loving and kind? We also need to consider whether there is any evidence for this particular view of human nature.

Another consideration is the relative influence of internal and external determinants of behaviour within the theory. Does the unconscious figure in the theory serve as an internal determinant, or is it more concerned with the here and now as external determinants? This is an important distinction, for if we think that much of our motivation to behave in certain ways is unconscious, does it then mean there are limits to the conscious control we have over our behaviour? A very simple example would be someone who wants to stop smoking. Freud would see one explanation of why people choose to smoke as being that the individual has a need for oral stimulation, caused by lack of oral stimulation as an infant. The individual as a baby was deprived of a dummy, or not allowed other opportunities to suck their thumb or the

like. The individual is not aware that this is the real reason they smoke; their true motivation is unconscious.

Questions need to be asked about how well the theory deals with the influence of the past, the present and the future on behaviour. Some theories, as you will see, consider that the past is irrelevant as although it undoubtedly influenced who we are, we cannot change it. An example would be of a woman who was sexually abused as a child. One set of theories would see it as important for this woman to explore her past abuse in the hope that by understanding it better, she can come to cope with it. Another theoretical approach would suggest that having the woman relive her early experiences by telling you about them is futile and is only likely to disturb her further. This second approach would instead help the women to cope with her current distress and try to put the past behind her.

An assessment also needs to be made about how well the theory explains the integration or apparent integration of behaviour. As individuals we do not always appear to behave consistently. Therefore, we need to assess whether a theory can cope with such inconsistencies. For example, we may have as our long-term goal to achieve a really good degree. To do this, we know that we need to focus on our studies and work hard. Despite having this goal, we skip lectures when we have had a late night previously, or we avoid going to the library to prepare for assessments yet worry about not getting the assessment done in time. As we shall see in this book, theories vary according to how well they can explain such apparent inconsistencies in behaviour.

The cultural context of personality theories

Another important issue in the evaluation of personality theories is rarely raised; it concerns the cultural context of most theories. One cross-cultural study by Curt Hoffman, Ivy Lau and David Johnson (1986) compared the types of personality that can be identified by name in Western cultures with those in Chinese culture. In the West there is a recognised artistic personality. This describes someone who is creative, temperamental and intense. However, there is no label in Chinese to describe such an individual, although there are words equivalent to the characteristics that make up the Western artistic temperament. The Chinese also have personality types, such as a *shi gú* individual, which do not exist in Western cultures. A *shi gú* individual is described as being worldly, socially skilful, devoted to their family and fairly reserved. We see from this example that while the same characteristics of personality are identifiable across the cultures, it is the way that these are then expressed as personality types that is influenced by culture. Culture will also influence which personality types are valued within a particular culture. In Western capitalist cultures the driving, ambitious individualist is often valued,

while in a more cooperative society, the team player type is likely to be valued more.

The individualistic perspective of Western psychology was discussed earlier in this chapter, and this perspective permeates the study of personality. Western psychology has sometimes been termed the 'cult of the individual'. The theories of personality that constitute Western psychology all focus on individual functioning. There is an assumption that individuals will behave or at least wish to behave in ways that put their needs first. Most of us will have experienced this attitude directly. How often have we said or heard someone else say, 'It's my life and I'll do what I want with it'? Words to this effect are not unusual in family disputes between parents and their children. Similarly, in the clinical treatments linked to some of the personality theory, the focus is on treating the individual and meeting that individual's needs. The concept of self is at the core of this theorising. There is often no real consideration of what might be appropriate for the family, especially if this is at odds with what appears to be best for the individual.

There is virtually no acknowledgement that the personality theories we are about to study are culturally bound. Many of these theories will have limited applicability in collectivist cultures, where decisions are made at the group or community level to promote the welfare of the groups as opposed to the constituent individuals. One example might be of a student who is thinking of doing a PhD after completing her first degree. She is very able, very motivated and funding was available. However, she doesn't make the application. On being asked about it, she says that after discussion with her family, she has decided that it is not the right thing to do at this time. She is philosophical about it and does not seem at all upset. She says that she could have gone against her family, but it would not make her happy to do this. She feels that to do so would have been very selfish. She adds that some of her friends had tried to persuade her, talking about it being her right to decide what she does with her future; but she does not see it this way, as her family is more important to her.

There is a lot to consider if you are going to develop a truly critical appreciation of personality theories. In the following chapters, you will be introduced to a range of personality theorists. It is impossible to cover in depth every theorist; rather, we have included theorists in order to reflect their contribution to the discipline and to ensure that all the major approaches are covered. There is a huge literature on personality theory, and we offer guidance on further reading for each theorist. The concepts within each theory that have been researched are identified and examples of the major studies included. After debating how to order the theories, we have grouped similar types of theoretical approaches together and have begun with the earliest theories chronologically. This is no reflection on the importance of the theory. With this said, we hope you enjoy the experience as we know other students do.

Final comments

In summary, you should now appreciate why psychologists study personality and be aware of a variety of definitions of personality. You should understand the components of

psychological definitions of personality and have developed an understanding of the historical roots of personality theory. Finally, you should understand the major questions that personality theories aim to address and understand the criteria that can be used to evaluate personality theories.

Summary

- The difficulties associated with defining personality have been examined. A range of definitions have been presented, including lay definitions and psychological definitions. Lay definitions frequently include physical attributes.
- The emphasis in psychological definitions is on individual differences. Allport (1961) developed one of the earliest definitions, describing personality as a 'dynamic organisation, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create the person's characteristic patterns of behaviour, thoughts and feelings'. Characteristics that usefully and reliably distinguish between individuals are identified, and individuals are then compared with each other or with population norms. There is still no consensus on a definition of personality within psychology.
- Criteria of psychological definitions include the following: relatively stable, enduring, important aspect of the self. A distinction is sometimes made between observable and unobservable aspects of personality as well as between conscious and unconscious aspects.
- The origins of personality theory in the scientific developments of physiology and medicine have been examined. The division between clinically derived and the more statistically based individual differences approach are also examined.
- Personality theories aim to explain the motivational basis of behaviour, the basic nature of human beings, the developmental experiences that help to shape personality and categorisations of types of human personality that can be used to predict behaviour. The traditional question of heredity versus environment is also addressed. In all these areas, there are diverse views among theorists. The question of how to bring about changes in behaviour is addressed by some of the more clinical theorists, while others are more descriptive.
- The idiographic approach to studying personality adopts case study types of methodology, studying individuals and stressing the uniqueness of each individual. The alternative nomothetic approach studies groups of individuals aiming to identify similarities. The distinction is not always clear-cut in personality research.
- A further distinction is made between research-based theories and clinically derived theories for which there may be a dearth of supporting research evidence.
- Personality theories can be difficult to evaluate due to the absence of research on particular theories or concepts within theories. Suggestions for the evaluation theories are presented. These include empirical validity, testable concepts, comprehensiveness, parsimony, heuristic value and applied value. The importance of citing theories within a cultural and historical context is also emphasised.

Connecting up

This chapter serves as the introduction to the first part of the book (Chapters 2–10), though many of the themes discussed are explored throughout the book.

Critical thinking

Discussion questions

- How do you think everyday ideas of personality compare with formal theories of personality?
- What do you think determines or influences your personality?

Essay questions

- Critically discuss the origins of personality theory.
- Describe the different techniques used to study personality. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?
- What are the major aims of studying personality?
- Describe the criteria that can be used for the evaluation of personality theories.
- Compare the idiographic versus nomothetic approaches to studying personality.



Going further

Books

- Deese, J. (1972). *Psychology as science and art*. New York: Harcourt Brace. A short book but a classic of its kind. Sets current approaches to psychology in context and addresses the nature of theories.
- Miles, J. (2001). *Research methods and statistics: Success in your psychology degree*. Exeter: Crucial. Chapter 1 of this book, *The role of theory in psychology*, gives a practical approach to linking theory and research with lots of useful tips presented in a reader-friendly way.
- King, D., Viney, W. and Woody, W. (2009). *A history of psychology: Ideas and Context*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Lawson, R., Graham, J. and Baker, K. (2006). *A history of psychology*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Leahy, T. (2003) *A history of modern psychology* (6th edn). London: Prentice Hall. Chapter 1 is useful as it covers material on psychology as science and the nature of theory in quite an accessible style.
- Richards, G. (2002). *Putting psychology in its place: A critical historical overview*. London: Psychology Press. Chapter 11 covers personality theory in particular.

Journals

We would also encourage you at this stage of the book to start looking at what personality journals you can have access to via your library or online resources. It might be worth checking to see if you have access to the following journals, as they could be used to supplement your further reading:

- *European Journal of Personality*. Published by Wiley. Available online via Wiley InterScience.
- *Journal of Personality*. Published by Blackwell Publishing. Available online via Blackwell Synergy, SwetsWise and Ingenta.

- *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Published by the American Psychological Association. Available online via PsycARTICLES.
- *Journal of Personality Assessment*. Published by the Society for Personality Assessment. Available online via Business Source Premier.
- *Journal of Research in Personality*. Published by Academic Press. Available online via Ingenta Journals.
- *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. Published by Sage Publications for the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. Available online via SwetsWise, Sage Online, Ingenta and Expanded Academic ASAP.
- *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. Published by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc. Available online via Business Source Premier.
- *Personality and Individual Differences*. Published by Pergamon Press. Available online via Science Direct.

A specific journal relating to this chapter is the *History of Psychology* journal published by the American Psychology Association. Available online via PsycARTICLES.

Web links

- A good website outlining many of the personality theories covered in this part of the book is at <http://www.personalityresearch.org/>.
- A website about the historical and philosophical background of Psychology written by Dr C. George Boeree is at <http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/historyofpsych.html>.
- Links on the history of psychology, including timelines, online archives can be found at the Social Psychology Network at <http://www.socialpsychology.org/history.htm>.



Explore the website accompanying this text at www.pearsoned.co.uk/maltby for further resources to help you with your studies. These include multiple-choice questions, essay questions, weblinks and ideas for advanced reading.