

Personality

- TRAITS assess personality characteristics which are stable over long periods of time, whereas STATES assess short-term changes, as in the emotions.
- Behaviour is determined both by the personality of an individual and the situation in which they find themselves.
- METHODS OF ASSESSMENT tend to be less reliable and more difficult to interpret than PRODUCTIVE MEASURES, such as PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRES.
- The EYSENCK PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRE is an example of a DIMENSIONAL THEORY OF PERSONALITY, in which individuals are given scores on four separate personality dimensions, of EXTRAVERSION, NEUROTICISM, PSYCHOTICISM, and a LIE SCALE.
- Differences between extraverts and introverts can be explained in terms of extraverts having a lesser degree of cortical arousal, and hence being STIMULUS HUNGRY. This can explain the greater consumption of physical and social stimulation by extraverts.
- Personality measures can sometimes be more informative about an individual's personality than can the descriptions of a friend.

Personality is the behaviours that distinguish individuals and characterize them as specific people. Particularly distressing to relatives of a schizophrenic (see Chapter 30) is the DISINTEGRATION OF PERSONALITY, the sense of a different person inhabiting a familiar body.

TRAITS, the long-lasting behavioural characteristics of personality, must be distinguished from STATES, the more transitory behaviours of emotion. One might be anxious *today* because of an exam (state anxiety), or one might *generally* be an anxious person (trait anxiety).

Behaviours result partly from personality, and partly from situations. Thus two individuals might differ in their talkativeness in different situations.

	<i>Amount of talking in situation</i>			
	<i>Discussion group</i>	<i>Lecture</i>	<i>Theatre</i>	<i>Funeral</i>
Person A: talkative trait	+++	++	±	-
Person B: non-talkative trait	++	+	-	-

The amount of talking depends both on the personality of A and B and also on the situation in which they find themselves. A knowledge of personality allows us to predict the behaviour of individuals in novel situations and to assess differences in that behaviour.

There are two broadly separate ways of asking questions about personality. One method asks questions such as 'What is X like as a person?' and 'How did X come to be the way they are?'; this is called an **IDIOTHETIC** approach, since it particularly concerns the single individual and their particular idiosyncrasies, and is primarily the province of the psychoanalyst, or psychodynamic theorist (see Chapter 11). A second type of question asks, 'How do X and Y differ?', or more generally, 'How does X differ from other people?'. This is the **NORMOTHETIC** approach that compares individuals with the rest of the population, and is the province of **PSYCHOMETRICS**.

Personality can be assessed in as many ways as there are situations and people. The **METHODS OF ASSESSMENT** involve observations of a subject in different situations. Thus in a **CLINICAL INTERVIEW** (or in its most extended form, psychoanalysis) a professional talks to a patient and forms a judgement; at its worst the method is lengthy, unreliable, idiosyncratic, unsystematic, and of dubious validity, and is often distorted by the theoretical preconceptions of the interviewer. Its great advantage is that it is unlimited in range, almost any questions can be asked and the answers evaluated. **ASSESSMENT INTERVIEWS** are more systematic, particularly if they ask for judgements on a series of rating scales, so that a range of behaviours may be systematically assessed; nevertheless reliability often leaves much to be desired. Finally, in **NATURALISTIC OBSERVATION**, a subject is watched or filmed while behaving in a natural setting, and the behaviours rated and assessed by a group of trained observers. In both these latter situations judgements are more reliable than in the clinical interview. The major theoretical problem of all three methods of assessment is that the personality of the subject is not assessed directly, but rather is filtered through the personality of the assessors, who themselves may have a distorted or biased view of the world. Nevertheless, with care, valuable results can be obtained.

PRODUCTIVE MEASURES of personality involve the subject producing responses to situations. The situation may be as straightforward as the humble but frequently used **PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRE**, which may contain between 10 and 200 questions, each requiring Yes/No answers or rating responses. The questions ask what the subject likes doing, feels about events, or would do in a particular situation, etc., so that the subject is asked to introspect on their own experiences in a systematic way. The advantages are the speed and ease of administration, reliability, quantitative results, and being standardizable; more problematic is that questionnaires are sometimes tedious to complete, are limited in range, obtaining answers only to questions

that have been thought of in advance, and require cooperative and truthful subjects. PROJECTIVE TESTS, such as the famous RORSCHACH INK BLOTS, in which a subject is asked what they see in a random ink-blot, the TAT (THEMATIC APPERCEPTION TEST) in which subjects describe ambiguous cartoon stories, and WORD ASSOCIATION TESTS, in which subjects say the first word that comes into their heads in response to another word, are productive measures, which have the disadvantage that the answers require interpretation by a trained assessor. All tend to be biased towards a psychoanalytic perspective, and are little used in routine practice.

So-called OBJECTIVE TESTS involve subjects carrying out simple tasks such as blowing up a balloon, while automatic equipment records the rate of puffing, size of the puffs, size of the balloon, etc. Although undoubtedly people differ in the way they carry out the tasks, ultimately there is a mass of inchoate data, albeit 'scientifically' obtained, with so little theory to explain the differences that the results are of little practical use.

Since questionnaires are quite the commonest form of personality assessment, the rest of this chapter will be devoted to one of the most popular of them, the EYSENCK PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRE (EPQ), which demonstrates well the characteristics of a DIMENSIONAL THEORY OF PERSONALITY.

A dimensional theory says that individuals vary along a continuum, with a few individuals at either extreme, and the majority at intermediate positions. People are not divided into two or more separate TYPES, into which they are pigeon-holed, but instead the extremes act as convenient labels, although most individuals are not as extreme as these labels. (There is an old psychological joke about there being two types of people — those who divide people into two types and those who do not.)

The oldest dimensional theory goes back to Classical times and was codified by Galen (129–ca. 199) as part of his theory of the humours. Four separate humours, derived from the various physiological fluids, combined in differing amounts to produce two separate dimensions of personality (see Fig. 8.1): sanguine-splenetic (based on a relative excess of blood from the heart, or 'black bile' supposed to come from the spleen), and phlegmatic-choleric (based on the relative excess of phlegm from the head, or bile from the gall-bladder). Individuals had different mixes of these constituents, for various reasons, such as the season of the year or the place where they lived, and this resulted in a range of possible personality types, which are seen around the outside of Figure 8.1. Of course *l'homme moyen*, the typical person, was placed exactly at the centre. Eysenck's modern theory of personality builds upon the Greek example, but rotates the important axes through forty-five degrees, and relabels them EXTRAVERSION (E) VS INTROVERSION (I) and NEUROTICISM (N) VS STABILITY (S). An extreme extravert

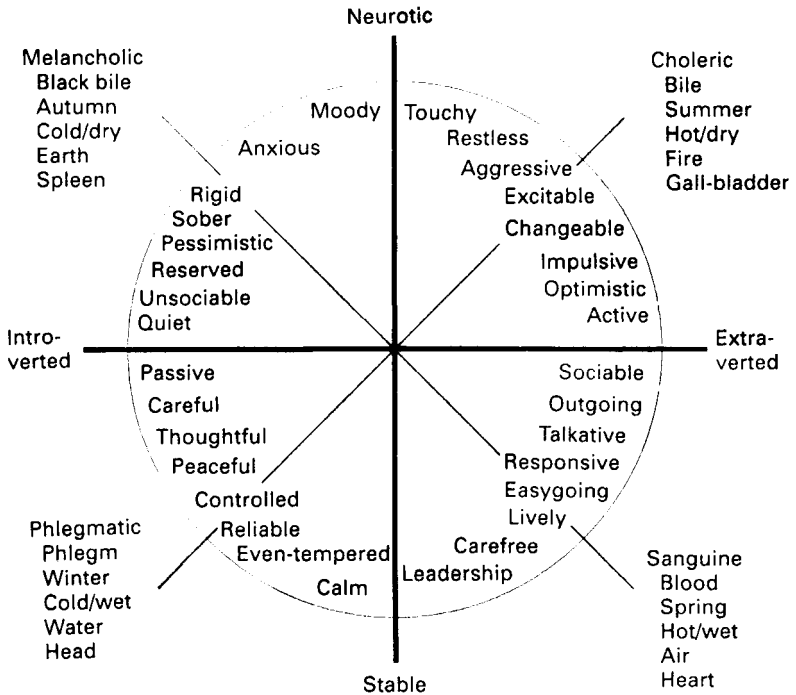


Fig. 8.1 The Galenic theory of the humours in relation to the modern dimensional theory of introversion – extraversion and neuroticism – stability. In Galenic theory, there were four principal personality types, indicated at the four corners of the diagram and by the lighter, diagonal axes; a range of intermediate types are also indicated on the inner circle. Each personality was felt to be due to an excess of a particular HUMOUR which came from a particular organ of the body. The humour was characterized by its predominant ELEMENT and by its associated QUALITIES, and these qualities relate directly to the personality type. Each humour was associated with a particular season of the year, and individuals born then were more likely to have the particular personality type. The modern theory of personality uses the same descriptions (although not the same theory of its origins) but rotates the axes by 45 degrees to the vertical position, to the positions shown by the solid lines. Adapted from Eysenck H J (1964), Principles and methods of personality description, classification and diagnosis, *Br J Psychol.* 55, 284–94.

is a person who is sociable, cheerful, enjoys taking risks and is optimistic, in contrast to an extreme introvert who dislikes company, is overly careful, pessimistic and appears to lack enjoyment. The more typical AMBIVERT, in the middle of the range, has some of each of these characteristics. An individual with a high neuroticism score (which should not be taken as having the same meaning as a person with a neurosis, which is a psychiatric term – see Chapter 28) tends to be anxious, particularly about the minutiae of life, to worry unnecessarily, especially about health, and to be overly emotional, whereas a stable personality is calm, unflappable, steady and unemotional. Eysenck

has also extended the original two dimensions of the Greek scheme with a third dimension, called PSYCHOTICISM (P), (again not to be taken as synonymous with psychotic, which is a psychiatric term, see Chapter 28, although there is some evidence that high P scorers are more likely to be psychotic). High P scorers tend to be solitary, uncaring, insensitive, aggressive and impulsive individuals, although of course only a very high scorer would be all of these things. Eysenck has also developed a fourth score, the LIE SCALE (L), which was originally designed to assess whether respondents were telling the truth or were trying to FAKE GOOD in order to impress. The L scale asks questions to which any ordinary person would normally have to answer a particular way, for instance asking if they have *ever* been late for an appointment, and assuming that an answer of 'no' is designed to impress or deceive, rather than tell the truth. More recently the L scale has been re-interpreted as a measure of SOCIAL ACQUIESCENCE and is being regarded as a measure of a separate personality dimension in its own right, reflecting a person's desire to please others and answer as they would find desirable. To give some idea of the range of scores, Figure 8.2 shows the personality scores of entrants to medical school compared with the norms for the population of that age; entrants are more extravert, less neurotic, less psychotic, and are lying slightly more than the average population. Since there are only minimal differences between those accepted and those rejected, the differences of entrants from the general population must be due to certain types of individual applying to medical school, rather than medical schools preferentially selecting certain types of student.

If a personality test is to be useful, it should also predict other aspects of behaviour, and this the EPQ does well. For instance in comparison with introverts, extraverts consume more tea, coffee, alcohol, and cigarettes, have earlier and more varied sexual behaviour, and are more likely to suffer from sexually transmitted diseases and to divorce. In contrast, high N scorers have increased rates of psychosomatic diseases and have more sexual problems, such as impotence and premature ejaculation, whereas high P scorers have increased rates of serious mental illness, criminality, alcoholism and drug abuse. The test therefore predicts a broader range of behaviours than the 90 Yes/No questions might lead us to expect.

If differences exist between individuals then there must be reasons for these differences. Eysenck has argued that extraversion is a result of differences in cortical arousal, neuroticism of differences in autonomic arousal, and psychoticism of differences in androgenic activity. These aspects of Eysenck's theory are not entirely uncontroversial, and therefore just the theory of extraversion will be described in more detail to give an idea of the way in which such a theory can be developed.

Sensory inputs have a dual input to the cortex: a direct route and

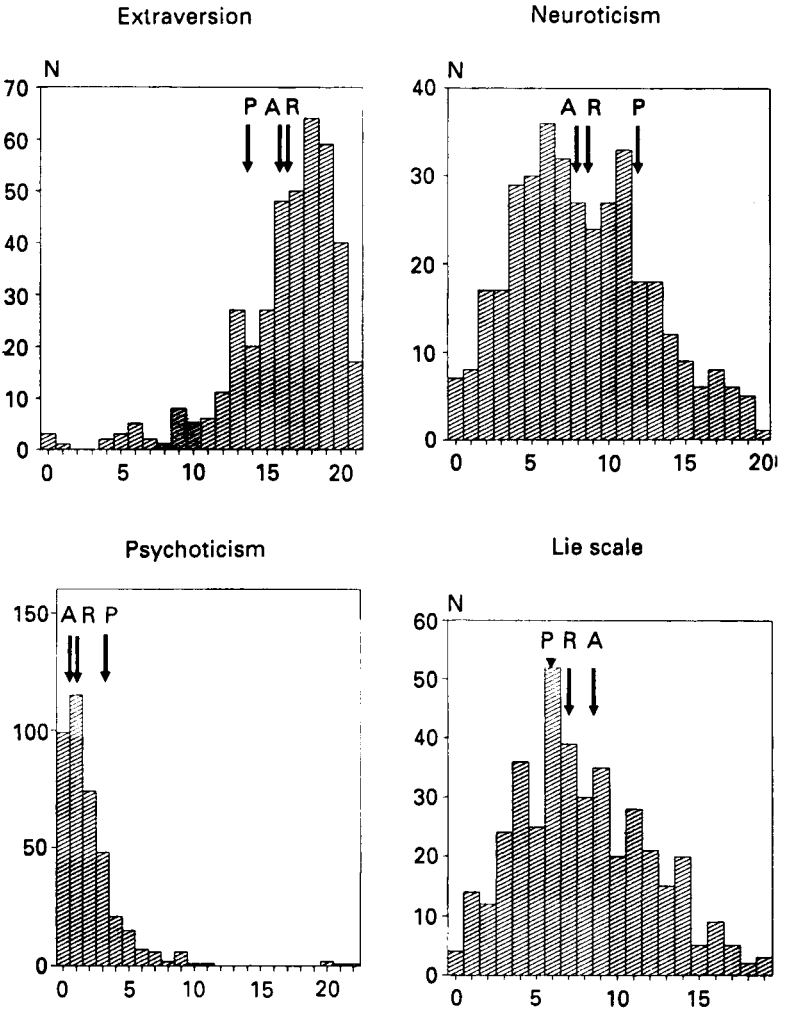


Fig. 8.2 The personality of 255 entrants to medical school. The mean scores of successful applicants to medical school (A) are compared with those of 99 rejects (R), and with the population norms for the same age-sex group (P). Unpublished data of I C McManus.

an indirect route whereby they activate the reticular activating system in the brain stem, which in turn activates the cortex (Fig. 8.3). In the presence of such activation there would be a danger of over-activation (and epileptic discharge) and therefore the cortex also inhibits its own activity by the process of REACTIVE INHIBITION. Eysenck proposes that extraverts have relatively low levels of cortical activation, via the reticular system, and have greater reactive inhibition than do introverts. The consequence is that in an extravert a sensory event produces less cortical activity than in an introvert. If sensory events are of less impact to an extravert, then greater levels of sensory

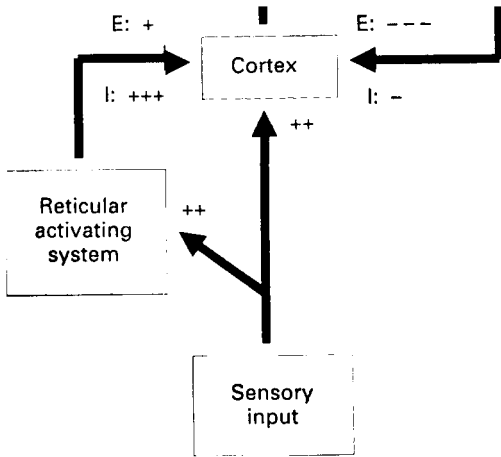


Fig. 8.3 Eysenck's theory of the relationship between extraversion and cortical arousal. The sensory input causes excitation (+ +) of the reticular activating system and the cortex. The cortex inhibits its own activity by reactive inhibition, either strongly in extraverts (E: - - -) or weakly in introverts (I: -). The reticular activating system excites the cortex either weakly in extraverts (E: +) or strongly in introverts (I: + + +).

stimulation would be needed to obtain the same level of cortical activation. Extraverts will therefore be **STIMULUS HUNGRY** and require greater stimulation (and hence also will ingest more stimulants such as tea, coffee, cigarettes, etc) and will obtain more social stimulation than do introverts. Introverts can be seen as **chronically over-aroused**, and extraverts under-aroused. The theory can also explain why extraverts have higher auditory detection thresholds, have higher pain thresholds, are slower at being conditioned, and are less able to carry out boring jobs or **VIGILANCE TASKS**, which involve the detection of rare events.

A final question concerning personality tests is whether they will tell us anything about a person that, say, their best friend could not have told us from their experience. An experiment looked at this by asking pairs of friends to complete an EPQ; each member of the pair was then asked to complete a second EPQ in the way that they thought their friend would have completed it. Comparison of the results showed that individuals were good at estimating the extraversion of their friends, but were poor at describing their friend's neuroticism or psychoticism. Personality tests therefore are useful at giving us information we would not necessarily have known in some other way.