CHAPTER 19: PERSONALITY

‘All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think, we become’ (Buddha). This quote from Buddha helps us to understand the importance of personality in our lives.

Famous authors such as William Shakespeare and Robert Louis Stevenson have created believable characters by carefully observing people of different personalities. In fact, contrasting personalities are the central theme in one of Stevenson’s most famous novels, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

This chapter explains how psychologists view personality in a number of different ways, and how the nature–nurture debate is involved in the area of personality as much as it is in intelligence.

KEY KNOWLEDGE

The concept of personality, including characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours of an individual, and the influence of genetic and environmental factors.

(VCE Study Design 2012)
Personality defined

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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Personality is a word in common use, for example:
- ‘She has a great personality.’
- ‘He must have had a personality bypass!’
- ‘Cult of Personality’ – the lead single and Grammy-Award-winning song from the album *Vivid* by Living Colour.

If we have all used the term, perhaps we believe we know what it means; but do you realise that many respected authors and researchers into personality have refused to define it because it is too complicated?

One well-respected author (Byrne 1974) has said that ‘Personality psychology is psychology’s garbage bin.’ He means that we simply think of any part of human psychology that we cannot easily fit into other areas (such as intelligence, emotion or psychological illness) as part of personality.

The definition of **personality** that we have chosen to use in this textbook is:

Personality refers to a combination of ... lasting and distinctive behaviours, thoughts, motives and emotions that typify how we react and adapt to other people and situations (Plotnik & Kouyoumdjian 2008).

Let’s consider this definition.
- **Personality is a combination**—Personality is complicated and involves different aspects of behaviours, thoughts, motives and emotions, and the interactions between them.
- **Personality is lasting**—Personality is stable over time and your personality remains the
same, or with slight changes, over many years, especially from the age of 30 onwards. Despite this, there have been many cases where significant changes in personality have been brought about by education and/or experience.

- **Personality is distinctive**—The combination and interaction of our behaviours, thoughts, motives and emotions is unique in each person.

- **Personality typifies how we react and adapt to other people and situations**—Personality is responsible for the way we interact with the world.

So, the key aspects are that an individual’s personality is distinctive and consistent in influencing their interaction with their environment.

It is also important to realise that there are several things that personality is not. It is not intelligence, it is not simply mood (although it can cause moods), and it is not behaviour (although it can cause behaviours).

### Early theories of personality

#### Somatotypes

As long ago as 3000 bce in India, students of medicine related personality characteristics to body shape, a theory made popular in the Western world by William Sheldon (1940).

Sheldon proposed the theory of **personality influenced by somatotypes**, concluding that body shapes corresponded to particular personality types:

- **thin body shape** (Sheldon’s *ectomorph*; ancient India’s *vata*) – changeable, unpredictable, variable (in mood and actions), enthusiastic, imaginative, impulsive, quick to grasp ideas

- **muscular, well-built body shape** (Sheldon’s *mesomorph*; ancient India’s *pita*) – predictable, articulate, intelligent, critical, passionate with a short, explosive temper

- **plump, rounded body shape** (Sheldon’s *endomorph*; ancient India’s *kapha*) – cheerful, slow to anger, with a tendency to procrastinate and be obstinate, lazy.

Sheldon’s method was as follows:

*Figure 19.3* In Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*, the soon-to-be-murdered Caesar watches Cassius, the leader of the group that will commit the murder, and says: ‘Yon Cassius hath a lean and hungry look/He thinks too much – such men are dangerous!/Let me have men about me who are fat.’ Caesar was reading Cassius’ personality from his body shape.
- **1 Body form:** He photographed 4000 first- or second-year male college students from behind, in their underwear, and rated their body form from a series of measurements.

- **2 Personality:** He surveyed the participants and rated them on 50 personality characteristics.

- **3 Results:** He found strong correlations between body shape and the personality characteristics. He generalised his conclusions, indicating that body type and personality are strongly related for all people.

### RESEARCH METHOD

In a class discussion, analyse the flaws in Sheldon’s experimental method under the following headings:
- sampling bias
- over-generalisation
- experimenter bias.

### Humours

Talking about a friend, we might say, ‘She has a great sense of humour.’

We are using a word from ancient times to describe her personality.

Ancient Greek philosophers and scientists, such as Hippocrates (400 BCE) and Galen (140 CE), classified four types of *humours* in people. Humours were liquids produced by different body organs:

- **sanguis** (blood) – a hot, sweet, temperant humour whose office is to nourish the whole body, to give a strength and colour
- **pituita** (phlegm) – a cool and moist humour whose office is to nourish and moisten the members of the body
- **cholera** (yellow bile) – a hot, dry and bitter humour that helps the natural heat and senses, and serves to the expelling of excrements
- **melancholia** (black bile) – a cold, dry, thick, black and sour humour.

Personality was thought to be decided by which liquid a person had in greatest quantity:

- **Melancholy** (depressed, sad) people were believed to have an excess of black bile, produced by the spleen.
- **Sanguine** (optimistic) people were believed to have too much blood, thought to come from the liver.
- **Choleric** (easily angered) people were thought to have too much yellow bile, produced by the gall bladder.
- **Phlegmatic** (calm, unemotional) people were thought to have an excess of phlegm, produced by the lungs and the brain.

*FIGURE 19.4 The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton (1651), which was based on Galen’s theories, was probably the first textbook on depression ever published.
The study of personality has been of importance for centuries. In the following chapters we will look at some of the more famous theories in detail.

First of all, it is important to consider whether we are born with a certain personality that stays with us for life (the nature argument) or whether the environment in which we grow up is the major influence (the nurture argument). You will notice that the early theories suggested that personality was all determined by nature. In the twentieth century, however, there began to be consideration of the role played by the environment.

Nature and nurture influencing personality

Figure 19.6 Caspi and colleagues (2003) found that a happy, confident child becomes a confident adult, while an emotional child becomes a withdrawn adult.

Personality change over the lifespan

Does a happy baby grow up to be a happy child, adolescent and adult? Do they remain happy throughout life? Will a miserable, crying, unhappy baby turn into a child and then an adult with a bad temper and unpleasant personality characteristics?

Caspi and colleagues (2003) observed three-year-old children and noted the ways in which they behaved. The researchers continued to observe the same individuals until they were 26 years old. They found that it was reasonably common for certain key characteristics or traits (see Chapter 20) to continue to dominate the personality of the individual:

1. Sensitive and emotional children tended to become nervous and withdrawn adults.
2. Restless and impulsive children tended to be outsiders as adults.
3. Confident, friendly, eager children tended to become ‘take-charge’ types of confident adults.
Nature–Nurture and Personality

Does the research by Caspi and colleagues show anything of the balance between nature and nurture? In small groups, discuss the following questions:

1. The children were three years old when first studied. Was this too late to decide that their personalities at this age were due to genetics (inborn characteristics)?

2. Think of some events that could have occurred in the first three years of life to cause the children to be Type 1, 2, or 3 personalities, as described above.

3. Certain psychological conditions could have contributed to the behaviours of the children.
   a. Which type would a child most likely be if they had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (a genetic condition)?
   b. Which type would a child most likely be if they had general anxiety disorder (which could be genetic or the result of experiences)?

4. The fact that 23 years passed during the research suggests that there would have been many changes in the world of the children. Does this fact support the heredity or environment side of the question?

Roberts and Delvecchio (2000) investigated the extent to which personality remains stable with age. Obviously, if personality is entirely genetic, it will remain consistent throughout life and the correlations between each seven-year interval will be very high. If it is entirely determined by environment, personality will change significantly as life experiences occur, and correlations will be very low.

Roberts and Delvecchio assessed personality at seven-year intervals with the following results.

**Table 19.1** Roberts and Delvecchio’s assessment of personality changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of initial assessment</th>
<th>Correlation over seven-year interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>0.34 (low)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College age (about 18)</td>
<td>0.54 (moderate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>0.64 (moderate to strong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 years</td>
<td>0.74 (strong)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Can you think of some reasons why personality tends to become more stable as people get older?

2. Does your answer suggest that nature or nurture is more of an influence? Explain.
One sure way to test the nature–nurture question, as with the debate on intelligence, discussed in Chapter 16, is through twin studies, comparing identical twins (with a 100 per cent genetic match) and fraternal twins (with a 50 per cent genetic match).

The predicted outcomes would be:

- **Identical twins reared together** (a very close match in personality, whichever side of the argument you wish to take):
  - If nature is believed to be the controlling force—very strong correlation
  - If nurture is believed to be the controlling force—very strong correlation

- **Identical twins reared apart**:
  - If nature is believed to be the controlling force—very strong correlation
  - If nurture is believed to be the controlling force—very low correlation

- **Fraternal twins reared together**:
  - If nature is believed to be the controlling force—moderate correlation
  - If nurture is believed to be the controlling force—strong correlation

- **Fraternal twins reared apart**:
  - If nature is believed to be the controlling force—moderate correlation
  - If nurture is believed to be the controlling force—very low correlation.

Tellegen and colleagues (1988) performed a major study in which 400 pairs of twins were studied for three different personality characteristics:

- positive emotionality (feeling of well-being, sociable)
- negative emotionality (anxious, angry)
- constraint (cautious, inhibited).

The results of this study are shown in Figure 19.8, which demonstrates that identical twins have much greater similarity (congruence) in these three aspects of personality than fraternal twins, in whatever environment they grew up.
Lochlin (1992) summarized five different twin studies from five different countries and found consistent results. In these studies, the characteristic of **extroversion** (outgoing, sociable, lively and active personality) was measured, with the results shown in Figure 19.9. As with the previous research, the congruence for identical twins was significantly greater than for twins who shared only half their genetic blueprint.

Some studies have taken this kind of research even further, comparing the personalities of unrelated children who were adopted at the same time and into the same families. Three such studies were reported by Lochlin (1992), who measured the characteristic of extroversion with the results shown in Figure 19.10.
Complete the following predictions for the findings of studies that compared unrelated children adopted together and reared together (zero genetic match):

→ If nature is believed to be the controlling force: _______ correlation.
→ If nurture is believed to be the controlling force: _______ correlation.

Can personality change?

STANLEY 'TOOKIE' WILLIAMS

In 1981, American street gang leader Stanley 'Tookie' Williams was found guilty of shooting and killing four people and sentenced to death.

In the early years of his imprisonment, Williams, who always claimed to be innocent, was a violent and unruly prisoner. In 1993, however, after six-and-a-half years in solitary confinement, he denounced street gangs, encouraged other people not to join, and wrote children's books with a message aiming to steer them away from gang membership.

Williams was nominated five times for the Nobel Peace Prize and once for the Nobel Prize for Literature. In a 2005 interview he said:

There is no part of me that existed then that exists now. The majority of the detractors and naysayers ... it's difficult for them to recognise

the redemption. They've been unable to stop smoking or drinking or lose weight and they're looking at me being in San Quentin and they say, 'This man is on death row convicted of killing four people, how can he be redeemed?' They can't believe that. They don't want to believe that. They would feel lesser (sic) about themselves.

Williams' final appeal against the death sentence was rejected by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on 12 December 2005. Williams was executed by lethal injection on 13 December 2005, despite petitions, crowds of supporters outside San Quentin Prison, pleas from many celebrities and ordinary people, and plenty of evidence that the original trial was flawed. Thousands turned out to mourn Williams at his funeral service on 20 December 2005.

CAN PERSONALITY CHANGE?

Conduct an internet search on Stanley 'Tookie' Williams and read some of the articles you find. Do you believe it is possible that Williams' personality underwent such a change? Why or why not?
The roles of nature and nurture

It is likely that both nature and nurture play important roles in determining personality characteristics.

- **Nature:** The case for a person’s genetic make-up having a major role in determining personality is especially shown by the high correlations for identical twins reared in different environments, and the fact that there is still some correlation for fraternal twins reared apart. This case is also supported by the very low correlations for unrelated children and adults living together.

- **Nurture:** The case for nurture is supported by the fact that, even for identical twins reared together, there is only about a 0.6 to 0.65 correlation in personality. Something has to explain the difference, and this can only be environment and the experiences that the person has had.

As we have seen, personality becomes more stable with age and, as we age, there are various common trends in personality, such as a tendency towards increased tolerance and conscientiousness. You will recall Phineas Gage (see Chapter 2), whose personality was completely changed by an accident. This also happens with some illnesses. Both injury and illness are environmental factors.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

• Personality refers to the long-lasting set of characteristics that influence how a person thinks, feels and acts. This set of characteristics is unique for each individual; even identical twins differ in their personalities.

• Personality characteristics and their causes have been of interest to doctors and scientists for over 3000 years. Famous authors such as William Shakespeare and Robert Louis Stevenson created believable characters by carefully observing people of different personalities.

• People have tried to explain the origins of different personalities over thousands of years, using many different theories such as the balance of body fluids, or humours (Hippocrates, Galen), and body shape (Sheldon).

• Over a lifespan we see that personality may change in some ways and remain consistent in others. A nervous or angry child will often become an anxious or bad-tempered adult; a cheerful and friendly child is likely to become a confident ‘take-charge’ type of adult.

• There are some common changes that occur as we age; there is a tendency for all people to become more tolerant and conscientious as they get older.
Much research into personality has involved twin studies, which have shown that although much of personality can be explained by genetic make-up – as demonstrated by the high level of similarity between identical twins – environmental influences are also important. In the nature-nurture debate, the answer is that both are vitally important.

The case study of Stanley ‘Tookie’ Williams suggests that it is possible for major changes of personality to occur.
MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. Personality refers to the characteristics of a person that:
   a. predict the way in which a person will deal with a particular situation
   b. are unique and lasting, and influence behaviour in a range of situations
   c. create consistent patterns of behaviour
   d. all of the above.

2. 'Personality psychology is psychology’s garbage bin' (Byrne 1974). This means that:
   a. personality psychology is rubbish
   b. personality psychology includes a wide variety of components that do not fit in other areas of psychology
   c. personality psychology should not be studied
   d. personality psychology is too confusing to be studied systematically.

3. The earliest known theory of personality came from ancient:
   a. Greece
   b. India
   c. Rome
   d. Egypt.

4. According to the somatotype theory of personality, endomorphs tend to be:
   a. changeable, unpredictable, variable (in mood and actions)
   b. predictable, articulate, intelligent, critical, passionate with short, explosive tempers
   c. cheerful, slow to anger, with a tendency to procrastinate and be obstinate, lazy
   d. ambitious, unpredictable, intelligent.

6. According to the somatotype theory of personality, mesomorphs tend to be:
   a. changeable, unpredictable, variable (in mood and actions)
   b. predictable, articulate, intelligent, critical, passionate with short, explosive tempers
   c. cheerful, slow to anger, with a tendency to procrastinate and be obstinate, lazy
   d. ambitious, unpredictable, intelligent.

7. Hippocrates and Galen promoted the theory that humours determine personality. They would have expected a person with a calm, unruffled personality to have an excess of which fluid?
   a. phlegm
   b. blood
   c. yellow bile
   d. black bile.

8. A person with an excess of blood would be expected, by Hippocrates and Galen, to show what kind of personality?
   a. laid-back
   b. angry
   c. depressed
   d. optimistic.

9. According to Hippocrates and Galen, a person with a melancholy personality would have an excess of which fluid?
   a. phlegm
   b. blood
   c. yellow bile
   d. black bile.

10. According to research, a nervous and anxious child is likely to grow up to be:
    a. a nervous and anxious adult
    b. a confident and outgoing adult
    c. an intelligent and sociable adult
    d. an adult of any personality; there is no relationship between childhood personality and adult personality.

11. In the nature–nurture debate, nature refers to:
    a. the environment in which the child grows and learns
b  the way the child’s personality develops
  c  the influence of the child’s parents
  d  the genetic blueprint carried in the cells of the body.

12 In the nature-nurture debate, nurture refers to:
   a  the environment in which the child grows and learns
   b  the way the child’s personality develops
   c  the influence of the child’s parents
   d  the genetic blueprint carried in the cells of the body.

13 The evidence from twin-studies suggests that:
   a  the nature side of the debate is correct
   b  the nurture side of the debate is correct
   c  neither side of the debate is correct
   d  nature and nurture interact to determine personality.

14 One major problem with Sheldon’s research was that he assessed both personality and body shape himself. This contributed to the problem of ____________ in his research.
   a  involuntary participation
   b  participant bias
   c  order effects
   d  experimenter bias

15 The case study of Stanley ‘Tookie’ Williams suggests that personality:
   a  is fixed throughout life
   b  may change over time
   c  is randomly determined
   d  is genetically determined.

16 A definition of personality would suggest that it is ____________ and ____________.

17 What was meant by the somatotype theory of personality?

18 Identify the humours and personality types by copying and completing the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HUMOUR</th>
<th>PERSONALITY TYPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Black bile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Calm, unemotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Yellow bile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 Research has shown that if personality is assessed once and then again seven years later, the trend from childhood to adulthood is that it tends to become ____________.

20 Research has shown that as people get older, their personality tends to become more ____________ and ____________.

21 Twin studies have consistently shown that the personalities of identical twins tend to be ____________ similar than the personalities of ____________ twins.

22 Identify and explain two design faults in William Sheldon’s research (1940).