**Personality Traits**

Now in its third edition, this dynamic textbook analyses the traits fundamental to human personality: what they are, why they matter, their biological and social foundations, how they play out in human life and their consequences for cognition, stress and physical and mental health. The text also considers the applications of personality assessment in clinical, educational and occupational settings, providing the reader with a detailed understanding of the whole field of personality traits. This edition, now in 2-colour with improved student features, includes the latest research from behavioural genetics, neuroscience, social psychology and cognitive science, assesses the impact of new research techniques like brain imagery, and provides additional content on positive aspects of traits and practical uses of personality assessment. This is an essential textbook for students taking courses in Personality and Individual Differences and also provides researchers and practitioners with a coherent, up-to-date survey of this significant area.

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Personality Traits

THIRD EDITION

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To my wife, Diana – GM

To my parents,
Hugh and Isobelle Deary – IJD

To my parents – MCW
Contents

List of figures xi
List of tables xviii
List of boxes xxiv
Preface to the third edition xxv
Preface to the second edition xxviii
Preface to the first edition xxx

Part I The nature of personality traits 1

1 The trait concept and personality theory 3
   Introduction: conceptions of traits 3
   A brief history of traits 8
   Psychometric approaches to identifying personality dimensions 12
   Primary factors of personality: the 16PF and other questionnaires 19
   Higher-order factors: the ‘Big Five’ or the ‘Gigantic Three’? 23
   Current conceptions of personality structure 26
   Conclusions 40

2 Persons, situations and interactionism 42
   Traits and situations 42
   Are traits universal across cultures? 55
   Conclusions 62

3 Personality across the life span 63
   Trait stability 63
   Temperament 70
   Temperament, personality and stability: longitudinal studies 78
   Conclusions 83

4 Stable traits and transient states 85
   Introduction: the place of states in trait theory 85
   Trait-state models 86
   State dimensions: affect, mood and self-report arousal 91
Beyond mood: additional state domains 101
Traits and states: empirical studies 104
Conclusions 118

5 Alternative views of personality: challenges to trait theory 121
Traits in psychodynamic theory 122
The unconscious: contemporary studies 128
Assessment of implicit traits 133
Humanistic and phenomenological approaches 139
Conclusions 148

Part II Causes of personality traits 151

6 Genes, environments and personality traits 153
Introduction 153
Twin studies 159
Other research designs 164
Genes, environment and multiple personality traits 168
Further issues in genetic research 171
Molecular genetic studies of personality 181
Conclusions 185

7 The psychobiology of traits 187
Introduction: neuropsychological approaches to personality 187
Ground-plans for neuropsychological theory 189
Psychophysiological techniques: an outline and examples 196
Personality and brain imaging 203
Personality and arousal: towards an integrated theory? 209
Personality and sensitivity to motivational stimuli 219
Psychophysiology: where next? 226
Conclusions 228

8 The social psychology of traits 231
Introduction: personality and social behaviour 231
Personality development: social-psychological perspectives 236
Consistencies in social knowledge and cognition 248
Traits and processes: agreeableness and social behaviour 254
‘Social-psychological’ traits 257
A rapprochement between social psychology and trait theory? 261
Conclusions 264
### Part III  Consequences and applications

#### 9 Stress

- Introduction: the nature of stress 269
- Stress and physiological reactivity 271
- Neuroticism and stress vulnerability 273
- Transactional perspectives on personality and stress: mediator and moderator hypotheses 281
- Neuroticism, stress and emotional disorders: a self-regulative perspective 292
- Conclusions 299

#### 10 Traits and health

- Introduction 301
- Heart disease 304
- Cancer 308
- Neuroticism as a risk factor for multiple diseases 310
- Stress and health 312
- Traits and health-related behaviours 317
- Life course approaches to personality, stress and illness 318
- Models of psychosomatic illness 319
- Conclusions 321

#### 11 Abnormal personality traits?

- Personality disorders: concept and classification 324
- Problems with personality disorders in current categorical systems 329
- Are there abnormal personality traits? 336
- Personality disorders and models of normal personality: integrating psychiatry and differential psychology? 347
- Conclusions 354

#### 12 Personality, performance and information processing

- Performance studies and trait theory 357
- Theories of personality and performance 361
- Extraversion–introversion and performance 367
- Trait anxiety, neuroticism and performance 377
- Personality and intelligence 385
- Conclusions 390

#### 13 Applications of personality assessment

- Principles of trait assessment 392
- Educational and clinical applications 405
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality and job performance</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational psychology: further applications</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14 Conclusions</strong></td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievements of trait research</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards a theory of traits</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traits and the coherence of personality theory</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author index</td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject index</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures

1.1 Humoral schemes of temperament proposed by (a) Kant and (b) Wundt  

1.2 Mean scores obtained on the 16PF by three occupational groups  

1.3 A hierarchy of factor solutions (three, four, five and six factor analyses) with factor score correlations across levels  


2.1 Mischel and Shoda’s (1995) Cognitive-Affective Personality System (CAPS)  


3.1 Decline in reliability over time of traits  


4.1 A state-trait model for detrimental effects of anxiety on information processing and performance  


4.2 Schematic outlines of alternative cognitive science explanations for personality-emotion associations  


4.3 Two-dimensional models of mood  

4.4 A three-dimensional model of mood
4.5 A multidimensional state-trait anxiety model

4.6 Personality effects on induced mood

B.4.2.1 A path model for extraversion effects on happiness

5.1 IAT stimuli that might be used in a study of implicit preferences for cats versus dogs

6.1 A model of the contributions of genetic (A), common environment (C) and unshared environment (E) factors to phenotypic personality trait scores, in MZ and DZ twins

B.6.3.1 Means on a composite index of antisocial behaviour as a function of monoamine oxidase A (MAOA) activity – based on genotype – and a history of maltreatment in childhood

6.2 Environmental (E) and genetic (G) mediators of phenotypic (P) change and stability from time 1 to time 2

6.3 Path diagram showing latent genetic and environmental influences (circles) on the measured phenotypes (rectangles) of cigarette smoking, monoamine oxidase activity and neuroticism

7.1 Some causal paths assumed by biological theories of personality
7.2 Eysenck’s (1967) model for the hypothetical physiological basis of extraversion (reticular formation–cortical arousal) and neuroticism (limbic system or visceral brain)


7.3 Gray’s axes as aligned with Eysenck’s axes

7.4 Functional properties of Gray’s (1982) behavioural inhibition system


7.5 Zuckerman’s (1991) psychobiological model for personality


7.6 Normal adult EEG. Note the alpha rhythm which is prominent over the rear parts of the head when the eyes are closed


7.7 Brain waves classified by frequency

7.8 Early components of the auditory event-related potential recorded at central electrode (Cz), showing effects of attention on N1 and P2 waves


7.9 Electrodermal response amplitude as a function of sensation seeking and stimulus intensity level, for initial stimuli (left panel), and all stimuli (right panel)


7.10 Mean heart rate (z-scores) for children at each of four assessments

7.11 Areas of the brain investigated by SPET scan by Ebmeier et al. (1994), shown in two horizontal sections

7.12 Negative emotional stimuli, the 5-HTTLPR allele, the anterior cingulate and the amygdala

7.13 The effect of high (8 KHz) and low (0.5 KHz) 80 dB tones on the auditory evoked potentials of introvert, middle and extravert subjects

7.14 The interactive effect of caffeine dosage and extraversion on initial electrodermal response amplitude

7.15 Effects of trait anxiety (Anx) and impulsivity (Imp) on EMG eyeblink response

B.8.1.1 Levels of emotional development

8.1 Triadic reciprocal relationships between behaviour (B), interpersonal factors (P), and the external environment (E), according to Bandura (1999)
From Social cognitive theory of personality by Bandura, A. In: D. Cervone and Y. Shoda (eds.), *The coherence of*
8.2 Bandura’s distinction between outcome expectations and self-efficacy perceptions


9.1 Emotional distress resulting from various everyday stressors in high and low neuroticism subjects


9.2 Personality characteristics of people diagnosed with emotional disorders


9.3 Part of a causal model of the effects of neuroticism and negative life events on psychological distress


9.4 The transactional model of stress: symptoms result from negative appraisals and ineffective coping

9.5 Examples of mediation and moderation hypotheses in research on traits and stress

9.6 A structural model for effects of neuroticism and cognitive process variables on stress outcomes

9.7 An outline of the SREF model of emotional distress and self-regulation

10.1 Four causal models for associations between health and personality

10.2 A transactional model for vulnerability to cardiovascular disease: interaction of structural weakness and psychosocial vulnerability


12.1 The Yerkes-Dodson Law as an explanation for dependence of extraversion effects on task difficulty and level of environmental stimulation

12.2 Interactive effects of extraversion–introversion and sleep deprivation on tracking performance

12.3 Part of Humphrey and Revelle’s (1984) model of personality effects on performance


12.4 Possible adaptive functions of the information-processing correlates of extraversion–introversion

12.5 An outline of Sarason’s model of test anxiety effects on performance


12.6 Possible adaptive benefits of emotional stability and anxiety

13.1 Four possible outcomes of clinical diagnosis, with costs and benefits

13.2 A sample item representing the face perception sub-test of the Multi-Factor Emotional Intelligence Scale
Competing models of emotional intelligence. In R. J. Sternberg
(ed.), Handbook of human intelligence, 2nd edn. New York:
Cambridge University Press.

14.1 A cognitive-adaptive framework for understanding the
processing basis for traits
Reprinted from Cognitive science perspectives on personality
and emotion, Matthews, G. (ed.), ‘Extraversion, emotion and
performance: a cognitive adaptive model’, pp. 339–442,
copyright 1997, with permission from Elsevier.

14.2 A cognitive-adaptive model of extraversion
Matthews, G. ‘Personality and skill: a cognitive-adaptive
framework’. In P. L. Ackerman, P. C. Kyllonen and R. D.
Roberts (eds.), The future of learning and individual differences
research: processes, traits, and content, pp. 251–70. American
with permission.

14.3 A cognitive-adaptive model of neuroticism/trait anxiety
Matthews, G. ‘Personality and skill: a cognitive-adaptive
framework’. In P. L. Ackerman, P. C. Kyllonen and R. D.
Roberts (eds.), The future of learning and individual differences
research: processes, traits, and content, pp. 251–70. American
with permission.
Tables

1.1 Ratings of likeableness of some favourable, neutral and unfavourable traits  

1.2 Examples of experimental studies showing correspondences between traits and objective behavioural measures

1.3 Correlations between trait descriptive adjectives thought to relate to conscientiousness, agreeableness and intellectance ($n = 1,010$)  

1.4 Factor solution obtained from correlational data of table 1.3

1.5 The fifteen personality traits assessed by the 16PF, with examples of famous individuals exemplifying the traits, and 16PF5 alpha coefficients  
Adapted from *The 16PF Fifth Edition Practical Manual*  
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1.6 Traits associated with the three dimensions of Eysenck’s model of personality

1.7 Trait facets associated with the five domains of the Costa and McCrae five factor model of personality

1.8 Studies of rating data demonstrating the Big Five

1.9 A new factor analysis of Webb’s (1915) trait rating data  

1.10 Correspondences between primary traits in four systems  
2.1 Correlations between judgements of children and their social behaviour as a function of feature-centrality in the judgement and level of situation-competency demand

2.2 Factors in an experimental situation that favour the importance of traits or manipulations in accounting for behaviour differences

2.3 Hierarchy of hypotheses from the person–situation controversy, arranged from most to least pessimistic

3.1 Inter-trait correlations obtained by Conley (1985)

3.2 Components of temperament described by Buss and Plomin (1984)

3.3 Strelau’s criteria for differentiating temperament and personality

3.4 Scales of the Formal Characteristics of the Behaviour-Temperament Inventory.

3.5 Selected loadings of personality and temperament scales on five factors.
3.6 Aspects of temperament measured by the Adult Temperament Questionnaire

3.7 Correlations between ATQ factor scores and NEO-PI-R FFM scores

4.1 Examples of how different types of factor relate to changes in energetic and tense arousal

4.2 Three secondary factors assessed by the Dundee Stress State Questionnaire (DSSQ)

4.3 Data from illustrative studies of personality and mood

5.1 Examples of empirical psychoanalytic research

5.2 A survey of idiographic methods

B.5.2.1 Statements describing hopes and fears relating to three motive domains

6.1 Correlations between adopted children (age 16 years) and adopted, biological and control parents from the Colorado Adoption project

6.2 Extraversion correlations in four studies of separated twins

6.3 Genetic and environmental influences of peer-rated personality trait scores in German monozygotic and dizygotic twins
6.4 Genetic and environmental contribution (percentage variance) to the Big Five personality dimensions


6.5 Broad heritabilities of self-report measures of the Big Five Factors


6.6 Categories of environmental influences that cause children in the same family to differ


7.1 A highly simplified description of some different systems for ‘arousal’

7.2 Two types of correlate of extraversion


8.1 Three aspects of personality coherence, within social-cognitive theory


8.2 Stages of development of the social self

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8.3 Associations between four traits of the FFM and various aspects of social functioning identified by Jensen-Campbell et al. (2009)

8.4 Sample items for generalised self-efficacy


8.5 Use of the ‘strange situations’ paradigm to classify attachment style in young children

9.1 Correlations between neuroticism, extraversion and scales of the General Health Questionnaire, in two student samples
9.2 Empirical demonstrations of negative appraisals in neurotic and trait anxious individuals 287

10.1 Common psychosomatic conditions as reviewed by Kellner (1991) 320

11.1 Titles of personality disorders recognised in the DSM-IV and ICD10 classification systems 326

11.2 DSM-IV clusters of personality disorders 326

11.3 Brief definitions of the DSM-IV personality disorders 327

11.4 Diagnostic criteria for schizotypal, antisocial and dependent personality disorders 328

11.5 Suggestions for revising the current categorical (e.g., DSM and ICD) systems for classifying personality disorders 333

11.6 Conjoint factor analysis of personality disorder scales and factors from the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R) and the NEO-PI-R (after Austin and Deary, 2000; Larstone et al., 2002) 343


11.7 Items from Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist-Revised 345


11.8 A combined analysis of the NEO-PI five factor model of normal personality traits and the DAPP-BQ sixteen factor model of personality disorders 348


11.9 Brain systems associated with Cloninger’s three-dimensional system for normal and abnormal personality 351

12.1 Cognitive patterning of extraversion–introversion effects on performance 369

13.1 Definitions of reliability and stability 395

13.2 Definitions of validity 396

13.3 Some common response styles 398
13.4 Two kinds of self-favouring bias identified by Paulhus and John (1998)


13.5 Some implications of the APA Ethics Code for assessment of personality traits

13.6 Some personality characteristics of various childhood disorders (see Kamphaus et al., 1995)

13.7 Selected correlational data from three meta-analytic reviews of associations between the Big Five and occupational criteria

13.8 Four trait complexes identified by Ackerman and Heggestad (1997)


14.1 Three levels of explanation for trait psychology

14.2 Empirical findings regarding extraversion–introversion, allocated to different levels of explanation

14.3 Empirical findings regarding neuroticism–emotional stability, allocated to different levels of explanation
Boxes

1.1 Instruments for measuring the Big Five  page 33
2.1 Taxonomies of situations: towards measurement models? 54
2.2 Are there sex differences in personality traits? 58
3.1 Personality and ADHD 73
3.2 Does personality change in old age? 79
3.3 Early temperament and criminal behaviour 80
4.1 Secrets of happiness: subjective well-being 105
4.2 Extraversion, social activity and positive mood 115
5.1 Dreams: royal road or blind alley? 126
5.2 Measurement of individual differences in basic needs 145
6.1 Towards an evolutionary psychology of traits? 154
6.2 A twin family study 166
6.3 Gene–environment interaction and the cycle of violence in maltreated children 172
6.4 The nonshared environment in adolescent development (NEAD) project 177
7.1 Personality and emotional processing: a functional imaging study 206
7.2 Impulsivity: a problem variable for psychophysiology 220
8.1 Temperament and social learning: development of emotional competence 239
8.2 Social-psychological bases for shyness 252
9.1 A genetic contribution to coping? 273
9.2 Homesickness, stress and personality in students 275
10.1 Conscientious children live longer; cheerful children die younger 304
10.2 Hostility and cardiovascular disease 308
10.3 Recommendations for research into psychosocial factors and cancer 311
11.1 The effect of receiving a personality diagnosis label on the way patients are perceived by psychiatrists 330
11.2 Livesley and colleagues’ research programme on the psychometric approach to personality disorder 339
12.1 Probing the cognitive architecture: extraversion and the response selection bottleneck 370
12.2 Jumping to conclusions? Anxiety and predictive inference 382
13.1 Alexithymia 409
13.2 Personality and leadership 414
Preface to the third edition

The first and second editions of Personality Traits explicated and consolidated our opinion that the science of personality could be built on a foundation of traits. The first edition had the job of defining the field. It grew out of the growing consensus regarding traits as entities, and particularly well-validated personality trait models. The second edition was more comfortable in the presence of its psychological neighbours. It absorbed the confidence building around traits and trait models and reached out to companion disciplines that could inform personality trait science and also benefit from it. That maturity and integration was the dual driving force for this third edition. It is no longer necessary primarily to be marking territory, to be showing what is and what is not trait land. In this third edition, with personality traits and their models more securely established and connected within psychology, there is more reaching out: to the revisionary critics, who have some interesting new ideas; to the fast-growing sciences that can offer explanations for trait differences; and to the applied fields that are increasingly enjoying the benefits of including personality trait variance in their models. The structure of the book has been retained. Readers will first find out about the distinctive characteristics of traits, then their biological and social foundations, and then how they play out into human life: what traits are and which ones there are, how differences in them come about, and why they matter. The book’s message is that traits are tractable and important variants of the human condition. Those variants are still not fully understood, and we have tried to make it clear how much is well established and how much is mysterious. We avoid hand-waving to fill in the gaps. Where there are data we try to explain their meaning and implications clearly. Where there are gaps or chasms we point them out.

The staples of the book’s first part have not changed. The principals of traits and the major models are covered and updated. There are interesting challenges. There are still urges to increase traits beyond the still-in-favour five (perhaps plus or minus two). New looks have taken place at higher-order trait variance, with more discussion about the possibility of even a single general personality trait, and what that could mean. There is more emphasis on the lesson that traits are tendencies that play out in situations. Accordingly, the section on interactionism explains how traits act differently depending on the situation, and how understanding more about situations that trigger destructive behaviours opens up potential to help treat psychological problems. A distinctive part of the book that we have
developed is the treatment of psychological states and moods. It is important both to distinguish them from traits and to explain their associations with them. In this new edition there is further articulation of neural bases for emotions. We cover the growing evidence that multiple paths may link traits to individual differences in emotional states. We still think it is important to alert the reader to accounts that are complementary to trait approaches and we highlight new interest in unconscious processes and the development and evaluation of implicit trait measures.

Part two – the causes of personality traits – caused excitement and concern, especially with regard to the biological section. In previous editions, the biological basis of traits has largely meant the behaviour genetics and psychophysiology of traits. Those are still covered in detail, and part of the updating has reflected the increasing prominence of reinforcement sensitivity theory (RST) in personality trait science; the interest from the investment made by Jeffrey Gray. But the real changes have come in the pace of the research on molecular genetics and brain imaging as applied to traits. Both are exciting, and both brought problems. Obvious excitement lies in possibly realising molecular mechanisms and neural networks that provide foundations for trait differences. The problems lie in the facts that the genetic studies have small effect sizes and problems of replication, and that the brain imaging studies can have relatively small numbers of subjects and few attempted replications. One major avenue towards the biological basis of traits are studies that conduct genetically-informed brain imaging examinations using validated cognitive paradigms, such as emotional and social stimulus processing. Examples of this new approach are described and explained. Social foundations of traits are considered too. There is growing evidence for relationships between traits and key social-psychological processes including attachment, self-knowledge and self-regulative motivations.

Part three has grown, reflecting the increasing evidence that traits matter: to mental health professionals, to health psychologists, to cognitive psychologists, and others. Each of these, it is increasingly obvious, will do disservice to their clients and participants – and they will be acting, advising and experimenting suboptimally – if they ignore trait variation. There is more in this edition on research into stress-buffering traits such as optimism, hope and spirituality. New approaches to treat depression, such as mindfulness-based therapies, show promise that a wider set of tools is available for psychologists and other practitioners to help bring about lasting change in levels of distress. The growing evidence for the importance of conscientiousness as a health-related trait is covered. Psychobiological research is showing that emotional triggers, together with biological risk factors, play a role in the triggering of heart attacks. There is further understanding of the place of personality traits in the multiple pathways of risk across the whole life course for complex illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and cancer. We have tried to capture the fascinating development of personality disorders. For decades, the evidence that personality disorder can be captured in continua has been growing. Coverage of this evidence has been a
distinctive aspect of all editions of this book. Now, with the evidence becoming more and more solid, we see the dimensional approach to personality disorder waiting in the wings to see if it will appear when the curtain goes up on the fifth revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-V). Our opinion is that some compromise will emerge between traits and syndrome labels. Applied to human performance, there are increasingly successful information-processing models, especially for anxiety. We are also seeing – as was the case with the brain-imaging studies that are informed by personality variation – that there is more application to traits of theories and methods from cognitive neuroscience. In applied psychology there is increasing acceptance of dimensional models in various fields. There are accumulating data supporting the use of trait-based meta-analyses, especially in organisational settings. There is continued interest in new trait constructs – notably emotional intelligence – which do not always fulfil their initial promise.

This third edition, then, finds traits in rude health and increasing their social networks. The health is ensured by the continued work of able trait mechanics-psychometricians who optimise construct content and measurement. The social networks are growing: because a greater range of biological, neuroscience, psychological, and social scientists are applying themselves to explaining trait variation; and because a diverse range of scientists and practitioners are benefiting from taking trait variation into account. These new partners mean that the reader of Personality Traits has to cope with concepts and their interactions from an increasing range of scientific disciplines. There’s no escaping that; the human condition lives in a multivariate world.

Gerald Matthews
Ian Deary
Martha Whiteman
Preface to the second edition

The first edition of this book was motivated by the authors’ perception that research on personality traits had reached a ‘critical mass’ that would justify a textbook focusing on the trait as an organising construct for understanding personality. We are gratified by the success of the first edition, which satisfied the need for a book on personality based on modern scientific research. Since the publication of the first edition, other authors appear to be distancing themselves from the traditional Hall of Fame text that we criticised initially. It is a relief to see the Hall of Fame approach receding into the distance so that the teaching of personality can be based on empirical data rather than historical relics.

We appreciate the feedback that we received from colleagues concerning the first edition. These comments helped to shape both the content and organisation of this new edition. We encourage academic faculty, practitioners and students to continue to share their opinions of the text with us. So far as content is concerned, the challenge has been to keep pace with the surge of new data and theorising on traits. In consequence, all chapters have been updated, and readers will note that a high proportion of the studies cited are recent. To better keep up with new developments, we invited a new author to join the original duo: Dr Whiteman brings expertise in health, epidemiology and lifespan aspects of personality.

Recent research confirms our original contention that trait research is becoming ever more interwoven into mainstream psychology. Focal topics as diverse as behaviour genetics, stress and abnormality simply cannot be understood without reference to traits. Several fields of inquiry have seen the extension and elaboration of research that we highlighted in the first edition. Recent psychometric studies largely take the Five Factor model as a reference point, even when seeking to fractionate or collapse its dimensions. The trend towards integration of trait psychology and social-cognitive psychology has accelerated, for example with the important new work on how Agreeableness relates to social behavior. We have also expanded our coverage of self-efficacy. In other cases, we have added much new material to develop more fully topics such as sex differences, brain-imaging studies, molecular genetics, psychopathy and traits in occupational psychology. We have added three new chapters to review in more depth personality across the lifespan, traits and health, and the practical applications of personality trait assessment. Other new research areas include psychophysiological studies inspired by recent work on reinforcement sensitivity, schizotypy, spirituality and the controversial but influential construct of emotional intelligence.
From its inception, the book has aimed to meet the needs of both the researcher requiring an introductory survey of traits, and the student of personality. Thus, we have also responded to feedback on the use of the book for teaching. The layout and structure are better geared to teaching needs: including summaries, space for notes, and more boxes on special topics. In addition, the new chapter on practical application is intended to emphasise the real-world utility of personality assessment (and its limitations) for the benefit of the practitioner.

As a closing thought, it is satisfying to see a valid edifice of personality psychology rising ever higher from its solid foundation in the rigorous assessment of stable traits. The flourishing dialogue between trait psychologists and social psychologists – traditional adversaries – is especially welcome: both sides have much to learn from one another. However, this undoubted success brings new challenges and issues. We have referred already to the potentially overwhelming volume of new research, which raises special difficulties for theory. How can we have a unified theory of personality traits that explains findings from so many disparate subdisciplines, ranging from molecular genetics to high-level social cognitive processes? We have sketched out some tentative suggestions for theory development in the concluding chapter. It is important also to maintain boundaries between core personality research and other disciplines. Social psychology and personality are often seen as a single field, but are there aspects of social psychology that should be sharply differentiated from personality? The possible evolutionary basis for human nature has been much debated of late, but perhaps it is unwise to merge evolutionary psychology with personality. We continue to anticipate the maturation of a trait-based personality science, but we also perceive a need for clarifying the scope of this science. We hope that this text continues to assist both students and working psychologists in grasping the basic principles and findings of research on personality traits.
Preface to the first edition

The stimuli for writing this book were private and public. In our conversations with colleagues in other areas of psychology we have noticed a lack of awareness of recent advances and retreats in personality psychology. In parallel with these conversations, we noticed that textbooks on personality and sections on personality in general psychology texts frequently failed to reflect what was happening in the research journals and at personality conferences. Many psychologists, we found, were under the impression either that traits had perished under Mischel’s broadsword in 1968, or that trait theorists were still discussing how many angels were perched on their particular pinhead. Personality texts, more surprisingly, seemed stuck in an arcane formula, variously described as a Dutch Auction or a Hall of Fame. Thus, the typical book on personality has a number of more or less free-standing chapters on ‘approaches to personality’ handed down largely by great names: Freud, Jung, Maslow, Erikson, Horney, Sullivan, May, Kelly, Rogers. What many of these approaches shared was a lack of current, and often past, academic interest and a lack of empirical evidence or even testability. Within the Hall of Fame, traits appeared as one or two dusty portraits, neither more nor less distinguished than the other works on offer, though perhaps with a little less depth.

The typical book reviewing personality does not adequately represent current personality research. It offers a parallel world where knowledge does not progress and where stories pertaining to human personality are collected irrespective of their validity. The version of traits offered is frequently a straw man that entails a rigidity and narrowness not seen among living trait researchers. One still sees situationism and interactionism portrayed as alternatives to trait models, whereas the truth is that there are no credible situationists who deny the existence of traits and no trait theorists who deny the power of the situation. Situationism and trait theories are complementary, not alternatives, and interactionism is the description of the emergent approach consequent on recognising these truths. This does not deny that some researchers will devote their careers more to studying traits or situations, and there is more than one way to become an interactionist. It is a truism verging on cliché to say that behaviour is multifactorially determined and that there is a reciprocity between the person and the environment. However, this richness may only be captured by systematic empirical research that stakes out the lawful personological and situational (and interactional) factors influencing behaviour.
An accurate exposition of scientific research on personality must break the common mould from which many personality texts have been cast; it must explain to the reader why some personality theories and constructs should be dropped from our consideration, and others need to be recognised as having become married. This book is about contemporary personality research, one which is aware of the historical roots of the field but focuses on constructs with a future as well as a past. Although the treatment of personality is centred on traits, it recognises other empirical approaches. The book makes no expansionist claims for traits, but does assert that other aspects of research on personality may be seen from the vantage point of the trait theorist and may be used in tandem with traits.

The book is not wholly or even largely concerned with the narrow psychometrics of personality traits. As is the case with cognitive abilities, psychometric studies provide a possible classificatory scheme for personality traits that has to look elsewhere for validation. Therefore, whereas some attention must be given to the dimensionality of personality traits, most of the evidence for the validity of traits will come from what we call horizontal and vertical validation. Horizontal validation includes such efforts as finding the same factorial structure for a trait scheme in different groups (sexes, cultures, ages), and finding convergent and discriminant validity when the traits are compared with other related and unrelated psychometric constructs. Vertical validity may look up or down. Upward vertical validation involves finding real-life correlates of trait differences, such as occupational and other life successes and failures, social behaviours, and susceptibility to clinical conditions. Downward vertical validity concerns finding the psychological and biological underpinnings of traits, and involves a variety of approaches from cognitive to psychobiological. Therefore, the richness of psychological research involving traits includes differential, biological, cognitive and social techniques. Thus, whereas the sine qua non of the personality researcher must be a minimum level of psychometric knowledge, the personality researcher must be eclectic in validating traits.

The structure of the book reflects the validational structure outlined above. Part 1 of the book charts the trait domain and attempts to clarify the boundaries between the most agreed upon dimensions. It also examines the relationship between trait theory and its supposed alternatives in the domain of personality. Part 2 deals with the causes of traits, both biological and social. Part 3 concerns some of the consequences of trait differences. Again, it is important to emphasise that, whereas a replicable and generalisable psychometric structure for personality traits is necessary for a theory of personality, it is not sufficient. Sufficiency arises when the origins of traits have been established in valid constructs that lie outside the trait domain, and where there are replicable, significant and objective real-life outcomes of traits in terms of human behaviour. The book gives an idea of the empirical mass of trait theories of personality; compared with other psychological constructs we think that trait theory has come near to the status of a paradigm
in psychological research. Not the least impressive fact about traits is that their influence may be carried in the genetic material.

The book builds an eclectic picture of human personality around traits. It is a call to those interested in human individuality to come and stand on some ‘solid ground on the wetlands of personality’ (Costa and McCrae, 1995b); as such it welcomes all other empirical approaches to personality. Therefore, the reader will see an attempt to reconcile trait theory with the often-neglected work on abnormal personality, with state research, with social psychology, with situationism, and so forth. Because we have adopted an eclectic approach, some chapters or sections will begin with a description of the explanatory principles of an area of psychological research, and only then move on to the association of that area with trait theory. We contend that all empirical research on personality must ultimately be woven into a comprehensive account of the person, and that perhaps trait theory is a reasonable platform from which to begin. In the treatment of individual topics, the book, because of its breadth, is frequently selective, though never intentionally unrepresentative. Our aim has been to offer the general flavour of an area as well as a dip into some specific noteworthy studies. We have attempted to provide a comprehensive scientific account of contemporary personality research with traits centre stage, and with a strong supporting cast. This has been successfully accomplished in part elsewhere, though usually such books have been written at the level of the research monograph or have had a focus on a narrower range of traits (Eysenck, 1982; Eysenck and Eysenck, 1985; Brody, 1989; Zuckerman, 1991; Costa and McCrae, 1993). The level of the material has been pitched to appeal to interested senior undergraduates, postgraduate students, and career psychologists who wish to catch up on the contemporary scientific study of personality.