



Levels of Personality

A completely revised and updated edition of a much-acclaimed textbook providing a critical introduction to human personality for psychology students. *Levels of Personality* carefully avoids the traditional 'catalogue of theories' approach. Instead it relates theories to each other within a conceptual framework of different levels of behaviour, moving inwards and downwards from 'surface level' explanations. Analytical case studies then apply these levels of understanding to areas of special interest such as aggression and sexuality. The author adopts a deep analytical and critical approach and questions whether personality theory and research has really addressed important questions, or produced useful answers. This new edition incorporates two new chapters on personality disorders, and on personality in the workplace, as well as improved pedagogical features including statistics boxes, assessment boxes, relevant websites and key references for each chapter.

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THIRD EDITION

Mark Cook



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Preface to the third edition

This new edition includes two new chapters, on personality disorders (Chapter 13), and personality in the workplace (Chapter 14). All the other chapters have been revised and updated. The amount of updating gives an interesting commentary on the development of personality research during the last 20 to 30 years. The chapter on psychoanalysis needed the least updating, because research on empirical verification of Freudian theories of personality seems to have largely dried up. Personal construct psychology is still active, but seems to generate therapy and guidance rather than research. The chapters on trait and factor approaches have needed extensive alteration, because criticisms and reformulations continue to proliferate.

On a personal level, I have continued to be active in the applied areas, using personality tests to select staff for a range of employers. I have also been involved in the publication and development of personality tests, including the California Psychological Inventory (formerly, but not presently) and Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (ongoing).

The Statistics Boxes in the text explain various statistical terms and points. These are intended to explain to the reader what, e.g., variance is, and why it is important in personality. The boxes are not intended as formal definitions of statistical concepts. Nor do they give any information about numerical aspects, except in very general terms to enable the reader to see what is being done. Readers who are familiar with psychology's statistics will probably find they can ignore the boxes.

The Assessment Boxes in the text cover a mixture of basic technicalities, which again some readers will probably know already, and some more idiosyncratic or speculative thoughts.

The websites listed do not generally include test publishers, nor do they include any of the numerous test-your-own-personality sites, which are easy to find, but should be used with caution.

Preface to the third edition

I would like to thank Karen Howard for her help with the Figures, the Psychology Department for their support and help, the University Library and Inter Library Loans for their invaluable assistance, and Cambridge University Press for giving me the opportunity to write this third edition.

Preface to the second edition

The ten years since I started writing the first edition of this book have seen a great increase in interest in psychological testing in Britain. At the beginning of the 1980s only a few employers in Britain used personality tests: since then their use has spread from the private sector into the National Health Service and local government. Only the education sector still selects, or tries to select, its staff by inefficient, unscientific methods. Since 1987 I have been a Director of Oxford Psychologists Press Ltd, who distribute and publish tests of personality and intelligence, including the California Psychological Inventory, which readers will find mentioned in Chapters 2, 3, 10 and 11.

The second edition incorporates two new Chapters (Chapters 12 and 13), the first on alcoholism and the other on psychological resilience. All of the other chapters have been updated and rewritten. The amount of updating needed for each chapter gives an interesting commentary on developments in personality research since 1982. The chapter on psychoanalysis needed the least updating, because research on empirical verification of Freudian theories of personality has largely dried up. The chapter on learning-based approaches (Chapter 4) didn't need much change either. Chapter 5 on biological approaches, by contrast, needed quite a lot of revision. So did the chapters on aggression and sexual variation (Chapters 10 and 11); views on sexual variation have taken a sharply biological turn in the last ten years. The chapters on traits and factors (Chapters 2 and 3) have been extensively altered, partly because criticisms and reformulation of the trait approach continue to pour forth from personality theorists, partly because personnel psychologists have made some real advances. Research on numerous, very various approaches to the self (Chapter 7) has also proliferated. Personal construct theory, by contrast (Chapter 6), seems to be going out of fashion.

I'd like to thank Cassell for giving me the chance to publish a second edition of this book, and my wife, once more, for her patience while I have been occupied writing it.

Preface to the first edition

I have been intending to write this book for as long as I have been teaching Individual Psychology. I have never really been satisfied with any of the texts I have used, so the logical thing is to write my own. The sources of my dissatisfaction with the texts I have used are various, but the two main shortcomings are adherence to the ‘theory of the month’ approach, and being transatlantic. Some texts also tend to be rather low level and condescending to the reader.

The ‘theory of the month’ approach – or week if the lecturer likes to move fast – is probably inspired by Hall and Lindzey’s (1957) *Theories of Personality*. This is an excellent and useful work, but as a reference book, not a text. Too many subsequent textbooks have followed its format: a chapter on Freud, a chapter on Jung, a chapter on Sheldon, a chapter on Dollard and Miller, a chapter on Rogers, a chapter on Skinner (who may be an anti-personality theorist, but generates some superbly memorable jargon), a chapter on Allport, perhaps a chapter on Cattell, rarely or never a mention of Eysenck.

There are several problems with this approach. Some theories cover several aspects of personality: Allport discusses traits, habits, motives and the self, while Cattell’s account covers all these, and psychodynamics, biological aspects and factor analysis as well. A ‘mixed’ account is surely better discussed in sections – traits, motives, the self – rather than presented in a great wodge just because one person wrote it all. Some theories are obsolete, long abandoned as dead ends, such as Sheldon’s theory of physique and personality. Some theories included in many texts are not scientific theories at all; it is difficult enough extracting testable propositions from Freudian theory, but not worth even trying with some of his followers. But the major limitation of the ‘theory of the month’ approach is its failure to integrate, to say what type of account each theory is trying to give, and how it relates to the others. Chapter 1 tries to present a structure around which seven types of theory can be organised, and uses the

Preface to the first edition**xix**

analogy of three railway lines, running underground from the surface of behaviour to three termini.

Most personality texts come from across the Atlantic. There is of course nothing wrong with transatlantic origin per se: the vastly greater number of psychology students in North America means economies of scale, which means large, well-produced books at very reasonable prices. However North American authors often seem oblivious of non-American theorists and researchers. The most glaring example of this is Hans Eysenck, whose existence is entirely ignored in some texts, and whose contribution is not really done justice in others. I do not intend this as a flag waving 'buy British' book; I have mentioned British theory and research wherever it seems relevant, not for the sake of it. But in doing so, I seem to have mentioned it rather more than transatlantic texts usually do.

When I started writing this book, I was an 'academic' psychologist, engaged in research and teaching. Hence I was critical of most personality theory and research, for personality is one of the 'soft' areas of psychology. Since then I have become at least partly an applied psychologist, engaged in counselling, selection and assessment work, actually using the concepts and measures of personality that I'd previously only found fault with. Academic psychologists will probably think the effect is to have made me uncritical of woolly thinking and poor measures. It may have, but there is something to be said for having actually used some of the measures one writes about, in the real world.