

# Topic 1: Research and Theory

## Definition of Personality

- The psychological **structures** underlying **consistent** patterns in **thoughts, feelings** and **behaviours**.
- It is **consistent** over time
- People have **different personalities**: so it also defines differences in behaviour between people.

## Value of theory

- Theory is **understanding**, if you understand something, you have the power to **change** it
- If you understand some process or outcome, you have a greater ability to intervene and change that process or outcome
- **Personality**: if you have an expert understanding of **human behaviour**, you can help a person **change** in a way that it more effective than a non-expert

## The study of personality

### How personality is studied

- The answer is complex and people disagree
- **Scientific way**: using **systematic, objective** (free from bias) **observation** to **test** propositions derived from theory
  - When results support the propositions, we are more **confident** in the theory, when they don't we are less confident in the theory
  - Idea for a theory > proposition to explain/study the idea > evidence
  - Theories being tested
  - The idea needs to be a **theory**, and **understanding**. If it's just a proposition, the line of enquiry might be empirical in nature, but not really scientific as no generalised understanding is being developed.
- Psychology is **evidence based**
  - Behaviour change techniques should be **empirically validated**
  - E.g. a randomised control trial between treatment groups and a control group
  - E.g. cognitive behaviour therapy, interpersonal theory, acceptance and commitment therapy
- It can be difficult to measure psychological states

### Consistency in behaviour

- Personality is meant to be **stable** over time
- **Cross-situational consistency**:
  - When behaviour is consistent across **various situations**
  - E.g. A person may be grumpy or disagreeable across many situations
  - Explained by trait theories
- **Within-situation consistency**:
  - Behaviour is consistent **within a situation** but inconsistent across situations. It is situation specific
  - E.g. a person is fearful in relation to horror movies but otherwise not fearful
  - Explained by cognitive theories
- People usually display both

- **Longitudinal consistency**
  - Patterns of behaviour are stable over time (regardless of whether they are consistent across situations or just within situations)

### Theories of personality

- Some theories are more favoured than others
  - Theories might work well, but not in **all relevant contexts**. Some theories may work quite well (are supported by data) in some contexts but not so well in other contexts
  - Evidence can be **contradictory** or mixed

### Aims of personality theories

- To **explain consistent patterns** in thoughts, feelings and behaviours and **individual differences** in these patterns
- Personality theories address the following questions:
  - What are the **psychological structures** underlying consistent patterns in thoughts, feelings and behaviours
  - How do these psychological structures **interact** with each other and the **environment** to explain behaviour
  - How do these psychological structures **change** and develop over time

### Empirical evidence underlying theories

- **Case studies**
  - Involves **intensive study** of a single or small number of individuals
  - Gather **large** amounts of information
  - Hard to establish **causality**
  - **Generalisability**/ external validity is an issue
  - Potential for **bias**
  - Useful if you want to study brain functioning in a person with an acquired brain injury that is almost unique
- **Correlational designs**
  - Involves **measuring variables** of interest in a relatively **large sample**. Aim is to investigate **relationships** between variables (including mean differences)
  - Does not provide information on **causality**
  - Uses a representative sample of the population and is therefore more **generalizable**
- **Experimental studies**
  - **Manipulation** of variables: test for **causality**
  - Population > sample > drug group/ placebo group
  - **Control** of variables
  - Can be impractical and not replicate real life situations (**artificial**)
  - Sample size must be **large** enough and **representative** enough to **generalise** to the population