

Individual Differences: Introduction

The endeavour to research '**normality**' has led some to criticise individual difference researchers (Szasz). But these are just generalisations, analogous to a medical doctor judging whether the malfunctioning of a person's liver is causing harm or not. If the liver is abnormal but doesn't cause the person harm, then there is no need for surgery. Indeed, it can be of great advantage to be **abnormal**. Consider outliers in intelligence tests.

Of course, it is likely that researchers will find differences that will suit stereotypes. However, judging people according to how they perform is a **moral judgment** and is not scientific.

"It is a mistake to judge the use of something by the consequences of its misuse" (Chamorro-Premuzic)

Intelligence is a **theoretical construct** that is indicated by intelligent acts. One single indicator of this construct is IQ tests. We know that those good at one complicated task tend to be good at others, which is the basis of intelligence research. IQ tests appear to be one of the most reliable measures of 'intelligence' and they can be administered easily, which is why we use them and tend not to use – for example – index finger size.

In applied settings, these can be used to help 'normal' people improve in everyday settings (e.g. work) and to treat abnormal patients (**psychopathology**) in an attempt to either become 'normal' or to cope better.

This classification is descriptive and based on scientific observation and self-report measures.

Classification

Like doctors attempt to classify weights, psychologists attempt to classify personalities and intelligences.

Individual Differences

Explaining **how** and **why** people differ. Explaining variation in people's behaviour through various "**latent**" **constructs** (unobservable traits) such as personality and intelligence. What makes some people do things differently to others?

A.K.A Differential Psychology

The motivation – as always – is to **describe, explain and predict behaviour.**

Factors Influencing Individual Differences

Biological Factors: sex, handedness (McManus). We resemble our parents more than others and so we assume that like physical characteristics, some of our psychological characteristics (often our propensities) are inherited.

Environmental Factors: parental environment, school, religion. Understanding biological influence helps us to understand the influence of the environment.

Personality: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism. (Costa & McCrae)

Mood & Motivation: Ambition, Desire for status, Self-efficacy (Bandura)

Intelligence: Spatial reasoning, Emotional Intelligence, Creativity, Numerical reasoning.

Age

Assumptions of Individual Difference

People have different **interests, values and preferences**

These different interests, values and preferences are reflected in people's behaviour.

People tend to act relatively consistently over space and time.

We can reliably perceive our own **and others** interests, values and preferences (key to psychological and scientific observers)

Human behaviour is relatively **predictable** and so findings can be practiced effectively in formal settings (Clinical, Educational (learning styles), Occupational). This is different from saying behaviour is stable however, as we know that it is not. There are many situational factors that affect behaviour. The aim here is to measure **typicalities.**