

# Sports psychology

## CHAPTER 8:

# Individual aspects of performance that influence young people's participation and aspirations

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter you should have knowledge and understanding of:

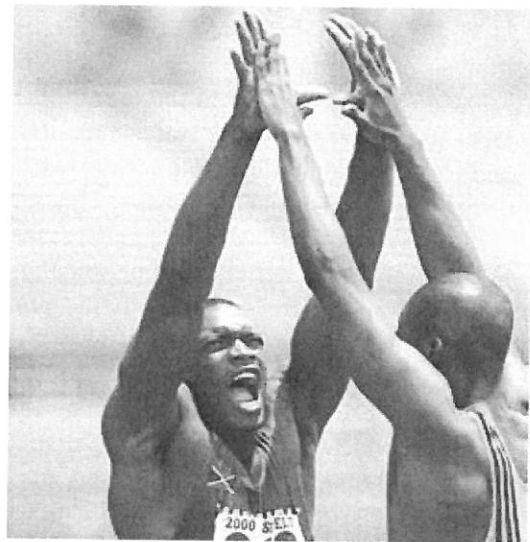
- personality and its importance in producing effective performance and in following a balanced, active and healthy lifestyle
- attitudes and their influence on performance and lifestyle
- achievement motivation and its effect on performance and on following an active and healthy lifestyle
- attribution theory and the impact of attribution on performance and sustaining a balanced, active and healthy lifestyle
- aggression and its impact upon performance and behaviour.

## INTRODUCTION

The 'Sports psychology' section is a continuation of the AS section 'Acquiring movement skills'. The focus at AS was upon how skills are learned and controlled. By way of extension, 'Sports psychology' addresses the important mental processes that work together to facilitate effective performance in sport.

In their separate ways, both 'Acquiring movement skills' and 'Sports psychology' demonstrate how sporting competence and participation can be increased. Through this, a common theme emerges, as both areas set out to encourage and sustain a balanced, active and healthy lifestyle.

In this chapter you will be focusing on personality and its influence on a healthy, balanced lifestyle.



*Fig 8.1 All areas of the sport psychology syllabus combine to facilitate effective performance while encouraging the pursuit of a balanced, active and healthy lifestyle*

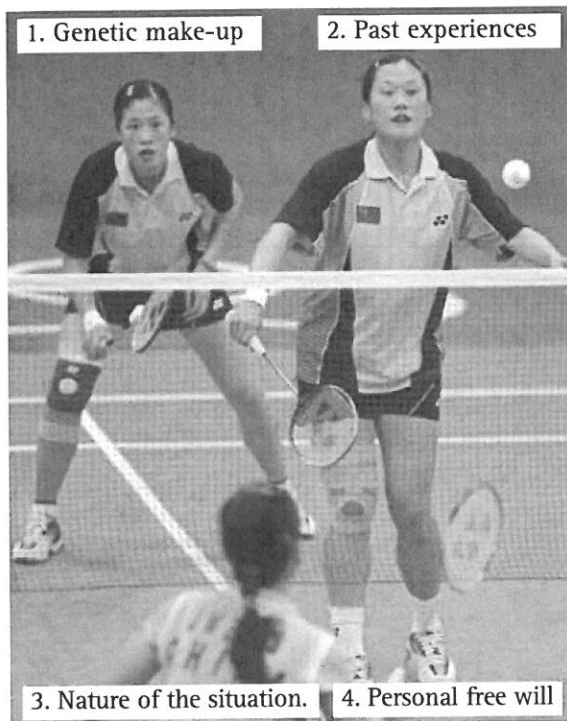


Fig 8.2 Four factors influence how we respond in any given situation (Jarvis, 2006). These factors appear in various combinations in most personality theories

## Personality

Athletes display their own unique patterns of behaviour whilst engaged in sports performance. Some psychologists believe that quality of performance and participation in sport are determined by personality.

It is unlikely that a definition of personality will be examined directly. To clarify the term is, however, important.

The term personality is derived from the word 'persona', which was a mask in Greek drama. This implies that a person may give the appearance of being unlike their true self, which makes the assessment of personality difficult. A psychologist named Allport defined personality simply as, 'What a man really is!'; to which Whiting later added, 'Not what he appears to be.'

Among the more recent definitions, two are important to us:

*'Personality is the sum total of an individual's characteristics which make a human unique.'*  
(Hollander)

*'Personality represents those characteristics of the person that account for consistent patterns of behaviour.'*  
(Pervin, 1993)

In your exam, you will need to demonstrate knowledge of personality theories. These theories are based on three very different views or perspectives. Each perspective must be clearly understood.

The three views on personality development are known as:

- 1 trait perspective
- 2 social learning perspective
- 3 interactionist approach.

### EXAM TIP

Exam questions often ask for explanations of the three personality perspectives. You need to be aware of the drawbacks found in trait and social learning perspectives and the advantages of the interactionist approach.

## Trait perspective

The trait theory of personality formation suggests that personality is made up of a range of different secondary traits inherited from parental genes. The trait view, therefore, maintains that all behaviour is innate and genetically programmed. For example, a person may have a natural inclination towards ambition, competition or aggression. Traits are thought to be stable, enduring and consistent in all situations.

Trait theory is depicted as:

Behaviour = Function of Personality (B = F(P)).

### KEY TERMS

#### Trait theory

People are born with established personality characteristics.

#### Trait

A single characteristic of personality that is believed to be a natural force or instinct causing an individual to behave in a predicted way.

#### Genes

Biological units of inheritance found in each individual cell in the body. A person's genes determine their physical and psychological characteristics.

#### Aggression

An action intended to bring about harm or injury. Aggressive behaviour is undesirable and dysfunctional in the context of sport.



### PERSONALITY TYPES

Eysenck identified four primary personality traits or types. These personality types are arranged in Fig 8.3 on a two-dimensional model.

### EXAM TIP

The relationship between personality and arousal often features in questions on social facilitation and inhibition.

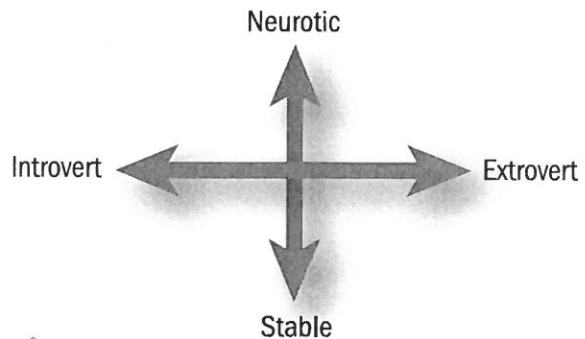


Fig 8.3 Personality traits of introvert/extrovert and neurotic/stable

The drawback with the trait approach is that, in reality, behaviour is not always predictable. It does not account for the fact that people adapt their behaviour in response to a particular environmental situation. Similarly, the influence that the environment and other people have on the shaping of personality is not considered.

There are two specific theories that belong to the trait perspective of personality that you need to understand. They are:

- personality types (Eysenck and Cattell)
- Narrow Band Theory Type A and Type B (Girdano).

### KEY TERMS

#### Reticular activating system (RAS)

Introverts are more easily aroused than extroverts because of the sensitivity of an area of the brain called the reticular activating system. There is a greater likelihood that with increased stimulation the introvert will become over-aroused.

#### Arousal

A physical and mental state of preparedness.



Personality type or primary trait	Description of personality type
Extrovert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affiliate well to other people</li> <li>• Outgoing, gregarious and sociable</li> <li>• Become aroused more slowly than introverts</li> <li>• There is low sensitivity of the reticular activating system (RAS)</li> </ul>
Introvert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tend to be shy and reserved</li> <li>• Prefer isolation from others</li> <li>• Become aroused more quickly than extroverts</li> <li>• There is high sensitivity of the reticular activating system (RAS)</li> </ul>
Neurotic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display extreme and unpredictable emotions in the form of mood swings</li> <li>• Their moods are unreliable</li> <li>• They experience high degrees of stress</li> <li>• Their recovery from stress is slow</li> </ul>
Stable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display predictable emotions in appropriate situations</li> <li>• Their moods are predictable</li> <li>• They tend not to experience intense stress</li> <li>• Their recovery from stress is rapid</li> </ul>

Table 1 Eysenck's four primary personality types



Fig 8.4 Extroverted people perform best in conditions that stimulate high arousal. Introverts tend to be more aroused by events than do extroverts. This is due to differences in the individual's reticular activation system (RAS)

Eysenck proposed the existence of four personality types and that one type belonged in each quadrant.

- 1 Extrovert and Stable
- 2 Extrovert and Neurotic
- 3 Introvert and Stable
- 4 Introvert and Neurotic.

Later, Eysenck (1975) added a third scale to his personality model which he termed psychoticism. Psychoticism is a measure of how tender or tough-minded people are. Eysenck used this third scale in a test to determine an individual's personality profile. The test was called Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire (EPQ).

## KEY TERMS

### Tough-minded

The term 'mental toughness' has been used only recently by psychologists. It describes qualities such as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and readiness to return to competition after failure (Middleton, 2004).

### Personality profile

An overall assessment of an individual's personality.





Cattell was also a believer in trait theory. Cattell, however, questioned whether personality could be understood by examining just three dimensions. Instead, he proposed that it was necessary to consider a much larger number of traits before a complete picture of personality could be revealed. Cattell examined 16 personality factors in a questionnaire called Cattell's 16PF test.

### TASK 1

- 1 To carry out a Cattell 16 PF test, go to [www.heinemann.co.uk/hotlinks](http://www.heinemann.co.uk/hotlinks), enter the express code 6855P and click on the relevant link.  
Consider whether there are links between the sport that you most enjoy and your personality profile.
- 2 Discuss the value of personality profiling as a way of selecting a team or when advising a person as to which sport to take up.

### NARROW BAND THEORY

Girdano was another trait theorist. He proposed that there are two distinct personality types – Type A and Type B.

Type A characteristics	Type B characteristics
Highly competitive	Non-competitive
Works fast	Works more slowly
Strong desire to succeed	Lacking in desire to succeed
Likes control	Does not enjoy control
Prone to suffer stress	Less prone to stress

Table 2 Girdano's Type A and Type B characteristics

You will see links between the trait approach (including Narrow Band Theory) and the adoption of a balanced, active and healthy lifestyle when personality profiling is explained later in the section (see page 202–203).

## Social learning perspective

Social learning theory, in direct contrast to trait theory, proposes that all behaviour is learned. Learning occurs by way of environmental experiences and through the influence of other people. Personality is, therefore, not genetically programmed.

Social learning theory is depicted as:

Behaviour = Function of Environment (B = F(E))

### KEY TERM

#### Social learning theory

All behaviour is learned from environmental experience.

#### Vicarious

Learning by watching the performance of another person.



The social learning approach was presented by the psychologist Bandura. He believed learning was stimulated by environmental experiences. Two processes are involved in social learning:

- the behaviour of others being imitated through observation
- new behaviour being acquired after observation, but only when it is endorsed through social reinforcement.

For example, a sports performer who is inexperienced may be inspired by the positive attitude and commitment displayed in training by an experienced player. The novice elects to copy the desirable approach of the role model and receives positive reinforcement from both coach and peers. The process of reinforcement has facilitated learning.

Social learning is often termed vicarious learning and is most likely to take place in the following conditions shown in Fig 8.5.

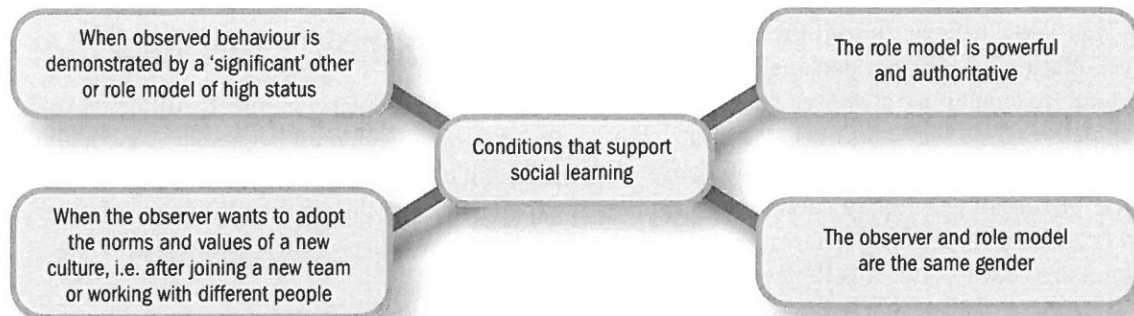


Fig 8.5 Conditions that support social learning

## REMEMBER

Bandura's model of observational learning was covered in *OCR AS PE SB*, Chapter 8.2, pages 197–8.

A drawback with the social learning perspective is that it does not take into account genetically-inherited factors.

Social learning theory provides one explanation as to why there are individual differences in the attitude, aggression and motivation of sports performers, and you will be looking at this area later in the chapter (page 204). Social learning theory may also offer insight into why young people develop an interest in sport and as a consequence elect to follow a lifestyle which is healthy, active and balanced.

## Interactionist approach

Modern thinking on personality has moved away from the more extreme trait theories and toward social learning theories. According to Gill (2000), however, most personality psychologists prefer the interactionist theory as an explanation of behaviour.

The interactionist approach is based on the work of Hollander (1967). Hollander proposed that personality has three levels that interact to form personality.

### KEY TERMS

#### Interactionist theory

Behaviour occurs from the influence of inherited traits and learned experiences.



### 1 Psychological core

This is the most internal of the personality levels and is thought to be the true self. Inaccessibility makes it the most difficult level to research but it is known to be stable and remains relatively constant over time.

### 2 Typical responses

Typical responses are changeable and are learned behaviours. They become modified as the person responds to environmental situations. They often reflect the makeup of the personality core.

### 3 Role-related behaviour

This is the most external of the personality levels. It is therefore the level that is dynamic and changeable. An individual may have to adjust in order to fulfil many different roles in one day, for example the role of student, coach or friend. Role-related behaviour is a direct consequence of the immediate environment.

While the core of personality, according to Hollander, provides the structure of true self, the changing and dynamic levels of personality allow learning to take place.

Interactionist theory is depicted as:

$$\text{Behaviour} = \text{Function of Personality} \times \text{Environment} \quad (B = F(P \times E))$$

The interactionist view combines the trait and social learning perspectives. It proposes that personality is modified and behaviour is formed when genetically-inherited traits are triggered by an environmental circumstance.

The interactionist view supports the claim that typical responses emerge in accordance with changing environmental situations. Behaviour is therefore unpredictable. This approach offers an explanation why the personalities of sports performers can change in different situations.

### EXAM TIP

Although Hollander is not included on the specification, you should be aware of Hollander's contribution to the interactionist approach to personality.

The interactionist approach is not simple. Any behaviour or response in sport can be the outcome of unlimited combinations of personality and environmental factors. For example, a player may respond positively to the autocratic leadership of a captain for most of the time, but this leadership style may trigger an aggressive response on one occasion. This unpredictable response from the team player may have been the result of frustration, a build-up of anxiety or even a lack of sleep prior to the game.

Despite these complexities, Bowers (1977) stated that the interactionist view alone explains twice as much as trait and social learning perspectives.

### STRETCH AND CHALLENGE

Discuss the implications of Hollander's interactionist approach for the physical educator who wishes to improve the performance of an established athlete or as a base from which an individual may be encouraged to pursue a balanced, active and healthy lifestyle.

To get the most out of 'Stretch and Challenge' questions you must read ahead and look at other recommended texts. While you must address the question directly, it will become apparent that many other topics will relate and link to the task that has been set. If you are able to make and understand these connections, a deep and versatile understanding of A-level Sport Psychology will develop.

## The effects of personality profiling on the adoption of a balanced, active and healthy lifestyle

A large volume of research has been undertaken into the relationship between personality and sporting behaviour. Differences between the personalities of athletes and non-athletes have been explored together with comparisons between successful and less successful performers. Of most interest to you is the research into whether personality factors are associated with:

- participation in general
- the choice of sport and physical exercise.

While social learning theory provides a strong explanation as to why vicarious processes draw young people to games and athletic activities, Eysenck *et al.* (1982), using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, proposed that people who were attracted to sport scored highly on the scales of extroversion and psychoticism.

Schurr (1977), using Cattell's 16PF test, found athletes to be more independent and less anxious than non-athletes, but differences between the two groups were not significant. Using the same test, Francis *et al.* (1998) agreed with Eysenck in that he found hockey players to be higher in extroversion and psychoticism than non-hockey players.

In contrast, McKelvie (2003) found no differences in extroversion between athletes and non-athletes. In this study, however, athletes emerged as being more stable. Furthermore, performers in high-risk sports like surfing and mountaineering scored highly in extroversion while being low on the scale of neuroticism (Diehm and Armatas, 2004).

Research in this area is detailed but confusingly inconclusive. By way of a definitive statement on the subject, Weinberg and Gould (2007) propose:

*'No specific personality profile has been found that consistently distinguishes athletes from non-athletes.'*

(Weinberg and Gould, 2007)

Personality profiling may not be helpful as a predictor of those who are likely to participate or excel in sport or physical activity.

While the inclination to participate in sport cannot be predicted by personality profiling, it may be that the identification of traits can be used by a psychologist to recommend participation in sport. Through this intervention, personality profiling may therefore help a person and lead them toward an active, healthy and balanced lifestyle.

Two examples are given below.

- 1 The competitive nature of Type A behaviour (see page 200) has been linked to anger and increased incidence of cardiovascular disease. Blumenthal (1988) proposed that aerobic exercise significantly reduced unhealthy cardiovascular reactions to mental stress. Thus Type A patterns of behaviour can be altered through exercise.
- 2 Exercise and increased levels of fitness appear to increase the self-esteem of those individuals who register initially as having low self-esteem (Biddle *et al.*, 1995).

Although personality profiling may help a coach to get to know people and provide the motivation for the individual to change behaviour and lifestyle, it must be understood that sport and exercise can not fundamentally change overall personality (Gill, 2000).

### EXAM TIP

You need to know that personality profiling helps when observing and questioning an individual. Getting to know the individual may help to formulate intervention strategies. Personality profiling has, however, only limited value.

### EVALUATE CRITICALLY PERSONALITY PROFILING IN SPORT

Whether it is through displays of dysfunctional aggression, variations in cognitive processes or debilitating levels of stress and anxiety, all individuals differ in their response to sporting

situations. These differences have preoccupied psychologists to the extent that countless studies have been undertaken to find a definitive link between personality and sport. Despite this, there remain serious limitations to personality profiling in sport. These limitations are listed below.

Key word to identify limitation	Explanation of limitation
Proof	A link between personality types and sport performance cannot be proved. A psychologist named Martens believes that the relationship between sport participation and personality are doubtful.
Evidence	There is no evidence that an ideal sports personality exist, e.g. the most stable and extroverted squad member may not be the best player in the team, or the most appropriate to create team cohesion.
Subjectivity	Profiling results are often subjective. This means that conclusions may be influenced by personal opinions and are not totally supported by scientific evidence.
Invalidity	Profiling results are often inaccurate and invalid. Invalid means that tests do not measure that which they intend to measure.
Modification	The performer may unconsciously modify their behaviour to match up to the profile ascribed to them.
Reliability	Many profiles are calculated by using self-report questionnaire studies. The results of these studies are not always reliable as performers may not answer all questions accurately.
Stereotyping	There is a danger that profiling will stereotype a person.

Table 3 Limits of personality profiling

### KEY TERM

#### Team cohesion

This term describes team work. It will be covered in Chapter 9 on page 230.

