

## Individual Differences Area

The individual differences approach believes that everyone is different and unique and that it is these differences that explain our behaviour. This includes looking at differences such as culture, biology and cognitions. As a result of this, the individual differences area spends a lot of time looking at differences between people and their resulting behaviour. A great deal of psychological research takes what is called a nomothetic approach; it tries to find things that are similar got all people so that we can find laws of behaviour that can be generalised to everyone.

### 1. Principles and Concepts:

1. Everyone is different and unique and our differences explain our behaviour
2. Looks at differences between us rather than taking a nomothetic approach
3. Not everyone is the 'average person'
4. Believes a person's behaviours are unique to them due to a combination of biological and experiential factors,  
such as DNA, cognitions and development

### 2. Research to Illustrate the Area:

Freud (Little Hans) - Shows that children can differ and are unique as some have phobias whereas other children may not. Freud looked Hans' dreams, fantasies and phobias and explains how these cause change in his behaviour, but also sees how external factors have an influence.

Baron Cohen (Autism in adults) - Focuses on how people differ because of their DNA but also shows how this may not change them and how biological factors can cause change. Looked at each group of the sample as unique but wanted to see how unique.

Gould (a nation of morons) - Looks at an attempt to develop a test to measure a way in which people differ, but outlines the problems with cultural bias. Evaluation shows how everyone is unique, as proven with the intelligence tests, as well as how it can be down to external factors as well as their biology.

Hancock (language in psychopaths) - Focuses on trying to measure differences in people when you are aware of the differences, and seeing how this will change their language and behaviour. Looks at how different murders can affect behaviour and language.

### 3. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Area:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Enables comparisons</li><li>- Usefulness</li><li>- High ecological validity</li><li>- Practical applications</li><li>- Nature and nurture</li><li>- Takes in consideration external factors</li><li>- Collects both qualitative and quantitative data</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ethical issues</li><li>- Subjective</li><li>- Individual explanations only</li><li>- Unrepresentative samples</li><li>- Considering too many factors</li><li>- Bias</li><li>- Hard to verify scientifically</li></ul>

One strength of the individual differences area is that it accepts both sides of the nature/nurture debate. Freud's study on Little Hans' dreams and phobias demonstrated that his behaviour was being caused by both external influences around him, such as his family and friends, but also, he displayed the classic behaviours for a child experiencing the Oedipus Complex. This is a strength because Freud has shown both acceptance and understanding of results that

support both the nature and nurture side of the debate, meaning that he is considering all factors surrounding Little Hans and what could have caused his changes in behaviour.

Another strength of the individual differences area is that the theme 'measuring differences' has high ecological validity. Hancock's study into the language of psychopaths took place in a Canadian correctional facility, which was the prisoners' natural environment. This means that they were in their natural environment so they weren't affected by confounding variables, caused by the settings of the lab. This is a strength because it means that because it has this high validity as it took place in their natural environment so this means the results are generalizable to the target population which means that the results are more representative.

One weakness of the individual differences area is that the data collected is subjective. Objective is when data has an unbiased view which will be interpreted the same by everyone, so subjective is the opposite of this. Gould's study was analysing the results that Yerkes collected from the US Army. This is subjective because his analysis of the results was his opinion which could have been biased as could have been analysed differently by another psychologist. This is a weakness because this means that all Gould's analysis could be bias and completely his view, portraying something that isn't there, whereas it is better to be objective.

Another weakness of the individual differences area is that it considers too many factors that cause changes in behaviour. The individual differences area looks at biological, cognitive and external influences on behaviour which means it covers all causes of the debate. Freud studies little Hans and predicted from his results that it was down to his biology, normal childhood development and his surroundings that caused changes in his behaviour, which means it doesn't give one clear fault. This is a weakness because it means that the data is not very clear as could believe that every behaviour is caused by everything, so that there wouldn't be one explanation for causes of behaviour.

#### 4. Applications of the Area

Personality

Intelligence

Psychopathy

Abnormality

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### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

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| (a)  | Explain <b>two</b> defining principles or concepts of the individual differences area.   | [4]  |
| (b)  | Outline what is meant by the concept of holism <b>and</b> how this relates to the individual differences area.   | [4]  |
| (c)  | Describe <b>one</b> application <b>and</b> explain how it is linked to the individual differences area.  | [4]  |
| (d)  | Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the individual differences area.   | [8]  |
| (e)* | Discuss ethical considerations in psychological research.<br>Support your answer using core studies from both the individual differences area <b>and one</b> other area. | [15] |

