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Book Review

Introduction to personality and intelligence.

by Haslam, N. (2007)

Sage Publications:London (\$46.95)

Reviewed by
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Haslam's introduction to personality provides a refreshing approach to the study of the psychology of personality. It opens with a poem from the Nobel Prize winning Polish poet, Wislawa Szymborska. I saw no need for Haslam to provide the justification for the poem's appearance, as I applaud the inclusion of any reference that demonstrates the intricate connections between literature and psychology. The poem indeed reflects the author's approach to his treatise on personality. He is logical yet sceptical; humane yet objective and poignant yet practical. Indeed, another quote of Szymborska's

*For poetry that with ironic precision allows the historical and biological context
to come to light in fragments of reality*

could equally apply to how Haslam has approached his presentation of a subject, which would have appeared to have been exhausted in the introductory text genre.

The book is presented in four parts, which include: a description of Personality that focuses on its definitions; theoretical accounts of personality that cover classic and contemporary approaches; applications of personality to other contexts including the very important mental health context.; and finally a section on intelligence. The inclusion of intelligence for me seemed at odds with the rest of the book, despite Haslam's justification that its association to cognitive differences necessitates its inclusion. The section itself was well done and covered relevant, useful and challenging material but to my view didn't relate particularly well to the previous sections. Nevertheless the preceding sections provide a compact presentation of a diverse range of ideas. Haslam presents his ideas in a somewhat conversational, intimate manner. However he covers a lot of research (much of it contemporary) but is not embroiled by the academic acknowledgement of his resources. The illustrative studies were extremely well selected and provided tantalising research related to the topic of each chapter which should ensure that Haslam's aim to elevate his novice readers' curiosity should easily be achieved.

The section on psychoanalysis was particularly well done, and provided more information than is usually presented in introductory texts. Psychology's indebtedness to Sigmund Freud is too often minimised and it is to Haslam's credit that he is emphatic about Freud's contemporary relevance and contests the criticisms that have been levelled at Freud. I particularly enjoyed seeing "Freud. S. Just about anything" listed as further reading and a note to reinforce Freud's literary brilliance. Similarly the explanation as to the inclusion of

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Weston's reference should reinvigorate interest in psychoanalysis and psychodynamics in the social psychology and personality context.

In addition the coverage of the mental disorders and their etiological relationship to personality should also stimulate the interest of the novice reader. Haslam does not restrict his coverage to the Personality Disorders, which is often the case. His focus and use of the term "vulnerability" encourages an empathic view of the mental disorders and the suggestions for further reading are recent and highly relevant for *any* student of psychology.

The inclusion of the chapter of *psychobiography and life narratives* is also an innovative inclusion, as this chapter encourages readers to integrate all the previous material into their analysis of famous people, a technique that will without a doubt have students captivated. It provides a creative avenue for the application of theories.

In conclusion, this book is an excellent introductory text on personality for students interested in, or studying psychology. It is not so densely written as to deter readers, but is replete with current and classic research tenets. Furthermore, the structure of the book epitomises the way psychology is studied in general, The theories are presented to provide diverse explanations of human behaviour, and yet these very ideas are consistently challenged on the basis of various omissions such as cultural and family influences. Ultimately, however, the predictive power of the construct reinforces its validity.

This book is a stimulating read and will be enjoyed by students. It is currently available in all academic bookshops.