Individual Differences – Type A and Type B Personalities and Evaluation

**Explanation**
Some psychologists believe that people can be classified as different personality types. Friedman and Rosenman suggested **two main types**:
- **Type A** – Competitive, ambitious, impatient, restless, impatient, hostile
- **Type B** – More relaxed, easy-going, tolerant, less competitive, hostile

**Type A Personality and Stress-Related Symptoms**
Friedman and Rosenman (1959) suggest that Type A’s are **more likely to be stressed** than Type B’s. Therefore, are **more likely to suffer from coronary heart disease** (the heart might be affected by SAM).

**Research Support:**
The Western Collaborative Group (WCG) study aimed to investigate links between the Type A and Type B behaviour pattern and CHD.

**Procedure:**
- Used **structured interviews** (social desirability bias)
- 3154 Californian **men** aged between 39 and 59 (androcentric)
- Were categorised into Type A and Type B personality types
- A large sample was followed for 8 ½ years to assess lifestyle and health outcomes

**Findings:**
- By the end, **257 men** had developed CHD of which **70%** were Type A
- **Twice** the rate found in Type B
- The difference in the incidence of CHD was due **independent** of lifestyle factors, such as smoking and obesity that are known to increase the chances of heart disease

Therefore, personality types do effect stress causing heart disease, but lifestyle factors also play a role (as shown above).

Findings have been supported by Eysenck (1988). He proposed two types of personality one was **type vulnerable to CHD** (similar to Type A).

More recently, a meta-analysis of 35 studies (Myrtek, 2001) found a significant association between Type A personality and heart disease.

**Evaluation**

**Research Support**
There is support for variation in the physiological response to stress between Type A and Type B individuals.
- Friedman (1975) asked participants to complete an unsolvable puzzle in a noisy environment – offering a reward on completion Type A appears more stressed and annoyed by the task compared with Type B’s
- Showed higher levels of adrenaline during the competition, despite showing no difference when resting under normal conditions
- This provides support for the physiological response to the stress of Type A individuals will make them more prone to the long-term problems (i.e. CHD)

**Conflicting Evidence**
David and Richard (1988 b) followed up 357 of the original cohort for the WCG after 22 years to look at longer-term effects.
- They found although behaviours such as smoking and cholesterol levels were an important prediction of CHD mortality
- Type A behaviour did not show significant correlation with it
- Although Type A was more likely to suffer from heart disease, there were more likely to survive coronary events
- However, there is a possibility of a confounding variable introduced by the publication of the initial results which led to; Type A individuals adjusting their “stressed-out” behaviours (reducing negative responses)

**Gender and Culture Bias**
- WCG study was carried out on men (androcentric)
- Type A personality traits (i.e. masculinity and competitiveness) could be considered to be male-centred
- It may be that women do not show the same characteristics in a relationship with stress
- Linda Baker (1984) found women did not show similar levels of Type A personality traits and that they also show greater autonomic arousal to stressors
- Suggesting that they would experience the same negative effects on their health