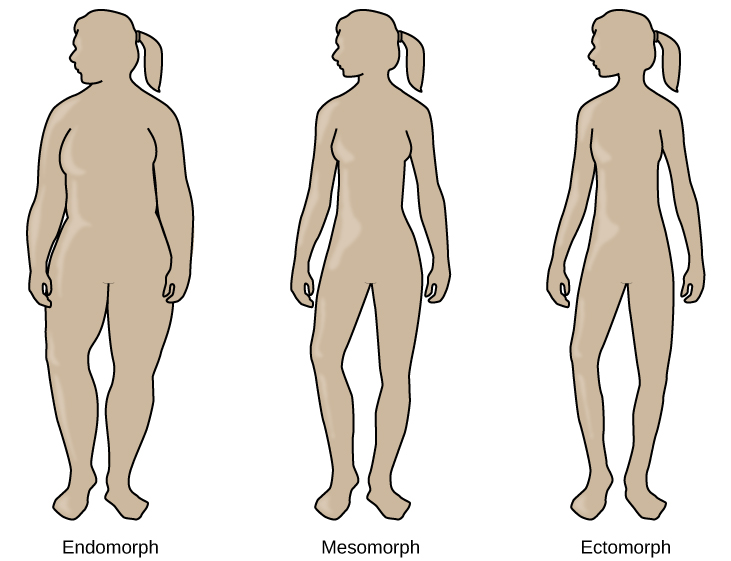
**Body Type and Temperament**

Is there an association between your body type and your temperament? The constitutional perspective, which examines the relationship between the structure of the human body and behavior, seeks to answer this question (Genovese, 2008). The first comprehensive system of constitutional psychology was proposed by American psychologist William H. Sheldon (1940, 1942). He believed that your body type can be linked to your personality. Sheldon’s life’s work was spent observing human bodies and temperaments. Based on his observations and interviews of hundreds of people, he proposed three body/personality types, which he called somatotypes.

The three somatotypes are ectomorphs, endomorphs, and mesomorphs ([Figure 11.12](https://openstax.org/books/psychology/pages/11-6-biological-approaches#Figure_11_06_Somatotype)). Ectomorphs are thin with a small bone structure and very little fat on their bodies. According to Sheldon, the ectomorph personality is anxious, self-conscious, artistic, thoughtful, quiet, and private. They enjoy intellectual stimulation and feel uncomfortable in social situations. Actors Adrien Brody and Nicole Kidman would be characterized as ectomorphs. Endomorphs are the opposite of ectomorphs. Endomorphs have narrow shoulders and wide hips, and carry extra fat on their round bodies. Sheldon described endomorphs as being relaxed, comfortable, good-humored, even-tempered, sociable, and tolerant. Endomorphs enjoy affection and detest disapproval. Queen Latifah and Jack Black would be considered endomorphs. The third somatotype is the mesomorph. This body type falls between the ectomorph and the endomorph. Mesomorphs have large bone structure, well-defined muscles, broad shoulders, narrow waists, and attractive, strong bodies. According to Sheldon, mesomorphs are adventurous, assertive, competitive, and fearless. They are curious and enjoy trying new things, but can also be obnoxious and aggressive. Channing Tatum and Scarlett Johannson would likely be mesomorphs.



**Figure 11.12** Sheldon proposed three somatotypes: endomorphs, mesomorphs, and ectomorphs. Do you think Sheldon’s ideas about somatotypes are generally accurate about most people?

Sheldon (1949) also conducted further research into somatotypes and criminality. He measured the physical proportions of hundreds of juvenile delinquent boys in comparison to male college students, and found that problem youth were primarily mesomorphs. Why might this be? Perhaps it’s because they are quick to anger and don’t have the restraint demonstrated by ectomorphs. Maybe it’s because a person with a mesomorphic body type reflects high levels of testosterone, which may lead to more aggressive behavior. Can you think of other explanations for Sheldon’s findings?

Sheldon’s method of somatotyping is not without criticism, as it has been considered largely subjective (Carter & Heath, 1990; Cortés & Gatti, 1972; Parnell, 1958). More systematic and controlled research methods did not support his findings (Eysenck, 1970). Consequently, it’s not uncommon to see his theory labeled as pseudoscience, much like Gall’s theory of phrenology (Rafter, 2007; Rosenbaum, 1995). However, studies involving correlations between somatotype, temperament, and children’s school performance (Sanford et al., 1943; Parnell); somatotype and performance of pilots during wartime (Damon, 1955); and somatotype and temperament (Peterson, Liivamagi, & Koskel, 2006) did support his theory.