

A PEARSON AUSTRALIA CUSTOM BOOK

PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

Sample pages

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Topic 1 | What is Personality? 1 <i>Compiled by Dr Sharon Horwood</i> |
| Topic 2 | Dominant Theories: Trait and Biological 29 <i>Compiled by Dr Sharon Horwood</i> |
| Topic 3 | Dominant Theories: Social Learning and Self-Concept 57 <i>Compiled by Dr Anna Klas</i> |
| Topic 4 | Dominant Theories: Psychodynamic and Motivation 99 <i>Compiled by Dr Sharon Horwood</i> |
| Topic 5 | Testing and Measurement 133 <i>Compiled by Dr Sharon Horwood</i> |
| Topic 6 | Personality Across the Lifespan 177 <i>Compiled by Dr Merrilyn Hooley</i> |
| Topic 7 | Personality and Wellbeing, Health and Illness 203 <i>Compiled by Dr Sharon Horwood</i> |
| Topic 8 | Personality Disorders and Therapeutic Approaches 229 <i>Compiled by Dr Richard Moulding</i> |
| Topic 9 | Personality and Cognition 247 <i>Compiled by Dr Sharon Horwood</i> |
| Topic 10 | Personality in the Workplace 277 <i>Compiled by Dr Jeromy Anglim</i> |
| Topic 11 | Personality and Culture 297 <i>Compiled by Dr Lata Satyen</i> |
| Index..... | 327 |

Topic 1

What is Personality?

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Learning Objectives

- LO 1.1** Define personality
- LO 1.2** Summarise the main perspectives of personality
- LO 1.3** Describe the scientific basis of personality psychology
- LO 1.4** What makes a good theory of personality?
- LO 1.5** Outline the basic issues in personality psychology

What Is Personality?

LO 1.1 Define personality

Personality shapes our lives in many ways: It determines whether you think skydiving or reading a book is more fun and predicts whether you usually arrive 5 minutes early or 15 minutes late. Personality can forecast who—at least on average—lives a long life and who doesn't, who is successful at work and who isn't, and who has a happy marriage and who doesn't (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Roberts et al., 2007). It can suggest that certain careers might be a good fit or that certain romantic partners might not be.

personality

someone's usual pattern of behavior, feelings, and thoughts

So what exactly is personality—that elusive and ineffable entity that is nevertheless so important? **Personality** describes someone's usual pattern of behavior, feelings, and thoughts. By *usual*, we mean how someone acts across time or across situations. For example, how would you react to skydiving? Most people will have some fear of jumping out of an airplane, but some people are exhilarated by the jump while others are terrified. The same situation elicits different reactions in different people because people have different personalities. To be indicative of personality, this reaction should be fairly consistent: Someone who is terrified of skydiving on Tuesday should also be terrified on Friday. If they're not, their reaction might be due not to their personality but to a difference in the situation (maybe the plane on Tuesday was in great condition and flown by an experienced pilot, but the plane on Friday was a rusty claptrap flown by a high school student who just got his pilot's license).

If risk taking is part of your personality, this tendency should also be similar across different situations. If you are inclined to jump out of airplanes, you also are probably more willing to go cage diving with great white sharks or drive a race car than your more cautious friends.

Personality includes human tendencies we all share but also considers how we differ from each other. Everyone takes some risks, but some take more and some take less. In other words, understanding your own comfort with risk taking will also help you understand other people.

Some individual differences in personality are relatively easy to quantify. For example, we can describe someone as "neurotic" (someone who worries about flying in a plane, much less skydiving) or "calm" (someone who doesn't worry much about anything). Using a personality questionnaire, for example, we can determine how neurotic or calm someone is compared to others. But how many personality characteristics should we consider? As you will learn, personality psychologists have identified five personality factors that explain much of the individual variation in personality. Although this "Big Five" system is incredibly useful, it can't possibly include every personality trait. There are other ways of identifying personality, from unconscious defense mechanisms to views of the self to motivations.



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Felix Mizionnikov/Shutterstock



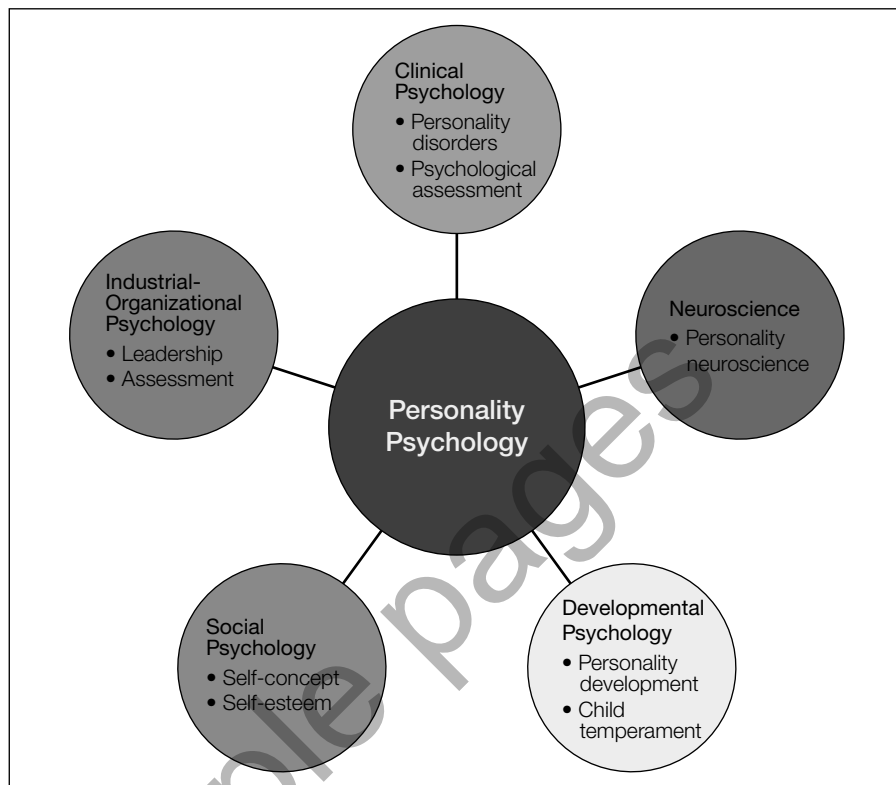
CREATISTA/Shutterstock

Personality is complex and shaped by many factors, including genetics, parenting, and relationships with peers.

And of course no personality system can truly capture all of the unique differences among people and their life experiences. As Malcolm X wrote: “Why am I as I am? To understand that of any person, his whole life from birth must be reviewed. All of our experiences fuse into our personality. Everything that ever happened to us is an ingredient.” (X & Haley, 1965). In other words, each person’s psychology is incredibly complex. Personality psychology aims to define and measure what it can, while acknowledging that will not be everything. So although definable personality might be the tip of the iceberg, it’s a fascinating and increasingly well-understood slice of ice.

Then there’s the question of where personality comes from—what makes people who they are? For example, Steve Jobs was adopted. Was his personality more likely to resemble his biological parents, whom he did not meet until he was in his 30s, or his adoptive but not genetically related parents, who raised him? Personality is shaped by many factors, including genetics, parents, peers, birth order, and culture. We explore which of these influences is the strongest—and which are weaker than you might think.

Personality psychology deals with a lot of fundamental questions about who we are and how we got that way. It touches on topics important across many different areas of psychology, including developmental psychology (How does personality change as we get older?), neuroscience (How can we see personality in the brain?), clinical psychology (What is the relationship between personality

Figure 1.1 The Personality Hub

traits and mental health issues?), and industrial-organizational psychology (Do good workers have certain personality traits?). Personality is a “hub” topic, at the center of the web of subareas within psychology (see Figure 1.1).

Differences in personality are one of the main reasons people are so endlessly fascinating—sometimes maddening and sometimes delightful but often fascinating. Why did he do that? How does she really feel? Will he ever change? Psychology is the study of what makes people tick and why they behave the way they do. Of all the subareas of psychology, personality psychology takes the most direct approach to answering these questions. If you’re looking to better understand yourself and others, you’ve come to the right place.

extraversion

how outgoing, assertive, and talkative someone is

introversion

how shy and reserved someone is; the opposite of extraversion

Where Can We See Personality?

Personality is everywhere, whether we’re interacting with others in person or online, in virtual reality or through text messages. One well-known personality trait is **extraversion**, or how outgoing, assertive, and talkative you are (versus its opposite, **introversion**, or how shy and reserved you are. For example, Steve Jobs



Who are you? The study of personality, perhaps more than any other area of psychology, can help you understand yourself and others.

was probably an extravert, and Bill Gates—with his penchant for emailing instead of calling—is probably an introvert.

But how do we guess the personality of someone we've just met, or someone we just can't figure out, if he's not a well-known public figure? You could give him a personality questionnaire, but that's sometimes difficult to pull off (You: "Hey, will you fill out this survey for me?" Him: "Why?" You: "Oh, no reason—I just want to see if you're worth dating.") As an alternative, you can gather clues about his personality without him even realizing you're doing it. In one study, college students allowed researchers to look at their Facebook pages, read their transcripts, peek into their student conduct records, and note how long it had been since they received or sent a text message. The extraverts had more friends on Facebook and were more likely to have violated campus conduct rules (for example, getting caught with alcohol). Extraverts also texted more frequently; one extraverted student even sent a text while the researcher was asking how long it had been since her last text message (Thalmayer et al., 2011).

So does personality predict whether you use a Mac or a PC? Surprisingly, it doesn't—perhaps because many other factors determine which computer you choose. But personality does predict preferences for features associated with each brand (Nevid & Pastva, 2014). For example, anxious people prefer a computer that is easy to use, and those who are very open to new ideas prefer a stylish design—both of which might incline them to use a Mac if the decision were up to them. So there's at least a little truth to the idea that Mac users, like Steve Jobs, are more likely to be broad thinkers interested in ideas—and maybe a little more anxious, too.

Several studies show that observers can guess your personality based on your Facebook page, especially your level of extraversion (Azucar et al., 2018). People

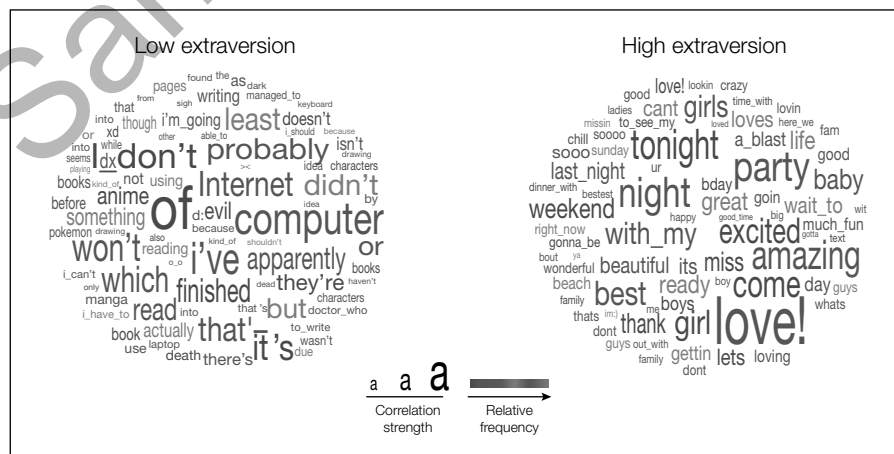
could also tell who was an organized person and who was not (Back et al., 2010; Ivcevic & Ambady, 2012). Observers can even guess your personality fairly accurately by seeing how you build your city in a virtual reality game such as CityVille (Wohn & Wash, 2013). Somewhat surprisingly, Facebook profiles and other personal web pages are usually consistent with people’s true personalities, not the personalities they think they “should” have (Back et al., 2010; Vazire & Gosling, 2004).

What do extraverts and introverts post about online? A study of nearly 70,000 Facebook users lets us see. As the word clouds in Figure 1.2 demonstrate, extraverts are focused on going out, relationships, and positive emotions. Words such as *tonight*, *party*, *love*, and *amazing* distinguish them most from introverts. Introverts discuss more solitary pursuits; their posts use words such as *computer*, *internet*, and *read* more than extraverts’ do (Park et al., 2015). The word clouds bring to mind the starkest of personality stereotypes: the party girl extravert and the computer geek introvert.

Observers were also able to accurately guess people’s personalities by seeing their offices or their bedrooms. As John Steinbeck wrote, “[A] human occupying a room for one night [im]prints his character, his biography, his recent history, and sometimes his future plans and hopes. . . . Personality seeps into walls and is slowly released” (Steinbeck, 1962). Extraverts’ bedrooms, for example, are noisier and more likely to have disorganized piles of papers. Perhaps because they want people to drop by and chat, extraverts’ offices are more likely to have a comfortable guest chair or a candy dish on the desk (Gosling et al., 2002). Introverts’ offices are less welcoming—they’d rather be alone. And

Figure 1.2 Word Clouds for Low and High Extraversion

Words used more frequently in Facebook posts by introverts (left) and extraverts (right).



SOURCE: Park, G., Schwartz, H. A., Eichstaedt, J. C., Kern, M. L., Kosinski, M., Stillwell, D. J., Ungar, L.H., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2015). Automatic personality assessment through social media language. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, American Psychological Association.

perhaps you should oblige. As personality psychologist Sam Gosling advises, “After a few minutes perched on a hard chair surrounded by gloomy, sparse walls, make your excuses and run for it—everyone will be happier that way” (2008, p. 181).

Your physical appearance and mannerisms also give off whiffs of personality. Vain, self-centered people are more likely to wear stylish, expensive clothes and cultivate a carefully groomed appearance (Vazire et al., 2008). Extraverts smile more, speak in louder voices, and swing their arms more when they walk. One finding even confirmed a suspicion I (J. M. T.) have had since high school: People who are more anxious and depressed really do wear dark clothes more often (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992, 1995).

Not only can other people guess our personality, but personality can predict what we might do next, even online. For example, extraverts leave more comments on Facebook, view their own and others’ pages more often, and are more likely to post pictures of themselves with other people (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Gosling et al., 2011). Anxious people are more likely to post status updates on Facebook, especially negative ones (Locatelli et al., 2012), and to post about their feelings (Seidman, 2013).

So whether you’re posting on Facebook, making your bed, sneaking beer into a dorm party, wearing black jeans and a black T-shirt, or sending text messages, watch out—your personality is showing.



What would you guess about the personality of this room’s occupant?

Perspectives on Personality

LO 1.2 Summarise the main perspectives of personality

Next, let's preview the views of personality you will be reading about. The chapters all describe viewpoints that are influential today and will likely continue to be influential for some time to come. The theories range considerably in their starting points, which can make matters a little confusing. The starting point, in some sense, is always a view of human nature—of what aspect of human experience is the key to understanding people.

In explaining why someone did something, people often say “It's just human nature.” But what *is* human nature? *In what terms* should we think about the nature of people? Different theorists have offered very different answers.

Each theoretical orientation discussed in this book has a somewhat different angle on human nature. Thus, each represents a different *perspective* on what constitute the central elements of the human experience. Here are brief overviews of the perspectives you'll be reading about.

The *trait perspective* begins with the intuitive idea that people have fairly stable qualities (traits) that are displayed across many settings and are deeply embedded in the person. This way of thinking originated in ancient times, but it remains very important today. From this point of view, the big issues are what (and how many) traits are the important ones in personality and how trait differences are expressed in behavior.

The *motive perspective* begins with the idea that the key element in human experience is the motive forces that underlie behavior. Theorists have posited many different motives and have studied how several of them vary over time and under different circumstances. People also differ in their patterns of underlying strengths of different motives. These differences in the balance of motives are seen as the core of personality, from this perspective.

The *inheritance and evolution perspective* emphasizes the fact that humans are creatures that evolved across millennia and that human nature (whatever it is) is deeply rooted in our genes. In this view, personality is genetically based. Dispositions are inherited. Indeed, some theorists take this idea a step further to suggest that many qualities of human behavior (and thus personality) exist precisely because long ago they had evolutionary benefits.

Another biological view, the *biological process perspective*, stems from the idea that personality reflects the workings of the body we inhabit and the brain that runs the body. This biological perspective focuses on how the nervous system and hormones influence people's behavior and how differences in those functions influence the kind of person you are.

The *psychoanalytic perspective*, taken up next, is a very different view of human nature. It's based on the idea that personality is a set of internal psychic forces that compete and conflict with one another. The focus of this perspective is on the dynamics of these forces (and how they influence behavior). Human nature, from

this viewpoint, involves a set of pressures inside the person that sometimes work with each other and sometimes are at war with each other. One specific theory dominates the perspective—the theory of Sigmund Freud.

We've termed the next perspective *psychosocial*. The theories in this perspective start from the assumption that the most important aspect of human nature is our formation of relationships with other people and the ways these relationships play out.

The psychosocial theories have historical links to psychoanalytic theory (they sometimes are called *neoanalytic*), but they really represent a very different worldview. The *social learning perspective* begins with a view of human nature in which change, rather than constancy, is paramount. That is, from this perspective, the key quality of human nature is that behavior changes systematically as a result of experiences. Because there are several views of how learning takes place, several theories link learning to personality. This perspective assumes that, a person's personality is the integrated sum of what the person has learned up till now.

The *self-actualization and self-determination perspective*, also sometimes referred to as an *organismic perspective*, has its roots in the idea that every person has the potential to grow and develop into a valuable human being if permitted to do so. In this view, people naturally tend toward self-perfection. People can move themselves more fully in that direction by exercising their free will to do so and by having environments that support that effort. The sense of self-determination is central to this view of human nature. Personality in this view is partly a matter of the uniqueness hidden within and partly a matter of what the person chooses to make of that uniqueness.

The *cognitive perspective* takes as its starting point the idea that human nature involves deriving meaning from experiences. The mind imposes organization and form on experience, and those mental organizations influence how people act. An understanding of personality from this viewpoint means thinking about the processes of construing the world and how they are used to determine one's actions and reactions to the surrounding world.

The *self-regulation perspective* starts from the idea that people are complex psychological systems, in the same sense that homeostatic processes reflect complex physiological systems and weather reflects complex atmospheric systems. There are recurrent processes that form organized actions that attain specific endpoints. Thus, there is an assumption of organization, coherence, and patterning. Self-regulating psychologically means (in part) synthesizing goals and moving toward those goals.

Person and Situation

Students taking a personality course often have two big questions right from the start: "How can you possibly measure something as elusive and complicated as personality?" and—especially if they just took social psychology—"Isn't behavior determined more by the situation someone is in, and not their personality?"

We answer the first question about personality measurement in Topic 4. For now, know that personality—at least some of it—can be measured, and well enough to predict behavior, work success, and even how long you live (Judge, 2009; Martin et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 2007). But what about the second question—how much does the situation matter? Or, as one psychologist put it, “How can we talk about the way a person typically acts if that way is always changing? The same person acts very differently on different occasions” (Fleeson, 2004, p. 83).

situation

the other people and the physical environment surrounding a person

Back in the 1960s, this question caused a crisis in the field of personality. Social psychologists were finding that the **situation**—the other people and the physical environment surrounding a person—had powerful effects on behavior. For example, social psychologist Stanley Milgram found that most men would obey an experimenter’s orders to administer a high level of electric shock—so high it’s marked with an ominous “XXX” on the shock generator. Left to choose a level of shock on their own, virtually no one went this high (Milgram, 1963, 1974). A later re-analysis found that personality did predict behaviour in Milgram’s study, but that result isn’t as well known (Blass, 1991).

person–situation debate

the view that stable personality traits predict behavior versus the view personality doesn’t really exist and the situation is much more important

In 1968, psychology researcher Walter Mischel argued that the effect of personality on behavior was too small to matter. Personality traits, he maintained, did not do a very good job of predicting how people acted. The field entered a long period of dormancy and self-doubt, even though Mischel (1990) later said he was misinterpreted and that he had not meant to attack the field of personality as a whole. A debate ensued between those who defended the idea that stable personality traits could predict behavior and those who argued that personality didn’t really exist and that the situation was much more important. This became known as the **person–situation debate**. At issue was the question “Do people have consistent behavioral tendencies across situations (in other words, personality)?” Yes, said those on the “person” side; “no,” said those on the “situation” side. (Note that the person–situation debate is distinct from the **nature–nurture debate**, which instead asks what *causes* personality traits—genetics or environment. The person–situation debate instead asks whether personality traits exist at all.)

nature–nurture debate

the view that genetics cause personality traits versus the view that the environment causes personality traits

During one of the years when this debate was raging, psychology researchers gathered for a small conference held in the woods of the Pacific Northwest. One attendee was a researcher we’ll call Dr. Context, who insistently argued that behavior was due to the situation and not to stable personality traits. One night, the attendees heard some alarming news: A famous serial killer had escaped from a nearby prison. Dr. Context quickly sprang into action, making plans to nail the windows shut and post guards in rotating shifts. A professor on the other side of the debate—let’s call him Dr. Personality—patted Dr. Context on the back and told him not to worry. “Relax, Dr. Context,” he said sarcastically. “If the killer does show up, what he does next will depend on the situation!” (Funder, 2008, p. 568).

As this story suggests, even those who believe in the power of the situation understand that people vary systematically in their usual behavior—in other



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Are these people's behaviors determined by personality or by the situation?

words, people's personalities differ. Dr. Context felt no need to protect himself from his fellow researchers but was terrified of the escaped serial killer. He knew that a serial killer is much more likely to kill someone than the average person. But that doesn't mean the situation is unimportant: As social psychology experiments have shown, ordinary people will harm others in certain situations (such as in Milgram's experiments, when they obeyed the experimenter's authority). In other words, both personality and situations influence behavior.

Eventually, researchers came to recognize this. For example, several analyses found that situations and personality traits predict behavior about equally well (Funder & Ozer, 1983; Richard et al., 2003). In addition, most situations in everyday life are weaker than those explored in the famous social psychology experiments. For example, personality influences behavior during everyday life much more than it influences behavior during a riot.

Of course, people's behavior is not completely consistent, which is why personality measures ask people to report their *usual* traits and behaviors. What happens if we instead try to predict one particular behavior instead of the average of many?

For example, let's say you decide to see if a measure of extraversion predicts how social your friends are. Instead of measuring their behavior over a long period of time and across several situations, you decide to record their behavior

on a particular Thursday night in the middle of the semester. Your friend Emily, an extravert, had a big test the next day, so she spent the whole evening studying alone. Your friend Isaac, an introvert, didn't have any tests until next week, so he went out for dinner with some friends. If extraversion means someone is more social, what went wrong here? The problem was you measured behavior on only one evening. In most cases, personality traits will predict behavior more accurately across many situations, not just at one isolated time (Epstein, 1979; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974). As you saw, testing schedules influenced Emily's and Isaac's behavior. If you instead measured Emily's and Isaac's social behavior for two weeks—or, better yet, two months—the chances are good that Emily would go out more than Isaac did. Averaging their behavior across several situations would increase the predictive power of personality (Buss & Craik, 1983).

conscientiousness
being neat, organized,
and achievement
oriented

As another example, consider the personality trait called **conscientiousness**, which includes being neat, organized, and achievement oriented. A good measure of conscientiousness should predict, for example, whether a student arrives on time for class or not: Those high in conscientiousness should be more likely to arrive early, and those low in conscientiousness should be more likely to arrive late.

But Conscientious Courtney's score might not predict whether she will arrive to class on time on one specific day (for example, Personality Psychology; Thursday, October 15). If she's late, it might be because her bus showed up late, she couldn't find a parking space, her roommate took too long in the shower, or her alarm didn't go off because the electricity went out during the night. All sorts of situations could have interfered. So, while conscientiousness might not do a good job predicting whether Courtney arrives on time for that one class on that one specific day, it will most likely be correlated with her average arrival time for the class across the entire semester. Even stability in behavior from one week to another is reasonably high (Fleeson, 2001). This is one of the core features of personality: It's about someone's behavior most of the time, not in one isolated moment. You might think about that the next time a friend of yours does or says something inconsiderate—that's probably not who he really is. If he's usually inconsiderate, though, that might be his personality—and you might not want to be his friend anymore.

Here is the take-home message: It is tough for anyone—even with the best personality measures—to predict perfectly what a person will do at any random time. Introverts can sing out loud, sloppy people can dress nicely, and unhappy people can laugh. We are not prisoners of our personalities. Instead, because personality is someone's *usual* tendency—not just their behavior in one minute or during one day—measuring behavior over a longer time span and across situations is a better way to show how personality can predict behavior. This is another answer to Mischel's criticism that behavior and personality are only weakly linked. That might be true for one behavior in one situation, but the link is much stronger when many behaviors are averaged. Rather than competing to see who has the biggest role in shaping behavior, the person and situation actually work together in many different ways, called **person–situation interaction** (see Table 1.1).

**person–situation
interaction**
when the person
and situation work
together to determine
behavior

Table 1.1 How the Person and the Situation Can Work Together to Influence Behavior

| Factor | Example |
|--|---|
| Personality can be impacted by experiences | You and your friends go to different colleges. Over time, you notice that your friends seem different than when you were in high school. |
| People respond differently to the same situation | Some of your friends thrive at parties, whereas others shrink into the background. |
| People choose their situations | You choose to read a book on a Saturday afternoon. Your friend chooses to take a cooking class, while another friend chooses to go rock-wall climbing. In each case, you are each choosing the situation you're most comfortable with. |
| People change the situations they enter | You are having a serious private conversation with a friend when someone else unexpectedly walks in. Do you put the conversation on hold? Include the other person? Whatever you choose, the previous situation is changed by the presence of the third person. |

First, personality can be impacted by experiences—situations that last a long time, such as going to a certain school or moving in with someone. Let's say you and your friend Rose were very close in high school and had very similar personalities. But you decided to go to college, and she decided to join the military. Four years later, your personalities will probably be different based on these experiences. Second, people respond differently to the same situation. For example, extraverts get energized at parties with large numbers of people, and introverts find such situations tiring. Third, people choose their situations—an extravert is more likely to choose to go to that party than the introvert. Some people pay to go skydiving; other people would pay to never have to go skydiving. Fourth, people change the situations they enter. If three people are calmly debating free will versus determinism in the dining hall and they are then joined by an argumentative hall mate, the discussion will suddenly become louder and more heated (Buss, 1979; Funder, 2008).



Germanskydiver/Shutterstock

Lots of fun or lots of crazy? Personality influences the situations people enter.

Yes, your behavior probably changes from one situation to the next, but how do you behave *most* of the time? And how do you behave when you have a choice? The rules of society require that you do things like wear clothes, stop at stoplights, and raise your hand before you ask a question in class. Virtually everyone does those things. But are you the type who asks questions in class in the first place? That's a pretty good indicator of personality—specifically, of extraversion.

Personality and Science

LO 1.3 Describe the scientific basis of personality psychology

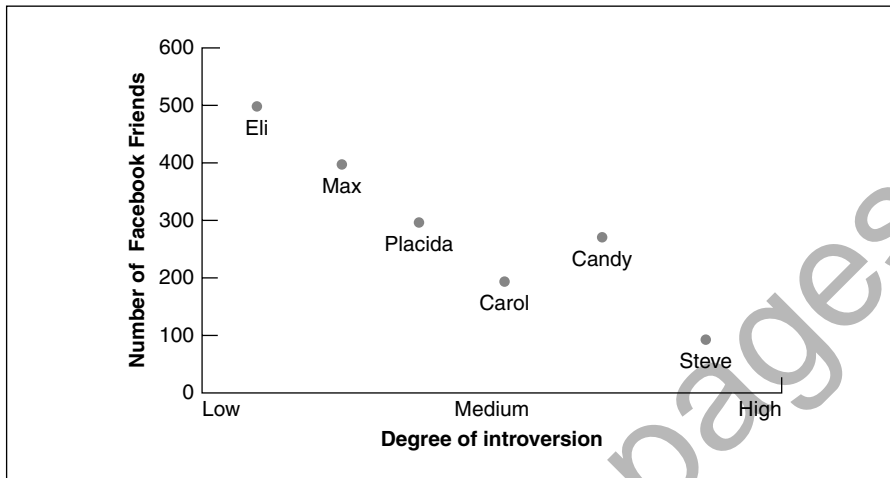
Modern personality psychologists are scientific in the sense that they attempt to use methods of *scientific inference* (using systematically gathered evidence) to test theories. A person might be able to learn a great deal about personality by reading about Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*, or by seeing *Hamlet* at a Shakespeare festival. Indeed, it has been argued that Shakespeare invented personality as we have come to recognize it (Bloom, 1998). Such insights are not scientific, however, until they have been tested in a systematic way, using validated methods. As we will show, scientific methods have yielded insights into personality that are not available to a keen novelist or philosopher.

Should you use astrologers and other such stargazers in assessing personality? Or, why not go to the nearest carnival and have your personality read from the lines in the palms of your hands? Perhaps you should turn to physiognomy—the art of face reading—to evaluate others. Should you make personality inferences about people who have large foreheads? No, such approaches do not work. All of these techniques are generally invalid; they are wrong or vague as often as they are right. However, through an understanding of personality psychology—classic theories and modern research—meaningful answers about personality *are* available.

Some scientists believe that rigorous study of personality must become mathematical and involve numbers—for instance, statistics such as *correlations*. A *correlation coefficient* is a mathematical index of the degree of agreement (or *association*) between two measures. For example, height and weight are positively correlated: in most (but not all) cases, the taller a person is, the more the person weighs. Extroversion and shyness are negatively (inversely) correlated: Knowing that a person scores high on a test of extroversion lets us predict that the person will not often act in a shy manner. In the example shown in Figure 1.3, there is a negative correlation between a person's degree of introversion and the number of friends that person has on Facebook. Such statistics help us quantify relationships. Correlations tell us about associations, but not about causal relationships. For example, if we learn that stout people tend to be jolly, that positive correlation does not tell us why the relationship exists. Is there some underlying predisposition that makes certain people tend to eat a lot and also be happy? Does plentiful food and extra weight make a person feel happier? Do happy people not worry about their looks and so gain weight? Do plump people

Figure 1.3 Correlation Between Facebook Friends and Introversion

These data show a negative (inverse) correlation between introversion and an aspect of social networks: the more introverted the subject, the fewer the friends, generally speaking. Note, however, that Candy is quite introverted but still has an average number of Facebook friends. Such statistics are used to evaluate the validity of both the measure and the construct of introversion.



What might explain this sort of correlation?

Consider This

It might be that Steve is introverted, hesitates to approach others, and so is rarely friended. Or, it might be that he has few friends because his computer is always breaking, and so he loses social contacts, becomes lonely, and turns more introverted. Or, it might be that Steve has a thyroid disorder, looks overweight, and therefore keeps to himself and becomes introverted and something of a loner; but if his thyroid condition were corrected, both his extroversion and his number of friends would increase. The true causal links affect what types of interventions would be successful but usually cannot be judged from simply knowing the correlation.

hide an inner loneliness by pretending to be jolly? Do other people assume that portly people are jolly and therefore approach them in a kidding way, thereby making them more jolly? What are the causal relationships? There has, in fact, been some scientific research on whether the stout are more jolly, but no clear conclusions can yet be drawn, although obesity may be a risk factor for depression (Roberts, Deleger, Strawbridge, & Kaplan, 2003; Roberts, Strawbridge, Deleger, & Kaplan, 2002). Thus, the scientific study of personality helps us untangle these webs of associations.

Although statistics such as correlations can indeed be extremely helpful, they are only tools to be used to help uncover the truth.

The most fundamental theoretical question is this: What concepts are useful for describing personality? Should we concentrate on the differences between people? Or should we avoid comparisons, instead focusing on intensive understanding of one person?

Differences Between People

Personality researchers have devoted considerable effort to identifying the ways that individuals differ from one another—that is, of describing **individual differences**.

THREE WAYS OF DESCRIBING PERSONALITY

Essentially, we have the choice of classifying people into a limited number of separate groups, a type approach. Or we can decide that people vary in gradations and describe people by saying how much of the basic dimensions they possess, a trait approach.

Types The *type approach* proposes that personality comes in a limited number of distinct categories (qualitative groupings). Such personality **types** are categories of people with similar characteristics. A small number of types suffice to describe all people. In ancient Greece, for example, Hippocrates described four basic types of temperament: sanguine (optimistic), melancholic (depressed), choleric (irritable), and phlegmatic (apathetic) (Merenda, 1987). Those ancient Greek categories are no longer used in current psychology, but now as then, each person belongs to only one category, and there are no gradations or partial memberships in a category.

Traits Nature often presents us with more gradual transitions (quantitative dimensions). Consider “cruelty”: Between Mother Teresa and Stalin lie many intermediate levels of cruelty. Therefore, personality researchers generally prefer **quantitative measures**, which give each person a score, ranging from very low to very high or somewhere in between. In contrast to types, **traits** are such quantitative measures. Traits permit a more precise description of personality than types because each trait refers to a more focused set of characteristics, and each person is a combination of many traits, each of which describes a narrower and more precise scope of behavior.

Factors More traits than types are necessary to describe a personality. One classic study counted nearly 18,000 traits among words listed in the dictionary (Allport & Odbert, 1936). Do we really need that many? To eliminate unnecessary redundancy (e.g., by combining synonyms such as “shy” and “withdrawn”), researchers rely on statistical procedures that compute correlations among trait scores, and on that basis they have proposed broad **factors** of personality. Factors are quantitative, like traits, but they include a broader range of behavior. Factors are often thought to derive from underlying biological variables.

Types, traits, and factors are similar in that they all are ways of describing the differences between people. They differ in how broad or specific they are, with types being the most general and traits the most specific. Examples of popular types, traits, and factors are presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Ways of Describing Personality

Types, traits, and factors all have a role in personality theory and research. The terms are sometimes used imprecisely, but knowing their differences helps us understand the variety of ways that personality can be described and measured.

| Way of Describing Personality | Example |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Type | One model of personality in popular culture, the Enneagram, suggests that there are nine categories of people: reformer, helper, achiever, individualist, investigator, loyalist, enthusiast, challenger, and peacemaker. |
| Trait | Students in a personality course are assigned to search the psychological literature for research on whatever dimension of personality they find interesting. Students choose quite a variety: shyness, bullying tendency, self-esteem, anxiety, creativity, perfectionism—the list goes on! |
| Factor | The currently popular “Big Five” model of personality describes these major dimensions of personality: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. A test gives each person a score on each dimension. |

Should We Study Individuals?

When researchers study personality, they have another choice to make. Should they look at many people and compare them? Researchers do this when they give a personality test to a group of people and compare the behaviors of people with various scores. For example, do students who score high on a test of conscientiousness get higher grades? Other researchers take a different approach, looking in detail at one person. They might, for example, investigate an important historical figure, studying that person’s letters and speeches and political activity to understand that person.

Theory in Personality Psychology

LO 1.4 What makes a good theory of personality?

What *is* a theory?

A **theory** is a summary statement, a general principle or set of principles about a class of events. Put differently, a theory is a set of ideas about how to think about that class of events. A theory can apply to a very specific class of events, or it can be broader. Some theories in psychology are about processes in a single nerve cell. Others concern complex behaviors, such as maintaining close relationships, playing chess, and living a full life.

Theories are used for two purposes (no matter what they are about). The first purpose is to *explain* the phenomena it addresses. A theory always provides a way to explain some things that are known to be true. For example, biological

personality theories hold that heredity influences personality. This idea provides a way to explain why children seem like their parents in certain ways (which we know to be true).

Every theory about personality provides an account of at least some phenomena. This first purpose of the theory—explanation—is fundamental. Without giving an explanation for at least some of what’s already known, a theory would be useless.

Theories also have a second purpose, though. A theory should suggest possibilities you don’t yet know for sure are true. Put differently, a theory should allow you to *predict new information*. A theory of personality should let you predict things you haven’t thought to look for yet—maybe things *nobody* has thought to look for yet. For the psychologist, this is where much of the excitement lies.

Psychologists generally want to make predictions about large numbers of people, but the same principle holds when you make predictions in your own life. It’s exciting to take an idea about personality and use it to predict how your roommate will react to a situation you haven’t seen her in before. It’s particularly exciting when your prediction turns out to be right!

The predictive aspect of theories is more subtle and more difficult than the explanatory aspect. The difficulty lies partly in the fact that most theories have a little ambiguity. This often makes it unclear exactly what the prediction should be. In fact, the broader the theory (the more things it tries to account for), the more likely it is to be ambiguous. As you’ve seen, personality is a very broad concept. This forces theories of personality to be broad and complex. As a result, it’s sometimes hard to use them to make very specific predictions.

Evaluating Theories

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH

How do psychologists decide whether a theory is any good? In describing the predictive function of theories, we’ve revealed a bias held by most of today’s personality psychologists: Theories should be *testable*, and they should be *tested*. It’s important to find out whether a theory makes predictions that receive support.

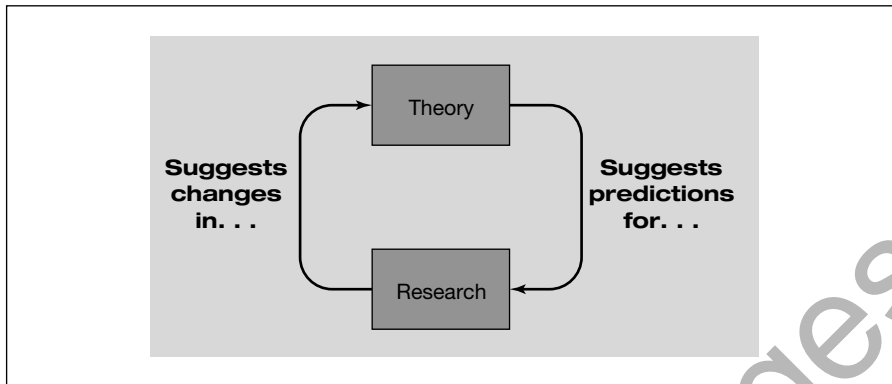
We want to be quite clear about what we’re saying here. Personality is so important in life that lots of people besides psychologists think about it. Theologians, philosophers, artists, poets, novelists, and songwriters have all written about personality, and many have had good insights about it. We don’t mean to diminish the value of these insights. But are the insights enough?

People have different opinions on this. Some believe that insight stands on its own. Even some personality theorists believed this. Sigmund Freud, who’s often viewed as the father of personality psychology, wasn’t much interested in whether his ideas were supported in research by others. He saw the insights as sufficient in themselves.

The view that dominates today’s psychology, however, is that ideas—even brilliant ones—have to be tested before they can be trusted. Too often, things

Figure 1.4

In a scientific approach to personality psychology, there is a continuous cycling between theory and research. Theory suggests predictions to be tested, and the results of studies suggest the need for new or modified theory.



that *seem* true turn out not to be true after all. Unfortunately, until you test them, you never know which ideas are brilliant and right and which are brilliant but wrong. Because of this, today's personality psychology is a scientific field, in which research counts for a lot. Studies of personality provide information about how accurate or useful a theory is. The studies either confirm or disconfirm predictions and thereby support or undermine the theory.

When theories are used to generate predictions for research, a continuous interplay arises (see Figure 1.4). If a theory makes predictions, the result is research—scientific studies—to test the predictions. Results often support the predictions. Sometimes, however, the result either fails to support the theory or supports it only partly. This may suggest a limit on the theory—perhaps it predicts under some conditions but not others. Such a finding leads to revision of the theory.

Once it's been revised, the theory must be tested again, because it's no longer quite the same theory as before. Its new elements must be examined for other predictions they might make. The cycle of prediction, testing, revision or refinement, and additional prediction and testing can be virtually never ending.

What Else Makes a Theory Good?

An important basis for deciding whether a theory is good is whether it does what a theory is supposed to do: explain and predict. But that's not the only way people evaluate theories. There are several more criteria for why one theory may be preferable to another.

One criterion is the breadth of the information behind the theory. Some theories are criticized because they're based heavily on the theorists' experiences conducting therapy. Other theories are criticized because they're based on studies



Like a good work of art, a good theory should evoke some sort of reaction, either good or bad, but not indifferent.

of laboratory animals in highly artificial situations. Others are criticized because they rest largely on information from long sets of rating scales. None of these sources of information is bad in itself. But to base a theory on just one source of information weakens the theory.

A theory should also have the quality of **parsimony**. That is, it should include as few assumptions (or concepts) as possible. Put differently, it should be as simple as possible. This criterion is important, but there's a danger in applying it too rigidly. Knowledge is far from complete. A theory that looks parsimonious today may not be able to account for something that will be discovered tomorrow. A theory that looks too complex today may be

the *only* one that can handle tomorrow's discovery. Nevertheless, excess theoretical "baggage" is a cause for concern.

Another basis for evaluating theories is highly subjective. Some theories just "feel" better than others. Some theories will fit your personal worldview better than others. You're not the only one who reacts this way. So do psychologists. There's even evidence that scientists prefer theories that fit their images of *themselves* (Johnson, Germer, Efran, & Overton, 1988). William James, an important figure in the early years of psychology, said people will prefer theories that "are most interesting, . . . appeal most urgently to our aesthetic, emotional, and active needs" (James, 1890, p. 312). Which theories feel best to you, then, depends partly on how you see the world.

Personality perspectives

Almost everyone has heard of Sigmund Freud's theories, and you might have heard that Freud says that in dreams the following objects may be symbolic of a penis: hammers, rifles, daggers, umbrellas, neckties (long objects peculiar to men), snakes, and many other objects. They are all phallic symbols. You might also have heard that the vagina may be dreamt of as a path through the brush, or as a garden, as in a dream in which a young woman asks a gardener if some branches could be transplanted to her garden. Taken out of context, such assertions may seem senseless, yet Freud greatly influenced twentieth-century thought. We will attempt to show why Freudian theory has had such a tremendous impact.

Many other personality theorists and researchers are quite well known, but the best and most modern understanding of personality comes from a synthesis

Table 1.3 Overview of the Personality Perspectives

| Perspective | Key Strength |
|------------------------|--|
| Psychoanalytic | Attention to unconscious influences; importance of sexual drives even in non-sexual spheres |
| Neanalytic/ego | Emphasis on the self as it struggles to cope with emotions and drives on the inside and the demands of others on the outside |
| Biological | Focus on tendencies and limits imposed by biological inheritance; easily combined with most other approaches |
| Behaviorist | Emphasis on a more scientific analysis of the learning experiences that shape personality |
| Cognitive | Emphasis on active nature of human thought; uses modern knowledge from cognitive psychology |
| Trait | Focus on good individual assessment techniques |
| Humanistic/existential | Appreciation of the spiritual nature of a person; emphasizes struggles for self-fulfillment and dignity |
| Interactionist | Understanding that we are different selves in different situations |

of psychological research on such matters as the nature of the self, psychobiology, learning theories, trait theories, existential approaches, and social psychology. As a taste of what lies ahead, here is an introduction to the concepts and the psychologists we will be investigating. Major features of the perspectives to be covered are presented in Table 1.3.

Overview of the Eight Perspectives

We will examine the psychoanalytic aspects of personality, with a focus on the unconscious. Interestingly, study of the unconscious has once again become a significant area of ongoing research in psychology. It is now clear that the brain has complex, hidden subsystems, as Freud postulated. We focus on the ego or “self” aspects of personality, tracing notions of the self from Alfred Adler’s work on inferiority complexes right up to modern theorizing about multiple selves. Theories of how and why we have a sense of “self” continue to fascinate psychologists (Dweck, Higgins, & Grant-Pillow, 2003).

Just as people come in different sizes, shapes, and colors, so too do people differ somewhat in their biological systems. We study the biological aspects of personality. An individual’s characteristic emotional and motivational nature, generally known as *temperament*, is strongly influenced by multiple biological factors. Such matters have attracted the attention of leading scientists since the time of Charles Darwin. Today, new developments in evolutionary theory and in understanding human genetics are being applied to personality psychology.

Behaviourist and learning aspects of personality are considered. Starting with the work of radical behaviorist B. F. Skinner, we examine the extent to

which personality can be “found” in the external environment. We analyse the cognitive aspects of personality, with a focus on people’s consistencies in perceiving and interpreting the world around them. As we will see, cognitive approaches are increasingly joined with social psychology into social-cognitive approaches to personality, such as Albert Bandura’s notions of the importance of self-efficacy. We also focus on trait aspects of personality. In the mid-twentieth century, the Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport almost single-handedly developed intriguing trait approaches that have dominated this area ever since, although there has been a recent resurgence of scientific interest in trait approaches. Today, notions of five basic trait dimensions provide a common currency for thinking about personality traits.

Humanistic and existential aspects of personality focus on freedom and self-fulfillment. Starting with the influential work of Carl Rogers, we examine what seems to make humans uniquely human. Further, what makes people happy and fulfilled?

Are Personality Aspects Really Separable?

Is it best to divide the field of personality by aspects? All brilliant personality theorists necessarily include more than one aspect of personality in their writings. For example, Freud had many biological notions in his theories, and he certainly appreciated the major role played by socialization forces. Similarly, B. F. Skinner, the ultimate behaviorist, well understood the tremendous influence of other people in our lives, despite his research focus on the conditioning of laboratory animals. Our goal is not to place sophisticated theories into narrow pigeonholes, but rather to provide an in-depth examination of different sorts of significant insights into the nature of personality.

Which personality perspective is right? Are people governed by traits or hormones or unconscious motives or nobility of spirit? This is a different question from “Which personality *theory* is right?” or “Which *hypothesis* is true?” Theories and hypotheses are testable and, by their nature, can be proven wrong; that is, they are falsifiable. We will examine many such theories and hypotheses later in this text and show which aspects are wrong or doubtful. But the question here is “Which personality *perspective* is correct?” This question is easy to answer: All eight are right in that they all provide some important psychological insight into what it means to be a person. In other words, we can benefit from learning about the strengths (and the weaknesses) of all eight perspectives.

This answer is not an evasion or a dodge. Human nature is tremendously complex and needs to be examined from multiple perspectives. In fact, it is a weak strategy to rely too much on one approach and ignore the valuable insights provided by other perspectives and scientific research. Each of these perspectives adds richness to our understanding of personality. On the other hand, it is inappropriate to perpetuate notions that are not supported by concrete evidence.

A Brief History of Personality Psychology

A number of scientific and philosophical forces that converged early in the twentieth century made possible the birth of personality psychology. Sigmund Freud, very conscious of these new beginnings, deliberately published one of his major books, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in the year 1900 (rather than in 1899). By the 1930s, modern personality theory was taking shape. Personality psychology is only about a century old, but its roots go back through human history. The time line shows the approximate sequence of important milestones in the history of personality psychology and their relationship in time to important world events.

Time Line

Developments in the Field of Personality Psychology

The major developments in the field of personality psychology can be seen here in historical relation to one another and in relation to their broader societal and cultural contexts.

| | |
|------------|---|
| 1859: | Charles Darwin publishes <i>Origin of Species</i> |
| 1861–1865: | American Civil War |
| 1880s: | Francis Galton begins measuring individual differences |
| 1880s: | Massive immigration to United States begins |
| 1900–1921: | Women seek right to vote |
| 1900: | Sigmund Freud publishes <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> |
| 1905: | Binet and Simon begin first valid intelligence testing |
| 1906: | Ivan Pavlov works on conditioning of nervous system |
| 1910–1930: | Jung, Adler, Horney, and others refine psychoanalysis |
| 1914–1918: | World War I |
| 1917: | Personality testing begins in U.S. Army |
| 1919: | J. B. Watson founds behaviorism |
| 1920–1933: | Kurt Lewin studies Gestalt psychology in Berlin; flees Nazis to United States in 1933 |
| 1920s: | Roaring Twenties |
| 1930s: | Margaret Mead studies personality cross-culturally |
| 1930s: | Great Depression |
| 1930s: | B. F. Skinner studies reinforcement schedules |