

Chapter 1

The Study of Personality

Introduction

Chapter Goals

- Provide an overview of the controversies in the field of personality
- Explain the purpose and utility of studying personality to mental health professionals
- Review the various definitions of human personality
- Offer insights into the history of personality theories
- Introduce some of the methods used to measure or evaluate personality
- Present some of the major personality theorists who have developed the concepts we will be studying

Subdisciplines of psychology such as social psychology, cognitive psychology, and industrial psychology endeavor to find common principles that will explain everyone's behavior. These subfields have achieved considerable success in doing so, since we are all similar in many ways. Despite our similarities, however, there is little doubt that each human being is unique—different from every other individual on the planet. Seeking to understand human commonalities and seeking to account for individual differences are complementary, insofar as we cannot fully apprehend differences if we cannot identify our common characteristics.

Personality psychology looks for answers to numerous questions. In what ways do human beings differ? In what situations and along what dimensions do they differ? Why do they differ? How much do they differ? How consistent are human differences? Can they be measured? These are the issues that this text will explore. An important aspect of this exploration will be a critical examination of the numerous theories that have been proposed to explain personality. Some of these are competing and contradictory while others are supportive and complementary.

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Personality psychology was a latecomer among the various disciplines within psychology. Before it was adopted as a subject for study, however, it was already well established as a topic of discussion in the public domain. People have always been practicing personality psychology whether they have recognized it or not. When we seek the right person for a mate, our judgment of his or her personality is indispensable in evaluating our hoped-for compatibility. And are personnel directors really doing anything other than analyzing the applicant's personality during a job interview? Similarly, when we describe a physician as a "good doctor," have we really assessed the caliber of his or her medical knowledge? Or are we saying that we are satisfied with the doctor's professional persona? When we listen to political speeches, how do we rate the orators? Are we looking at their command of the issues or their political acumen? Or is it essentially their personality that we appraise? In most cases, it would seem the latter. These examples illustrate the omnipresence of informal personality assessment. It is a subject of universal interest and continual relevance in all human interactions. On the other hand, although the study of personality is compelling and important, personality as such is also very hard to pin down.

Personality falls under the heading of things that most people believe they understand. In fact, there is probably no domain within any field of knowledge in which more people think they have achieved some expertise. Simply put, most people believe they can know or understand other people. We all try to predict behavior, interpret conversations, and make inferences about others' actions. If someone offends us, acts strangely, or seems excessively kind, we will quickly try to understand their motives. In addition, we often draw inferences about what kind of people they are; that is, what personality traits they may possess. Most of us regard ourselves as competent judges of personality. We make use of our skills in personality assessment on a daily basis; however, most of us would have a difficult time explaining exactly how we draw our conclusions about others.

Besides evaluating and rating each other's personalities, we also tend to be confident that we are very good in so doing. It is rare to find someone who admits that he or she is not a good judge of people and does not understand the behavior of others. As this text will show, most of us are not only often incorrect in our assessments of others but also overconfident of our abilities. Most people have an innate trust in their ability to impute underlying motives to the actions of others. We are personality experts, or at least think we are. Moreover, once we evaluate someone else's personal qualities, we tend to interpret their subsequent actions through the lens of our initial assessment, making it difficult to see that we might have been inaccurate in the first place.

We tend to go through our lives categorizing the people we encounter under various labels. Our language is replete with words that describe types or groups of people, many of them quite pejorative. Words like *macho*, *wimp*, *nerd*, *milquetoast*, *playboy*, *redneck*, *square*, and *hippie* are used to categorize a type of person, most often one we find undesirable. This tendency to categorize people makes a great deal of sense in some contexts because it is a universal human characteristic to impose order on complex situations. As complex as human behavior can be, repeating patterns can be discerned.

Almost all human encounters involve classifying and categorizing personalities. For example, business people typically judge their associates on their general demeanor, physical bearing, verbal style, and presumed ability to fit into the milieu of a specific organization. University professors presenting technical papers to their colleagues will be judged to some

extent on their personality. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of any interpersonal interaction in which the appraisal of personality does not play an important role.

Can anybody really understand human personality? Furthermore, does it even exist? Or is it a convenient construct that is so intangible as to have no meaning? In fact, some experts do not accept the notion that people have consistent personalities. These experts espouse **situationalism**; the most extreme members of this group reject the concept of personality completely. Situationalists propose that differences in human behavior are artifacts of the various situations in which human beings find themselves, as well as their cultural environments or social surrounds. The authors of this text, however, are confident that the construct of personality is real and legitimate and will demonstrate its legitimacy in the chapter on individual differences.

▣ THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

The study of personality has a long history. For example, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Machiavelli, among numerous other philosophers and writers, explored human personality in their works. Many of their books reveal compelling insights into the human psyche. Modern theorists to a large extent echo the theories set forth by these earlier thinkers.

Plato

Plato (427–347 BCE) saw the human soul as the seat of personality. In his well-known dialogue, *The Republic* (c. 390 BCE), he said that the soul consists of three basic forces guiding human behavior: reason, emotion, and appetite. Reason is given the highest value whereas emotion and especially appetite are regarded as the “lower passions.” Plato believed the most powerful of these forces is reason, which keeps the more primitive forces of appetite and emotion at bay.

Aristotle

Aristotle (384–322 BCE), one of Plato’s students and the teacher of Alexander the Great, referred to the seat of personality as the **psyche**. His description of the psyche suggests that he was the first biological psychologist. Aristotle proposed that the psyche is the product of biological processes. He also saw the psyche as including a set of faculties that he placed in a hierarchy of importance. The first faculty that Aristotle distinguished is the nutritive—the human organism’s basic drives to meet its bodily needs. This faculty can be found in plants as well as in animals and people. The next and higher faculty is the perceptual, which Aristotle defined as the aspect of mind that interprets sensory data. Animals as well as people have a perceptual faculty. The last and highest faculty is the intellectual, which Aristotle saw as unique to human beings.

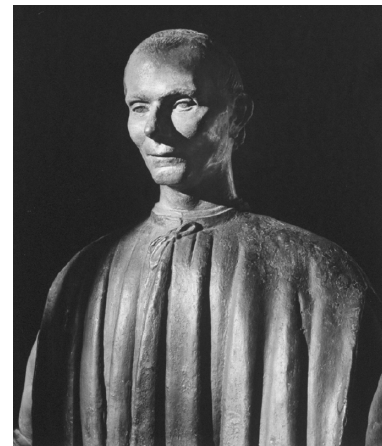


Photo 1.1 Niccolò Machiavelli
(1469–1527)

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Descartes

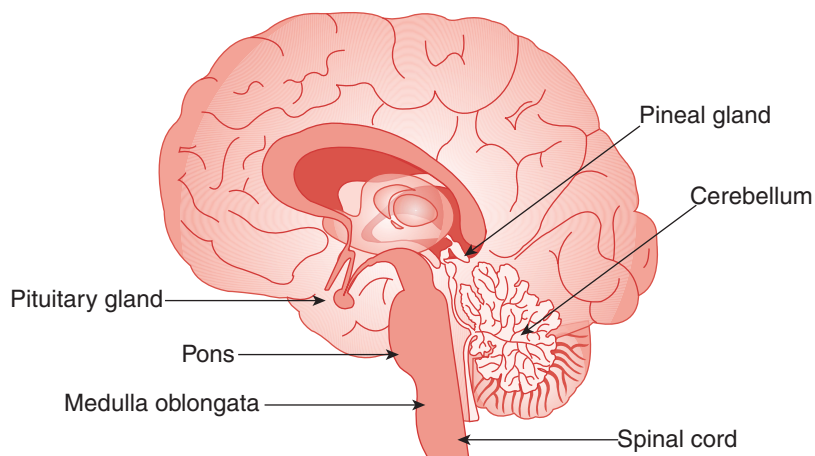
René Descartes (1596–1650), a French philosopher, viewed human personality as the product of the interaction of divine and primal forces. He saw the essential force behind human personality as the immortal soul—pure, perfect, and intangible. Descartes set out to explain how this spiritual entity interacted with the physical body. His observation of an anatomical dissection led him to think he had resolved this mind-body problem. He noticed a small body in the apparent center of the brain known as the **pineal gland** or **pineal body**, so named by the Greco-Roman physician Claudius Galen (c. 130–c. 200 CE) because its shape reminded him of a pine cone.

Descartes (1649) came to the conclusion that that this cone-shaped endocrine gland must be the point of contact between the soul and the body. Cartesian dualism, which is the philosophical position that two substances—matter and spirit, or brain and mind—exist independently of each other although they interact—became the most common view in the Christian West after the seventeenth century because it “explained” the existence of human free will and consciousness in an otherwise mechanistic universe. Indeed, before the advent of the computer, it seemed impossible to allow for consciousness without appealing to nonphysical concepts. Cartesian dualism is still the dominant view on the mind-body issue among the general public, although it is not held by cognitive psychologists or neurologists.

Machiavelli

In contrast to Descartes, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), a Florentine diplomat and political thinker, believed that personality is best understood in a social context. According to Machiavelli’s worldview, people are essentially selfish, greedy, ungrateful, and vengeful.

Image 1.1 Descartes believed that the pineal gland is the seat of the soul within the human brain



Furthermore, he saw two primary forces as defining human character. The first one is an almost untranslatable Italian term—**virtù**—which is best described as a combination of assertiveness, fearlessness, and self-confidence. Machiavelli called the second force *fortuna*, which is the Latin word for luck. A person could become a powerful leader with the help of a good dose of virtù and fortuna. Machiavelli (1546/1935) warned that leaders who act out of kindness and a belief in the essential goodness of humanity will always fail. This belief is sometimes expressed by contemporary people as “nice guys finish last.”

Almost every major philosopher from ancient Greece and Rome through the Enlightenment proposed some form of personality theory, and many of their ideas served as the groundwork of theories set forth by modern psychologists. This text will concentrate on the theories that arose after the development of psychology as a distinct discipline. Because psychology is one of the social sciences, its practitioners seek not only to construct theories of personality or human behavior but also to find ways to test and validate them. As we will see, most of the more recent theorists in personality psychology claim to have discovered empirically verified principles as opposed to untested philosophical conjectures. Some have succeeded; some have not. The authors of this text, however, have little doubt that theories of personality should be held to the same standards used to judge theories in any other science.

▣ THE MAKING OF A THEORY

In attempting to explain natural phenomena, researchers systematically observe events or conduct experiments on the subject of interest. They then review their findings, looking for any patterns or consistent outcomes that they may have uncovered. Their final step is to assess their findings in light of prior studies in the field and then propose a comprehensive explanation that links these findings with earlier and current ones. This comprehensive explanation is called a **theory**.

We can consider an example from the history of medicine that illustrates the steps in the **scientific method**. In 1847, Ignaz Semmelweis (1818–1865), a young Austrian medical graduate who had just been appointed an assistant physician in midwifery at a large hospital in Vienna, noticed a puzzling phenomenon. There were two maternity wards in the hospital; patients in the first ward, attended by fully licensed physicians and medical students, had a rate of post-childbirth infection (called “puerperal fever” or “childbed fever”) three times as high as that of patients in the second ward, who were attended only by nurses and midwives. Puerperal fever was a common cause of death following childbirth at the time that Semmelweis began his investigation.

Quantifications, observations, and measurements (sometimes called characterizations). Semmelweis began by keeping careful records of deaths from puerperal fever in the two wards under his care. In the 1840s, puerperal fever was commonly attributed to weather conditions, overcrowding in the hospital, or even the position in which the woman lay while giving birth. Semmelweis could find no correlation between climatic conditions or the number of patients in each ward and the number of cases of infection.

Hypotheses (theoretical or hypothetical explanations of the observations and measurements). Semmelweis tested the hypothesis, then widely taught in medical schools, that the position of

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the woman in childbirth was the cause of infection. He asked patients in both wards to lie in different positions during delivery. Again, he found no correlation.

Then a chance event led to the formulation of a new hypothesis. Semmelweis had a friend named Jacob Kolletschka, a professor of medicine, who died suddenly in March 1847 after performing an autopsy. During the autopsy, the professor had punctured his finger with a scalpel that had been used by one of his students to dissect an infected corpse. The description of the massive infection that killed Kolletschka haunted Semmelweis. In the younger doctor's own words,

It rushed into my mind with irresistible clearness that the disease from which Kolletschka had died was identical with that from which I had seen so many hundreds of lying-in women die. The [patients] also died from phlebitis, lymphangitis, peritonitis, pleuritis, meningitis and in them also metastases sometime occurred. (Haggard, 2004, p. 86)

Semmelweis knew that the physicians and medical students who attended the women in the first of his two wards had usually spent the morning performing autopsies in another part of the hospital. Although the doctors washed their hands afterward with ordinary soap and water, Semmelweis suspected that this cleansing was not thorough enough and that the doctors were carrying infected material from the autopsy laboratory on their hands into the first delivery ward. The reason for the lower rate of infection in the second ward was that the nurses and midwives who attended the patients in that ward were not involved with autopsies. Semmelweis then formulated his new hypothesis:

If this theory that the cadaveric material adhering to the hand can produce the same disease as the cadaveric particles adhering to the scalpel be correct, then if the cadaveric material on the hands can be completely destroyed by chemical agencies, and the genitals of the woman in labour or in the lying-in state, be brought into contact with the clean fingers only, and not simultaneously with cadaveric particles, then the disease can be prevented to the extent to which it originated by the presence of cadaveric material on the examining fingers. (Sinclair, 1909)

Predictions based on reasoning, including logical deductions from the hypotheses and theories. Next, Semmelweis predicted that the doctors' use of a strong disinfectant to cleanse their hands would lower the rate of infection among women in the first ward. He began with the nineteenth-century equivalent of chlorine bleach:

I began about the middle of May, 1847, to employ *chlorina liquida* with which every student was required to wash his hands before making an examination. After a short time a solution of *chlorinated lime* was substituted because it was not so expensive. In the month of May, 1847, the mortality in the first Clinic still amounted to over 12 per cent, with the remaining seven months it was reduced in very remarkable degree. (Sinclair, 1909)

Experiments or Tests of All of the Above. Semmelweis continued to keep records of the infection rate in the two wards following the introduction of antiseptics:

In the first seven months [from May through December of 1847] mortality was 3 per cent compared to 11.4 per cent prior to introduction of antiseptics. This compared to 2.7 per cent

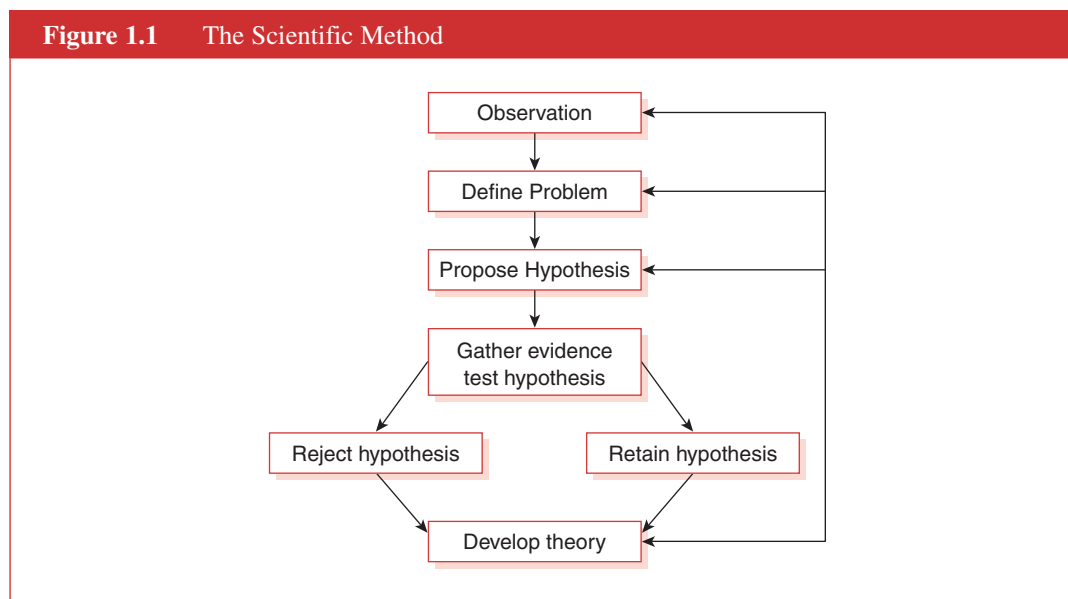
in the Second Division [ward]. In 1848 the mortality fell to 1.27 per cent versus 1.3 per cent in the Second Division. In 1848 there were two months, March and August, in which not one single death occurred among the patients of the First Division. (Sinclair, 1909)

Figure 1.2 is a visual review of the steps that psychologists and other scientists use to formulate a theory.

In any science, researchers construct a theory in such a way as to lead to **hypotheses**, or predictions based on that theory, that are subject to **verification** and **falsifiability**. That is, it must be stated in such a way that scientific experiments can be designed to test the applicability of the theory to real-world situations. Thus, a genuinely scientific theory must be precise, specific, and at least in some ways quantifiable.

To see the importance of these qualifications, let us suppose a theory that states that all manifestations of personality are a result of the soul's actions. How would we test this theory? First, we would have to define *soul* precisely. Then, we would have to devise a way to measure the soul and its effect on behavior. These measurements would be difficult at best. Although attempts were made by a Massachusetts physician named Duncan MacDougall to prove that the human soul has mass and weight (he weighed dying patients lying on a specially constructed bed in his office shortly before and shortly after death), his experiment—reported in the *New York Times* on March 11, 1907—would not have defined the soul to the satisfaction of all scientists, nor would he have proved that the soul affects human behavior even if he had succeeded in showing that it has a measurable weight.

Alternatively, suppose we have a theory that states that a person's response to fear and anger is mediated by the **amygdala** (an almond-shaped region of the brain associated with the emotions of aggression and fear). Here we have a proposition that is quite testable; it can be verified or falsified. This is exactly what Paul Whalen and his colleagues (2001) set out to do.



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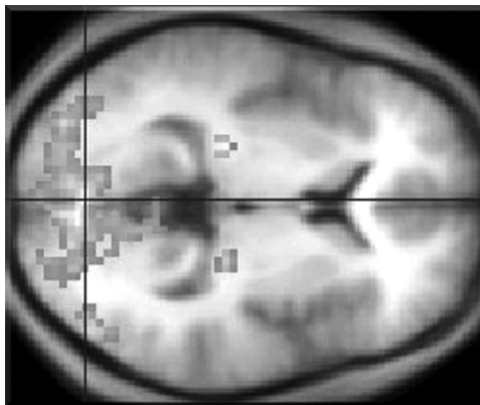
They showed participants photographs of faces expressing either fear or anger. The researchers then employed functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which is a technique that graphically depicts ongoing activity within the brain. In effect, fMRI can show the locations where thought is taking place within the brain while the subject is thinking. Whalen's team found that brain activity is significantly elevated in the amygdala when people viewed faces showing fear and is elevated to a lesser extent when they viewed angry faces.

It is important to understand that the word *theory* is used in formal science in quite a different way from its uses in ordinary speech. People often use *theory* informally to mean a guess or a hunch. In scientific usage, however, a theory is an organized set of principles that explains and makes verifiable predictions about some aspect or segment of reality. Theories are not opposed to facts; rather, facts are the building blocks of theories.

The ability to formulate specific and testable theories in personality psychology is vital if this field of study is to be a science in the full sense of the word. Yet personality psychology still lacks a full consensus as to what exactly is being studied. We can agree that the term *personality* describes enduring and reasonably consistent patterns of behavior, **perception**, attitudes, and cognition. But psychologists cannot as yet agree as to how these enduring patterns develop and come to be established in human beings.

As we move from descriptive accounts of personality to specific theories and models, we see progressive divergence among researchers in the field. When a descriptive account is founded on a theory of origin or structure, it gives way to an array of theoretical models or schools. In this context, *school* refers to a loose grouping of psychologists whose work and interpretation of data reflect a common conceptual foundation or the personal influence of a teacher. Each school attempts to provide a comprehensive and reasonably consistent understanding of patterns of human behavior. Personality psychology, more than any other area within psychology, is now defined and divided by these schools.

Image 1.2 Functional MRI Image of a Human Brain



Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, John Watson, B. F. Skinner, and Carl Rogers all set forth their own schools of personality psychology. As we will see, their models vary widely, and they were all highly individual thinkers. Such people frequently provide the impetus for new advances and ideas. However, no theorist, however gifted or original, should have his or her ideas accepted without testing and experimentation. The study of and research into human personality must proceed in an open and empirically based fashion in order to reach a point at which psychology will be able to explain and predict human behavior more accurately. A great deal of research is needed before we can even discriminate clearly between the so-called “normal” and the “pathological.”

As of the early 2000s, there is little agreement about what portion of human personality can be attributed to **genes**, biology, or biochemistry. Indeed, the ancient mind-body problem has not yet been resolved. A significant number of psychologists believe that unconscious processes actively and independently guide all human behavior. While some theorists are firm in the belief that the **unconscious** is merely a by-product of neurological processes, still others believe that personality is derived from supernatural—or at least unobservable and unfalsifiable—entities.

The significance of personality psychology as well as the importance of its continued advance and improvement is evident whenever society is threatened by a human predator or a menacing despot. Fearsome people like a serial killer or a tyrannical leader are often analyzed for media consumption by personality experts who freely make predictions of and explanations for the behavior of these sociopaths. The earliest and best-known example of this type of analysis is the psychiatrist Walter Langer’s (1899–1981) assessment of the mind of Adolf Hitler, undertaken in secrecy in 1943 for the U.S. Office of Strategic Services. Langer’s (1972) study, finally published in the 1970s, was famous for predicting that Hitler would commit suicide rather than surrender when he was forced to recognize that the war was lost.

As Langer was recruited by a wartime intelligence agency, contemporary personality specialists are called on by law enforcement agencies to develop profiles to aid in the capture of serial murderers and other criminals. An example of psychological profiling that has been used in forensic casebooks is the case of John Duffy, an English serial rapist and killer who terrorized northwest London for four years between 1982 and 1986. A professor of behavioral science at Surrey University was asked in July 1986 to draw up a psychological profile of the offender. When Duffy was arrested shortly afterward, his personality characteristics matched 13 of the 17 points in the professor’s profile (Evans, 1996, pp. 163–165).

This text will examine all the prominent schools of thought in personality psychology and will analyze and critique the numerous models offered by these schools. The authors will also present an integrative model of human personality built on the vast body of personality research and on the half-century of clinical experience of Albert Ellis and his associates.

▣ PERSONALITY: A FUZZY SET

In mathematics, a **fuzzy set** is a set of objects in which each member is assigned a number that indicates the degree to which the member belongs to the set. For example, although people are often assigned to the set of conservative or liberal, any individual’s actual assignment would, most appropriately, be a function of their accepting certain beliefs or principles over competing beliefs. Hence, as someone adopts more beliefs regarding minimal government intervention, the probability of their being assigned to the conservative set increases. In

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contrast, as someone adheres to an increasing number of beliefs in favor of social welfare programs, the probability of being assigned to the liberal set increases. Thus, unlike a more clearly defined set like gender, a membership in a fuzzy set is probabilistic.

Fuzzy set theory is often used in decision making with imprecise data. Some observers would define theories of personality as an example of a fuzzy set because the concept of personality seems so imprecise. Potter Stewart, a former associate justice of the Supreme Court, once made a telling statement about pornography. Stewart said, “I cannot define it, but I know it when I see it.” He could just as easily have been describing personality. Most of us think we have a personality; we recognize personalities in others; but most of us would have a difficult time pinning down exactly what the word means. Here are some recent attempts at defining personality:

The collective perceptions, emotions, cognitions, motivations, and actions of the individual that interact with various environmental situations. (Patrick & León-Carrión, 2001)

The psychological forces that make people uniquely themselves. (Friedman & Schustack, 2006)

The various styles of behavior that different organisms habitually reflect. (Rychlak, 1981)

The visible aspect of one’s character as it impresses others. (Random House *Webster’s College Dictionary*, 1991)

The characteristic manner in which one thinks, feels, behaves, and relates to others. (Widiger, Verheul, & van den Brink, 1999)

If we desired, we could fill an entire book with elegant but divergent definitions of personality. Most would bear a family resemblance to one another, but no two would be completely concordant. How can this be? How can a term that is used by both professionals and lay people on a daily basis not have a standard definition? Perhaps the variations exist for that very reason—that is, when a clinical or technical term enters everyday speech, it loses its original precision. For this and related reasons, the editors of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) typically change the names of several psychological disorders in each new edition. An example of this transition is the term **psychosomatic**. This term originally referred to a physical symptom or disorder caused or notably influenced by psychological dysfunction. Over time, however, *psychosomatic* came to be used in popular magazines or newspapers to refer to imaginary or **psychogenic** symptoms. It was ultimately replaced in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-IV; APA, 2000) by a diagnostic category titled Psychological Factors Affecting Medical Condition. The example given in the manual of a medical condition affected by a psychological factor is that of a person with weight-related diabetes who continues to overeat from anxiety.

The definition of personality that will be used in this text is: behaviors, styles of thought, speech, perception, and interpersonal interactions that are consistently characteristic of an individual. This definition includes both the overt and covert actions of an individual. Covert actions refer to all cognitive processes, both conscious and **nonconscious**.

It is important to note that our use of the term *nonconscious* is not the same as the psychoanalytic use of unconscious. As will be further discussed in the chapter on cognitive

models of personality, the human brain processes a great deal of information outside its field of conscious awareness. These are called nonconscious cognitions.

▣ NORMAL AND PATHOLOGICAL PERSONALITIES

Although distinguishing between a normal personality and one that is dysfunctional, ill, or otherwise problematic may seem simple, it is not. The distinction between *normal* and *abnormal* remains one of the most vexing issues in personality psychology. When describing a normal personality, we can be certain of one thing—that our definition will be found lacking at least by some people. The Quaker saying, “All the world is queer save me and thee, and sometimes I think thee is a little queer,” definitely captures the subjective nature of defining normality.

The distinction between *normal* and *pathological* is almost always arbitrary and, to some extent, an expression of the preferences of the individual making the distinction. Of course, in the case of such severe extremes as obsessive or compulsive personalities, or of individuals falling within the spectrum of **schizophrenia**, even a layperson can often determine that there is some pathology to be found in the afflicted person’s personality. It is not, for example, normal for people to hear voices commanding them to kill someone, as the assassin of President James Garfield claimed after shooting him in 1881 (Rosenberg, 1968). By definition, however, such extreme conditions are unusual.

Another obvious means of determining pathology is by self-report. People who have personalities that cause them subjective misery can clearly be categorized as having pathological characteristics. Most personalities, however, cluster around the central tendencies of the more common personality configurations. Choosing the point at which a divergence from that mean becomes pathological is difficult. It involves making sharp divisions in what is basically a continuum—a problem that recurs in other contexts.

Each of the various schools of psychology has its own means of distinguishing the normal from the pathological. For example, a Freudian psychoanalyst would posit defects in the person’s **intrapsychic** defense mechanisms, perhaps a breakdown of **ego** defenses against **id** impulses. Or the psychoanalyst might say that the overinvestment of mental energy in an intrapsychic **object** can result in a pathological personality. These terms will be explained in Chapter 4. A simpler model of pathology was proposed by the classical school of behaviorism. Behaviorists regard all personality pathology as resulting from aberrant conditioning and subsequent reinforcement. For example, a behaviorist would say that a perennially shy person was trained to be this way through parental **reinforcement**, and his/her personality remains shy due to reinforcers found in the person’s present environment.

Exercise 1

Prepare a brief outline of what you see as the elements of a normal personality and the elements of an abnormal personality. Then describe your difficulty in making the determination.

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VIGNETTE

According to the Old Testament (1 Samuel 16), David, the second king of Israel, had quite humble origins. He was an illiterate shepherd with two notable talents—fearlessness and deadly accuracy with a slingshot. These talents allowed David to rise rapidly in prestige and power when he employed them to slay the giant Philistine warrior, Goliath. After the death of King Saul in battle, David became the king of the Israelites (2 Samuel 2), but David did not fare well with the absolute power of a monarch. He became something of a tyrannical warrior king. After developing a passion for the wife of one of his officers, he conspired to send the man to his death in the front line of a battle (2 Samuel 11), essentially murdering a rival for a woman's love. In addition to David's other moral failings, he was prone to fits of exhibitionism, at one point dancing naked among his subjects (2 Samuel 6). King David is an instance of a Biblical figure whose personality became one dimension of his religious significance. Solomon was known for his wisdom and reflection (1 Kings 3), while Herod (Matthew 2) was known for his vanity and cruelty.

World history, like biblical history, is often guided by the vagaries of human personality. Alexander the Great's narcissistic conviction that he was a god, particularly after it appeared to be confirmed by an oracle at the oasis of Siwa during the Macedonian invasion of Egypt (331 BCE), played an essential role in his conquest of a great portion of the known world. Elizabeth I's reluctance to marry, possibly rooted in incestuous overtures from her stepfather during her adolescence as well as in her father Henry VIII's execution of her mother in 1536, kept England's domestic affairs free from interference by other European powers during the queen's lifetime. Mohandas Gandhi possessed a high degree of self-discipline and focus that rallied his people and led to the independence of India and Pakistan from Great Britain. In contrast, Josef Stalin's cruelty and paranoia led to a reign of terror in the Soviet Union that was responsible for the death of millions in the 1930s. The personality of key historical figures, past and present, is a major factor in the outcomes of significant events.

Each chapter of this text will include a vignette of a famous, infamous, or ordinary individual to illustrate the significance of personality in determining the fate of the individual or even the world.

Vignette Question

1. Why do you think David, despite clearly violating many social mores, is still presented as a biblical paradigm?

▣ SCHOOLS AND MODELS OF PERSONALITY

Virtually all approaches to the study of personality can be divided into two categories, idiographic and nomothetic. The oldest approach and the one employed in literature for millennia is the **idiographic**. Idiographic personality theorists stress the uniqueness of individual

personalities, suggesting that no two are exactly alike. A follower of this approach would study each person as a complete and unique entity and would not compare his or her personality to others. The Greek philosopher Theophrastus (372–287 BCE) took this approach more than 23 centuries ago, in his book *Characters*. In it, he described several prototypical personalities, most of which could easily describe a present-day person. His description of the flatterer is as follows:

The Flatterer is a person who will say as he walks with another, “Do you observe how people are looking at you? This happens to no man in Athens but you. A compliment was paid to you yesterday in the Porch. More than thirty persons were sitting there; the question was started, who is our foremost man? Everyone mentioned you first, and ended by coming back to your name.” With these and the like words, he will remove a morsel of wool from his patron’s coat; or if a speck of chaff has been laid on the other’s hair by the wind, he will pick it off; adding with a laugh, “Do you see? Because I have not met you for two days, you have had your beard full of white hairs; although no one has darker hair for his years than you.” Then he will request the company to be silent while the great man is speaking, and will praise him, too, in his hearing, and mark his approbation at a pause with “True”; or he will laugh at a frigid joke, and stuff his cloak into his mouth as if he could not repress his amusement. He will request those whom he meets to stand still until “his Honour” has passed. He will buy apples and pears and bring them in and give them to the children in the father’s presence; adding with kisses, “Chicks of a good father.” Also when he assists at the purchase of slippers, he will declare that the foot is more shapely than the shoe. If his patron is approaching a friend, he will run forward and say, “He is coming to you,” and then turning back, “I have announced you.” He is just the person, too, who can run errands to the Women’s Market without drawing breath. He is the first of the guests to praise the wine; and to say, as he reclines next the host, “How delicate is your fare!” and (taking up something from the table) “Now this—how excellent it is!” He will ask his friend if he is cold, and if he would like to put on something more; and before the words are spoken, will wrap him up. Moreover he will lean towards his ear and whisper with him; or will glance at him as he talks to the rest of the company. He will take the cushions from the slave in the theatre, and spread them on the seat with his own hands. (cited in Roback, 1928, p. 9)

Theophrastus depicts an ingratiating person whose primary goal is to gain standing with another person through psychological manipulation. Most of us have encountered or at least witnessed sycophants playing on another person’s vanity to obtain some advantage. The question raised by such people is whether they differ in kind from the majority or merely in degree of some particular trait. Those who take a **nomothetic** approach to personality psychology would strongly affirm the latter proposition. The nomothetic approach stresses that uniqueness exists only as a combination of quantifiable traits. According to this model, we all have a number of traits in common, and we differ only in the amount of each trait we possess.

The first nomothetic personality psychologist may very well have been Claudius Galen, a Greco-Roman physician of the second century CE. We have encountered Galen earlier as the writer who gave the pineal body the name by which it is still known. He proposed that various combinations of the four **humors** or bodily fluids regulated human personality. The four humors he identified were blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. According to the

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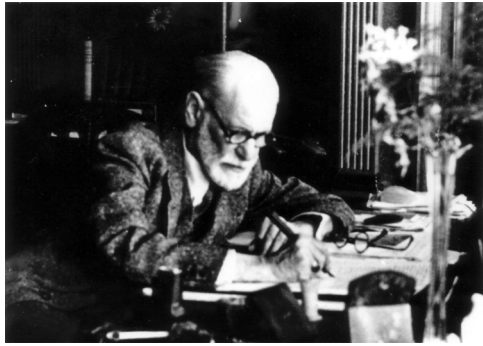


Photo 1.2 Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)

relative predominance of each humor in the individual, these fluids were supposed to produce temperaments designated respectively as *sanguine* (warm, pleasant), *phlegmatic* (slow-moving, apathetic), *melancholic* (depressed, sad), and *choleric* (quick to react, hot-tempered). From a historical perspective, Galen's four humors could be considered the equivalent of a modern four-factor (Lester, 1990) model of personality.¹

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), arguably the most influential personality theorist even in the twenty-first century, could be classified as nomothetic in his approach. He created a fascinating complex model of developmental stages, drives, and psychic structures. Indeed, he was an exceptional

observer of human behavior. Freud is justly entitled to praise for developing his complicated explanations of personality: In so doing, he made the study of personality interesting and helped to start the process of research into personality in earnest.

Freud's first attempt at understanding personality is found in his *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, written in 1895 as part of his correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess. In this early model, Freud attempted to explain consciousness and human drives as outgrowths of the structure and interrelationships of neurons or nerve cells. Failing in this project, Freud moved on to his later topological and structural models of the psyche. His system resembled the celestial model of Ptolemy (c. 90–c. 168 CE), an Egyptian astronomer who became a Roman citizen. Ptolemy explained the observed motions of the planets while holding that the Earth was at the center of the universe. Specifically, Ptolemy's geocentric system appeared somewhat accurate in predicting planetary movements, but its faulty underlying assumptions necessitated increasingly complex modifications to explain apparent exceptions. We see the same process occurring with Freud's model of the psyche. His theory of human personality was superficially accurate in its descriptions of many human attributes. As his successors examined it more closely over time, however, they found a growing number of gaps and flaws. We can only hope that had Freud lived longer, he would have adjusted his model to accommodate the evidence of current research in personality.

Freud was followed by figures like Alfred Adler (1870–1937), who added the concepts of inferiority feelings and personal striving to the Freudian system. Then there was Carl Jung (1875–1961), who added numerous mystical elements, such as the collective unconscious shared by people across generations, archetypes of unconscious symbols, and a personality typology based on four functions of the mind—thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. Karen Horney (1885–1952), variously classified as a neo-Freudian or social psychologist, produced her own brand of psychoanalysis focused on the striving child.

The vast majority of contemporary textbooks in the field of personality psychology follow a common outline, classifying personality theories into three large groups: psychoanalytic, behavioral, and humanistic. And most of these texts continue to emphasize psychoanalytic theory as a viable explanation of human personality and behavior. This text will explore this fascinating starting point, but it will also show it as just that: a starting point. This text will examine it under the bright light of contemporary research in experimental psychology.

Table 1.1 Major Schools of Personality Psychology

<i>School</i>	<i>Founders</i>	<i>Essential Premises</i>
Psychoanalytic	Sigmund Freud	Self-regulating and independent unconscious processes make up the essence of personality. They operate through mental structures that are in continual conflict.
Neo-psychoanalytic	Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, Karen Horney	Conscious individual, social, and interpersonal factors are powerful forces in shaping personality.
Humanistic	Albert Ellis, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow	People are basically good and strive toward maximum personal development or self-actualization.
Behavioral	John Watson, B. F. Skinner	Personality is the observable result of reinforcement.
Genetic/Biological	William Sheldon, Edmund O. Wilson, Hans Eysenck	Genes, hormones, and neurochemicals in the brain regulate the greater portion of human personality.
Trait	Raymond Cattell, Hans Eysenck	Differences among people can be reduced to a limited number of distinct behavioral styles or traits.
Cognitive/REBT	Albert Bandura, Ulric Neisser, Albert Ellis	Personality results from the interplay of learned and innate styles of thinking.

▣ PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

Virtually all interpersonal interactions involve a personality assessment. All prospective lovers will have their personalities rated by those who arouse their passions. And what is a job interview if not a personality test (Yadav, 1990)? As we will discuss in detail in later chapters, assessments like those carried out in job interviews may lack standardization, reliability, and validity, but they are indeed personality tests.

Every human encounter is at least in part a personality assessment. Indeed, while some observers strongly object to formal, objective, and empirically evaluated personality tests, all of us are both subjects and administrators of a subjective personality test with each such encounter. People tend to identify with generic and positive descriptions of personality; that is, we all tend to be easily convinced that someone or some system (like astrology) has captured our essence, even though it actually presents only benign generic descriptions with which most people would identify. An American psychologist named Bertram R. Forer (1914–2000) conducted an interesting experiment in 1948, which he described in an article published in 1949. He gave his students a personality test and then gave each of them a personality analysis supposedly based on the results of the test. He then asked the students to

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rate their analysis as to how well it applied to them on a scale ranging from 0 = *very poorly* to 5 = *excellent*. The students gave their analyses an average rating of 4.27. Forer then revealed that he had given all the students the identical personality analysis and that he had compiled it from a series of newspaper horoscopes. Here is the analysis that Forer (1949) gave his students:

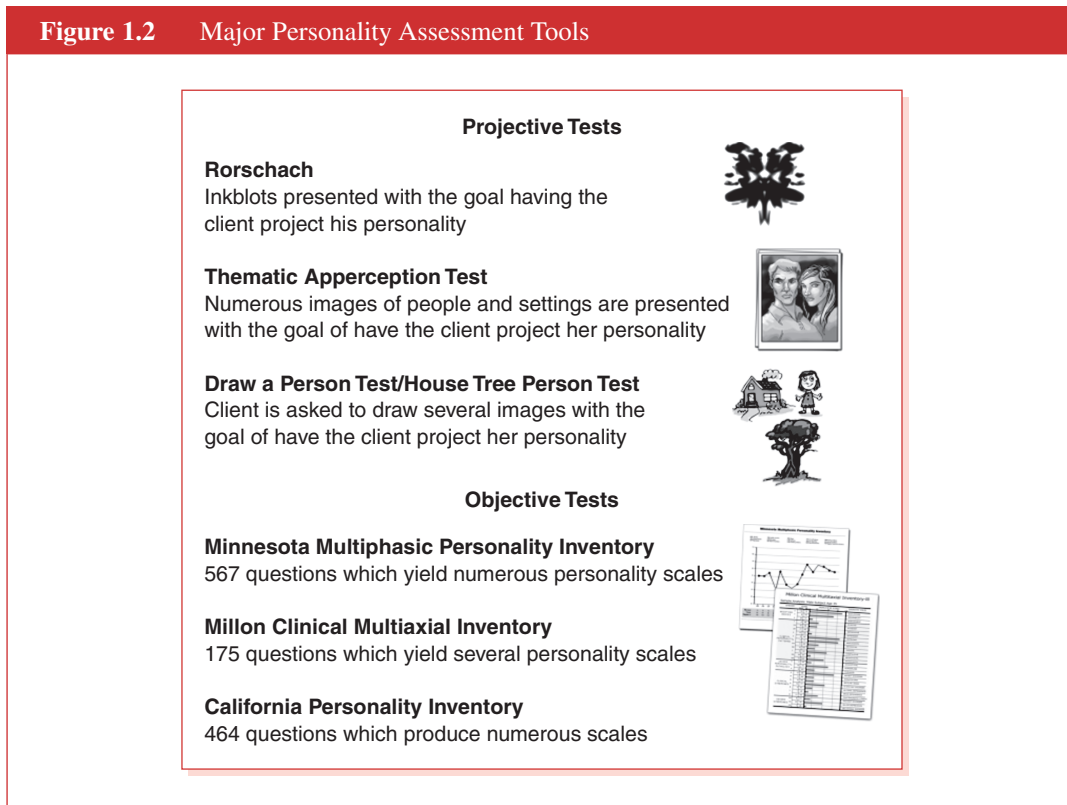
You have a need for other people to like and admire you, and yet you tend to be critical of yourself. While you have some personality weaknesses you are generally able to compensate for them. You have considerable unused capacity that you have not turned to your advantage. Disciplined and self-controlled on the outside, you tend to be worrisome and insecure on the inside. At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety and become dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations. You also pride yourself as an independent thinker; and do not accept others' statements without satisfactory proof. But you have found it unwise to be too frank in revealing yourself to others. At times you are extroverted, affable, and sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary, and reserved. Some of your aspirations tend to be rather unrealistic. (p. 120)

The principle that Forer studied was later designated the Barnum effect, after the famous showman Phineas T. Barnum, by the psychologist Paul Meehl (Dickson & Kelly, 1985).

Formal personality assessments, performed either with projective instruments like the Rorschach inkblot series, objective tests like the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), or an interview by a credentialed professional, must exceed a standard set by the Barnum effect (Andersen & Nordvik, 2002; Dickson & Kelly, 1985; Furnham & Schofield, 1987; Snyder, Shenkel, & Lowery, 1977). In other words, scientific assessment methods must be falsifiable and partly validated in ways other than by subjective agreement among examiners. Assessment tools must predict behavior better than chance, and they must be based on psychologically valid methods.

More than a modicum of research into personality has been confounded by the Barnum effect. The history of psychological research includes techniques like **phrenology**, which captivated both scientists and the lay population. For a nearly a generation the most widely known method for personality analysis, phrenology was based on the shape of persons' heads. Phrenological guidebooks sounded very much like horoscopes. Both participants and researchers endorsed personality profiles that sounded appropriate, even though the profiles did not have a meaningful association with the behavior of the individuals they sought to measure. The legacy we can derive from such techniques is caution. As we will show, all techniques used to assess personality must be at a minimum superior to methods that appear meaningful largely as a result of the Barnum effect.

The Rorschach, the Thematic Apperception Test, and the Draw-A-Person Test are all examples of personality tests predicated on the notion that dynamic unconscious forces lie at the foundation of human personality. These and similar assessment tools have a long and controversial history in the study of personality and will be examined in detail. Such objective tests as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory, the California Personality Inventory, and the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule have a slightly shorter history of use. These tests are generally based on empirical research

Figure 1.2 Major Personality Assessment Tools

and are continually evaluated and updated on the basis of more recent evidence. They have the marked advantage of avoiding the taint of administrative bias.

The specific meaning of the items or questions in these assessment instruments is not as important as the casual observer might think. The way a person responds to clusters of these items actually constitutes characteristic behavioral responses associated with personality types or traits. This approach to personality assessment has proven to have a high level of **validity**. On the horizon are new techniques utilizing fMRI, positron emission tomography (PET) scans, and others that directly associate personality with activity in specific areas of the brain. These techniques are in their infancy; but it is likely that the next generation of personality psychologists will have powerful tools to assist them in understanding human nature.

▣ TRAITS, TYPOLOGIES, AND CHARACTER

Most of us are inclined to categorize people; psychologists are no exception. Freud proposed several character types based on his theory of childhood development. The so-called oral, anal, urethral, phallic, and genital personalities refer to persons whose sexual energies became diverted or stalled during certain phases of development. The English language is

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replete with far more terms that describe types of character or personality. Words like *shy*, *aggressive*, *kind*, *introverted*, *neurotic*, or *fixated* are just samples of the nearly 17,000 English terms that describe personal attributes. The abundance of these descriptors raises an important question: Did natural language evolve to describe personality accurately? Or do these terms really describe overt behaviors rather than lasting and enduring traits?

The evidence seems to suggest a weak *yes* to the former supposition. Most personality psychologists generally agree that composites of these terms are indeed useful in describing human personality when combined along specific dimensions known as factors. As of the early 2000s, the Five-Factor Model best describes the dimensions of personality. There are, however, a two-factor (Block, 2001), a three-factor (Eysenck, 1991, 1992, 1994; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1971), a four-factor (Brown, Strong, & Rencher, 1974; Merenda, 1987), and even a sixteen-factor (Delhees & Cattell, 1970) model of personality. All have research supporting them, and all have adherents. Some of the traits associated with the Eysenck two-factor and the Cattell sixteen-factor personality models are presented in Figure 1.4.

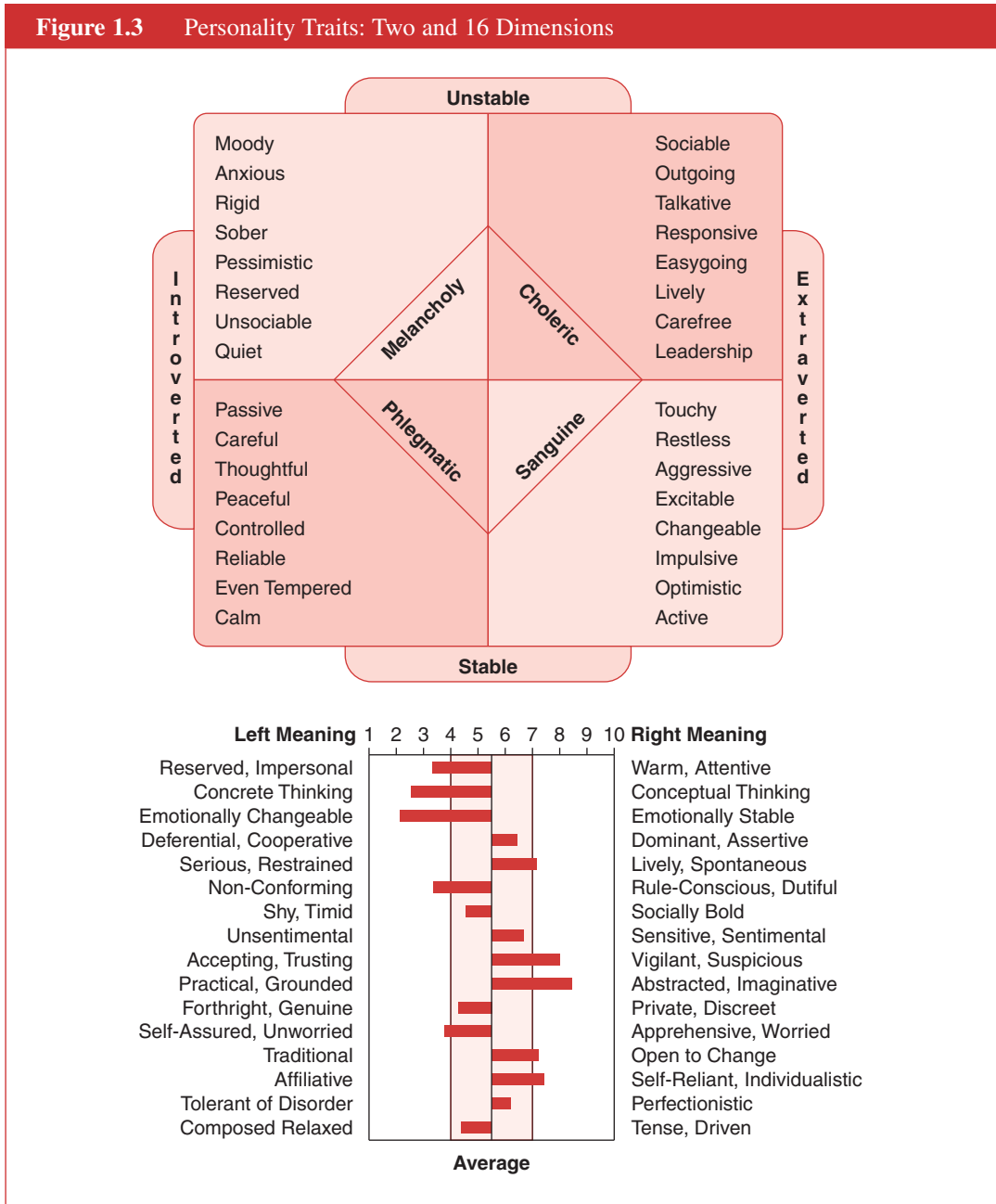
Thus the student of personality psychology must be prepared to examine the various systems that explain human personality and look more deeply into those that make the most sense. Unlike some other fields of study, personality psychology is still a work in progress that does not yet have universally accepted principles. Many psychologists still subscribe to one of the various schools of personality theory. The authors of this text will help you in this process of exploring the various options but we recommend that you engage the different points of view with an open and critical mind.

THE RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE

In addition to a thorough review of the major theories and perspectives, this text will set forth its own model and perspective, based on the work of its first author, Dr. Albert Ellis (1913–2007). His theory of personality, referred to as the Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) model, is described here. Dr. Ellis practiced psychoanalysis in New York City prior to 1955 but left the field of traditional psychoanalysis in that year to practice a more directive form of psychotherapy, which he first called Rational-Emotive Therapy or RET. He later changed its name to Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT). For close to half a century the practice of REBT has been predicated on a theory of human personality, but prior to the early 2000s, Ellis’s theory has largely been implied in his books rather than stated explicitly.

Ellis’s formal break with his psychoanalytic training came with the publication of his paper, “Rational Psychotherapy,” which was first delivered as a lecture at the American Psychological Association’s annual convention in Chicago on August 31, 1956. The paper was then published in the *Journal of General Psychology*; it was one of the earliest contributions to cognitive theories of personality.

Unlike such theorists as George Kelly (1905–1966) and Albert Bandura (1925–), Ellis was a clinician who described his findings in clinical terms. And unlike most theoretical psychologists, his point of view was based on the accumulated experience of working closely with more than 10,000 persons in therapy over the course of half a century. Ellis (1958a, 1976) observed early in his career that a key component of human personality is irrationality, which often leads to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dysfunction. An example of what Ellis meant by irrationality is the tendency of people to prefer short-term satisfaction of desires



(“I *must* have what I want *now*”) to longer-term benefits (“It’s better to build a good credit rating by paying my bills on time than a poor one caused by overspending”). Ellis said in 1987,

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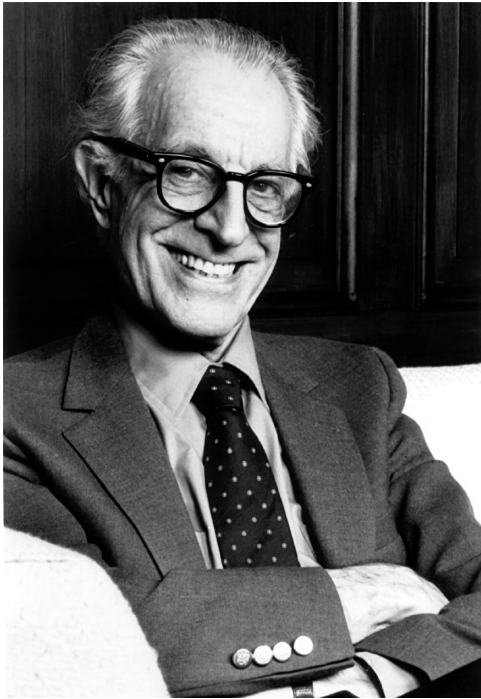


Photo 1.3 Dr. Albert Ellis (1913–2007)

I am still haunted by the reality, however, that humans—and I mean practically all humans—have a strong biological tendency to needlessly and severely disturb themselves and that, to make matters much worse, they also are powerfully predisposed to unconsciously and habitually prolong their mental dysfunctioning and to fight like hell against giving it up. No, I do not think they are masochistic—I think . . . that they are obsessed with the pleasures of the moment rather than of the future. (p. 365)

The treatment of irrational thinking became one of the primary predicates of his clinical method and theory of personality. This text will be the first work to comprehensively examine and integrate the vast body of thought and research on this subject by Ellis, his students, and his associates.

REBT uses a multifactorial and biological view of personality. Ellis's assertion that people are innately irrational has been validated by numerous studies (Ellis, 1976; Kendler, Myers, & Prescott, 2002; Kendler, Jacobson, Myers, & Prescott, 2002; Kendler, Myers, Prescott, & Neale, 2001; Knowles, Mannuzza, & Fyer, 1995; Ruth, 1992). This idea is not new, and in fact, it was a premise of the early

psychoanalysts. For example, Morton Prince (1854–1929), the founder of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, stated the following in an early text on personality theory:

There is every reason to believe that intrinsically there is no essential difference between those physiological dispositions and activities of the lower nervous centers (subcortical ganglia and spinal cord), which condition and determine unconscious behavior, and those dispositions and activities of the higher centers—the cortex—which condition and determine both conscious and unconscious behavior. The former are undoubtedly innate in that they are primarily conditioned by inherited anatomical and physiological prearrangements of neurons and the latter are preeminently acquired through experience although probably not wholly so. (Our knowledge of the localization of function in the nervous system is not sufficiently definite to enable us to delimit the localization of either innate or acquired dispositions.) (Prince, 1921, p. 230)

Prince's proposition that personality can best be understood through the understanding of the brain is not new, but models of personality must integrate current neurological research to the greatest extent possible.

REBT views the brain as the seat of personality and genetics as the blueprint of the brain's development. It also regards these same factors as the basis of the irrationality that distorts much of our personality. Many behavioral dispositions are genetic in origin and, like most

other genetic traits, developed as adaptations to the environment. This pattern of adaptation will be explored further in the section on natural selection. The connections between genetic endowments and personality can be better understood when we examine some other paradoxes of human evolution. For example, people born with the trait for sickle cell anemia have an adaptive advantage over those who lack the trait in countries where malaria is endemic. Evolutionary advantage may also explain genetic tendencies toward obesity in some populations. In times of famine, people who gain weight easily, have a lower metabolic rate, and are more motivated to seek food will be far more likely to survive and reproduce.

In the same manner as obesity and the sickle cell trait, many human behavioral tendencies evolved in very different ecological settings from those of our current world. The environment in which modern humans lived as hunters and gatherers for 99% of their existence has been termed the **environment of evolutionary adaptedness** (EEA) by John Bowlby (1907–1990) as part of his **attachment theory**. The human EEA is broadly identified with the Pleistocene era, a period of prehistoric time that began about 1.8 million years ago and ended about 12,000 years ago. Modern humans are left with behavioral and emotional residues that were probably quite adaptive in the Pleistocene era. For example, the well-known “fight or flight” reaction to stress increased a primitive human’s chances of survival when confronted by a predatory animal. In the contemporary world, however, this same reaction may predispose us to respond with inappropriate and maladaptive emotions—as when a driver cut off in traffic gives in to “road rage” and behaves in ways that may actually cost lives (Gaylin, 1984, p. 124). It follows then that much of what is considered unacceptable behavior not only might be beneficial in a different environment but might actually endow some people with a distinct survival advantage. The concept of the EEA is integral to the REBT model of personality and psychotherapy. People are innately irrational partly because they have acquired a set of behavioral inclinations adapted to different times and places.

As Daniel Kahneman (1934–) and his colleague Amos Tversky (1937–1996) (Kahneman & Tversky, 2000; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973, 1983) have observed, people make decisions based on universal **heuristics**, or rules of thumb encoded in the human psyche by evolutionary processes. These rules of thumb are used by psychologists to explain how people make decisions or value judgments, or solve problems when they are dealing with incomplete information. Many of these heuristics may superficially seem logical and adaptive, but on closer examination, they lead to poor or biased decisions. A commonplace example, well-known to the advertising industry, is that people typically perceive an expensive name brand of food as tasting “better” than a generic store brand. Kahneman and Tversky concluded that people have a very poor ability to judge probabilities.

Such a universal tendency is unlikely to be accidental. These heuristics, like Bowlby’s (1982) attachment theory, may be an evolutionary residue that allowed humans to make snap judgments in less complex times. The “quick and dirty” decision strategies essential in avoiding information overload but likely to lead to fallacies are called cognitive heuristics.

The REBT view of personality makes no use of a dynamic unconscious in the Freudian sense but fully acknowledges the significance of nonconscious processes in personality (Beck & Hollon, 1993; Ellis, 1995b; Kihlstrom et al., 1988; Lewicki, Czyzewska, & Hill, 1997). Given the vast accumulation of research by cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists, and other researchers, this finding must be accepted as beyond serious dispute. Furthermore, REBT differs dramatically from the psychodynamic schools of therapy in that the nonconscious foundations of personality are often viewed as secondary to the conscious.

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As this book will show in detail, psychodynamic theorists believe that the most productive work takes place in therapy when the unconscious is made conscious. In contrast, altering nonconscious emotions and information is not the primary goal of REBT because the evidence shows that the nonconscious aspects of mental processing are frequently not directly accessible through talk therapy. REBT accepts people as conscious and free agents capable of overt volition. It acknowledges that all people have powerful innate inclinations, such as the tendency to experience fear or anger. When we examine the biological stratum of personality, we will see that our genes and physical constitution endow us with the primitive fundamentals of our being; the quintessence of personality, however, is the collection of beliefs and attitudes that overlie these basic endowments.

Another essential aspect of the REBT model is the notion that personality can be understood only as a synthesis of biological and behavioral psychology. Students of personality failing to consider both factors have frequently drawn defective inferences about human behavior. Failure to acknowledge these two dimensions of personality has led to what is called the cardinal causation error of personality psychology. This error occurs when mental health clinicians and researchers infer causal relationships between an adult's personality and the behavior of his or her parents. For example, an individual presents to a therapist as an introverted, insecure, and anxious individual. This individual then reports that he was emotionally and physically abused by his father. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* (a Latin phrase that can be translated as "after this; therefore, because of this"): The therapist concludes that the cause of this individual's personality pathology is his father's treatment of him. This conclusion has been a mainstay of clinicians. REBT posits an alternative interpretation.

Parents with aberrant tendencies will tend to pass these unfortunate characteristics to all or some of their offspring. These aberrant parents will also tend to act out their behavioral disturbances with at least some of their children. When the situation is viewed superficially, it seems compellingly obvious that the abusive treatment is the direct cause of the child's ultimate behavioral disturbances, but the important genetic connection tends to be overlooked. In Chapter 16, evidence will show that it is not the disturbed upbringing that leads to the greatest portion of adult personality disturbances, but the child's genetic legacy combined with the overall social and environmental milieu.

Research will be provided to support this contention, and it will be contrasted with other prominent views. It is important to remember that the personality psychologist must keep an open mind to new ideas as well as continually challenge and test accepted ones. Consequently, the REBT model of personality takes a strongly scientific position that differs from those of many early schools of personality psychology. It advocates an open-ended process of continual testing of hypotheses and, when appropriate, modification of them. The authors believe this process to be the standard for any principle or theory in either applied or research psychology. The study of personality must be dynamic and not bogged down by undue regard for the past.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The study and understanding of personality is important within the field of psychology and many other disciplines in which people are evaluated. Personality theory is the study of the ways in which people differ from one another. It focuses on those differences in the way

people think, behave, and process information. And it is these differences that define personality itself. Despite this working definition, personality is difficult to define precisely, as the many experts in the field of personality psychology differ in their standards and instruments of measurement.

Throughout history philosophers, politicians, physicians, jurists, and psychologists have developed theories to explain how and why the differences among people occur. Most had the goal of explaining or predicting human behavior. More recently, techniques have been developed to assess personality. These can include formal tests like the MMPI-II or such informal measures as simple observation. Assessment of personality is essential to understanding the individual and the ability to make generalizations about people. These generalizations commonly include classifying people by personality traits, which are the distinguishing characteristics of a person, and types that describe a person's overall pattern of interacting, behaving, and thinking. This chapter also introduced a new model of personality based on the work of Albert Ellis, who developed REBT.

NOTE

1. A **factor** is an interpreted summary of multiple correlations combined in a statistical method called factor analysis. It is an approach that has been extensively employed in personality research. Galen, of course, did not use this mathematical method.

