CHAPTER 1

Studying the Person

What Do We Know When We Know a Person?
- Sketching an Outline: Dispositional Traits
- Filling in the Details: Characteristic Adaptations
- Constructing a Story: Integrative Life Narratives

Science and the Person
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Personality Psychology
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Summary
If you are reading this book, then you are (most likely) a person! Personality psychology is the scientific study of the whole person. Therefore, personality psychology and this book are fundamentally about you.

When you began to study psychology, you may have expected that all of the courses you might take—indeed the entire field of psychology itself—would be about you, or at least about people like you. After all, what is psychology about if not people? But if you have taken an introductory psychology class, you probably now know that psychology is about many things: perception and attention, cognition and memory, neurons and brain circuitry, abnormal behavior, social behavior, therapy, the behavior of birds, chimps, and the white rat, and on and on. Although many fields in psychology examine particular parts or views of the person, only one field purports to study the person as a whole. In personality psychology we try to put it all together. We try to understand the individual human being as a complex whole. Welcome to personality psychology! I am happy we have finally found each other.

The ultimate goal of personality psychology is to construct a scientifically credible account of psychological individuality. Such an account must situate a person in a biological and cultural context while specifying how that person is similar to and different from other persons. Personality psychologists often study individual differences in people. They develop ways to classify, categorize, and organize the diversity of psychological individuality, and they look for the biological and environmental forces and factors that explain those differences. How do personality psychologists do this? How do they endeavor to give a scientific account of an individual human life?

In truth, it turns out that personality psychologists proceed in a manner that is similar to what we all do when we try to understand ourselves and one another. In that each of us expends a good deal of energy talking and thinking about particular persons, each of us is something of an amateur personality psychologist. Personality psychology formalizes and systematizes the general human effort to know persons. But we all already have a great deal of experience with knowing persons. What do we know when we know a person? And how do we talk about what we know?

What Do We Know When We Know a Person?

Imagine for a moment that you are new on campus. You want to meet people, and you want to make some new friends. You are also eager to pursue some of your professional interests, which include writing and journalism. So you attend a planning meeting for the student newspaper. You would like to work as a reporter for the paper. It is a good meeting, and you learn a great deal about the newspaper and the staff. You listen to stories about how much fun it is to work on the paper and about how difficult it can be to balance work on the newspaper with the other things you need to do in college, such as attend classes. Afterward, one of the senior reporters asks you to join her and a few editors for coffee at her apartment. You say yes.

The evening goes very well. At the party, you have many opportunities to observe the young woman who invited you in the first place. Let us call her Amanda. Amanda seems very different from the rest of this friendly crowd. Everybody else is lounging around the apartment, freely talking, eating, drinking, and generally having a very good time. But at the beginning of the evening, Amanda seems tense. You expect that since she invited people to her apartment, she would feel right at home, that she would be welcoming and comfortable. Instead, she stays out of the boisterous conversations of the group; she never tells any stories, even after one of the editors asks her what she thinks about a professor they both know. She hardly smiles at all. Her friends do not seem to be bothered by this, as if she acts this way often. Nonetheless, you think it is strange, and stranger still when you spot her a little later typing on her laptop in the bedroom. It looks as if she is sending an e-mail message.

Returning to the living room, you make a mild joke about Amanda preferring the Internet to the company of real people. “No,” the paper’s sports editor maintains, “Amanda likes everybody. She is just a little moody and unpredictable. I wouldn’t worry about her.”
The rest of the evening proves him right, at least with respect to his claim that Amanda is unpredictable. When she returns from her computer, Amanda warms up appreciably. She is hardly the life of the party, but now she smiles more and seems much more attentive to what is going on. Later, she seeks you out and asks you about your past, your tastes in music, courses you might take, why you moved from sunny California to this rainy campus, what you’ve loaded recently onto your iPod, whether or not you have met some of the more annoying people on campus—the usual sorts of things people talk about when they are just getting to know each other. She tells you about herself. Over the course of a half-hour conversation, you learn the following things about Amanda:

1. Amanda once shared this apartment with two roommates, but both moved out because they did not like Amanda’s boyfriend, who visited frequently. Amanda doesn’t like him anymore, either. They broke up last month.

2. Amanda stepped down from an editorial position on the paper last year in order to devote more time to her classes. Had she not, she might have been editor-in-chief this year, but she might have also flunked out of school. She is happier now that she is a reporter again, but she misses the power that came with her previous position.

3. The apartment is filled with books on psychology, philosophy, and religion. Amanda’s major, however, is political science. She eventually wants to go to law school, that is, if her grades improve. She doesn’t seem to know much about law or politics, however.

4. Amanda used to do yoga. She works out at the gym almost everyday. She loves junk food, and she eats a great deal of it over the course of the evening. She is tall and slim. She claims she has never dieted.

5. Despite all the books on religion, Amanda maintains she is an atheist. Her father, who died 2 years ago, was a Baptist minister. After squandering years of his youth on alcohol and drugs, her father experienced a religious conversion in young adulthood. He always said that the day he was “saved” was the happiest day of his life. Shortly after that experience, he married the woman who was to become Amanda’s mother. But the two divorced 3 years before he died. “I loved him and I hated him,” Amanda says.

6. Amanda doesn’t like the popular music that you like. She prefers jazz and bands popular in the 1970s.

Around 11:00 p.m., the party winds down, and people begin to leave. You and Amanda have agreed to get together tomorrow for lunch, to talk more about the newspaper and life on campus. You are struck by how much she seems to have changed over the course of the evening. Amanda was nervous and sullen at the beginning. Now she is kissing people goodbye! She seems to linger a bit longer than you expect with her goodbye to the sports editor. You hadn’t noticed anything special between them before, but now you begin to wonder.

**SKETCHING AN OUTLINE: DISPOSITIONAL TRAITS**

How well do you know Amanda? After an evening with her friends and coworkers and after spending some time talking with her alone, you have begun to form some impressions about this woman. How would you describe her?

One of the first things you might say about Amanda is that she is a little moody and unpredictable. Of course, you have seen her in only one setting. It is difficult to generalize with any confidence. But you were surprised by how sullen and tense she was at the beginning of the evening and how much more comfortable she seemed by the end. Throughout the evening, however, Amanda was kind and considerate toward everybody. The sports editor remarked that Amanda likes everybody, and it seemed to you that everybody likes Amanda as well. She was certainly friendly to you during the second half of the evening. She asked a lot of questions about your life; she listened very intently; she seemed genuinely interested in you; she invited you for lunch tomorrow. What does this all mean?
You might say that, in very general terms, Amanda seems to be moody but very warm and caring. There is a gentleness about her that is evident in her speech and actions. She is not a domineering person.

In suggesting that Amanda is relatively moody, warm, and nondomineering, you have begun to sketch a personality portrait. You have begun to organize what you think you might now know about Amanda into some general statements concerning her characteristic patterns of behavior, thought, and feeling. Of course, you are doing this with skimpy behavioral evidence that is not sufficient to give you complete confidence in your initial attributions. In other words, it may turn out that you do not know what you are talking about! You may be completely wrong about her. After all, you have observed her behavior on only one occasion. Maybe she is rarely moody; maybe she dominates many other social situations. Maybe she is warm and friendly with strangers, like you, but as you get to know her better she becomes distant and cool. Maybe she was having an especially good day, or an especially bad one. You just don’t know much yet. But you have to start somewhere. And where I think you are likely to start is with dispositional traits.

Personality traits are those general, internal, and comparative dispositions that we attribute to people in our initial efforts to sort individuals into meaningful behavioral categories and to account for consistencies we perceive or expect in behavior from one situation to the next and over time. You do not know Amanda well yet, but based on what you have observed you might begin to suppose that, in general, she tends to be relatively more moody, warm, and caring than many, if not most, other people, and relatively less domineering. These kinds of trait attributions might guide you in your future interactions with Amanda in that they might give you some clues about what to expect from her.

Personality psychologists have identified many different methods for quantifying individual differences in dispositional traits. The most common procedure is to administer self-report questionnaires, such as the one presented in Table 1.1. The rationale behind this method is that most people probably have a good idea of what their basic traits are. People know, for example, how friendly they are compared to other individuals. They have a pretty good read on how conscientious, moody, dominant, open-minded, or gullible they may be. Therefore, it makes good sense to present them with simple questions or items similar to those in Table 1.1 and ask them to respond honestly.

You should answer each of the 20 items in Table 1.1 to see how you score on the trait measured therein. What do you think the scale measures?

Personality psychologists make good use of the concept of trait in their efforts to sketch an overall outline of a person’s individuality. Some of the most influential theories in the history of personality psychology, such as those proposed by Hans Eysenck (1952) and Raymond B. Cattell (1943), have been built around the concept of the personality trait. One of the singular contributions of personality psychology is the construction and validation of scientifically useful measures of individual differences in personality traits (Orr & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Wiggins, 1973). Good trait measures are useful in predicting behavior over time and across situations (Epstein, 1979). They have also been employed in efforts to discern the biological bases of human behavior (Zuckerman, 1995, 2005).

How many dispositional traits might there be? Many years ago, two psychologists went to the English-language dictionary and counted more than 18,000 words that referred to psychological states, traits, and evaluations (Allport & Odert, 1936). Of those, about 4,500 seemed to refer to relatively stable and enduring dispositional traits. Since then, psychological research has winnowed the list down considerably. Today, many personality psychologists argue that the many different dispositional traits that might be invoked to outline psychological individuality can be grouped into about five categories (Costa & McCrae, 1985; Goldberg, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1999; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). The Big Five trait categories are listed in Table 1.2 using their most common names: Openness to Experience (O), Conscientiousness (C), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), and Neuroticism (N). The five superordinate trait categories are easy to remember because their
**TABLE 1.1 A TRAIT QUESTIONNAIRE**

For each of the following 20 questions, answer either yes (if it is generally true for you) or no (if it is generally not true for you).

1. Do you often long for excitement?
2. Are you usually carefree?
3. Do you stop and think things over before doing anything?
4. Would you do almost anything for a dare?
5. Do you often do things on the spur of the moment?
6. Generally, do you prefer reading to meeting people?
7. Do you prefer to have few but special friends?
8. When people shout at you, do you shout back?
9. Do other people think of you as very lively?
10. Are you mostly quiet when you are with people?
11. If there is something you want to know about, would you rather look it up in a book than talk to someone about it?
12. Do you like the kind of work that you need to pay close attention to?
13. Do you hate being with a crowd of people who play jokes on one another?
14. Do you like doing things in which you have to act quickly?
15. Are you slow and unhurried in the way you move?
16. Do you like talking to people so much that you never miss a chance to talk to a stranger?
17. Would you be unhappy if you could not see lots of people most of the time?
18. Do you find it hard to enjoy yourself at a lively party?
19. Would you say that you are fairly self-confident?
20. Do you like playing pranks on others?

To arrive at your score, give one point for each of the following items answered yes: #1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20. Then, give yourself one point for each of the following items answered no: #3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18. Add up all the points to arrive at a total score. Your total score should be between 0 and 20, inclusive.

As you may have guessed by now, this scale measures the trait of extraversion. The higher your score, the higher your extraversion (and, therefore, the lower your introversion). Therefore, high scores suggest a tendency toward extraversion and low scores suggest a tendency toward introversion. Most people score somewhere in the middle.


first letters spell the word OCEAN. The Big Five traits provide a comprehensive description of basic dimensions of variability in human psychological qualities that are implicated in consequential social behavior—a vast ocean of concepts for describing general psychological differences between persons. The Big Five traits sketch the outline of the person. But if you want to fill in some of the details, you have to go beyond dispositional traits.

**FILLING IN THE DETAILS: CHARACTERISTIC ADAPTATIONS**

In your evening with Amanda, you learned a number of things and developed a number of ideas about her that do not fit neatly into the categories of personality traits. For example, you learned that she likes junk food and jazz, that she works out at the gym regularly, that she wants to be a lawyer but
TABLE 1.2  THE BIG FIVE: ADJECTIVE ITEMS THAT DESCRIBE EACH OF THE FIVE BASIC DISPOSITIONAL TRAITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extraversion (E)</th>
<th>Agreeableness (A)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociable–Retiring</td>
<td>Good natured–Irritable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun loving–Serious</td>
<td>Soft hearted–Ruthless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allofrequent–Reserved</td>
<td>Courteous–Rude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly–Alone</td>
<td>Forgiving–Vengeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous–Inhibited</td>
<td>Sympathetic–Callous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkative–Quiet</td>
<td>Agreeable–Disagreeable</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neuroticism (N)</th>
<th>Conscientiousness (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worrying–Calm</td>
<td>Conscientious–Negligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous–At ease</td>
<td>Careful–Careless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-strung–Relaxed</td>
<td>Reliable–Undependable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure–Secure</td>
<td>Well organized–Disorganized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-pitying–Self-satisfied</td>
<td>Self-disciplined–Weak-willed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable–Hardy</td>
<td>Persevering–Quitting</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Openness to Experience (O)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original–Conventional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative–Down to earth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative–Uncreative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad interests–Narrow interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex–Simple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curious–Incurious</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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doesn’t know much about law, that she wanted to be editor-in-chief of the newspaper but dropped out of the running when her grades began to suffer, that she is very interested in popular psychology and mysticism, that she is an atheist, that she may be having a romantic relationship with the sports editor, that she recently broke off a romantic relationship, that she once stole off to her bedroom to type an e-mail message while hosting a party (you saw her do it). All of this material helps to fill in the details of Amanda’s psychological individuality. As you spend more time with Amanda, you will gather many more details. As you move beyond dispositional traits in your assessment of Amanda’s individuality, you look for ways to organize the details. Personality psychologists offer a number of ways to do this. There is a vast domain in personality research that includes concepts for thinking and talking about the details of psychological individuality. In Amanda’s case, we might talk about her relatively strong need for power, as expressed in her desire to be editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, and the ways in which that need conflicts with other needs and demands in her life. We might consider her pattern of interests and values. We might suspect that she has substituted mysticism and New Age psychology for her childhood Baptist faith. Her spirituality focuses on her own inner development rather than on the external world. Self-improvement is important to her, as reflected in her reading interests and in her commitment to physical fitness. While she is a warm and caring person, she values the inner life over external and societal concerns, despite the fact that she wants to be a lawyer and that she enjoys wielding influence over others. Not surprising for a young, unmarried woman in contemporary American society, Amanda is concerned about romantic relationships. She has experienced disappointment in love. How does she view the prospects of love and intimacy? Because her parents divorced, does she worry that she will be unable to sustain a long-term romantic relationship?
Trait attributions are useful because they tell us about trends in behavior over time and across different situations, settings, and contexts. In talking about the psychological details of Amanda’s individuality, however, we have moved beyond general trait attributions to consider aspects of her personality that are contextualized in time, place, and/or role. The particulars of Amanda’s personality include attributions that are situated in time: As a child she was a Baptist, but now she is an atheist; at this time in her life, she is concerned about romantic relationships; she wants to be a lawyer in the future. In addition, some aspects of Amanda’s personality are couched in terms of particular places or situations: At parties, she is slow to warm up; one-on-one, she can be very intimate. Finally, we can identify psychological aspects of Amanda’s individuality that come out only within particular social roles: As a student, she works very hard and virtually always succeeds when she has enough time; as a citizen, she is unaware of political happenings and has little knowledge of current events.

Borrowing a term from McCrae and Costa (1996), I will use the expression characteristic adaptations for those aspects of personality that are contextualized in time, place, and/or role. Characteristic adaptations are contextualized facets of psychological individuality that speak to motivational, cognitive, and developmental concerns in personality. As we will see in Chapters 7–9, characteristic adaptations address many of the most important questions in personality psychology: What do people want? How do people seek what they desire and avoid what they fear? How do people develop plans, goals, and programs for their lives? How do people think about and cope with the challenges of social life? What psychological and social tasks await people at particular stages or times in their lives?

Many of the greatest theories in the history of personality psychology have addressed questions regarding characteristic adaptations. We can group these theories into three major categories. First, there are theories of human motivation, which essentially speak to the question of what people fundamentally want or desire in life. Sigmund Freud (1900/1953) suggested that humans are motivated by deep urges regarding sexuality and aggression. By contrast, Carl Rogers (1951) and other humanistic psychologists (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1991; Maslow, 1968) placed prime importance on needs for self-actualization and other growth-promoting human tendencies. Henry Murray (1938) enumerated a list of more than 20 basic psychological needs or motives, and David McClelland (1985) devoted his long career to studying three of them—the needs for achievement, power, and affiliation/intimacy. Second, there are theories of cognition and personality, which underscore the role of cognitive factors—values, beliefs, expectancies, schemas, plans, personal constructs, cognitive styles—in human individuality. Historically, the most famous of these theories is probably George Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory, but many contemporary approaches to personality also emphasize cognitive or social-cognitive factors and processes (e.g., Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). A third set of theories is more explicitly developmental, focusing on the evolution of the self and its relationships with others from birth to old age. Erik Erikson’s (1963) theory of psychosocial development and Jane Loevinger’s (1976) theory of ego development are among the most influential and far-reaching developmental theories of personality ever created.

Table 1.3 outlines some of the most important ideas and theories that fall under the general rubric of characteristic adaptations. Theories of human motivation, for example, specify such characteristic adaptations as human needs, motives, goals, and strivings. Social-cognitive theories of personality speak to adaptations such as personal constructs, beliefs, values, schemas, and personal ideologies. Developmental theories address questions of stages, pathways, and developmental tasks in psychological individuality. The different ideas and approaches in Table 1.3 cover a large territory. Different entries in the table emphasize very different aspects of psychological individuality. But what they all have in common is that they help to address many of the details that must be filled in after a general dispositional outline is sketched. As you move from dispositional traits to characteristic adaptations in the study of persons, you move from a focus on personality structure to one that emphasizes personality dynamics, process, and change (Cantor & Zirkel, 1990; Cervone, Shadel, & Fencius, 2001). In examining the details, you begin to explore aspects of psychological
TABLE 1.3 A SELECTION OF CHARACTERISTIC ADAPTATIONS AND A SELECTION OF CORRESPONDING CLASSIC THEORIES

| Motivational theories and concepts: drives, needs, motives, goals, strivings, personal projects, current concerns |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sigmund Freud (1900/1953) | Unconscious drives/needs for sexuality and aggression |
| Henry Murray (1938) | More than 20 psychogenic needs, such as needs for achievement, power, and affiliation/intimacy |
| Carl Rogers (1951) | Fundamental need for self-actualization motivates healthy, growth-inducing behavior |
| Abraham Maslow (1968) | A hierarchy of needs, running from physiological and safety needs to esteem and actualization needs |
| Deci and Ryan (1991) | Three basic growth needs: autonomy, competence, relatedness |

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social-cognitive theories and concepts: personal constructs, beliefs, values, expectancies, schemas, cognitive styles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Kelly (1955)</td>
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<td>Cantor and Kihlstrom (1987)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Self-developmental theories and concepts: stages, pathways, developmental tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erik Erikson (1963)</td>
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<td>Jane Loevinger (1976)</td>
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individuality that may be more fluid and malleable than what you would typically see if you were to stick exclusively to the trait outline with which you began.

**CONSTRUCTING A STORY: INTEGRATIVE LIFE NARRATIVES**

Now that you have begun to outline Amanda’s individuality with dispositional traits and you have filled in some of the details by entertaining characteristic adaptations that speak to motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental concerns, what more is there to do? Is anything missing? What seems to be missing is any mention of what Amanda’s life means. More specifically, what does her life overall mean to her. In what sense does Amanda organize her life into a unified and purposeful whole? These sorts of questions about persons are questions of identity (Erikson, 1959; McAdams, 1985c).

Identity is the problem of unity and purpose in life, a problem—or better, a challenge—that many persons, especially those living in modern societies, first encounter as they move from adolescence into young adulthood. Amanda is a young adult. What is her identity? What provides her life with an overall sense of unity, purpose, and meaning?

The question of identity points to a third way to think about psychological individuality. Beyond traits and adaptations, many people seek an integrative framework or model for their own lives that gives them a sense that the various pieces of who they are come together into some kind of sensible whole. Of particular interest is the desire on the part of many people to integrate their lives in time.

Who am I today? How am I different from and similar to who I was in the past and who I may be in the future? What connects my past as I remember it, my present situation as I understand it to be now, and my future as I currently anticipate it? The challenge of modern identity is to come up with a way of understanding and talking about the self such that (a) despite the many different parts of me I am whole and coherent, and (b) despite the many changes that attend the passage of time, the self of my past led up to or set the stage for the self of the present, which in turn will lead up to or set the stage for the self of the future. According to a number of theorists, this kind of integration of the
self into an identity is accomplished through the construction and revision of a “life story” (Bruner, 1996; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; McAdams, 1985c, 1996b, 2001b, 2008; Singer, 2005; Singer & Salovey, 1993; Thorne, 2008; Tomkins, 1979). The third level of personality is the level of identity as a life story. A life story is an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that integrates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future in order to provide a life with a sense of unity and purpose. Beginning in late adolescence, many people in modern societies begin to think about their lives in terms of a unifying and purpose-giving story. Over time and through the adult years, they work on various aspects of the story, rewriting and revising as their views of their lives change with time and circumstances (McAdams, 1993, 1996a). The story is the identity, and thus as identity changes, so changes the story. Let us then entertain these further ideas about Amanda’s individuality: Amanda’s identity is an inner story, a narration of the self that she continues to author and revise over time to make sense, for herself and others, of her own life in time. It is a story, or perhaps a collection of stories, that Amanda continues to fashion to specify who she is and how she will eventually fit into the world of adults. Incorporating beginning, middle, and anticipated ending, Amanda’s story tells how she came to be, where she has been and where she may be going, and who she will become. Amanda continues to revise the story through the adult years as she and her changing social world negotiate niches, places, opportunities, and positions within which she can live meaningfully.

What is Amanda’s story about? You do not know Amanda very well yet, but perhaps you can take a few hints from your initial meeting. Amanda told you a kind of life story, implicit and indirect, about her father. Once upon a time, he was a drunken and dissolute youth. Then he found Christianity, which turned his life around. He married and became a Baptist minister. Eventually, his marriage ended in failure. Amanda told you that she both loved and hated her father. She told you she is an atheist. It is clear that Amanda has rejected certain parts of her father’s narrative—there are important ways in which her life story will depart from his; she seems to suggest. What have been the high points, the low points, and the turning points in her own life, as she sees it now? Who are her heroes? Who are the villains? What does she anticipate for the future chapters of her life story? What does she make of her own history? How has the past given birth to the present? Amanda continues to revise the story through the adult years as she and her changing social world negotiate niches, places, opportunities, and positions within which she can live meaningfully.

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### TABLE 1.4

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional traits</td>
<td>Broad dimensions of personality that describe assumedly internal, global, and stable individual differences in behavior, thought, and feeling. Traits account for consistency in individual functioning across different situations and over time.</td>
<td>Dominance</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Tendency toward depression</td>
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<td>Punctuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>More particular facets of personality that describe personal adaptations to motivational, cognitive, and developmental challenges and tasks. Characteristic adaptations are usually contextualized in time, place, situation, or social role.</td>
<td>Goals, motives, and life plans</td>
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<td>adaptations</td>
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<td>Religious values and beliefs</td>
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<td>Developmental tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life stories</td>
<td>Internalized and evolving narratives of the self that people construct to integrate the past, present, and future and provide life with some sense of unity, purpose, and meaning. Life stories address the problems of identity and integration in personality—problems especially characteristic of modern adulthood.</td>
<td>Earliest memory</td>
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<td>Reconstruction of childhood</td>
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<td>Anticipations of future self</td>
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<td>“Rags to riches” stories</td>
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Stories, plots, and counterplots that mislead you in your search to know the truth about who you are. A similar idea runs through certain contemporary approaches to understanding life stories, such as those that are sometimes described as postmodern (Gergen, 1991), discursive (Harre & Gillett, 1994), or dialogical (Oles & Herrmans, 2005). But whereas Freud looked deep within the person, postmodern approaches look to the confusing swirl of narratives in culture and society. According to the postmodern view, people are storytellers who make themselves anew with each new conversation they have, each new story they tell and perform. No story ever really takes hold though, for life moves too quickly in today’s society; there are too many things to do and to be.

As outlined in Table 1.4, a full psychological account of an individual human life must consider that life from at least three different standpoints. What do we know when we know a person? If we know that person well, we should have some sense of (1) where he or she stands on a series of dispositional traits that speak to general tendencies in behavior across situations and over time; (2) how he or she is confronting and adapting to motivational, cognitive, and developmental tasks and concerns that are contextualized in place, time, and/or role; and (3) what kind of identity he or she is articulating in life through the construction of stories about the self. Psychological individuality is conveyed, therefore, through the patterning of traits, adaptations, and stories.

**Science and the Person**

Up to this point, I have suggested that in some ways personality psychologists are just like almost everybody else. In that we are all persons, each of us is interested in knowing persons, even if the persons we wish to know are ourselves. Had you or I met Amanda in the example I have been describing, we might have eventually come to some conclusions regarding her traits, adaptations, and stories as we came to learn and to know more about her. Personality psychologists aim to describe and understand persons, too. But unlike many other people, personality psychologists aim to study persons in a scientific way. It is time to consider the science in all of this.
Scientists try to make the confusion of everyday experience more understandable. Through science, we formulate statements about reality and then assess their truth value through rigorous and replicable tests. We do this in order to create an orderly and predictable model of the universe and how it functions. Scientists’ motivations for doing this sort of thing are many. They include the desire to control our environments in order to stave off threats and dangers posed by the natural world (disease, natural catastrophe) or by other humans whom we fear (enemies in times of war, people we do not like). Our motivations for conducting scientific evaluation also include the wish to improve our lives and the lives of generations to come by understanding more about the world and by making things (cell phones, x-ray machines, jet planes, computers) that promise to enhance our lives in the world. Most basic, however, is the simple desire to understand—the fundamental motive of curiosity. Science depends on the human desire to know for the sake of knowing. Therefore, while the personality psychologist may study the person for a wide variety of reasons—to provide a diagnosis in the clinic, to help select a job candidate, to design an appropriate treatment strategy—the fundamental goal is to understand the person for the sake of understanding.

Science generally proceeds according to three steps: (1) unsystematic observation, (2) building theories, and (3) evaluating propositions. These three steps refer both to what the individual scientist does when exploring a new problem or issue and to what particular fields of science do or have done—fields such as organic chemistry, economics, botany, and personality psychology—as they evolve from “primitive” to more “mature” sciences. Because it is relatively new, personality psychology is still a fairly primitive science. Nonetheless, all three steps in the scientific process are clearly evident in what personality psychologists do today. Let me then describe each of these steps in some detail.

**STEP 1: UNSYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION**

The first step in developing a scientific understanding of anything is to look at, listen to, feel, smell, and/or taste the thing we want to understand. We may do this with the help of special instruments, such as telescopes and brain scanning machines, or we may rely solely on our unassisted five senses (most often seeing and hearing). But however we do it, we must carefully observe the phenomenon of interest over a long period of time. Early observation is relatively unsystematic. We explore the phenomenon with few expectations about what we will see (or hear). We look for patterns, regularities in the phenomenon, so that we can arrive at a tentative first ordering or classification of what we are observing. The process requires a playful and almost naive approach to reality on the part of the scientist. The great physicist, Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), captured the attitude perfectly in this passage written shortly before his death:

> I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me. (Judson, 1980, p. 114)

Let us not be fooled into thinking, however, that the scientist’s curiosity is slaked by collecting innocent sense impressions about the world. The right image of the scientist in Step 1 of the scientific process is that of a creative observer who perceives order or pattern where it has not been perceived before. Discussing the physical sciences, Hanson (1972) states that the keen observer is “not the man [or woman] who sees and reports what all normal observers see and report, but the man [or woman] who sees in familiar objects what no one else has seen before” (p. 30). Thus, unsystematic observation is not a passive and casual sort of thing but rather an active attempt to discern and then describe organization, pattern, design, or structure in a phenomenon that initially seems to be unorganized and without design. This highly descriptive, exploratory phase of the scientific enterprise is crucial, for it provides the scientist and the scientific community with a set of articulate described patterns in the concrete world that can be synthesized into a more general or abstract theory about how that world works.
It may be surprising to learn that science as described in Step 1 is inherently subjective. We tend to believe science to be a rational, objective, and dispassionate sort of thing. Whereas this view has a good deal of merit with respect to certain aspects of science (especially Step 3, as described later), it is misleading when it comes to Step 1. The creative observer of reality who sees things in a way different from anybody else is not necessarily “objective” in his or her point of view. Rather, the creative observer interacts in a highly subjective way with the phenomenon of study, in some cases altering the phenomenon by virtue of observing it (Hanson, 1972; Zukav, 1979). The scientist in Step 1, operating in the context of discovery (Reichenbach, 1938), seeks to discover new ways of seeing reality, formulating in a highly subjective manner new categories, new terminologies, and new distinctions to describe the careful observations that he or she undertakes. As the scientist begins to organize observations into categories, he or she moves from the concrete and particular events that are discerned to the more abstract and general representations of those events, a process that philosophers call induction.

The ultimate result of induction is the creation of the abstract and general theory of Step 2, which is ultimately grounded in the subjective observations of Step 1 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

There are numerous examples in psychology of highly subjective observations of human behavior resulting in new insights and theories. Jean Piaget (1970), a Swiss developmental psychologist, based many aspects of his theory of cognitive development on the careful observations he made of his own three children in their first few years of life. Many of the most influential ideas in the personality theory of Sigmund Freud are results of Freud’s highly subjective observations of the dream reports, spontaneous utterances, and behavioral symptoms displayed by his neurotic patients, his colleagues, and (maybe most of all) himself. Both Piaget and Freud organized many of their initial observations within case studies. A case study is an in-depth investigation of a single individual, sometimes conducted over a substantial period of time. The case-study method gives the personality psychologist a good deal of information about one human being. Though case studies can be used in a number of different ways, personality psychologists have traditionally used them as ways to organize complex observations about a single person so as to build a theory about some (or all) persons in general (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003; Elms, 2007; McAdams & West, 1997). In later chapters we will encounter examples of case studies in psychology that serve as bridges between the unsystematic observation of single individuals in Step 1 and the building of more general theories in Step 2.

**STEP 2: BUILDING THEORIES**

The second step of the scientific enterprise involves making a theory. Scientists organize the various observations collected in Step 1 into a more-or-less coherent system that explains the phenomenon of interest. Precisely how scientists do this, however, is one of the great mysteries of science. Though theories arise out of observations, they are not always arrived at in a completely logical or systematic manner. Some highly creative scientists stress the seemingly irrational and unconscious manner in which a theoretical insight may have come to them.

In a famous story, Friedrich Kekule, a German chemist of the 19th century, described how a series of discoveries concerning the structure of organic molecules came to him in hypnagogic reveries, or waking dreams. In Kekule’s day, chemists had discerned a number of different chemical
compounds containing carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and a few other elements, but they had found it especially difficult to link these observations together via an abstract theory specifying the rules of their structure. Kekule had dwelt on the compounds’ behavior so intensely that, on occasion, the atoms would appear to dance before him in hallucinations. One summer evening, he fell into a reverie and (he later wrote) “Lo! The atoms were gamboling before my eyes. I saw how, frequently, two atoms united to form a pair; how a larger one embraced two smaller ones; how still larger ones kept hold of three or even four of the smaller; whilst the whole kept whirling in a giddy dance. I saw how the larger ones formed a chain.” (Judson, 1980, p. 115). Another time, when Kekule was nodding in his chair before the fire, the atoms danced again, “all twining and twisting in snake-like motion. But look! What was that? One of the snakes had seized hold of its own tail, and the form whirled mockingly before my eyes” (Judson, 1980, p. 115). The chains and rings that Kekule imagined came to comprise the fundamental models or pictures of organic molecules that underlie basic theories of organic chemistry even today.

I do not want to suggest that scientific theories are always, or even often, formulated through dreams and reveries, but they are sometimes developed in strange ways. The strangeness of
development is not necessarily a reflection of how good the theory is. This is an important point in personality psychology because (as we will see in the chapters that follow) the many theories of personality that have been offered have been created in a wide variety of ways, some stranger than others. There is no consensus in the scientific community about the best way of proceeding in Step 2 of the scientific process—the step in which the scientist builds a theory. There is much agreement, however, on what a theory is and what it should do. A theory is a set of interrelated statements proposed to explain certain observations of reality. A theory is always a tentative and somewhat speculative abstraction. A theory is generally accepted by a scientific community to the extent that it is consistent with observations of the phenomena it purports to explain. Theories are subject to change whenever new, inconsistent observations become available.

A theory provides at least four different tools that the scientist can use to increase understanding (Millon, 1973): (1) an abstract model or picture that serves as an easily envisioned representation for the structure of the theory, (2) a conceptual terminology or set of names for key ideas and major classes of observations in the theory, (3) a set of correspondence rules that describe the specific relationships to be expected between the various components, and (4) hypotheses, or testable predictions that are logically derived from the correspondence rules. In other words, a theory provides a particular picture of reality, well-defined terms that name the major components of that picture, specified relationships among the components, and specific predictions about how those relationships can be tested in empirical research.

The four aspects of theory are used by scientists to explain a set of observations in a clear and precise manner. Many psychologists in general and personality psychologists in particular lament that their theories do not explain as much as they would like. Nonetheless, virtually all agree that theories are at the heart of science. Furthermore, they agree that some theories are “better” than others, though they disagree wildly as to exactly which ones are better. What makes one theory better? What are the criteria of a good theory? Below are seven standards by which a scientific theory may be judged (from Epstein, 1973; Gergen, 1982).

1. **Comprehensiveness:** The wider the scope of a theory’s explanatory abilities, the better. All other things being equal, a theory that explains more is preferred to one that explains less.
2. **Parsimony:** Science is a simplifying and economizing game. Theories attempt to explain the maximum number of observations with the minimum number of explanatory concepts. Thus, a simpler and more straightforward explanation is generally preferred to a more complex one.
3. **Coherence:** A theory should be logical and internally consistent. The various statements that make it up should hang together in a sensible manner.
4. **Testability:** From the theory, a scientist should be able to derive hypotheses that can be readily evaluated (tested) through empirical research.
5. **Empirical validity:** Empirical tests of hypotheses derived from the theory should support the theory’s major claims. In other words, the results of hypothesis-testing research should be in accord with what the theory says.
6. **Usefulness:** Theories that are able, in some way, to solve humanly significant problems are generally preferred to those that seem less relevant, all other things being equal.
7. **Generativity:** A good theory should generate new research and new theorizing. It should give birth to a wide variety of creative activity on the part of scientists and laypersons alike. In the social sciences, a generative theory may serve “to challenge guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is ‘taken for granted,’ and thereby to generate fresh alternatives for social action” (Gergen, 1982, p. 109).

**STEP 3: EVALUATING PROPOSITIONS**

Science distinguishes itself from all other modes of understanding the world by virtue of its insistence on evaluating propositions in an empirical fashion. The theories of Step 2 that derive from the
observations of Step 1 must be empirically tested in Step 3 as the scientist moves from the context of discovery to the **context of justification** (Reichenbach, 1938). In Step 3, the scientist attempts to evaluate or "justify" the truth of a given statement proposed by a given theory. The scientist seeks to subject a portion of a theory to a rigorous and objective test. This is where the image of the scientist as a no-nonsense, hard-headed, cool, and dispassionate examiner of the real world has its origin and its validity. The context of justification is no place for flights of fancy and wild speculation; it is no place for exploring phenomena in an unsystematic and subjective manner. Rather, the scientist carefully determines the truth and utility of theoretical propositions that were formulated in the more freewheeling Steps 1 and 2 of the scientific process.

However, although Steps 1 and 2 are more freewheeling than Step 3, they are not so freewheeling that virtually anything goes. Indeed, the scientist’s anticipation of Step 3—his or her knowledge that theories must ultimately be subjected to empirical testing—influences the way in which the scientist explores the phenomenon of interest (Step 1) and the kinds of theories he or she eventually produces (Step 2). In other words, the anticipation of Step 3 in the scientific process feeds back to influence what the scientist does in Steps 1 and 2. Therefore, scientists who are proposing theories are urged by the logic of scientific inquiry to put forth theories that present testable hypotheses. In the words of the philosopher of science Karl Popper (1959), a theory should be stated in such a way as to render its propositions falsifiable. The theory should specify what observations it would take to disprove its major propositions, or such observations should at least be deducible from the theory’s propositions.

Popper’s standard of falsifiability is a real bugaboo for the more speculative and philosophical among us because it puts fairly substantial constraints on the kinds of theoretical statements we can make. For instance, a personality theory that proposes that all human beings are basically good is not, in and of itself, falsifiable, because any instance of bad behavior can be dismissed as merely superficial behavior that masks the fundamental goodness of people. We can design no set of observations that would enable us to prove the statement false, to prove that people are not good. Therefore, as a scientific proposition, the statement that all people are good (or that all people are bad, or neutral, or even intelligent) flunks the basic test of falsifiability. There are many statements like this, and some are included as basic assumptions in certain personality theories existing today. Nonetheless, personality theories also contain a number of propositions that are falsifiable, such as Alfred Adler’s (1927) claim (Chapters 6 and 11) that first-born children tend to be more conservative than other children, or Erik Erikson’s (1963) proposition (Chapter 9) that healthy psychosocial development involves the establishment of identity before one establishes intimacy with others. Statements such as these can be tested using standard personality research methods. Let us now consider in general terms how this is done. In later chapters, we will examine many specific examples of evaluating theoretical propositions through personality research.

**Setting Up an Empirical Study**

Imagine that we wish to evaluate Alfred Adler’s proposition, embedded within his more general personality theory (Chapter 11), that first-born children tend to be more conservative than later-born children. How might we begin? Well, chances are that we have already begun! By stating a testable hypothesis derived from Adler’s theory, we are showing that we have some familiarity with Adler’s theory. **Scientific hypotheses should be grounded in theories.** Immersing oneself, therefore, in the theoretical and empirical literature that bears on a given proposition is an essential early task of hypothesis-testing research. Thus, our initial responsibility in carrying out this empirical study is to go back to Adler’s writings to review exactly what his theory suggests. In doing this, we come to realize that we cannot possibly submit all of Adler’s ideas to empirical testing at once. Rather, we can test one hypothesis at a time. Adler wrote that first-born children have an advantage over later-borns in that they hold the full attention and love of their parents during the years when they are the family’s only child. Those early years represent an ideal world that, later on, is disrupted by
the birth of siblings. For the rest of their lives, first-borns aim to “conserve” that early reality. They are oriented to distrust change. We would continue our background reading to include various other theories of birth order and theories about conservatism. For example, political psychologists have written extensively about the origins of conservatism in family life. We would eventually move to the empirical literature, much of it found in scientific journals, on both birth order and conservatism to see (a) how these ideas have been examined empirically by others (what methods scientists have employed) and (b) what empirical findings or results have been obtained. Our background reading would supply us with important ideas concerning how to think about our present study and how to design it to test the hypothesis in a fair and precise way.

Having reviewed the literature on the relationship between birth order and conservatism, we should next choose an appropriate sample of persons to examine. All hypothesis-testing research in personality psychology must confront the problem of sampling. No sample is perfect. One researcher may choose to investigate Adler’s hypothesis in a sample of 100 sophomores attending the University of Illinois in the summer of 2008. Another researcher may prefer to look at a sample of 60 girls attending a preschool in Alabama. Another, more ambitious researcher may select a nationwide sample of middle-age men and women, the data for which exist in a national archive that was established 30 years ago.

It is very easy to criticize another person’s research in terms of the sample he or she employs, claiming, for instance, that the sample does not represent all people, that the sample is biased in some way. The problem is that all samples are biased in some way, though some certainly are more so than others. In general, we should strive to obtain a sample for our study that is appropriate for the proposition to be evaluated. Therefore, if we are testing a hypothesis about, say, clinically depressed adults, a random sample of college students will not do. If we are testing a hypothesis about changes in normal personality development that occur around age 40, then we need a sample of midlife men and women who have little history of serious psychiatric disturbance. To confirm or disconfirm a given hypothesis, different researchers employing different kinds of samples should, over time, produce similar results. Thus, no single study, no matter how representative or large the sample, establishes once and for all the truth value of a scientific proposition.

With the choice of an appropriate sample of participants within which to test our hypothesis, the next step is to operationalize the variables that we have chosen to investigate. A variable is any quality that can assume two or more values. In our example of testing Adler’s hypothesis, both birth order and conservatism are variables because both can be given at least two different values or levels. For instance, a participant in our study can be a first-born, a second-born, and so on. He or she can also be “extremely conservative,” “mildly conservative,” “not very conservative,” and so on.

To operationalize a variable is to decide how to measure it—that is, to specify the “operation” through which it is to be assessed. In our example, birth order is relatively easy to measure. We would merely ask participants to indicate what their birth order is. Conservatism is a trickier variable. We might wish to administer an established paper-and-pencil test of political values to assess conservatism. Or we might wish to interview participants to determine the extent of their conservative orientation. Or we might wish to observe “conservative behavior” in a standard laboratory task. In light of our earlier discussion of Level 1 personality traits, we might consider conservatism to be one piece of the larger trait cluster of openness to experience. For example, Sulloway (1996) has reviewed historical records of famous scientists and politicians to argue that first-borns often show much lower levels of openness to experience compared with later-borns. According to Sulloway, later-borns are “born to rebel” against the conservative authority represented by their parents and their older siblings. Therefore, we might administer to the participants of our hypothetical study a standard questionnaire measuring openness to experience. But whatever measures we used, we would aim to translate our observations about conservatism, or openness to experience, into numbers in order to assess our hypothesis. In other words, the operationalization of most variables in personality research requires us to quantify the data. Personality psychologists have devised a
number of different procedures for quantifying variables. We will have numerous opportunities to see these methods in action when we examine particular research efforts in subsequent chapters.

As they operationalize variables in order to evaluate theoretical propositions, personality psychologists tend to design studies according to one of two very simple, basic research designs, or combinations of the two. These two general formats for hypothesis-testing research are the correlational and the experimental design.

The Correlational Design

Empirical studies that assess the extent to which two different variables relate to each other are termed correlational ("co-related") studies. In a correlational study, the scientist asks a very simple question: When one variable changes in value, what happens to the other variable? If an increase in the value of one variable tends to be associated with an increase in value of the other variable, the variables show a positive correlation to each other. An example of a positive correlation would be the relationship between the two variables of height and weight in a random sample of 200 American adults. In general, as height goes up, weight goes up, though of course there are exceptions. A positive correlation between height and weight in this sample says that taller people, on the average, tend to be heavier than shorter people. Thus, having information about one of the variables for a given participant in the study gives you a reliable hint about the value of the other variable for that participant: If you know that John is tall, you might guess—with a fair chance of being correct—that he is relatively heavy (compared with a short person).

A negative correlation is indicated when an increase in one variable is generally associated with a decrease in the other variable. An example here might be the relationship between the variables of age and thumb-sucking in a random sample of 500 American children between the ages of 12 weeks and 12 years. In general, as age goes up, thumb-sucking goes down: Older children suck their thumbs less frequently on average than younger children.

When two variables are not related to each other in any systematic manner, we say that there is little or no correlation between them. An example of this third possibility might be the relationship between the variables of weight and intelligence in a random sample of 1,000 American adults. In general, heavier adults are neither consistently more intelligent nor consistently less intelligent than lighter adults. Therefore, weight and intelligence are uncorrelated with each other. Merely knowing an adult’s weight will give you no reliable hint concerning his or her intelligence.

A numerical way of expressing the degree of correlation between two variables is the correlation coefficient. Readily calculated with a hand calculator or computer, correlation coefficients range from +1.0 (a perfect positive correlation) through 0.0 (no correlation between the two variables) to −1.0 (a perfect negative correlation). Figure 1.1 illustrates the distribution of scores on two variables that would produce five different values for correlation coefficients. In personality research, correlations generally fall within a "moderate" range. For instance, a moderately strong positive correlation between two personality variables might be +.50 (r = .50); a moderately strong negative correlation between two personality variables might be −.50 (r = −.50).

Like most statistics used by personality psychologists, individual correlation coefficients are often evaluated in terms of their statistical significance. Statistical significance is a measure of the extent to which a given result can be attributed to chance. As a general convention, personality psychologists maintain that a given effect, relationship, or difference is statistically significant when the probability of obtaining that effect, relationship, or difference by chance is less than 5%. We say, in this case, that the finding is "significant at the .05 level," meaning that there is less than a 5% likelihood that the particular finding we have obtained is due to chance (or, saying it another way, there is more than a 95% likelihood that the finding is not due to chance). With respect to correlation coefficients, statistical significance is determined by the absolute value of the correlation coefficient and the number of participants from which the correlation was obtained. Thus a relatively strong
CHAPTER 1  STUDYING THE PERSON

FIGURE 1.1  SCATTER DIAGRAMS SHOWING VARIOUS DEGREES OF CORRELATION BETWEEN TWO VARIABLES

A. Perfect Positive (r = +1.00)

B. Perfect Negative (r = −1.00)

C. Moderate Positive (r = +0.67)

D. Moderate Negative (r = −0.67)

E. Unrelated (r = 0.00)

NOTE: Each point on each plot represents the location of a participant’s corresponding two scores (Variable 1, Variable 2) in the study.
negative correlation of $-0.57$ would be statistically significant in a sample of 100 people, but the same $-0.57$ would not be strong enough to reach statistical significance in a sample of only 10 people.

Although a correlational study shows which different variables naturally relate to each other, correlation does not imply causation. Just because variables A and B are correlated in a statistically significant manner, we cannot legitimately conclude that A causes B or that B causes A. Thus, a statistically significant correlation coefficient of $+0.45$ between, say, number of silk blouses owned (Variable A) and the size of one’s office (Variable B) in a sample of 50 female business executives does not mean that owning silk blouses causes one to occupy large offices or that large offices cause one to own silk blouses. We might instead speculate that a third variable, such as executive status, is probably at work here, causally responsible for the other two variables. Female executives with higher status probably, because of their status, occupy larger offices and enjoy greater purchasing power (with which to buy silk blouses) than do lower status executives.

The Experimental Design

It is generally believed that personality psychologists can determine cause-and-effect relationships between different variables in an experiment. In an experiment, a scientist manipulates or alters one variable of interest in order to observe its impact on another variable of interest. The first variable—the one that is manipulated or altered—is termed the independent variable. The second variable is the dependent variable. The dependent variable is understood as the individual’s response to the experimental alteration or manipulation of the independent variable. Thus, the dependent variable is a function of the independent variable: It is “dependent” on the independent variable. In cause-and-effect terms, experimentally controlled variations in the independent variable are seen as causing variations in the dependent variable.

If an experiment is to give valid information concerning cause and effect, the experimenter must be sure that the independent variable is the only variable that is systematically altered. Therefore, the experimenter designs the study to hold all variables constant except one—the independent variable—so that he or she can conclude that variations in the participants’ responses (the dependent variable) are functions of variations in the independent variable, and only in the independent variable. Other extraneous variables threaten to confound the results; therefore, they must be controlled, to the greatest extent possible. This is why experiments are usually conducted in highly controlled environments, such as laboratory rooms or through computer simulations. In these kinds of settings, the experimenter is able to control the kinds of stimuli to which the participants are exposed and to observe carefully the participants’ responses.

Let me illustrate the basic principles of the experiment with a very simple example. Imagine that you wished to design an experiment testing the hypothesis that a person smiles more when interacting with another person who smiles than when interacting with a person who does not smile. You obtain a sample of 100 college students to participate in your study. Each person is asked to come to a laboratory room to engage in a one-on-one interview, which is to be videotaped. Participants are randomly assigned to one of two different groups: the experimental group and the control group. This means that 50 of your 100 participants are chosen by chance (such as by flipping a coin or pulling names out of a hat) to participate in each of the two conditions, or groups. For the experimental group, the interviewer talks with the participant for about 20 minutes, emitting smiles at regular intervals determined ahead of time by the experimenter. Participants in the control group experience the same interview except for one critical difference: The interviewer does not smile. It is essential that the conditions of the experimental and control groups, therefore, be identical with the exception of one variable: the interviewer’s smiling. Thus, the independent variable in this experiment is whether or not the interviewer smiles. The dependent variable is the amount of smiling emitted by the person being interviewed, which could be assessed by observing the videotapes. The hypothesis would receive experimental support if the participants in the experimental group smile more than do participants in the control group, at a level reaching statistical significance. A statistically
significant difference between the two groups in this experiment would suggest that variations in the experimentally manipulated independent variable were responsible for, or caused, variations in the dependent variable. In other words, the level of smiling of the interviewer was responsible for determining the level of smiling of the interviewee.

Because of the experiment’s ability to tease out cause and effect through the careful manipulation and control of variables under standardized conditions, some psychologists consider the experiment superior to the correlational design as a basic method for doing hypothesis-testing research. For instance, one researcher terms the experiment the “basic method of science” (Mischel, 1986, p. 15), while others characterize it as the “preferred” (Byrne & Kelley, 1981) or the “most prestigious” (Singer, 1984) method. By contrast, other personality psychologists are highly critical of laboratory experimentation, arguing that experiments tend to be contrived, artificial, and trivial (Carlson, 1971, 1984; Gergen, 1982). Indeed, many empirical questions in personality psychology defy experimental investigation because the independent variables of concern cannot be systematically varied for individual participants—variables such as sex, age, ethnic origin, birth order, body size, brain chemistry, or indeed personality dispositions themselves. In some cases in which independent variables can be systematically varied, such an experimental manipulation is unfeasible or unethical. For instance, a scientist wishing to study the effects of child abuse on personality development in humans cannot legally or ethically subject half of the children in a sample to abusive conditions (the experimental group) and half to nonabusive conditions (the control group) and then observe the effects of the manipulation. Rather, child abuse must be studied in the real world through some modification of a general correlational design.

The study of the person is a broad and rich enough endeavor to encompass both experimental and correlational approaches to hypothesis-testing research (Duke, 1986). Therefore, the chapters in this book contain numerous examples of good personality research studies that are purely correlational in nature, some that are purely experimental, and some that are combinations of the two. Both correlational and experimental methods are alive and well, and both are extremely valuable in studying the person. When it comes to personality psychology, it is probably misleading to consider either of the two methods the basic method of science.

The three basic steps of scientific inquiry—unsystematic observation, building theories, and evaluating propositions—bring us full circle. We begin in Step 1 with observation; we move to abstractions in Step 2, in which our observations are organized within a theory; and then we move back to observation in Step 3—this time, a more systematic form of observation—as we attempt to test hypotheses empirically. The results of our experiments and correlational studies in Step 3 feed back to modify our theory. Therefore, the observations of Step 3 function in much the same way as their less systematic sisters of Step 1: They influence the making and remaking of theory. Science progresses through a continuous dialogue between observation and theory. Observations ultimately give rise to theories. Theories give rise to new observations designed to evaluate the theories’ propositions. These new observations feed back to influence the theories from which they were derived, occasionally even giving birth to radically new theories. And so on. An underlying assumption of the whole procedure is that over the long course of observation followed by theory followed by observation, science formulates better and better ways of understanding the world, moving closer and closer, over a period of many years, to truth.

**Personality Psychology**

The scientific focus on psychological individuality distinguishes personality psychology from all other branches of psychology and from the social sciences more generally. It takes a fair amount of hubris to place the individual human person at the center of all inquiry, to maintain that the person in his or her very individuality is important enough and cohesive enough to warrant special status as
the main unit of analysis. Modern personality psychology is the heir to what psychological historian Daniel Robinson has called “Renaissance Humanism,” the 16th-century worldview that celebrated “the dignity of man, the theme insisting that the world was made for man” (1981, p. 171). Robinson points out that modern science, in its dispassionate objectivity and urge toward reductionism, has generally rejected Renaissance Humanism. But personality psychology has moved against the tide. For the personality psychologist, scientific investigation is made for man and for woman. In focusing unswervingly on the individual, personality psychology has come to occupy a unique and extraordinarily critical place in the world of science.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Personality psychology was born within psychology departments in American universities in the 1930s. Although personality theorists such as Freud, Jung, and Adler had been writing for more than 30 years by then, it was during the 1930s that a number of separate lines of inquiry came together to generate a new academic discipline. The first issue of the journal Character and Personality (now the Journal of Personality) was published in 1932. The journal aimed to join German studies of character with British and American studies of individual differences in persons, incorporating case studies, correlational surveys, experiments, and theoretical discussions. In 1937, Gordon Allport published the first major textbook on personality: Personality: A Psychological Interpretation. Although textbooks on mental hygiene, abnormal psychology, and character and personality had already been published, Allport’s was the first to articulate a grand vision for the field of personality and to place it within the context of historical and contemporary scholarship in the arts and sciences. Allport viewed personality psychology as the study of the individual person. He defined the personality as “the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment” (1937, p. 48).

From the beginning, personality psychology was a dissident field within the large scene of American psychology (Hall & Lindzey, 1957). In the 1930s, American psychology tended to focus minutely on such things as habits, reflexes, stimuli, and discrete responses—the basic molecular elements of organism behavior. By contrast, personality was holistic, taking on the whole person as a primary unit of study, suggesting that unity, coherence, and wholeness are properties of human lives. In the 1930s, American psychology obsessed over the vicissitudes of animal learning, focusing on the relation between external stimuli and publicly observed responses in rats and pigeons. By contrast, personality concerned itself with the problems of human motivation, understood in terms of unobservable urges and promptings from within. This orientation is evident even in textbooks written before Allport’s. Writes Garnett (1928), “It is surely in the springs of human action, if anywhere, that the key to personality is to be found” (p. 14). In the 1930s, American psychology searched for universal laws applicable to all organisms. American psychology was a thoroughly nomothetic enterprise at this time, meaning that it aimed to discover and test general principles or laws of behavior. By contrast, personality emphasized how people were different from one another, as well as how they were alike. Allport went so far as to suggest that the scientist should examine each individual personality as a unique entity. He argued for an idiographic approach to personality, which, in contrast to the nomothetic approach, would ignore general laws to discern the specific and individual patternings of particular lives. While Allport’s insistence on the idiographic has always been controversial, even within the field of personality psychology (e.g., Holt, 1962), personality psychologists have traditionally been much more interested than most other psychologists in the complexities of the single case.

The history of modern personality psychology can be divided into three periods (McAdams, 1997b). The period from approximately 1930 to 1950 was marked by the establishment of the field and the development of a number of general systems. In the 1930s and 1940s, personality psychologists proposed comprehensive conceptual systems for understanding the person. Some of
these grand theories of personality are still very influential today and are discussed in subsequent chapters of this text. Among the more influential personality theories proposed during this time were Allport’s (1937) psychology of the individual (see Feature 1.A), Murray’s (1938) personological system (Chapters 7 and 12), the trait theories (Chapters 4 and 5) offered by Cattell (1947) and Eysenck (1952), Rogers’s (1942) humanistic theory (Chapter 7), Kelly’s (1955) cognitive theory of personal constructs (Chapter 8), Erikson’s (1950) psychosocial theory of personality development (Chapter 9), and various derivatives of American behaviorism and social learning theory (Chapter 3).

By the 1930s, furthermore, Sigmund Freud (Chapters 7 and 11), Carl Jung (Chapter 11), and Alfred Adler (Chapter 11) had all developed comprehensive theories of personality derived from clinical observations and rooted in the European psychoanalytic tradition. These psychoanalytic theories became incorporated within personality psychology proper and began to have a significant influence on how personality psychologists thought about and empirically studied human individuality. Beginning with Hall and Lindzey (1957), personality textbooks organized the field according to these grand systems, variously dividing the systems into psychoanalytic and psychosocial theories, temperament and trait models, approaches emphasizing needs and motives, humanistic self theories, organismic theories, cognitive theories, learning theories, and cognitive/social-learning theories. College textbooks on personality theories sometimes list as many as 20 grand theorists. No other branch of psychology ever had more competing theories. The period from 1950 to 1970 marked a second historical phase. With the tremendous expansion of higher education after World War II, psychology departments grew and became more specialized, spawning professional specializations in such personality-related areas as clinical, counseling, and industrial/organizational psychology. In the United States, increased federal funding supported personality research in laboratories and field settings. Personality psychologists focused their research efforts on the examination and elaboration of particular personality constructs—such as extraversion (Eysenck, 1952), anxiety (Taylor, 1953), the need for achievement (McGee, 1961), and a host of other traits, needs, motives, and so on that could be reliably and validly measured and whose impact on behavior could be directly observed. Overall, personality psychology turned away from the grand theories of the 1930s and 1940s and came to focus instead on problems and controversies concerning personality measurement. What constitutes a valid measure of a personality construct (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Loewinger, 1957)? Are objective measurements of personality superior to clinical intuitions (Meehl, 1954; Sawyer, 1966)? Do personality scales measure what they say they measure, or do they simply assess a person’s style of responding to tests (Block, 1965; Edwards, 1957; Jackson & Messick, 1958)?

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, psychologists delivered a series of devastating critiques of personality psychology that threw the field into a crisis. Carlson (1971) chastised personality psychologists for ignoring the grand theories of the early years and straying away from their implicit mandate to study real lives and whole persons in depth. Fiske (1974) wondered whether perhaps personality psychology had gone about as far as it could go, limited as it is by its reliance on imprecise verbal reports from people. Shweder (1975) questioned the need for any form of psychology based on individual differences. Most influential, however, was Mischel’s (1968, 1973) critique, in which he argued against explanations of human behavior based on internal personality traits and in favor of explanations that focused on the situational and cognitive/social-learning determinants of behavior. As we will see in Chapter 4, Mischel’s critique launched a protracted debate in the field of personality psychology over the efficacy of trait-based versus situation-based approaches to predicting and understanding social behavior. The trait versus situation debate preoccupied the field of personality psychology through the 1970s and into the early 1980s.

A third phase in the brief history of modern personality psychology, therefore, began around 1970 and continues to the present day. The phase began with critique and pervasive doubt concerning the legitimacy and worth of personality studies, but it evolved by the mid-1980s into a broad sense of renewal and revitalization (Buss & Cantor, 1989; Hogan, Johnson, & Briggs, 1997; Maddi,
As the trait versus situation controversy has died down, contemporary research in personality has become more sensitive to the complex interactions of internal personality variables and external situational factors in the prediction of behavior (Kenrick & Funder, 1988). Trait models for personality have regained their status and influence in psychology as a whole, especially with the emergence of the Big Five factor model for personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 1990; Wiggins, 1996). Having resolved or put aside a number of measurement controversies, personality psychologists have refined new research methodologies for the scientific study of persons (Robins, Fraley, & Krueger, 2007). Recently, there has been a renewed interest in integrative personality theory (McAdams & Pals, 2006; Mischel & Shoda, 1995) and in the development of personality across the life course (Mroczek & Little, 2006), and a renewed commitment to studying whole persons in their full biographical complexity (Franz & Stewart, 1994; Nasby & Read, 1997; Schultz, 2005).

The contemporary renaissance in personality studies affirms what I have always felt deeply about this particular field of study: Personality psychology is the centerpiece of psychology as a whole. It is with reference to individual persons that many of the most important theories, findings, and applications in psychology must be oriented. Personality psychology addresses the most general and most fundamental questions in the field: What is human nature? What is a person? How do we understand persons? It is the most fundamental and the most fascinating field in psychology, in my view, because it reflects directly upon each of us, upon the self. While other branches of psychology offer many important insights into human behavior and experience, it is only personality psychology that focuses unswervingly on the individual person—on your particular individuality as a person. Indeed, I would go further to suggest that personality psychology should be one centerpiece of any constellation of studies and programs promising to educate a person in the broadest sense. One of the goals of a liberal arts education is the conscientious examination of the self and its place in the world, the concerted reflection upon one’s own life in culture, history, and the cosmos. It is in personality psychology—if anywhere in psychology—that such an examination may begin, for personality psychology itself begins with just such an examination.

Personality psychology draws on fields as diverse as brain physiology, molecular genetics, evolutionary biology, cognitive science, sociology, cultural anthropology, and even literary studies in the study of whole persons. Consequently, personality psychology lies at the crossroads of many disciplines. Within psychology proper, personality psychology shares some affinities with developmental, social, abnormal, and clinical/counseling psychology. Strong connections can also be shown between personality research and industrial-organizational psychology (e.g., Roberts & Hogan, 2001). Nonetheless, important differences between these fields and personality psychology can be identified.

Although personality psychologists are concerned with the development of human beings from birth to death, they differ from most developmental psychologists by focusing their inquiries on the adult years. Furthermore, whereas developmental psychology concerns itself with meaningful change and transition over time, personality psychologists tend to focus on those aspects of the person that show some degree of continuity or stability over time. Yet these distinctions are fuzzy and matters of relative emphasis. For example, many personality psychologists are interested in personality change, so their inquiries sometimes overlap with those made by developmental psychologists (e.g., Mroczek & Little, 2006).

Personality psychology has many ties to social psychology. Personality and social psychologists publish in some of the same journals; they belong to some of the same societies; and they tend to share many intellectual interests. Still, there is a fundamental difference between the cores of the two disciplines: Social psychologists focus on human sociality, while personality psychologists focus on human individuality. Having said this, I must blur the distinction, for human sociality must always take into consideration the role of human individuals, and human individuality must always be seen in social context. Therefore, in examining social behavior, social psychologists are quite likely
Gordon W. Allport (1897–1967) may not have invented personality psychology, but more than anybody else he was responsible for establishing personality as a vigorous field of scientific inquiry in university settings. Allport’s greatest contribution is probably the textbook he published in 1937: Personality: A Psychological Interpretation. In what is generally considered to be the first authoritative text on personality, Allport presented an integrated agenda for the field of personality psychology, and he foresaw many of the issues and controversies that have defined the field ever since.

Allport was born in 1897 in a small town in Indiana, one of four sons of a physician and his wife. He grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, attended Harvard University for his undergraduate and doctoral work, and studied extensively in Europe. He appears to have been influenced greatly by such German psychologists as William Stern and Edward Spranger (Nicholson, 2002). From 1930 to 1967, Allport taught at Harvard, where he helped establish the interdisciplinary Department of Social Relations. In his early years there, he articulated a vision for personality psychology that was to serve as a humanistic alternative to behaviorism and an optimistic antidote to Freud’s unflattering view of the human condition. In his autobiography, Allport (1968) stated that he wished to create a field of study centered on an image of man “that would allow us to test in full whatever democratic and humane potential he might possess” (p. 394). In the middle of the Great Depression in Europe and the United States and on the eve of World War II, Allport wrote Personality in the spirit of social reform and the hope for a better world. Allport’s text was cosmopolitan, erudite, and steeped in old-world European scholarship. But it was also profoundly American in its unabashed optimism and egalitarian tone.

In Personality, Allport presented an eclectic array of concepts and hypotheses, loosely tied to one dominant theme: The person is a unique whole. The person’s wholeness is best captured in Allport’s concept of the proprium. According to Allport (1955), “the proprium includes all aspects of personality that make for inward unity” (p. 40). The uniqueness of individuals is expressed through personality traits. For Allport, the trait was the major structural unit of personality. He defined a trait as a “neuropsychic structure having the capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent and to initiate and guide equivalent (meaningfully consistent) forms of adaptive and expressive behavior” (Allport, 1961, p. 347). Allport held that traits are real, causal entities that correspond to as yet unknown neurophysiological structures. They are not mere descriptive categories of functionally equivalent behaviors. Rejecting the distinction between motive and trait, Allport insisted that traits
have motivational features, serving to energize, direct, and select behavior. While traits may account for consistency in behavior across situations and over time, Allport knew that human behavior is often inconsistent and strongly shaped by situational factors (Zuroff, 1986). A single person, furthermore, may be characterized by contradictory traits. Therefore, "the ever changing nature of traits and their close dependence upon the fluid conditions of the environment forbid a conception that is over-rigid or over-simple" (Allport, 1937, p. 312).

Allport’s brand of trait psychology tended toward the literary in content and style. While he encouraged nomothetic research on common traits, he tended to distrust statistical analyses of group data because, he argued, they tend to blot out the uniqueness of the single person. While large-scale trait studies could be useful for deducing general laws of behavior, Allport believed that they should be supplemented by the idiographic, in-depth examination of the unique and common traits manifested in the single case (Barenbaum, 1997). The best example of this approach is Allport’s Letters from Jenny (1965), in which he analyzed a series of personal letters written by one woman over a long period of time in order to delineate the key traits in her personality.

Furthermore, in Letters from Jenny Allport confronted the problems and possibilities of doing personality studies through the in-depth analysis of the single case. Allport championed idiothetic case-study research throughout his career, as well as the use of personal documents such as letters, journals, and autobiographies in personality research (Allport, 1942; Allport, Bruner, & Jandorf, 1941). It was only through the analysis of the single case, he believed, that a psychologist might convey the full individuality of the person.

Beyond his seminal writings on personality, the self, traits, and case studies, Allport made major contributions in a wide range of areas, including the psychology of expressive movements (Allport & Vernon, 1933), the psychology of rumor (Allport & Postman, 1947), the psychology of religion (Allport, 1950), research on attitudes and values (Allport & Vernon, 1933), and the nature of prejudice (Allport, 1954). Through the awesome breadth of his work and his humanistic vision for a science of individuality, Gordon Allport personified the potential and the possibilities of personality psychology. His work and his career have inspired generations of psychologists who have chosen as their intellectual mission the scientific study of the whole person.

to consider carefully the role of the self, as many contemporary textbooks in social psychology will show; similarly, in examining human individuality, personality psychologists must also consider social contexts, as we will see in this book. Still, the general fact remains that personality and social psychologists do exhibit differences in matters of emphasis (Smith, 2005). To put things in simple behavioral terms, personality psychologists tend to be somewhat more interested in how different people react differently to the same situation, whereas social psychologists emphasize how people in general react differently to different situations. But you can always find exceptions to this tendency, as personality psychologists often examine the efficacy of situations as well, and social psychologists are quite likely to consider individual differences, too.

There is a strong clinical tradition in personality psychology, going back to Freud and the origins of psychoanalysis at the turn of the 20th century. The fields of abnormal psychology and clinical/counseling psychology consider problems in human life such as psychopathology, mental illness, and behavioral dysfunctions. Many clinicians concern themselves with personality disorders of various kinds. Furthermore, some theories of personality prescribe specific techniques for changing abnormal behavior and enhancing mental health (e.g., psychoanalytic therapy, Rogerian counseling). Nonetheless, personality psychology proper tends to focus more on relatively normal functioning and the wide varieties of psychological individuality that may be expressed among more-or-less well-adjusted people. As the scientific study of the whole person, personality psychology is not centrally concerned with psychotherapy and other treatment aspects of clinical practice. However, there is no more important background for effective psychotherapy than a strong understanding of theory and research in personality psychology. And I hope that you will also conclude that such an understanding can enhance your own life, as well.
CHAPTER 1
STUDYING THE PERSON

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The Person: An Introduction to the Science of Personality Psychology is organized into four parts. The first part (Chapters 1–3) considers basic questions in the field and the fundamental contexts of psychological individuality. Before we can examine the three levels of personality that I have identified in this chapter, we need to understand how human lives are situated in time and space. The ultimate context in this regard is human evolution. In Chapter 2, we consider how human nature has been shaped by evolution. Recent years have witnessed an upsurge of interest in “evolutionary personality psychology.” I submit that any reasonable scientific effort to understand persons must consider the role of evolution as the macrocontext of human individuality. The conception of human evolution, as originally expressed by Charles Darwin (1859), is too important to be left out of any personality theory, in my view, but it is also too general to function as a personality theory itself. Human evolution is best viewed, then, as a fundamental context for human behavior and experience, and understanding human life from an evolutionary point of view is a necessary first step in studying the person, but only a first step.

A second fundamental context is culture. Chapter 3 brings together the many seminal ideas from behaviorism, social learning theory, theories of socialization, theories of human ecology and environments, and cross-cultural psychology that must be considered when examining the exquisite way in which human lives are socially and culturally contextualized. The theories of behaviorism that so dominated American psychology in the middle of the 20th century—theories offered by Clark Hull (1943) and B. F. Skinner (1938)—were never theories of personality. But their cornerstone ideas concerning learning and environments are fundamental for a scientific understanding of human individuality. Behaviorism addresses how organisms learn by interacting with their environments. For human beings, those environments range from immediate physical and social situations to the larger contexts of family, neighborhood, class, and culture.

The remaining three parts of this book follow the tripartite scheme for conceptualizing persons that I have introduced in this chapter. The second part (Chapters 4–6) focuses on Level 1 in the study of persons: dispositional personality traits. Chapter 4 examines fundamental issues in trait psychology, including defining and measuring traits, the concepts of reliability and validity in trait assessment, and the interactions between traits and situations in the prediction of behavior. Chapter 5 focuses on particular traits that personality psychologists have studied, organized according to the Big Five classification scheme. We look at how these traits are defined, what they mean, how they influence social behavior, and how they may be grounded in human physiology and the activity of the brain. Chapter 6 considers continuity and change in traits across the human lifespan and addresses these intriguing questions: To what extent are traits a product of genetics? Do traits have their origins in temperament differences apparent in infancy? Can traits change in adulthood?

The book’s third part (Chapters 7–9) focuses on Level 2 in the study of persons: characteristic adaptations. Motivational adaptations are the subject of Chapter 7, in which we examine the most important ideas and research findings about human individuality as manifested in needs, goals, motives, strivings, and other expressions of human desire. Here we find the seminal contributions of Sigmund Freud on unconscious sexual and aggressive drives, Henry Murray and David McClelland on psychogenic needs and social motives, humanistic theories of motivation (such as that offered by Carl Rogers), and the more recent contributions of self-determination theory and the study of personal strivings, tasks, and projects. Chapter 8 moves to cognitive adaptations, featuring George Kelly’s personal construct psychology and the increasingly influential social-cognitive approaches to personality that address concepts such as social intelligence, cognitive schemas, and the cognitive regulation of behavior. Chapter 9 considers characteristic adaptations that are contextualized in time, as in developmental stages and tasks. The chapter is organized around two highly influential theories of self-development—Jane Loevinger’s theory of ego development and Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial stages. The former theory focuses on the structure of the self whereas the latter mainly considers the content of social life.
The book’s fourth part (Chapters 10–12) focuses on Level 3 in the study of persons: life stories. Chapter 10 introduces the concept of a life story and describes recent theory and research on how people construct narratives to make sense of their lives. Chapter 11 asks a fundamental question about peoples’ lives and the stories they construct to make sense of them: How should psychologists interpret life stories? Here, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and more recent psychoanalytic theorists (e.g., Heinz Kohut) offer intriguing and controversial ideas regarding the interpretation of dreams, fantasies, memories, and life stories writ large. Their emphasis on the unconscious meanings and the intrapsychic mysteries of human personality contrasts sharply with current postmodern approaches to personality, which emphasize the social construction of lives. Yet both psychoanalytic and postmodern approaches agree that the stories people tell about their lives may not be what they seem to be at first blush. Finally, Chapter 12 considers how personality psychologists themselves construct stories to make sense of the stories people tell and live. In considering psychobiography, case studies, and conceptualizations of the human life course, Chapter 12 brings us back to the issue with which this book begins: How can we account for the individual life as a whole? What do we know when we know a person? How can we understand the individual human life? I believe that a scientific understanding of the individual life begins with (1) a solid grounding in the evolutionary and cultural contexts of human behavior and proceeds to a systematic consideration of (2) dispositional personality traits; (3) characteristic motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental adaptations; and (4) integrative life stories. I believe that thinking of psychological individuality in this way brings into a meaningful synthesis the best that personality psychology has to offer. And I also strongly believe that thinking about who you are in these terms can help you develop a better and more fulfilling understanding of your own life and your place in the world.

SUMMARY

1. Personality psychology is the scientific study of the whole person.
2. What do we know when we know a person? Observation of everyday social interactions shows that people tend to make at least three different kinds of attributions about persons in their efforts to know them. They account for a person’s psychological individuality in terms of (1) dispositional traits, (2) characteristic adaptations, and (3) integrative life stories. These three types of attributions about persons correspond to three levels of personality. A full understanding of the individual human life begins with a solid grounding in the evolutionary and cultural contexts of human behavior and experience, and it proceeds to a systematic consideration of traits, adaptations, and life stories.
3. At Level 1, personality traits are general, internal, and comparative dispositions that account for consistencies perceived or expected in behavior from one situation to the next and over time. Typically assessed via self-report questionnaires, traits sketch an outline of psychological individuality.
4. At Level 2, characteristic adaptations are contextualized facets of psychological individuality that speak to motivational, cognitive, and developmental concerns in personality. Contextualized in time, place, or social role, characteristic adaptations fill in the details of psychological individuality. Some of the most influential theories in the history of personality psychology have addressed fundamental questions regarding motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental adaptations in life.
5. At Level 3, a life story is an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that integrates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future in order to provide a life with a sense of unity and purpose. Throughout the history of personality psychology, scholars and scientists have debated the merits and limitations of different approaches for interpreting the stories people tell about their lives. If traits sketch an outline and adaptations fill in the details of psychological individuality, life stories speak to what a human life means overall.
6. As the scientific study of the whole person, personality psychology follows a three-step sequence of inquiry that is common to most sciences: (1) unsystematic observation, (2) building theories, and (3) evaluating propositions.
7. In the third step, scientists derive hypotheses from theories and test their adequacy in research. One general design of hypothesis-testing research is the correlational design, in which the psychologist determines the extent to which two or more variables relate to each other. A second general design is the experiment, in which the psychologist manipulates the independent variable to assess its impact on the dependent variable.

8. Personality psychology was born in university psychology departments in the 1930s. The first authoritative text for the field was Gordon Allport’s (1937) *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*. Allport identified an important distinction in personality research between the nomothetic approach, which aims to discover and test general principles of behavior across many individuals, and the idiographic approach, which focuses on the specific and individual patterning of the single human life.

9. The history of modern personality psychology can be divided into three periods: (1) 1930–1950, the period of developing general systems and grand theories of personality; (2) 1950–1970, the period of refining measurement techniques and elaborating personality constructs; and (3) 1970–today, a period that began with a crisis concerning the legitimacy of personality studies and developed into the present sense of renewal and invigoration in the field of personality psychology.

10. Personality psychology is related to many other branches of psychology and sits at the crossroads of many different disciplines in the cognitive and social sciences. It is distinguished from other fields, however, by its focus on psychological individuality; its tendency to examine relatively enduring, rather than fleeting and momentary, characteristics of persons; its interest in individual differences as manifested in adulthood; and its focus on relatively normal, healthy psychological functioning.