

PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

DOMAINS OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HUMAN NATURE

Second Canadian Edition

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PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY: DOMAINS OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HUMAN NATURE
Second Canadian Edition

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Dedication

To Tommy and Ana.

RL

To my father and first personality teacher, Arnold H. Buss.

DB

To Chris, whose personality is the best part of my day; and to
Atticus and London, whose spirits are greatly missed.

DK

To my husband, Henry, my best friend and greatest supporter.

CE

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About the Authors

Randy J. Larsen received his PhD in Personality Psychology from the University of Illinois at Champaign–Urbana in 1984. In 1992, he was awarded the Distinguished Scientific Achievement Award for Early Career Contributions to Personality Psychology from the American Psychological Association, and in 1987 he received a Research Scientist Development Award from the National Institute of Mental Health. He has been an associate editor at the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, and has been on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Research in Personality*, *Review of General Psychology*, and the *Journal of Personality*. Randy Larsen has served on several Scientific Review Groups for the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Research Council. He is a Fellow in the Association for Psychological Science and the American Psychological Association. His research on personality has been supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Aging, the McDonnell Foundation for Cognitive Neuroscience, and the Solon Summerfield Foundation. In 2000 he was elected president of the Midwestern Psychological Association. He has served on the faculty at Purdue University and the University of Michigan. Currently Randy Larsen is chairman of the Psychology Department, and the William R. Stuckenberg Professor of Human Values and Moral Development, at Washington University in St. Louis, where he teaches Personality Psychology and other courses. He lives in St. Louis with his wife and two children.



Courtesy of Randy J. Larsen

David M. Buss received his PhD in 1981 from the University of California at Berkeley. He served on the faculties of Harvard University and the University of Michigan before accepting a professorship at the University of Texas at Austin, where he has taught since 1996. Buss received the American Psychological Association (APA) Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contribution to Psychology in 1988, the APA G. Stanley Hall Award in 1990, and the APA Distinguished Scientist Lecturer Award in 2001. Books by David Buss include *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating* (Revised Edition) (Basic Books, 2003), which has been translated into 10 languages; *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind* (4th ed.) (Allyn & Bacon, 2012), which was presented with the Robert W. Hamilton Book Award; *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy Is as Necessary as Love and Sex* (Free Press, 2000), which has been translated into 13 languages; and *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (Wiley, 2005). Buss has authored more than 250 scientific publications and has also written articles for *The New York Times* and the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. He appears in the ISI List of Most Highly Cited Psychologists Worldwide, and as the 27th Most Cited Psychologist in Introductory Psychology textbooks. He lectures widely throughout the United States and abroad and has extensive cross-cultural research collaborations. David Buss greatly enjoys teaching, and in 2001 he won the President's Teaching Excellence Award at the University of Texas.



Courtesy of David M. Buss

David B. King received his PhD in 2013 from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. During his doctoral training, he specialized in the field of *health psychology*, studying social factors in the daily stress of Canadian paramedics. He also holds a Master of Science degree in *statistical modelling* and a Bachelor of Science degree in *psychology*, both from Trent University. David's current research addresses the question of how stress unfolds within social contexts of varying size and complexity. Within dyads and small groups, he is interested in understanding how individuals cope with stress together and carry stress across roles and settings. On the sociocultural level, he explores how people cope with stress arising from disease outbreaks, pandemics, and other collective threats to health. In addition to his research, David has been teaching at the university level since 2012, leading courses in *personality*, *gender*, *health*, and *death and dying* in the Department of Psychology at the University of British Columbia. He remains dedicated to his goal of fostering critical thinking and student engagement in psychology, as well as improving science literacy more broadly in the community. David has authored multiple papers in peer-reviewed academic journals and is the co-author of one additional textbook, the Canadian edition of *Health Psychology: Biopsychosocial Interactions* (Sarafino, Smith, King, & DeLongis, 2015). He has also received multiple awards, including an Early Career Achievement Award from the American Psychological Association and a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Award from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In his spare time, David enjoys writing, staying active, and spending time in nature with his husband, Chris, and his two rescue dogs from Mexico, Hunter and Scout.



Courtesy of David B. King

Carolyn E. Ensley received her PhD in 1999 from the University of Waterloo in Waterloo, Canada. Carolyn's doctoral research examined dual-task interference and the role of attention in visual information processing. After completing her PhD, Carolyn began a post-doctoral fellowship for the Ontario government, which involved developing an assessment tool that could accurately predict the length of stay for psychiatric patients at inpatient facilities. The tool is now used at psychiatric facilities across Ontario. In 2004 Carolyn began teaching at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo and since that time has developed and taught more than 60 courses covering a wide variety of topics in undergraduate psychology. Carolyn is an expert on evolutionary influences on personality and personality and psychological disorders. When not working, Carolyn enjoys reading, birding, gardening, and spending time with her husband, Henry, and her sons Jonathan, James, and Joshua.



Courtesy of Carolyn E. Ensley

Preface

We are pleased and excited to present the second Canadian edition of *Personality Psychology: Domains of Knowledge About Human Nature*. As with previous editions of the book, the second Canadian edition continues to adopt a framework of six important domains of knowledge about personality functioning, rather than organizing material around the traditional grand theories of personality. This innovative framework is one of the reasons *Domains of Knowledge* has remained a forerunner among personality texts, and it has proven equally valuable within a Canadian context. These six domains are the *dispositional domain* (traits, trait taxonomies, and personality dispositions over time), the *biological domain* (genetics, physiology, evolution), the *intrapsychic domain* (psychodynamics, motives), the *cognitive-experiential domain* (cognition, emotion, and the self), the *social and cultural domain* (social interaction, gender, and culture), and the *adjustment domain* (stress, coping, health, and personality disorders). Original authors Randy Larsen and David Buss believed that these domains of knowledge represented the contemporary state of affairs in personality psychology, and progress in the field since publication of the first American edition has continued to bear out that belief.

In line with the goals of previous editions, we envision our text as a reflection of the field of personality psychology, both generally and now specifically within a Canadian context. Our desire is to capture the excitement of what the science of personality is all about and how it remains relevant to Canadians. For the second Canadian edition, we did our best to remain true to that vision. We believe that the field of personality psychology has entered a golden age of sorts, and we hope that the changes we've made to this edition convey a discipline that is vibrant in a way it never has been before. After all, no other field is devoted to the study of all that it means to be human.

For the previous American edition on which the first Canadian edition was based, each chapter was streamlined through judicious trimming. This provided room for discussing new research and made the book a bit shorter and more economical. The book has since been edited and revised further to resonate with a Canadian readership. Key additions and revisions to the first and second Canadian editions are described below. We have updated the language of the text (to improve gender neutrality, to remove potentially stigmatizing language, and to ensure that examples are relevant within a modern context), added more salient cultural references, and paid special attention to current social issues that many Canadians consider important. In order to showcase Canadian contributions to personality research, we have included in each chapter a *Highlight On Canadian Research* box describing research by Canadian scientists. At the end of each chapter (as well as sections within), we have also added a few questions (referred to as “Concept Checks”) to help students think more critically about the material.

Chapter 2: Personality Assessment, Measurement, and Research Design

- Research on social desirability and impression management, including a highlight of leading Canadian research by Del Paulhus.
- Updated practical examples of personality assessment and research methods.

Chapter 3: Traits and Trait Taxonomies

- An expanded look at the HEXACO model of personality developed by Canadian researchers, which is now featured as a main taxonomy following the Five Factor Model.
- A detailed discussion of the Honesty–Humility trait and new research supporting its inclusion as a sixth factor of personality.

Preface

- A new and expanded examination of the Dark Triad and Dark Tetrad models, including definitions of narcissism, subclinical psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and dispositional sadism. These additions better enable the reader's understanding of research findings on the dark traits discussed throughout the text.

Chapter 4: Theoretical and Measurement Issues in Trait Psychology

- Highlighted discussion of the work of Canadian researcher Sampo Paunonen, including expanded discussions of the hierarchical organization of traits.
- Information on personality testing in RCMP officers.
- New research on gender diversity in the Canadian workforce.

Chapter 5: Personality Dispositions over Time: Stability, Coherence, and Change

- New research on impulsivity in the section on sensation seeking, including findings on differential developmental trajectories of these traits.
- New content on increasing openness and creativity.
- New content on volitional personality change.
- Information on the Victoria Longitudinal Study addressing stability and change of personality traits over time.
- Updated research findings on historical changes in narcissism.

Chapter 6: Genetics and Personality

- Findings from a Canadian twin study on mental toughness.
- New material from behavioural genetics on the link between social values and personality.

Chapter 7: Physiological Approaches to Personality

- An overview of the famous Canadian case study of the brain injury of Patient K. C., including the contributions of the case to modern psychology.
- A highlighted discussion of Canadian research from the Centre for Gambling Research at the University of British Columbia.
- A closer look at fascinating research that demonstrates how the brain uses its own models of personality to predict behaviour.

Chapter 8: Evolutionary Perspectives on Personality

- Research on the adaptive rumination hypothesis, which proposes that depression is an evolved mechanism in humans.
- Information on how ADHD may have evolved as an adaptive trait.

Chapter 9: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Personality

- The discussion of a famous Canadian case of repression.
- Canadian research on dream analysis and dream interpretation.

Chapter 10: Psychoanalytic Approaches: Contemporary Issues

- The inclusion of an example of a Canadian court case that was influenced by false memories.
- Research on Erikson's psychosocial stages of development among Holocaust survivors from Canadian psychologist Peter Suedfeld.
- Updated research on attachment theory and narcissism.

Chapter 11: Motives and Personality

- Significant updates and corrections to the table of Murray's needs.
- Research on the effects of Canadian acculturation on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for achievement.
- Updated research on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and self-actualization, including a brief discussion of self-transcendence.
- An expanded discussion of peak experiences, flow, and the autotelic personality.

Chapter 12: Cognitive Topics in Personality

- The inclusion of a clearer definition of *schema*.
- Information on learned helplessness among First Nations youth.
- New exercise on intelligence, numeracy, and information-processing within the context of analyzing data.

Chapter 13: Emotion and Personality

- Updated research on the basic emotion of pride from Canadian researcher Jessica Tracy.
- Updated research on money and happiness, including Canadian research on prosocial spending.
- A closer look at the link between money and happiness in a Canadian context.

Chapter 14: Approaches to the Self

- Updated research on the mirror recognition test in other species.
- Canadian research on the link between ambiguous text messaging and social anxiety.
- An expanded discussion of the distinction between shyness and social disinterest in childhood, based on Canadian research.
- Canadian research on implicit and explicit self-esteem.
- Canadian research examining self-concept and body dissatisfaction among First Nations schoolchildren.
- New discussion on self-concept differentiation and related research.

Chapter 15: Personality and Social Interaction

- More inclusive language when discussing relationships and families.
- Where available, research on gay and lesbian relationships, including new research on assortative mating among gay men.
- Canadian research on Internet trolling behaviour and its psychological underpinnings.

Chapter 16: Sex, Gender, and Personality

- Updated discussion of sex and gender (including additional definitions of key terms) to better align the text with a contemporary Canadian perspective.
- New section on gender identity.
- Updated research on sex differences throughout, with outdated research removed or replaced.
- Updated research on masculinity/femininity, gender stereotypes, and theories of sex differences.
- Information on the challenges faced by the transgender community, including a highlight box on Canadian research examining increased suicide risk resulting from discrimination.

Chapter 17: Culture and Personality

- New and comprehensive highlight box examining cultural identity (and related psychosocial factors) in Indigenous peoples of Canada, reviewed by David Newhouse, Chair of Indigenous Studies at Trent University.
- An expanded discussion of acculturation, including new Canadian research.
- Intriguing Canadian research on a third type of self-construal, the metapersonal type, and its link to environmental awareness and conservation behaviour.
- A detailed discussion of the limitations of Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) populations in research, as outlined by Canadian researchers.
- Information on the Cross-Cultural (Chinese) Personality Assessment Inventory and how it differs from conventional measures and models of personality.

Chapter 18: Stress, Coping, Adjustment, and Health

- New section on hardiness and resilience.
- Improved integration of research findings on the role of the Big Five traits in stress, coping, and health.
- Canadian research on the effects of acute social stress on children's emotional processing in the lab.
- Information on coping in a social context, including Canadian research on the role of neuroticism in relationship-focused coping.

Chapter 19: Disorders of Personality

- Reordering of clusters to align with the layout of the DSM-5.
- Inclusion of Cluster letters (A, B, or C) to better align with the DSM-5 and improve cross-referencing.
- Reviews of Canadian cases of antisocial personality disorder.
- Canadian research on ambiguous facial expressions and borderline personality disorder.
- A closer look at alexithymia, including a discussion of Canadian research on the topic.

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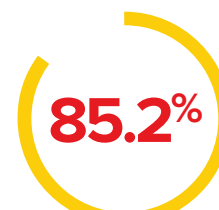
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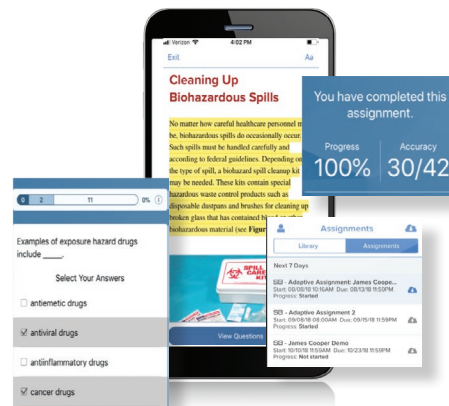
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Personality Psychology

Personality Defined

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And Mechanisms . . .
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Key Terms

Introduction

Those who carry humour to excess are thought to be vulgar buffoons, striving after humour at all costs, not caring about pain to the object of their fun; . . . while those who can neither make a joke themselves nor put up with those who do are thought to be boorish and unpolished. But those who joke in a tasteful way are called ready-witted and tactful . . . and it is the mark of a tactful person to say and listen to such things as befit a good and well-bred person.

Aristotle, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, expressed these wise observations on the subject of humour and people who do and do not indulge in it. In this quote we see Aristotle behaving much as a personality psychologist. He is analyzing the characteristics of individuals who have an appropriate sense of humour, providing some details about what features are associated with a sense of humour. Aristotle adds to this description by comparing people who are extreme, having either too much or too little sense of humour. In his book on ethics, Aristotle described and analyzed many personality characteristics, including truthfulness, courage, intelligence, self-indulgence, anger proneness, and friendliness.



Each person is, in certain respects, like all other persons, like some other persons, and like no other person.

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We might conclude that Aristotle was an amateur personality psychologist. But aren't we all amateur personality psychologists to some extent? Aren't we all curious about the characteristics people possess, including our own characteristics? Don't we all use personality characteristics in describing people? And haven't we all used personality characteristics to explain behaviour, either our own or that of others?

When we say that a friend goes to a lot of parties because they are outgoing, we are using personality to explain their behaviour. When we refer to another friend as conscientious and reliable, we are describing features of their personality. When we characterize ourselves as thoughtful, intelligent, and ambitious, we are describing features of our personality.

Features of personality make people different from one another, and these features usually take the form of adjectives; for instance, John is lazy, Lina is optimistic, and Samir is anxious. Adjectives that can be used to describe characteristics of people are called **trait-descriptive adjectives**. There are nearly 20,000 such trait-descriptive adjectives in the English language. This astonishing fact alone tells us that, in everyday life, there are compelling reasons for trying to understand and describe those we interact with, as well as ourselves.

Notice that the adjectives describing personality refer to several very different aspects of people. Words such as *thoughtful* refer to inner qualities of the mind. Words such as *charming* and *humorous* refer to the effects a person has on other people. Words such as *domineering* are relational and signify a person's position, or stance, toward others. Words such as *ambitious* refer to the intensity of desire to reach our goals. Words such as *creative* refer both to a quality of mind and to the nature of the products we produce. Words such as *deceitful* may refer to the strategies used to attain one's goals, however socially problematic. All of these features describe aspects of personality.

? Exercise

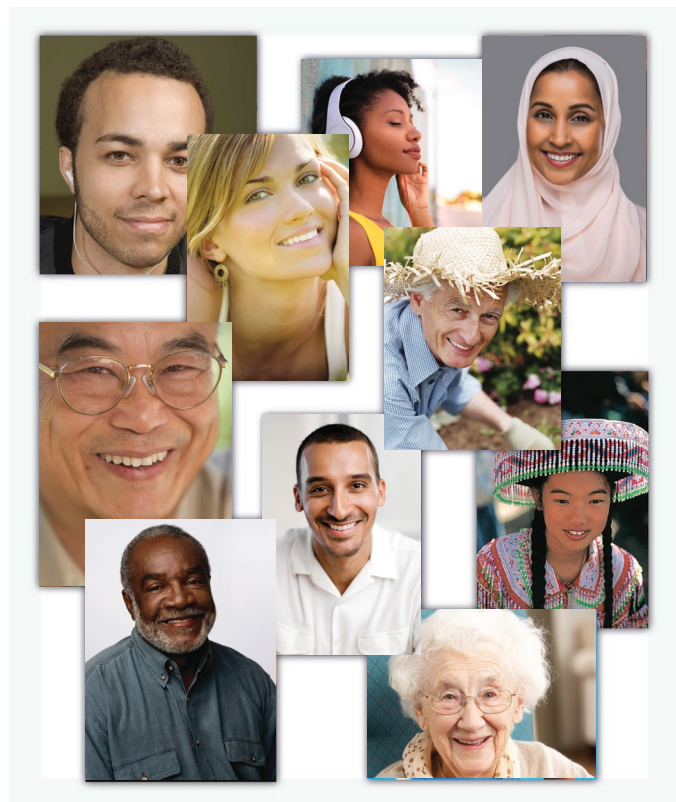
Think of someone you know well—say, a friend, family member, or roommate. Consider the many characteristics that make this person unique. List the five adjectives you think best capture this person's personality. For example, if you were to describe this person to someone, what five adjectives would you use? Now, ask your target person to list the five adjectives *they* think make them most unique. Compare your lists. How similar or different are they?

Personality Defined

Establishing a definition for something as complex as human personality is difficult. The authors of the first textbooks on personality—Gordon Allport (1937) and Henry Murray (1938)—struggled with the definition. The problem is how to establish a definition that is sufficiently comprehensive to include all of the aspects mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, including inner features, social effects, qualities of the mind, qualities of the body, relations to others, and inner goals. Because of these complexities, some texts on personality omit a formal definition entirely. Nonetheless, the following definition captures the essential elements of personality: **Personality** is the set of psychological traits and mechanisms within the individual that are organized and relatively enduring and that influence the individual's interactions with, and adaptations to, the intrapsychic, physical, and social environments. Let's examine the elements of this definition more closely.

Personality Is the Set of Psychological Traits . . .

Psychological traits are characteristics that describe ways in which people are different from each other. Saying that someone is *shy* is to mention one way in which that person differs from others who are more outgoing. Traits also define ways in which people are *similar* to some others. For example, people who are shy are similar to each other in that they are anxious in social situations, particularly when there is an audience watching them.



People are different from each other in many ways. The science of personality psychology provides an understanding of the psychological ways that people differ from one another.

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Consider another example—the trait of talkativeness. This characteristic can be meaningfully applied to people and describes a dimension of difference among them. Typically, a talkative person is that way from day to day, from week to week, and from year to year. Certainly, even the most talkative person can have quiet moments, quiet days, or even quiet weeks. Over time, however, those with the trait of talkativeness tend to emit verbal behaviour with greater frequency than those who are low on talkativeness. In this sense, traits describe the **average tendencies** of a person. On average, a high-talkative person starts more conversations than a low-talkative person.

Research on personality traits asks four kinds of questions:

- How many traits are there?
- How are the traits organized?
- What are the origins of traits?
- What are the correlates and consequences of traits?

One primary question is *how many* fundamental traits there are. Are there dozens or hundreds of traits, or merely a few? The second research question pertains to the *organization*, or structure, of traits. For example, how is talkativeness related to other traits, such as impulsivity and extraversion? A third research question concerns the *origins* of traits—where they come from and how they develop. Does heredity influence talkativeness? What sorts of cultural and child-rearing practices affect the development of traits such as talkativeness? A fourth key question pertains to the *correlations and consequences* of traits in terms of experience, behaviour, and life outcomes. Do talkative people have many friends? Do they have a more extended social network to draw upon in times of trouble? Do they annoy people who are trying to study?

The four research questions constitute the core of the research program of many personality psychologists. Psychological traits are useful for at least three reasons. First, they help *describe* people and help understand the dimensions of difference among people. Second, traits are useful because they help *explain* behaviour. The reasons people act may be partly a function of their personality traits. Third, traits are useful because they can help *predict* future behaviour—for example, the sorts of careers individuals will find satisfying, who will tolerate stress better, and who is likely to get along well with others. Thus, personality is useful in *describing, explaining, and predicting* differences among individuals. All good scientific theories enable researchers to describe, explain, and predict in their domains. Just as an economic theory might be useful in describing, explaining, and predicting fluctuations in the economy, personality traits describe, explain, and predict differences among people.

And Mechanisms . . .

Psychological mechanisms are like traits, except that the term *mechanisms* refers more to the processes of personality. For example, most psychological mechanisms involve an information-processing activity. Someone who is extraverted, for example, may look for and notice opportunities to interact with other people. That is, an extraverted person is prepared to notice and act on certain kinds of social information.



Courage is an example of a trait that is activated only under particular circumstances.

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Most psychological mechanisms have three essential ingredients: *inputs*, *decision rules*, and *outputs*. A psychological mechanism may make people more sensitive to certain kinds of information from the environment (input), may make them more likely to think about specific options (decision rules), and may guide their behaviour toward certain categories of action (outputs). For example, an extraverted person may look for opportunities to be with other people, may consider in each situation the possibilities for human contact and interaction, and may encourage others to interact with them. Our personalities contain many psychological mechanisms of this sort—information-processing procedures that have the key elements of inputs, decision rules, and outputs (see Figure 1.1).

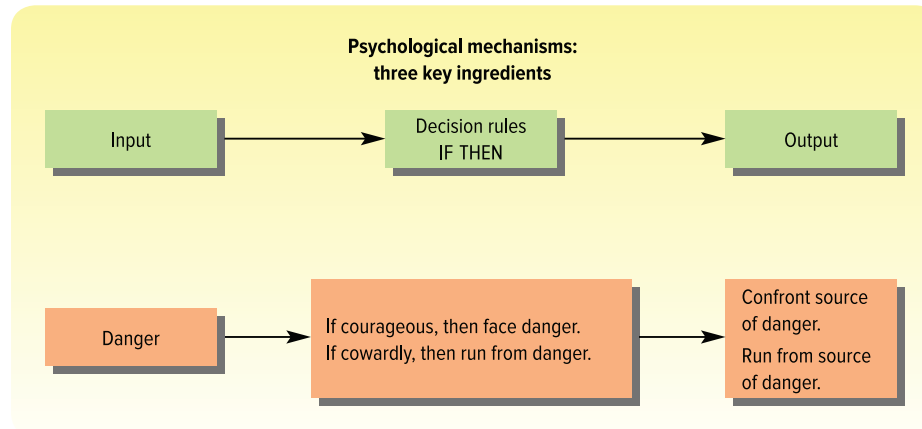


FIGURE 1.1 Psychological mechanisms have three essential ingredients. Our personalities contain many such mechanisms.

This does not mean that all of our traits and psychological mechanisms are activated at all times. In fact, at any point in time, only a few are activated. Consider the trait of courageousness. This trait is activated only under particular conditions, such as when people face serious dangers and threats to their lives. Some people are more courageous than others, but we will never know which people are courageous unless and until the right situation presents itself. Look around next time you are in class: Who do you think has the trait of courageousness? You won't know until you are in a situation that provides the potential for courageous behaviour.

Within the Individual . . .

Within the individual means that personality is something a person carries with themselves over time and from one situation to the next. Typically, we feel that we are today the same people we were last week, last month, and last year. We also feel that we will continue to have these personalities into the coming months and years. And, although our personalities are certainly influenced by our environments, and especially by the significant others in our lives, we feel that we carry with us the same personalities from situation to situation in our lives. The definition of personality stresses that the important sources of personality reside within the individual and, hence, are at least somewhat stable over time and somewhat consistent over situations.

That Are Organized and Relatively Enduring . . .

Organized means that the psychological traits and mechanisms for a given person are not simply a random collection of elements. Rather, personality is organized because the mechanisms and traits are linked to one another in a coherent fashion. Imagine the simple case of two desires—a desire for food and a desire for

intimacy. If you have not eaten for a while and are experiencing hunger pangs, then your desire for food might override your desire for intimacy. On the other hand, if you have already eaten, then your desire for food may temporarily subside, allowing you to pursue intimacy. Our personalities are organized in the sense that they contain decision rules that govern which needs are activated, depending on the circumstances.

Psychological traits are also relatively **enduring** over time, particularly in adulthood, and are somewhat consistent over situations. To say that someone is angry at this moment is not saying anything about a trait. A person may be angry now but not tomorrow, or may be angry in this situation but not in others. Anger is more of a *state* than a trait. To say that someone is anger prone or generally hot tempered, however, is to describe a psychological trait. Someone who is anger prone is *frequently* angry, relative to others, and shows this proneness time and time again in many different situations (e.g., the person is argumentative at work, is hostile and aggressive while playing team sports for recreation, and argues a lot with family members).

There may be some occasions when this generalization about the consistency of personality from situation to situation does not hold. Some situations may be overpowering and suppress the expression of psychological traits. Individuals who are generally talkative, for example, may remain quiet during a lecture, at the movies, or in an elevator—although you undoubtedly have experienced someone who could not or would not keep quiet in any of these circumstances!

The debate about whether people are consistent across situations in their lives has a long history in personality psychology. Some psychologists have argued that the evidence for consistency is weak (Mischel, 1968). For example, honesty measured in one situation (say, cheating on a test) may not correlate with honesty measured in another situation (say, cheating on income taxes). We will explore this debate more fully later in the book. For now we will simply say that most personality psychologists maintain that although people are not perfectly consistent, there is enough consistency to warrant including this characteristic in a definition of personality.

The fact that personality includes relatively enduring psychological traits and mechanisms does not preclude change over time. Indeed, describing precisely the ways in which we change over time is one goal of personality psychologists.

And That Influence . . .

In the definition of personality, an emphasis on the **influential forces** of personality means that personality traits and mechanisms can have an effect on people's lives. Personality influences how we act, how we view ourselves, how we think about the world, how we interact with others, how we feel, how we select our environments (particularly our social environment), what goals and desires we pursue in life, and how we react to our circumstances. People are not passive beings merely responding to external forces. Rather, personality plays a key role in affecting how people shape their lives. It is in this sense that personality traits are forces that *influence* how we think, act, and feel.

The Individual's Interactions with . . .

This feature of personality is perhaps the most difficult to describe, because the nature of **person–environment interaction** is complex. In Chapter 15, we examine interactionism in greater detail. For now, however, it is sufficient to note that interactions with situations include perceptions, selection, evocations, and manipulations. *Perceptions* refers to how we “see,” or interpret, an environment. Two people may be

exposed to the same objective event, yet what they pay attention to and how they interpret the event may be very different. And this difference is a function of their personalities. For example, two people can look at an inkblot, yet one person sees two cannibals cooking a human over a fire, whereas the other perceives a smiling clown waving hello. As another example, a stranger may smile at someone on the street; one person might perceive the smile as a smirk, whereas another person might perceive the smile as a friendly gesture. It is the same smile, just as it is the same inkblot, yet how people interpret these situations can be determined by their personalities.

Selection describes the manner in which we choose situations to enter—how we choose our friends, hobbies, university or college classes, and careers. How we go about making these selections is, at least in part, a reflection of our personalities. How we use our free time is especially a reflection of our traits. One person may take up the hobby of parachute jumping, whereas another may prefer to spend time quietly gardening. We select from what life offers us, and these choices are partly a function of personality.

Evocations are the reactions we produce in others, often quite unintentionally. To some extent, we create the social environments that we inhabit. A child with a high activity level, for example, may evoke in parents attempts to constrain the child, even though these attempts are not intended or desired by the child. A person who is physically large may evoke feelings of intimidation in others, even if intimidation is not the goal. Our evocative interactions are also essential features of our personalities.

Manipulations are the ways in which we intentionally attempt to influence others. Someone who is anxious or frightened easily may try to influence their group to avoid scary movies or risky activities. Someone who is highly conscientious may insist that everyone follow the rules. Or a man who is very neat and orderly may insist that his partner pick up her things. The ways in which we attempt to manipulate the behaviour, thoughts, and feelings of others are essential features of our personalities. All of these forms of interaction—perceptions, selection, evocations, and manipulations—are central to understanding the connections between the personalities of people and the environments they inhabit.

And Adaptations to . . .

An emphasis on **adaptations** conveys the notion that a central feature of personality concerns adaptive functioning—accomplishing goals, coping, adjusting, and dealing with the challenges and problems we face as we go through life. Few things are more obvious about human behaviour than the fact that it is goal directed, functional, and purposeful. Even behaviour that does not appear functional—such as excessive worrying—may, in fact, be functional. For example, people who worry a lot often receive lots of support from others. Consequently, what appears on the surface to be maladaptive (worrying) may, in fact, have some rewarding characteristics for the person (eliciting social support). In addition, some aspects of personality processes represent deficits in normal adaptations, such as breakdowns in the ability to cope with stress, to regulate one's social behaviour, or to manage one's emotions. Although psychologists' knowledge of the adaptive functions of personality traits and mechanisms is currently limited, it remains an indispensable key to understanding the nature of human personality.

The Environment

The physical **environment** often poses challenges for people. Some of these are direct threats to survival. For example, food shortages create the problem of securing adequate nutrients for survival. Extremes of

temperature pose the problem of maintaining thermal homeostasis. Heights, snakes, spiders, and strangers can all pose threats to survival. Human beings, like other animals, have evolved solutions to these adaptive problems. Hunger pangs motivate us to seek food, and taste preferences guide our choices of which foods to consume. Shivering mechanisms help combat the cold, and sweat glands help fight the heat. At a psychological level, our fears of heights, snakes, spiders, and strangers—the most common human fears—help us avoid or safely interact with these environmental threats to our survival.

Our social environment also poses adaptive challenges. We may desire the prestige of a good job, but there are many other people competing for the same positions. We may desire interesting friends and mates, but there are many others competing for them. We may desire greater emotional closeness with others, but may not know how to achieve closeness. The ways in which we cope with our social environment—the challenges we encounter in our struggle for belongingness, love, and esteem—are central to an understanding of personality.

The particular aspect of the environment that is important at any moment in time is frequently determined by personality. A person who is talkative, for example, will notice more opportunities in the social environment to strike up conversations than will someone who is low on talkativeness. A person who is disagreeable will occupy a social environment where people frequently argue with them. A person for whom status is very important will pay attention to the relative hierarchical positions of others—who is up, who is down, who is ascending, who is sliding. In short, from among the potentially infinite dimensions of the environments we inhabit, our “effective environment” represents only the small subset of features that our psychological mechanisms direct us to attend and respond to.

In addition to our physical and social environments, we have an intrapsychic environment. *Intrapsychic* means “within the mind.” We all have memories, dreams, desires, fantasies, and a collection of private experiences that we live with each day. This intrapsychic environment, although not as objectively verifiable as our social or physical environment, is nevertheless real to each of us and makes up an important part of our psychological reality. For example, our self-esteem—how good or bad we feel about ourselves at any given moment—may depend on our assessment of the degree to which we are succeeding in attaining our goals. Success at work and success at friendship may provide two different forms of success experience and, hence, form different intrapsychic memories. We are influenced by our memories of these experiences whenever we think about our own self-worth. Our intrapsychic environment, no less than our physical and social environments, provides a critical context for understanding human personality.

? Exercise

Write a one-page essay about a good friend, someone you know well, in which you describe what is characteristic, enduring, and functional about that person. Include in this description those elements of the ways in which they interact with, or adapt to, the physical, social, and intrapsychic environments. Which traits or characteristics about this person do you think are most adaptive?

Three Levels of Personality Analysis

Although the definition of personality used in this book is quite broad and encompassing, personality can be analyzed at three levels. These three levels are well summarized by Kluckhohn and Murray in their 1948 book on culture and personality, in which they state that every human being is, in certain respects,

- 1. like all others (the human nature level);
- 2. like some others (the level of individual and group differences); and
- 3. like no others (the individual uniqueness level).

Another way to think of these distinctions is that the first level refers to “universals” (the ways in which we are all alike), the middle level refers to “particulars” (the ways in which we are like some people but unlike others), and the third level refers to “uniqueness” (the ways in which we are unlike any other person) (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Three Levels of Personality Analysis	
Level of Analysis	Examples
Human Nature	Need to belong Capacity for love
Individual and Group Differences	Variation in need to belong (individual differences) Males are more physically aggressive than females (group difference)
Individual Uniqueness	Seiko’s unique way of expressing their love Darren’s unique way of expressing aggression

Human Nature

The first level of personality analysis describes **human nature** in general—the traits and mechanisms of personality that are typical of our species and are possessed by everyone or nearly everyone. For example, most humans have language skills which allow us to learn and use a language. All cultures on Earth speak a language, so spoken language is part of the universal human nature. At a psychological level, all humans possess fundamental psychological mechanisms—for example, the desire to live with others and belong to social groups—and these mechanisms are part of general human nature. There are many ways in which each person is like most or all other people, and by understanding those ways we may achieve an understanding of the general principles of human nature.

Individual and Group Differences

The second level of personality analysis pertains to individual and group differences. Some people are gregarious and love parties; others prefer quiet evenings reading. Some people take great physical risks by jumping

out of airplanes, riding motorcycles, and driving fast; others avoid physical risks entirely. Some people enjoy high self-esteem and live life relatively free from anxiety; others worry constantly and are plagued by self-doubt. These are dimensions of **individual differences**, ways in which each person is like *some* other people (e.g., extraverts, sensation seekers).

Personality can also be observed by studying **differences among groups**. That is, people in one group may have certain personality features in common, and these common features make that group of people different from other groups. Examples of groups studied by personality psychologists include different cultures, different age groups, different political parties, and groups from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Another important set of differences studied by personality psychologists concerns those between males and females. Although many traits and mechanisms of humans are common to both sexes, there are a few that differ. For example, there is accumulated evidence that, across cultures, males are typically more physically aggressive than females. Males are responsible for most of the violence the world over. One goal of personality psychology is to understand why certain aspects of personality differ among groups, such as understanding how and why women are different from men and why people from one culture differ from those from another culture.



Personality psychologists sometimes study group differences, such as differences between men and women.

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Individual Uniqueness

No two individuals, not even identical twins raised by the same parents in the same home in the same culture, have exactly the same personalities. Every individual has personal qualities not shared by any other person in the world. One of the goals of personality psychology is to support individual uniqueness and to develop ways to capture the richness of unique individual lives.

One debate in the field concerns whether individuals should be studied *nomothetically*—that is, as individual instances of general characteristics that are distributed in the population, or should be studied *idiographically*, as single, unique cases. **Nomothetic** research typically involves statistical comparisons of individuals or groups, requiring samples of subjects on which to conduct research. Nomothetic research is typically applied to identify universal human characteristics and dimensions of individual or group differences. **Idiographic** (translated literally as “the description of one”) research typically focuses on a single subject, trying to observe general principles that are manifest in a single life over time. Often, idiographic research results in case studies or the psychological biography of a single person (Runyon, 1983). Sigmund Freud, for example, wrote a psychobiography of Leonardo da Vinci (1916/1947). An example of another version of idiographic research is provided by Rosenzweig (1986, 1997), in which he proposes to analyze individuals in terms of the sequence of events in their lives, trying to understand critical life events within the individuals’ own histories.

The important point is that personality psychologists have been concerned with all three levels of analysis: the universal level, the level of individual and group differences, and the level of individual uniqueness. Each contributes valuable knowledge to the total understanding of the nature of personality.

A Fissure in the Field

Different personality psychologists focus on different levels of analysis. And there is a gap within the field that has not yet been successfully bridged. It is the gap between the human nature level of analysis and the analysis of group and individual differences. Many psychologists have theorized about what human nature is like in general. However, when doing research, psychologists most often focus on individual and group differences in personality. As a consequence, there is a fissure between the grand theories of personality and contemporary research in personality.

Grand Theories of Personality

Most of the grand theories of personality address the human nature level of analysis. That is, these theories attempt to provide a universal account of the fundamental psychological processes and characteristics of our species. Sigmund Freud (1915/1957), for example, emphasized universal instincts of sex and aggression; a universal psychic structure of the id, ego, and superego; and universal stages of psychosexual development (oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital). Statements about the universal core of human nature lie at the centre of grand theories of personality.

Many of the textbooks used in teaching university courses in personality psychology are structured around grand theories. These books have been criticized, however, because many of those theories are primarily of historical interest. Only parts of them have stood the test of time and guide personality research today. Although the grand theories are an important part of the history of personality psychology, there is much interesting personality research going on today that is not directly relevant to the historical grand theories.

Contemporary Research in Personality

Most of the empirical research in contemporary personality addresses the ways in which individuals and groups differ. For example, the extensive research literature on extraversion and introversion, on anxiety and neuroticism, and on self-esteem all focuses on the ways in which people differ from one another. The extensive research on masculinity and femininity deals with the psychological ways in which men and women differ and the ways in which people acquire sex-typed social roles. Cultural research shows that one major dimension of difference concerns whether individuals endorse a collectivistic versus an individualistic attitude. Eastern cultures tend to be more collectivistic and Western cultures more individualistic (see Chapter 17).

One way to examine personality psychology would be to pick a dozen or so current research topics and explore what psychologists have learned about each. For example, a lot of research has been done on self-esteem—what it is, how it develops, how people maintain high self-esteem, and how it functions in relationships. There are many other interesting topics in contemporary personality psychology—shyness, aggression, trust, dominance, hypnotic susceptibility, depression, intelligence, attributional style, goal setting, anxiety, temperament, sex roles, self-monitoring, extraversion, sensation seeking, agreeableness, impulsivity, sociopathy, morality, locus of control, optimism, creativity, leadership, prejudice, and narcissism.

A course that just surveys current topics in personality research seems unsatisfactory. It would be like going to an auction and bidding on everything—soon you would be overwhelmed. Just picking topics to cover would

not result in any sense of the connection among the aspects of personality. Indeed, the field of personality has been criticized for containing too many independent areas of investigation, with no sense of the whole person behind the separate topics of investigation. What holds personality together as a coherent field would be missing in such an approach.

You have probably heard the ancient legend of the three blind men who were presented with an elephant. They tried to figure out what the whole elephant was like. The first blind man approached cautiously; walking up to the elephant and putting his hands and then arms around the animal's leg, he proclaimed, "Why, the whole elephant is much like a tree, slender and tall." The second man grasped the trunk of the elephant and exclaimed, "No, the whole elephant is more like a large snake." The third blind man grasped the ear of the elephant and stated, "You are both wrong; the whole elephant more closely resembles a fan." The three blind men proceeded to argue with one another, each insisting that his opinion of the whole elephant was the correct one. In a sense, each blind man had a piece of the truth, yet each failed to recognize that his perceptions of the elephant captured only a narrow part of the truth. Each failed to grasp the whole elephant. Working together, however, the blind men could have assembled a reasonable understanding of the whole elephant.

The topic of personality is like the elephant, and personality psychologists are sort of like the blind men, examining only one perspective at a time. Psychologists often approach the topic of personality from one perspective. For example, some psychologists study the biological aspects of personality. Others study ways that culture promotes personality differences among people and among groups. Still other psychologists study how various aspects of the mind interact and work together to produce personality. And others study relationships among people and believe that social interaction is where personality manifests its most important effects. Each of these perspectives on personality captures elements of truth, yet each alone is inadequate to describe the entire realm of human personality—the whole elephant, so to speak.

Six Domains of Knowledge About Human Nature

The various views of researchers in personality stem *not* from the fact that one perspective is right and the others wrong, but rather from the fact that they are studying different domains of knowledge. A **domain of knowledge** is a specialty area of science and scholarship in which psychologists have focused on learning about some specific and limited aspects of human nature. A domain of knowledge delineates the boundaries of researchers' knowledge, expertise, and interests.

This degree of specialization is reasonable. Indeed, specialization characterizes many scientific fields. The field of medicine, for example, has heart specialists and brain specialists, focusing in great detail on their own domains. It is likewise reasonable for the field of personality psychology to have intrapsychic specialists, cultural specialists, and biological specialists. Each of these domains of personality has accumulated its own base of knowledge. Nonetheless, it is desirable to integrate these diverse domains to see how they all fit together.

The whole personality, like the whole elephant, is the sum of the various parts and the connections among them. For personality, each part is a domain of knowledge representing a collection of knowledge about

certain aspects of personality. How are the domains of knowledge defined? For the most part, natural boundaries have developed in the field of personality psychology. That is, researchers have formed natural clusters of topics that fit together and are distinct from other clusters of knowledge. Within these identifiable domains, researchers have developed common *methods for asking questions*; have accumulated a foundation of *known facts*; and have developed *theoretical explanations* that account for what is known about personality from the perspective of each domain.

The field of personality can be neatly cleaved into six distinct domains of knowledge about human nature: personality is influenced by traits the person is born with and develops over time (*dispositional domain*); by biological events (*biological domain*); by processes within the person's own mind (*intrapsychic domain*); by personal and private thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs, and other subjective experiences (*cognitive-experiential domain*); by social, cultural, and gendered positions in the world (*social and cultural domain*); and by the adjustments that the person must make to the inevitable challenges of life (*adjustment domain*).

Personality psychologists working within each domain often use different theoretical perspectives and focus on different facts. As a consequence, psychologists from different domains can sometimes appear to contradict one another. The psychoanalytic perspective of Sigmund Freud, for example, views the personality as consisting of irrational sexual and aggressive instincts, which ultimately motivate all human activity. The cognitive perspective on personality, in contrast, views humans as rational “scientists,” calmly trying to anticipate, predict, and control the events that occur in their worlds.

On the surface, these perspectives appear incompatible. How can humans be both irrational and rational? How can humans be driven by desire yet be cool and detached in their quest for accurate prediction? On deeper examination, the contradictions may be more apparent than real. It is entirely possible, for example, that humans have both powerful sexual and aggressive motivations and cognitive mechanisms designed to perceive and predict events with accuracy. It is entirely possible that sometimes basic emotions and motivations are activated and at other times the cool cognitive mechanisms are activated. And it is possible that the two sets of mechanisms sometimes become linked with one another, such as when the rational mechanisms are used in the service of fulfilling fundamental desires. In short, although each theoretical perspective may be focused on a critically important part of human psychological functioning, each perspective by itself does not capture the *whole* person.

This book is organized around the six domains of personality functioning—dispositional, biological, intrapsychic, cognitive-experiential, social and cultural, and adjustment. Within each of these domains of personality, we focus on two key elements: (1) the *theories* that have been proposed within each domain, including the basic assumptions about human nature, and (2) the *empirical research* that has been accumulating within each of these domains. In an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and research in personality, we focus primarily on the theories that have received the greatest research attention and the topics within each domain for which there is the greatest cumulative knowledge base.

Dispositional Domain

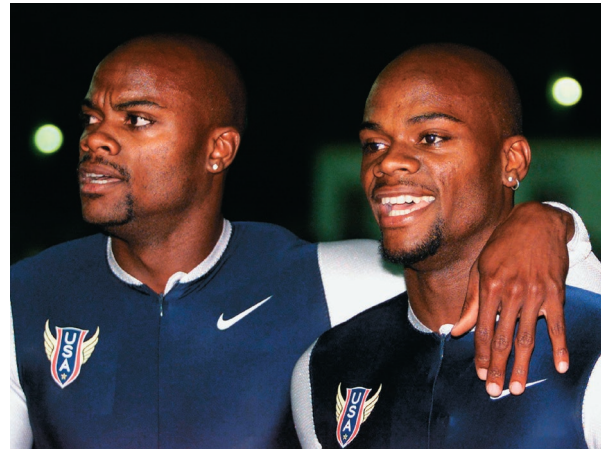
The **dispositional domain** deals centrally with the ways in which individuals differ from one another. As such, the dispositional domain cuts across all the other domains. The reason is that individuals can differ in their habitual emotions, their habitual concepts of self, their physiological propensities, and even their

intrapsychic mechanisms. However, what distinguishes the dispositional domain is an interest in the number and nature of fundamental dispositions. The central goal of personality psychologists working in the dispositional domain is to identify and measure the most important ways in which individuals differ from one another. They are also interested in the origins of the important individual differences and in how they develop and are maintained.

Biological Domain

The core assumption within the **biological domain** is that humans are, first and foremost, collections of biological systems, and these systems provide the building blocks for behaviour, thought, and emotion. As personality psychologists use the term, *biological approaches* typically refers to three areas of research within this general domain: genetics, psychophysiology, and evolution.

The first area of research addresses the genetic underpinnings of personality. Because of advances in behavioural genetic research, a fair amount is known about the genetics of personality. Some questions this research addresses include the following: Are identical twins more alike than fraternal twins in their personalities? What happens to identical twins when they are reared apart versus when they are reared together? Behavioural genetic research permits us to ask and provisionally answer these questions.



Identical twins Alvin (left) and Calvin (right) Harrison, age 26, celebrate their first and second place finishes in the 400-metre race in Brisbane, Australia, August 8, 2000. Psychologists study twins to determine whether some aspects of personality are influenced by genetics.

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The second biological approach is best described as the psychophysiology of personality. Within this domain, researchers summarize what is known about the basis of personality in terms of nervous system functioning. Examples of such topics include cortical arousal and neurotransmitters, cardiac reactivity, strength of the nervous system, pain tolerance, circadian rhythms (whether you are a morning or a night person), and the links between hormones, such as testosterone, and personality.

The third component of the biological approach concerns how evolution may have shaped human psychological functioning. This approach assumes that the psychological mechanisms that constitute human personality have evolved over thousands of years because they were effective in solving adaptive problems linked to survival and reproduction. An evolutionary perspective sheds light on the functional aspects of personality.

Intrapsychic Domain

The **intrapsychic domain** deals with mental mechanisms of personality, many of which operate outside of conscious awareness. The predominant theory in this domain is Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. This

theory begins with fundamental assumptions about the instinctual system—the sexual and aggressive forces that are presumed to drive and energize much of human activity. Considerable research reveals that sexual and aggressive motives are indeed powerful, and their manifestations in actual behaviour can be studied empirically. The intrapsychic domain also includes defence mechanisms, such as repression, denial, and projection—some of which have been examined in laboratory studies. Although the intrapsychic domain is most closely linked with the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, there are modern versions as well. For example, much of the research on the power motives, achievement motives, and intimacy motives is based on a key intrapsychic assumption—that these forces often operate outside the realm of consciousness.

Cognitive-Experiential Domain

The **cognitive-experiential domain** focuses on cognition and subjective experience, such as conscious thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires about oneself and others. The psychological mechanisms involved in subjective experience differ, however, in form and content from one another. One important element of our experience entails the self and self-concept. Descriptive aspects of the self organize how we view ourselves: knowledge of ourselves, images of past selves, and images of possible future selves. Do we see ourselves as good or as evil? Are our past successes or past failures prominent in our self-views? Do we envision ourselves in the future as married with children or as successful in a career? How we evaluate ourselves—our self-esteem—is another facet of the cognitive-experiential domain.

A somewhat different aspect of this domain pertains to the goals we strive for. Some personality psychologists, for example, view human nature as inherently goal-directed, stressing the organizing influence of fundamental needs or strivings, such as the need for affiliation and the striving to influence others. Recent research within this tradition includes approaching personality through the personal projects; that is, the tasks that individuals are trying to accomplish in their daily lives. These can range from the commonplace, such as getting a date for Saturday night, to the grandiose, such as changing thought in Western civilization.

Another important aspect of subjective experience entails our emotions. Are we habitually happy or sad? What makes us angry or fearful? Do we keep our emotions bottled up inside, or do we express them at the drop of a hat? Joy, sadness, feelings of triumph, and feelings of despair all are essential elements in our subjective experience and are subsumed by the cognitive-experiential domain.

Social and Cultural Domain

One of the special features of this book is an emphasis on the **social and cultural domain** of personality. The assumption is that personality is not something that merely resides within the heads, nervous systems, and genes of individuals. Rather, personality affects, and is affected by, the social and cultural context.

At a cultural level, it is clear that groups differ tremendously from one another. Cultures such as the Yanomamö Indians of Venezuela are highly aggressive; indeed, a Yanomamö man does not achieve full status as a man until he has killed another man. In contrast, cultures such as the !Kung San of Botswana are relatively peaceful and agreeable. Overt displays of aggression are discouraged and bring social shame on the perpetrator. Personality differences among these groups are most likely due to cultural influences. In other words,

different cultures may bring out different facets of our personalities in manifest behaviour. Everyone may have the capacity to be peaceful as well as the capacity for violence, as documented by the dramatic changes in violence and peacefulness over time (Pinker, 2012). Which one of these capacities we display may depend on what is acceptable in and encouraged by the culture.

At the level of individual differences within cultures, personality plays itself out in the social sphere. Whether we are dominant or submissive affects such diverse parts of our lives as the conflicts we get into with our partners and the tactics we use to manipulate others. Whether we tend to be anxious and depressed or buoyant and optimistic affects the likelihood of social outcomes, such as marital stability and divorce. Whether we are introverted or extraverted affects how many friends we will have and our popularity within the group. Many important individual differences are played out in the interpersonal sphere.

One important social sphere concerns relationships between men and women. At the level of differences between the sexes, personality may operate differently for men than for women. Gender is an essential part of our identities.



By studying people in different cultures, psychologists are learning how society shapes personality by encouraging or discouraging specific behaviours.

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Adjustment Domain

The **adjustment domain** refers to the fact that personality plays a key role in how we cope, adapt, and adjust to the ebb and flow of events in our day-to-day lives. Evidence, for example, shows that personality is linked with important health outcomes, such as heart disease. Personality is also linked with health-related behaviours, such as smoking, drinking, and risk taking. Some research has even demonstrated that personality is linked with how long we live.

In addition to health, many important problems in coping and adjustment can be traced to personality. In this domain, certain personality features are related to poor adjustment and have been designated as personality disorders. Chapter 19 is devoted to the personality disorders, such as narcissistic personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and avoidant personality disorder. An understanding of “normal” personality functioning can be deepened by examining the disorders of personality, much as in the field of medicine, in which an understanding of normal physiological functioning is often illuminated by the study of disease.



Personality relates to health by influencing health-related behaviours, such as smoking.

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? Exercise

Think of a behaviour pattern or characteristic that you find interesting in yourself or someone you know. Such characteristics as procrastination, narcissism, and perfectionism are good examples, but any personality characteristic that catches your interest is suitable. Then write six sentences about this characteristic, one to represent each of the six domains: dispositional, biological, intrapsychic, cognitive-experiential, social and cultural, and adjustment. Each sentence should make a statement or ask a question about the characteristic from the perspective of a particular domain. Which domain offers you the most insight about the characteristic?

The Role of Personality Theory

One of the central aims of this book is to highlight the interplay between personality theory and research. In each domain of knowledge, there are some prevailing theories, so we close this chapter with a discussion of theories. Theories are essential in all scientific endeavours, and they serve several useful purposes. A **good theory** is one that fulfills three purposes in science:

- provides a guide for researchers,
- organizes known findings, and
- makes predictions.

One of the most important purposes of theories is that they serve as a *guide for researchers*, directing them to important questions within an area of research.

A second useful function of theories is to *organize known findings*. In physics, for example, there is a bewildering array of events—apples fall from trees, planets exert attraction on each other, black holes pull in light. The theory of gravity neatly and powerfully accounts for all of these observations. By accounting for known findings, theories bring both coherence and understanding to the known world. The same applies to personality theories. Theories are viewed as powerful if they succeed in accounting for known findings, in addition to guiding psychologists to important domains of inquiry.

A third purpose of theories is to *make predictions* about behaviour and psychological phenomena that no one has yet documented or observed. Einstein's theory of relativity, for example, predicted that light will bend around large stars long before we had the technology to test this prediction. When researchers finally confirmed that light does, indeed, bend when going around stars such as our sun, that finding bore out the power of Einstein's theory.

Finally, we need to distinguish between scientific **theories and beliefs**. For example, astrology is a collection of beliefs about the relationship between personality and the position of the stars at birth. Some people hold that such relationships are true, even in the absence of supporting evidence. To date, psychologists have not found reliable factual support, using standard research methods and systematic observations, for the idea that the positions of the stars at a person's birth influence personality. As such, astrology remains a *belief*, not a scientific theory. Beliefs are often personally useful and crucially important to some people, but they are based

on faith, not on reliable facts and systematic observations. Theories, on the other hand, are tested by systematic observations that can be repeated by others and that yield similar conclusions.

In sum, three key criteria of personality theories highlight the interplay of theory and research. They guide researchers to important domains of inquiry, account for known findings, and make predictions about new phenomena.

Standards for Evaluating Personality Theories

As we explore each of the six domains, it will be useful to bear in mind five **scientific standards for evaluating personality theories**:

- comprehensiveness
- heuristic value
- testability
- parsimony
- compatibility and integration across domains and levels

The first standard is **comprehensiveness**—does the theory do a good job of explaining all of the facts and observations within its domain? Theories that explain more empirical findings are generally superior to those that explain fewer findings.

A second evaluative standard is **heuristic value**—does the theory provide a guide to important new discoveries about personality that were not known before? Theories that steer scientists to making these discoveries are generally superior to theories that fail to provide this guidance. Plate tectonic theory in geology, for example, guided researchers to discover regions of volcanic activity that were unknown prior to the theory. Similarly, a good personality theory will guide personality researchers to make discoveries that were previously unknown.

A third important standard for evaluating theories is **testability**—does the theory provide precise predictions that can be tested empirically? Some theories—for example, certain aspects of Freud's theory of intrapsychic conflict—have been criticized on the grounds that they are difficult or impossible to test; other aspects of Freud's theory are testable (see Chapters 9 and 10). As a general rule, the testability of a theory rests with the precision of its predictions. Precise theoretical predictions aid progress in the science because they allow inadequate theories to be discarded (those whose predictions are falsified) and good theories to be retained (those whose predictions are empirically confirmed). If a theory does not lend itself to being tested empirically, it is generally judged to be a poor theory.

A fourth standard for evaluating personality theories is **parsimony**—does the theory contain few premises and assumptions (parsimony) or many premises and assumptions (lack of parsimony)? As a general rule, theories that require many premises and assumptions to explain a given set of findings are judged to be poorer than theories that can explain the same findings with fewer premises and assumptions. Although parsimony is important, bear in mind that this does not mean that simple theories are always better than complex theories. Indeed, simple theories often crash and burn because they fail to meet one or more of the other five standards described here; for example, they may fail to be comprehensive because they explain so little. It is our view that human personality is genuinely complex, and so a complex theory—one containing many premises—may ultimately be necessary.

A fifth standard is **compatibility and integration across domains and levels**. A theory of cosmology in astronomy that violated known laws of physics, for example, would be incompatible across levels and hence judged to be fundamentally flawed. A theory of biology that violated known principles of chemistry similarly would be judged to be fatally flawed. In the same way, a personality theory in one domain that violated well-established principles in another domain would be judged highly problematic. For example, a theory of the development of personality dispositions that was inconsistent with well-established knowledge in physiology and genetics would be judged to be problematic. Similarly, a theory of evolutionary influences on personality that contradicted what is known about cultural influences, or vice versa, would be problematic. Although the criterion of *compatibility and integration across domains and levels* is a well-established principle in most sciences (Buss, 2012; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992), it has rarely been used to evaluate the adequacy of personality theories. We believe that the “domains” approach taken in this book highlights the importance of the evaluative criterion of compatibility across levels of personality analysis.

In sum, as you progress through the six domains of personality functioning, keep in mind the five standards by which theories within each domain can be evaluated—comprehensiveness, heuristic value, testability, parsimony, and cross-domain compatibility (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Five Standards for Evaluating Personality Theories	
Standard	Definition
Comprehensiveness	Explains most or all known facts.
Heuristic value	Guides researchers to important new discoveries.
Testability	Makes precise predictions that can be empirically tested.
Parsimony	Contains few premises or assumptions.
Compatibility and integration	Consistent with what is known in other domains; can be coordinated with other branches of scientific knowledge.

Is There a Grand Ultimate and True Theory of Personality?

The field of biology contains a grand unifying theory—the theory of evolution by natural selection, originally proposed by Darwin (1859) and further refined in its neo-Darwinian form as inclusive fitness theory (Hamilton, 1964). This theory is comprehensive, guides biologists to new discoveries, has led to thousands of empirical tests, is highly parsimonious, and is compatible with known laws in adjacent scientific disciplines. Evolutionary theory provides the grand unifying framework within which most biologists conduct their work. Ideally, the field of personality psychology would also contain such a grand unifying theory. Alas, at the current time, it does not.

Perhaps Sigmund Freud, the inventor of psychoanalytic theory, provided the most ambitious attempt at a grand unifying theory of personality (see Chapter 9). And many grand theories have followed Freud’s. But over the past several decades, most personality researchers have come to the realization that the field currently

lacks a grand unifying theory. Instead, most have focused on more specific domains of functioning. It is precisely for this reason that our book is organized around the six domains—these represent the domains in which progress, scientific findings, and new discoveries are being made.

In our view, an ultimate grand theory of personality psychology will have to unify all six domains. It will have to explain personality characteristics and how they develop over time (dispositional domain). It will have to explain evolutionary, genetic, and physiological underpinnings of personality (biological domain). It will have to explain deeply rooted motives and dynamic intrapsychic processes (intrapsychic domain). It will have to explain how people experience the world and process information about it (cognitive-experiential domain). It will have to explain how personality affects, and is affected by, the social and cultural context in which people conduct their lives (social and cultural domain). And it will have to explain how people cope and function—as well as how adjustment fails—as they encounter the numerous adaptive problems they face over the inevitably bumpy course of their lives (the adjustment domain).

Although the field of personality psychology currently lacks a grand theory, we believe that work in these six domains will ultimately provide the foundations on which such a unified personality theory will be built.

 Concept Check

What does it mean to say that personality consists of both traits and mechanisms? What does it mean to say that personality traits are organized and relatively enduring?

What are the three levels of analysis in personality research? Provide an example of each.

Name and describe the five standards for evaluating personality theories. What is a “good” theory?

Key Terms

trait-descriptive adjectives	environment	adjustment domain
personality	human nature	good theory
psychological traits	individual differences	theories and beliefs
average tendencies	differences among groups	scientific standards for evaluating personality theories
psychological mechanisms within the individual	nomothetic	comprehensiveness
organized	idiographic	heuristic value
enduring	domain of knowledge	testability
influential forces	dispositional domain	parsimony
person–environment interaction	biological domain	compatibility and integration across domains and levels
adaptations	intrapsychic domain	
	cognitive-experiential domain	
	social and cultural domain	

CHAPTER 2

Personality Assessment, Measurement, and Research Design

Sources of Personality Data

Self-Report Data (S-Data)

Observer-Report Data (O-Data)

Test Data (T-Data)

Life-Outcome Data (L-Data)

Issues in Personality Assessment

Evaluation of Personality Measures

Reliability

Validity

Generalizability

Research Designs in Personality

Experimental Methods

Correlational Studies

Case Studies

When to Use Experimental, Correlational, and Case Study Designs

Summary and Evaluation

Key Terms

Introduction

Imagine that a federal election is looming. You are faced with a choice among numerous candidates and parties to vote for. The personalities of the candidates may prove to be critical to your decision. How will they hold up under stress? What are their attitudes toward climate change or immigration? Will they stand tough in negotiating with leaders from other countries? This chapter is concerned with the means by which we gain information about other people's personalities—the sources from which we gather personality data and the research designs we use in the scientific study of personality.

When deliberating among political parties, you might want to know what the party leaders say about their values and attitudes—through a *self-report*. You might want to know what others say about their strengths in dealing with foreign leaders—through an *observer report*. You also might want to place the party leaders in a



Much of the discussion surrounding political candidates involves their personalities.

(left): ©Victor Biro/Alamy Stock Photo; (right): ©The Canadian Press/Nathan Denette

more controlled situation, such as a debate, and see how each performs—to acquire *test data*. Furthermore, you might want to know about certain events in their lives, such as whether they have served in the Armed Forces, been arrested, or been caught in an embarrassing sexual scandal—*life history data*.

Each of these sources of data reveals something about the personalities of the party leaders, yet each alone is incomplete and may be biased. Party leaders may self-report a tough stance on climate change but then fail to follow through on it. Observers may report that one party leader is honest, yet they may be unaware of lies the party leader has told. A debate may show one party leader in a positive light, but perhaps another candidate happened to have a cold that day. And the public record of serving in the Canadian Armed Forces may not reveal the family connections that enabled the party leader to avoid combat. Each source of data provides important information. But each source, by itself, is of limited value. It offers an incomplete picture.

This chapter covers three topics related to personality assessment and research. The first concerns where we get our information—the sources of personality data and the actual measures that personality psychologists use. The second topic concerns how we evaluate the quality of those measures. The third topic pertains to how we use these measures in actual research designs to study personality.

Sources of Personality Data

Perhaps the most obvious source of information about a person is **self-report data (S-data)**—the information a person reveals about themselves. Clearly, individuals may not always provide accurate information for a variety of reasons, such as the desire to present themselves in a positive light. Nevertheless, the journals that publish the latest research in personality reveal that self-report is the most common method for measuring personality (Connelly & Ones, 2010).

Self-Report Data (S-Data)

Self-report data can be obtained through a variety of means, including interviews that pose questions to a person, periodic reports by a person to record the events as they happen, and questionnaires or surveys.

The questionnaire method, in which individuals respond to a series of items that request information about them, is by far the most commonly used self-report assessment procedure.

There are good reasons for using self-report. The most obvious reason is that individuals have access to a wealth of information about themselves that is inaccessible to anyone else, such as their habitual level of anxiety (e.g., Vazire, 2010). Individuals can report about their feelings, emotions, desires, beliefs, and private experiences. They can report about their self-esteem, as well as their perceptions of the esteem in which others hold them. They can report about their innermost fears and fantasies. And they can report about immediate and long-term goals. Because of this potential wealth of information, self-report is an indispensable source of personality data.

Self-report can take a variety of forms, ranging from open-ended “fill in the blank” questions to forced-choice true-or-false questions. Sometimes these are referred to as **unstructured** (open-ended, such as “Tell me about the parties you like the most”) and **structured** (“I like loud and crowded parties: answer true or false”) personality tests. A prime example of the open-ended form of self-report is called the Twenty Statements Test. In this test, a participant receives a sheet of paper that is essentially blank, except for the words “I am” repeated 20 times. There is a space after each of these partial statements, and participants are asked to complete them. For example, a person might say, in this order: *I am a woman; I am 19 years old; I am shy; I am intelligent; I am someone who likes quiet nights at home; I am introverted*; and so on. Personality instruments that use open-ended formats require coding schemes for classifying the responses they obtain. In other words, psychologists must devise a way to score or interpret the participant’s open-ended responses. To get an idea of how outgoing the individual in our example is, the psychologist might count how many statements refer to social characteristics. We explore the Twenty Statements Test further in A Closer Look: Who Am I?.

A Closer Look

Who Am I?

The Twenty Statements Test (TST) was published by a pair of sociologists. Manford Kuhn and Thomas McPartland were interested in attitudes people had toward themselves. In 1954, they published the “Who am I?” test. This test asked the participant to simply answer this question by completing the phrase “I am _____” 20 times. Kuhn and McPartland developed a way of scoring the test by analyzing the content of the person’s responses. The order of each response was thought to be significant (e.g., something mentioned earlier might be more important to the self-definition than something mentioned later).

In the first decade of use by psychologists, the TST was applied mainly to clinical and personality research questions. For example, one study used the TST to see if the self-concepts of people in “unadjusted” marriages differed from the self-concepts of people in “well-adjusted” marriages (Buerkle, 1960). Results showed that those in adjusted marriages tended to mention their partner, their marriage, and their family more often in their self-definitions than those in unadjusted marriages. This finding implies that part of a successful marriage is incorporating the marriage role into one’s definition of oneself.

In the 1970s, researchers turned a more critical eye on the TST. It is an open-ended questionnaire, so people with low verbal ability do not complete it as quickly or as thoroughly as those with high verbal

In the 1980s, the TST was used in the study of timely personality topics, such as the influence of gender and other social roles in people's self-definitions. For example, one study compared married and single women (Gigy, 1980). Married women tended to respond to the "Who am I?" question by mentioning relationships (*I am a mother, I am a wife*), acquired roles in family life (*I am the one who takes the children to school*), and household activities (*I am the one who buys groceries*). Clearly, marriage can mean a large change in self-concept, and studies such as this one document the link between social roles and how individuals see themselves.

There has been a trend toward using culture in self-definitions (Bochner, 1994). For instance, research by Ip and Bond (1995) found that responses to the TST by Asian participants included more references to themselves as members of social groups (e.g., “I am a member of the swim team”) or occupants of social roles (e.g., “I am Sam’s friend”) than those by American participants. This tendency for individuals from Eastern cultures to include more references to other people in their self-concept than individuals from Western cultures has been confirmed in other research (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Research using the TST has further demonstrated interesting aspects of self-concept when individuals with multiple cultural identities are primed to think about one identity or the other; or to respond in a particular language. One study found that Chinese-born Canadian university students described more interdependent aspects of themselves on the TST (i.e., those that were in line with a more collectivistic cultural orientation) when they were asked to write their responses in Chinese rather than in English (Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002). Results such as these show how culture and language may influence our self-concept. The Twenty Statements Test is a useful way to measure how people define themselves according to a variety of traits and attributes. It has proven especially effective at identifying the most important components of a person’s identity—the ingredients that provide a person with a sense of self-esteem, meaning in life, and sense of belonging in the world of other people (Vignoles et al., 2006).

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ENERGETIC

A *personality scale* typically involves summing the scores on a series of individual rating scales like the one above. A personality scale for activity level, for example, might consist of adding up scores from rating scales on *energetic*, *active*, and *vigorous*.

? Exercise

DIRECTIONS: This list contains a series of adjectives. Please read them quickly and put an X in the box beside each one you consider to be self-descriptive. Try to be honest and accurate.

☐ absent-minded	☐ clever	☐ irrational
☐ active	☐ cold	☐ lively
☐ adaptable	☐ dependent	☐ shy
☐ adventurous	☐ determined	☐ sociable
☐ affectionate	☐ disorderly	☐ straightforward
☐ caring	☐ impersonal	☐ touchy
☐ cheerful	☐ impulsive	☐ trusting

More common than adjective checklists or scales, however, are self-report questionnaires that include statements. Examples of widely used self-report inventories are the NEO-FFI Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 2005) and the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) (Gough, 1957/1987). Sample items from the CPI are: *I enjoy social gatherings just to be with people*; *I looked up to my father as an ideal man*; *A person needs to "show off" a little now and then*; *I have a very strong desire to be a success in the world*; *I am very slow in making up my mind*. Participants read each statement and then indicate on an answer sheet whether they agree with the statement and feel that it is true of them or disagree with the statement and feel that it is false about them. Sample items from the NEO-FFI Personality Inventory are: *I like most people I meet*; *I laugh easily*; *I often get disgusted with people I have to deal with*. Participants indicate the degree to which they agree the item describes them, using a 1 to 5 Likert scale, with 1 anchored with the phrase *strongly disagree* and 5 anchored with *strongly agree*.

? Exercise

Choose a personality characteristic you would like to measure. Start by writing down a clear definition of that characteristic. For example, you might choose a characteristics such as friendly, conscientious, anxious, or narcissistic. Then write a short questionnaire, about five items long, to measure this characteristic. Your items can be statements or adjectives, and they can be open-ended, true-false, or on a Likert-response scale. Then give your questionnaire to other people. How easy was it to write items? Do you think your measure accurately assesses the trait?

Self-report measures, like all methods, have limitations and weaknesses. For the self-report method to be effective, respondents must be both willing and able to answer the questions put to them. Yet people are not always honest, especially when asked about unconventional experiences such as unusual desires, socially unacceptable behaviours, or less popular traits. Some people may also lack accurate self-knowledge. Because of these limitations, personality psychologists often use sources of data that do not rely on the honesty or insight of the participant. One such source is an observer or observers.

Application

Experience sampling—a wrinkle in self-report. One source of data in personality research is called **experience sampling** (e.g., Hormuth, 1986; Larsen, 1989; Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003). In this method, people answer some questions, perhaps about their moods or physical symptoms, every day for several weeks or longer. People are usually contacted electronically (paged) one or more times a day at random intervals to complete the measures. In one study, 74 university students reported on their moods every day for 84 consecutive days (Larsen & Kasimatis, 1990). The investigators were interested in discovering the links between the day of the week and mood. They found a strong weekly cycle in the moods of the university students, with positive moods peaking on Friday and Saturday and negative moods peaking on Tuesday and Wednesday (Monday was not the worst day of the week). The introverts turned out to have a much more regular weekly mood cycle than extraverts. That is, the moods of the introverts were more predictable from this seven-day rhythm than the moods of the extraverts. This difference was probably due to the fact that extraverts are less likely to wait for the weekend to do things that put them in a good mood—partying, socializing, or going out for a special meal with friends. Extraverts typically avoid routine in their daily lives, and introverts typically lead more predictable lives.

Although experience sampling uses self-report as the data source, it differs from more traditional self-report methods in being able to detect patterns of behaviour over time. Thus, experience sampling provides information not readily available using questionnaires taken at just one point in time. It's an excellent method, for example, for obtaining information about how a person's self-esteem may go up and down over time or how a person reacts to the stress of life day after day.

Observer-Report Data (O-Data)

In everyday life, we form impressions and make evaluations of others with whom we come into contact. For each individual, there are typically dozens of observers who form impressions. Our friends, families, teachers, and casual acquaintances are all potential sources of information about our personalities. **Observer-report data (O-data)** capitalize on these sources for gathering information about a person's personality.

Observer reports offer both advantages and disadvantages as sources of personality data. One advantage is that observers may have access to information not attainable through other sources. For example, observers can report about the impressions a person makes on others, one's reputation more generally, whether interactions with others are smooth or full of strife, and a person's relative status within a group hierarchy. Indeed, one study found that altruistic traits can be identified by observers with some accuracy by a mere 20-second exposure (Fetchnhauer et al., 2010). As noted by Santayana (1905/1980), “[The observer] sometimes reaches truths about people's character and destiny which they themselves are far from divining” (p. 154).

A second advantage of observer-reports is that multiple observers can be used to assess each individual, whereas in self-reports only one person provides information (Connelly & Ones, 2010; Paunonen & O'Neill, 2010). The use of multiple observers allows investigators to evaluate the degree of agreement among observers—also known as **inter-rater reliability**. Furthermore, statistical procedures, such as averaging the assessments of multiple observers, have the advantage of reducing the idiosyncratic features and biases of single observers. Typically, a more valid and reliable assessment of personality can be achieved when multiple observers are used.