Perspectives on Personality

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Charles S. Carver | Michael F. Scheier

Perspectives on Personality

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To Youngmee Kim

CSC

To Meredith and Jeremy, who bring great joy to my life

MFS

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Preface

Perspectives on Personality, Eighth Edition, examines one of the most engaging topics in all of life: human personality. As the title of the book implies, there are many viewpoints on personality, many ways to think about human nature. This book describes a range of perspectives that are taken by personality psychologists today.

The content of this book reflects two strongly held beliefs. The first is that *ideas* are the most important part of a first course on personality. For this reason, concepts are stressed throughout the book rather than theorists. Our first priority has been to present as clearly as we can the ideas that form each theoretical viewpoint.

The second belief is that *research* is important in personality psychology. Ideas and intuitions are valuable, but someone needs to check to see whether they actually work. For this reason, each theory is accompanied by discussion of research that bears on the theory. This emphasis on the role of research stresses the fact that personality psychology is a living, dynamic process of ongoing scientific exploration.

As before, we focus on the idea that each viewpoint discussed in the book represents a *perspective* on personality. By that, we mean a particular orienting viewpoint, an angle from which the theorists proceeded. Each perspective reflects assumptions about human nature. As in previous editions, each perspective chapter includes discussion of assessment from that perspective and some discussion of how behavior problems can arise and be treated from that perspective. Each chapter concludes with a discussion of current problems and strengths within that theoretical viewpoint and our own guess about its future.

The perspectives are presented in an order that makes sense to us, but the chapters can easily be read in other orders. Each theoretical section of the book is intended to stand more or less on its own. When one chapter is linked to a previous chapter, it is generally easy to see the point without having read the prior chapter. There are a few exceptions to this, however. We refer back to the trait perspective relatively often, so it's probably best to read that chapter (Chapter 4) early on. It also makes historical sense to read the psychoanalytic perspective before the psychosocial perspective, because the latter grew partly from the former.

As in the previous editions, the final chapter takes up the question of how the different viewpoints relate to each other. The main goal of this chapter is to tie together ideas from theories discussed separately in earlier chapters. A secondary goal is to consider the usefulness of blending theoretical viewpoints, treating theories as complementary, rather than competing.

In revising, we've tried very hard to make the content accessible. We use an informal, conversational style, and we've used examples of how the ideas can apply to one's own life. We hope these qualities make the book engaging and enjoyable, as well as informative.

New to This Edition

- Incorporates important developments in the field of personality psychology over the past 5 years or so.
- Cutting edge material has been added on topics in molecular genetics and genomics (Chapter 6) without loss of continuity with earlier versions.
- New material has been added on the biological underpinnings of impulsiveness (Chapter 7) expanding on the previous edition's coverage.
- Expanded coverage of "mindsets" as a facet of the cognitive perspective (Chapter 12).
- More detailed coverage of the role of mental contrasting in the self-regulation perspective (Chapter 13).
- Over 200 new citations have been included.

Available Instructor Resources

The following resources are available for instructors. These can be downloaded at http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc. Login required.

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Chapter 1

What Is Personality Psychology?

Learning Objectives

1.1 Identify three reasons for using the concept of personality

1.2 Indicate the two functions that any theory should serve

1.3 Summarize the main themes of the 10 theoretical perspectives on personality to be discussed in this text

1.4 Outline reasons as to why assessment of personality, behavioral problems, and behavior change are important

Sue met Rick in a philosophy class when both were sophomores. They started spending time together, and their relationship gradually deepened. Now, two years later, they're talking seriously of marriage. Sue describes Rick like this: "He's good looking and smart. He knows how to do things you don't expect a guy to know, like cooking. But the best part I don't even know how to describe, except to say he has a really great personality."

What qualities do you value in a potential husband or wife? Most people want to see a sense of humor, good looks, and a streak of romance. Almost always, though, a big consideration is the person's personality. Most people want someone who has a "good personality." What does that mean? If you had to describe a friend of yours who *does* have a good personality, what would you say? "Rick has a really great personality . . ." But then what?

Describing someone's personality means trying to portray the core of who that person is. It means crystallizing something from what you know about the person. It means taking a big pile of information and reducing it to a smaller essence. Personality shows up in what people say and do, and in *how* they do what they do—the style that puts a unique stamp on their actions.

1.1: Defining Personality

1.1 Identify three reasons for using the concept of personality

Trying to describe someone's personality is an exercise in being a psychologist. Everyone is a psychologist part of the time, because we all spend time trying to understand what other people are like. When you think about how to describe someone and how those qualities are conveyed to you, you're doing informally what personality psychologists do more formally.

There's a little difference in focus, though, between what you do in daily life and what personality psychologists do. Using the word *personality* in everyday speech tends to focus on the specific personalities of specific persons (Rick, for instance). Psychologists often focus on personality as an abstraction. When psychologists use the word *personality*, they usually are referring to a conception of what everyone's personality consists of.

What *is* personality, viewed that way? Psychologists have argued for a long time about this question. Many definitions have been offered, but none is universally accepted. Personality is, in fact, an elusive concept.

1.1.1: Why Use the Word *Personality* as a Concept?

In trying to define personality as a concept, we might start by thinking about why people use the word. Understanding why it's used should help us decide what it means. When *you* use the word *personality*, why do you use it?

One reason people use the word *personality* is to convey a sense of *consistency* or *continuity* about a person. There are

several kinds of consistency, all of which evoke the concept of personality. There is consistency across time (Sue talked a lot when you first met her, and years later she still dominates conversations). There is consistency across similar situations (André is very polite to waiters and has been that way every time you've been with him in a restaurant). Sometimes you even see consistency across situations that are quite different from each other (Victoria tends to order people around—at work, in stores, even at *parties*). In each case, it's undeniably the same person from one instance to another, because the person acts (or talks, or thinks, or feels) in consistent ways from time to time and from setting to setting. One reason for using the word *personality* is to capture this consistency or continuity within the person.

A second reason people use the word *personality* is to convey the sense that whatever the person is doing (or thinking or feeling) *originates from within*. The idea that behavior comes from inside the person may seem so obvious that it hardly deserves noting, but not everyone sees it that way. Nonetheless, the term *personality* conveys the sense of a causal force *within* the person, influencing how the person acts. That internal force in facthas very important behavioral effects (Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007).

These two reasons for using the term *personality* combine when you try to predict and understand people's behavior (even your own). It's important to predict behavior. When you choose a roommate for next year, you're predicting that you'll get along. When you tell a friend who you know is always late that the movie starts at 8:00, when it really starts at 8:30, you're predicting that doing this will get her to arrive more or less on time. An important contributor to these predictions is your view of the other person's personality.

The term *personality* is also used for another reason. It often conveys the sense that a few qualities can summarize what a person is like, because they're so prominent in that person's behavior. Saying that Karen has a sociable personality implies that sociability stands out in her actions. Saying that Tanya has a hostile personality implies that hostility is a key quality in her. Noting the most prominent characteristics of a person brings to mind the concept of personality, because those characteristics seem to capture what the person is like.

Individual differences in behavior and reactions are an important part of personality.

This patchwork of reasons for using the term *personality* moves us closer to having a definition for it. That is, the word *personality* conveys a sense of consistency, internal causality, and distinctiveness. As it happens, these elements are included in almost all definitions of personality.

1.1.2: A Working Definition

Here's one definition. We're not saying it's "right," but we think it comes close. We've adapted it slightly from one written decades ago by Gordon Allport (1961): ***Personality*** *is a dynamic organization, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create the person's characteristic patterns of behavior, thoughts, and feelings*.

This definition makes several points:

- Personality isn't just an accumulation of bits and pieces; it has *organization*.
- Personality doesn't just lie there; it has *processes* of some sort.
- Personality is a *psychological* concept, but it's tied to the *physical* body.
- Personality is a *causal force* that helps determine how the person relates to the world.
- Personality shows up in individualized *patterns*—recurrences and consistencies.
- Personality is displayed not just one way but *many ways*—in behaviors, thoughts, and feelings.

This definition covers a lot. It points to several elements that should be part of any view of personality. As good as it is, though, it isn't perfect. Even this careful definition seems to let something about the concept slip through your fingers. This elusiveness is something that personality psychologists have struggled with for as long as the term has been used.

1.1.3: Two Fundamental Themes in Personality Psychology

Two themes stand out in thinking about personality. One is **individual differences**. Each person who ever lived is different from everyone else. No two personalities are quite alike—not even those of identical twins. Some people are generally happy, some are sad. Some people are sociable, some are shy. As we said earlier, one reason to use the word *personality* in the first place is to capture central features of a person. This couldn't happen if the features didn't differ from one person to another. Thus, the notion of individual differences is important even in everyday use of the term *personality*.

Individual differences are also important to theorists who try to understand personality. To be useful, any

approach to personality has to have something to say about these differences. A really complete account of personality should address where the differences come from. A complete account should also consider why the differences matter.

The other theme concerns what we'll call **intrapersonal functioning**. By this phrase, we mean the processes within the person that Allport (1961) called a "dynamic organization" of systems. The idea here is that personality isn't like a rubber stamp that you pound onto each situation you enter. Instead, it involves processes that go on inside you, leading you to act the way you do. The processes create a sense of continuity within the person, even if the person acts differently in different circumstances. That is, the same processes are engaged, even if the results differ across situations.

Here's an example. Some people believe that behavior is a product of motives. Motive tendencies rise and fall as time passes and situations change. Which motive is strongest at any given time determines what the person does at that time. A person may work alone for four hours, then spend a couple of hours hanging out with friends, then go eat dinner, followed by some TV. The behaviors differ, but they all stem from motives that vary in strength over the course of the day. This view of personality treats the motives as key variables. In this view, the processes by which motives vary in strength are some of the processes of intrapersonal functioning.

This is just one example of an intrapersonal process. It's not the only process that has been argued for. Regardless of what processes are assumed, though, the idea of *process* is important. A complete account of personality should say something about processes underlying personality and how and why they work.

Different approaches to personality emphasize these two themes to differing degrees. Some approaches emphasize process and consist largely of a view of intrapersonal functioning. Other approaches treat individual uniqueness as most important and are more vague about the processes underlying the uniqueness. These differing emphases contribute to the diversity among personality theories.

Why spend so many words on what personality psychology is about? We've placed you in the role of a theorist here. Theorists have to keep in mind what aspects of human experience they want to understand. To understand the theories, you'll have to do that too.

1.2: Theory in Personality Psychology

1.2 Indicate the two functions that any theory should serve

Much of this book is descriptions of theoretical principles. Because theories will be so important, let's spend a little time on what they are, what they do, and how to evaluate them.

1.2.1: What Do Theories Do?

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

No matter what they are about, theories have two purposes. The first is to *explain* the phenomena it addresses. A theory always gives a way to explain some things that are known to be true. For example, biological personality theories hold that heredity influences personality. This idea provides a way to explain why children seem like their parents in certain ways (which we know to be true).

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

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

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

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

1.2.2: The Role of Research in Evaluating Theories

How do psychologists decide whether a theory is any good? In describing the predictive role of theories, we've revealed a bias most personality psychologists hold: Theories should be *testable*, and they should be *tested*. It's

important to find out whether a theory makes predictions that work.

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

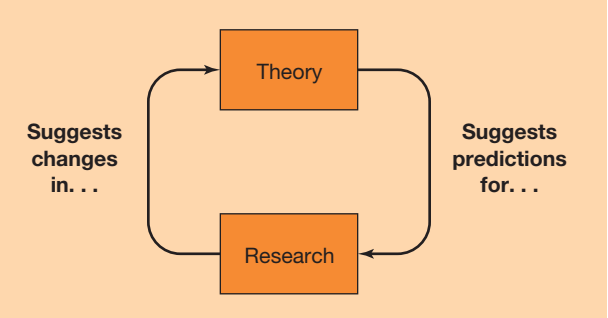
People have different opinions on this. Some believe that insight stands on its own. Even some personality theorists believed this. Sigmund Freud, who's often viewed as the father of personality psychology, wasn't much interested in whether his ideas were supported in others' research. He thought the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

The view that dominates today's psychology, however, is that ideas—even brilliant ones—have to be tested before they can be trusted. Too often, things that *seem* true turn out not to be true. Unfortunately, until you test them, you never know which ideas are brilliant and right and which are brilliant but wrong. Because of this, today's personality psychology is a scientific field, in which research counts for a lot. Studies of personality provide information about how accurate or useful a theory is. The studies either confirm or disconfirm predictions and thereby support or undermine the theory.

When theories are used to generate predictions for research, a continuous interplay arises (see Figure 1.1). If a theory makes predictions, the result is research—scientific studies—to test the predictions. Results often support the predictions. Sometimes, however, the result either fails to support the theory or supports it only partly. This may suggest a limit on the theory—perhaps it predicts under some conditions but not others. Such a finding leads to revision of the theory.

Figure 1.1

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



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

1.2.3: What Else Makes a Theory Good?

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

One of them is the breadth of the information behind the theory. Some theories are criticized because they're based heavily on the theorists' experiences conducting therapy. Other theories are criticized because they're based on studies of laboratory animals in highly artificial situations. Others are criticized because they rest largely on information from long sets of rating scales. None of these sources of information is bad in itself. But to base a theory on just one source of information weakens the theory.

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

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

Another part of evaluating theories is highly subjective. Some theories just "feel" better than others. Some theories will fit your personal worldview better than others. You're not the only one who reacts this way. So do

psychologists. There's even evidence that scientists prefer theories that fit their images of *themselves* (Johnson, Germer, Efran, & Overton, 1988). William James, an important figure in the early years of psychology, said people will prefer theories that "are most interesting, . . . appeal most urgently to our æsthetic, emotional, and active needs" (James, 1890, p. 312). Which theories feel best to you, then, depends partly on how you see the world.

1.3: Perspectives on Personality

1.3 Summarize the main themes of the 10 theoretical perspectives on personality to be discussed in this text

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

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

1.3.1: Perspectives to Be Examined Here

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

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

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

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

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

The *psychoanalytic perspective*, taken up next, is a very different view of human nature. It's based on the idea that personality is a set of internal psychic forces that compete and conflict with one another. The focus of this perspective is on the dynamics of these forces (and how they influence behavior). Human nature, from this viewpoint, involves a set of pressures inside the person that sometimes work with each other and sometimes are at war with each other. One specific theory dominates the perspective—the theory of Sigmund Freud.

We've termed the next perspective *psychosocial*. The theories in this perspective start from the assumption that the most important aspect of human nature is our formation of relationships with other people and the ways these relationships play out. The psychosocial theories evolved from psychoanalytic theory (for that reason they sometimes are called *neoanalytic*), but they really represent a very different worldview.

The *learning perspective* begins with a view of human nature in which change, rather than constancy, is paramount. From this perspective, the key quality of human nature is that behavior changes systematically as a result of experiences. Because there are several views of how learning takes place, several theories link learning to personality. In this perspective, a person's personality is the integrated sum of what the person has learned up till now.

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

The *cognitive perspective* takes as its starting point the idea that human nature involves deriving meaning from

experiences. The mind imposes organization and form on experience, and those mental organizations influence how people act. From this viewpoint, understanding personality means understanding the processes of construing the world and how they determine one's actions in and reactions to the world.

The *self-regulation perspective* starts from the idea that people are complex psychological systems, in the same sense that homeostatic processes reflect complex physiological systems and weather reflects complex atmospheric systems. There are recurrent processes that organize actions to attain specific endpoints. Self-regulating psychologically means (in part) synthesizing goals and moving toward those goals.

1.3.2: Perspectives Reconsidered

As we said, each perspective takes a different starting point to think about personality. We'll also say this about them: Most of them weren't really intended to be full models of personality, and it can be a little misleading to present them (and judge them) as though they were.

There was a time when personality psychologists created grand theories aimed at the total complexity of personality (Freud's theory is the best example). However, this is less common now. More common are theories that deal with some *aspect* of personality or some set of issues or processes in personality. The fact that a theory isn't grand in scale doesn't mean it has nothing important to say. It does mean, though, that it won't say *everything*. It gives us a particular viewing angle on personality. This viewing angle may be special and may yield insights you can't find from other angles. But it yields only part of the picture. This limitation is important to keep in mind as you think about the various theories and what each has to say.

Will personality return in the future to grand-scale theories? Several contemporary personality psychologists hope so (e.g., McAdams & Olson, 2010; McAdams & Pals, 2006; Roberts & Wood, 2006). They argue that a full understanding of personality requires much more than is generally addressed by "perspective" theories. This movement is partly a reaction to the concern that personality psychology has lost its focus on individuality.

What should be included in the full picture, though, is a matter of opinion (Table 1.1). Most who write on this topic say the genetic design of the human should be included, along with traits. Some think motives, values, abilities, and skills should be included as part of personality. Most who write on this topic now include integrative narratives—stories that people develop about themselves to provide coherence and meaning to their self-understanding. In some accounts, culture is part of the personality picture; in others, it is seen as a force outside personality that can affect personality.

Table 1.1 Topics that some now argue should be included for a full understanding of personality

Topic	Level of Agreement
Genetic design of the human	High
Dispositional traits	High
Motives and values	Moderate
Abilities (skills)	Moderate
Adaptations (e.g., beliefs)	Moderate
Integrative narratives	High
Culture	Low

SOURCE: Based on discussions by McAdams and Pals (2006), McCrae (2010), and Roberts and Wood (2006).

It is very hard to present a picture of personality that incorporates all of those topics at once. In some ways, the emerging broader accounts actually aren't really grand-scale theories, but a putting-together of several perspective views. We'll touch on most of the ideas that go into these broader accounts at one point or another, but we will do it one perspective at a time.

1.4: Organization within Chapters

1.4 Outline reasons as to why assessment of personality, behavioral problems, and behavior change are important

Let's now say a little bit about how chapters are organized. Most of the content of each chapter is a description of the elements and processes of personality, as viewed from that perspective. Each chapter thus tells you about individual differences and intrapersonal functioning, as seen by that theoretical viewpoint.

Each chapter also addresses two more subjects. One is what that perspective says about the process of measuring personality, called *assessment*. The other addresses potential problems that people may experience, and the processes by which behavior is changed for the better through therapy. Here's a brief preview of what these sections will be like.

1.4.1: Assessment

Personality psychologists give considerable attention to the process of measuring personality, for at least three reasons. First, they want to be able to portray the personalities of specific persons, just as you characterize the personalities of people you know. To be confident these pictures are accurate, psychologists need good ways to measure personality.

A second reason concerns research. To study qualities that pertain to personality, psychologists have to measure those qualities. Without being able to assess individual differences or intrapersonal functioning, it's impossible to study them. Good assessment, then, lies at the heart of personality research.

A third reason to measure personality strays a bit from the main focus of this book. Assessing people's personality is an important part of applied psychology. For example, organizational psychologists use personality to help make hiring decisions (e.g., you might want to hire someone with a desired pattern of motives). Clinical psychologists use personality assessment to help diagnose problems.

Assessment is important throughout personality psychology. Some issues in assessment are the same for all perspectives (these are addressed in Chapter 3). But assessment is also viewed somewhat differently from different perspectives, because different perspectives highlight different aspects of behavior and experience. As a result, perspectives often differ in the techniques they emphasize. In discussing assessment in each later chapter, we focus on how assessment from that viewpoint has its own special character.

1.4.2: Problems in Behavior, and Behavior Change

The other topic included in each theory chapter concerns the fact that people's lives don't always go smoothly. Each view of normal personality also suggests a way to think about problems. Indeed, it can be argued that a theory of personality gains credibility from saying useful things about problems. To clarify how each approach to personality views problems, we briefly take up this issue in each chapter from that chapter's viewpoint. As with assessment, our emphasis is on that theoretical orientation's special contribution to thinking about problems.

Personality does not always function smoothly. Each perspective on personality has its own view about why problems occur.

Finally, we describe how the theoretical orientation under discussion contributes to understanding therapyto deal with problems. If each view has a way of thinking about normal processes and about how things can go wrong, each view also has a way to think about how to make things better. Each suggests ways to turn problematic functioning back into effective and satisfying functioning.

Summary: What Is Personality Psychology?

Personality is a hard concept to define. Thinking about how people use the concept, however, suggests three reasons for its use. People use it to convey a sense of consistency or continuity within a person, to convey the sense that the person is the origin of behavior, and to convey the sense that the essence of a person can be summarized or captured in a few salient qualities.

The field of personality addresses two fundamental themes. One is the existence of differences among people. The other is how best to conceptualize intrapersonal functioning—the processes that take place within all persons, giving form and continuity to behavior.

Much of this book deals with theories. Theories are summary statements, sets of principles that pertain to certain classes of events. Theories have two purposes: to explain things that are known and to predict possibilities that haven't yet been examined. One way to evaluate the worth of a theory is to ask whether research supports its

predictions. Scientific psychology has a continuing cycle between theory and research, as theories are tested, modified on the basis of results, and tested again.

Theories can be evaluated on grounds other than research, though. For example, a theory shouldn't be based on a single kind of information. Theories benefit from being parsimonious—having relatively few assumptions (or concepts). People also tend to favor theories that fit well with their intuitions and personal world view.

The theories described in this book derive from several perspectives, or viewpoints, on human nature. Each theory chapter focuses on assumptions about the nature of personality within a particular theoretical framework. Also included are a discussion of assessment from the viewpoint of the theory under discussion, and a discussion of problems in behavior and how they can be remedied.

Chapter 2

Methods in the Study of Personality

Learning Objectives

2.1 Define case study, experience sampling, and the concept of generality

2.2 Examine the process of establishing two kinds of relationships between variables

Sam and Dave are taking a break from studying. Sam says, "My roommate's girl at home broke up with him. Chicks here better watch out, 'cause he's gonna be doin' some serious partying to forget her."

"What makes you think so?"

"What kind of dumb question is that? It's obvious. That's what I'd do."

"Huh. I know guys whose hometown girls dumped them, and none of them did that. It was exactly the opposite. They laid around moping. I don't think you know anything about how people react to breakups."

When people try to understand personality, where do they start? How do they form theories? How do they test them? How do psychologists decide what to believe? These are all questions about the methods of science. They exist in all kinds of science, from astronomy to zoology. They're particularly challenging, though, when applied to personality.

2.1: Gathering Information

2.1 Define case study, experience sampling, and the concept of generality

There are two main sources of information about personality. One of them is your own personal experience of the world. The other is other people and how they react to the world. Each is useful but neither is perfect.

2.1.1: Observe Yourself and Observe Others

One way to get information about personality is to look to your own experience—a process called *introspection*. This technique (what Sam in the opening example did) is open to everyone. Try it. You have a personality. If you want to understand personality, take a look at yours. Sit back and think about your life. Think about what you did in various situations and how you felt. Pull from those recollections a thread of continuity. From this you might even start to form a theory—a set of ideas to explain your thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Looking at your own experience is an easy beginning, but it has a problem. Specifically, your consciousness has a special relationship to your memories because they're yours. It's hard to be sure this special relationship doesn't distort what you're seeing. For instance, you can misremember something you experienced, yet feel sure your memory is correct.

This problem goes away when you look at someone else instead of yourself (like Dave in the opening example). That's the second method of gathering information: Observe someone else. This method also has a problem, though—the opposite of introspection's problem. Specifically, it's impossible to be "inside another person's head," to really know what that person is thinking and feeling. This difference in perspective can create vast differences in understanding. It can also lead to misinterpretation. Which is better? Each has a place in the search for truth. Neither is perfect, but they sometimes can be used to complement one another.

2.1.2: Depth Through Case Studies

These two starting points lead in several directions. Personality psychologists sometimes try to understand an entire person at once, rather than just part of the person.