

FOUNDATIONS

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INTRODUCING PERSONALITY



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Define personality and explain the personality concept in psychology.
- Describe the four major types of knowledge relevant to the study of personality.
- Identify and critically discuss the major dichotomies of personality.
- Identify ways to apply knowledge of personality psychology in specific interpersonal and professional settings.

WHO ARE YOU AS A PERSON?

If you had just one opportunity, at this very moment, how would you describe yourself as a person? How would you present yourself to people who don't know you? What would you convey about yourself to those who will live on this planet 100 years from now? You have just 30 seconds and 280 characters, between 40 and 70 words, like on X/Twitter. This is not an epitaph nor is it an obituary. This is about you today and now. So, who are you? Nice to meet you.

To answer, you perhaps start with, "My name is . . ." But do our names have anything to do with who we are as persons? Maybe yes. In 800 essays on the topic "My Name," 75% of college-age respondents considered their first names as very important to these individuals' identity. Yet 1 in 10 of them suggested they wouldn't mind changing their first names for good. When people change their names, do they also change their personalities?

Would you then mention your last name in your self-description? Our surnames often reveal our family origins. And yet we can change our names due to marriage and choice. We can change our gender. The same is true about our citizenship.

Perhaps you then reveal where you are from and where you live now. Have you noticed this is one of the most frequently asked questions when people meet for the first time? Why do they ask it? Hopefully not to make stereotypical judgments about you based on your birthplace. Same is true about the question, "What do you do?" Being a nurse, artist, teacher, or engineer identifies your occupation. But does it define you as a person?

Maybe you will mention your religion if you are a devout follower of faith. Perhaps you include your education. But all these facts above, how strongly do they represent who you are? Certainly, you are not just a complex blend of references to names, birthplace, height and weight, religious practices, educational institutions, and occupations. There is something special, unique, outstanding about you as a human being. For example, things accomplished and places visited. Something you have experienced or overcame. Your moments of pain. Things and events that made you happy or sad. By the way, could you tell, are you an ambitious person? Are you a procrastinator? Do you wait, or do you prefer to get everything now? Do you like the company of others, or prefer to be left alone? Are you mostly a talker or a listener? Are you one who mostly shares or takes? And all in all, do you like yourself?

So little time and so little space for this question, "Who are you as a person?" In fact, many people in the past, when I asked them, felt a bit puzzled when answering this question. Some asked for more time to think. Others would reject the imposed word limit: 280 characters? Professor, are you kidding? Yet others would say openly how little they know about themselves and how important it is to reflect on the things that matter to them.

Who are you? Maybe your life is a constant search for answers to this question. Let this book be a humble helper along this journey.

IDENTIFYING PERSONALITY

Defining *personality* is one of the most challenging tasks in psychology. Psychologists often view personality according to their main theoretical positions held within the discipline. So, if this is the case, and the views of personality are very diverse, what should we do? No matter how dissimilar the views of personality are, we need to have an initial point of reference. Let's suggest a

working definition: **Personality** is a stable set of behavioral and experiential characteristics of an individual. These characteristics manifest in many forms and include interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns (American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology, 2022a). We should also understand that this definition isn't carved in stone: During our learning journey, we will have more than ample opportunity to reexamine and clarify this initial definition. But we need to start somewhere.

Explaining the Definition and Asking Questions

Details are important when we finish our projects. Yet they are no less important at the beginning of the journey. To make sure that we are on the same page from the start, consider the following questions and answers about the personality definition and its interpretations.

- Q.** Which characteristics of an individual do psychologists associate with what they call personality?
- A.** The American Psychological Association refers to configurations of “characteristics and behavior” (APA, Dictionary of Psychology, 2022a). Our working definition here also refers to patterns of *thinking*, *feeling*, and *behaving* (experience in psychology traditionally refers to thinking and feeling).
- Q.** Do we need to study every behavioral act and every moment of experience of individuals to judge their personality?
- A.** Of course not. We are looking only at relatively *stable* patterns and *enduring* features of behavior and experience. These features manifest in various life situations. Psychologists try to describe, measure, compare, and explain such patterns. Later we will turn to the study of personality **traits** as distinct and stable patterns of behavior and experience (Chapter 6 specifically focuses on traits).
- Q.** Does every individual have a personality?
- A.** It is logical to assume that personality has to be associated with, or remains inseparable, from a certain material or physical carrier, such as a human body. However, in many parts of the book, and particularly in Chapters 7 and 13, we will discuss whether personality can be viewed and understood independently from such a carrier.
- Q.** Do stones, bridges, paper bags, or atomic particles have personalities? What about machines or artificial intelligence applications? They can display distinct characteristics, features, and patterns.
- A.** Probably not. Personality—let's get back to the definition—refers to behavior and feelings. Bridges and paper bags do not feel. We can assign in our imagination certain personality qualities to these and other objects like to software or literary figures, but these will be the imaginative features based on rather creative, artistic comparisons.
- Q.** But do pets have personalities? Cats and dogs can feel.

- A.** This is an intriguing question to which we will turn in Chapter 5. For the sake of certainty, let's accept for now that personality is something related to human beings (we will call them persons, individuals, people, women, men, intersex, and so on) as carriers of personality features. But we will not ignore the questions about machines and pets and whether they “have” personality.
- Q.** Do our personalities “exist” after we die?
- A.** This is a difficult question. We remember people who are no longer with us; very often, we keep memories of their lives and their personalities. Furthermore, there is physical (their belongings, for example) or digital (their sites and online pics) evidence associated with such personalities. How many people who have already passed away still have their pages on social networks? On their pages, we can see the pictures of smiling, acting, and living individuals chitchatting about their lives and the world. Their profiles are there, but the hosts aren't. In Chapters 5 and 13 we will discuss the meaning of individual immortality.
- Q.** Can a human being have two or more personalities?
- R.** Probably yes. There are individuals who become impostors, pretending to be someone else for very long periods. Clinicians in the United States also recognize dissociative identity disorder (known as “multiple personality disorder”). But some psychologists across the globe disagree with their U.S. colleagues. Although there have been probably many thousands of individuals who have claimed to have or experience several personalities, the validity of their self-reported symptoms is often disputed. We will examine personality from the mental illness perspective in Chapter 11.
- Q.** Is there another personality or personalities exactly like yours?
- A.** Probably yes and maybe no. It depends how we interpret “exactly” and how many personality features we compare. But if we look at just a few features of you, we can suggest that a person with similar features may be located very near you—a step or a link away. Just look around.

Three Principles Explaining Personality

Although personality may appear as a theoretical concept, it is also very important in psychological practice at least for three reasons.

The first one has to do with *consistency*. The personality concept helps psychologists establish consistency in the individual's observable qualities and characteristics; based on that, they make predictions regarding the person's behavior. For example, consider a client who is never late for her appointments with a therapist, who writes down questions to the therapist before each therapeutic session, and who meticulously follows all the therapist's recommendations. Most likely, this person will be expected to exhibit these and similar patterns of behavior in the future therapeutic sessions.

The second reason is about the practical value of the personality concept, or the *causation* of behavior. Personality is a concept indicating that an individual's behavior, feelings, or thoughts are not just direct and random responses to various outside influences. These behaviors, feelings, or thoughts are, to a degree, originated “from within”: We know that some people tend to

be more secretive, open-minded, anxious, or aggressive than others. Personality features, for that reason, appear as an underlying force, influencing a person's interactions with the social environment. Some of these features can be very powerful causes of behavior, whereas others are only weak ones. For example, openness to experience, as a personality trait, may result in extremely promiscuous and dangerous behavior in one individual; although in another one, openness to experience may cause many helping, generous, and unselfish acts.

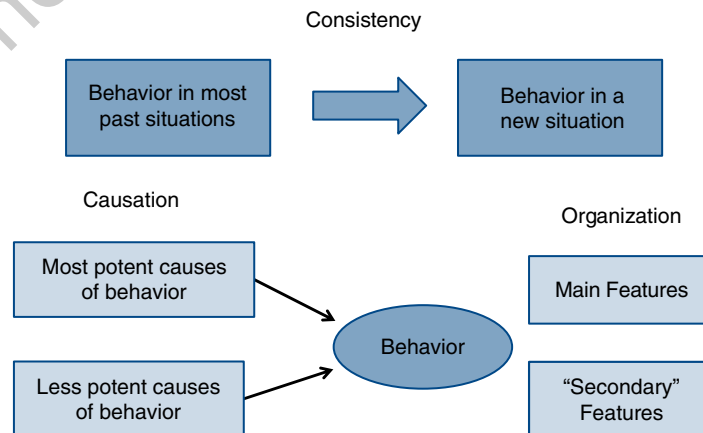
The third reason has to do with *organization*. People display thousands of seemingly unrelated characteristics. The systemic approach that has been used in psychological studies of personality helps psychologists delineate a few salient qualities of an individual, which are supposed to relate to each other. In a way, these qualities can represent a “summary” for what the individual is. Some characteristics are essential and central to the person. For example, five characteristics—neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience—have been found by many psychologists to be the “core” or the most salient traits and were named the Big Five, which we will study later (Costa & McCrae, 1995). The more essential the quality is, the better it describes the essence of the individual's personality, the more it distinguishes this person from other people, and the more accurate it is in predicting the person's behavior.

Each of the central traits influences other secondary, less essential characteristics, which, in turn, affect a set of relatively stable behaviors, or habits (see Figure 1.1).

You can imagine that traits can be organized in “trees,” with each salient trait (that represents an individual's personality) manifesting in secondary traits and then in very specific behavioral habits. Introversion (one of the most salient traits), for example, may lead to a person's continuous avoidant behavior of certain friends (secondary trait) and later may develop into a stable pattern of habits that involves enjoying a wide range of solitary activities at home, such as playing video games.

Studying personality is one of the most intriguing enterprises in psychology. In this journey, we will pursue at least two goals (Hogan & Bond, 2009). First, we will be trying to find out in which ways people are alike. Second, we will try to see in which ways each individual is different. Personality is the unity and competition of opposites, to which we turn in the next section.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Consistency, Causation, and Organization in the Continuum of Personality Traits



CHECK AND APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. How does the American Psychological Association define *personality*? How would you define personality? How different is your definition from the one produced in this chapter? In what ways?
2. Explain consistency, organization, and causation—all as applied to personality.

PERSONALITY'S DICHOTOMIES

In many ways, personality can be described as a coexistence and interaction of at least two conditions that are opposite to each other. They are called opposites, or dichotomies. However, because they coexist, they are dependent on each other. As an example, the categories *big* or *kind* cannot be meaningful unless there are categories such as *small* or *mean*. In other words, the opposite is necessary for the existence of the other, and one manifests together with the other. Let's further explain this in the following illustrations. We will use examples from history, most recent research in psychology, and daily experiences.



RGR Collection / Alamy Stock Photo

PHOTO 1.1 Most critics say Andy Warhol was a unique person. What does it mean to be unique? Are you a unique person? If not, why? If yes, which individual features or traits, from your view, make you markedly different from other people?

Personality Is Unique and Typical

Andy Warhol was and remains one of the most fascinating and internationally acclaimed artists ever and especially of the 20th century. He stood out because of his unique art, but he was also outstanding because of his personality (see Photo 1.1). Many who knew him claimed that his personality—a pattern of his actions, pranks, ideas, and emotional expressions—was unquestionably one of a kind. Warhol maintained the unique ability to surprise, shock, and inspire—all at the same time. One of his gifts was his ability to combine the incompatible just to see what happened. He had his mother sign his artwork. He asked other people to impersonate him on a lecture tour. He made movies of objects that never moved and used actors who could not act at all, and he made art out of boxes and cans that did not look like art (Menand, 2010). His personality was a spectacular bundle of positive energy, destined to shock and impress. And yet this type of behavior, this pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting, is not necessarily unique! His behavior and experiences exhibited a particular type of personality that, in theory and practicality, can be found in other people; someone's apparent uniqueness can be typical. Warhol belongs to a type of individuals who are predictable in their unpredictability: They are showy, flamboyant, and intriguing most of the time. There are many other people who think and act in a similar way. Being “typical” is, in fact, about combining or exhibiting the essential characteristics of many people.

We are similar to many other people because we share related genetic characteristics with them. We are also subject to comparable physical and environmental factors, such as geographic location or persistent weather patterns. Circumstances we all experience together may “produce” in us similar behavioral and emotional features, such as persistent despair, pride, or aggressiveness; however, most of these circumstances are interconnected (Astuti & Bloch, 2010), as we will see in Chapter 2. Sure, we shouldn't expect a 100% match of all personality features between any two individuals—even so-called *identical twins* are not necessarily identical since during their mother's pregnancy, they have different placement in the womb and tend to receive different quantities of nutrition and exposure to hormones (Segal, 2012)—but we all are different, and we all are similar to a certain degree.

Let's briefly summarize the topic of uniqueness. Our personality features are unique, and as distinguishable patterns of behavior and experience, they will be called personality traits. As strokes of a pencil or coal on a piece of paper define the important features of a portrait, traits help in defining personality (the term *trait* comes from the Latin *tractus*, which means “a stroke”). Taken together in a combination, our traits form a certain **type**. *Type* refers to a kind or category of elements or features sharing similar characteristics or qualities. Individuals thus displaying similar combinations of traits may be considered as belonging to the same type. We, as individuals, are unique. However, our apparent uniqueness can be . . . typical.

SELF-REFLECTION

Would you like to meet another you? Imagine that scientists have cloned a biological individual or produced a device empowered by artificial intelligence who (or that) looks, thinks, and acts exactly like you. This would be a bot or another individual displaying the same

personality features that you have. Would you like to meet this person? What would you learn from this person? Would you be willing to have this person as your close friend, or would you rather keep your distance from this individual?

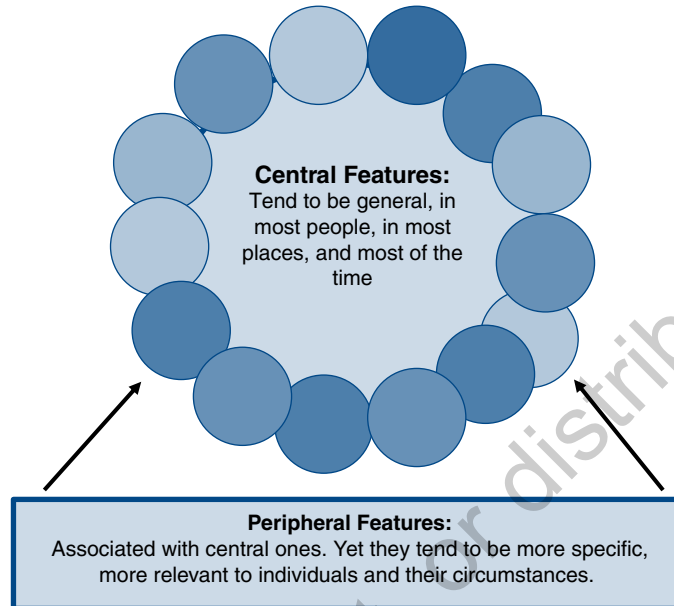
Personality Features Can Be Central and Peripheral

Do you think of yourself as mostly an optimist, pessimist, or somewhere in between? Are you pessimistic in some situations and optimistic in others? Or are you optimistic most of the time? Some personality features are **central** because they tend to be somewhat wide-ranging and present—to various degrees—in most people, most of the time. Consider, for example, openness to experience (mentioned earlier in this chapter), which includes a combination of imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety, and intellectual curiosity. **Peripheral** personality features tend to be more specific and also tend to appear in particular individuals in specific individual or cultural circumstances. Also consider, for example, *sensitivity to humor*, which is a tendency to react angrily (or not to react) to actual or imaginable insults. Central features are not necessarily more important than peripheral, and the differences between them are not clear-cut.

Now let's talk about **pessimism**—a persistent, broad-spectrum belief in and anticipation of undesirable, negative, or damaging outcomes. Pessimism can be a central feature. It can be prevalent in some individuals (do you know some of them?) but not in others. Pessimism, however, may manifest in a range of peripheral features. One person with a strong propensity for pessimism may display persistent sadness or constant lack of initiative or chronic lack of self-discipline, which may affect individual performance. Research shows that such individuals are less likely to be successful in job searches compared to optimists with similar skills (Kaniel et al., 2010). Yet other people with a propensity for pessimism can display a very different pattern: They are always prepared for possible, undesirable outcomes and thus practice self-discipline and careful preparations to avoid them. Studies show, in fact, that pessimism encourages some people to live more carefully by taking serious health and safety precautions (Lang et al., 2013). Pessimism as a central feature or trait in yet another person may manifest as a secondary trait in the form of **cynicism**, which is persistent distrust of other people's motives. People prone to cynicism tend to question others' good intentions and believe that such intentions and actions are not altruistic but rather selfish. People who tend to be pessimistic are not necessarily cynical; however, a person who tends to be cynical is likely to be pessimistic. A cynical person does not have to be prone to sadness or display a lack of self-discipline. Such individuals tend to distrust others and treat them with suspiciousness (Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2018).

As we will see later in other chapters, the interactions between central and peripheral traits tend to be extremely complex. At times they can seem puzzling.

Research helps clarify the interaction between central and peripheral personality features (see Figure 1.2). For example, people have been shown to have a general tendency to **self-enhance** or deem our self as superior to peers (in other words, we tend to believe that we are somewhat better, smarter, and more reasonable than others). Self-enhancement can be understood as a central trait. However, studies reveal that people in Western cultures (Western Europe,

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Personality's Central and Peripheral Features

Australia, New Zealand, and North America) tend to self-enhance differently than people in East Asian cultures. Westerners were likely to self-enhance on traits relevant to individualism (being ambitious, decisive, etc.), and Easterners tended to self-enhance more on attributes relevant to collectivism, such as duty, responsibility, and the like (Gaertner et al., 2010). Will a similar study reveal the same tendencies in 2030? Some central personality features may be determined largely by biological factors (such as genetics), as research suggests, which may also affect their relative universality and constancy. Peripheral traits may appear as adjustments to specific social circumstances and can be associated with an individual's lifestyle. These peripheral features often change without affecting central features (McCrae & Costa, 1999). Imagine a woman who has been shy and withdrawn in her childhood. She felt most of the time uncomfortable being among strangers in her home country. In college, in The United Kingdom, however, she grows increasingly comfortable when interacting with most fellow students. Yet still, in most situations outside the campus, she remains largely shy and appears somewhat withdrawn.

Personality Is Stable and Evolving

A Christmas Carol is a masterpiece by the great English writer Charles Dickens. Its main character is Ebenezer Scrooge, whose personality is distinctively set early in the novel. He is consistent: He is mean, greedy, rude, cold, and full of envy. He is impolite to others, unhelpful, and lacks empathy. On Christmas Eve, Scrooge undergoes a miraculous and sweeping psychological transformation. After three spirits visit him at night and reveal to him how unhappy and meaningless his life is, he wakes up a different man. He suddenly turns into a kind, compassionate, generous, and caring individual. He dramatically changes his patterns of behavior and thought! Though Scrooge is a character in a fairy tale, you may find many examples of people who almost

suddenly and swiftly change their behavior, their beliefs, and even their lifestyle. Change is part of our lives. Yet some changes take place faster than others, and some people experience them more often than others. Some tend not to change.

Stability is part of our lives as well. Research shows that people are inclined to challenge logic and math only to remain loyal to their stable, deep-seated values (Grant, 2021; Kahan, 2012). Do you know of people who have not changed their main habits for years? Some of them prefer to act in the politest way to avoid any form of confrontation. Others constantly seek action, engagement, and new conflicts. Some others prefer to pick the same type of a battle, like Jacques Vergès was, an attorney who was always eager to defend “very bad guys.” Among his defendants, almost exclusively, were accused terrorists, gangsters, dictators, bankrupts, and thieves. He defended the Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie and the Cambodian dictator Khieu Samphan. He was a confrontational attorney and a feisty human being; his key strategy in life and in the courtroom was to accuse the accuser and challenge the challenger. His biographers say that he learned this technique in childhood, when his father taught him to throw stones at bullies. Vergès remained in a constant war of arguments with others. Big deal, one may say—he worked for money! Not necessarily. In very many cases, he worked *pro bono*, for free, just because he really loved what he was doing (McFadden, 2013).

Stability and change are based on many interconnected influences. Research has established that through our individual life span we keep many of our personality characteristics relatively stable: A challenger and troublemaker is likely to retain his or her “feistiness” for a long time. However, adults and children as groups, for example, tend to have a different sense of humor or the propensity to laugh about certain themes because our general perceptions of what is funny when we are children differs from our perception as adults (Stanley et al., 2014). Your parents may laugh at something you consider not funny at all. Studies also reveal that central features tend to change slowly, and peripheral ones may change faster. Change is susceptible to time. Most personality-related changes take place during childhood. Our personalities become relatively stable in middle age and are less changeable after we reach 50 (Roberts & Friend-DelVecchio, 2000). Yet many aspects of personality in older age, as research shows, are likely to relate to personality features in childhood (Harris et al., 2016).

Considering this research, should we assume that the transformation that has taken place in Scrooge’s personality was rather atypical because older adults are not that susceptible to sudden personality changes compared to the young? It is probably so. But remember that our personalities are unique; statistical tendencies suggesting how we should feel or react in a certain type of situation are only expectations based on probabilities. Personality is supposed to be stable, and at the same time, it is evolving because stability and change are both adaptive features. As humans, we continually adjust to a changing social and physical environment. We often learn from our mistakes. We tend to grow wiser with age and better understand our personal boundaries (wisdom, among other things, is about knowing your own limitations). We tend to imitate other people’s successful actions. We learn about connecting certain behaviors to the circumstances in which these behaviors occur. Some learn that being greedy is beneficial at times. Others, like Scrooge, learn kindness. Jacques Vergès was, the lawyer who loved defending notorious individuals, saw his work as rewarding, thus allowing him to fulfill his individual skills and potential as an attorney.

Early Hindu writings (Chapter 2) from thousands of years ago suggest that some individuals are like “carvings” on a rock—their individual features are solid and long lasting. Other people are like “carvings” on the earth because their mental states are fast passing. Yet others are compatible with marks on the water because they are extremely changeable.



PHOTO 1.2 Connie Picciotto, who died in 2016 at the age of 70, carried on one of the longest continuous acts of political protest in the United States by keeping vigil, day and night, near the White House since the 1970s to protest nuclear weapons. Some personality features can be viewed as “normal” in some social situations and as “abnormal” in others. Could you suggest such features and situations? Discuss an individual’s trait such as stubbornness, for starters.

Personality Can Be Viewed as “Normal” and “Abnormal”

Connie Picciotto (1946–2016) kept vigil near the White House for more than 30 years (see Photo 1.2). Day after day, she peacefully demonstrated there against nuclear weapons. Two large boards behind her with messages in all capital letters read “BAN ALL NUCLEAR WEAPONS OR HAVE A NICE DOOMSDAY” and “LIVE BY THE BOMB, DIE BY THE BOMB.” She carried on one of the longest continuous acts of political protest in the United States: Five presidents resided in the White House since the first day of her protest. Thousands of tourists saw and photographed her there. Some stopped and talked to her. (The author of this book talked to her briefly, too.) Others smirked and passed by. Why did this woman spend more than half of her adult life in front of the White House? Why did she choose such an extraordinary method of activism? Was she . . . normal?

As you might know, effective activism requires a measure of unconventionality, but when nonconventional behavior is consistent and inflexible, it can be judged as deviant (Gibson, 2013). However, don’t we all act in unconventional ways from time to time? And who is the judge of our actions?

We the people, as ultimate judges, create conventional rules to distinguish between acceptable and objectionable behavior. Moderation, modesty, honesty, and friendliness as individual traits are likely to be considered desirable and appropriate. Most people in most circumstances view

these traits positively. In contrast, we recognize inappropriate, undesirable, or unhealthy patterns of actions and thought. We avoid, criticize, or reject them; for example, being a consistent liar is typically frowned upon. What other commonly undesirable patterns could you name?

Notice that judgments about normal (appropriate) and abnormal (inappropriate) traits of a person vary across circumstances, generations, and cultures. For example, flashy disco clothes at a “Remember the 70s” party would be expected, but wearing such clothes to an afternoon biology class lecture would be considered unusual and would definitely turn a few heads. Likewise, some personality traits may be seen as unusual, ambiguous, or even abnormal when you apply one set of social standards to judge them. **Tolerance threshold** is a measure of tolerance or intolerance toward specific personality traits in a society or within a cultural group. Tolerance thresholds can be high or low, and they are tested in specific situations. The musical personality David Bowie’s eccentric behavior was largely accepted a couple decades ago and even admired because people, and particularly millions of his followers across the globe, expected him, as a creative person, singer, and performer to act in these unusual ways. High thresholds indicate relative societal tolerance to varying personality traits, whereas low thresholds signify relative societal intolerance against specific behaviors associated with certain personality traits.

Particular personality features are defined and categorized in medical terms. **Personality disorders** are enduring patterns of behavior and inner experience that deviate markedly from the expectations of the individual’s culture. It is not just being different. It is a persistent behavioral pattern that leads to the individual’s distress and impairment in one or several important areas of functioning (Akhtar, 2002). Clinicians today recognize personality disorders as a special diagnostic category, and there is growing consistency in the way these disorders are diagnosed in different countries. Overall, personality disorders represent a deviation (and there are various degrees of such deviation) from what is considered “standard” personality in a specific social and cultural environment (Yang et al., 2010). We will turn to this discussion in Chapter 11.

Is it accurate to assume that “what’s typical is normal; what’s normal is good,” and therefore, “what’s not typical is abnormal; what’s abnormal is bad”? Notice how, in each case, a description of what exists becomes converted into a prescription of what we like or dislike. As Scottish philosopher Hume pointed out more than 200 years ago, values, ethics, and morality are based not on logic or reason but on the sentiments and public opinions of a particular society. Thus, no description of human behavior, however accurate, can ever ordain what is “right” or “wrong” behavior (Levy, 1997). It makes no difference whether we are studying cultural customs, religious convictions, political beliefs, educational practices, recreational activities, sexual proclivities, or table manners. If most people display a particular behavior, it does not necessarily make it right; if most people do not, it does not automatically make it wrong.

Personality Is Rooted in Nature and Nurture

Did you ever notice how quickly U.S. presidents age right before your eyes? Passing the middle of their 4-year term in office, they look tired, their faces are wrinkled, and their eyes signal fatigue. Their body language sends a desperate call for a long vacation. Science has established that aging is a biologically programmed mechanism. However, today’s science also shows that non biological factors play a significant role in how the body ages. For example, chronic stress, overeating, or an inactive lifestyle accelerates aging (Epel, 2009, 2012). And this is true for every age group, including those who are in their 20s.

The debates about complex interactions of natural (biological) and social (cultural) factors have always been the focus of attention in social sciences and psychology. The essence of the **nature–nurture debates** was not necessarily about the dilemma of whether it is exclusively nature or nurture that makes us who we are as people. Some emphasized the importance of biological factors affecting human development, behavior, and experience. Others underlined the crucial role of social factors. Later, these views merged. A century ago, psychologists began viewing human beings as products of both the natural world and the social environment (Münsterberg, 1915). The assumption about the dual impact of natural and social factors on an individual’s functioning is generally accepted today.

Consider the pseudobulbar affect, or PBA. This is a syndrome characterized by persistent, involuntary, and uncontrollable laughing and crying episodes or a combination of both (Ahmed & Simmons, 2013). Medical research indicates these symptoms are related to neurological disease or injury, which are natural factors. Yet these natural factors affect the behavior and experiences of a living, breathing, functioning person; they have a serious impact on the individual’s social interactions, work, education, relationships, and the overall quality of life. It is common that individuals with PBA become socially withdrawn, shy, and overanxious over the years (Colamonico et al., 2012; Gordon, 2012). Why? People are aware of their symptoms, notice other people’s negative reactions, and often feel embarrassed by strangers’ remarks. Although this syndrome is a neurological condition, it can profoundly affect individuals’ social behavior, self-esteem, and the way they see other people (Miller, 2021).

The question remains open about many specific mechanisms of nature–nurture interactions. Most debates focus on the extent or degree of the impact of such factors and on the ways our knowledge can be applied to practice.

Personality Refers to Body and Mind

Research showed that people who are ill but remain optimistic and strongly believe they will get healthy, tended to recover somewhat better than pessimists (Bryan et al., 2004). This may be a fine illustration of how the optimistic mind affects the body. Or does it? Could it be that healthy people tend to be more optimistic than those who are unhealthy? Understanding the mechanisms of the mind–body interactions has been one of the most challenging topics of research and intellectual debates in the history of science and one of the most intriguing problems in psychology (Gergen, 2001).

For centuries, many scholars believed that experimental science was incapable of studying the “higher” mental processes, including values, will, or beliefs. How could one, they argued, measure compassion? Others disagreed. They believed in the possibility of the scientific study of the mind through research on the nervous system and the brain. These opposing views stood for a global scientific and cultural divide between the two “camps” of thinkers. One often criticized the other for reducing the complexity of mental life to, practically, the movements of molecules through body fibers. The other camp, in response, accused its critics of backwardness and even ignorance (i.e., How can you not study the mind scientifically?). Nevertheless, using the most advanced methods of neurophysiology and computer science, today’s researchers face a challenge in measuring the subjective elements of a person’s experience. Yet they are firm in their assumptions that personality features are inseparable from our body. Neuroscientists have long associated personality with the functioning of the human brain (see Chapter 2). Leading

researchers refer, for instance, to the functioning of the *brain stem* and the *hypothalamus* as key brain structures that has something to do with self-awareness, an important feature of personality (Damasio, 2012; Parvizi & Damasio, 2001).

The body and mind interact in remarkable ways. Remember the study showing that optimists who believe they will get healthier tend to achieve more positive results than bitter pessimists? Other studies reveal that optimism and high self-esteem contribute to healthy habits (Bryan et al., 2004). An individual's strong sense of personal control has a significant impact on health: If you believe that you are in charge of your life, you'll stay healthier than those who are not so sure about who is in charge (Johnson & Krueger, 2005). There is supportive evidence for the positive impact of our deep-seated positive beliefs, including love and faith, on health and behavior (Myers, 2008).

CHECK AND APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

In the futuristic flick *Her*, the main character (Theodore) is a shy, bored, and frustrated man who is about to get a divorce. Driven by his loneliness, he purchases software that serves as his personal assistant. This thinking-and-talking operating system can self-advance and grow cognitively and emotionally. Theodore picks a gender for the system and calls her Samantha. Gradually, as they spend many hours "together," Theodore falls in love with Samantha (or what she represents): a kind, smart, gentle, and compassionate "being." At one point, Theodore becomes jealous of her for interacting with other clients who have purchased her services. The problem, of course, is that Samantha isn't human.

This film may be labeled as scientific fiction. Yet to some, *Her* is more than sci-fi entertainment. Technology guru and futurist Ray Kurzweil has already proposed that by 2045 humans will have achieved digital immortality by uploading their minds to computers. Humans, because of digital immortality, will overcome the need for a biological body for survival. Futurists who subscribe to this idea agree and argue that advances in neural engineering and modeling of brain function will make it possible to reproduce human minds in a digital medium even earlier than we think (Kurzweil, 2012). People will be able to create virtual bodies and virtual reality in which the virtual reality will be as realistic as the actual reality (we will turn to this discussion in Chapter 7).

Questions

Let's assume that Kurzweil's project is successful, and in 5 or 10 years, people can upload their personality features to computers. What benefits could this technological project bring to you personally? What ethical problems would you anticipate if such a project is implemented?

Personality Is Active and Reactive

Classical psychological experiments conducted in several countries in the past showed that children from wealthier families tended to see coins as smaller than they were, while children from poor families overestimated the size of coins (Bruner & Goodman, 1947; Dawson, 1975). This is just a small illustration that our minds and bodies work differently when we lack something and feel it. Anyone who has a shortage of money, time, food, rest, sleep, or emotional support from others is likely to think and behave out of so-called **scarcity mindset**: a reaction to a shortage of

resources. People thus concentrate more on pressing threats and necessities and reassess the value of certain things that are in short supply. The chronically lonely, as research shows, become more aware of other people's feelings and become better interpreters of other people's emotions. People who are short on money pay greater attention, compared to people with money, to price tags in stores. This scarcity mindset may become a useful, adaptive mechanism of acting and thinking, but it may also produce less adaptive responses. People in need tend to process less information, weakening their self-discipline, and are likely to make more logical errors than those without scarcity mindset. As such, if you are temporarily low on cash, you will likely score lower on cognitive tests compared to the life periods when you have enough money (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013).

These research data seem to make good sense. We respond to conditions in which we live here and now. We tend to adjust to changing circumstances. Our personality traits are formed under the complex interaction of natural and social factors. It seems plausible that personality is a “product” of circumstances, and every step we take is a response to these circumstances.

This position or view in psychology is called **determinism**: Psychological phenomena are causally determined by preceding events or some identifiable factors. In theory, the more such factors we identify, the more understandable and predictable psychological phenomena become (Kenrick et al., 2003). Determinism encourages personality psychologists to (1) study the factors that influence personality and its various features, (2) explain personality by referring to these factors, and (3) predict its development in the future.

Determinism faces at least two challenges. First, there are too many unknown factors affecting our behavior and experience, so we simply cannot take into consideration all of them to explain personality. Second, these factors are interconnected and thus are not clearly identifiable. Psychologists generally avoid **fatalism**, which states that humans are not in control of their lives because something or somebody else predetermines or “programs” them. It can be God, fate, or chance. Psychologists today are likely to support the position called **self-determination**, which means that we, as individuals, generally are in control of our plans, actions, responses, minds, and personality features. The key word here is *generally*, which means that there are exceptions for this expectation. Supporters of self-determination tend to be reasonably optimistic.

CHECK AND APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Define *personality traits*. Explain central and peripheral traits. What traits do you think you have? Could you name them?
2. How does the story of Ebenezer Scrooge relate to the study of personality? Could you provide examples of individuals who have significantly and rapidly changed their personality features.
3. Explain the tolerance threshold. Give an example.
4. Discuss the case of Connie Picciotto. Was her persistent behavior “normal” or “abnormal” from your standpoint?
5. Give an example of scarcity mindset. Give an example in which you or another person acted this way.
6. Explain the difference between determinism, fatalism, and self-determination—all referring to personality.



PHOTO 1.3 Why do people tend to view narcissism negatively? Can narcissism as a trait be useful or helpful? In which situations?

APPROACHING PERSONALITY

In an influential book, *The Mirror Effect* (2009), the doctor and TV personality Drew Pinsky and his colleague S. Mark Young provided an intriguing account of a personality feature known as *narcissism*. The authors reviewed stories of people who displayed the important signs of narcissism in their behavior and judgments (see Photo 1.3). What were those signs? In a nutshell, people labeled *narcissistic* were prone to vanity, which is the excessive belief in a person's own superiority, outstanding talents, or irresistible appeal to others; these individuals persistently craved being the center of attention; they believed they were entitled to enjoy special perks unavailable to other people; and they were manipulative and capricious. Based on these stories, the authors made several conclusions:

- Narcissistic people are trapped between their own imagined magnificence, on the one hand, and emotional disconnection with other people, on the other.
- People, especially the young, pay too much attention to celebrity narcissists and copy their behavior; this is how many new narcissistic personalities are likely to develop.
- Celebrities do not become narcissists; rather, most narcissists are driven to become celebrities.
- The behavior of modern celebrities, as individuals, is much more dysfunctional than it was a decade or two ago.
- Narcissism is more prevalent these days than it has ever been in human history.

But how do Pinsky and Young make these far-reaching conclusions? How did they study these personality types? How do we know that the knowledge we are gaining from the book about

narcissism—as a personality feature—is accurate and the book’s generalizations are correct? If our goal is to gain knowledge about personality, we have to pay attention to knowledge and the ways we select it.

Let’s define a few key terms first. **Knowledge** is information that has a purpose or use. We are particularly interested in knowledge related to personality. This knowledge has certainly not been “set” or finalized once and for all. It is constantly evolving. Take, for example, what people knew about shyness and behavioral inhibition. Centuries ago, persistent inhibitive behavior was primarily associated in the minds of scientists and doctors with an imbalance of vital liquids in the body. Later theories of the 19th century referred to the nervous system and its weakness as a major cause of shyness. Many studies in the 20th century referred to shyness as a complex behavioral reflex, while others focused on introversion, an underlying psychological layer. Yet more recent studies focused on a dynamic combination of psychological, cultural, and hereditary factors as foundations of shyness. We can safely state that today’s knowledge of shyness is evolving (Carducci, 2017).

To gain knowledge about personality, some of us read peer-reviewed psychological papers, while others discuss issues on social media, yet others browse through stories in online tabloids. Many people look for these and other sources. Which of these sources convey knowledge: a peer-reviewed academic journal or an online blog? Which of these contain knowledge: a research paper on narcissistic personality or a popular book on the same subject? In fact, they all do. Knowledge remains knowledge, regardless of whether you find it interesting or boring. Knowledge can be accurate and inaccurate. For centuries, different people and groups observed human behavior and experience, described them, and then used this knowledge to pursue their goals—academic, religious, social, political, educational, business, humanitarian, etc. As a result, several types of psychological knowledge have emerged (see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1 ■ Four Types of Knowledge Related to Personality: A Preview

<i>Type of Knowledge</i>	<i>Sources of Knowledge</i>
Scientific	Knowledge accumulated through research, systematic empirical observation, and evaluation of a wide range of psychological phenomena. Facts are obtained with the help of scientific research methodologies and rigorous verification by multiple sources, typically including educated and trained peer reviewers. Scientific knowledge evolves with new scientific evidence.
Popular (or Folk)	Everyday assumptions about psychological phenomena and behavior. Such assumptions are often expressed in the form of judgments, assumptions, beliefs, evaluations, or prescriptions. Popular opinions change frequently based on new facts or assumptions.
Values	A consistent set of beliefs about the world, the nature of good and evil, right and wrong, appropriate or inappropriate behavior, and the purpose of human life. Human values tend to be stable and are based on a certain organizing principal or central idea, which is often accepted uncritically.
Legal	Knowledge encapsulated in the law and detailed in rules and principles regulating people’s behavior. Legal authorities commonly establish these rules, change them, and enforce them.

Four Types of Knowledge

Scientific Knowledge

The type of knowledge to which we will pay most attention in this book is **scientific knowledge**. Its major source is science, or systematic empirical observation, measurement, and evaluation of facts. It is rooted in the scientific method, which uses cautious research procedures designed to provide reliable and verifiable evidence (Gergen, 2001). Scientific knowledge is accumulated through research, or systematic empirical observation and evaluation of a wide range of psychological phenomena. Facts should be obtained with the help of sound research methodologies, which require rigorous verification by multiple sources. However, relevance of these facts, as well as relevance of scientific knowledge, is continually changing with time because of new research evidence (Kendler, 1999).

Supporters of the importance of scientific knowledge saw it for centuries as the exclusive arbiter of truth in people's understanding of personality. However, what was accepted as scientific and what was not varied greatly throughout history, all based on religious, political, and cultural values of the time. Take the individual's emotional domain, for example. Over 2,500 years ago, the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus believed that the movement of atoms of different shape and speed should have influenced an individual's various emotional states. More than 400 years ago, René Descartes, the French-born scientist, associated emotions with the activities of "animal spirits" passing through the body's vascular system. Later, according to the James–Lange concept of the late 19th century, there were bodily reactions that evoked experiences that a person then labeled as *emotions*. The Cannon–Bard theory of the 20th century explained emotions as signals that cause an individual's bodily reactions. In the 1920s, the physiologist Ivan Pavlov in Russia (a Nobel Prize Winner) and the psychologist John Watson in the United States (the President of the American Psychological Association) insisted that emotions were an individual's learned reflexes. Can you guess which of these views developed by renown scientists represented scientific knowledge and which did not?

In fact, all of them represented science. All these theories attempted scientific yet incomplete, developing knowledge. New theories produced new scientific knowledge. This does not make the earlier views unscientific. They were just less scientific than modern views. Science is always a work in progress.

Popular Beliefs

Imagine you hear your friend saying, "Short people are enthusiastic, dynamic, and ambitious because they want to compensate psychologically for their height. They make great friends for the same reason: their height." How does your friend know about the connection between people's height and their behavior? Does this connection really exist?

Probably the most accessible type of knowledge to most people is **popular (or folk) beliefs**. They are assumptions that represent a form of "everyday psychology" created by the people and for the people (*folk* is an old Germanic word meaning "people"). It appears that the statement about short people belongs to this category. This judgment can easily be shared with other people who, in turn, may ignore, accept, or reject it. Popular beliefs related to personality are

either individual or common assumptions about certain aspects of human behavior and experience. Some of these assumptions, such as the belief in the connections between people's height and their ambition, for example, are very broad. Others, such as how to ask for an extension of a paper's deadline in a psychology class, when the professor is in a good mood, could be very specific. Popular beliefs are, to some degree, our working assumptions about us and other people. These assumptions can be measured and tested. Yet often they are not. Many people simply believe them and use them as if they were based on facts. Popular beliefs refer to all areas of life. Consider important phenomena in our lives such as poverty. Bad things happen, and sometimes people struggle financially, but most get out of that tough situation. Yet why do some people remain chronically poor during their lives? And why do some people gain significant wealth even though they were not born rich? Think about the entrepreneurs like Jack Ma Yun in China or Elon Musk in the United States. People have different opinions on this subject. According to Pew Research, most Americans, for example, pointed to circumstances, not work ethic, for why people become rich or poor. Almost two thirds think the main reason for some people becoming wealthy is because they have had more advantages in life than most other people. More than 70% believed people remain poor because they have faced difficult obstacles in life. Yet almost one quarter of Americans maintained the belief that some people are poor because they have not worked as hard as others (Pew, 2020). Such views on poverty and wealth can affect many aspects of the individual's life: from choosing volunteer activities, to selecting hobbies, and voting in local and national elections. But how did these people get this knowledge? How do they know why people become rich and poor? What if their beliefs were wrong?

Many popular beliefs indeed tend to be accurate: They may be based on common sense, proven facts, or scientific research. This shouldn't be too surprising because people, as a group, tend to be careful and meticulous observers of behavior (Lock, 1981). For instance, from our own experience and from stories told by our friends, we know that people tend to become desperate during a lingering period of personal failures. We also learn that we all can have "good days" and "bad days" from time to time and that hope is often one of the greatest remedies against sadness and despair. We, as individuals, tend to distinguish between different kinds of popular knowledge. Some of us enjoy watching shows about vampires, yet we do not really believe in vampires roaming around. On the other hand, a streamed program on alcoholism may motivate some of us to make an intervention and to talk to a relative or friend in hopes of diverting them from excessive substance use.

It is also true that popular beliefs tend to be inconsistent. A person may have one opinion related to interpersonal skills of tall and short individuals but later agree with another person who has a different view. Popular beliefs can be inaccurate or simply wrong. Some people, for example, think that parental mistakes during early childhood can "cause" schizophrenia in children when they enter adulthood (science is skeptical about this belief). Or take, for example, popular assumptions about "permanent harms" of teenage masturbation—in particular, the belief that masturbation causes irreversible personality problems, intellectual decline, mental illness, or even blindness (Laqueur, 2004). Such unproven assumptions significantly impacted parental practices of millions of people around the globe and especially vast cultural prohibitions in many parts of the world related to women's sexuality (Kaur & Lindinger-Sternart, 2020).

Knowledge related to personality and designed for mass consumption is called *popular psychology*, or simply **pop psychology**. Pop psychology reaches people primarily through the media—television, streaming services, podcasts, social media, or popular books. This information tends to be simple and often sensational. Although professionals—who write for social media, popular blogs, or appear on YouTube—tend to have advanced degrees in psychology or medicine (and many of their ideas are valuable), it takes an average viewer’s effort to filter sensational ideas or unproven generalizations from facts. Therefore, we will constantly need to learn and critically review many popular beliefs related to personality, human behavior, emotions, and the applications of these beliefs.

Values

In contrast to folk beliefs, **values** are rather stable perceptions about the world and the individual’s place in it. Values refer to the nature of good and evil, purpose of human existence, life and death, right and wrong behavior, sexual practices, gender roles, and so forth. Values are different from popular beliefs because they are grounded on a set of unwavering principles, often accepted without critical evaluation. Tradition and authorities, including parents, often become sources of these principles. Values are deep-seated beliefs that do not necessarily require factual scrutiny. One person can hold a belief in the absolute necessity of being honest all the time and everywhere. This person is likely to practice this value. Another person believes that homosexuality is an abnormal

personality trait and a type of abhorrent behavior. This belief (if it is deeply held) may also be of value. In the history of human civilization, politics played a big role in promoting certain values related to individual behavior and traits while suppressing others (Dumont, 2010). In Germany more than 85 years ago, the Nazi ideology blended a mixture of radical nationalism and racism that affected the entire German society. During that time, the German educational institutions and the media actively promoted the “ideal” personality type: men and women that are physically fit, emotionally stable, morally pure, hard working, and uncompromising against Germany’s domestic and foreign enemies. German psychologists were ordered by the government to provide research data to help the younger generations become physically and mentally strong; to learn Nazi principles advocating the supremacy of the Arian race; and to defend, as brave soldiers, the German state (Shiraev, 2015).



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PHOTO 1.4 Are you a religious person? If yes, how did your beliefs influence your personality? If you are not religious, how did this view affect your behavior and in which ways?

Religion is one of the most powerful sources of values. People routinely use religion to navigate and explain their behavior and personality (Harrington, 1996). Behavioral prescriptions, such as moderation in needs, respect for strong family ties, frugality, discipline, and thrift, are common in the doctrines and practices of Christianity, Judaism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions. Religious values also affected people's views of psychological illness. Within the Christian tradition, as an illustration, the core beliefs related to sin, confession, and repentance motivate many individuals to believe that some severe forms of mental illness are God's punishment for inappropriate behavior (see Photo 1.4; Shiraev & Levy, 2024).

How important is the impact of religious values on behavior? It depends on who you are and where you live. Some of us are religiously devout. Others are not. Some people do not practice religion, and it is not a source of values for them. Globally, back in 2017, 62% of people in the world defined themselves as religious. Three quarters of people globally believed in the existence of a soul in them, 54% believed in life after death, and 49% believed in hell. In general, as education and income levels grow higher, religiosity levels tend to diminish. The most religious countries were Thailand (98% of the surveyed said they believed in God) and Nigeria (97%). China is the least religious country, where almost 7 out of 10 people said they were atheists, more than double than any other country (Gallup International, 2017). Most U.S. adults (81%) said they believe in God in 2022, compared to 90% in 2011 according to Gallup polls (Jones, 2022a).

Some religious values translate into actual behavior, but others do not. Indian psychologists admit the paradoxical nature of their society in which everyday life is conducted between profound mysticism and the spiritual nature of religious values on the one hand and ordinary, everyday lives on the other. The worship of goddesses and the abuse of women, unfortunately, coexist. Asceticism and modesty often are powerless against consumerism. The profound hope for fairness is numbed by daily corruption. These scholars maintain that spirituality and religious passion have not, unfortunately, played a crucial role in the improvement of the ordinary person (Chaudhary, 2010; Chaudhary et al., 2022; Ramanujan, 1989).

Legal Knowledge

Official prescriptions—including “this is allowed” or “this is not”—for centuries regulated behavior of individuals and groups. Law is a custom or practice of a community that is recognized as binding. **Legal knowledge** emerges in official prescriptions by authorities (ranging from tribal leaders to countries' governments). Legal knowledge may agree with or may contradict popular beliefs and values. The legal definition of mental illness, for instance, is country specific. Legal knowledge often produces labels to place people in special categories. The labels *lunatic* and *idiot* appeared until recently in the U.S. Code (the official compilation of federal laws), referring to individuals *non compos mentis* (not of sound mind). Existing legal categories such as *criminal* or *insane* can automatically create expectations that those who carry these labels presumably possess mainly undesirable personal qualities, including propensity to violence, disobedience, irrationality, perversion, and other forms of deviance.

Legal definitions provide strict guidelines about an individual's social status, such as formal maturity, as an example. In the United States, an individual becomes an “adult” and gains new rights, such as being able to vote or get married, at age 18. However, the official age allowing

alcohol consumption is 21. Other legal rules define which acts of individual violence are allowed (like self-defense) and which are condemned or punished. Legal knowledge provides explanations for right and wrong actions related to marriage and divorce, people's ability to adopt children, an individual's choice of a sexual orientation, and so forth. From the legal standpoint, homosexuality was considered a pathological trait and illness in the United States for most of the past century. In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down all state bans on same-sex marriage, legalized it in all 50 states, and required states to honor out-of-state same-sex marriage licenses. In many countries, governments continue to criminalize people for their sexual orientation. Posting materials related to LGBTQ+ issues is likely to create serious legal problems for the author of such an article or video in Russia or Iran.

All in all, legal rules establish boundaries of acceptable human behavior and affect daily customs and practices globally. Legal knowledge directly affects many of our judgments, emotions, and thoughts.

How Different Types of Knowledge Interact

What is *character*? Define it in one sentence. Next, ask people near you to do the same. You will receive different answers. Probably you will receive quick replies, such as "Character is one's mental strength" or more evasive answers like "Character is something everyone has." These unrehearsed answers will probably reflect these respondents' popular knowledge. Other answers may be more sophisticated. Some people may refer to literary characters. Others will associate character with moral values. Some will cite definitions from academic books. You can imagine how many different answers you can get after collecting, for instance, 100 replies!

In our lives, the four types of knowledge are deeply interconnected. Common sense assumptions, such as how to be forgiving or resilient, have always been part of people's knowledge about their individual life. A continually moving flow of new facts and opinions constantly changes these views. At certain times in history, as we will see later in the book, values—often associated with religion or politics—have had a tremendous impact on other types of knowledge. Studies showed that individuals who are good at math and statistics tend to suddenly stop using reason when they discuss research results that threatens their values (Kahan, 2012). Values can affect scientific knowledge, and scientific knowledge influences values. All four types of knowledge remain inseparable parts of our inquiry into personality because we are learning not only what personality is but also how personality has been understood in the past, how people view it today, and how people apply their knowledge to their lives.

Let's return to *The Mirror Effect*, the book on narcissistic personality described early in this chapter. What knowledge does it convey to the reader? Many of the book's ideas are based on tabloid stories, radio and television interviews, and personal observations. However, this book is also rooted in science. The authors first published their research in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Research of Personality* (Pinsky & Young, 2006). The book also discussed values that lead so many young people to be obsessed with the lives of celebrities. Overall, the book is an important source of information about personality. Yet the challenge remains: We need to distinguish among scientific facts, popular ideas, value judgments, and legal facts.

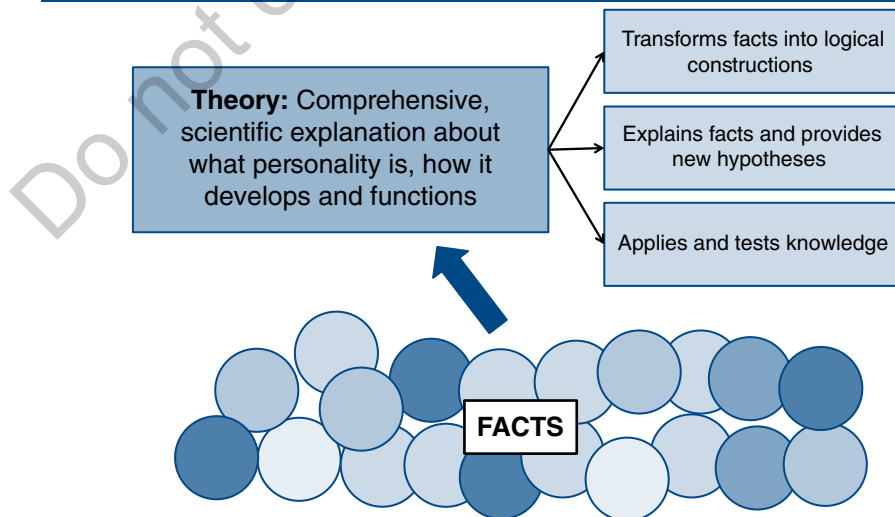
Knowledge and Theory

We certainly hope the knowledge that we gain about personality has everything to do with facts. Facts, even the most comprehensive and accurate ones, have to be explained. Our knowledge also requires **analysis**, which is the breaking of something complex into smaller parts to understand their essential features and relations. This step is difficult enough, but even more is needed. If psychologists did only analysis, they would remain hopelessly confused by the multitude of research data, facts, numbers, and opinions. Which facts are accurate? Which facts are more important than others? To answer these and other questions, we have to look at the facts in light of broader ideas about personality. The ancient Greeks called this knowledge “from above” or theory ($\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\iota\alpha$). Applied to personality, **theory** is a type of comprehensive, scientific explanation about what personality is, how it develops, and how it functions.

- Theory is based on scientific knowledge and serves as a powerful tool in the studies of personality.
- Theory allows us to transform a formless heap of research data and opinions into a logical construction.
- Theory provides an explanation for a particular observation and through new assumptions suggests several hypotheses that can be tested to support or challenge the theory.
- Theory can then be applied to see if it explains many known facts and if new facts can be explained by the theory. Theorizing about personality requires both strong empirical knowledge and, of course, a measure of imagination (see Figure 1.3).

The scientific study of personality has a broad and varied history. We will take a critical look at many theories and their applications in the following chapters. We will also examine major psychological schools that have contributed and continue to impact our knowledge of personality.

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Knowledge and Theory in Studying Personality



We will study facts established by psychologists working in different countries and using different methods. We also look at a wide range of ideas created by those whose work did not necessarily fit into these convenient academic categories. As a famous ancient saying attributed to the Roman playwright Terence goes, *I am a human: I regard nothing human as foreign to me.*

Personality Theories and Academic Traditions

We can approach (or come near to) what we label *personality* from different angles. **Personality psychology**—a branch of psychology that studies personality—has been around for a relatively short period, about 100 years. However, personality psychology carries the influences of the knowledge accumulated for centuries within various approaches and scholarly disciplines.

Many theories of personality developed within **academic traditions**. These traditions bring together scholars that share similar views on a particular scientific approach, subject, or method. At least two types of such traditions exist. First, there are actual associations involving interacting individuals—the followers of an academic tradition. Second, there are traditions as convenient symbols to indicate a similarity in views among people who may or may not know one another. Some traditions remain short lived. They emerge, capture the imagination of their followers, and then lose their appeal. Other academic traditions remain influential for many years. Psychoanalysis since the beginning of the 20th century was a dominant field providing major views of personality approximately until the 1960s. It has generally lost its dominant position today (we discuss this tradition in Chapter 4). However, even though some theories have lost their leading role, we continue studying them today. Like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, they are important elements of contemporary personality theory and its applications.

Academic traditions perform several functions. The first is organizational. Scientists have to exchange their ideas and discuss their research with one another. Discussion societies and clubs involving scientists were common in the past. In the 18th century, the famous French intellectual Paul-Henri Thiry (known also as Baron d’Holbach) established the *salon*: a regular get-together of progressive thinkers, authors, and educators. Liberal-minded philosophers discussed materialism and atheism and criticized the oppressive rule of the king. Psychoanalysts in the 20th century also formed groups to discuss new ideas, current research, and its applications. Researchers who study personality also belong to their academic organizations that conduct regular meetings, publish journals, and organize regular face-to-face meetings, podcasts, and webinars.

The second function is consolidation of knowledge. Quite often, several scholars working on the same problem or using the same theoretical approach can work more efficiently than individual scholars working separately. There are long-term informal associations, their purpose being to let their participants collaborate and share research findings. Such associations gain recognition among scholars of two or more generations. Many prominent psychologists of the past cared about their students, readers, and other followers—those who could and would continue or promote research of their mentors. Many psychologists actively and deliberately recruited their assistants, associates, and other colleagues to keep their research tradition thriving (Krantz & Wiggins, 1973). They do this today.

The third function of academic traditions is regulatory. Scholars themselves or through their academic associations render professional judgments and peer-reviewed opinions about the quality of research papers and books. On the one hand, such judgments are necessary because, for

example, they can distinguish important, high-quality research from pop psychology. On the other hand, as it has been in the past in authoritarian countries, governments would support some academic traditions and reject others (Kusch, 1999). Formal academic associations thus played the role of censors. In the context of knowledge, **copyright** is a deliberate practice of selecting and disseminating what is deemed “appropriate” knowledge (from someone’s point of view) and restricting knowledge deemed inappropriate. Copyright can be political, as in Russia or Iran, for example, where the law prohibits academic studies related to LGBTQ+ issues. Fortunately, copyright is rather a rare phenomenon in contemporary science in a democratic society.

In summary, certain academic traditions create favorable conditions for particular types of research of personality and development of scientific knowledge. A strong academic support of a theory, or its rejection, is crucial for this theory’s survival and future impact. It is always important to examine which methodology is chosen to support a theory.

CHECK AND APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What is the difference between values and popular beliefs?
2. What discrepancies between values and individual behavior can you name as you observe people’s everyday interactions?
3. Think about your day. Recall the situations in which you were using legal knowledge and scientific knowledge in making decisions or judging other people.
4. What is the book *The Mirror Effect* about?
5. Name the functions of academic traditions.
6. Ask your professors to which academic group or society they belong. Ask if this is an international or national group or whether it is local. What do they actually do as members of this group?

APPLYING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PERSONALITY

Studying personality remains a theoretical endeavor as long as we do not pay attention to the practical value of the research into personality. Personality psychology as a discipline should offer solutions to many personal problems and social challenges of today’s world. It also has to offer practical suggestions about how to unleash the psychological potentials that everyone has inside. In every chapter of this book, we will discuss the applications of personality psychology.

Areas of Application

Would you like to learn about your major strengths as a person? Do you want to learn what are your major individual weaknesses? Which job will be an ideal match for your personality type? What kind of a person will be an ideal match for you to create a family?

When I ask my students on the first day of class whether these questions interest them, practically everyone says that they do. Most of us are curious about who we are as individuals and how we can use this knowledge to help us pursue a healthy, happy, and successful life. In the past and

today, philosophers and natural scientists, doctors and educators, and explorers and experimentalists have all attempted to bring the power of scientific knowledge to solve practical issues referring to the individual's personality. For starters, let's mention a few areas of applications.

To improve treatment procedures, doctors use research into personality to distinguish different patterns of their patients' behavior. Medical professionals recognize that different people understand their symptoms differently and that their personalities have a lot to do with how these symptoms are explained. *Personalized medicine* is an applied field in which clinical professionals use their knowledge about an individual's unique personality characteristics to choose effective treatments (Collins, 2010). As an example, a patient's critical thinking skills (either developed or not), motivation level (high or low), and general emotional tone (optimistic or pessimistic) can greatly affect the way this individual understands treatment recommendations and follows them (Bray, 2010).

A professional's knowledge about personality disorders (we will study them in Chapter 11), and measuring their symptoms, provides valuable knowledge about diagnoses, treatment, and prevention of other psychological disorders (Tyrer & Johnson, 1996). Even seemingly inconsequential behavioral features, like walking, may provide clues about potentially significant psychological problems. Japanese researchers, for example, found that people with symptoms of clinical depression tend to move differently than people without depressive symptoms (Nakamura et al., 2007). Our individual style of walking and moving can be used in diagnosing and monitoring neurodegenerative diseases or other problems related to aging (Otte et al., 2021).

Applied to clinical and counseling psychology, research into personality allows therapists to create new procedures and methods to help people recover from physical and mental abuse and discontinue their harmful habits and behavioral patterns (Jones, 2008). Knowledge of specific personality features of victims suffering from acute stress helps psychologists apply special therapeutic techniques in the aftermath of natural disasters or violent conflicts (Chung & Bemak, 2011). Knowledge about specific factors of individual decision-making in health-related areas helps psychologists make changes in people's behavior with respect to their daily nutrition choices, hygiene, and reproductive health (Leenen et al., 2008). Children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders may benefit from specific recommendations related to the development of the ability to delay immediate impulse gratification—an important personality feature, which we will discuss in Chapter 2 (Faja & Dawson, 2013).

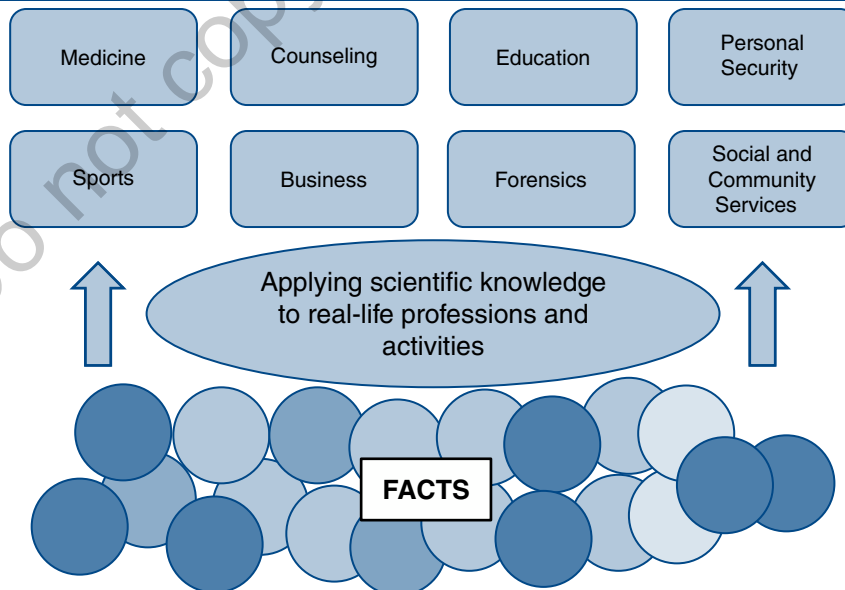
In education, many applications of personality psychology help improve educational effectiveness. Educational success is based, along with many other factors, on the type of motivation that teachers and students bring to classrooms. Successful learning is often about the ability to perform difficult, sometimes tedious tasks. Many factors influence this ability. However, individuals who have developed a strong sense of learning and who believe that they study for an important and socially meaningful goal perform better on many educational tasks, including the most boring ones. This knowledge allows psychologists to provide help in forming such traits in students (Yeager et al., 2014). Self-discipline can be improved not only by means of repetition but also through a deeper understanding of long-term, socially meaningful goals of studying. Psychologists assist educational professionals in many other areas, such as conflict resolution at schools, prevention of bullying, or addressing the deadly impact of substance abuse, including opioids, among the young.

Applied to business, research into personality provides knowledge about skills assessment, performance evaluation, and creative potentials related to various professional activities.

Psychologists suggest effective methods for job-related, competitive selection processes during hiring and promotion. Psychologists studying personality also make a strong contribution to *organization development*—planned changes targeted at improving organizational and individual performance and well-being in an established private business, a government institution, or a start-up (Frank et al., 2007). Psychologists also study common errors and individual weaknesses related to a wide range of professional activities. For example, if you are a defendant or witness in court, do you hope for fair judgments from the members of the court and jurors? Studies show that many factors can sway the jurors' perceptions and judgments, including their age, preexisting beliefs, and the appearance of the defendants. These findings were used in legal training of professionals as well as in jury-selection procedures (Quas et al., 2007).

In the forensic and security fields, studies into personality help practitioners better identify suspects, create their individual profiles, and compose various patterns of criminal behavior. Chapter 11, for example, discusses research into the personality of stalkers, or individuals engaged in persistent and unwanted pursuit of another person. National intelligence in the United States has long used help from professionals studying personality characteristics of foreign leaders (Post & George, 2004). The growing field of cybersecurity is in significant need of scientific data that explains the behavior of hackers. Studies into personality (including research of individual prejudice and intolerance) helped psychologists train specialists in conflict analysis, prevention, and resolution (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). Cooperation between personality psychologists and political scientists provided insight in the study of violence and martyrdom (Bélanger et al., 2014). Studies suggest that many radicalized youth could respond positively to reeducation and deradicalization efforts and return to violence-free life (Stern, 2010). See Figure 1.4 for a review of personality theories' applications. Which other application areas could you suggest?

FIGURE 1.4 ■ Main Application Areas of Personality Theories



Steps in Applying Knowledge

Personality psychology—as a research and applied discipline—engages in an important mission of promoting science, reason, and educated social action. Psychologists expect that you will enrich and modify your view of yourself and others based on your analysis and evaluation of the facts developed in personality psychology. Psychologists also expect that you could make educated improvements in your life. What specific steps can you take to make these improvements?

There are at least three steps people can take to improve themselves in three different yet interconnected contexts of our lives: the individual, the interpersonal, and the global.

The Individual Context

Studying personality, you will learn critical judgments about yourself and other people. Studies show that many people wrongly believe they are competent enough to make good decisions about their lives. Unfortunately, scores of people have only limited knowledge about themselves and other people. People who are incompetent tend to make two kinds of mistakes. First (because of their lack of knowledge), they reach too many erroneous conclusions that guide them in making too many wrong choices in relationships, business, and education. Second, they develop and maintain overconfidence, which does not allow them to realize that they have already made too many logical mistakes, jumped to wrong conclusions, and ignored important facts (Dunning & Kruger, 1999; Sanchez & Dunning, 2021). Therefore, to avoid these mistakes, try to do the following:

- Apply the knowledge you gain from this book (and from the lectures) to self. Ask this question: How is this knowledge relevant to my life?
- Learn about your strengths and weaknesses. Evaluate your strengths and try to learn from your accomplishments. Examine your mistakes and try to explain why they occur.
- Examine which events or issues consistently make you (1) happy and (2) unhappy.
- After reading or summarizing a chapter or a part of it, ask two questions: How did this research help me in my development and growth? How can I use this research or this theory to become a better person?

The Interpersonal Context

Our goals in life can be self-oriented (“I want to be an interesting and attractive person”) and socially oriented (“I want to make a difference in this world”). Studies show that people who set and then pursue their socially oriented goals can develop stronger will and a better ability to overcome difficulties compared to those who set mostly self-oriented goals (Yager et al., 2014). Your life should mean something to others. You can be more efficient and helpful because other people certainly need your knowledge and skills. You can apply your knowledge in social contexts of your life in the following ways:

- Think of your classmates, friends, and family members. There is always someone who needs help, advice, and guidance. Relate your knowledge to others.
- When *you* are in need, turn to others for guidance and help. They may know something that you don't.
- Specifically, after reading a chapter or a part of it, ask these questions: How can I use this knowledge to help others? How can I use this knowledge to ask others to help me improve and achieve?

The Global Context

Apply your knowledge to the global world and to your entire life. Psychologists today, at least most of them, have embraced a progressive view of their discipline and society in general: For years, based on surveys, most psychologists identified themselves as “liberal” and “progressive” (Aschwenden, 2018). Progressivism as a social position means that to improve the lives of people, concerned professionals and citizens should engage in an educated, deliberate, and planned intervention in many areas of our society. Today, we commonly call such a planned intervention “social policy.” For psychology professionals, progressivism means an opportunity to apply scientific knowledge directly to social issues. Progressivism also emphasizes the importance of applied psychological knowledge in at least three areas: (1) health care, (2) education, and (3) social services. Therefore, you can apply your knowledge in global contexts in the following ways:

- Think about yourself and others from a greater perspective. What do you want to achieve globally? What is your role, your mission as an individual in this life, in this world?
- As a person, what are you bringing to the world? What do you want to be recognized for?
- Specifically, after reading a chapter or any part of it, ask this question: How can I use this knowledge to make a real difference in life? Ask others to answer this question. And then think, discuss, and do something useful.

CHECK AND APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What are the main areas of application of personality psychology?
2. Name at least one applied area or issue that you think should have been mentioned here.

Most of us probably will not be involved in national policymaking or global economic and social decisions. Yet we all can make a difference by promoting scientific knowledge and critically discussing and applying it. During class discussions and seminars, in articles and public lectures, in the media and social networks, or during face-to-face contacts, we can discuss both new and classical research findings, promote our original ideas, influence each other's opinions, change common stereotypes, and, most importantly, help other people. The first step is to gain knowledge. Let's begin.

SUMMARY

Personality is not easy to define, and there are several views on what personality is. We understand personality as a stable set of behavioral and experiential characteristics of an individual.

Personality refers to both unique and typical, distinguishable patterns of behavior and experience; together, they will be called personality traits. Taken together, in a combination, an individual's traits form a certain type. Type refers to a kind or category of elements or features sharing similar characteristics or features.

Some features can be called central because they tend to be broad and general. Peripheral personality features are associated with central ones, yet they tend to be more specific, more relevant to particular individuals and specific circumstances. Central features are not necessarily more important or valuable than peripheral.

Personality can be stable and evolving at the same time. Stability and change are based on many interconnected influences. Research has established that during the life span we as individuals keep many of our personality characteristics relatively stable. Most personality-related changes take place during childhood. Our personalities become more or less stable in middle age and are least changeable after people reach approximately age 50. Exceptions from these expectations are plenty.

Personality can be viewed as normal and abnormal. Tolerance threshold is a measure of tolerance or intolerance toward specific personality traits in a society or a cultural group. Tolerance thresholds are tested in specific social situations. Personality disorders are enduring patterns of behavior and inner experience that deviate markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture.

Our behavioral patterns and experiences that become a core of our personality are likely to be explained by a combination of biological and social factors. The debates about complex interactions of natural (biological) factors and social (cultural) influences have always been the focus of attention in social sciences and psychology.

Understanding the mechanisms of the mind–body interactions has been one of the most challenging topics of research and intellectual debates in the history of science and one of the most intriguing problems in psychology.

Personality is active and reactive. Determinism encourages psychologists to study how personality was formed (in the past) and how personality features affect behavior and experience now and in the future. Psychologists generally avoid fatalism, which states that we, as humans, are not in control of our actions and thoughts because something or somebody else (like God, fate, or chance) predetermines them.

At least four types of knowledge related to personality are relevant to our discussion: scientific knowledge, popular beliefs, values, and legal knowledge. These types constantly interact.

Knowledge requires analysis, which is the breaking of something complex into smaller parts to understand their essential features and relations. Applied to personality, theory is a type

of comprehensive, scientific explanation about what personality is and how it develops and functions.

Many theories of personality developed within particular academic traditions. These traditions bring together scholars that help them share similar views on a particular scientific approach, subject, or method.

Personality theories find applications in many walks of life. Philosophers and natural scientists, doctors and educators, curious explorers and experimentalists, and then professional psychologists try to apply their knowledge of personality to a wide variety of human activities.

VISUAL REVIEW

Visual Review. Chapter 1. Introducing Personality

1. IDENTIFYING PERSONALITY

Personality:
A stable set of behavioral and experiential characteristics of an individual

These characteristics are stable and organized; they influence an individual's behavior

Personality can be described as a coexistence of several psychological dichotomies

2. APPROACHING PERSONALITY

Four types of knowledge related to personality: Scientific, Folk, Values, and Legal.

Theory is a type of comprehensive, scientific explanation about what personality is, how it develops, and how it functions.

Many theories of personality developed within particular academic traditions.

3. APPLYING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PERSONALITY

Knowledge is applied in personalized medicine, clinical and counseling psychology, education, business, forensic, and security fields, among others.

Three contexts of applications: Individual, interpersonal, and global.

KEY TERMS

academic traditions
analysis
censorship
central
cynicism

determinism
fatalism
knowledge
legal knowledge
nature–nurture debates

peripheral	scientific knowledge
personality	self-determination
personality disorders	self-enhance
personality psychology	theory
pessimism	tolerance threshold
pop psychology	traits
popular (or folk) beliefs	type
scarcity mindset	values

EVALUATING WHAT YOU KNOW

Define *personality*.

Explain the three principles referring to personality.

Explain personality's dichotomies and give examples.

Describe the four types of knowledge related to personality; provide examples.

Explain how the four types of knowledge interact.

Describe the areas of application of knowledge about personality.

Describe the steps in applying knowledge.

A BRIDGE TO THE NEXT CHAPTER

Studying personality should be interesting yet challenging. We are not the first to start this journey. Early philosophers, doctors, and scientists have laid the foundations for personality theory. Year after year, decade after decade, psychologists, like prospectors, tried to gather different theories, concepts, methods, and approaches to find valuable “nuggets” of knowledge about personality. Offering their findings for critical peer review or other forms of evaluation, psychologists began to “filter” and accumulate the best, most successful, and effective methods of investigation and psychological intervention. Travel and publications made this knowledge available to more psychologists globally. More scientists began to combine methods received from different schools to critically examine personality and then apply this knowledge. Psychologists gain their knowledge from other disciplines, including biology, medicine, social sciences, computer sciences, sociology, behavioral economics, and philosophy. This list can easily be continued.

We are at the beginning of our journey. Our next step, in the following chapter, will be to examine how science, social sciences, and humanities throughout their long history have contributed to our knowledge of personality today.