

DANIEL CERVONE • LAWRENCE A. PERVIN

# PERSONALITY

THEORY AND RESEARCH

FOURTEENTH EDITION



WILEY



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EDITION

## THEORY AND RESEARCH

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WILEY

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*To the memory of Lawrence A. Pervin*

# PREFACE

The 14<sup>th</sup> edition of *Personality: Theory and Research* begins with sad news. Professor Lawrence A. Pervin passed away on June 23, 2016. The present revision was prepared independently.

Professor Pervin's contributions to personality science are simultaneously appreciated and underappreciated. What is appreciated is his independent scholarly work: research, theory, and especially integrative analyses and critiques of the discipline's research programs and conceptual models. Across the decades, Larry Pervin challenged the field to be better than it was. He tutored us on how to improve.

What likely is underappreciated is the reverberating impact of his professional efforts. For example, readers of the current 29<sup>th</sup> volume of *Psychological Inquiry* recognize the Journal as a uniquely valuable forum for the development and exchange of ideas in personality and social psychology. But what percentage of readers knows that this entire intellectual exchange, across the decades, owes its existence to the efforts of Larry Pervin, the Journal's founding editor? I also note his efforts in organizing an edited volume of extraordinary strength, namely, the first edition of the *Handbook of Personality* (Pervin, 1990). Its diverse contributions compelled the reader to explore the challenges that contributing authors posed for one another and the harmonies that could be heard amidst the many voices (Cervone, 1991).

With regard to the present text, Professor Pervin not only is the founding author. He also remains an indelible intellectual presence. His original conception – to combine, for the benefit of the student, coverage of personality theory, personality research, and clinical case examples – continues to provide the book's structure. His impact can be felt throughout the pages of 14e.

## To Students and Instructors

It is now well more than four decades since the first edition of this text. The field has developed and the book has changed to keep pace. As described below, *Personality: Theory and Research* contains a major new feature that is designed to keep pace with these developments. But before discussing changes, let's consider what remains the same.

## The Aims Remain the Same

The volume's basic aims remain the same as they were when Larry Pervin crafted the first edition:

1. *Present the major theoretical perspectives on personality.* The field's *major* theoretical perspectives are covered in depth. Some textbooks cover numerous theories, including minor perspectives with little relevance to the contemporary scientific field. That strategy bears a cost: When many theories are reviewed, the more influential ones may not be covered in sufficient depth. We strive to provide intellectually deep coverage of each of the field's main theoretical perspectives. Note that by "perspectives" we mean that we cover not only the work of the classic theorists (e.g., Freud, Rogers) but also theoretical and empirical advances by other investigators who embraced the general perspectives developed originally by those theorists.

2. *Achieve balance.* We strive to present unbiased coverage of the theories of personality. This does not mean that our coverage is not critical. We discuss both the strengths and limits of each theory. Our evaluations, however, are not designed to persuade students of the merits of a particular approach but to broaden their understanding and enhance their own critical thinking skills.
3. *Integrate theory and research.* We aim to show the student how theory and research inform one another. Theoretical developments spur research, and research contributes to the development, modification, and evaluation of personality theories.
4. *Integrate case material with theory.* By necessity, theory and research deal with abstractions and generalizations, rather than with specific and unique individuals. To bridge the gap between the general and the specific, we present case study material that illustrates how each theory assesses and interprets the individual. We follow one case throughout the book to show how the various theories relate to the same person. Thus, the student can ask, “Are the pictures of a person gained through the lens of each theory completely different from each other, or do they represent complementary perspectives?” Our inclusion of case material also enables the student who is interested in clinical psychology to see connections between personality psychology and clinical practice.
5. *Provide the basis for comparison of the theories.* Coverage of each of the theoretical perspectives is consistent. We present each theory’s treatment of personality structures, processes or dynamics, personality development, and clinical applications. Subsequent to this coverage, we evaluate the theories at the conclusions of chapters. Through the given chapter, students are provided the opportunity to make their own comparisons and begin to come to their own conclusions concerning the merits of each.
6. *Present the field in an accessible manner, while respecting its complexity.* We strive to teach students about the field of personality psychology as it really exists—including some of its nuances and complexities. Yet we strive to make this presentation accessible, including using a writing style that addresses students’ interests and questions and provides necessary background content.

## New to 14e

Although the goals of the text have remained the same, the content clearly has changed over time, in keeping with changes in the field. Along with deleting or abbreviating coverage of the theories that no longer seemed as important to the field as they once were, we have expanded coverage of others, often in response to feedback from reviewers. As a scientific enterprise, the study of personality is not unlike the unfolding of personality itself, reflecting both continuity and at times dramatic shifts. We have attempted to present both in each new edition of the text. Finally, in accord with the view that sometimes “less is more,” in many places we have been more concise and focused in our discussion.

The book’s writing style has shifted over the years too; it increasingly features a “conversational” tone. The style is purposeful; the goal is to engage the reader directly in ways that prompt critical thinking. Students probably have more intuitions—often good, solid intuitions—about the material in this course than about any other class in the college curriculum. The textbook author, and classroom instructor, can capitalize on these intuitions to encourage students to think critically about personality science—and science in general.

In addition to these incremental changes, 14e contains a major new feature. Substantial *Contemporary Developments* sections appear within five chapters of the text. Four of these sections are devoted to a topic that receives scant coverage in other texts: *Contemporary Developments*

in *Personality Theory*. The intellectual activity that is personality theory did not cease at the close of the millennium. Investigators continue to pursue the challenges that motivated the Grand Theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Four such developments are found in within coverage of the four theoretical perspectives that receive multi-chapter coverage in the text: psychodynamic theory, phenomenological theory, trait theory, and social-cognitive theory. The four 21<sup>st</sup>-century theories that are included were selected not only “on their own merits” but also because each addresses limitations in 20<sup>th</sup>-century theorizing in a particularly direct manner. The *Contemporary Developments in Personality Theory* material thus is another opportunity for students to think critically. Readers are encouraged to consider limitations in prior theorizing as a prelude to the coverage of new developments.

In addition, Chapter 2 (*The Scientific Study of People*) contains a section on *Contemporary Developments in Personality Research*. Readers learn about computerized text analysis methods through which researchers infer personality characteristics by analyzing spontaneous language use in social media.

Finally, material that previously appeared in print in Chapter 15, *Assessing Personality Theory and Research*, has been moved to the online Instructor Companion Site at [www.wiley.com/go/cervone/personality14e](http://www.wiley.com/go/cervone/personality14e). Because that material is a reflection on prior chapters and the state of the professional field, it is not absolutely necessary for understanding the personality theory and research covered in Chapters 1–14. Nonetheless, highly engaged students may wish to revisit topics, contemplate the field, and consider ways in which they themselves can advance it by reading Chapter 15 online.

Professor Pervin and I always hoped that *Personality: Theory and Research* will enable students to appreciate the scientific and practical value of systematic theorizing about the individual, to understand how evidence from case studies and empirical research informs the development of personality theories, and to discover a particular theory of personality that makes personal sense to them and is useful in their own lives.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the Psychology staff at John Wiley & Sons not only for their continued support but also for their suggestions that have strengthened the text. I am also grateful to many students and instructors who have sent me questions and suggestions for future coverage; feel free to keep sending them to [dcervone@uic.edu](mailto:dcervone@uic.edu).

I also thank Dr. Walter D. Scott, of Washington State University, for giving permission to include the case study that appears in Chapter 14. Dr. Scott was the therapist for the case, whose assessment tools and case report were prepared collaboratively by Dr. Scott and the author.

I am particularly grateful to Professor Tracy L. Caldwell of Dominican University. Dr. Caldwell prepared the extensive set of supplementary material available at the book’s Instructor Companion Site at [www.wiley.com/go/cervone/personality14e](http://www.wiley.com/go/cervone/personality14e), suggested the “toolkit” metaphor that appears in Chapter 1, and has provided invaluable input on both science and pedagogy that has strengthened this text across multiple editions.

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# Personality Theory: From Everyday Observations to Systematic Theories

## Questions to be Addressed in this Chapter

Defining Personality

Why Study Personality?

Three Goals for the Personality Theorist

Answering Questions about Persons Scientifically: Understanding Structures, Processes, Development, and Therapeutic Change

Important Issues in Personality Theory

Evaluating Personality Theories

The Personality Theories: An Introduction

Major Concepts

Review

## Chapter Focus

*I can be selfish, but I believe it is because I try to be perfect. Perfect in the sense I want to be an “A” student, a good mother, a loving wife, an excellent employee, a nourishing friend. My significant other thinks I try too hard to be “Mother Teresa” at times—not that that is a bad thing. But I can drive myself insane at times. I have led a hard childhood and adulthood life; therefore I believe I am trying to make up for all the bad times. I want to be productive, good—make a difference in my world.*

*I’m a real jackass. I’m intelligent enough to do well in school and study genetics but have no idea when to shut up. I often am very offensive and use quite abrasive language, although I’m shy most of the time and talk to few people. I’m sarcastic, cruel, and pompous at times. Yet I’ve been told that I’m kind and sweet; this may be true, but only to those I deem worthy of speaking to with some frequency. I’m very fond of arguing and pretty much argue for fun.*

*I have always been described by others as cynical and/or as having integrity. I would describe myself as inquisitive, philosophical and justice-oriented. I craze organization,*

*but my room is the messiest one I have seen thus far ... like the room of a toddler. I am introspective but I don't reach many conclusions about myself. I seem very passive and mellow – but I am just too tired to get fired up.*

*This person is shy at times. They tend to open up to some people. You never know when they're happy or sad. They never show their real feelings, and when they do it's so hard for them. They did have a trauma experience that closed them up—where they seem to be afraid to let their real self show. They are funny and do have a lot of fun and are fun to be around, but at times it's hard to know if they're really having a good time. The person is loved by a lot of people and is an extremely giving person but doesn't like "seriousness."*

These sketches were written by people just like you: students beginning a course on the psychology of personality. When I teach the class, on Day 1, I ask people to describe their personality and that of a friend. Two things happen. First, students can answer the question; when asked to "describe your personality," they rarely say "I don't know how to do that; it's only the first day of personality class." Second, as you see here, their answers are often detailed, nuanced, and insightful—so much so that one is tempted to ask: Is the class filled with personality theorists?

In a sense, it is. We're all personality theorists. We ask about ourselves and others: "Why am I so shy?" "Why are my parents so weird?" "Am I so shy because my parents are so weird?" Even before taking a personality class, we devise answers that are sophisticated and often accurate. You already hold ideas about personality and put them to work to understand the events of your day, to anticipate the events of your next day, and to help yourself and your friends handle the stresses, bumps, and bruises of life.

"But"—you may be asking yourself—"if I already know so much about personality, what will I learn in this class? In other words, "What is the professional personality psychologist doing that I'm not doing already?" This chapter addresses this question by introducing the scientific goals and methods of psychologists who study personality. But first, we will define our key term and comment on the status of this scientific field.

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## Questions to be Addressed in this Chapter

1. How do scientific theories of personality differ from the ideas about persons that you develop in your daily life?
2. Why is there more than one personality theory and in what general ways do the theories differ?
3. What are personality psychologists trying to accomplish; in other words, what aspects of persons and individual differences are they trying to understand and what factors are so important that they must be addressed in any personality theory?



## Defining Personality

*Personality psychology is concerned with the dynamics of intra-individual functioning and the coherence and thematic unity of particular lives.*

Block (1992, p. xiii)

You already have an intuitive understanding of “personality.” Is a formal definition even necessary? It is because—as so often happens with words—different people use the word “personality” in different ways. The differences can create confusion in both an introductory course and the professional field (Cervone, 2005). Let us therefore examine some ways in which the word “personality” is used. We then will provide a formal definition of the term.

In one common usage, people say, for example, that “Ellen DeGeneres has a lot of personality” or “My psych professor has no personality.” Personality here means “charisma”. This is *not* the way that personality psychologists use the word; this book is most definitely *not* about “Charisma: Theory and Research”.

Professional psychologists use the word “personality” in two ways. Specifically, they propose two types of personality variables, that is, two types of concepts for understanding people and how they differ.

**1. Dispositions.** One type of variable is *personality dispositions*. In general, in the sciences, dispositions are descriptions; dispositional terms describe what a person or thing tends to do. A glass vase tends to break if you bump into it. “Fragile” is a dispositional term that describes this tendency. Some types of turtles tend to live very long lives. “Longevity” describes this tendency (turtles are “high in longevity” compared to many other species). In the study of personality, psychologists try to identify the personality dispositions that best describe individuals and the major ways that people differ from one another.

People have a lot of tendencies: sleeping when tired, eating when hungry, bored when reading a textbook. Which count as *personality* dispositions? You can figure this out for yourself. Think about how you use the word “personality,” and you will quickly realize that you employ the word to describe psychological characteristics with two qualities: “personality” tendencies are (a) *enduring* and (b) *distinctive*.

- By “enduring,” we mean that personality characteristics are at least somewhat consistent across time and place. If one day you find yourself acting a little strange—maybe because you are stressed about something—you likely would not say that your “personality has changed” on that day. You use the word “personality” to describe characteristics that endure for long periods of time: months and years and perhaps your entire life.
- By “distinctive,” we mean that personality characteristics differentiate people from one another. If asked to describe your personality, you would not say, “I tend to feel sad when bad things happen but happy when good things happen.” *Everybody* feels sad/happy when bad/good things happen. These tendencies are not distinctive. But if, like one of our opening sketches, someone is “*shy most of the time ... sarcastic, cruel, and pompous at times ... yet kind and sweet to those deemed worthy of speaking to,*” then *that* is a distinctive—and is therefore a (rather complex) personality disposition.

**2. Inner Mental Life.** A second set of concepts refers to inner mental life. Personality psychologists study the beliefs, emotions, and motivations that comprise the mental life of the individual. Conflicts between alternative desires; memories that spring to mind and fill you with emotion; emotions that interfere with your ability to think; long-term goals that

make otherwise mundane tasks meaningful; self-doubts that undermine efforts to achieve these goals—these and more are the features of mental life targeted by the personality psychologist.

A technical term—used in the quote above, from the personality psychologist Jack Block—for this scientific target is “intraindividual functioning”. Personality psychology is not only concerned with differences between people or *interindividual* differences. Personality psychologists are fundamentally concerned with the interplay of thoughts and emotions within the mind or *intraindividual* mental functioning.

Many branches of psychology study mental life. What’s unique about personality psychology? One distinctive feature is the field’s concern with how multiple aspects of mental life are connected to one another or “cohere” (Block, 1992; Cervone & Shoda, 1999). Compare this interest to the primary interests in other branches of psychology. A cognitive psychologist may study memory. A social psychologist may study self-concept. An educational psychologist might address perfectionistic tendencies at school. But the personality psychologist is concerned with how these distinct systems cohere in the life of an individual. You just saw such personality coherence in the opening quote above; the person’s memory (of a hard life) was connected to her self-concept (being a productive person who makes a difference to the world), which, in turn, explained her perfectionism (“striving to be perfect”).

A useful concept to describe these connections is “system”. A **system** is any connected set of interacting parts that comprise whole. Personality can be thought of as a system. Distinct psychological qualities—beliefs, values, emotions, goals, skills, memories—influence one another and comprise the person as a whole (Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Nowak, Vallacher, & Zochowski, 2005)

We now are in a position to define personality. In psychology, **personality** refers to *psychological systems that contribute to an individual’s enduring and distinctive patterns of experience and behavior*. As you can see, the definition combines the two meanings above. Ideally, the personality psychologist will be able to identify psychological systems (aspects of inner mental life) that help to explain people’s distinctive experiences and actions (their dispositions).

## Why Study Personality?

Why take a course in personality? One way to answer this question is to compare the material in this course with other courses in psychology. Consider intro psych—the typical Psych 101. Students are sometimes disappointed with its content. The course does not seem to be about whole, intact people. Instead, one learns about parts of people (e.g., the visual system, the autonomic nervous system, long-term memory, etc.) and some of the things people do (learning, problem-solving, decision-making, etc.). “Where in psychology,” one reasonably might ask, “does one learn about the whole, intact person?” The answer is here, in personality psychology. Personality theorists address the total person, trying to understand how different aspects of an individual’s psychological life are related to each other and relate also to the society and culture in which the person lives (Magnusson, 2012). One reason for studying personality psychology, then, is that it addresses psychology’s most complex and interesting topic: the whole, integrated, coherent, unique individual.

Another reason is the impact of personality psychology on the wider intellectual world. Personality theories have been influential not only within scientific psychology. They also have influenced society at large. In fact, they have been so influential that they probably have affected your thinking even before you enrolled in this course. Have you ever said that someone has a big “ego”? Or called a friend an “introvert”? Or asked whether a slip-of-the-tongue reveals

something about the hidden beliefs of the speaker? If so, you were already using terms and ideas that come from personality psychology.

Here are three indications of the influence of personality psychology:

- At the end of the 20th century, scholars (Haggblom et al., 2002) identified the most influential scientific psychologists of the 20th century. Who made the list? In the top 25, the *majority* were investigators who contributed to the psychology of personality.
- The end of the century was also the end of the millennium. A television network polled historians and others to determine the 100 most influential people—of any sort—of the past 1000 years. The only psychologist to make the list—and easily, at #12—was a personality theorist: the psychodynamic theorist, Sigmund Freud (A & E's Biography: 100 Most Influential People of the Millennium <https://wmich.edu/mus-gened/mus150/biography100.html>).
- In 2007, a statistical analysis identified the highest-impact book authors in the humanities or social sciences (fields including not only psychology, but also political science, philosophy, linguistics, literary criticism, sociology, and cultural studies). The singularly most-cited living author was a personality theorist: the social cognitive theorist Albert Bandura (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/most-cited-authors-of-books-in-the-humanities-2007/405956.article>).

Here, in personality theory and research, you will find the most influential ideas in the history of the psychological sciences.

## Three Goals for the Personality Theorist

Now let's return to an earlier question: What is the professional personality psychologist doing that you, the reader, are not?

Consider what you do. You interact—in person and electronically—with friends and family. You observe people not only in person, but also in movies and videos, and (through writing) in books, magazines, and blogs. You think about yourself: your strengths and weaknesses, hopes and plans, and responsibilities to others. And you learn how others do these same things, when they tell you about themselves, *their* friends and families, and *their* hopes and dreams. Somehow, from this everyday observations, you develop thoughts about human nature and the main ways that people differ from one another.

For most people, that is plenty of thinking about personality. But personality psychologists are not “most people.” Psychologists who study personality pursue three goals that distinguish their activities from the nonprofessional who is interested in persons.

### 1. Scientific Observation

Personality psychologists do not observe people casually. Instead, they pursue *scientific* observation. The features that make observations “scientific” vary from one science to another. In personality psychology, three stand out:

1. **Study diverse groups of people.** Psychologists cannot base personality theories merely on observations of people they happen to run into in daily life. They must observe diverse groups of individuals, to ensure that conclusions about personality represent the lives the world's citizens. This need is particularly critical because people from different nations and cultures may differ in ways that become apparent only once they are studied within their specific life contexts (Cheng, Wang, & Golden, 2011). Not only nations and cultures, but

also subcultures—associated with ethnicity, spiritual beliefs, or economic circumstances—may display distinctive psychological characteristics (Oyserman, 2017).

In today's personality science, researchers often succeed admirably in reaching such diverse participants group. For example, one research team summarized self-descriptions of personality from participants in 56 nations (Schmitt et al., 2007). Another studied personality tendencies across regions of the globe and found that more mild climates foster more outgoing (sociable, open-minded) personality styles. The ability to study global populations is made easier by a technological advance. By analyzing “big data”—large bodies of information acquired by recording computer users' preferences and statements on social media and other internet sites (Bleidorn, Hopwood, & Wright, 2017)—researchers can get information about people throughout the world.

These trends, however, are recent. Before the 21st century, the majority of participants in psychological research were from Europe and North America—which contain less than 20% of the world's population, combined. This is significant in that all of the major theories of personality developed prior to the present century.

- 2. Ensure that observations of people are objective.** A second requirement is “objectivity”. Information that is *not* influenced by the subjective personal opinions and desires of the person getting the information is called “objective”. If you step on a scale and it tells you your weight, the scale is “objective”: It is not influenced by your own subjective desires for a different weight. Psychologists strive for scientific methods that provide information about personality that is objective.

Objective methods promote a key goal of science: replicability. Whenever one scientist reports a finding, others should be able to replicate it; in other words, they should be able to repeat the procedures and get the same result. Using an example above, if one team of researchers found that mild climates predict outgoing personality styles, you should be able to repeat their procedures and find the same thing.

It turns out that replicability is difficult to achieve—so much so that psychology recently has experienced a “replication crisis” (Shrout & Rodgers, 2017). Researchers have sometimes found it hard to replicate well-known findings. Although these difficulties primarily have occurred in branches of the field other than personality psychology, the overall question of replicability is significant in our field—particularly so because one valuable source of evidence in personality psychology cannot, even in principle, be replicated: case studies. Case studies are in-depth examinations of a particular individual (see Chapter 2). For example, a therapist might report a case study of a client in therapy. As a general rule, case studies cannot be replicated; if you read a clinical case study, you cannot contact the client and repeat the study.

- 3. Use specialized tools to study thinking, emotion, and neurobiological systems.** Psychologists observe people, just as you do. But they also make observations using specialized tools. These tools often are designed to overcome specific obstacles to obtaining scientific information. Here are two examples. Suppose that you want to learn about the personality characteristics of large numbers of people. An obstacle is the sheer cost and difficulty of contacting people and having them complete personality tests. A specialized tool researchers use to overcome this obstacle is computer software that assesses personality characteristics by analyzing the language use in social media (Park et al., 2014). A second example is that, if you try to study people's feelings—their moods and emotions—by asking them how they feel, some people are reluctant to discuss their feelings openly. Researchers have developed tools to assess moods and emotions without ever explicitly asking people to talk about themselves (Quirin, Kazén, & Kuhl, 2009). For example, if research participants are asked to describe the emotion expressed in an abstract image, their descriptions reveal their own emotional state (Bartoszek & Cervone, 2017).

## 2. Scientific Theory

The fundamental goal of science is to *explain* events (Salmon, 1989). Scientists develop explanatory frameworks—that is, theories—to explain their scientific observations.

What exactly is a scientific theory? The word “theory” can be used in different ways. For example, you might say that you “have a theory that my friend Liliana is anxious because she’s really attracted to some guy and hasn’t told him.” Even if you are right, your idea about Liliana is not, in and of itself, a scientific theory of Liliana’s personality. Scientific theories of personality have three distinctive qualities; they are *systematic*, *testable*, and *comprehensive*.

- 1. Systematic.** As we have noted, you already have developed lots of different ideas about different people. But you probably have not gone to the trouble of relating all of them to one another. Suppose that on one you say “Liliana is anxious because she’s really attracted to some guy and hasn’t told him” and on another you say “My mother gets anxious all the time; she must have inherited it.” If so, you usually do not have to relate the statements to each other; people don’t force you to explain why one case had an interpersonal cause (relationship breakup) and another had a biological cause (inherited tendencies). But personality psychologists must relate all their ideas to one another, to create a systematically organized theory.
- 2. Testable.** If you tell a friend “My parents are weird,” your friend is not likely to say “Prove it!” But the scientific community says “Prove it!” any time a scientist says anything. The personality psychologist must develop theoretical ideas that can be tested by objective scientific evidence. This is true of any science, of course. But in personality psychology, attaining the goal of a testable theory can be particularly difficult. This is because the field’s subject matter includes features of mental life—goals, dreams, wishes, impulses, conflicts, emotions, unconscious mental defenses—that are enormously complex and inherently difficult to study scientifically.
- 3. Comprehensive.** Suppose that you have just rented an apartment and are considering inviting in a roommate to share rent costs. When deciding who to invite, you might ask yourself questions about their personalities: Are they fun loving? Conscientious? Open-minded? And so forth. Yet there also are a lot of other questions that you do not have to ask: If they are fun loving, is it primarily because they inherited this quality or learned it? If they are conscientious now, are they likely to be more or less conscientious 20 years from now? When thinking about persons, you can be selective, asking some questions and ignoring others. But a personality theory must be comprehensive, addressing all significant questions about personality functioning, development, and individual differences. This is what distinguishes personality theory from theorizing in most other branches of psychology. The personality theorist cannot be satisfied with studying “parts” of persons. The personality theorist is charged with comprehensively understanding the person as a whole.

## 3. Applications: From Observation and Theory to Practice

As the quotes from students that open this chapter make clear, people formulate insightful ideas about personality prior to studying personality psychology. Yet, in everyday life, people rarely convert their personal insights into systematic applications. You may recognize that one friend’s problem is a lack of self-confidence and that another’s is an inability to open up emotionally. Yet, after realizing this, you probably don’t design therapies to boost people’s confidence in themselves or enable them to open up. Personality psychologists, however, do this. They aim not

only to develop testable, systematic theory but also to convert their theoretical ideas into beneficial applications.

In fact, many of the personality theorists you will learn about in this book did not start out in personality psychology. Instead, they often first worked as counselors, clinical psychologists, or physicians. Their personality theories were efforts to understand why their clients were experiencing psychological distress and how that distress could be reduced.

In summary, personality psychologists aim to (1) to observe people scientifically, (2) develop theories that are systematic, testable, and comprehensive, and (3) to turn their research findings and theoretical conceptions into practical applications. It is these goals that distinguish the work of the personality psychologist from that of the poet, the playwright, the pop psychologist—or the student writing personality sketches on the first day of class. Lots of people develop insightful ideas about the human condition. But the personality psychologist is uniquely charged with organizing theoretical ideas into comprehensive, testable, and practical theories.

Throughout this book, we evaluate the personality theories by judging how well they achieve these goals. This book's final chapter, a commentary on the current state of the field that can be found on the text's companion website [www.wiley.com/college/cervone](http://www.wiley.com/college/cervone), judges how successful the field of personality psychology as a whole has been in achieving these five aims.

## Answering Questions about Persons Scientifically: Understanding Structures, Processes, Development, and Therapeutic Change

Personality psychologist addresses four distinct topics; in other words, there are four issues that every personality theory must address. We can introduce them with a simple “mental experiment”.

Think of someone you know well, for example, a good friend or family member. Two things you know for sure are:

1. Whatever the individual's personality is like today, it likely was similar last month and last year, and likely will be similar next month and next year. You might say that personality is “stable” over time.
2. Despite this stability in personality, the individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions also change. Sometimes they are happy and other times sad. Sometimes they are in control of their emotions and sometimes they “fly off the handle.”

Two things you do not know absolutely for sure, but that probably think are correct, are:

3. If you saw the person when they were a toddler or a grade schooler, their personality would not be the same as it is now. Their personality likely has changed, or “developed,” over time.
4. If the person suddenly experiences a period of psychological distress—for example, a period of depression or anxiety—they probably could “bounce back” from this. In fact, there might be something you could do to improve the person's psychological well-being.

These four points correspond directly to the topics addressed by personality psychologists. The psychologist introduces formal scientific terms to describe the topics, but the topics themselves are fundamentally the same. They are: (1) personality *structure*—the enduring “building blocks” of personality; (2) personality *process*—dynamic changes in thinking, emotion, and



motivation that can occur from one moment to the next; (3) *growth and development*—how we develop into the unique person each of us is, and (4) *psychopathology and behavior change*—how people change and why they sometimes resist change or are unable to change. We introduce these topics now. You will see them again, over and over, in later chapters.

## Structure

People possess psychological qualities that endure from day to day and from year to year. The enduring qualities that distinguish individuals from one another are referred to as personality **structures**.

Structural concepts in personality psychology are similar to structural concepts you are familiar with from other fields. For example, from study of human biology, you already know that there are enduring biological structures including individual organs (the heart, the lungs) and organ systems (the circulatory system, the digestive system). Analogously, personality theorists hope to identify enduring psychological structures. These structures may involve emotion (e.g., a biological structure that contributes to good or bad mood), motivation (e.g., a desire to achieve succeed or to be accepted by others), cognition (e.g., a negative belief about oneself that contributes to states of depression, Beck, 1991), or skills (e.g., a high or low level of “social intelligence,” Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987).

You will see throughout this textbook that the different personality theories provide different conceptions of personality structure. A more technical way of saying this is that the theories adopt different **units of analysis** when analyzing personality structure (Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992). The “units of analysis” idea is important, so we will illustrate it.

As you read this textbook, you may be sitting in a chair. If we ask you to describe it, the chair, you may say that it “weighs about 15 pounds,” or that it “is made of wood,” or that it “is unattractive”. Weight, physical substance (the wood), and attractiveness are different units of analysis for describing the chair. Although the units may be related in some way (e.g., wood chairs may be heavier than plastic ones), they plainly are distinct.

The general idea is that virtually anything can be described in more than one way—that is, through more than one unit of analysis. Personality is no exception. The different theories of personality you will learn about in this book use different units of analysis to analyze personality structure. The resulting analyses may each be correct, in their own way. Yet each may provide different types of information about personality.

We will illustrate this point with an example: a difference between “trait” and “type” units of analysis.

One popular unit of analysis is that of a personality **trait**. The word *trait* generally refers to a consistent style of emotion or behavior that a person displays across a variety of situations. Someone who consistently acts in a way that we call “conscientious” might be said to have the trait of “conscientiousness”. A term that is essentially synonymous with *trait* is *disposition*; traits describe what a person tends to do or is predisposed to do. You probably already use trait terms to describe people. If you say that a friend is “outgoing,” “honest,” or “disagreeable,” you are using trait terms. There is something implicit—something that “goes without saying”—when you use these terms. If you say that a friend is, for example, “outgoing,” the term implies two things: (1) the person tends to be outgoing *on average* in his/her own daily behavior (even if, on occasion, he/she does not act this way), and (2) the person tends to be outgoing *compared to others*. If you use trait terms this way, then you are using them in the same way as most personality psychologists do.

Traits usually are thought of as continuous dimensions. Like the biological traits of height and weight, people have more or less of a given trait, with most people being in the middle of the dimension.