

Chapter 1

Studying the Person

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Personality psychology is the scientific study of
 - a. The whole person
 - b. Abnormal behavior in humans
 - c. Social groups
 - d. Personal adjustment
2. Which of the following is **not** a main concern of personality psychology?
 - a. Species-typical characteristics
 - b. A person's uniqueness
 - c. Individual differences
 - d. Psychotherapy
3. Which of the following is **not** considered a characteristic adaptation?
 - a. The achievement motive
 - b. Religious values
 - c. The life intimacy task
 - d. Friendliness
4. A teenager who understands her entire life as a journey on the path to becoming an accomplished musician provides us with an example of a

- a. Dispositional trait
 - b. Characteristic adaptation
 - c. Life story
 - d. None of the above
5. Which of the following features of psychological individuality functions to provide a person's life with a sense of unity and purpose?
- a. Characteristic adaptations
 - b. Archetypes
 - c. Dispositional traits
 - d. Life stories
6. Compared to social psychology, personality psychology places more emphasis on
- a. How people behave when they are alone
 - b. The problems that people face in modern life
 - c. The universal features of human nature
 - d. How different people behave differently in the same situation
7. Today, most personality psychologists tend to regard the concept of a “personality trait” as:
- a. Indispensable to the science of personality
 - b. A useful fiction about the consistency of human lives
 - c. A deeply flawed idea that has no place in the science of personality
 - d. Useful for predicting behavior when people are alone but not when they are in social situations
8. In personality psychology, case studies are usually used to
- a. Examine a single life in detail
 - b. Test the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable
 - c. Look at one variable in depth and across different situations
 - d. Focus on the behavior of a particular population or group
9. The primary goal of science is
- a. Personal growth
 - b. Understanding
 - c. Quantification
 - d. Technological advance
10. The first step in scientific inquiry is
- a. Testing hypotheses
 - b. Quantifying data
 - c. Proposing a theory

- d. Observing a phenomenon

11. The distinction in science between the context of discovery and the context of justification is essentially the distinction between

- a. Generating hypotheses and testing hypotheses
- b. Finding facts and proving theories
- c. Testing theories and testing hypotheses
- d. Building theories and generating facts

12. When a scientist investigates a phenomenon in an *inductive* way, he or she seeks to

- a. Discover concrete facts from abstract theories
- b. Create abstract theories from concrete observations
- c. Test abstract hypotheses with concrete observations
- d. Disprove common misunderstanding with experiments

13. A very useful methodology for inductive investigations in personality psychology is the

- a. Experimental method
- b. Correlational method
- c. Statistical method
- d. Case study

14. A theory is

- a. A set of statements proposed to explain certain observations
- b. A collection of facts about reality
- c. A prediction about how a stimulus causes a response
- d. A careful description of numerous observations

15. Which of the following scientific tools is a good theory **not** likely to provide?

- a. Abstract model
- b. Hypotheses
- c. Conceptual terminology
- d. Statistical procedure

16. Which of the following is **not** a criterion of a good theory?

- a. Parsimony
- b. Testability
- c. Coherence
- d. Complexity

17. One criterion of a good theory is that it be generative. This means that the

theory should

- a. Support the status quo
 - b. Be consistent with empirical observations
 - c. Lead to new research and theorizing
 - d. Account for the greatest number of phenomena with the fewest explanatory concepts
18. In the context of justification, a scientist seeks to
- a. Discover new facts
 - b. Build theories
 - c. Test hypotheses
 - d. Collect unsystematic observations
19. To say that a theory should be falsifiable is to say that it
- a. Should be resistant to attempts to prove it false
 - b. Should be stated in such a way that scientists can understand if it is true
 - c. Should specify observations it would take to disprove the theory's major propositions
 - d. Should stimulate critical thinking in the scientist
20. In setting up a hypothesis-testing study, a scientist should first
- a. Decide on the proper statistical procedure to be employed
 - b. Recruit a body of subjects (persons) who can participate in the study
 - c. Design a methodology that is appropriate for the problem
 - d. Review the theoretical and empirical literature concerning the hypothesis
21. A good sample for a hypothesis-testing research study should
- a. Be larger than 30 subjects
 - b. Be appropriate for the hypothesis to be evaluated
 - c. Be representative of all subjects within a particular category
 - d. Include many different kinds of subjects
22. A variable is
- a. A personality trait
 - b. Any quality that can assume two or more values
 - c. A fixed quantity
 - d. Any method that can be used to evaluate a person's standing on a personality dimension
23. To operationalize a variable is to
- a. Figure out a way of measuring it
 - b. Figure out a way of controlling it
 - c. Decide on a rule for deducing hypotheses
 - d. Decide on a strategy for testing hypotheses
24. If a scientist obtained a $+0.75$ correlation coefficient between intelligence and

height in a sample of 125 male chimpanzees, this means that in the particular sample

- a. Taller chimpanzees are always more intelligent than shorter ones
 - b. Taller chimpanzees tend to be more intelligent than shorter ones
 - c. 75% of the chimpanzees who are tall are also very intelligent
 - d. Taller chimpanzees tend to be less intelligent than shorter ones
25. If a particular finding in a study is statistically significant "at the .05 level," then the chances are about 5% that the finding is
- a. False
 - b. True
 - c. Meaningful
 - d. Due to chance
26. If Variable A is negatively correlated with Variable B, then
- a. Variable A causes Variable B
 - b. Variable B causes Variable A
 - c. Both variables are caused by a third one
 - d. None of the above can be stated with certainty
27. In an experiment, the psychologist manipulates the _____ variable in order to observe the effect on the _____ variable.
- a. Independent, dependent
 - b. Control, experimental
 - c. Dependent, independent
 - d. Experimental, control
28. In an experiment in which subjects are exposed to one of two different noise levels to assess the influence of noise on academic performance, the independent variable is
- a. The subjects
 - b. The noise level
 - c. Academic performance
 - d. The experimenter's attitude
29. In an experiment, the experimental and control groups differ from each other on what basic dimension?
- a. The level of the independent variable
 - b. The level of the dependent variable
 - c. The level of the extraneous variable
 - d. The level of the controlled variables
30. Which of the following criticisms is often levied against the experimental method

in personality psychology?

- a. Causal relationships cannot be determined
- b. Too many variables are examined at once
- c. Complex personality processes cannot be assessed
- d. Hypotheses cannot be disconfirmed

31. Science progresses through a continuous dialogue between

- a. Fact and fiction
- b. Observation and theory
- c. Theory and hypothesis
- d. Reality and imagination

32. Which of the following is generally **not** a central point of emphasis in personality psychology per se?

- a. Individual differences in persons
- b. Continuity and stability in the person over time
- c. Focus on the adult years
- d. Psychotherapy technique

33. As opposed to nomothetic research, idiographic studies in personality

- a. Seek to test hypotheses generated by theories
- b. Attempt to examine variables as they naturally co-occur
- c. Focus attention on the details of a single case
- d. Use grand theories to interpret results

34. Which of the following trends is especially characteristic of *current* work in personality psychology?

- a. Building grand, unifying theories
- b. Evaluating response bias in personality measures
- c. Interaction between psychological and contextual variables
- d. Reducing social behavior to brain processes

35. In the 1950s and 1960s, the field of personality psychology devoted a great deal of attention to

- a. Problems in measurement
- b. Building grand, unifying theories
- c. Identifying social factors influencing personality
- d. Measuring biological bases of behavior

36. Gordon Allport's vision of personality emphasized

- a. Brain correlates of traits
- b. Unconscious motivational processes
- c. The rational aspects of human functioning
- d. Psychopathology

37. Allport's concept of proprium involved
- Personality traits that explain behavior
 - All aspects of personality that create psychological unity
 - Motivation constructs that conflict with each other
 - All social and internal factors that explain personality
38. The major structural unit of Allport's concept of personality is
- Motivation
 - Behavior
 - Trait
 - Adaptive characteristics
39. According to Allport,
- Traits have motivational features
 - Motivation directs traits
 - Behavior determines traits and motivation
 - Unconscious forces shape human individuality
40. *Letters from Jenny* is an example of what type of research?
- Nomothetic
 - Idiographic
 - Construct validity
 - Hypothesis-testing research

ESSAY QUESTIONS

41. Psychological individuality may be considered from three different levels: (a) dispositional traits, (b) characteristic adaptations, and (c) integrative life stories. Describe each level and provide examples as to how a particular person's life can be understood in terms of these three aspects of personality.
42. What is a scientific theory? How are theories developed in science and according to what criteria are they evaluated?
43. What is the distinction between context of discovery and context of justification in science? Describe procedures that scientists follow within each of the two contexts.
44. Design an experiment to test the hypothesis that extraverted people should engage in greater levels of social interaction than introverted people. Illustrate such concepts as experimental and control groups, independent and dependent variables, and sampling.

45. What is personality psychology? What are its main goals? How does it differ from other branches of psychology?

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Take a particular case as exemplified in a short story or a movie and illustrate each of the three different levels—dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and life stories—from which a personality psychologist might seek to understand the particular case.
2. Why should personality psychologists seek to understand whole persons in a scientific way? To what extent is a scientific understanding of persons possible, or even desirable?
3. What does it mean to understand a person? How is a scientific understanding of a person different than other kinds of understanding? How do we know whether we understand a person? Why should we even desire to understand persons?

SUPPLEMENTARY SOURCES

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Multiple Choice Answer Key

Chapter 1

1. a
2. d
3. d
4. c
5. d
6. d
7. a
8. a
9. b
10. d
11. a
12. b
13. d
14. a
15. d
16. d
17. c
18. c
19. c
20. d
21. b
22. b
23. a
24. b
25. d
26. d
27. a
28. b
29. a
30. c
31. b
32. d
33. c
34. c
35. a
36. c
37. b
38. c
39. a
40. b