

SIXTH EDITION

# CHOICE AND CHANGE

The Psychology of Personal Growth & Interpersonal Relationships



*April O'Connell*

*Vincent O'Connell*

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**The Psychology of Personal Growth  
and Interpersonal Relationships**

**Sixth Edition**

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*Once again,  
to all of you  
who are now or will be  
working along with us in the vineyard.*

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# PREFACE

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**To Our Student Readers: Welcome to *Choice and Change*.** We have written all the editions of our text with you in mind so that you would have a textbook that you would actually enjoy reading. Textbooks don't have to be dull—especially not in psychology which is all about you, your family, and your friends. So we have made sure to include many examples of the text material.

**Meet Culturally Diverse Students Much Like Yourselves and the People You Know.** In addition, you will encounter some students (very much like yourselves or like people you know) in the very first box (page 1 of Chapter 1) as they struggle for self-understanding and self-actualizing. Their concerns and problems reflect their wide diversity in age, racial and ethnic background, and educational/vocational goals.

Meet Eduardo Sanangelo, the youngest child of an Hispanic-American family, anxious to start his studies even though English is his second language.

Meet Shannon McCrory, beautiful but struggling with shyness and poor self-esteem as she believes herself to be physically handicapped and socially backward.

Meet Jonnimae Jones, African-American and single mother of teenagers determined to make something of herself.

Meet Martha Vining, Italian-American and dealing with having married a man outside her Italian culture.

Meet Dan Westwind, Native-American, going to the “white man’s college” after many years and having to confront his hostility to the white society.

Meet Alec Riordan, Caucasian-American, working out his anger at his family for their prejudicial world view.

Meet Natasha Petrovicc, who (along with her family) is a refugee from a previous Soviet bloc country and experiencing some culture shock in the New World.

Follow these students in chapter after chapter as they dialog with their professor and with each other about the topics covered in the text.

**Read also the Written Verbatim Comments of Actual Students.** Over the course of years, we have collected many written responses from students much like yourselves and reproduced many of them throughout the text. So watch for boxes that say *Students Verbatim* that are actual real-life comments by students.

**Become a Psychonaut by Responding to the Boxes Which Invite You to Do Reflective Writing.** Many of the boxes invite you to explore your own experiences and reactions. You might want to keep a journal so that at the end of the course you will have a written record of your own self-exploration. Keep this journal. It will even be more interesting to you in years to come for you will have a written record of what you were thinking and feeling and figuring out during this course—a time capsule of this one segment of your life.

**Correspond with us (your authors) if you like.** We would like to hear from you. Tell us what you liked about the book or didn't like. Share with us your experiences that are similar or different from the scenario students in the boxes. Ask us questions or tell us about yourselves. We may not be able to respond instantly but respond we will. You can reach us at [april.o'connell@santafe.cc.fl.us](mailto:april.o'connell@santafe.cc.fl.us).

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Finally we wish to acknowledge the spirit and energy of some extraordinary college administrators—their hard work, their compassion for others, and their dedication to the educative process have been awesome and inspiring: Larry Tyree, President of Santa Fe Community College; Pat Grunder, Vice-President for Educational Resources; Michael Reiner, Chair of Social Sciences/History; and Joanna Clark and Betty Odum, instructors in Arts and Sciences.

Finally, we need to thank the library staff, particularly June Littler and Mary McCarty, without whose help this edition would never have been finished on time.

April O'Connell

Vincent F. O'Connell



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# 1 THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF

## Self-Concept, Self-Esteem, and Self-Actualizing



### Box 1.1

#### SCENARIO One Identical Letter, Five Very Different Reactions

*On a bright, sunny day in May, six people each received the following formal letter from the Admissions Office of the college to which they had all applied.*

Dear Prospective Student,

With regard to your application to be admitted as a freshman to State College, we are sorry to inform you that we cannot process your application officially at this time. You passed the math examination, but your scores on the reading and composition portions are below the cutoff level for immediate acceptance.

We can, however, admit you to our pre-college program. The pre-college program is designed to bring students up to passing levels in these courses. You have already passed your math, so you need register only for the reading and composition classes. Since your scores were just below the established cutoff scores, we are confident that you will have little trouble in passing the two exams within one term. Since you only have to take two pre-college classes, you can also take an actual college course. We suggest a psychology course which will help you make some decisions about your educational/vocational objectives and your life-career in general.

Please call us for an interview with one of our academic counselors at your earliest opportunity, so we can register you and plan for your further education.

Very sincerely yours,

I. L. Andrews  
Dean of Admissions and Records.

**Eduardo Sanangelo** (22 years, Hispanic-American) was elated! He threw his cap into the air, caught it, and

rushed into the house shouting, "I'm in! I'm in! Well, sort of in. I can't register as a freshman right away but I have been admitted on the pre-college level. They have these courses you can take to bring you up to level and then you get in! I knew my English wasn't good enough. But I passed the math so all I have to do is take two English courses, and I'm in!"

**Jonnimae Jones** (30 years, African-American, single working mother of two teenagers) read the letter, and then clutched the letter to her heart. Her eyes were misty but she was smiling as she whispered to herself, "I can do it. I know I can. I've come this far. It won't be easy, but I'm going to make it."

**Shannon McCrory** (17 years, Caucasian, and just graduated from high school) leaned her head on her father's shoulders and wailed, "Oh, Pa, does this mean I got to go to college? They'll laugh at me. I don't have nice clothes and I sound like the hillbillies on TV." Shannon didn't give voice to her most troubling anxiety, but her father knew what it was. He put his arm around her. "Girl, there ain't nothing you need be ashamed of. Folks know you're the prettiest and smartest girl hereabouts. But, honey, you ain't gotta do nothin' you don't want."

**Dan Westwind** (38 years, Navajo Native American) had been working on an old truck until he saw the Chief walk toward him with a letter in his hand. The old man handed Dan the letter. After reading the letter, Dan turned to the Chief and said, "For me to go an extra term will cost more money." The old man shrugged. Dan understood the shrug: He was to go no matter what the cost. Dan nodded, folded the letter, and put it in his pocket. Neither man said anything more. Dan waited respectfully until the old chief left and then resumed working on the truck.

## Box 1.1

**SCENARIO (continued)**  
**One Identical Letter, Five Very Different Reactions**

**Natasha Petrovicc** (24 years, Caucasian and a newly arrived refugee from the Balkans) put her hand to her mouth in astonishment. She had only applied to the college at her husband's urging. And now she was accepted. This was not the way things happened in the old country. There you had to be one of the rich elite. Or know somebody in the Politburo. It was all too new, too wonderful . . . and too scary all at the same time. Waves of dizziness overcame her and her legs gave way from

under her. She found herself sitting on the ground quite faint and frightened.

**Nat Bernstein** (19 years, Caucasian, Jewish, son of Dr. Ellen Bernstein and Dr. Harry Bernstein) walked into his parents' bedroom, took a gun from the bottom drawer of his father's bureau, and put a bullet through his head. He was pronounced dead-on-arrival (DOA) at the hospital.

## How We Cope with Life Events Depends on Our Personality Style

The introductory scenario describes an identical event in the lives of six people. How each of those six people reacted to this identical event was dramatically different. Given the encouragement of the Dean's letter, what could account for Nat Bernstein's suicide? What accounts for the exuberant response of Eduardo Sanangelo and the unemotional response of Dan Westwind? Given the burdens that Jonnimae Jones is carrying—member of a depressed minority, single working mother of two teenagers—what gives her the self-confidence that she can “make it”? What are the factors behind Shannon's lack of confidence and Natasha's dizziness? The answers to these questions, of course, involve what we call “personality” or personality style.

## Personality Includes Every Dimension of Human Experience

The general public tends to think of personality as our “public image”—what we show to others when we put our “best foot forward.” But the psychological definition of personality involves much more than our public image (see Tip 1.2). Our personality involves our physical characteristics and general health. (When we are feeling sick, we may become irritable and pessimistic when we are ordinarily cheerful and optimistic.) Personality also involves our **cognition** or mental abilities. (If a brilliant individual suddenly develops a brain tumor, not only is his intellectual ability severely hampered, his personality will undergo a dramatic change as he struggles with his impairment.) Our personality also includes our **worldview**, which is how

**Tip 1.1 Why Did These Six People React As They Did?** At the end of this chapter, we look into some of the possible reasons why each of these peoples reacted as they did. (If you would like to know immediately, turn to pp. 16–21.)

**Tip 1.2 Defining Personality: Unique, Dynamic, Consistent.** Most professional definitions of personality include three characteristics: uniqueness, dynamic organization, and consistency. *Uniqueness* means that no two personalities are exactly alike (not even those of identical twins). *Dynamic* means that our personalities are not static but fluid and changeable in mood and intensity from moment-to-moment. Yet despite these moment-by-moment changes, most of us develop a fairly *consistent* personality patterning which is recognizable to others.

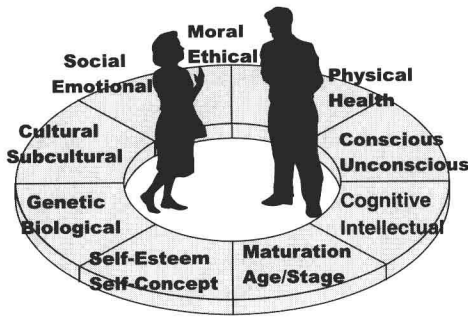


Figure 1.1 Personality consists of every dimension of human existence.

we perceive the possibilities for living and which also partly determines our moral/ethical and spiritual values. (A person who believes the “world is a maggot hill” will interact with others quite differently from a person who believes, as Will Rogers did, that “a stranger is a friend I haven’t met yet.”) In a later chapter we shall see how our personalities are also influenced by the **culture** (for example, Hispanic, African-American, Mid-Eastern, etc.) we were born into, as well as by all the **subcultures** of our profession, place of work, religious affiliation, and clubs and recreations. In short, personality includes just about everything we know about ourselves (see Figure 1.1).

In addition to what we know about ourselves, personality also includes many things we don’t know about ourselves, called the **unconscious** parts of personality (Freud, 1900). Even though we may be unaware of the unconscious aspects of our personality, they influence our personality style throughout our lifetime.

## Two Core Dimensions of Personality: Self-concept and Self-Esteem

Two core dimensions of personality involve our *self-concept* and our *self-esteem*. Self-concept and self-esteem are sometimes used interchangeably as if they mean the same thing; but while these two terms are closely related, their meanings are somewhat different.

### Self-Concept: How We *Think* of Ourselves

Our **self-concept** has largely to do with factual information—how we *think* about ourselves in terms of our gender, sibling rank, race, nationality, religion, etc. When we are young, our self-concept is a matter of destiny—we are born into it. As a child, we may say, “There are four of us children—I’m the oldest.” As we get older, we may identify ourselves in terms of our family’s religion. We say, “In our house, we’re Baptist/Catholic/Jewish/Muslim.” Still later, our self-concept enlarges to include the region of the world we come from. A man smiles as he says, “Ma’am, ah’m from TEXAS” and that tells us that his self-concept includes a very strong identification as a Texan. Very often, our self-concept is the way we introduce ourselves to others: “I’m Doris Davidson, your neighbor three doors down from you, and I’m organizing a crime-watch organization in our neighborhood.” Or the way others introduce us: “This is Jim Delericio. He’s your son’s Little League coach.”

### Self-Esteem: How We *Feel* About Ourselves

If our self-concept is how we *think* about ourselves, our **self-esteem** is how we *feel* about ourselves. Other terms that mean almost the same thing are self-respect, self-liking, self-confidence, self-worth, self-regard. There have been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of studies done on self-esteem. The findings have been remarkably consistent; namely, that our self-esteem affects every area of our life—for good or for ill (Rogne, 1991). Some of these findings are summarized below.