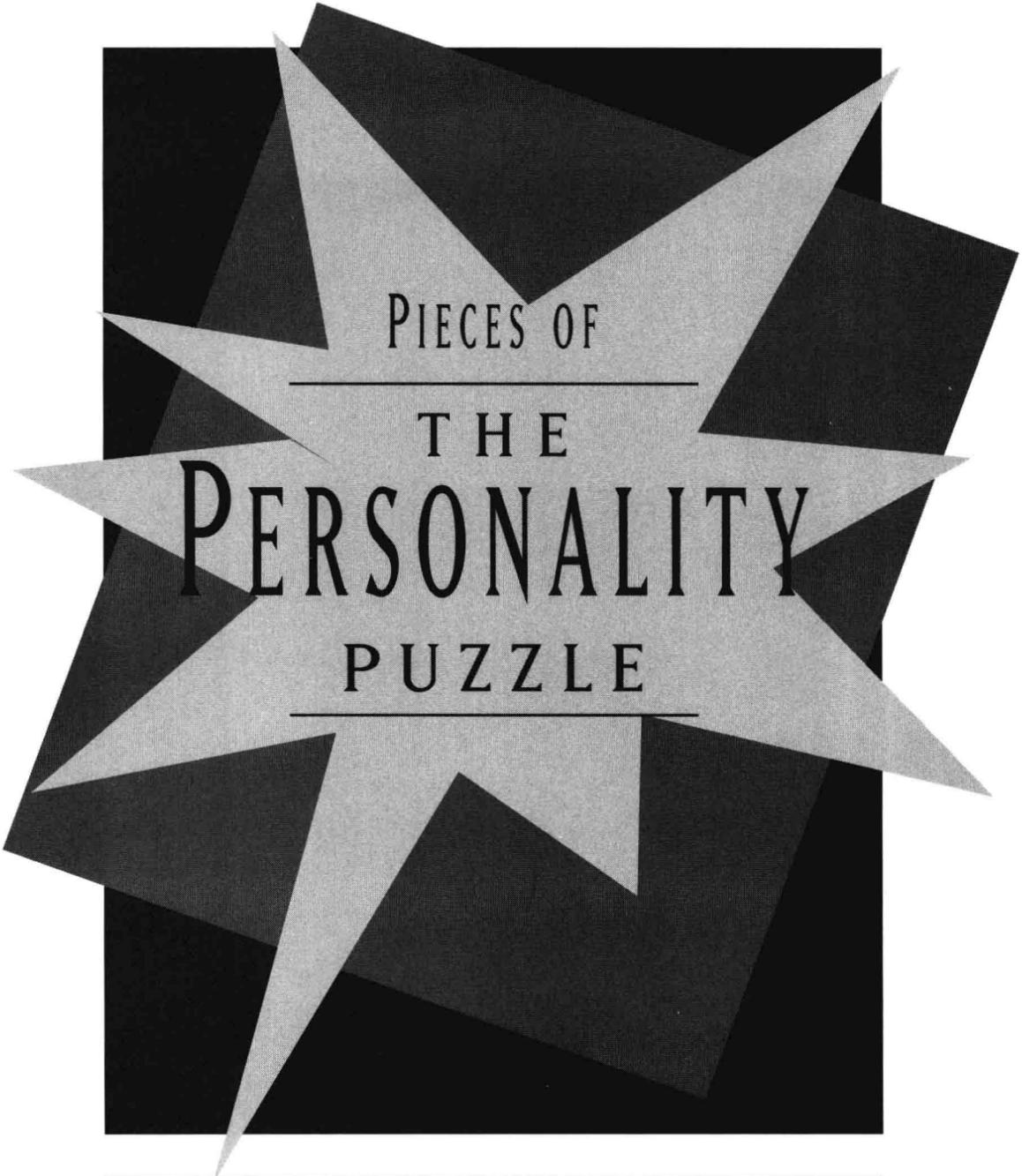


PIECES OF THE PERSONALITY PUZZLE

Readings in
Theory and
Research

DAVID C. FUNDER
DANIEL J. OZER





PIECES OF

THE
PERSONALITY

PUZZLE

READINGS IN THEORY AND RESEARCH

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PREFACE

Theory and research in personality psychology address the ways in which people are different from one another, the relations between body and mind, how people think (consciously and unconsciously), what people want (consciously and unconsciously), and what people do. Personality is the broadest, most all-encompassing part of psychology.

This breadth of relevance is personality psychology's greatest attraction, but it also makes good work in this field difficult to do. Nearly all personality psychologists have therefore chosen to limit their approach in some way, by focusing on particular phenomena they deemed of special interest and more or less neglecting everything else (Funder, 1997). A group of psychologists who focus on the same basic phenomena could be said to be working within the same paradigm, or following the same basic approach.

The articles in this reader are organized by the basic approaches they follow. The first section presents articles that describe and discuss the research methods used by personality psychologists. The second section includes articles relevant to the trait approach, the approach that concentrates on the conceptualization and measurement of individual differences in personality. The third section presents articles that follow the biological approach, and attempt to connect the biology of the body and nervous system with the processes of emotion, thought, and behavior. The fourth section presents classic and modern research from the psychoanalytic approach, which considers (among other things) unconscious processes of the mind based, ultimately, on the writings of Sigmund Freud. The fifth section presents some examples from the humanistic approach, which focuses on experience, free will, and the meaning of life. Articles in the sixth section consider the constancy and variability of personality across different cultures. Finally, articles in the seventh section trace the way the behavioristic approach developed into social learning theory, and from there into modern social-cognitive approaches to personality. The reader will come almost full circle at that point, as we observe (in a brief afterword) that some of the issues considered by the social-cognitive approach concerning the

nature and operation of individual differences are similar to those sometimes addressed by the trait approach.

There is no substitute for reading original work in a field to appreciate its content and its style. But assembling a reader such as this does entail certain difficulties, and requires some strategic choices. The editors chose, first of all, to be representative rather than exhaustive in our coverage of the domain of personality psychology. While we believe the most important areas of personality are represented by an exemplar or two in what follows, no topic is truly covered in depth. If you become seriously interested, we hope you will use the reference sections that follow each article as a guide to further reading.

A second choice was to search for articles most likely to be interesting to an audience that does *not* consist entirely of professionally trained psychologists. At the same time, we tried to ensure that many of the most prominent personality psychologists of this century were represented. In some cases, this meant we chose a prominent psychologist's most accessible—rather than by some definition most “important”—writing.

A third decision—made reluctantly—was to excerpt nearly all of these articles. Most of the articles that follow are, in their original form, much longer. We tried to be judicious in our editing. We removed passages that would be incomprehensible to a nonprofessional reader, digressions, and treatments of issues beside the main point of each article. We have marked all changes to the original text; three asterisks centered on a blank line mark the omission of a complete paragraph or section, while three asterisks run into the text indicate that sentences within that paragraph have been omitted.

Most articles have footnotes. Some of these are by the original authors (we have indicated which these are), but we deleted most author footnotes. We have added many footnotes of our own. These define bits of jargon, explain references to other research, and—when we couldn't help ourselves—provide editorial commentary.

Each section begins with an introduction that describes the articles to follow and lays out their sequence. Each article is preceded by a brief essay outlining what we see as its take-home message and some issues we believe the reader should consider.

Finally, this volume contains a few surprises. The reader will find two passages from novels, an excerpt from a 19th-century textbook in “physiognomy,” and an article originally published in *Ms*. These were not written by psychologists, but we believe they are of interest and shed a kind of light on their topic not always provided by the professional literature.

The reader follows the same organization as Funder's (1997) textbook, *The Personality Puzzle*, and some of the research referred to in that book will be found here. However, one does not need to use that text to use this reader; the two books are largely independent, and this reader was designed to be

useful in conjunction with almost any textbook—or even by itself. The reader includes representative writings in method, theory and research, the three staples of any good personality course.

Acknowledgments

Many individuals assisted this project in many ways. Useful suggestions were provided by Jana Spain of Highpoint University, Susan Krauss Whitbourne of the University of Massachusetts (Amherst), Andrew J. Tomarken of Vanderbilt University, and Brian C. Hayden of Brown University. Liz Suhay of W. W. Norton assembled the manuscript, gathered copyright permissions, and performed numerous other necessary tasks with speed and good humor. April Lange, our editor, patiently shepherded this book to completion and talked us out of several truly bad ideas. The original idea for a book of readings to accompany Funder's *Personality Puzzle* came from Don Fusting, a former Norton editor. We are grateful to all these individuals, and also to the authors who graciously and generously allowed us to edit and reproduce their work.



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PART I

Research Methods

How do you find out something new, and learn something that nobody has ever known before? This is the question of “research methods,” the strategies and techniques that are used to obtain new knowledge. The knowledge of interest for personality psychology is knowledge about people, so for this field the question of research methods translates into a concern with the ways in which one can learn more about a person. These include techniques for measuring an individual’s personality traits as well as his or her thoughts, motivations, emotions, and goals.

Personality psychologists have a long tradition in being particularly interested in and sophisticated about research methods. Over the years, they have developed new sources of data, invented innovative statistical techniques, and even provided some important advances in the philosophy of science. The selections in this section address some critical issues that arise when considering the methods one might use to learn more about people.

The opening selection, by Dan McAdams, asks “what do we know when we know a person?” The article presents an introduction to and comparison of the various conceptual units—ranging from traits to the holistic meaning of life—that personality psychologists have used to describe and understand people.

The second selection, by Kenneth Craik, is a historical survey of the most important basic methods that personality psychologists have used to gather information about individuals. The article illustrates both the diversity of methods that have been tried and the uneven history of their development—some have been used continuously over the years; some were popular for a time and then died out; and others continue to come and go.

The third selection, by Jack Block, is an introduction to the longitudinal method of personality research. In this method, the same people are studied over a range of time—many years—sufficient to provide a window into some of the important ways in which they develop. Of course, this research is extraordinarily difficult to do, but Block argues for its importance and outlines some vital considerations for how it should be conducted.

The fourth selection, by Leonard Horowitz, is a brief introduction to a particular statistic that is unavoidable by any reader of personality research—the correlation coefficient. The fifth selection, by Robert Rosenthal and Donald Rubin, describes a useful technique for interpreting the size of a correlation coefficient. For example, if someone tells you they have obtained a correlation between a trait and behavior equal to .32, is this big or little? (For reasons Rosenthal and Rubin explain, the answer is “pretty big.”)

The fifth and sixth selections are two of the unquestioned all-time classics of psychological methodology. They are absolutely required reading for any psychologist. The article by Cronbach and Meehl concerns “construct validity,” or the issue of how one determines whether a test of personality (or any other attribute) really measures what it is supposed to. The article by Campbell and Fiske presents an important method, called the multitrait-multimethod matrix, for separating out the components of a measurement that reflect real properties of people, as opposed to properties of the instrument used to take the measurement.

The final selection is an excerpt from an important book by Robert Abelson. It argues that the topic of statistical data analysis is not a matter of formal proof or even mathematics. Rather, the essence of data analysis is understanding a set of observations and communicating this understanding to others. We consider this the most important lesson about research methodology that one can learn.

WHAT DO WE KNOW WHEN WE KNOW A PERSON?

Dan P. McAdams

Personality psychology is all about understanding individuals better. In this first selection, the personality psychologist Dan McAdams asks one of the fundamental questions about this enterprise, which is: when we learn about a person, what is it we learn? He begins by describing the kind of personality psychology that nonpsychologists (or psychologists when off duty) frequently practice: discussing an individual that one has just met. In such discussions, the individual is often considered at several different levels, ranging from surface descriptions of behavior to inferences about deeper motivations.

The challenge for professional personality psychologists, McAdams argues, is to become at least as sophisticated as amateur psychologists by taking into account aspects of individuals at multiple levels. In his own work, McAdams collects life stories and tries to understand individuals in holistic terms. He is a critic of the more dominant approach that characterizes individuals in terms of their personality traits. However, in this well-balanced article we see McAdams attempt to integrate the various levels of personality description into a complete portrait of what we know when we know a person.

From "What Do We Know When We Know a Person?" by D. P. McAdams (1995). In *Journal of Personality*, 63, 365–396. Copyright © 1996 by Duke University Press. Reprinted with permission.

One of the great social rituals in the lives of middle-class American families is "the drive home." The ritual comes in many different forms, but the idealized scene that I am now envisioning involves my wife and me leaving the dinner party sometime around midnight, getting into our car, and, finding nothing worth listening to on the radio, beginning our traditional post-party postmortem. Summoning up all of the personological wisdom and nuance I can muster

at the moment, I may start off with something like, "He was really an ass." Or adopting the more "relational" mode that psychologists such as Gilligan (1982) insist comes more naturally to women than men, my wife may say something like, "I can't believe they stay married to each other." It's often easier to begin with the cheap shots. As the conversation develops, however, our attributions become more detailed and more interesting. We talk about people we liked as well as

those we found offensive. There is often a single character who stands out from the party—the person we found most intriguing, perhaps; or the one who seemed most troubled; maybe the one we would like to get to know much better in the future. In the scene I am imagining, let us call that person “Lynn” and let us consider what my wife and I might say about her as we drive home in the dark.

I sat next to Lynn at dinner. For the first 15 minutes, she dominated the conversation at our end of the table with her account of her recent trip to Mexico where she was doing research for an article to appear in a national magazine. Most of the people at the party knew that Lynn is a free-lance writer whose projects have taken her around the world, and they asked her many questions about her work and her travels. Early on, I felt awkward and intimidated in Lynn’s presence. I have never been to Mexico; I was not familiar with her articles; I felt I couldn’t keep up with the fast tempo of her account, how she moved quickly from one exotic tale to another. Add to this the fact that she is a strikingly attractive woman, about 40 years old with jet black hair, dark eyes, a seemingly flawless complexion, clothing both flamboyant and tasteful, and one might be able to sympathize with my initial feeling that she was, in a sense, “just too much.”

My wife formed a similar first impression earlier in the evening when she engaged Lynn in a lengthy conversation on the patio. But she ended up feeling much more positive about Lynn as they shared stories of their childhoods. My wife mentioned that she was born in Tokyo during the time her parents were Lutheran missionaries in Japan. Lynn remarked that she had great admiration for missionaries “because they really believe in something.” Then she remarked: “I’ve never really believed in anything very strongly, nothing to get real passionate about. Neither did my parents, except for believing in us kids. They probably believed in us kids too much.” My wife immediately warmed up to Lynn for this disarmingly intimate comment. It was not clear exactly what she meant,

but Lynn seemed more vulnerable now, and more mysterious.

I eventually warmed up to Lynn, too. As she and I talked about politics and our jobs, she seemed less brash and domineering than before. She seemed genuinely interested in my work as a personality psychologist who, among other things, collects people’s life stories. She had been a psychology major in college. And lately she had been reading a great many popular psychology books on such things as Jungian archetypes, the “child within,” and “addictions to love.” As a serious researcher and theorist, I must confess that I have something of a visceral prejudice against many of these self-help, “New Age” books. Still, I resisted the urge to scoff at her reading list and ended up enjoying our conversation very much. I did notice, though, that Lynn filled her wine glass about twice as often as I did mine. She never made eye contact with her husband, who was sitting directly across the table from her, and twice she said something sarcastic in response to a story he was telling.

Over the course of the evening, my wife and I learned many other things about Lynn. On our drive home we noted the following:

1. Lynn was married once before and has two children by her first husband.
2. The children, now teenagers, currently live with her first husband rather than with her; she didn’t say how often she sees them.
3. Lynn doesn’t seem to like President Clinton and is very critical of his excessively “liberal” policies; but she admires his wife, Hillary, who arguably is more liberal in her views; we couldn’t pin a label of conservative or liberal to Lynn because she seemed to contradict herself on political topics.
4. Lynn hates jogging and rarely exercises; she claims to eat a lot of “junk food”; she ate very little food at dinner.
5. Lynn says she is an atheist.
6. Over the course of the evening, Lynn’s elegant demeanor and refined speech style seemed to give way to a certain crudeness;

shortly before we left, my wife heard her telling an off-color joke, and I noticed that she seemed to lapse into a street-smart Chicago dialect that one often associates with growing up in the toughest neighborhoods.

As we compared our notes on Lynn during the drive home, my wife and I realized that we learned a great deal about Lynn during the evening, and that we were eager to learn more. But what is it that we thought we now knew about her? And what would we need to know to know her better? In our social ritual, my wife and I were enjoying the rather playful exercise of trying to make sense of persons. In the professional enterprise of personality psychology, however, making sense of persons is or should be the very *raison d'être* of the discipline. From the time of Allport (1937) and Murray (1938), through the anxious days of the “situationist” critique (Bowers, 1973; Mischel, 1968), and up to the present, upbeat period wherein we celebrate traits¹ (John, 1990; Wiggins, 1996) while we offer a sparkling array of new methods and models for personality inquiry (see, for example, McAdams, 1994a; Ozer & Reise, 1994; Revelle, 1995), making sense of persons was and is fundamentally what personality psychologists are supposed to do, in the lab, in the office, even on the drive home. But how should we do it?

Making Sense of Persons

* * *

Since the time of Allport, Cattell, and Murray, personality psychologists have offered a number of different schemes for describing persons. For ex-

ample, McClelland (1951) proposed that an adequate account of personality requires assessments of stylistic traits (e.g., extraversion, friendliness), cognitive schemes (e.g., personal constructs, values, frames), and dynamic motives (e.g., the need for achievement, power motivation). In the wake of Mischel's (1968) critique of personality dispositions, many personality psychologists eschewed broadband constructs such as traits and motives in favor of more domain-specific variables, like “encoding strategies,” “self-regulatory systems and plans,” and other “cognitive social learning person variables” (Mischel, 1973). By contrast, the 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a strong comeback for the concept of the broad, dispositional trait, culminating in what many have argued is a consensus around the five-factor model of personality traits (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993; McCrae & Costa, 1990). Personality psychologists such as A. H. Buss (1989) have essentially proclaimed that personality *is traits* and only traits. Others are less sanguine, however, about the ability of the Big Five trait taxonomy in particular and the concept of trait in general to provide all or even most of the right stuff for personality inquiry (Block, 1995; Briggs, 1989; Emmons, 1993; McAdams, 1992, 1994b; Pervin, 1994).

Despite the current popularity of the trait concept, I submit that I will never be able to render Lynn “knowable” by relying solely on a description of her personality traits. At the same time, a description that failed to consider traits would be equally inadequate. Trait descriptions are essential both for social rituals like the post-party post-mortem and for adequate personological inquiry. A person cannot be known without knowing traits. But knowing traits is not enough. Persons should be described on at least *three separate* and, at best, *loosely related levels* of functioning. The three may be viewed as levels of comprehending *individuality* amidst otherness—how the person is similar to and different from *some* (but not all) other persons. Each level offers categories and frameworks for organizing *individual differences* among persons. Dispositional traits comprise the first level in this scheme—the level that deals pri-

¹The reference here is to the “person-situation debate” that dominated personality psychology from 1968 to 1988. The debate was about whether the most important causes of behavior were properties of people or of the situations they find themselves in. The “situationist” viewpoint was that situations were more important. As McAdams notes, the eventual resolution of this controversy reaffirmed the importance—but not all-importance—of stable individual differences in personality (traits) as important determinants of behavior.

marily with what I have called (McAdams, 1992, 1994b) a “psychology of the stranger.”

The Power of Traits

Dispositional traits are those relatively nonconditional, relatively decontextualized, generally linear, and implicitly comparative dimensions of personality that go by such titles as “extraversion,” “dominance,” and “neuroticism.” One of the first things both I and my wife noticed about Lynn was her social dominance. She talked loudly and fast; she held people’s attention when she described her adventures; she effectively controlled the conversation in the large group. Along with her striking appearance, social dominance appeared early on as one of her salient characteristics. Other behavioral signs also suggested an elevated rating on the trait of neuroticism, though these might also indicate the situationally specific anxiety she may have been experiencing in her relationship with the man who accompanied her to the party. According to contemporary norms for dinner parties of this kind, she seemed to drink a bit too much. Her moods shifted rather dramatically over the course of the evening. While she remained socially dominant, she seemed to become more and more nervous as the night wore on. The interjection of her off-color joke and the street dialect stretched slightly the bounds of propriety one expects on such occasions, though not to an alarming extent. In a summary way, then, one might describe Lynn, as she became known during the dinner party, as socially dominant, extraverted, entertaining, dramatic, moody, slightly anxious, intelligent, and introspective. These adjectives describe part of her dispositional signature.

How useful are these trait descriptions? Given that my wife’s and my observations were limited to one behavioral setting (the party), we do not have enough systematic data to say how accurate our descriptions are. However, if further systematic observation were to bear out this initial description—say, Lynn were observed in many settings; say, peers rated her on trait dimensions;

say, she completed standard trait questionnaires such as the Personality Research Form (Jackson, 1974) or the NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1985)—then trait descriptions like these, wherein the individual is rated on a series of linear and noncontingent behavior dimensions, prove very useful indeed.

* * *

The Problem with Traits

It is easy to criticize the concept of trait. Trait formulations proposed by Allport (1937), Cattell (1957), Guilford (1959), Eysenck (1967), Jackson (1974), Tellegen (1982), Hogan (1986), and advocates of the Big Five have been called superficial, reductionistic, atheoretical, and even imperialistic. Traits are mere labels, it is said again and again. Traits don’t explain anything. Traits lack precision. Traits disregard the environment. Traits apply only to score distributions in groups, not to the individual person (e.g., Lamiell, 1987). I believe that there is some validity in some of these traditional claims but that traits nonetheless provide invaluable information about persons. I believe that many critics expect too much of traits. Yet, those trait enthusiasts (e.g., A. H. Buss, 1989; Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993) who equate personality with traits in general, and with the Big Five in particular, are also claiming too much.

Goldberg (1981) contended that the English language includes five clusters of trait-related terms—the Big Five—because personality characteristics encoded in these terms have proved especially salient in human interpersonal perception, especially when it comes to the perennial and evolutionary crucial task of sizing up a stranger. I think Goldberg was more right than many trait enthusiasts would like him to be. Reliable and valid trait ratings provide an excellent “first read” on a person by offering estimates of a person’s relative standing on a delimited series of general and linear dimensions of proven social significance. This is indeed crucial information in the evaluation of strangers and others about whom we