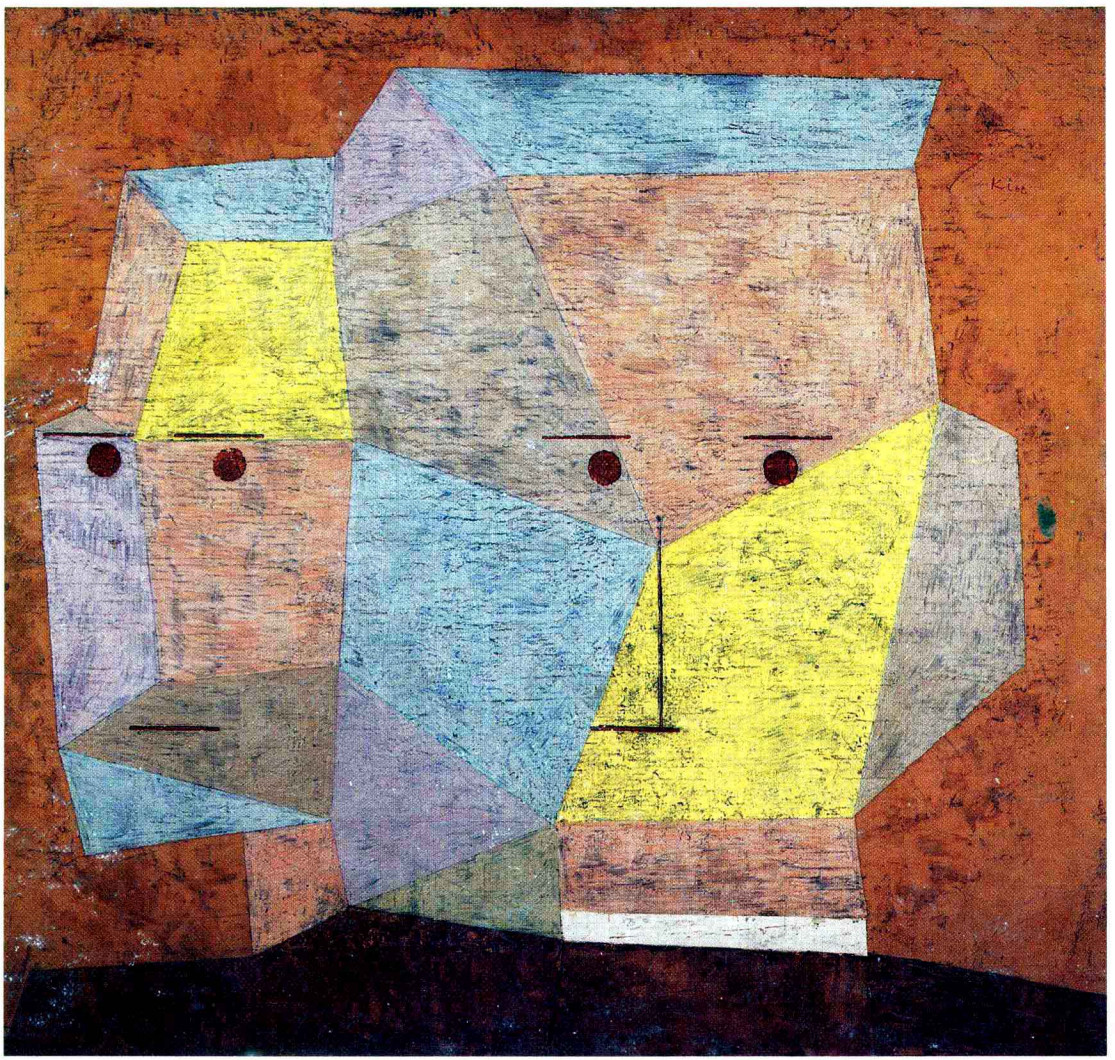
The Human Personality



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The Human Personality

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To Dorothy, Jon, Jeff, Bruce, Tarah, and Cory

COVER: Painting by Paul Klee, "Two Heads" 1932, courtesy The Blue Four Galka Scheyer Collection, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California.

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Preface

The Human Personality is an introduction to one of the most exciting and challenging areas in the behavioral sciences. This book is designed to channel students' natural curiosity about their own and others' personalities into a consideration of how human variation can be systematically and rigorously investigated. Its chief objective is to convey to students my deep conviction that the humanity we all share is not only compatible with but essential to the scientific enterprise—the thrill of theory development, fact-finding, and hypothesis testing.

A fundamental premise of this textbook is that the study of personality is best understood as a natural outgrowth of basic psychology. Although important concepts have evolved from the clinical observations of early theorists such as Freud, Jung, and Sullivan, the current work in personality theory and research—including the study of physiological and motivational systems, the new research on emotion, the emergence of cognition as a central field, and the important work currently underway in developmental and social psychology—lies closer to the methods and findings of general psychology. Personality research is distinguished from general psychology at those points where individual variation in experience or expressive action reflects the functioning of the emotional and cognitive systems. This book thus pays considerable attention to issues of personal style—how we process and retrieve information, react to danger or threat, cope with interpersonal conflict, and demonstrate curiosity, excitement, joy, and love.

The text is organized around a distinction between the *private* personality of self-consciousness, memories, fantasies, and dreams, and the *public* personality of individual variation in our direct confrontations with our physical and social environment. The book places more emphasis on private experiences of emotions and dreams than most introductory texts, perhaps, but always in the context of their importance for objective research and measurement of inner life. Another special emphasis in this text is on the normal personality. While no one doubts the importance of the contributions that have emerged from clinical explorations with severely disturbed people, the early personality theorists created an imbalance in our perspective on human variation. In this text, most of the material is oriented toward personality patterns easily recognizable by students and toward research and quasi-clinical methods applicable to our daily lives rather than to the special settings of mental hospitals or psychoanalytic consulting rooms. Naturally, I have included references and case material from extreme situations, as well as a review of the

clinical methods used to change personality, but I have made a considerable effort to differentiate personality research from the study of psychopathology.

Introducing students to the current complexity and sophistication of modern psychometrics and experimental or field-survey methods is a sensitive task. Even before reviewing the range of current research and assessment methods (Chapter 7), in the discussions of the early theorists I have alerted students to the necessity of hypothesis testing, objectivity, and replicability of research findings. While I have not highlighted personological study of the type associated with Henry A. Murray or Robert M. White, I have tried to show the value of such approaches within the broader framework. In examining the development of personality I have also tried to emphasize the importance of observation and experiment with children as an important alternative to retrospective accounts by adult patients, which still form a basis for so much theorizing by psychoanalytically oriented theorists. But I have also introduced students to the necessity of life-span approaches in the study of adult personality as a corrective for cross-sectional or time-limited experimental methods.

After an introduction to the general study of personality, Part 1 traces the shift in emphasis on the private personality from the work of Freud and Jung through the increasing concern with social-environmental influences of the Neo-Freudians, the social-learning theorists, and the existentialists—the humanistic "Third Force" of psychology—who sought to avoid reductionism and denigration of the constructive and self-creating capacities of the person. Finally, the emergence of a cognitive orientation and the new work on cognitive-affective relationships are represented by the early work of Kurt Lewin and Fritz Heider and the current emphases of Richard Lazarus, Silvan Tomkins, and Carroll Izard, among others. The text suggests the move toward an integration of earlier approaches, with social-learning theorists increasingly accepting cognitive and private-personality notions, and points the way toward operational definition and systematic research.

Part 2 examines the foundations of variation in the private personality—the emotional, motivational, and cognitive systems—and concludes with a description of the emergence of a concept of self that can be scientifically scrutinized. Part 3 moves to the public personality, with chapters reviewing the research on stress, anxiety, conflict, defenses, and coping mechanisms. These chapters also pay special attention to the emotions, including the available research on the positive and constructive human emotions of interest and joy, curiosity, creativity, altruism, and love. Part 4 concludes the book with a consideration of how personality develops and changes, with the final chapter devoted to the various psychotherapies and the problems of assessing their effectiveness.

Although an integrative thread runs through the text, with Chapters 8–18 reexamining earlier theoretical notions in the light of new approaches, individual groups of chapters are designed for optional separate study. More than any other, Chapter 7 can be detached and read early in the course. Chapters 1–3 are best read together, with Chapters 4–6 in close proximity. Chapters 8–11 form a closely related sequence, as do Chapters 12–13, 14–15, and 16–17.

Many other teaching suggestions are included in the Instructor's Manual that is available for this book.

I am indebted to the dozens of colleagues and patients and hundreds of students who have helped me try to make sense of the vast area of personality theory and research. The various drafts of the manuscript benefited from readings of specific chapters or of the full text by Rae Carlson, Kay Deaux, Bernard S. Gorman, Robert R. Holt, Jerome Kagan, Helen Block Lewis, Leon H. Rappoport, Joseph F. Rychlak, Dorothy G. Singer, Charles P. Smith, and Alden E. Wessman. Useful suggestions came from Michael Neale, Christopher Pino, and David Rollock, all of whom class-tested the manuscript at Yale.

I have had valuable help in bibliographic work from a series of research assistants, some by now full-fledged professionals. They include David Diamond, Michael Dineen, Jon Edelson, Susan Frank, Richard Gerrig, Andrew Gottlieb, Douglas Hammond, Mark Litt, Michael Ranis, Wanda Rapaczynski, Bruce Singer, Jeff Singer, Jon Singer, Helen G. Spencer, and Roni Beth Tower. And I much appreciate the manuscript typing and word-processing by Frances DeGrenier, Virginia Hurd, and Charlotte Shah.

This book was first commissioned by Judith Greissman, whose enthusiasm and astute criticism sustained me over the years. Valuable editorial assessments and aid came from Phyllis Fisher. My editor, Natalie Bowen, brought acute perception and a wonderful flair for English expression to my assistance. My greatest debt in completing the book is to Lorraine Bouthilet, who has worked closely with me for nearly three years in helping to edit and revise the earlier drafts and to prepare the summaries and glossary. Her fine psychological background and editorial gifts have been invaluable.

Jerome L. Singer

Contents

Preface *iii*

1 *Introduction: Exploring Personality* **1**

A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO PERSONALITY **3**

- A Greek Philosopher's Typology **7**

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY **10**

- The Persistence of an Ancient Personality Typology **11**

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES **13**

THE MAJOR PERSONALITY THEORIES **17**

EXPLORING THE HUMAN PERSONALITY **19**

SUMMARY **20**

PART ONE

Theories of Personality

2 *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Sigmund Freud* **24**

FREUD'S INFLUENCE **26**

- Sigmund Freud **27**

PERSPECTIVES FOR UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY **28**

- Scientific Evidence of Repression **32**
- The Interplay of Personality Agents: An Allegory **35**
- The Rat Man: A Psychoanalytic Case Study **39**

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS **40**

EVALUATION OF PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY **42**

SUMMARY **45**

3 *The Evolution of Psychoanalytic Theory* **48**

CHANGES WITHIN CLASSICAL PSYCHOANALYSIS **49**

JUNG'S EXPANSION OF THE PRIVATE PERSONALITY **50**

- Carl G. Jung **51**
- Research Support for Jung's Personality Typology **56**

ADLER'S EMPHASIS ON THE PUBLIC PERSONALITY **57**

- Alfred Adler **58**

THE NEO-FREUDIANS' SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE **61**

- Clara Thompson: The Psychology of Women **63**

SULLIVAN'S INTERPERSONAL THEORY **64**

ERIKSON'S EXTENSION OF THE PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORY OF DEVELOPMENT **70**

- Erik Erikson: Explorer of the Life Cycle **71**

PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORIES TODAY **73**

SUMMARY **74**

4 *Behaviorist and Social-Learning Theories* **77**

THE EMERGENCE OF BEHAVIORISM **78**

DOLLARD AND MILLER'S PERSONALITY THEORY **79**

ROTTER'S EXPECTANCY THEORY OF SOCIAL LEARNING **87**

- Measuring Generalized Expectancy **89**

BANDURA'S SOCIAL-BEHAVIOR THEORY **90**

- Bandura's Model of Observational Learning **94**

SUMMARY **96**

5 *Psychology's "Third Force": Humanistic Theories* **98**

ORGANISMIC (GESTALT) PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY **98**

- Angyal's Case of the Domineering Father **103**

SELF THEORIES **106**

THE EXISTENTIAL ORIENTATION **111**

- Kafka's *The Castle*: How Do We Know Where We Stand? **114**

SUMMARY **115**

6 *Cognitive-Affective Theory* **117**

FORERUNNERS OF THE COGNITIVE-AFFECTIVE APPROACH **117**

CURRENT TRENDS IN THE COGNITIVE-AFFECTIVE APPROACH **124**

- The Autocentric-Allocentric Modalities and Dogmatism **127**

TOMKINS' COGNITIVE-AFFECTIVE THEORY 128
An Example of Tomkins' Affect Dynamics 131
AN OVERVIEW OF COGNITIVE-AFFECTIVE THEORY 133
SUMMARY 139

7 *Research Methods and Personality Assessment* **142**
THE OBJECTIVES OF PERSONALITY RESEARCH 144
HOW IS INFORMATION ABOUT PERSONALITY OBTAINED? 147
The Mental-Status Examination 149
PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING: QUESTIONNAIRES AND PROJECTIVE METHODS 150
Establishing the Validity of a Personality Scale 152
CASE STUDIES AND LIFE HISTORIES 164
THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD IN PERSONALITY RESEARCH 166
SUMMARY 169

PART TWO
The Private Personality

8 *Motivation and the Emotional System* **174**
THE COMPLEX DETERMINANTS OF MOTIVATION 174
BODY-REGULATING SYSTEMS 177
THE EMOTIONAL OR AFFECTIVE SYSTEM 182
THE FACE AND EMOTION 183
Cultural Influences on Basic Facial Expressions 187
EMOTIONS AS MOTIVES 190
SUMMARY 195

9 *Information-Processing and Cognitive Style* **198**
THE COGNITIVE SYSTEM 199
PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES AND THE COGNITIVE SEQUENCE 201
The Asymmetrical Brain: Two Kinds of Wisdom 206
FIELD DEPENDENCE-INDEPENDENCE: A COGNITIVE STYLE 208
SUMMARY 217

10 *Dreams, Hypnosis, and the Stream of Consciousness* **220**

IMAGERY **221**

DAYDREAMS AND THE STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS **226**

- Measuring Imagination with Rorschach Inkblots **228**

ALTERNATE STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS: HYPNOSIS AND DREAMING **234**

- The Relation of Dream Content to Recent Conscious Thought **240**
- Personality and REM-Sleep Deprivation **243**

SUMMARY **244**

11 *Belief Systems and the Concept of Self* **246**

LOCUS OF CONTROL: WHAT DO WE RELY ON? **247**

BELIEF SYSTEMS, PERSONALITY TRAITS, AND OVERT BEHAVIOR **249**

THE STUDY OF SELF **254**

- Self-consciousness and Identification with Parents **258**

SUMMARY **269**

PART THREE

The Public Personality

12 *Stress I: Frustration and Danger* **274**

FRUSTRATION **275**

- Survival Motivation and the Strength of Human Taboos **279**
- Laboratory Studies of Learned Helplessness **280**
- Coping with Frustration **282**

DANGER AND FEAR **285**

TRAUMATIC STRESS **291**

- A Hostage Remembers **292**

SUMMARY **297**

13 *Stress II: Anxiety and Defense* **299**

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF ANXIETY **299**

MEASURING ANXIETY AND STUDYING ITS CONSEQUENCES **305**

DEFENSE MECHANISMS AND COPING STRATEGIES 310
Denying Anxiety: The Repressive Style 312
IMPLICATIONS 321
SUMMARY 322

14 *Anger and Aggression* 324
ANGER 325
Mitigating Anger and Avoiding Aggression 329
EXPLAINING AGGRESSION 330
The Bobo Doll: Aggression in Young Children 334
The Shock Machine: An Experimental Procedure for Studying Aggression 335
SOCIAL FACTORS AND AGGRESSION 336
Children's Aggressiveness and Parents' Response 342
Pathways to Boyhood Aggression 344
AGGRESSIVE PERSONALITIES 346
SUMMARY 349

15 *Interest, Joy, Creativity, and Love* 351
INTEREST AND JOY: THE POSITIVE EMOTIONS 352
Patterns of Childhood Humor 361
CREATIVITY 364
A Synectic Group at Work 366
LOVE AND INTIMACY 367
Computer Simulation of a Romantic Relationship 373
SUMMARY 375

PART FOUR
The Developing and Changing Personality

16 *Early and Middle Childhood* 378
TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF DEVELOPMENT 380
Charles Dickens and the Persistence of a Childhood Attitude 381
HEREDITY AND TEMPERAMENT 382

EARLY DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES 388
Early Stimulation and Intellectual Development 389
MIDDLE CHILDHOOD 400
SUMMARY 403

17 *Adolescence and the Adult Years* 406
PERSONALITY CONSISTENCY, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE 406
Situations and Their Meanings 411
ADOLESCENCE 412
Homoerotic Orientation and Chumship: A Case Study 416
THE ADULT YEARS: CONCEPTIONS OF THE LIFE SPAN 419
What Makes a Happy (Harvard) Man? 422
THE OLDER YEARS 424
SUMMARY 430

18 *Psychotherapy and Social Change* 432
DRASTIC PERSONALITY CHANGE 433
PSYCHOANALYSIS 435
MORE ACTIVE FORMS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY 439
SOCIAL CHANGE AND PERSONALITY MODIFICATION 447
THE LIMITS OF PERSONALITY CHANGE 451
SUMMARY 452

Glossary 455

Copyrights and Acknowledgments 468

References and Index to Authors of Works Cited 470

Subject Index 493

CHAPTER
1

Introduction: Exploring Personality

The Brothers Karamazov, a famous novel by the Russian novelist Feodor Dostoievsky, concerns the lives of the four sons of a well-to-do landowner. The oldest brother, Dmitri, is a dashing, handsome army officer, courageous and loyal but also extremely impulsive, emotional, and somewhat violence-prone. The second brother, Ivan, is much more reserved, rather cynical, highly intellectual, and full of guilt. Alyosha, the third brother, is almost unbelievably kind, innocent, religious, and determined to be helpful to others. And the fourth, Smerdyakov (actually Karamazov's illegitimate son by a mentally retarded peasant woman), is represented as servile, deeply bitter, and ultimately murderous.

Almost every reader can recognize some aspects of his or her own personality in one or another of the four Karamazov brothers. The personality psychologist is interested in the fact that four boys growing up in the same household with the same father and, for three of them, the same mother, should turn out to be so different from one another. At the same time, the brothers share certain characteristics, motivations, and goals because of the strong influence of their father.

One of the great theorists of personality, Sigmund Freud, attempted to understand what experiences in Dostoievsky's own life might have influenced the content of the novel. Freud pointed out that each of the brothers showed important characteristics that were a part of Dostoievsky's own personality. For example, Dostoievsky was at various times an impulsive gambler (just as he described Dmitri), who often lost all his money. He was also a gifted writer and intellectual, much like Ivan. After an early phase of revolutionary activity, which nearly led to his execution and resulted in his imprisonment by the government of the Russian czar, Dostoievsky became deeply religious and a strong supporter of the monarchy. In his religious zeal, he reflected aspects of Alyosha. Finally, like Smerdyakov, the sinister illegitimate son, Dostoievsky was an epileptic, suffering from convulsions and loss of consciousness followed by periods of depression.

The plot of Dostoievsky's novel hinges around the mysterious murder of the father and the trial of Dmitri for patricide. Freud suggested that some of the power and intensity of the novel come from the fact that Dostoievsky's own father had actually been murdered when the novelist was 18. But Freud went further. He suggested that the author's motivation to write the novel and the excitement that many people feel in reading it reflect a common human experience. According to Freud's personality theory, all children grow up with a mixture of love and hate toward their parents, sometimes even expressed, for boys, in a fantasy of killing their father. Freud pointed out that the three works often considered the pinnacles of literature in Western civilization—Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Dostoievsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*—all share the theme of a father's murder.

A scene from the MGM production of* The Brothers Karamazov. *From the left: Lee J. Cobb as the father, Feodor; Yul Brynner as Dmitri; William Shatner as Alyosha; Richard Basehart as Ivan. Not shown is Albert Salmi, who played Smerdyakov.

The sketchy discussion above does justice neither to a complex and emotionally powerful novel nor to its implications for psychology. The discussion does suggest, however, the many kinds of questions that personality psychologists address in their research and in their theories, questions such as these:

1. Can we identify individual personality characteristics and styles that remain consistent in a particular personality across time?
2. Can we identify individual characteristics that make it possible to define one person as different from another? Ivan Karamazov is clearly different from Dmitri by being more inhibited, thoughtful, and involved with intellectual approaches to daily life. Dmitri, on the other hand, takes action again and again without advance thought but at the same time expresses his emotions openly; he shows warmth and tenderness where Ivan cannot. Are there a limited number of characteristics, or *traits*, that define the differences between these two brothers?
3. Can we discover how people develop differently, at least in their surface behavior patterns, even though they have the same parents and grow up in the same household and in the same culture? What kinds of childhood behavior might have been systematically rewarded or punished so that the Karamazov boys developed different styles of action and speech? To what extent do differences in behavior and daily life lead people, even in the same environment, to develop consistent differences in their beliefs, attitudes, fantasies, expectations, and interactions with others?

In this chapter, we shall look at some of the issues that attract personality researchers. Keep in mind that personality is not a physical entity or tangible thing, but an abstract pattern of consistent personal characteristics that psychologists try to identify. Like other scientists, psychologists group observed facts or data into hypothetical constructs—organizing principles or imaginary entities—that help them keep track of the complexities of natural phenomena. Just as an atom or an electron is hypothetical, personality traits or concepts like "self" or "personality" are useful hypothetical notions to organize complex observations.

The Public Personality and the Private Personality

Try this exercise on yourself. Look in the mirror as you do every morning. What is your face and figure like? Imagine that what you see has been videotaped and can also be seen by others. What do other people make of you? Are you tall or short, broad or slim, muscular or a bit flabby? Beyond these physical characteristics, how do you appear to others? Are you a fast talker or someone who takes a long time and mulls things over before saying what has

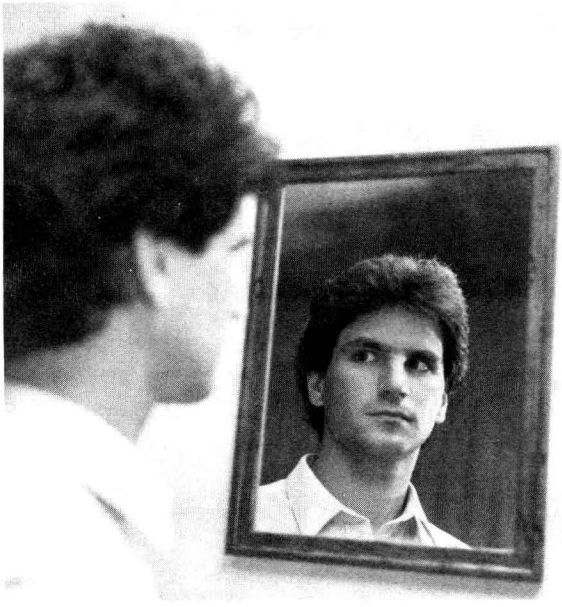
to be said in a short sentence or two? Is your speech typical of the area you come from—whether a soft Southern drawl or staccato Brooklyn speech—or does it contain a trace of the foreign accent your parents or grandparents may still have?

But there are other features to consider besides the way you look and talk. You may be the kind of person who smiles a lot and laughs easily or, on the other hand, you may prefer to keep your feelings to yourself. If so, you may notice that you keep your lips rather tightly together and express good feelings only through a slight upward turn of the corners of your mouth. Do people think you are too emotional or do they regard you as rather distant and detached? Would people describe you as someone who is independent, self-contained, even selfish? If people were asked to describe you by listing your major personality characteristics, would they put *sociable, playful, cheerful,* and *altruistic* at the top of the list or would they start with qualities such as *ambitious, independent,* and *persistent*? And since the notion of personality implies some degree of regularity or predictability, you might also think about how *consistent* your behavior is. Are you the same way with everybody or do you find that with your closest friends you become quite a different person? Perhaps you put up a front of joking and laughing at parties, but when you are with people you're close to, perhaps you are often bitter and talk much more freely about the doubts you have about your future or life in general. If situations and different settings evoke different reactions from you, is there such a thing as "the real you"?

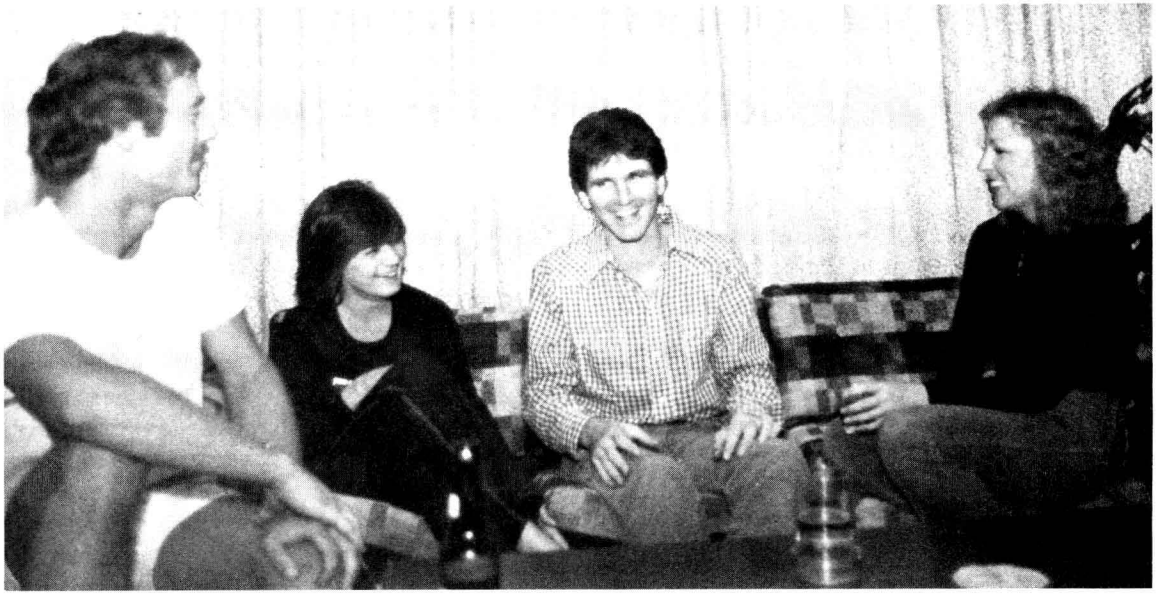
So far we have focused on your external appearance and behavior—the you that others see and listen to, the you that you present to the world. This is your *public personality*. It is the side of you that is visible to others and about which most people might agree, depending on how much time they have spent with you and in how many different situations they have seen you behave. Some psychologists, called *behaviorists*, attempt to restrict psychology to the public personality—to actions and words that can be observed and measured. They argue that the public personality is all that needs to be known for a scientific study of the human personality. They propose that information obtained about your behavior in a variety of situations is all that is necessary to be able to predict what you would do in new situations. From the behavioral standpoint, your personality is best defined through the consistencies of your speech patterns, your ways of walking and holding yourself, your reactions to situations of threat or intimacy, and the amount of talking, laughing, or frowning you do in social groups.

But is that public side of yourself the whole story of your personality? Aren't there many aspects of your experience on this earth that most people could not possibly know?

Suppose you grew up in a small apartment with three brothers and sisters and had to share a bedroom or wait your turn to get into the bathroom. Even in those crowded situations you might still find moments of privacy in which your thoughts followed paths different from anyone else's. There were times as you lay in bed before going to sleep when you had the most exciting day-



Self-awareness—looking at yourself in a mirror or simply thinking about yourself—is a form of your **private** *personality. How others appraise you—how you appear in a social setting, for example (below)—is a form of your* **public** *personality.*



dreams or imaginings that transported you to faraway countries and climes. It is not likely that you told your family or friends about many of these fantasies. But you remember them; indeed they are part of your most private self.

On a hike once in the woods you might have met someone else hiking along. You had an interesting conversation and this got you thinking about