

# Evolving Conceptions of Psychobiography and the Study of Lives

*Encounters With Psychoanalysis, Personality Psychology, and Historical Science*

How are we to conceptualize the evolving relations between the study of individual lives and the discipline of psychology?

This question is more complex than it first appears. How to conceptualize the study of lives? How do we conceptualize the discipline of psychology? And how are we to conceptualize their evolving relationships? Much is at stake in the answer, with implications for what psychology might become. People bet their careers and their working lives on different answers to such questions.

This chapter attempts to tell a different story about psychobiography and the study of lives in relation to the discipline of psychology. It is not a traditional “rise of natural science” story, in which case studies are seen as being replaced by more rigorous quantitative and experimental methods. It is, instead, a story which respects the virtues of historical, interpretive, and narrative methods, as well as of quantitative and experimental methods.

Personal life histories are, I believe, involved in the creation and development of every tradition in psychology, including psychoanalysis, learning theory, behaviorism, humanist psychology, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and the study of lives. The development of the study of lives is examined in this chapter in relation to the lives and careers of a number of people active in the tradition, including Henry Murray, Robert White, Gordon Allport, Alan Elms, and Jerry Wiggins. I also include elements of my personal experience interacting with supporters and opponents of the study of lives. These examples

may resonate (or not) with readers reflecting on their own experiences encountering different “hard” or “soft” traditions in psychology over the years.

We are all faced with competing conceptions of psychology, back through the history of the discipline. Is psychology about the study of sensation and perception? Reaction times? Memory? The structural elements of consciousness? The unconscious? Learning? Behavior? Social psychological processes? Personality? Developmental processes and change? Cognition? Psychopathology? Therapy and change? Neuroscience? And/or is psychology about the study of persons and lives?

Each of these conceptions has been proposed (and more). Consensus has been difficult to achieve (Sternberg, 2005). There were early conceptions of psychology, such as Wundt’s physiological and experimental psychology (Wundt, 1873–1874), that focus on the experimental study of sensation and perception and reaction times, with little or no attention given to persons or lives. The history of experimental psychology (Boring, 1929/1950; Hearst, 1979) follows the application of experimental methods from sensation and perception, to memory, to animal learning, to motivation, to cognitive science, to social psychology, to experimental psychopathology, and so on (Hearst, 1979).

One view is that experimental methods would spread and eventually be able to more rigorously cover the whole array of topics in psychology (Hilgard, 1987). However, over the last century there have also been a variety of countermove-

ments, arguing that psychology needs a variety of alternative methods, from Dilthey's *Introduction to the Human Sciences* (1883/1988), to Freud's psychoanalytic case studies, to phenomenology, to the study of lives, to the dissident array of theorists concerned with the "whole person" (Hall & Lindzey, 1957). Cahan and White (1992) offer a brief survey of this set of "second psychology" or human science approaches and some of the tensions between natural science and human science visions of psychology.

The study of individual lives has not necessarily triumphed within psychology, but neither has it disappeared. It has evolved and reappeared in many different forms, and the study of lives has been actively growing in recent decades. At its best, this *Handbook of Psychobiography* could help organize and advance the psychological study of lives, as the *Handbook of Experimental Psychology* (Stevens, 1951) and the *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Lindzey, 1954) did for their areas.

This chapter is not an exhaustive history of relations between psychology and the study of lives. Rather, it discusses encounters that the study of lives has had with psychoanalysis, personality psychology, and historical science.

It seems to many that psychology ought to have something to do with the study of individuals, but this goal sometimes clashes with evolving conceptions of what counts as scientific. As Wundt said about William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), "It is literature, it is beautiful, but it is not psychology" (Fancher, 1979, p. 128). For more than a century, there have been worries about how the study of lives relates to science. Freud remarked that, even though trained as a neuropathologist, it still struck him "as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science" (Breuer & Freud, 1895/1955, p. 160). He consoled himself, however, with the thought that this came not from any preferences of his own, but was required by the subject matter (p. 160).

There is a long history of putting down or critiquing the study of individual cases. Lundberg (1926), for example, said that "(1) The case method is not in itself a scientific method at all, but merely the first step in the scientific method;

(2) individual cases become of scientific significance only when classified and summarized in such form as to reveal uniformities, types and patterns of behavior; (3) the statistical method is the best, if not the only method of classifying and summarizing large numbers of cases" (p. 61).

One of the most widely used methodology texts is Campbell and Stanley's *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research* (1963), which asserts that "one-shot" case studies

have such a total absence of control as to be of almost no scientific value. . . . Such studies often involve tedious collection of specific detail, careful observation, testing and the like, and in such instances involve the error of *misplaced precision*. . . . It seems well-nigh unethical at the present time to allow, as a thesis or dissertation in education, case studies of this nature i.e. involving a single group observed at one time only. (pp. 6–7)

This book has had tremendous influence (Shadish et al., 2003), and been drawn on in many later textbooks. What is less known, however, is that Campbell (1975) later retracted this "earlier dogmatic disparagement of case studies" (p. 191).

It seems we need better ways of thinking about the role of case studies throughout the scientific enterprise, from initial impressions and interpretations of cases, through theory building interacting with quantitative and experimental research, and back to reinterpreting and intervening with individual cases in their social, cultural, and historical contexts. Do narrative accounts of lives "lack the serious stamp of science"? They may lack quantification and experimental control, but are these the only forms that scientific rigor can take?

My argument in this chapter, in a nutshell, is as follows. Lee Cronbach (1957) argued that there are two disciplines of scientific psychology, correlational and experimental, with the possibility of integrating them through studying person—situation interactions (Cronbach, 1975). In this chapter I argue that there is also at least a third discipline of scientific psychology, namely, historical-interpretive psychology. Historical-

interpretive psychology employing narrative methods is used in clinical case studies, in psychobiography, and in the study of lives in particular social, cultural, and historical contexts. “Historical science,” or the study of particular contingent sequences of events and processes, as developed by Stephen Jay Gould (1986), can help clarify the objectives and methods of the study of lives and their place in scientific psychology.

It is a mistake, even a “misinterpretation,” to dismiss the case study as nothing more than “observing a single unit at a single point in time” (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Ideally, there can be a whole history of accounts and interpretations of individual lives, with the collection of additional evidence, employment of new theory and research, critical evaluation of earlier accounts, and progress toward more adequate accounts, explanations, and interpretations (Runyan, 1988b). Studying and interpreting individual lives is not just a “one-shot” affair but can involve “quasi-judicial” procedures, analogous to procedures in courts of law, where people with different interests and different evidence argue for different conclusions. One example is the history of Freud biographies, from a classic early sympathetic biography by Ernest Jones (1953–57), to a more critical comparative historical analysis (Ellenberger, 1970), to more detailed biographical information about Freud and his followers (Roazen, 1975), to an enormous number of intellectually and politically charged alternative accounts of Freud and his work. Consider also the history of Darwin biographies, or the history of biographies of William James. The study of lives has intellectual challenges to deal with, but being limited to “one-shot” case studies is not high on the list. The history of reconceptualizing, recontextualizing, and reinterpreting is central in the psychological study of lives. As a method, it can be seen more clearly as scientific when compared with other “historical sciences” (Gould, 2002) such as evolutionary biology, archaeology, or historical geology.

When Henry A. Murray (1893–1988) came up for tenure at Harvard in 1936, with the manuscript for *Explorations in Personality* partially available, although not yet finished, one of Murray’s supporters, Gordon Allport, argued

that Murray was the intellectual heir of William James and important to the development of a humanistically oriented psychology at Harvard (Triplet, 1983, p. 252). Another committee member, neuropsychologist Karl Lashley (1890–1958), strongly opposed the appointment, arguing that William James had done “more harm to psychology than any man that ever lived” and threatened to resign if Murray was given tenure (Robinson, 1992, p. 225). He saw Murray’s as a case in which “the conflict between the older humanistic and philosophical psychology” (Murray) was in tension with “the attempt to evolve a more exact science through an objective and biological approach” (Lashley) (Robinson, 1992, p. 226). The tenure vote was split three votes to three, and to resolve the impasse Boring proposed that Murray be given two five-year nontenured appointments, which was done. By 1946, though, the department had split into two different groups, psychology (experimental) and social relations (social and clinical psychology with sociology and social anthropology).

Murray’s two five-year appointments would have ended in 1947. In June 1945, Murray resigned from Harvard University. Behind the scenes, he was involved in formation of the new Social Relations department which began in 1946. In 1948, Murray published *Assessment of Men* (1948) on the Office of Strategic Services assessment program he had headed, and co-edited *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture* (Kluckhohn and Murray, 1948). He returned to his earlier biographical work on Melville, and published a 90-page Introduction (plus 75 pages of explanatory notes) to Melville’s *Pierre* (Murray, 1949). In 1948, Murray returned to Harvard as a lecturer in Social Relations, with an appointment as full professor in 1950, until his retirement in 1962.

The tension between natural science and human science conceptions of psychology has not gone away. When I was in graduate school in clinical psychology and public practice at Harvard from 1969 through 1975, I was told by many that my interest in individual life histories was clearly *not* scientific. One professor said in response to my dissertation proposal on the study of life histories, “You may think you’re flying to the moon, but instead, you’re flying to

the garbage dump.” David McClelland, another professor, objected to my interests in conceptual and methodological issues in the study of individual lives and wrote me a letter on May 25, 1971, the end of my second year in graduate school, saying that these philosophical interests were not suited to the program. “So, I would urge you strongly to leave Harvard before you waste more time here, your time and our time.” I declined the offer (Runyan, 2003). I assembled a more sympathetic dissertation committee, received some moral and intellectual support from Henry A. Murray and Robert W. White, both retired, and did a dissertation on “Life Histories: A Field of Inquiry and a Framework for Intervention” (Runyan, 1975). This was followed by work on methodological and conceptual issues in the study of lives (Runyan, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1988a, 1988b, 1994, 1997, 2002, 2003).

Conflicting views about the study of individual lives have not disappeared. In chapter 1 of this volume, the editor, William Todd Schultz, describes his experience as an undergraduate at Lewis and Clark College, where he received his bachelor of arts degree in 1985. His professors there ruled out research not deemed “empirical,” interpreted to mean quantitative or experimental, with qualitative theses not allowed.

As a graduate student at the University of California at Davis, he was able to get a psychobiographical dissertation approved, but it was a struggle. He was supported by Alan C. Elms, a major contributor to psychobiography (Elms, 1976, 1981, 1994). As reported by Elms, the psychology department at Davis required that dissertations be based on empirical research, interpreted as quantitative or nomothetic research. Elms argued that, according to standard dictionary definitions, “empirical” meant “related to facts or experiences . . . based on factual investigation” (Elms, 1994, p. 242) and that psychobiography involved painstaking factual research. “There is no inherent difference between the many items of biographical fact collected about one individual in a life-historical study and the few facts collected about each of many individuals in the standard sort of ‘empirical’ psychological research” (p. 243). The department approved two dissertation committees

for psychobiographical dissertations, for Eva Schepeler in 1990 and William Schultz in 1992. Part of Schepeler’s dissertation was published in 1993 as “Jean Piaget’s Experiences on the Couch: Some Clues to a Mystery” in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, and William Todd Schultz’s 1992 dissertation was titled “A Psychobiographical Inquiry into the Life, Mind, and Creative Work of James Agee.” Portions of Schultz’s dissertation were published in *American Imago* (1999) and *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* (1996), and he went on to edit this volume. Other psychobiographical dissertations have subsequently been approved at UC Davis for Kate Isaacson and Anna Song, two contributors to this volume. (I am serving as an outside member for Kate Isaacson’s psychobiographical dissertation on John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth.) With changing patterns of support and opposition, work in the study of individual lives has continued throughout the history of psychology. William James wrote *Principles of Psychology* (1890), reviewing and critically evaluating work in experimental and general psychology, but he also wrote *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902), which relied largely on autobiographical accounts of religious experience. G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924) in his two-volume work on *Adolescence* (1904) made extensive use of adolescent autobiographies. Edwin G. Boring in *A History of Experimental Psychology* (1929/1950) provided numerous biographical portraits, and Boring was the force behind the throne in starting the series *A History of Psychology in Autobiography*, beginning with the first volume in 1930 edited by Carl Murchison, with volume 8 appearing in 1989 (vols. 6–8 ed. by Gardner Lindzey). In *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science* (1942), Allport reviews a number of these early studies, dividing them into uncritical and critical uses of personal documents.

In this chapter, I do not attempt an exhaustive history of the evolving relationships between the study of lives and the discipline of psychology, but try instead to conceptualize the interaction in a way that may be useful for future work in the field. The following section briefly discusses relationships between psychoanalysis and psychobiography, while the third section

examines the complex and changing relationships between personality psychology and the study of lives. The fourth section discusses potential contributions of “historical science” to the study of lives, while in the Conclusion, I review several main ideas about relations of the study of lives to the goals and methods of psychology.

This chapter is not a comprehensive review of the field, but rather, a review by one person, in one location, at one point in time. It is both informed by and limited by my own particular encounters with the study of lives and is thus only one view of psychology and the study of lives. Useful chapters could also be written about relations of the study of lives with history, sociology, anthropology, political science, or literature. This chapter needs to be complemented by the views of many others.

Several stages in my thinking which have shaped the particularities of this chapter include a doctoral dissertation seeking to conceptualize the study of life histories as a field of inquiry (1975), an article on the life course as a theoretical orientation (1978), and then a book on methodological and conceptual issues in psychobiography and the study of lives (1982). A next step was analyzing what constitutes “progress” in psychobiography, and the processes through which it can occur (1988b). This was accompanied by a book on the relations of psychology and historical interpretation, with a chapter on alternatives to psychoanalytic psychobiography, and a chapter on reconceptualizing relationships between history and psychology, with substantive examples from psychohistorical research on Nazi Germany (1988a). Another line of work attempted to clarify the place of the study of lives in relation to personality psychology (Runyan, 1997).

After the publication of Robinson’s *Love’s Story Told: A Life of Henry A. Murray* (1992), I was forced to come to terms intellectually and emotionally with a different interpretation of Murray (Runyan, 1994). Lawrence Friedman’s biography of Erikson (1999), along with Sue Erikson Bloland’s article on her father (1999), led me to re-interpret Erik Erikson, and I helped organize a symposium on Erikson with Friedman, Paul Roazen, and Sue Bloland at the Harvard

Graduate School of Education on February 10, 2000. A complementary line of work was on personal and intellectual autobiography (2002, 2003). Since 1995, I have been doing archival research on relations between the life and work of several natural science and human science psychologists at Harvard, while learning much about the history of psychology from Sheldon H. White (Runyan, 2005). While not yet published, parts of this archival research will be drawn on in this chapter. The general point here is that there are evolving conceptions of psychobiography and the study of lives not only by decades in the field as a whole, but in smaller ways, within each person engaged in making their path through the field. Readers may, I hope, find this chapter useful in their own evolving understandings of psychobiography and the study of lives.

### Psychoanalysis and Psychobiography

Psychobiography is often dated as beginning with Freud’s *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910/1957). This was preceded by Freud’s work on *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s “Gadiva”* (Freud, 1907/1959) and followed by shorter pieces on Goethe and Dostoevsky as well as Freud’s book *Moses and Monotheism* (1939/1964). There were a number of other early psychoanalytic psychobiographies, such as several by Isidor Sadger (1908, 1909), and analyses of Shakespeare as revealed through Hamlet (Jones, 1910), Richard Wagner (Graf, 1911), the artist Giovanni Segantini (Abraham, 1912/1935), Amenhotep IV (Abraham, 1912/1935), Martin Luther (Smith, 1913), and Socrates (Karpas, 1915). Reviews of early psychoanalytic psychobiography are provided by Dooley (1916) in “Psychoanalytic Studies of Genius,” Barnes (1919), Fearing (1927) and Barnes’s *Psychology and History* (1925). However, Freud’s study of Leonardo had more influence and received substantially more attention than any of these other efforts (Elms, 1994; Collins, 1997), while his work on *Moses and Monotheism* has received many reinterpretations in recent years (Bernstein, 1998; Yerushalmi, 1991). More details on the history

of psychoanalytic psychobiography and psychohistory are provided in Elms (2003), Mack (1971), and Runyan (1982, 1988a).

Within psychoanalysis, many turned away from Freud's early drive theories, focusing instead on the role of the ego, object relations, and countertransference (Loewenberg, 1988). A recent special issue of the *Annual of Psychoanalysis* centers on psychoanalysis and history (Winer & Anderson, 2003). Co-editor James Anderson notes that psychoanalysts best known as psychobiographers remain Freud and Erik Erikson but that current psychoanalysts tend to rely more on other theorists in their clinical work (p. 79). Anderson (2003) reviews the relevance for psychobiography of such recent psychoanalytic theorists as Donald Winnicott (1896–1971), Otto Kernberg (1928–), and Heinz Kohut (1913–1981). The volume also includes autobiographical chapters by several writers in the field of psychoanalysis and biography, including Moraitis (2003), Runyan (2003), and Strozier (2003).

### Personality Psychology and the Study of Lives

There is a “puzzling history” of relationships between personality psychology and the study of individual lives:

Most simply, the study of individual persons and lives was one of the central concerns and motivating agendas for founders of the field such as Gordon Allport (1937) and Henry Murray (1938), but was then lost sight of in the 1950s and 1960s . . . as far greater attention was given to psychometric concerns and the experimental study of particular processes. (Runyan, 1997, p. 41)

There were exceptions, such as the work of Robert White (1952) or Erik Erikson (1958) on the study of individual lives, but the emphasis seemed more on aggregate psychometric or experimental work.

Major texts of the period gave relatively little attention to the study of individual lives. Hall and Lindzey's *Theories of Personality* (1957),

which eventually sold more than 700,000 copies, argues that the fruitfulness of personality theories “is to be judged primarily by how effectively they serve as a spur to research” (p. 27). A model for this book was Hilgard's *Theories of Learning* (1948), which outlines major theories of learning and the empirical research related to each of them. Mischel's *Personality and Assessment* (1968) argues for the superiority of experimentally based social learning theories over trait and psychodynamic approaches for the prediction and modification of behavior. It is noteworthy that an improved understanding of individual persons or lives was not emphasized in either of these influential books, or in a number of other personality texts of the time.

I speculated that the move away from the study of lives might be due to

changing intellectual fashions about what it means to “be scientific,” personal and temperamental preferences for particular kinds of research, the kinds of graduate students attracted to the field in the growing competition with clinical psychology after World War II, patterns of funding and grant support, and institutional processes determining who was or was not hired and promoted at Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Berkeley, and other major universities around the country. (Runyan, 1997, p. 42)

Since then, Barenbaum and Winter have conducted two useful reviews of the history of personality psychology, one a general history of personality psychology (Winter & Barenbaum, 1999), and the other, particularly relevant for present purposes, on the history of ambivalence toward case studies in psychology (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003). Their second review opens with a quote from R.S. Woodworth, long-term professor of psychology at Columbia University and author of the best-selling psychology textbook for 25 years, first published in 1921. In the revised edition of *Psychology* (1929), Woodworth begins with a life history of a woman novelist, Gene Stratton-Porter. He says he gave attention to the case history method in this introduction “not because it is the preferred

method in psychology, for it is the least rather than the most preferred, but because it can give us what we want at the outset, a bird's-eye view of the field, with some indications of the topics that are deserving of closer examination" (p. 19).

It may not be a surprise that, as the author of a widely selling text on *Experimental Psychology* (1938), Woodworth thinks of the case history as the "least preferred" method. What was a surprise, though, when I went back to look at the book, is that the text defines psychology as the study of individuals; as the "scientific study of the activities of the individual . . . psychology takes the individual as a whole, and describes his activities" (p. 3). Who would have guessed? Such a definition is most congenial to personologists, but not one I would have associated with Woodworth. (The history of psychology can be full of surprises.) In my own view, as discussed below, the study of individuals is one of the four objectives of personality psychology, but many conceptions of psychology do not have the study of individuals as even one of the stated objectives of the field.

Personality as an area of psychology was formulated at least in part by Gordon Allport (1937) and Henry A. Murray (1938), both professors at Harvard. How did Allport initially conceive the field? As an undergraduate at Oberlin College, I took a summer course at Western Reserve University in 1967, in which the official text was Allport's *Pattern and Growth in Personality* (1961), a revision of his groundbreaking *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* (1937). I found the book a mix of interesting topics, with impressive scholarship, but frustratingly elusive or noncommittal in some ways about Allport's particular beliefs or experiences. That summer, after my sophomore year, I was more drawn to Hall and Lindzey's *Theories of Personality* (1957), with its contending theoretical orientations and clearer links to empirical research.

I did not purchase my own copy of Allport (1937) until December 11, 1980 (the sales slip is still taped inside, in an effort to document historical particularities). Now, I find much of it of interest, particularly in relation to the current topic of relations between personality psychology and the study of individual lives. One passage caught my eye, providing a clearer sense

than I'd had before of Allport's view of relations between psychoanalysis and personality psychology. Allport seems to be arguing that his approach to personality psychology is a broader and more eclectic approach to personality than is psychoanalysis. In a footnote Allport says, "Devotees of psychoanalysis will no doubt be distressed to find here so tardy and so incomplete a review of the contributions of Freud and his many disciples, both orthodox and dissident" (p. 181). Allport then gives three reasons why his account of psychoanalysis is "so critical and so brief": that psychoanalytic concepts are drawn from neurotic and pathological material, that the parts valid for normal personality are incorporated elsewhere in the book, and that the story of psychoanalysis is too well known to need another exposition. Allport says that Franz Alexander's *The Psychoanalysis of the Total Personality* (1930)

wrongly implies that psychoanalysis is equipped to deal with the *whole* of personality. The truth is that it deals only with a fraction of the phenomena encountered in a comprehensive study of the subject. But in spite of its narrowness the bulk of all literature on the psychology of personality is written from this one point of view. It is time the story be told in more eclectic terms! (p. 181)

In short, Allport is objecting to psychoanalysis because it is too exclusively based on psychopathology, because the bulk of all literature on personality is written from this psychodynamic perspective, and because a more eclectic view is needed. In addition to the intellectual side of this, there may be personal reasons for Allport's demurrals, such as his "traumatic" encounter with Freud in 1920 (see Elms, 1994, chap. 5 this vol.; Barenbaum, chap. 16 this vol.).

What was the place of the study of individual lives in Allport's view of personality psychology? And how did it relate to his interests in individuality? Allport starts his book with the sentence, "The outstanding characteristic of man is his individuality" (1937, p. 3). What did Allport mean by individuality? Individuality in temperament? In cultural interests? In biological constitution? In personal experiences? In

values and strivings? He is concerned with how scientists can study this individuality with a combination of nomothetic and idiographic methods.

Allport outlines in a chart fifty-two different methods for studying personality (p. 370). In this chart, the methods of psychoanalysis or of “depth analysis,” including psychiatric interview, free associations, dream analysis, and analysis of fantasies, are only six of the fifty-two different methods. Methods are divided into fourteen groups, with “depth analysis” as only one of the fourteen groups, the others including studies of cultural setting, physical records, social records, personal records, expressive movement, rating, standardized tests, statistical analysis, miniature life situations, laboratory experiments, prediction, ideal types, and synthetic methods.

One of these synthetic methods was the “case study,” which Allport described as the “most revealing method of all” (Barenbaum, 1997). For a variety of reasons, however, Allport only published one long case study, *Letters From Jenny* (1965), and an autobiographical chapter (1967). After his autobiographical chapter was published, Allport wrote to Boring that “I think Carl Rogers comes through most clearly—no doubt because of his long practice in disclosing himself to his clients. By comparison, I find myself rigid and prosaic” (Nicholson, 2003, p. 181). I think Rogers’ emphasis on individual subjective experience was meaningful to Allport, and at least one of the important meanings of individuality. In Allport’s teaching file, I remember a quote along these lines: “Rogers practices what Allport preaches.” It is not clear to me yet whether this is a statement Allport had heard or had composed himself.

Although drawn to the study of individuality, Allport had reservations about publishing case studies himself, or about encouraging doctoral students to do them as dissertations. Bertram Cohler, who received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1967, reported that Allport cautioned him that “idiography was no country for young men,” which Cohler interpreted as a statement about political realities, expressing some of Allport’s ambivalence about case studies (Cohler, 1993, p. 134). However, from looking at Allport’s papers in the Harvard Archives, I see that he frequently had students in his personality class do

psychobiographical papers or final projects. In his notes, he says he could ask them to apply any of the theories in Hall and Lindzey’s *Theories of Personality* (1957). Before the book was published, when he referred to it as Lindzey and Hall, he was distributing draft chapters to students and eliciting their critical feedback.

While Allport, with his chart of fifty-two methods, was aiming for a more eclectic approach than psychoanalysis, Murray was after something different. His project for *Explorations in Personality* (1938) was primarily about applying the more rigorous methods of academic psychology to some of the ideas of dynamic psychology, as well as developing his own conceptions of personality.

Robert White’s conception of the study of lives was influenced strongly by Henry Murray, but also by Gordon Allport. Even though he received his Ph.D. in 1937, while lecturing at Harvard in 1940 White attended Allport’s seminar titled “How Shall a Life History Be Written?” When White was appointed director of Harvard’s new clinical psychology program in 1946, arrangements were made by Allport, as Murray was not then at Harvard.

As I came to understand it more over the years, the study of lives had somewhat different meanings for Henry A. Murray and for Robert W. White. For Murray, “the life history of a single man” is a unit the discipline of psychology needs to deal with, and the study of lives overlapped more with a romantic project of including the deepest human experiences within psychology, such as those of Jung, Melville, himself, and others. As opposed to “peripheralists” concerned with an objective approach to sensation and perception and overt behavior, Murray finds himself more sympathetic to “centralists” who are “especially attracted to subjective facts of emotional or purposive significance; feelings, desires, intentions” with a “craving to know the inner nature of other persons as they know their own” (Murray, 1938, p. 8). In Murray’s view, academic psychologists were too concerned with the periphery of sensation and perception and not sufficiently attuned to the “driving forces which are basic to human nature” (1938, p. 341). As Murray charged in 1935 to the experimental psychologists of his time,



The truth which the informed are hesitant to reveal and the uninformed are amazed to discover is that academic psychology has contributed practically nothing to the knowledge of human nature. It has not only failed to bring to light the great, hauntingly recurrent problems, but it has no intention, one is shocked to realize, of attempting to investigate them. Indeed—and this is the cream of a wry jest—an unconcerned detachment from the natural history of ordinary mortals has become a source of pride to many psychologists. (Murray, 1935/1981, p. 339)

For Robert White, who found his home within Murray's vision of psychology yet had a different temperament and different priorities, the study of lives was something else. It overlapped more with the study of normal growth and development (White, 1952, 1972), the understanding of competencies and effective adaptation, the value of lives for teaching abnormal psychology and personality psychology (White, 1948/1964, 1974), and the use of life history interviewing as a way of relating personally with students and others. For White, "[t]he study of personality includes the time dimension and is most perfectly represented in the study of whole lives in all their individuality" (White, 1972, p. 2).

White is known for early contributions to the study of lives as in his case of "Earnst" in *Explorations in Personality* (Murray, 1938), with papers titled "The Personality of Joseph Kidd" (1943), and for five memorable case histories in chapter 2 of *The Abnormal Personality* (1948/1964). This was followed by books on *Lives in Progress* (1952), *Opinions and Personality* (1956), *The Study of Lives* (1963) and *The Enterprize of Living* (1972), all of which contain conceptions and examples of the study of lives. White's (1987) memoir allows a glimpse of an earlier, more personal engagement with the study of lives.

White (1904–2001) was originally trained with a B.A. degree (1925) and an M.A. in history (1926) from Harvard. He planned to become a teacher of cultural and intellectual history. In a first teaching job as an instructor in history at the University of Maine (1926–

1928), he found himself not living up to his ideal of having a "helpful and understanding relation with students. Experience began to show that I did not know how to bring about such relations" (White, 1987, p. 1). With a shy and silent student from a poor family, with a homesick freshman who failed to return to school, and with a disruptive student he put down in class, White felt that his relations were ineffective or superficial. "Comfortably at home as I was with books, ideas, and music, I was not in good touch with the people around me. Suddenly I experienced a powerful need to understand better my students and my fellow teachers, not to mention myself" (1987, p. 2).

A catalyst for these desires to understand people better psychologically was the arrival in Maine of Donald MacKinnon (1903–1987), instructor in psychology who had begun graduate school at Harvard with Henry A. Murray. White admired MacKinnon's "clear mind, appropriate confidence, and willingness to set forth his convictions" as well as "the ease with which he seemed to size other people up" (1987, p. 2). White wondered "whether these qualities were the product of scientific training and graduate study in psychology. In retrospect I offer this idea as the surest proof that my thinking was fuzzy, but I more than half believed it" (1987, p. 2). As White later said, Donald MacKinnon converted him "from the history of nations to the history of individual lives" (White, 1972, p. v).

In a chapter titled "A Humanist Strays into Psychology," White (1987) speaks of the barrenness of mainstream experimental psychology for someone with his interests. The experimental tradition of Wundt and Ebbinghaus, as taught by Edwin G. Boring, chairman of the Harvard Psychology department, left him cold. Two promising professors were Henry A. Murray at the Harvard Psychological Clinic and Gordon Allport, who returned to Harvard from Dartmouth in 1930. "The straying humanist luckily found oases at the edges of the desert," White wrote (1987, p. 4).

After three years as an instructor in psychology at Rutgers (1930–1933), White returned to graduate school at Harvard in 1933. He had to choose between working with Allport or Murray, ultimately selecting the latter's research program,

which he long felt was the right one. White received his Ph.D. in 1937 with a dissertation titled “Experimental Evidence for a Dynamic Theory of Hypnosis” and published six journal articles on hypnosis from 1937 through 1942. (Murray had also investigated the subject of hypnosis.) In the end, however, White did not find hypnosis a congenial topic and stopped working with it in 1938.

While doing his dissertation on hypnosis, White was also working with the group at the Harvard Psychological Clinic on what became *Explorations in Personality* (Murray, 1938), a task that he found far more engaging. White contributed the section on the “Hypnotic Test” (pp. 453–461), and he was the biographer of the one complete life history in the book in chapter 7, “Case History: Case of Earnst” (pp. 604–702).

How was this early project in the study of lives tradition conceptualized? The introduction to the chapter was written by Murray (pp. 604–615), while White was the “biographer” charged with the task of collecting the observations and test results of the subject and then fitting “them together as best he could into an interesting and understandable portrait.” Murray goes on to say, “A ‘portrait’ meant a ‘biography’, since the notion was accepted generally that the history of the personality *is* the personality” (p. 604).

Like hundreds of thousands of other students across the United States, I was introduced to abnormal psychology and to the broader field of clinical psychology through Robert White’s *The Abnormal Personality* (1948/1964). White had drawn on his interests in history and in the study of lives by providing two introductory chapters, first a historical introduction and then a “clinical introduction,” consisting of five case histories in “realistic vividness.” He raised the questions: “What does it mean to be psychologically disordered? How does it feel and how does it express itself in behavior? What are the symptoms? What sense can be made out of a disorder, and how can its causes be untangled?” (1964, p. 50).

In the second chapter, White provides five examples of “disordered personalities”: Joseph Kidd, “a case of adolescent maladjustment with spontaneous recovery” (p. 52); Pearson Brack,

a bombardier in World War II suffering neurosis from combat stress; Bert Whippley, a career criminal who seemed to want to get arrested; L. Percy King, a psychotic with long-standing paranoid delusions who had been a state hospital patient for 28 years; and Martha Ottenby, a 56-year-old woman struck two years before with Pick’s disease, a rare degenerative brain disorder. White writes that when psychological disorders occur in people, “we shall get a fairer impression of the problems if we start with case histories rather than with lists of symptoms or theoretical formulations” (p. 50). He asks that readers keep these cases in mind, as they read the later chapters of the book about particular disorders.

After the great popularity of White (1948/1964), which eventually sold more than 350,000 copies through its fifth edition (White & Watt, 1981), White considered a book on normal personality development, which became *Lives in Progress: A Study of the Natural Growth of Personality* (1952). The three lives discussed were those of Hartly Hale, physician and scientist; Joseph Kidd, businessman; and Joyce Kingsley, housewife and social worker. All had been students at Harvard or Radcliffe. In subsequent editions, White followed up their later development. The book was intended as a brief introduction to the whole field of personality, and these three case histories were used to “introduce and illustrate the general ideas” that make up a scientific account of personality.

The study of personality and the understanding of lives were conceived broadly, so *Lives in Progress* White (1952) includes discussions of “The Shaping of Lives by Social Forces” (chap. 4), “The Biological Roots of Personality” (chap. 6), and “The Psychodynamics of Development” (chap. 8; White, 1966). White’s professional affiliations at Harvard had included the Department of Psychology, the Psychological Clinic, and the Department of Social Relations. These three social structures may have helped him to attend to biological, psychodynamic, and social and cultural perspectives on the study of lives (White, 1966, p. iv).

I share White’s view that personality can be influenced by biological, psychological, and social and cultural factors. However, what are the relations between “personality” and “the study

of lives”? White, and Murray before him, often spoke as if they were the same thing. In my view, personalities are a part of, though not all of, life histories. I used to have debates about this with Murray, with me thinking that I’d won, and him probably thinking that he’d won, although sometimes it seemed to me he agreed with this distinction between personalities and life histories.

Murray and White sometimes say that “the history of the personality is the personality.” One can agree with that. However, the history of the personality is not the same as the life history. The life history is a larger unit of analysis. It includes the history of the person interacting with contingent social, cultural, and historical contexts. This can be a valuable complement, even a humanizing component, to the hard science side of personality which emphasizes biological factors in evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and genetic sources of personality.

Since the 1930s in the United States, the study of lives has been allied with personality psychology, as in the “personology” of Henry Murray, the study of lives of Robert White, Erik Erikson’s work in psychobiography, or Gordon Allport’s interest in how the psychological life history should be written. Personality psychology includes at least three different methodological traditions, the psychometric study of traits and individual differences, the experimental study of particular processes or classes of behavior, and the interpretive study of individual lives.

Mischel (1968) argued that experimental social learning approaches were superior to trait measurements or to psychoanalytic interpretation. This was followed by many psychologists stressing the virtues of person-situation interactionism. In recent years, there has been renewed emphasis in personality psychology on the measurement of personality, as with the five-factor theory (McCrae & Costa, 2003), while social psychologists often stress the value of experimental methods. The interpretive study of individual lives, however, too often falls by the wayside. Throughout the history of personality psychology, the study of individual lives has been regarded ambivalently and sometimes undervalued (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003). In this chapter, I focus on changing conceptions of psychobiography and the study of lives, while

arguing for the enduring value of historical-interpretive and historical science methods.

The personal and interpersonal story of the study of lives tradition is more complex than one might at first imagine. White’s memoir, *Seeking the Shape of Personality* (1987), gives a largely positive account of his relations with Murray and the clinic. However, as White said in interviews and correspondence with Jim Anderson (2000), his relations with Murray were different than and more complicated than most people imagined. After World War II, when Murray returned to Harvard, he asked White to resign his new position as director of Harvard’s clinical psychology program (Anderson, 2000) so that the position could be given to Don MacKinnon, one of Murray’s first doctoral students, who had also been head of the O.S.S. Assessment Center near Washington, D.C. during World War II. White refused, and this event affected the later course of their relationship. It did not, however, prevent White from editing the volume on *The Study of Lives* (1963) in honor of Murray’s seventieth birthday and writing an informative and sympathetic account of work at the Harvard Psychological Clinic (White, 1981). MacKinnon went on to found the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research at the University of California at Berkeley in 1949, where I showed up in 1975, finding the institute sympathetic to my interests in the study of lives, though I was then largely unaware of this complex web of associations.

While doing the research and theorizing, writing the papers, and relating to colleagues, participants may have only a partial knowledge of what is going on, and some of this may be inaccurate. When Henry Murray read Rodney Triplet’s 1983 dissertation, “Henry A. Murray and the Harvard Psychological Clinic, 1926–1938: A Struggle to Expand the Disciplinary Boundaries of Academic Psychology,” Triplet provided more details on Murray’s tenure meeting than had previously been known. I heard Murray say about Boring, who Triplet reported voted against him, “That son of a bitch. He told me he’d done as much as he could for me.” I found Murray the most charismatic and interesting psychologist I had ever met since encountering him early in graduate school in 1970. Forrest Robinson’s (1992) biography of Murray, though,

also revealed much about Murray's intellectual and personal life that I had not known and led me to understand more about his relations with Herman Melville, with Christiana Morgan, and with psychology. In reviewing the book, I had to rethink my relations to him and his work, parts of which are reflected in "Coming to Terms with the Life, Loves and Work of Henry A. Murray" (Runyan, 1994).

Even though I had talked with Robert White since 1969, read his publications and his memoir (1987), I did not understand the complexity of his relations to Murray until reading Jim Anderson's paper about White (1991/2000), as well as having a number of chances to talk with White during the last year of his life (2000–2001), conversations I hope to write about in a volume in honor of Robert White. This invitation to contribute a chapter on the history of psychobiography and the study of lives for this volume has also provided a welcome although demanding opportunity to reinterpret relations of the study of lives to the discipline of psychology. Every tradition in psychology can be understood in relation to its triple personal, social, and cultural contexts. In the following discussion, I'll say a little about the study of lives in relation to its personal contexts, with the somewhat different meanings that the study of lives had among founders of the tradition such as Murray, White, and Allport, down to a recent contributor to personology, Jerry S. Wiggins, with a little on myself and on William Todd Schultz in relation to Alan Elms along the way.

I'll try to provide glimpses of each of these individuals encountering the study of lives in relation to psychoanalysis, personality psychology, and historical science.

### A Historical Sketch of Personology

A useful sketch of the history of personology is provided in Wiggins (2003). He identified major contributions by decade, from the field's origins with Freud (1910) on up through the present. In Table 2.1, I have slightly modified Wiggins's chart, by adding White's *The Abnormal Personality* (1948/1964), which was more

widely read than Murray's *Assessment of Men* (1948), and by subtracting one of my own books, *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (Runyan, 1988a), which excellent though it may be, has not (at least not yet) had significant impact, though I do include a later chapter (Runyan, 1997). I added a number of other works that I see as significant contributions to the study of lives, such as those of Boring and Lindzey (1967), Meehl (1973), and several contributions since 2000, including this Handbook.

Jerry Wiggins is best known through his landmark volume *Personality and Prediction: Principles of Personality Assessment* (1973). He also co-authored a scholarly personality textbook (Wiggins et al., 1971) and edited *The Five-Factor Model of Personality* (1996).

How, one may ask, did Wiggins manage to move from a major psychometric text, a general personality text (with little attention to the study of lives), and a book on the five factor model, to doing a history of "personology" as one of five major *Paradigms of Personality Assessment* (Wiggins, 2003)? Is Wiggins's path of including the study of individual lives one that could be followed by others? In this book, Wiggins has experts apply five different approaches to personality assessment to the same subject, a flamboyant Native-American woman lawyer who grew up in an abusive family and spent time in prison yet managed to get through an Ivy League college, obtain a law degree, and become a successful defense lawyer in Arizona. How did Wiggins come to outline the history of personology and to apply five major approaches to the same person, things rarely done by personologists themselves? I don't know the whole story, but a few fragments are provided below. Wiggins was born in 1931, attended college at American University in Washington, D.C., and received a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Indiana University in 1956. He taught at Stanford from 1957 through 1962, at the University of Illinois from 1962 through 1973, and from 1973 to retirement taught at the University of British Columbia.

Wiggins (2003) includes in his book a short section about his personal experiences with each of the five paradigms (pp. 16–22). His best-known ties are with the multivariate paradigm

Table 2.1 Historical Development Of The Personological Tradition  
(adapted from Wiggins, 2003)

ORIGINS	Freud (1910) <i>Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood</i>
1930s	Dollard (1935) <i>Criteria for the Life History</i> Allport (1937) <i>Personality: A Psychological Interpretation</i> Murray (1938) <i>Explorations in Personality</i>
1940s	Allport (1942) <i>The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science</i> White (1948) <i>The Abnormal Personality</i> ; Murray (1948) <i>Assessment of Men</i>
1950s	Erikson (1958) <i>Young Man Luther</i> White (1952) <i>Lives in Progress</i>
1960s	Boring, Edwin G. & Lindzey, G. (eds.) (1967) <i>A History of Psychology in Autobiography</i> , Vol. 5 (Allport, Murphy, Murray, Rogers, Skinner) Erikson (1969) <i>Gandhi's Truth</i>
1970s	Block (1971) <i>Lives Through Time</i> Meehl (1973) "Why I Do Not Attend Case Conferences" Levinson (1978) <i>The Seasons of a Man's Life</i>
1980s	Runyan (1982) <i>Life Histories and Psychobiography</i> McAdams & Ochberg (Eds) (1988) <i>Psychobiography &amp; Life Narratives</i>
1990s	Alexander (1990) <i>Personology: Method and Content in Personality Assessment and Psychobiography</i> Elms (1994) <i>Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology</i> Runyan (1997) "Studying Lives: Psychobiography and the Conceptual Structure of Personality Psychology"
2000–	McAdams, <i>The Person</i> , 3rd ed, (2001) Barenbaum & Winter (2003) "Personality" (ambivalence toward case studies) Wiggins (2003) <i>Paradigms of Personality Assessment</i> (5 paradigms applied to a single life) Schultz, W.T. (2005) this <i>Handbook of Psychobiography</i>

(Wiggins, 1973). When he moved from Stanford to the University of Illinois in 1962, he says he was on his way "to become a full-fledged member of the multivariate paradigm" (p. 20). This was to be "baptism by fire," though, as one of his first graduate teaching assignments was a lecture to the measurement section of the department. His fellow contributors to this section "included such superstars" as Raymond Cattell, Lee Cronbach, and Lloyd Humphreys. In a chapter on personality structure for the *Annual Review of Psychology* (Wiggins, 1968), he attempted to summarize Raymond Cattell's work, with substantial help from Cattell. Another influence was Donald Fiske, visiting at the University of British Columbia and co-teaching a graduate course on personality assessment, using Wiggins (1973) and Fiske's *Measuring The Concepts of Personality* (1971). Wiggins also has a 45-year association with Lewis R. Goldberg, and the Oregon Research Institute with Goldberg was a "home away from home." He also became friends with Paul Costa, who was the best man at his wedding to Krista Trobst.

Wiggins read first Freud in high school, "probably because of his emphasis on sex" (2003, p. 17). In his first year in college at American University, Wiggins wrote a term paper on "Hamlet and Oedipus," which he now sees as part of the personological paradigm. Over the Christmas break, he was made to feel welcome at the Library of Congress while researching this topic. When Lawrence Olivier's film on Hamlet appeared, he was able to impress a young lady by talking about its "Oedipal implications." By then, Wiggins said he often referred to James Agee's articles on film in *Partisan Review* and generally behaved "as an obnoxious teenage 'intellectual'" (p. 17). He maintained an interest in psychoanalysis while in a behaviorist graduate program at Indiana University, and when he became a faculty member at Stanford, he found senior figures such as Robert Sears and Ernest Hilgard had respect for it, and he was able to get funds for a brief psychoanalysis with a talented ego psychologist.

In encounters with the personological paradigm, Wiggins says he used Dan McAdams's

1990 personality text, *The Person*, to reorganize his undergraduate course along a personological orientation, and that students loved the book. McAdams also invited Wiggins to contribute an interpersonal perspective to a psychobiographical case in the *Journal of Personality* (Wiggins, 1997). Wiggins also says that I helped him to learn about life histories and psychobiographies and encouraged him to include his personal experiences with the different paradigms in this book.

I am flattered that Wiggins mentioned me as an influence, because his 1973 book *Personality and Prediction: Principles of Personality Assessment* (1973) was such a formative influence on my understanding of personality assessment. I remember finding the book in 1973, with its unusual red fish scale cover with gold lettering, in a bookstore in Amherst. With its rigorous analysis of the uses of personality assessment for predicting socially relevant behavior, including a historical overview of five American “milestone” studies in assessment, it introduced a new field to me. We first met when Wiggins was a visiting scholar at the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research at UC Berkeley in the late 1970s. We often ran into each other at later conventions of the American Psychological Association, and I’d hear about his book in progress as well as about his personal encounters with each of the different traditions. He was reluctant to include them in the book—“Who would be interested?”—but I encouraged him to include the stories as they were both humanly interesting and they illustrate the personal processes through which we are each exposed to different traditions. I wasn’t sure what he’d decided but was delighted to see in the published book that he included a number of these encounters. If I had an influence on getting such an accomplished personality psychologist interested in the study of lives, and to integrate it into his understanding of the field, that’s a worthy contribution.

### The Study of Lives in Relation to Other Approaches in Personality Psychology

Once “personology” or the study of lives is again included as a topic within personality psychol-

ogy, how to understand its relationships with quantitative and experimental research in the field? Personality texts can be organized around general theories of personality (Hall & Lindzey, 1957), around general conceptual issues (Allport, 1937, 1961), around empirical research on substantive topics, around applications, or around various combinations of these approaches (e.g., Mischel, et al., 2004).

I’d like to suggest an alternative way of conceptualizing the structure of personality psychology, one that highlights the ways that theory and research relate to the study of individual lives. The central idea is that personality psychology is concerned with four major tasks or objectives: (1) developing general theories of personality, (2) studying individual and group differences, (3) analyzing specific processes and classes of behavior or experience, and (4) understanding individual persons or lives.

The top level of Table 2.2 outlines major theoretical orientations in personality psychology, including psychoanalysis starting around 1900, behaviorism beginning around 1913, culture and personality in the 1930s, psychometric approaches to personality in the 1950s, humanistic psychology in the 1960s, and cognitive in the 1970s.

The second level on individual and group differences has subheadings referring to major individual differences such as intelligence, types of psychopathology, personality traits, dimensions, and types, with a number of significant persons associated with each of these traditions. The bottom category in the second level is that of group differences, as by gender, age, race, class, culture, or historical periods. As I see it now, the study of individual differences may rely significantly on psychometric methods, while the study of group differences may rely not just on testing but more heavily on social, cultural, and historical analysis.

The third level includes specific processes and classes of behavior, with examples such as “dreams, slips, jokes, anxiety,” all topics investigated by Freud; phobias, as investigated by behaviorists; honesty, researched by Hartshorne and May (1928); frustration and aggression, as studied at Yale in the 1930s; achievement motivation, as studied by David McClelland and col-

Table 2.2 The Study of Lives in Relation to Four Levels of Analysis in Psychology  
(items placed approximately by their historical time)

	1900		1940		1980
Level 1 GENERAL THEORY	Psychoanalysis	Behaviorism	Psychometric Culture & Personality	Humanistic	Cognitive Behavior Genetics
Level 2 INDIVIDUAL & GROUP DIFFERENCES					
<i>Intelligence:</i>	Binet	Terman	Wechsler		H. Gardner
<i>Psychopathology:</i>	Kraepelin		DSM I		DSM III
<i>Traits/Types</i>					
<i>Dimensions:</i>		Introversion/Extraversion	Murray MMPI	Meehl	Cattell Eysenck Big Five
<i>Group Differences:</i> (gender, age, race, class, sexuality, culture, historical period, etc.)					
Level 3 SPECIFIC PROCESSES & CLASSES OF BEHAVIOR	dreams slips jokes anxiety	honesty  phobias	achievement motivation frustration & aggression sex anti-semitism	creativity emotions	social cognition stress & coping delay of gratification goal seeking suicide
Level 4 PERSONS AND LIVES					
<i>Autobiographical Understanding:</i>	Psychological theorists, researchers, therapists, clients (Freud, Jung, Horney, Skinner, Rogers et al.)				
<i>Clinical Patients:</i>	Freud's case studies Dora, Little Hans, Rat Man			Case Studies in Behavior Mod	DSM Casebook
<i>Research Subjects:</i>			Earnst	Lives in Progress	Letters from Jenny
<i>Biographical Figures:</i>	Leonardo da Vinci Moses & Monotheism	The Early Mental Traits of 300 geniuses Melville	Hitler Stalin Woodrow Wilson	Young Man Luther Gandhi's Truth	Van Gogh Emily Dickinson Henry James Dostoevsky

leagues; delay of gratification, as studied by Mischel; and so on.

The bottom level of persons and lives has the four subcategories of autobiographical understanding, clinical patients, research subjects, and biographical figures, with selected examples of each of these four kinds of work in the study of lives.

The top row of level 4, autobiographical understanding, has been pursued by psychological theorists, researchers, therapists, clients, and developing persons. For example, there is substantial research on the self-understandings of theorists such as Freud, Jung, Helene Deutsch,

Karen Horney, Carl Rogers, B.F. Skinner, and others and how this may be related to their theories of personality (Stolorow & Atwood, 1979; Demorest, 2005).

To provide an illustration of the self-understanding of therapists, consider *How Therapists Change: Personal and Professional Reflections* (Goldfried, 2001). This volume contains chapters by a number of therapists associated with the Society for the Exploration of Psychotherapy Integration on their changing theoretical orientations and clinical approaches, sometimes related to personal experiences. There are autobiographical chapters by Paul Wachtel,

Marvin Goldfried, Morris Eagle, Lorna Benjamin, George Stricker, Arnold Lazarus, Leslie Greenberg, Michael Mahoney, and others.

Self-interpretations of the work and life of psychological researchers, as well as theorists and clinicians, are contained in the series *A History of Psychology in Autobiography* (Vols. 1–8, 1930–1989). The series began in 1930 with a focus on experimental psychology, but by 1967, the fifth volume, edited by E.G. Boring and Gardner Lindzey, included contributors from a wider array of areas of psychology. The 1967 volume contained chapters by Gordon Allport, Gardner Murphy, Henry A. Murray, Carl Rogers, B.F. Skinner, and others. Volumes 6–8, edited by Lindzey, contained chapters from an array of psychological researchers and theorists, including Ernest Hilgard, David Krech, Margaret Mead, S.S. Stevens, Anne Anastasi, Jerome Bruner, Hans Eysenck, Donald Hebb, Herbert Simon, Roger Brown, Lee Cronbach, Barbel Inhelder, Eleanor Maccoby, Stanley Schacter, and Paul Meehl.

The second row is clinical patients, with examples of Freud's case studies of Dora, Little Hans, and the Rat Man, or the influential collection *Case Studies in Behavior Modification* (Ullmann & Krasner 1965), or the case books prepared to accompany recent editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Accounts of mental illness from a first-person perspective include *The Inner World of Mental Illness* (ed. by Kaplan, 1964) or, in novelistic form, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (Green, 1964). The third row is research subjects, illustrated with the case of "Earnst," written by Robert White in Murray (1938), White (1952), or Allport (1965). These are obviously not exhaustive lists, but a few illustrations of each of the four kinds of studies of individual persons and lives.

The bottom row is biographical figures, with examples of Freud's studies of Leonardo da Vinci (1910/1957) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939/1964), to Catherine Cox's study, under Lewis Terman, to estimate *The Early Mental Traits of 300 Geniuses* (1926), to studies of Hitler starting with the O.S.S. in World War II with hundreds of later studies, to studies of Herman Melville by Henry Murray and others, to Erikson's influen-

tial *Young Man Luther* (1958) and *Gandhi's Truth* (1969), to the multivolume psychobiography of Stalin by Robert Tucker, to psychological interpretations of Vincent Van Gogh, Emily Dickinson, Henry James, and Dostoevsky.

Each level in the chart is associated with different methods. The second level, particularly the study of individual differences, is often pursued with psychometric and correlational methods. The third level, the study of particular processes and classes of behavior, is often studied with experimental methods, while the bottom level of individual lives is often associated with historical-interpretive methods. These, though, are rough associations, as topics in each row can be investigated with an array of methods.

To analyze relationships between these four enterprises in personality psychology, consider the task of trying to understand Adolf Hitler (a subject in the bottom row). In a valuable psychobiographical study, *The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler* (1977), Robert Waite draws on contributions from each of the top three levels. At the level of general theory, Waite draws most heavily on psychoanalytic theory, in discussing psychosexual stages in Hitler's development, Hitler's Oedipus complex, and the operation of defense mechanisms such as displacement and projection in Hitler's anti-Semitism. Waite also makes use of Erikson's psychosocial theory in discussions of trust and mistrust in Hitler's childhood, and discussions of identity crises and identity development in his adolescence and young adulthood.

At the second level of the chart, on individual and group differences, Hitler has been diagnosed medically and psychologically in a great number of ways. Diagnoses offered include Parkinson's disease, syphilis, and borderline personality. At the third level of particular classes of behavior and experience, Waite cites studies of anti-Semitism, survivor guilt, sexual perversion, masochistic behavior, and suicide to understand aspects of Hitler's behavior. (Additional details about interpretation of the Hitler case are in Runyan [1997].)

An alternative way of thinking about the relations of personality psychology to life stories, which has already had considerable influence, is provided by Dan McAdams in the third edition



of *The Person* (2001). He uses a tripartite conception of personality around traits, characteristic adaptations (motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental), and their relations to integrative life stories or narrative identities (McAdams, 2001; see also McAdams, Chap. 4 this vol.)

### Historical Science and the Study of Lives

While on sabbatical at Harvard in the spring of 1986, and again in the spring of 1990, I was much influenced by Stephen Jay Gould's arguments for the importance of "historical science" in both evolutionary biology and historical geology. In auditing lectures for his course titled "History of the Earth and of Life," I continually felt excited by the sense of these ideas having enormous implications for the social sciences and for our conception of psychology. I was affected particularly by Gould's *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle* (1987), by *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (1989), and an article on "Why History Matters" (1986). Most recently, Gould elaborated these themes in *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (2002), completed shortly before his death in May 2002.

What is Gould's conception of historical science? He argues that we often hold an oversimplified conception of "the scientific method," with images of a scientist in a "white lab coat twirling dials in a laboratory—experiment, quantification, repetition, prediction, and restriction of complexity to a few variables that can be controlled and manipulated" (Gould, 1989, p. 277). These are powerful procedures, but they are not adequate for explaining all of nature, particularly not for explaining complex sequences of historical events. Gould argues that "many large domains of nature—cosmology, geology, and evolution among them—must be studied with the tools of history" (p. 277).

Historical science is concerned with explaining complex sequences of historically contingent events and processes, which often can not be predicted, can not be exactly replicated, and can not be subsumed under general laws. If, for ex-

ample, we want to understand why dinosaurs became extinct about 65 million years ago, one interpretive hypothesis depends on the discovery in the late 1970s that one or more asteroids hit the earth, changed its climate, and may have led to the extinction of dinosaurs, with evidence embedded in geological strata of the time.

Consider the evolution of humans. Gould argues that the whole history of life depends upon historically contingent sequences of events. If those comets that hit the earth had gone into different harmless orbits, then "dinosaurs still rule the earth, precluding the rise of large mammals, including humans" (p. 280). Given the multiple contingencies of evolution, capable of cascading down many different paths, "[w]e came *this close* (put your thumb about a millimeter away from your index finger), thousands and thousands of times, to erasure by the veering of history down another sensible channel" (p. 289).

Gould argues that Darwin was "the greatest of all historical scientists" (p. 282). He contrasts Darwin's methods with the "hypothetico-deductive" conception of science, central to experimental inquiry, given classic formulation in Carl Hempel's *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (1965). In the history of psychology, the experimental psychology championed by Titchener and Boring won out over the human science psychology of Dilthey and the cultural-historical side of Wundt. The logical empiricism of Hempel, Nagel, and others was sometimes used as an ally of behavioral psychology (Smith, 1986). Gould's argument for historical science can be seen as an ally of "soft" or "human science" traditions such as psychoanalysis, phenomenological psychology, and the study of lives, making clearer appropriate standards of scientific rigor.

The relations between "natural science" and "historical science" are formulated in a useful way in Harvard's "core curriculum," with undergraduates required to take electives in both "science A" and "science B" (Keller, 1982). Science A courses (as described in the 1981–1982 Harvard catalogue) "are intended to introduce students to areas of science dealing primarily with deductive and quantitative aspects and to increase the student's understanding of the

physical world.” For example, Science A-16 is “Modern Physics: Concepts and Development” and Science A-25 is “Chemistry of the 20th Century.”

Science B courses “are intended to provide a general understanding of science as a way of looking at man and the world by introducing students to complex natural systems with a substantial historical or evolutionary component.” For example, Science B-15 is “Evolutionary Biology,” taught by E.O. Wilson, and Science B-16 is “History of the Earth and of Life,” taught by Stephen Jay Gould. Historical science appears in biological, physical, and social sciences. The goals of historical science—studying particular sequences of events and processes—and the methods of historical science for forming, critically evaluating, and constructing more adequate accounts and interpretations—have many analogies to, and implications for, the processes involved in advancing knowledge and understanding of individual lives.

After World War II, with the importance of technology in winning the war for the Allies, there was talk of “Science: The Endless Frontier,” (Zachary, 1997). Just as there are unending possibilities for natural science inquiry, there may also be an “endless frontier” for human science inquiry, with the possibilities for historical science interpretations of individual lives interacting with their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

### Conclusion: The Study of Individual Lives in Relation to the Goals and Methods of Scientific Psychology

The opening question of this chapter was: How are we to conceptualize the evolving relations between the study of individual lives and the discipline of psychology? I expressed a hope in 1982 that,

[i]n a view to the future, progress in the social and human sciences should be measured not solely by the development of more elaborate experimental and statistical procedures and the creation of increasingly comprehen-

sive theories, but also by the development of more rigorous and insightful case studies and psychobiographies, and by advances in our understanding of individual lives. (Runyan, 1982, p. 246)

We are, it seems to me, considerably further along in that quest, with contributions by McAdams and Ochberg (1988), Alexander (1990), Jamison (1993), Elms (1994), Franz and Stewart (1994), McAdams et al. (2001), Josselson et al. (2003), Winer and Anderson (2003), Wiggins (2003), and now this first *Handbook of Psychobiography*. There are now also websites on psychobiography maintained by William Todd Schultz and on narrative psychology maintained by Vincent Hevern.

To summarize, in this chapter I have argued that the study of individual lives can move from being seen as a predecessor or an adjunct to scientific psychology, to being seen as one of the ultimate objectives of an appropriately scientific and humanistic psychology.

Scientific psychology can be conceived of as including not only the two disciplines of correlational psychology, and of experimental psychology, but also a third discipline of historical-interpretive psychology. Work in “historical science” can help to clarify the goals and methods of the study of lives, and perhaps in the human sciences more generally.

A brief review of relations between psychoanalysis and psychobiography was followed by a look at the complex and changing relations of personality psychology to the study of lives. The study of individual persons and lives was one of the central concerns and motivating agendas for founders of personality psychology such as Gordon Allport and Henry Murray, but in the 1950s and 1960s, the field turned more toward psychometric-correlational research and experimental studies. There was a surge of interest in the psychological study of individual lives by the 1980s, and this chapter argues that “historical science” can help bring the goals and methods of the study of individual lives into clearer focus. Recent personality textbooks, however, too often still neglect or marginalize the study of individual lives. Along with the accomplishments of correlational,

experimental, and biological psychology, it is hoped that an increasing number of texts and overviews will include the “personological tradition” (as did McAdams, 2001, and Wiggins, 2003), review historical-interpretive and narrative methods, and include stories about individual lives as one of the starting points and end points of scientific psychology.

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