

50-1a Traits

We use the idea of traits every day to talk about personality. For instance, Daryl is *sociable*, *orderly*, and *intelligent*. His sister Hollie is *shy*, *sensitive*, and *creative*. Personality traits such as these can be quite stable (Allemand, Steiger, & Hill, 2013; Rantanen et al., 2007). Think about how little your best friends have changed in the last 5 years. It would be strange indeed to feel like you were talking with a different person every time you met a friend or an acquaintance. In general, then, a [trait \(Stable personality characteristic.\)](#) is a stable personality characteristic that a person shows in most situations (Möttus, Johnson, & Deary, 2012).

This man *is* a personality. After all, he does have a certain charm. But does he *have* a personality? Do you?



CBS Photo Archive/CBS/Getty Images

Typically, traits are inferred from behavior. If you see Daryl talking to strangers—first at a supermarket and later at a party—you might infer that he is “sociable.” Once personality traits are identified, they can be used to predict future behavior. For example, noting that Daryl is outgoing might lead you to predict that he will be sociable at school or at work. In fact, such consistencies can span many years.

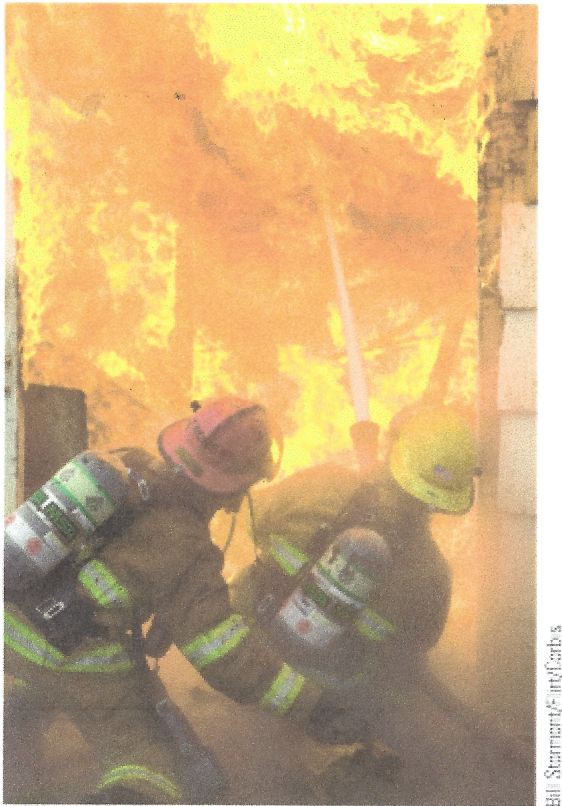
Traits even influence our health as well as our marital and occupational success (Donnellan et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2007). For example, who do you think will be more successful in her chosen career: Freddy, who is conscientious, or Eric, who is not (Brown et al., 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2010)?

50-1b Types

Have you ever asked the question, “What type of person is she (or he)?” A **personality type** (A style of personality defined by a group of related traits.) refers to people who have *several traits in common* (Larsen & Buss, 2010). Informally, your own thinking might include categories such as the executive type, the athletic type, the motherly type, the hip-hop type, the techno geek, and so forth. If you tried to define these informal types, you would probably list a different collection of traits for each one.

How valid is it to speak of personality “types”? Over the years, psychologists have proposed many ways to categorize personalities into types. For example, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung proposed that people are either *introverts* or *extroverts*. An **introvert** (A person whose attention is focused inward; a shy, reserved, self-focused person.) is a shy, reserved person whose attention is usually focused inward. An **extrovert** (A person whose attention is directed outward; a bold, outgoing person.) is a bold, outgoing person whose attention is usually directed outward. These terms are so widely used that you may think of yourself and your friends as being one type or the other. However, knowing if someone is extroverted or introverted tells you little about how conscientious she is, or how kind or open to new ideas he is. In short, two categories (or even several) are often inadequate to fully capture differences in personality. That’s why rating people on a list of traits tends to be more informative than classifying them into two or three types (Engler, 2014).

Psychologists and employers are especially interested in the personality traits of individuals who hold high-risk, high-stress positions concerning public safety, such as police, firefighters, air traffic controllers, and nuclear power plant employees.



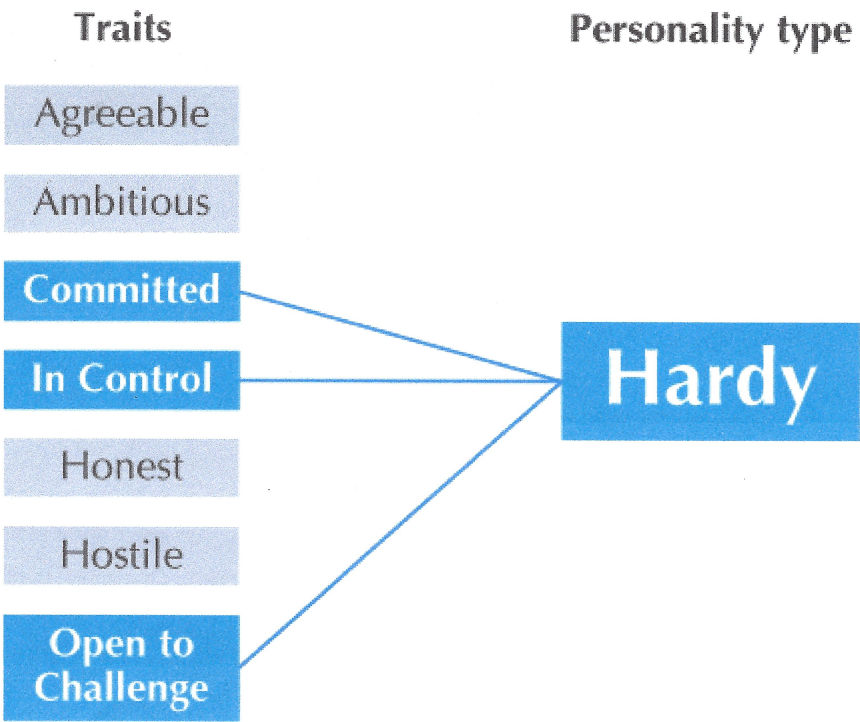
Bill Stormont/Flirt/Corbis

Even though types tend to oversimplify personality, they do have value. Most often, types are a shorthand way to label people who have several key traits in common. For example, in [Module 58](#), we discuss hardy personalities. Hardy people are unusually resistant to stress (see [Figure 50.1](#)). Similarly, in [Module 63](#), you will read about unhealthy personality types such as the paranoid personality, the dependent personality, and the antisocial personality. Each problem type is defined by a specific collection of traits that are not adaptive.

Figure 50.1

Personality Types.

Personality types are defined by the presence of several specific traits. For example, several possible personality traits are shown in the left column. A person who has a hardy personality typically possesses all or most of the highlighted traits. Hardy persons are especially resistant to stress (see [Module 58](#)).



Chapter 50: Personality: Overview of Personality: 50-1b Types
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Chapter Introduction

Conscientious Drivers Rarely Do This!

Sam is a good guy and a great friend. He’s talkative, curious, and good-natured. Conscientious? Not so much. Sam’s more likely to be found socializing at the local students’ pub than studying at the library.

Trait theories seek to describe personality in terms of a small number of underlying personality traits or factors, like the adjectives we used to describe Sam. The trait approach is currently the dominant method for studying personality. Of the various trait theories, the *Big Five theory* is currently the most influential. According to this theory, all personalities can be described as varying along five key factors: *extroversion*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, *neuroticism*, and *openness to experience*.

Knowing where a person stands on the “Big Five” personality traits helps predict his or her behavior. For example, people who score high on conscientiousness tend to be safe drivers who are less likely to have automobile accidents (Sam, Sam, what have you done! lol).



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Survey Questions

51-1 The Trait Approach—Describe Yourself in 18,000 Words or Less

Survey Question 51.1

Are some personality traits more basic or important than others?

Take a moment to read through [Table 51.1](#) and check the traits that describe your personality. Don't worry if some of your key traits aren't in the table. More than 18,000 English words refer to personal characteristics. Are the traits you checked of equal importance? Are some stronger or more basic than others? Do any overlap? For example, if you checked "dominant," did you also check "confident" and "bold"? Answers to these questions would interest a trait theorist.

Table 51.1

Adjective Checklist

Check the traits that you feel are characteristic of your personality. Are some more basic than others?

Aggressive	Organized	Ambitious	Clever
Confident	Loyal	Generous	Calm
Warm	Bold	Cautious	Reliable
Sensitive	Mature	Talented	Jealous
Sociable	Honest	Funny	Religious
Dominant	Dull	Accurate	Nervous
Humble	Uninhibited	Visionary	Cheerful

Check the traits that you feel are characteristic of your personality. Are some more basic than others?

Thoughtful	Serious	Helpful	Emotional
Orderly	Anxious	Conforming	Good-natured
Liberal	Curious	Optimistic	Kind
Meek	Neighborhoodly	Passionate	Compulsive

To better understand personality, [trait theorists \(A psychologist interested in classifying, analyzing, and interrelating traits to understand personality.\)](#) attempt to analyze, classify, and interrelate traits. In addition, trait theorists often think of traits as *biological predispositions*, a hereditary readiness of humans to behave in particular ways. (We encountered this idea before, in [Module 14](#), in which humans were described as having a biological predisposition to learn language.)

Hereditary or not, traits are stable dispositions that a person shows in most situations (Möttus, Johnson, & Deary, 2012). For example, if you are usually friendly, optimistic, and cautious, these qualities are traits of your personality.

What if I am also sometimes shy, pessimistic, or uninhibited? The original three qualities are still traits so long as they are most *typical* of your behavior. Let’s say that James’ friend Freddy approaches most situations with optimism but tends to expect the worst each time he applies for a job. If his pessimism is limited to this situation or just a few others, it is still accurate and useful to describe him as an optimistic person.

Chapter 51: Personality: Trait Theories: 51-1 The Trait Approach—Describe Yourself in 18,000 Words or Less
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51-1a Predicting Behavior

As we have noted, separating people into broad types, such as “introvert” or “extrovert,” may oversimplify personality. However, introversion/extroversion also can be thought of as a trait. Knowing how you rate on this single dimension allows us to predict how you will behave in a variety of settings. How, for example, do you prefer to meet people—face-to-face or through the Internet? Researchers have found that students high in the trait of introversion are more likely to prefer the Internet because they find it easier to talk with people online (Mitchell, et al., 2011; Rice & Markey, 2009). Other interesting links exist between traits and behavior. For a “dark” example, read on.

The Dark Triad: Oh, Oh, Seven

Ian Fleming’s character, James Bond, is undoubtedly the most famous fictional spy of all time, having appeared in 24 official Bond films since 1962. But suppose that he was real and was your boyfriend, husband, brother, or best friend. Very cool, no? Maybe not. According to psychologist Peter Jonason and his colleagues, Bond is a charming, manipulative, cold-blooded killer who is comfortable operating outside the law. He is also an impeccable dresser who casually beds women as it suits him (Jonason et al., 2012).

There are no real people like 007, right? Don’t be so sure. See [Table 51.2](#) to rate yourself on the “Dirty Dozen” (Jonason & Webster, 2010). A high score on the first four questions is associated with the trait of *Machiavellianism*, a willingness to manipulate others. A high score on the middle four questions is associated with the trait of *psychopathy*, an impulsive lack of empathy for others. A high score on the last four questions is associated with the trait of *narcissism*, a self-centeredness often based on feelings of superiority. Taken together, these three interrelated traits make up the *dark triad* (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013).

Table 51.2		
The Dirty Dozen		
On a scale where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree, circle the number which best describes how well you think each of the following statements applies to you.		
	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree

51-1b Classifying Traits

Are there different types of traits? Yes. Psychologist Gordon Allport (1961) distinguished between *central traits* and *secondary traits*.

Central Traits

How do central and secondary traits differ? [Central traits \(The core traits that characterize an individual personality.\)](#) are the basic building blocks of personality. A surprisingly small number of central traits can capture the essence of a person. For instance, just six traits would provide a good description of Jacintha's personality: dominant, sociable, honest, cheerful, intelligent, and optimistic. When college students were asked to describe someone they knew well, they mentioned an average of seven central traits (Allport, 1961).

[Secondary traits \(Traits that are inconsistent or relatively superficial.\)](#) are more superficial personal qualities, such as food preferences, attitudes, political opinions, musical tastes, and so forth. In Allport's terms, a personality description might therefore include the following items:

Name: Jane Doe

Age: 22

Central traits: Possessive, autonomous, artistic, dramatic, self-centered, trusting

Secondary traits: Prefers colorful clothes, likes to work alone, politically liberal, always late

Source Traits

How can you tell whether a personality trait is central or secondary? Raymond B. Cattell (1906–1998) tried to answer this question by directly studying the traits of a large number of people. Cattell began by measuring visible features of personality, which he called [surface traits \(The visible or observable traits of one's personality.\)](#). Soon, Cattell noticed that these surface traits often appeared together in groups. In fact, some traits clustered together so often that they seemed to represent a single, more basic trait. Cattell called these deeper characteristics, or dimensions, [source traits \(factors\) \(Basic underlying traits, or dimensions, of personality; each source trait is reflected in a number of surface traits.\)](#) (Cattell, 1965). They are the core of an individual's personality.

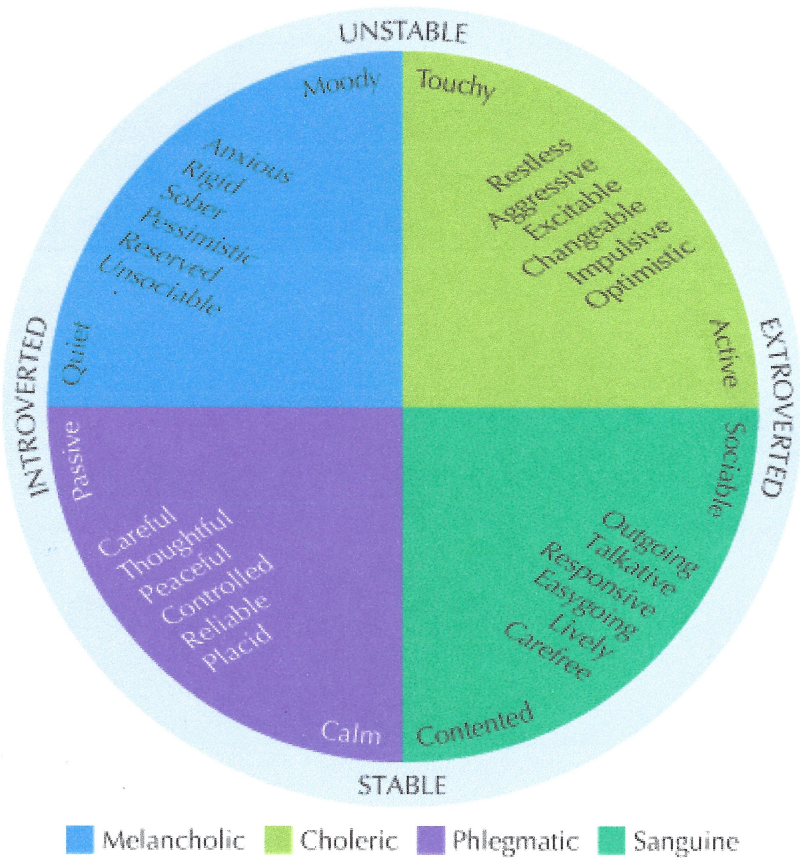
How do source traits differ from Allport's central traits? Allport classified traits subjectively, and it's possible that he was wrong at times. To look for connections among traits, Cattell used [factor analysis \(A statistical technique used to correlate multiple measurements and](#)

[identify general underlying factors.](#)), a statistical technique used to correlate multiple measurements and identify general underlying factors. For example, he found that imaginative people are almost always inventive, original, curious, creative, innovative, and ingenious. If you are an imaginative person, we automatically know that you have several other traits. Thus, *imaginative* is a source trait, or factor. For example, [Figure 51.1](#) shows one of the first trait theories, composed of two factors, introversion–extroversion and emotionally stable–unstable.

Figure 51.1

Eysenck’s Two-Factor Theory of Personality.

English psychologist Hans Eysenck (1916–1997) proposed that many personality traits are related to whether you are mainly introverted or extroverted and whether you tend to be emotionally stable or unstable (highly emotional). These characteristics, in turn, are related to four basic types of temperament first recognized by the early Greeks. The types are *melancholic* (sad, gloomy), *choleric* (hot-tempered, irritable), *phlegmatic* (sluggish, calm), and *sanguine* (cheerful, hopeful).



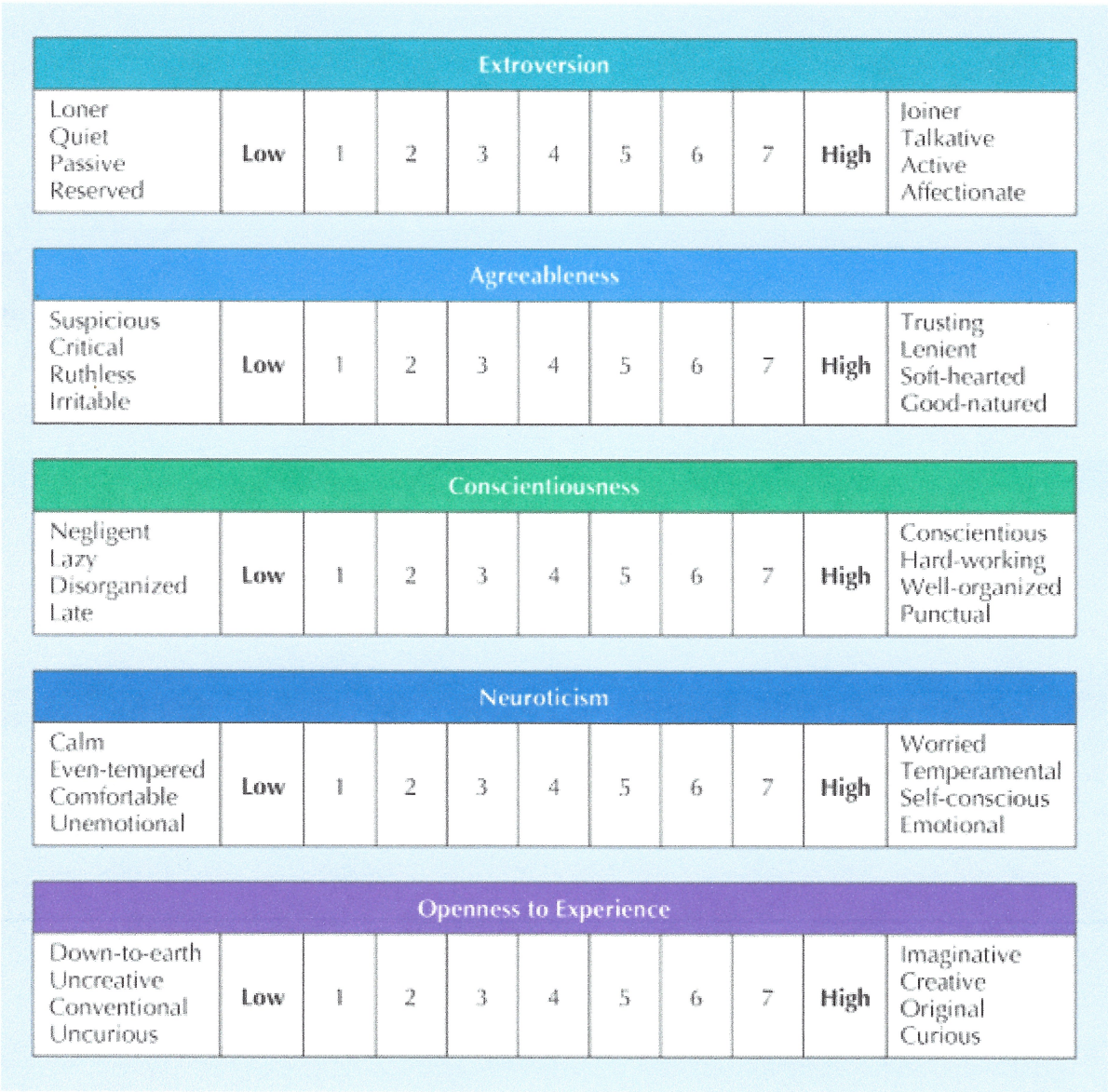
(Adapted from Eysenck, 1981.)

Cattell (1973) identified 16 source traits. According to him, all 16 are needed to fully describe a personality. Source traits are measured by a test called the *Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire* (often referred to as the *16 PF*). Like many personality tests, the 16 PF can be used to produce a *trait profile*, a graph of a person’s score on each trait. Trait

profiles draw a “picture” of individual personalities, which makes it easier to compare them (Figure 51.2).

Figure 51.2
Hypothetical 16 PF Profiles.

The 16 source traits measured by Cattell’s (1973) 16 PF are listed beside the graph. Scores can be plotted as a profile for an individual or a group. The hypothetical profiles shown here are group averages for college professors, lawyers, and professional actors. Notice the similarities between professors and lawyers and the differences between these two groups and professional actors. (Of course, your authors may only be expressing the common stereotype that professors and lawyers are more reserved abstract thinkers than actors or that actors are less emotionally stable and more happy-go-lucky than professors and lawyers. What do you think?)



51-1c The Big Five

Noel is outgoing and friendly, conscientious, even-tempered, and curious. His brother Joel is reserved, hostile, irresponsible, temperamental, and uninterested in ideas. You will be spending a week in a space capsule with either Noel or Joel. Who would you choose? If the answer seems obvious, it's because Noel and Joel were described with the **Big Five personality traits** (Theory that only a handful of characteristics account for most individual differences in personality.), a theory that only a handful of characteristics account for most individual differences in personality.

Five Key Dimensions

The "Big Five" traits shown in [Figure 51.3](#) attempt to reduce Cattell's 16 factors to just five factors, or source traits (McCrae & Costa, 2013; Nettle & Fleeson, 2010). The Big Five may be the best answer of all to the question: What is the essence of human personality?

Figure 51.3

The Big Five.

According to the five-factor model, basic differences in personality can be "boiled down" to the dimensions shown here. These dimensions cover a large measure of what we might want to know about someone's personality.



(Trait descriptions adapted from McCrae & Costa, 2001.)

If you would like to compare the personalities of two people, try rating them informally on the five dimensions shown in Figure 51.3. For *extroversion*, rate how introverted or extroverted each person is. *Agreeableness* refers to how friendly, nurturant, and caring a person is, as opposed to cold, indifferent, self-centered, or spiteful. A person who is *conscientious* is self-disciplined, responsible, and achieving. People low on this factor are irresponsible, careless, and undependable. *Neuroticism* refers to negative, upsetting emotions. People who are high in neuroticism tend to be anxious, emotionally “sour,” irritable, and unhappy. Finally, people who rate high on *openness to experience* are creative and open to new ideas (Ashcraft, 2015).

The beauty of the Big Five theory is that almost any trait that you can name will be related to one of these five factors. If you were selecting a college roommate, hiring an employee, or answering a post at a singles site, you would probably want to know all the personal dimensions covered by the Big Five.

The Big Five traits have been related to different brain systems and chemicals (DeYoung et al., 2010; Nettle, 2008). They also predict how people will act in various circumstances (Sutin & Costa, 2010). For example, people who score high in conscientiousness tend to perform well at work, do well in school, and rarely have automobile accidents (Brown et al., 2010; Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003). They are healthier and even live longer (Hampson et al., 2013; Martin, Friedman, & Schwartz, 2007.)

Which Personality Are You (and Which Is Best)?

Does that mean some Big Five trait scores are better than others? According to the *Big Five theory*, your rating on each of five basic personality traits, or factors, gives a good overall description of your personality. Try rating yourself (see [Figure 51.2](#)). How well do you think your ratings describe you? When you were rating yourself, did you notice that some of the traits don't seem very attractive? After all, who would want to score low in *extroversion*? What could be good about being a quiet, passive, and reserved loner? In other words, aren't some personality patterns better than others?

You might be surprised to learn that there is no single "best" personality pattern. For example, extroverts tend to earn more during their careers than introverts, and they have more sexual partners. But they also are more likely to take risks than introverts (and to land in the hospital with an injury). Extroverts also are more likely to divorce. Because of this, extroverted men are less likely to live with their children. In other words, extroversion tends to open the doors to some life experiences, and introversion opens doors to others (Cain, 2012; Nettle, 2005).

The same is true for *agreeableness*. Agreeable people attract more friends and enjoy strong social support from others. But agreeable people often put the interests of friends and family ahead of their own. This leaves such people at a disadvantage. To do creative, artistic work or to succeed in the business world often involves putting your own interests first (Nettle, 2008).

How about conscientiousness? Up to a point, conscientiousness is associated with high achievement. However, having impossibly high standards, a trait called *perfectionism*, can be a problem. As you might expect, college students who are perfectionists tend to get good grades. Yet some students cross the line into maladaptive perfectionism, which typically *lowers* performance at school and elsewhere (Weiner & Carton, 2012). Authentic Navajo rugs always have a flaw in their intricate designs. Navajo weavers intentionally make a "mistake" in each rug as a reminder that humans are not perfect. There is a lesson in this: It is not always necessary, or even desirable, to be "perfect." To learn from your experiences, you must feel free to make mistakes. Success, in the long run, is more often based on seeking "excellence" rather than "perfection" (Enns, Cox, & Clara, 2005).

Except for very extreme personality patterns, which are often maladaptive, most "personalities" involve a mix of costs and benefits (Turiano et al., 2013). We all face the task of pursuing life experiences that best suit our own unique personality patterns (Nettle, 2008).