



Claude-Hélène Mayer  
Zoltan Kovary  
*Editors*

# New Trends in Psychobiography



Springer

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# Foreword

I am delighted to celebrate the publication of *New Trends in Psychobiography*. The life historical investigation of creative people—exceeding the Cartesian split between subject and object—represents the unity of life and thought, the principle of all psychobiographical researches. I've been interested in psychobiography for more than a half century. When I began my graduate work at Harvard in 1965, Harvard was the first and last stronghold of a traditional academic personality psychology known as personology. This was a tradition established by Henry Murray in the 1930s. Its basic principle was that academic knowledge of human personality can be achieved by the systematic in-depth study of the individual person, this is a claim that is odd with academic psychology going back to then, and it is still the case. In 1972, when I joined the faculty of Rutgers University, we tried to re-establish the tradition of personology at Rutgers. Our effort failed, but the one concrete result of those efforts that George Atwood and I (George was on the faculty at that time) was that we embarked to plan a series of psychobiographical studies of the personal subjective origins of the theoretical systems of Freud, Jung, Wilhelm Reich, and Otto Rank. These studies formed the basis of our first book, "Faces in a cloud. Subjectivity in personality theory," published in 1979 but actually completed in 1976. In the conclusion of that book, we surmised that since theories of personality can be shown to be shaped by the subjective world of the theorist, what psychoanalysis needed was a theory of subjectivity itself. We laid down the principles of such a theory that we called psychoanalytic phenomenology. Since then, we have done psychobiographical studies of philosophers like Sartre, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and lastly Heidegger. Our study of Heidegger, especially Heidegger's descent into Nazism, was published in different volumes in recent years, for example in a book edited by Zoltan Kovary, one of the editors of this current volume. So, I am very grateful to him and Claude-Hélène

Mayer, and all the other authors of this book for expanding and enriching the tradition of psychobiography—psychobiography by the way as an instance of personology. So, I wish them all the best with this wonderful volume.

Santa Monica, CA, USA

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We would like to thank our authors for developing “New Perspectives in Psychobiography” and for publishing them with us. Special thanks to James Anderson and William McKinley Runyan, for their encouragement, ideas, and conversations around the topic of psychobiography. We also would like to thank Robert D. Stolorow, who wrote this book’s foreword and who is the pioneer of modern-day psychobiography along with his longtime fellow and co-author George E. Atwood. We are delighted to have them among the authors of this volume, too. We would also like to thank Elisabeth Vanderheiden for formatting the manuscript for us with lots of enthusiasm, love for detail, and engagement. We further would like to thank our publisher Springer International—and particularly Hendrikje Tuerlings—for the support in publishing the book.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: New Perspectives in Psychobiography



Claude-Hélène Mayer and Zoltan Kovary

**Abstract** This chapter is the introductory chapter to the book “New Trends in Psychobiography”. It provides the readers with an insight in the topic of psychobiography, presenting different phases of development of psychobiography throughout the past decades. It then introduces the various chapters published in the book, their contents and aims and thereby provides the reader with a preface of new trends theories and methods in psychobiography.

Psychobiography is the systematic application of scientific psychology in the interpretation of life and works of significant people like artists, scientists, philosophers, activists or politicians. Its history goes back to the beginning of 20th century; that was the time—in 1910—when Sigmund Freud created the first ever written psychobiography, “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood”. Although we can identify some antecedents from earlier ages (like historical and literatural biographies or pathographies written by psychiatrists), it was Freud’s work that introduced the modern psychological perspective in life history analysis. It is also important to mention, that psychobiography emerged from the investigation of outstanding artistic creativity, which is still one of the most frequent topic of these explorations. After Freud’s initiation—from the 1920s to the 1950s—psychobiography was a popular research method among psychoanalysts, but life historical approach also influenced the unfolding “idiographic” tradition of personality psychology in the US including G. W. Allport, Henry A. Murray and others. From the 1950s life historical-holistic

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approach went out of style in personality research, and even psychoanalysts began to criticize the usage of psychoanalytic ideas in non-clinical situations.

The next few decades (1950–1980) included the “age of stagnation” for psychobiography, except from the outstanding works of Erik H. Erikson, who improved this method in many ways. From the 1980s—according to the success of narrative psychology—we can experience the return of life historical perspective in personality psychology—supported by some welcome changes in psychoanalysis (self-psychology, the introduction of phenomenology and hermeneutics by Stolorow and Atwood, etc.) and in philosophy (the narrative identity theory of Paul Ricoeur). Modern day psychobiography therefore is much different from the classical version: theoretically it is more eclectic, using different trends of personality psychology, its research focus is widened, it is more accurate concerning source criticism, data handling, reflecting on the process of interpretation, validation and on the personal involvement of the psychobiographer. In 2005, the first synthesis of contemporary psychobiography was born: W. T. Schultz edited “Handbook of Psychobiography” featuring the most prominent US authors of the field.

Since the publishing of that book, thirteen years have gone by. Psychobiography became much more accepted by the science of psychology, and articles and monographies were published all over the world. The editors and the authors of this volume thought that it was time to collect all the authors and researchers of this developing and growing field again, and create an international volume. That is how “New Perspectives in Psychobiography” was born. The current book is divided in four main themes. Theme 1 is “Cornerstones of Psychobiography”, Theme 2 is “Theoretical, Methodological and Conceptual Approaches in Psychobiography”, while Theme 3 is “Psychobiographies on Selected Individuals”. Theme 4 presents the authentic voices of selected outstanding contemporary psychographers in interview.

**Theme 1** presents **cornerstones of the discourses of contemporary psychobiography**, such as basic principles and criticism, selected perspectives and ethics.

**Theme 2** presents and discusses **theoretical, methodological and conceptual approaches in psychobiography**, including nine chapters, including epistemology, systems psychodynamics, positive psychology movements, or phenomenological analysis.

**Theme 3** refers to **psychobiographies on selected individuals**, such as medical practitioners, writers, poets and philosophers, painters, couturiers, musicians, politicians, and religious leaders. Both themes present new perspectives in terms of psychobiographies either with regard to theory, methodology or concepts or relating to new insights into lives that have not or hardly been explored before with regard to selected aspects.

Finally, in **Theme 4**, selected **contemporary psychographers** are interviewed to comment on key questions in psychobiography.

*James Anderson and William L Dunlop* open up *Theme 1* by discussing the problems of psychobiography by providing a guide for executing psychobiography. This chapter focuses on the purpose of psychobiography, looking at the inner world of the individual and critical aspects that need to be considered in psychobiographical research. The authors provide guidelines on how theory in psychobiography should

be used and emphasise that the researchers should be aware of their interpretations and that cultural embeddedness should play a crucial role in the application and interpretation of psychological concepts and theories in psychobiography. **William McKinley Runyan** closes Theme 1 of this book. This chapter reviews the adventures of an advocate of the study of individual lives interacting with supporters and opponents of the project through years as a graduate student at Harvard from 1969 to 1975, and as a professor at UC Berkeley from 1979 to 2010. He also demonstrated that individual life histories are relevant in understanding psychologists like Freud, Horney or Skinner and philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein or Michel Foucault. He found that may be more personal dimensions in statistics than assumed; examples discussed here are Sir Ronald Fisher and Jerzy Neyman. **Joseph G. Ponterotto** and **Jason D. Reynolds** open the discourse on ethics and trends in best practices in psychobiography. Ethics, as they say, should be central to the psychobiography research plan and execution. They introduce a best practice ethics model for psychobiographers that is infused throughout the research, writing, and publication process. Addressed are ethical considerations at each stage of the research process, including: selecting one's psychobiographical research subject; navigating the initial proposal review and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process; considering informed consent procedures and options. **Robert F. Mullen's** chapter deals with the "Abstractions of intent: How a Psychobiography grapples with the fluidity of truth". Psychobiography, as he claims, uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. It is *phenomenological* because it presupposes that the issues under investigation are best understood from a perspective inclusive of the subject's personal, subjective and phenomenological world. The in-depth case study is also "*clinical and interpretive*": an accompanying facet of a carefully psychobiography is the hermeneutic circle, another component susceptible to error due to the varying definitions and understandings that accompany all manner of texts.

In Theme 2, **Zoltán Kőváry** focuses on the epistemological background of psychobiography, presenting that a psychobiographical research is based on the same foundations as the everyday work of the psychologist and also supports her/his self-knowledge by exploring self-involvement. That is why psychobiography can fill the gap between academic psychological research and practice, it might help the development of psychology students, and by unfolding the epistemological and ontological background of "studying individuality" can support the entire science of psychology to clarify its own "real" subject. and to become a "rigorous" science on its own. **Frans Cilliers** and **Claude-Hélène Mayer** take systems psychodynamic perspectives into account and emphasise that these perspectives have become vibrant in psychological and interdisciplinary research. The authors explain that the SP perspective, with its roots in psychoanalysis, fosters an understanding of the dynamics between individuals and system elements across the lifespan and might contribute to a deeper understanding of the (un-)conscious dynamics within individuals and systems, such as the environment, the family and organisations. Through the focus on the individual and the system, new insights into unconscious and often latent dynamics emerge and are discussed in this chapter.

**Zelda Gillian Knight** discusses the case for the psychobiography as a hermeneutic case study method. With an emphasis on life-narrative, psychobiography as a phenomenological-hermeneutic case study requires a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method of analysis; for this she presents a model of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in the context of psychobiography. Furthermore, the notion of the researcher's unconscious bias is introduced and included in this new method of analysis; it is termed the 'researcher's transferential implant'. **Claude-Hélène Mayer** and **Michelle May** present positive psychology theories which focus on positive, holistic and health related concepts within psychology. The authors explore the concepts of positive psychology movements (PP1.0 and PP2.0) and provide guidance for using positive psychology theories in psychobiographical research. They argue that PP2.0 can be particularly contributive to new perspectives psychobiographical research. **Barbara Burnell**, **Carla Nel**, **Paul J. P. Fouché** and **Roelf van Niekerk** are focusing on research suitability indicators in the study of exemplary lives and thereby show guidelines for the selection of the psychobiographical subject. This chapter aims to address the objectivity challenges arising from possible researcher bias during subject selection. The authors propose employing a suitability indicators approach to eugraphic subject selection by considering contextual factors and utilizing the psychosocial concept of generativity in its broadest sense. They conclude with the application of these guidelines to the study of two South Africans who, despite several striking differences, had a shared socio-historical context and generative focus, namely their opposition to the apartheid system.

In her chapter **Ágnes Bálint** argues that "Less is more and more is different: distinction between high resolution and low resolution psychobiography". She places the issue of psychobiography into a broad epistemological context, and by introducing the metaphor of digital image resolution, she makes a distinction between high and low resolution biographies. In case of high resolution psychobiographies biographers rely mainly on the bottom-up constructive processes, low resolution psychobiography, on the other hand, is narrowed in terms of content and focus. Details are not relevant unless they serve the aim of outlining a meaningful picture. The grappling with the fluidity of truth is the main topic in this chapter.

The chapter of **Carol du Plessis** and **Christopher R. Stones** illustrates how a 'forgotten' psychological theory (script theory, based on the work of Tomkins) can serve as an extremely useful explanatory paradigm for a complex religious figure. The case study focuses on Gordon Hinckley (b. 1910, d. 2008), who remains a prominent figure in contemporary Mormonism. Using Tomkins' script theory in conjunction with a psychobiographical method and the analysis of data gathered from published speeches, this study explores Hinckley's personality structure and identifies three core psychological scripts.

In *Theme 3* various authors describe life span and selected aspects of the lives of writers, poets and philosophers and other culturally significant individuals. The section is opened by **Márta Csabai** who writes about the case of Etty Hillesum in the time of Holocaust. Almost four decades after her death in Bergen-Belsen, the young Dutch woman's diaries were published in 1981 and since then have received intense attention from the general public, and some reflections from philosophical,

theological and psychological theorizing as well. The diaries reveal a deep struggle for personal independence against the unprecedented threats of the strengthening Nazi oppression. **Claude-Hélène Mayer** explores the career development of the world-known writer Paulo Coelho. The study is based on a single case and uses the methodological frame of Dilthey's modern hermeneutics. First- and third-person documents were collected and analysed through content analysis, focusing on particular events in the writer's life. The analysis shows that Coelho's life only partly matches with the proposed career development model and expands it through concepts of spirituality, calling, life goals and serendipitous career development events. **Rainer Matthias Holm-Hadulla** presents Johann Wolfgang Goethe's creative relationship with his mother under psychobiographical perspectives. According to him Goethe is the ideal case for psychobiography because he had a unique ability to describe his personal development and the psychic crises he experienced. He developed strategies to solve emotional problems that are of practical use till today, because his ability to remain dedicated to life and to his creativity, despite severe emotional crises, is of special psychological interest.

In the next chapters we can read the analysis of great thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Remaining in the field of existentialism, **Tamás Tényi** and **Dalma Tényi** discuss Dostoevsky and Nietzsche and the contradictory nature of the self related to their works and life history. The authors deal with the curious and uncanny parallel between a dream recounted in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and the famous Turin incident from Nietzsche's life shortly before his psychotic breakdown. Their psychoanalytic interpretation focuses on the articulation of the contradictoriness and multiplicity of the self. The title of **George E. Atwood's** chapter is "Time, Death, Eternity: Imagining the Soul of Johann Sebastian Bach", which describes a search for the soul of the composer, as it is expressed and symbolized in his music. The chapter—according to the author, who is a pioneer in the field of modern psychobiography—is less a scholarly argument and more a reverie, almost a dream, about Bach the man, and Bach the child. The author's goal is to create a fantasy embracing and interconnecting what is known of his life and of the patterns in his music. The chapter also contains an interview with him conducted by Penelope Starr-Karlin. **Athena Androutsopoulou**, **Evgenia Dima**, **Sofia Papageorgiou** and **Theodora Papanikolaou** reconstruct love, play and work as a central theme in painter Georgia O'Keefe's early and late memories. They explain what the concepts of love, play and work mean in the context of "Georgia". She thereby aimed at constructing herself in terms of making satisfactory meaning. The authors argue for a positive psychology perspective and provide the reader with some clinical implications. **Leandi Verwey** and **Zelda Gillian Knight** lead us to formerly unexplored territory of creativity. Their chapter is about 20th century couturier and fashion icon, Coco Chanel. This chapter is an example of psychobiographical research in that it consciously and deliberately employs the object relations theory of Donald Winnicott to explore the life narrative of the selected subject. According to this the chapter examines Chanel's life in a new way by considering her development psychologically, and the formation of her identity and the impact that this had on how she related to her Self and the world.

A novel and much interesting topic is **James L. Kelley's**, who is writing about the notorious Jim Jones; he and over 900 of his followers perished in what has been called "The Jonestown Massacre." This study uses methods of psychobiography and objection relations theory to account for Jones' lifelong ambivalence toward those to whom he acted as caregiver. The author proposes a psychological schema he names "nurture failure" to account for Jim Jones' style of leadership, which mixed solicitude with violence in the context of a religious organization that promised to right all of society's wrongs.

**Amadeusz Citlak** is introducing the "Lvov-Warsaw School" of psychobiography in his chapter. In the beginning of the 20th century, the philosophical-logical Lvov-Warsaw School was also a psychological school in which several interesting psychological theories were developed, including the theory of actions and products of Kazimierz Twardowski and the theory of cratism (the theory of power) of Władysław Witwicki. The latter created psychobiographies about Socrates and Jesus Christ, and the author's intention is to make a certain verification of Witwicki's assumptions.

**Roelf van Niekerk, Tracey Prenter and Paul J. P. Fouché** reflect on the life of Christiaan Barnard and the build-up to the first heart transplant in South Africa. Although it is based on a formal, academic psychobiography, this chapter is an attempt to formulate a non-academic psychobiography of Barnard's career. Instead of formulating a theoretical interpretation of Barnard's general career development, this chapter aims to illuminate the specific events and experiences that culminated in the first human heart transplant.

A psychobiographical portrait of enigmatic poet, academic, political activist, philosopher and social worker, Adam Small's Eriksonian ego-strength or virtues is shown by **Paul J. P. Fouché, Pravani Naidoo and Theo Erns Botha**. They develop new perspectives by drawing the portrait across pre-, middle- and post-apartheid eras. Alexander's psychobiographical indicators of salience and a psychosocial-historical conceptualization were used to identify and analyze significant biographical evidence on Small's life. The findings indicate that Small developed hope, will, purpose and competency as ego-strengths or virtues throughout his first four Eriksonian stages.

In the chapter "A Reflection on the Psychosocial-historical Turning Points in the Life of Sol Plaatje: Co-founder of the African National Congress" by **Crystal Welman, Paul J. P. Fouché** and **Roelf van Niekerk** aimed to identify the significant psychosocial-historical turning points in the life of enigmatic multilingual political activist and journalist Sol Plaatje (1876–1932), utilizing the lens of Erik Erikson's theory of lifespan development. The findings highlight significant psychosocial-historical events or turning points in the life of Plaatje. **Paul J. P. Fouché** with **Tracey Prenter** and **Roelf van Niekerk** present a paper about South-African born international movie-star Charlize Theron. This chapter represents an attempt to formulate a popular, non-academic psychobiography of Charlize Theron. In the academic psychobiography, Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development was employed as the theoretical framework to conceptualise the personality development of this exceptional individual. Instead of formulating a theoretical interpretation of Charlize's personality development, this chapter aims to focus attention on the course of development that culminated in the award of an Oscar to a South African raised in a

home environment marred by conflict and violence. Last, but not least, the chapter of **Sharon Johnson** presents insights into psychobiography as an effective methodology to work with young adults in South Africa. In this chapter, the advances applied aspects of psychobiography are shown and discussed, presenting insights into the life story of a young individual living in South Africa. The question of defining psychobiography and biographical life studies is explored in this chapter.

The book closes with *Theme 4*, the presentation of interview excerpts of extraordinary contemporary psychobiographers, such as Jim Anderson, William McKinley Runyan, Joseph G. Ponterotto, Dan McAdams and Jefferson Singer, conducted by **Claude-Hélène Mayer**. These psychobiographers respond to questions relating to the future of psychobiography, the differences of biography and psychobiography, psychoanalysis and psychobiography and contemporary psychobiographical research.

This short overview of the content of this book demonstrates that this new book is trying to cover many of the territories of 21st century psychobiography, intending to introduce new ones as well. It also aims at providing directions for future research and teaching using the psychobiographical method. Psychobiography is developing dynamically, and we really hope that this volume, “New Trends in Psychobiography” will support this development that will lead to the comprehensive recognition of this outstanding psychological method all over the world.

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**Part I**  
**Cornerstones of Psychobiography**

## Chapter 2

# Executing Psychobiography



James William Anderson and William L. Dunlop

**Abstract** In examining the problems of psychobiography and providing a guide for executing psychobiography, we begin by looking at its purpose: to gain a greater understanding of the biographical subject, to get access to the subject's inner world, to learn why the subject thinks and behaves as she or he does. Theoretical concepts are useful because they alert the psychobiographer to possible patterns in the subject's life. But the greatest danger is foisting theory onto the subject. Instead theory should open up, not close down; provide new questions, not easy answers; complicate, not simplify; produce possibilities, not reductions. Thorough research is the basis of psychobiography; the psychobiographer relies on material that brings one closest to the subjects, such as diaries, letters, and autobiographical writings. The subject's dreams, fantasies, and fiction also have a special value. Psychobiographers have the challenge of using their empathy and identification with subjects in order to understand subjects deeply while also being aware of how they themselves may slant their interpretations because of their feelings about the subjects. Knowledge of the subject's culture is necessary, especially when it differs markedly from that of the psychobiographer. The cultural factor is especially sensitive in psychobiographical writing because psychological concepts, developed for one society, may not apply well to another society.

**Keywords** Problems of psychobiography · Theoretical concepts of psychobiography · Subject's inner world

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## 2.1 Introduction

It has not escaped us that our title “executing psychobiography” can be read in a way we did not intend, as meaning: “killing off or liquidating psychobiography.” Numerous critics have been hostile to psychobiography for a simple reason, that many studies are deficient due to factors such as inadequate research or a dogmatic application of theory foisted onto the subject’s life. Aware of those critiques, a reader might well think, “At last, here is a chapter advocating that we get rid of psychobiography.” That reader will be disappointed. While we recognize that many published psychobiographies suffer from substantial shortcomings, our intention is not to argue that psychobiography should be abandoned. Rather, the existence of these faulted works, combined with the many misconceptions about this discipline, led us to write this study, which is meant as an exploration of the problems of psychobiography and a guide to *executing*, in the sense of doing or carrying out, psychobiography proficiently.

Our chapter draws and expands on earlier studies of the methodology of psychobiography, in particular, those of Anderson (1981a, 1981b, 2003a), Runyan (1982), Elms (1994), Schultz (2005c), Kőváry (2011), and Ponterotto (2014). We have organized our study as an exploration of five topics: the use of theory, the nature and gathering of research evidence, interpretation of that evidence, the psychobiographer’s relationship with the subject, and the impact of culture. All of these topics rest on an understanding of the purpose of psychobiography, and so, after an introductory illustration, we try to answer the question, “What does psychobiography mean to accomplish?”

### 2.1.1 An Instructive Illustration: Ogilvie on James Barrie

Psychologist Ogilvie (2004, 2005) sought an example of a literary figure who could be understood according to classical psychoanalytic theory. Knowing something about the life of James Barrie, the creator of Peter Pan, Ogilvie considered using that author as his example. Peter Pan, in his first appearance in Barrie’s writing, is a part-human creature, formerly a child, who escaped from his home and lives on an island nearby. Granted a wish, he flies back to visit his mother several times, but ultimately he becomes locked out and cannot return to her. From the window he can see her curving her arm as if she is lovingly imagining holding a small child.

Ogilvie states that the likely psychoanalytic explanation is obvious. Namely, that Barrie wrote the story based on his having been “displaced” by another child “who became the center of love and attention that previously had been showered upon him” (Ogilvie, 2004, p. 49). The story of Peter Pan “gives expression to his sense of betrayal” (Ogilvie, 2004, p. 50). The next step, thought Ogilvie, was to check the family records; might Barrie have been in the oedipal period of 3 to 5 years of age when a sibling was born? He was. Perfect.

Except for one problem. Upon looking closely at Barrie's life, Ogilvie found that there was a far better explanation for Barrie's creation of the scene with Peter Pan. When Barrie was six years old, his brother David, seven years his elder, died in a skating accident. Barrie's mother, traumatized, fell into a severe depression from which she never recovered. Barrie's childhood was dominated by his attempt to connect with, enliven, and interest his mother. In time he began telling her stories, and his writing, notes Ogilvie, stems in part from his desire to entertain her. Ogilvie concludes that the scene with Peter Pan trying to get close to his mother makes sense as an expression of the actual relationship Barrie is known to have had with his mother: Barrie wanted intimacy with his mother but felt blocked to some extent by her tie to her dead son.

Ogilvie's adventure in studying James Barrie illustrates a number of the main themes of this chapter on the writing of psychobiography. A psychobiographer must be careful not to foist a theory onto the subject, as Ogilvie considered doing at first. Instead, high-quality psychobiography stems from in-depth research. Interpretations work best when they emerge from the evidence. Theoretical concepts, though, can offer guidance, especially if used lightly rather than dogmatically. Ogilvie relies on such a concept: namely, that creative work stems from the author's inner world. Ogilvie ends up arguing persuasively that Barrie's imagination, as expressed in his writing on Peter Pan, maintained intimate ties with the author's earlier experience.

### ***2.1.2 Psychobiography as an Exploration of the Subject's Inner World***

The purpose of psychobiography is to use psychology in gaining a deeper understanding of the person whose life one is studying (see Kőváry, 2019). Psychobiographers seek to know why people think and act as they do, and they try to get at the individual's inner world. Psychology has long known that people not only hide much about themselves from others but they also hide much from themselves. The dual challenge for psychobiographers is to get underneath the image the subjects present to others and also to penetrate into the realm that contains that of which subjects are unaware in themselves.

A focus on the inner world directs psychobiographers to hone in on the subjectivity of the person we are studying. Psychobiographers want, for example, to discover, what the person thinks of as the truth, not the so-called objective truth that is supported by facts.

German historian Waite (1977), when he took on the grave question of Adolf Hitler's fanatical anti-Semitism, was aware of giving priority to the subjectivity of the person he was studying. Scholars have tried to track down the possibility that Hitler's maternal grandfather might have been a Jew. There is evidence, not definitive, that Hitler's grandmother worked as a servant in the house of a wealthy Jew and became pregnant while unmarried; her employer may have been the father.

Waite (1977) notes that while in power Hitler promulgated a law banning Jews from employing Gentile servants. He flew into a rage several times when Catholic household servants were mentioned. He directed the Gestapo to conduct a secret investigation of his genealogy, presumably with the hope that the findings would prove he did not have Jewish blood. One of his greatest concerns was that the Aryan race would suffer from “blood poisoning” because of the Jews living among them. He seemed to fear his own blood was tainted, as he frequently used leeches and directed his physician to remove some of his blood with a syringe. All of these behaviors could be accounted for by a belief Hitler had that his grandfather was Jewish. Waite further speculates that Hitler relied on the defense of projection; he placed parts of himself onto the Jews as a way of trying to rid himself of those parts. He ranted against Jews for having bodily odors and large noses; he was concerned about his own bodily odors and large nose. From an early age, as extensive evidence shows, Hitler considered himself to be inferior, unlikable, even monstrous. By becoming history’s most virulent anti-Semite, he declared in a sense: “It is the Jews who are depraved, not I.”

There are complex causes of Hitler’s anti-Semitism, not the least of which was the atmosphere of Vienna when he was a young man; hatred of Jews surrounded him. Waite takes into account those factors. But he argues that a key element is Hitler’s suspicion of having Jewish blood. Whether or not the dictator had Jewish ancestry counts for little; what matters is his belief on some level that he did.

Edel (1979), who wrote a psychologically informed biography of Henry James, underlines the value of getting at “the figure under the carpet, the evidence in reverse of the tapestry, the life-myth of a given mask” (p. 26). We all create an “inner myth,” Edel (1979) claims, “the myth that tells us we have some being, some selfhood, some goal, something to strive for beyond the fulfillments of food or sex or creature comforts” (p. 28).

While Edel describes the concept of the life myth, psychological researchers working in the field of narrative psychology have gone farther in producing the related but more developed concept of narrative identity (also called life story), which refers to “the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to provide his or her life with unity, purpose, and meaning” (McAdams, 2015, p. 250; also see McAdams & McLean, 2013). These researchers have shown the interpretive operations people use in deriving meaning from memories (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), the developmental milestones involved in the development of narrative identity (McAdams, 2015, p. 253), and how “gender, ethnicity, race, and social class shape the process of constructing narrative identity” (McAdams, 2015, p. 254). Psychobiographers, in exploring the way in which their subjects gain meaning by developing an inherent interpretation of their lives, can draw on the extensive knowledge psychologists have generated about how narrative identity operates.

William Todd Schultz in his psychobiography of Truman Capote illuminates Capote’s life myth or life story. Although often viewed as small, effeminate, and weak, Capote saw himself as powerful and capable of getting revenge when he was hurt or underestimated. As Schultz (2011b) notes, “Words would become his weapons. With words Capote made himself mighty” (p. 10). When Capote published

portions of *Answered Prayers*, his work in which he revealed embarrassing information about various socialites who had confided in him, those affected were disturbed and angry. “I can’t understand why everybody’s so upset,” Capote claimed, “What did they think they had around them, a court jester? They had a writer” (Schultz, 2011b, p. 10). Capote’s life myth was that he was a mighty writer who could and would hurt others when he wanted to.

Schultz also talks about a negative view Capote had of himself. If we adopt Edel’s “life myth” as a conception of one’s power and potential, then we should add something like a “vulnerability conception” to describe a view of self that captures one’s fears, fragilities, and critical evaluations of oneself. Schultz (2011b) describes what he calls Capote’s “ouch script.” According to this script, Capote, in Schultz’s words, believes that inevitably

[h]e seeks love, he tries to make himself as lovable as possible, but what he finds is hurt, disappointment, and betrayal. (p. 45)

We recommend too that the psychobiographer not only search for the life myth and the vulnerability conception but also analyze the dynamic relationship between the two. With Capote, for example, it is clear that he uses his sense of power as a writer in the service of protecting himself against the fears he has when he sees other as turning against him and harming him.

### 2.1.3 *What Theoretical Concepts to Use?*

Psychobiographers rely on theoretical concepts, which assist them in understanding the inner world of the subject. These concepts in essence describe patterns that apply to many people. Here are three examples from among dozens of concepts.

1. Sibling rivalry. As we shall see, Edel argued that this concept applies to the brothers William and Henry James.
2. Attachment and loss. Bowlby (1991), the founder of attachment theory, wrote a psychobiography of Charles Darwin. Bowlby suggests that Darwin’s persistent depression stemmed from the combination of his early loss of his mother (when he was eight years old), his having little opportunity to mourn her death, and his receiving inadequate substitute care.
3. Nuclear script (a concept from Tomkins, 1987). Singer (2016), in his penetrating psychobiography of Robert Louis Stevenson, explains that the novelist had a nuclear script that formed the basis for his creating the account of divided personality depicted in the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The elements of the novelist’s script, according to Singer, were:

his desire to engage in pleasure, his self-loathing for this indulgence, his subsequent efforts to justify his pleasure-seeking by questioning the hypocrisy of his Calvinist upbringing, and then his reversal back to reverence of the life of mature honor and moral decency.

The upstanding Dr. Jekyll and the immoral, pleasure-seeking Mr. Hyde are an expression of Stevenson's personal script.

In an article on best practices in psychobiography, Ponterotto (2014) takes the position that a variety of approaches, including work that is based on quantitative analysis, can result in sound psychobiography. We do not disagree with him, but, because of our emphasis on gaining access to the subject's inner world, we point out the advantages of a particular approach. We argue that the concepts just described, as well as other concepts that are valuable for psychobiographers, rest on what we call the *psychodynamic hypothesis*: it states that forces operating largely out of awareness produce many of a person's thoughts and behaviors. While Stevenson knew of his conflicts, it was these conflicts percolating in the recesses of his mind that played a central role in his creation of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

For an illustration of the necessity of the psychodynamic hypothesis, we turn to the autobiography of B. F. Skinner, arguably the most important developer of behavioral psychology. In the second volume of his three-volume account of his life, Skinner (1979) describes his reaction after a lover, whose first name began with the letter N, broke up with him: "For a week I was in almost physical pain, and one day I bent a wire in the shape of an N, heated it with a Bunsen burner, and branded my left arm. The brand remained clear for years" (p. 137).

Skinner offers no explanation, probably because he realizes that the behavioral psychology that he promulgated cannot make sense of such an incident. Without more information, we cannot provide a definitive psychodynamic interpretation, but we can suggest some plausible possibilities. Unconsciously he may have felt that the branding would keep this person, who had abandoned him, with him, and at the same time the pain from the burning may have hurt less than the emotional pain and hence may have seemed preferable. Whatever the explanation, it is undeniable that his behavior was unconsciously motivated; Skinner's not believing in psychoanalytic psychology did not keep him from behaving in the way psychoanalytic theory says people behave.

Still, we have the question of how to decide what to use from among the myriad theoretical concepts provided by psychologists. We offer five guidelines.

First, we recommend that psychobiographers become familiar with a wide range of approaches. It used to be that Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson were the thinkers most relied on by psychobiographers. Observing that contemporary psychoanalysts in their clinical work had become far more influenced by later analytic writers, I (the first author of this chapter) suggested that psychobiographers also might turn to post-Eriksonian theory (Anderson, 2003b). I described the approaches of Donald W. Winnicott, Heinz Kohut, and Otto Kernberg and how their concepts could be used in life studies.

Second, Kohut (1982, p. 396) made a distinction between "experience-near" and "experience-distant" concepts. There was a similar movement in the second half of the Twentieth Century to move away from metapsychology and instead to rely on what has been called clinical theory (see Holt, 1981). The idea is to avoid grand theories, such as Freud's model of id, ego, and superego and Carl G. Jung's postulation

of the collective unconscious, and to draw on concepts that clinicians frequently see as applying to their patients.

Third, we point to Schultz's (2005a, p. 120) directive that psychobiographers let the life they are studying guide them. Schultz illustrates this process with his work on photographer Diane Arbus. Starting with substantial evidence of her seeking out symbiotic relationships, he looks at theorists who examined this phenomenon. He finds suggestive leads in the work of Erich Fromm, who postulates that the search for symbiosis can be an "escape from freedom." Then he considers Melanie Klein's concept of splitting, wonders whether that defense is one Arbus uses, and finds convincing evidence that it is. His search soon leads him to considering Donald W. Winnicott's work on the false self, and again material on Arbus's life, including especially her own words, leads him to consider how she had, and reacted against, the kind of compliant adaptation to others that Winnicott discusses. Note how Schultz's use of theory opens him up to possibilities rather than closing him down.

Fourth, we turn to a similar idea from Alan C. Elms, who was Schultz's mentor in graduate school at the University of California, Davis. Elms recommends that psychobiographers be ready to change theories as they learn more about their subjects. "If you remain open to theoretical shifts when the biographical facts refuse to fit your initial theory," Elms (2005, p. 89) notes,

you may well end up with a stronger psychobiographical case than in the theory-centered approach.

Elms gives the example of his study of Secretary of State Alexander Haig. Elms thought at first that Haig might fit the Machiavellian personality. As he learned more, however, he concluded that Haig was better characterized as having an authoritarian personality. A representative behavior of Haig's was his reaction after President Ronald Reagan was wounded by a would-be assassin. Haig announced, "As of now, I am in control here in the White House." Haig's clumsy act provoked widespread derision. Elms (2005, p. 90) observed that Haig "was not being a smoothly manipulative Machiavellian but a crudely assertive authoritarian."

Fifth, it is valuable to rely on constructs that are supported by psychological research. McAdams (2005, p. 79) advocates that psychobiographers use

personality concepts that are embedded in a rich and evolving scientific discourse, wherein constructs are operationalized, hypotheses tested, and theories are continually reformed and refined as a result of consensually validated rules of discovery, inference, and justification.

McAdams (2005, p. 79) does not expect psychobiographers to limit themselves to these constructs, and he does not do so in his own psychobiographical writing. There is much of what psychobiographers study that is not explainable via concepts that are supported by the kind of research McAdams discusses. In writing a psychobiography of George W. Bush, for example, McAdams (2011) examined how Bush reacted to the one deeply tragic event of his childhood, the death of his three-year-old sister from leukemia when he was seven years old. The little boy became the "family clown" so as to lift "the spirits of his grieving mother" (p. 117). McAdams's explanation makes much sense, but there just does not happen to be a concept supported by research

that applies. It is likely that Bush was reliant on his connection to his mother for a sense of well-being and so he was motivated, unconsciously, to improve her mood in the aftermath of the death of her daughter. Note too that the same kind of analysis can apply to James Barrie; he persistently entertained his mother, who was depressed over the death of her son.

### 2.1.4 *Use of Theory*

The greatest danger in the use of theory is the temptation to force the subject to fit a theoretical concept, much as Procrustes made his victims fit his bed. Meyer (1972, p. 374) observed that the field of psychobiography at its worst “enjoys a sort of perpetual open season, during which a gaggle of sitting subjects may be peppered with analytic buckshot.”

Theory should open up, not close down; provide new questions, not easy answers; complicate, not simplify; produce possibilities, not reductions.

For an example of what not to do, we turn to Wolfenstein (1967, p. 97). Observing that Lenin, Trotsky, and Gandhi all had “stormy” adolescences, he said, by way of explanation, that adolescence is “the period of the ‘crisis of identity.’”

Coles (1973, p. 28) criticized Wolfenstein’s use of this concept of Erikson’s:

Here a phrase of Erikson’s has been turned into a new label ...What is meant to inspire in others one kind of response (does this way of putting things fit? is it helpful? or ought I look elsewhere, perhaps use my own words, or simply keep looking and listening?) gets quite another response (that is the answer, or what I want to prove, or what I had better well prove, since everyone else these days is doing so).

Wolfenstein might have looked at one of those revolutionaries—Gandhi, for example—noted that he had a “stormy” adolescence—and referred to Erikson’s work on the identity crisis. But that would have been the beginning, not the end. Then he could have looked at some of the features that Erikson, in his rich writing on identity formation [in works such as *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (Erikson, 1968)], described as being involved with the development of an identity. There are many questions he could have asked, such as: Did Gandhi have a “negative identity”? How did his identity draw on early identifications? What part did the options provided by his culture have in his development of identity?

Another example of contrasting uses of theory involved me (the first author of this chapter) and psychoanalyst George Pollock, with Heinz Kohut also playing a part.

I set out to do a psychobiographical study of William James for my dissertation in the psychology department (then called the Department of Behavioral Sciences) at the University of Chicago. First, though, I did a careful study of psychobiographical methodology (published as Anderson, 1981a). In choosing theory, I used the approach discussed in this chapter. I immersed myself in the data about James, including spending many weeks in the archives studying his unpublished letters, diaries, and other papers. Certain diary entries and what I called James’s “loss-of-self experience” led me to use Kohut’s recently developed self psychology as one

lens for understanding James. The loss-of-self experience was a mortifying moment in James's (1936/1902, p. 157) life when he suddenly felt "a horrible fear of my own existence." He pictured a severely ill patient he had seen in an asylum. "That shape am I, I felt, potentially....," James recalled.

There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear.

I had the unusual opportunity of consulting with Kohut by phone and sending him a written description of the loss-of-self experience. Kohut replied to me,

Thank you for the 2 pp about James's loss-of-self episode. Very convincing! I am curious whether you will also supply material from childhood (about the relationship to his selfobjects) that explains the precariousness of the self.

[In this context, "selfobjects" refers to the people he was closest to, such as his parents.] He also wrote he had arranged for me to meet with Ernest Wolf, probably his most-trusted protégé, and soon after receiving the letter I discussed with Wolf in further detail the use of self psychology in my study of James (Kohut, 1978a, July 25).

A few months later, at the invitation of George Pollock, the head of the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis, I gave a talk there about my work on James. I emphasized my use of Kohut's self psychology and mentioned that Kohut had told me he found my analysis of the loss-of-self experience according to self psychology to be "very convincing."

What I did not know at the time was that there was a bitter struggle raging between the old guard of the Institute, who were adherents of Freud and ego psychology, and the followers of Kohut's insurgent self psychology. Pollock, who was aligned with the orthodox analysts, took umbrage at my viewing James through the lens of self psychology. He asked Kohut whether Kohut could have seen my work as "very convincing," as I had claimed in my talk. Kohut found a copy of his letter to me in his files and confirmed that he had written me (Kohut, 1978b, November 5).

But here is the key point about use of theory. Pollock was convinced that the obvious concept for understanding William James had to be castration anxiety (castration anxiety plays a key role in the little boy's Oedipus complex; the boy fears he will be castrated for his sexual desire for his mother). In criticizing my presentation, Pollock wrote Kohut what must have seemed to him to be the clinching argument: "at no time did he mention the fact that William James's father had lost a leg" (Pollock, 1978 November 9). Here is Pollock's meaning: James's father lost a leg at the age of 13 and walked with a cork leg (that much is true). Therefore William James had to have castration anxiety as a central factor in his psychology. The connection that a dogmatic psychoanalyst would make is this: Since James saw his father had lost his leg, James had to feel he was in imminent danger of losing his genitals as punishment for his Oedipal desires. That leap in thinking is an illustration of pushing a preexisting theory onto a subject without adequate data. My extensive investigation

of James's life yielded no credible evidence that the concept of the Oedipus complex applied to James. See my study of the relationship of the son and father (Anderson, 1987).

Burke (1954, p. 49) once commented: "A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing." In other words, use of theory, especially when employed crudely and dogmatically, produces one view, thereby eliminating other views. It truncates our vision. That is where Pollock went wrong. His adherence to the concept of the Oedipus complex gave him only one way of understanding James. We recommend that psychobiographers remain ever vigilant of the danger of foreclosing other possibilities through cleaving blindly to a limiting theoretical viewpoint.

## 2.2 Research, the Basis of Psychobiography

No psychobiography can be any better than the research on which it is based. Psychologists who do other kinds of research are well aware that they can do nothing without their data, and in fact psychologists doing quantitative research and those doing qualitative research (such as psychobiographers) are all in the same situation: they gather research and then process it and interpret it.

Successful psychobiography rests on resourceful research. The most valuable materials are those which bring us closest to the subject, such as letters, diaries, autobiographical accounts, interviews with the subject, and interviews with people who knew or know the subject well. In his work on the chess champion Bobby Fischer, Ponterotto (2012) showed the kind of enterprise that he and we advocate. For example, he interviewed Russell Targ, Fischer's brother-in-law. In the following section, we will provide several anecdotes that underline the vital worth of different kinds of research material.

Addressing prospective psychobiographers, Elms (1994, p. 23) notes,

Even if you think you can get by with the published sources on your subject, I urge you to give archival research a try.

He adds,

The published versions of primary sources often inadvertently omit just those small clues that a psychobiographer may find most useful.

When I (the first author) worked on William James, my focus was on his period of depression while he was a young man (see Anderson, 1982). Ralph Barton Perry, a Harvard philosophy professor and a former student of James's, dominated the scholarship on this period with his interpretation that James's period of distress was in essence philosophical. "The spiritual crisis," Perry (1935, I, pp. 322–332) wrote, "was the ebbing of the will to live, for lack of a philosophy to live by." He added that James "experienced a personal crisis that could be relieved only by a *philosophical* insight."

Perry (1935) wrote a magisterial two-volume biography of James that included many letters and diary excerpts that were not published elsewhere. A diary entry that was crucial to understanding James's depressive period concerned his decision to abandon his plan of becoming a philosopher (he later changed his mind). James wrote that his "strongest moral and intellectual craving [was] for some stable reality to lean upon" but a philosopher forfeits such stability because his responsibility is "every day to be ready to criticize afresh and call in question the grounds of his faith of the day before." The pivotal sentence, as quoted by Perry (1935, I, p. 343), reads:

I fear the constant sense of instability generated by this attitude would be more than the voluntary faith I can keep going is sufficient to neutralize.

The whole problem seems to be one of James holding onto his belief in a stable reality. The impression is that he simply needed more faith.

But when I looked at the more-than-a-century-old, handwritten pages of the diary in the James papers at Harvard's Houghton Library, I saw that Perry had left out the second half of James's sentence. James had continued: "- and that dream-conception, 'maya,' the abyss of horrors, would 'spite of everything grasp my imagination and imperil my reason'" (Anderson, 1981b, p. 248). All of a sudden, James's distress sounded more psychological than philosophical. It was not a simple matter of needing to summon more faith. Instead, he was afraid of losing his sense of reality, becoming panicked, and going crazy. Intentionally or not, Perry had edited the materials (not only in this instance but elsewhere) in such a way as to have them support his philosophical interpretation. We recommend that, whenever possible, the psychobiographer seek primary materials rather than being satisfied with what has been published.

Our next example of the value of careful research involves George W. Bush. As President and Commander in Chief, George W., like his father, George H. W. Bush, led the American military in an invasion of Iraq. But the younger Bush did not stop short of Baghdad; in his war the military conquered the country. Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator, was captured and eventually executed. The common view is a Freudian one, that the younger Bush was trying to outdo the elder Bush. Noting how common competition of a son toward his father is, one author (Weisberg, 2008, p. xviii) claims:

But the term *competition* doesn't begin to do justice to the Oedipal complexities of this particular relationship. George W. Bush has been driven since childhood by a need to differentiate himself from his father, to challenge, surpass, and overcome him.

Again we have a theoretical concept being imposed on the psychobiographical subject. McAdams (2011) took an exhaustive look at the material, including comments by people who knew George W. and statements from George W. himself. He found ample evidence of George W.'s predominant love for his father and of George W.'s sense that his father's enemies were his enemies. George W. was particularly incensed at Saddam for Saddam's involvement in an assassination plot against his father. "Rather than win out over his father," McAdams (2011, p. 80) concludes, "it

seems more psychologically plausible to suggest that George W. Bush sought to win out over his father's *enemies*" (p. 80).

Classical psychoanalysis may seem to be the punching bag of this chapter, but in the next example it receives support rather than criticism. Naifeh and Smith (1989) wrote a psychologically informed biography of the artist Jackson Pollock. The book was the target of an attack review in the New York Times. "Their dime-store psychoanalysis reaches its greatest vulgarity," Frank (1990) wrote, "when they assert that Pollock's dripping and pouring technique of the late 1940s reminded him of his father urinating on a stone: 'Creative potency, like sexual potency,' they say, was a childish contest of that kind to him." Yet a careful reading of the book, which later won a Pulitzer Prize, shows that Naifeh and Smith researched their study scrupulously. They do not "assert" that there was some connection between Pollock's famous drip technique and urination. Instead they found considerable evidence about the importance and role of urinating in Pollock's life. And they cite several people who knew Pollock and report Pollock telling them that, when Pollock looked at his first drip paintings, memories of his father urinating came to mind. One friend recalled what he heard from Pollock:

He was himself standing beside his father on a flat rock, watching his father pissing, making patterns on the surface of the stone...and he wanted to do the same thing when he grew up. (Naifeh & Smith, 1989, p. 541)

Naifeh and Smith do not foist a Freudian concept on their subject; instead they present us with their evidence and the interpretation that arises from it.

## 2.3 A Special Category of Research

As psychobiographers seek to gain insight into the subject's subjective world, there is a special category of research that is especially valuable to them. Dreams, fantasies, humor, parapraxes, word associations, use of language, delusions, and artistic products have the capability of providing access to the subject's inner mind; all can be thought of as expressions of the unconscious. Discussing the aim of getting underneath the mask a person shows to others, Edel (1979, p. 26) writes of phenomena that can be thought of as portals to the inner world:

The aggressive emotion that masquerades as a cutting witticism; the excessive endearment that conceals a certain animus; the pleasant joking remark that is accompanied by a hostile gesture; the sudden slip of the tongue which says the opposite of what has been intended. This is the "psychological evidence" a biographer must learn to read...

For illustrations, we will turn to Edel's decades-long study of Henry James.

Edel, who already had evidence of the contentious, stressful, and also loving relationship between the two brothers, William and Henry James, came across a letter William wrote to a complete stranger. The recipient of the letter was the Secretary of the American Academy of Arts and Letters; he had just informed William that he, William, had been elected to the Academy.

“William replied that since Henry, his ‘younger, vainer and more frivolous brother,’ was already a member,” notes Edel (Anderson, 1979, I, p. 17), “there might be a redundancy of Jameses,” and he declined the invitation. William, no doubt, was trying to be humorous; yet the hostile and condescending side of his feelings about his brother seeped out in the comment, which provided Edel with additional evidence about the nature of the relationship of the two.

Two more examples also pertain to that relationship. Henry was in Europe when he learned of William’s marriage in the Boston area. In writing a letter of congratulations, Henry used these words:

as I was divorced from you by an untimely fate on this occasion, let me at least repair the injury by giving you...a tender bridal benediction. (Edel, 1977, I, p. 584)

With the word, “divorced,” Henry is ostensibly referring to their being distant from each other. Edel focuses on Henry’s use of language and speculates that Henry used that word because he felt “divorced” from his brother; they had a “primal relationship” and now another, William’s bride, had taken his place, and he may well have felt that William’s wedding provided an “injury.”

Edel (1977) finds further evidence about Henry’s reaction to William’s marriage in *Confidence*, the novel Henry was writing in the weeks after he learned of the wedding. There are two friends. One, named Wright, is scientific minded like William; the other is aesthetic and a lover of art, like Henry. The whole novel revolves around Wright’s decision not to marry one woman, due largely to his friend’s advice, and his marrying instead on the rebound another woman, with whom he becomes disenchanted. Edel sees Henry as struggling

through self-consolation, jealousy, rejection, assertion, in an attempt to rectify the disturbed familial emotions. (p. 586)

Here we have touched on a huge, complex, and controversial topic: how an artistic product, such as a novel, painting, or film, reflects the inner world of the creator. In this chapter on executing psychobiography, we can say no more than to advise psychobiographers not to overlook that rich source of information but also to be cautious: the product is rarely a photograph of the creator’s experience; rather it is an imaginative expression of it. For some inquiries into this topic, see Edel (1965), Schultz (2005c), and Anderson (2011).

A dream provides our last example involving the Jameses. Dreams, like creative products, are an expression of the inner world, difficult to interpret, and invaluable to psychobiographers. Edel (1977) seizes on a dream of James’s, called by James “the most appalling yet most admirable nightmare of my life” (I, p. 60). Edel’s (1977, I, 59–66) intricate analysis of the dream teases out indications of the novelist’s life-long attempt to turn the tables on the forces that he felt threatened him.

When we were writing this chapter, we did not have at hand a telling example of a parapraxis, a Freudian slip. But before the revisions were completed, there took place one of the debates among Republicans contesting for the 2016 presidential nomination. Marco Rubio, Senator from Florida, declaimed about the importance of being a parent (we’ve put his slip in italics):

The most important job I'm ever going to have, the most important job anyone in this room will ever have, is the job of being a parent. Not the job of being president, or the job of being a senator, or the job of being a congressman. The most important job any of us will ever do is the job of being a *president*, because the most important institution in society is the family. (Who said what and what it meant: The 4th GOP debate annotated, 2015)

A psychobiographer studying this public figure might speculate that Rubio, in contradiction to the public image he wishes to portray, actually values the job of president more than the job of being a parent, especially considering the many days he has been spending away from his four children while campaigning.

## 2.4 Interpreting

Having described the varieties of materials, much of which is hard to analyze, we turn now to the question of how psychobiographers decide what to do with this mass of information, that is, how to go from the evidence to the best understanding of the subject that they can come to. Of course, no comprehensive and definitive answer is possible, but we describe three approaches, those proposed by William McKinley Runyan, by Irving Alexander and Amy Demorest, and by William Todd Schultz.

Runyan (1982, p. 47) expands on the process of choosing among different interpretations. While affirming that there is no single incontestable interpretation, he notes that there are ways of assessing which interpretations are better:

Explanations and interpretations can be evaluated in light of criteria such as: (1) their logical soundness, (2) their comprehensiveness in accounting for a number of puzzling aspects of the events in question, (3) their survival of tests of attempted falsification, such as tests of derived predictions or retractions, (4) their consistency with the full range of available relevant evidence, (5) their support from above, or their consistency with more general knowledge about human functioning or about the person in question, and (6) their credibility relative to other explanatory hypotheses.

The second approach, which relies on what we call the Alexander-Demorest Identifiers of Saliency, is a strategy for looking at the subject's texts (such as memoirs, stories told to others, and interview material) and determining what is most significant psychologically. Alexander (1990) developed the method, and Amy Demorest, who studied with him in graduate school, has further refined and employed it.

Demorest (2005, pp. 12–13) summarizes the identifiers:

According to the identifier of *primacy*, what appears first is significant in serving as a foundation stone or key to unfolding meaning. The identifier of *frequency* signals the importance of that which recurs. In *uniqueness*, what is singular or odd is found to have significance. In *negation*, what is actively denied or opposed is flagged as having special consequence. *Emphasis* calls attention to that which is obviously accented or underlined; underemphasis can be as salient as overemphasis. With *omission* we are given notice of the importance of that which is missing. In *error* or *distortion* a mistake indicates the presence of revealing material. The indicator of *isolation* is a signal of salience to what which does not fit or stands alone. Alexander's last indicator is *incompletion*, which calls attention to the significance of that which is left unfinished.

As an example, we look back at the previously discussed incident from B. F. Skinner's life. Abandoned by a girlfriend, he burned the first initial of her name into his arm. Three of the indicators of salience point to the importance of this incident. It is unique, in the sense of being odd; it is underemphasized; and it fits the criterion of incompleteness, in that Skinner mentions it but does not elaborate on or explore it.

While the Alexander-Demorest approach may be used to select numerous scenes that are important for the subject, Schultz, creator of the third approach, argues for the value of choosing one particular scene, which he calls the "prototypical scene." "In this single scene (an episode or event)," Schultz (2005a, p. 116) explains, "the core parameters of an entire life story are embedded and encapsulated. The prototypical scene is the blueprint of a life; it summarizes nuclear conflicts and personality patterns." Schultz notes that such a scene is identifiable because it is so vivid, emphasized by the subject, emotionally intense, recurrent in the subject's life and work, and important in the subject's development. The scene also includes a violation of the status quo or of the normal course of life, and hence the subject is driven to return to it often to try to make it understandable.

Schultz gives an example of such a scene about which Truman Capote told and retold many times. Capote said that at the age of about two years old he was living with his very young mother in a hotel room:

She would leave me locked in this hotel room when she went out in the evening with her beaux and I would become hysterical because I couldn't get out of this room. (Schultz, 2005b, p. 51)

Schultz explains that this scene captures the key themes of Capote's life and his fiction: he feared betrayal and abandonment, he felt isolated, and he constantly desired to escape from the realities of his troubled life.

While we would not have described the three approaches if we did not see merit in them, we by no means claim that every psychobiographer should use these strategies. We realize that psychobiographers often, even usually, will use less systematic approaches. To some extent psychobiography remains an art—albeit one that may make use of the findings of scientific psychology—and analysis will rely always to a greater or lesser extent on the author's intuition, experience, empathy, and insight.

## 2.5 The Psychobiographer's Relationship with the Subject

It is just here, at the psychobiographer's use of oneself as the main tool of psychological analysis, that we encounter the most intricate topic in executing psychobiography: the author's relationship with the subject who is being studied.

Two perceptive comments from Edel provide us with an entrée into the topic. Edel (1961, p. 461) notes that the knowledgeable psychological biographer is able

to recognize the existence of a series of possibilities rather than accept smugly the single answer to any given question projected by himself; and he can try to understand systematically his own easy rationalizations. In a word, he indulges in fewer rigidities of thought and laxities of feeling derived from his own fantasies.

Edel (1961, p. 461) then goes on to identify what he sees as the central dilemma that we psychobiographers face:

our dilemma is that to write a good biography we must identify with our subject in some degree: how otherwise re-experience his [or her] feelings, his problems, his struggle? We must try to measure the world through the subject's eyes and to penetrate into that world. But in becoming this other person for the purpose of biography, the biographer risks everything.

Psychobiographers' success or failure can revolve around their relationship with the subject. On the one hand, a deeper understanding can come only from a close engagement with the subject, being able to identify in such a way as to imagine how subjects feel during travails they face. Psychobiographers must be able to picture that they themselves would act, or at least would want to act, as the subject acted, if they encountered the same circumstances as did the subject and had the same formative experiences as the subject had. Someone studying William James would have to find a bridge to imagining what it would be like to feel suffused with fear as James once was. A chronicler of Truman Capote would have to picture wanting, as did Capote, to get revenge. A biographer of Henry James would have to find in oneself the same desire for obtaining glory and conquering as Henry James had.

When psychobiographers can make a personal connection to the subject, their work is potentially enhanced. Schultz (2005a) reveals that he shared with his subject, Diane Arbus, an interest in eccentricity and a desire for what we would call authenticity. Schultz and Arbus were both fascinated with eccentrics. He notes that

like Arbus, I felt that by some convoluted magic they succeeded in being more real, more committed to their own intensification of personality, [more] absorbed in their fakery, whereas I, and my friends, simply felt fake. (p. 114)

But the psychobiographer's close connection to the subject can also cause trouble. Schultz (2005a) points out the personal motives, often unknown to themselves, of psychobiographers:

We may secretly wish to vindicate our subjects, attack them, love them, or participate vicariously in their fame. Our pursuit of their secrets may be a way of pursuing our own, a working through of conflicts and anxieties. (p. 113)

It is not hard to see how such feelings can lead to faulted studies. In his article on best practices in psychobiography, Ponterotto (2014, p. 83) explains that the strong and biased feelings of the author about the subject can result in four kinds of psychobiographies that are all problematical: hagiographies, idealographies, degradographies, and pathographies.

Psychoanalysis for decades (see, for example, Racker, 1968; Tansey & Burke, 1989) has put great emphasis on countertransference, which refers to the reactions and emotions, based in large part on the therapist's own psychology, that the therapist has

toward the patient. It is well accepted in psychoanalysis that analysts must develop a close familiarity with and mastery of their own feelings. Largely for that reason, every analyst is required to go through a personal psychoanalysis. Erikson (1975, p. 116) points to the parallel with psychobiographers; he uses the term “countertransference” to refer to their reactions and emotions toward their subjects.

We recommend that psychobiographers pay conscious attention to their countertransference. Talking with friends and colleagues, if not with a therapist, about possible biases, idealizations, identifications, and resentments can help. Perhaps it should be required to include some remarks in the work about one’s feelings regarding the subject. The benefit would be that the readers, working their way through the study, would be able to take into account the author’s biases.

Strouse (1987), biographer of Alice James (who was the sister of William and Henry James) carried out a searching and honest inquiry into her feelings about her subject. Alice James was a brilliant, witty, and insightful woman, as is apparent from her diary and her letters, but she led a frustrating and limited life. Overwhelmed by her psychological problems, she was an invalid from her teenage years until her death at age 43. She lived most of her life with her family in the Boston area and spent the final years living with a woman friend in England. Strouse, as a woman who grew up with brothers, notes she was attracted to writing about a woman who developed in such a sparkling and unusual family, the James family, also as the only daughter. While working on the book, Strouse was unclear about how attached she had become to Alice James. Strouse (1987, p. 69) visited her grave, and, she recalls, “I was quite astonished to find myself suddenly in tears.” Realizing that no one had visited the grave in years, she found herself saying to James, “Don’t worry—I’ll take care of you.” Then Strouse thought, Then Strouse thought,

I realized in a rush that she had worked her powerful will on me, just like she did with people who lived with her: there I was, after a hundred years, taking care of Alice.

Her reaction to James gave her insight into how the people around James had reacted to her.

As Strouse continued with her writing, she became stuck. She found herself bothered by Alice James. She saw James being unable to devote her fine mind to anything useful and pushing people away. James had rendered herself, as Strouse saw, “literally in-valid” (p. 70). Taking time off from her writing, Strouse gained a new insight into James. Strouse saw in effect that her own frustration that James did not do or accomplish more reflected James’s own disappointment.

[H]er fierce competitiveness - her ambition in that family to be more than ‘just’ a girl, an invalid, a waste, a failure - that measured the degree of her incapacity. (p. 71)

Strouse realized she had had a “countertransference reaction” to James. “I could learn about her from my own emotional responses” (p. 72),” Strouse concluded.

In looking at James, Strouse also was aware of the vast differences between being a woman in the 20th Century versus the 19th Century. Reading about James’s “lack of education, her circumscribed, thwarted life,” Strouse said to herself, “There but for the grace of God and a hundred years go I” (p. 69). We note too that psychobiographers’

engagement with a subject fuels their willingness to put in the hard work of studying the subject in depth.

While countertransference analysis focuses on the inner psychological response of the author to the subject, it is meant to include all aspects of the author's response, including Strouse's attention here to her role as a woman in comparison to James's role in an earlier era.

There is a parallel approach in the field of qualitative research called reflexivity, which also strives to be as comprehensive as possible but which complements countertransference by emphasizing the researcher's culture and related areas, such as socioeconomic status, class, gender, sexual orientation, and racial and ethnic background. Reflexivity refers to the process whereby researchers continuously look at and consider how their assumptions, values, and perceptions influence their data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Lambert, Jomeen, & McSherry, 2010, p. 322. On reflexivity, see also Chase, 2005; Reissman, 2008; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Researchers are not objective observers, but instead their culture impacts them in numerous ways.

## 2.6 Psychobiography as Cross-Cultural Research

That topic, of the impact of culture, requires a section of its own in this chapter. In many cases, the psychobiographical subject lived in a historical era—distinct from that of the psychobiographer's—with numerous differences, such as in values, assumptions, and gender roles. Jean Strouse and Alice James did not see the world in the same way, and there were many differences in the beliefs they adopted from the world around them. Even with more contemporary subjects, the cultural differences may be extensive. Two of Schultz's subjects, for example, had backgrounds distinctly different from Schultz's. Truman Capote (Schultz, 2011b) was influenced by Southern culture, and Diane Arbus (Schultz, 2011a) grew up in a particular New York Jewish milieu.

The cultural factor is especially sensitive in psychobiographical writing because psychological concepts, developed for one society, may not apply well to another society. For example, psychoanalytic ego psychology, as developed in the United States, valorizes autonomy, but in many eras and areas of the world, autonomy is aberrant and the emphasis is on connection with family.

One representative and flagrant example of a failure to appreciate differences in culture involves Abraham Lincoln. A historian (Tripp, 2005) claimed that Lincoln was gay. His main piece of evidence was that Lincoln for some years, as is true, slept in the same bed with a close friend, Joshua Speed. It may well be that the large majority of young men who slept in the same bed with a close friend of the same sex in New York City in the 1990s (where Tripp was living as he wrote the book) were gay. But in Springfield, Illinois, in the late 1830s, it was common for people of the same sex to share beds and therefore the situation provides no evidence of homosexuality.

Another example illustrates not only an ignorance of culture but also the foisting of theory onto a subject. Wolfenstein discusses Gandhi's hunger strikes as well as his choice of salt as a target for a large-scale non-violent protest against the British colonial government in India. Wolfenstein draws on a theoretical proposition from psychoanalyst Ernest Jones that salt can be a symbol of semen. Wolfenstein (1967, p. 221) proposes:

If it had this unconscious meaning for Gandhi, then we may understand his depriving himself of condiments, including salt, as a form of sexual abstinence, involving a regression to an issue of the oral phase. In the context of the Salt March, Gandhi's taking of salt from the British can thus be seen as reclaiming for the Indian people the manhood and potency which was properly theirs.

Erikson (1975) looked at the same incident of the Salt March but provided a strikingly different analysis. He argues that salt, as a food preservative, had a particular value in colonial India because of the chronic shortages of food. It also had substantial economic value. Most strikingly, salt was a perfect commodity for pointing out the injustice of British rule. Gathering salt that had been deposited on the seashore was illegal in the Raj because it was construed as an evasion of the salt tax. The goal of the Salt March, as Gandhi conceived it, was for the protestors to break the law by the simple act of picking up salt. With Wolfenstein's interpretation in mind, Erikson (p. 160) concludes that in deciding on the Salt March Gandhi

was obviously in command of his political and economic as well as his psychological wits. And in any context except that of irrationality clearly attributable to sexual repression, one should take any interpretation that explains a human act by recourse to sexual symbolism with more than one grain of salt.

Anthropologist Robert LeVine (Parin, LeVine, & Friedman, 1975, p. 384) recommends that psychobiographers "do extensive historical research to provide the cultural basis for [their] own empathy with historical figures." He advocates that the researcher gain a deep familiarity with the culture of the subject, much as anthropologists do when they carry out ethnographic research.

## 2.7 Conclusion

Some years before Edel considered writing a biography of Henry James, he arranged to edit a volume of James's plays. The James family had deposited at the Harvard library the family archives. Edel was given access to the materials, not yet processed, so he could search for scripts of the plays. One large wooden box, previously unopened, contained materials from James's last secretary; she was a typist, and James dictated much fiction, as well as letters, to her, rather than writing them out by hand.

That box contained the plays Edel was searching for. Some odd sheets of paper labeled "last dictation" caught Edel's eye. In Edel's words (McCullough, 1985): "The dictation was like 'stream of consciousness.' A note from [the secretary] said that

James during his last illness called for her and dictated these fragments, signing them ‘Napoleon’!”

Edel saw the significance of the material. A stroke had thrown James into a confused state. The pages recorded his delusions, including fantasies of being Napoleon. Edel, although he supposedly was in the library only to collect material related to the plays, copied out the sheets.

When he began work on the biography, years later, he had access to the James Papers, which had been processed in the meantime, and he discovered that the crucial dictations were missing. He learned that the James family descendants had destroyed them because, in their view, the sheets revealed the disintegration of James’s mind.

In his biography, Edel (1977) made use of the delusions. They provided the final and clinching evidence of the theme of James’s life myth that Edel traced throughout his long narrative. As Edel summarized it elsewhere (“The Ideal Edel,” 1977):

The myth that Henry James lived by, I believe, was a desire for power, a myth of the idea of glory, that he himself was a kind of Napoleon of letters.

We end with this story because it illustrates several of the central ideas we have discussed. First of all, research is all important. If Edel had not seen the significance of the dictations and had not been so resourceful as to copy them, a valuable piece of evidence would have been lost forever. We also spoke about the benefit of certain kinds of evidence that offer special access to the subject’s inner world; a delusion fits into that category. And finally we advocated that psychobiographers search for the subject’s life myth, as Edel did, with some assistance from the witness provided by the dictations.

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# Chapter 3

## Adventures in Psychobiography and the Study of Lives: A Personal Journey



William McKinley Runyan

**Abstract** Personal life histories are, I believe, intertwined with the creation and development of every tradition in psychology. This includes psychoanalysis, behaviorism and humanistic psychology. A useful review of this work is in the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (2005). Examples in this chapter are Freud, Karen Horney and B. F. Skinner. We also look briefly at a post-modern critic of psychology, Michel Foucault. How important are personal experiences and politics in opposition to psychology? More recently, I have argued that individual life histories are also relevant in understanding philosophers such as Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein, discussed in this chapter. Surprisingly, there may be more personal dimensions in statistics than assumed. Examples discussed here are Sir Ronald Fisher and Jerzy Neyman. This chapter reviews the adventures of an advocate of the study of individual lives interacting with supporters and opponents of the project through years as a graduate student at Harvard from 1969 to 1975, and as a professor at UC Berkeley from 1979 to 2010. With Gardner Lindzey (Lindzey & Runyan, 2007), I co-edited the most recent volume of the *History of Psychology in Autobiography* in 2007. This includes a wider array of perspectives than my own, with chapters by Elliot Aronson, Elizabeth Loftus, Albert Bandura, Walter Mischel, Daniel Kahneman, Ulric Neisser, and others. Many of these accounts are fascinating. I wonder, gentle reader, how has it been going for you? What experiences have you had encountering the variety of “hard” or “soft” traditions you have been exposed to?

**Keywords** Sigmund Freud · Karen Horney · B. F. Skinner · Michel Foucault · Bertrand Russell · Ludwig Wittgenstein · Sir Ronald Fisher · Jerzy Neyman · Psychobiography

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### 3.1 Introduction

I was thrilled to be starting a new program in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice at Harvard University in the fall of 1969. As an undergraduate at Oberlin College in Ohio majoring in psychology and sociology, I had been reading books such as Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (1963) and *Young Man Luther* (1957) or *The Social System* (1951) by Talcott Parsons. It was amazing to see so many of these names on the directory for William James Hall. It was possible to visit them in office hours and have a chance to talk. How might I make my way in this world?

The list also included B. F. Skinner. I had read his *Science and Human Behavior* (1953) and his utopian novel, *Walden Two* (1948). I had written a BA thesis on utopian communities, based on historical research and on visiting different kinds of contemporary utopian communities. One of these was Twin Oaks in Louisa, Virginia, drawing in part on ideas in Skinner's *Walden Two*. One of the most important books for me at the time was *The History of Psychology in Autobiography* (vol 5, 1967), edited by Boring and Lindzey. This included autobiographical chapters by Henry A. Murray, Gordon Allport, Carl Rogers and B. F. Skinner. This made it easier to understand their work, and to start a conversation with each of these individuals in the coming years. I regret never meeting Gordon Allport as unfortunately he had died in 1967.

I became professionally interested in studying individual lives by 1969 and later in psychobiography while trying to become an interdisciplinary social scientist. As an undergraduate at Oberlin College from 1966 to 1969, interested in psychology and sociology, I was strongly influenced by the interdisciplinary work of Harvard's Department of Social Relations. This department included professors in personality and clinical psychology, in sociology, and in cultural anthropology. An early book used in the program was *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*, edited by Clyde Kluckhohn and Murray (1948, 1953 revised). A theoretical statement which influenced me was in *Toward a Field Theory of Behavior: Personality and Social Structure* (Yinger, 1965). He argued that

In formal statements there is general agreement that the science of behavior must be carried forward on four levels—biological, individual, cultural, and social. These can be identified roughly with the four sciences of biology, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. (p. 8)

This vision of an interdisciplinary social science was appealing to me, and by the time I started graduate school, I saw myself as trying to develop the study of lives as a level of analysis in the social sciences. At an opening overnight retreat in September 1969, faculty and students in a new program at Harvard called "Clinical Psychology and Public Practice" sat in a circle and reported on their interests and plans for the future. My plan was to explore the possibilities for the systematic or scientific study of life histories. What were the possibilities of scientifically studying the course of lives? This question seemed both of personal interest and relevant to evaluating the effects of social intervention programs, not on short-term outcomes based on single variables but on the course of lives, to the extent that it could be known.

By the summer of 1970, I had gotten in touch with Henry A. Murray and Robert W. White, both of whom had been professors in the Department of Social Relations. Murray (1893–1988) had been a founder of personality psychology (*Explorations in Personality*, 1938) and an early advocate of “personology” or the study of lives. I found that Murray’s encouragement, vitality and enthusiasm inspired me in some way almost every time we met, from that first meeting in 1970 to a final visit in December 1987, about 6 months before his death at age 95. As I commented in reviewing his biography (Runyan, 1994), compared to other psychologists, Murray seemed more alive, to have greater depth and humane learning, greater awareness of inner experience, greater wit and expressiveness, and greater sensitivities to the nuances of social interaction. He could also be self-centered, jealous, and harshly critical of himself and others. Murray seemed to me a person of unusual stature, who gave me a sense of what it might have been like to know Freud or Jung, not as influential as they were in publications, but as charismatic and eye-opening in personal interaction as anyone I had met.

Robert White was supportive in different ways: thoughtful, reserved, even patrician, yet responsible and helpful, taking the time late in his life to write comments for my first two books. On *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982), he wrote

With impressive scholarship and with commendable judgment Professor Runyan brings up to date the larger problems in the study of lives.

On *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, (1988) he said

Showing that psychological understanding need not be limited to psychoanalysis, Runyan develops a comprehensive conceptualization for the use of psychology in psychohistory.

I greatly appreciated his taking the time to do this, and felt that his comments highlighted features of the books which were central in my aspirations for them.

After earning his undergraduate degree in history from Harvard in 1925, White intended to teach social and cultural history. Once in graduate school, however, he switched his field of interest from the history of nations to the history of lives. Though intrigued by psychoanalysis, which at that time focused largely on psychopathology, White was also interested in his subjects’ adaptive capacities and in the development of competence, sometimes in spite of difficult earlier circumstances. In *Lives in Progress* (1952) and later editions, White studied the lives and adaptations of three Harvard students, 2 males and one female, following them up with interviews in later years. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to talk more with White at the end of his life (1904–2001) and to think more about the personal meanings that the study of lives had for him. White received his Ph.D. under Murray in 1937 and wrote a classic early text on *The Abnormal Personality* (1948). As a junior in college, the third edition (1964) of White’s text provided an appealing and life-historically oriented introduction to the field.

I had studied the archives at Harvard’s Pusey Library and Houghton library containing the papers and correspondence of Gordon Allport, Henry Murray, Erik Erikson, William James and many others. In 2000 I asked Robert White if he would be

willing to deposit his papers and correspondence in Harvard's Pusey Library (named after Harvard President Nathan Pusey). He said he would be glad to do so. Apparently Harvard Archives had asked him when he retired in 1967, but had never heard back from him. A librarian now got involved and helped White's son go through his files in his Longwood Towers apartment in Boston. His papers were eventually archived in Pusey Library. This was a small contribution by me to historical scholarship in the history of psychology and of social relations at Harvard.

When I began graduate school I was familiar with the work of White and Murray, both of whom had retired by then, but I was unaware of the extent and nature of the opposition within academia to the study of individual lives. In graduate school from 1969–75, I got more of a feel for the problem. My sense of this opposition motivated my attention to methodological and conceptual issues in my dissertation, *Life Histories: A Field of Inquiry and a Framework for Intervention* (1975), and in my first book, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982). During graduate school, my interests in narrative and in the study of individual lives were not warmly received by some of the faculty. In talking with one senior professor of developmental psychology, Jerome Kagan, about my plans to write a dissertation on the study of individual life histories, he said that my proposal was not like taking a rocket to the moon but more like making a trip to the garbage dump. Not surprisingly, he did not become a member of my dissertation committee.

On May 25, 1971, near the end of my second year of graduate school, Professor David McClelland wrote me a letter saying that my philosophical interests were not suited to the program, neither to the action-oriented approach of Clinical Psychology and Public Practice nor to the empirical studies of the Personality and Developmental 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. Trying to understand what there was about my approach that he disliked so much, I went to talk with him about it in his office, but he refused, saying that this was not psychotherapy. Years later, in a chapter on "*Autobiographical Sources of My Intellectual Interests*" in McClelland (1984), McClelland said he used to have philosophical debates with his father, a Methodist minister and college president, which would start out objectively but "often became very heated." McClelland wrote that he "came to hate these family arguments," which drove him to put as much distance as possible between himself and his family. Because McClelland's father could take either side of an issue and "never once admitted that he was wrong, no matter how powerful my arguments were," these debates had "profound effects:

...I feel certain that my interest in empirical science came in part from my desire to find incontrovertible facts that could not be disputed. (3)

Although not certain, I wondered if these experiences were related to our conflicts.

Opposition to the study of individual lives sometimes comes from thinking it is not scientific enough. If it is not based on experiments or statistics, how could it be scientific? This debate about the scientific status of the study of lives is vividly illustrated in Henry A. Murray's own career. James B. Conant (1893–1978), initially a chemist, became President of Harvard in 1933. He started an "up or out" policy for

professors. They had to be promoted to Professor within 6 or 7 years or they would be forced to leave Harvard. Henry Murray had an M.D. in 1919 from Columbia and a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Cambridge University and was hired as Assistant Director of the Harvard Psychological Clinic under Morton Prince, M.D. in 1926. When Henry Murray came up for tenure in 1936, the manuscript for *Explorations in Personality* was available, although not yet published. Gordon Allport (1897–1967), one of Murray’s strongest supporters argued that Murray was the intellectual heir of William James and was important for the development of humanistically oriented psychology at Harvard. Another committee member, neuropsychologist Karl Lashley (1890–1958) had just been hired after a search for the “best psychologist in the world”. Lashley hated psychoanalysis, saw Murray’s work as unscientific, and threatened to resign if Murray was given tenure. Allport suggested he might go somewhere else if Murray was not given tenure. The tenure vote was divided with three votes for and three votes against. To resolve the situation, Edwin G. Boring, Chair of the Psychology Department proposed that Murray be given two five-year appointments without tenure. By 1946, after WWII, the department had split into two different departments: Psychology (experimental psychology) and Social Relations (social and clinical psychology with sociology and social anthropology.). A reader for the new Social Relations department was *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*, edited by cultural anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn and Murray (1948, revised 1953).

The debate about what counts as scientific psychology continues to the present. How is the study of individual lives related to scientific psychology? Lee J. Cronbach argued in his 1957 Presidential Address to the American Psychologist Association that there are “*Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology*”, experimental and correlational. In 1975, Cronbach wrote about the importance of person-situation interactions in “*Beyond Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology*”. In addition to person-situation interactions, I argue that there are at least four tasks or objectives in personality psychology: (1) developing general theories of personality (2) studying individual and group differences (3) analyzing specific behaviors or classes of experience, and (4) understanding individual persons or lives. This framework is elaborated on in my chapter on “Evolving Conceptions of Psychobiography and the Study of Lives” in the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (2005). I am aware that other sets of objectives can be outlined for other purposes.

While on sabbatical at Harvard in the spring of 1986 and again in the spring of 1990, I was excited by Stephen Jay Gould’s arguments for historical science, as in evolutionary biology and in historical geology. He covered both fields in his course titled “History of the Earth and of Life.” In Gould’s view, Darwin was “the greatest of all historical scientists” (Gould, 1989, p. 282). Historical science is needed for studying complex sequences of events and processes, as in life histories. It might become a great resource for psychobiography and for the study of lives. In my view, the study of individual lives is NOT merely a rough initial stage in the science of psychology, to be replaced by quantitative or experimental psychology. The study of individual lives is also one of the ultimate objectives of an appropriately scientific and humanistic psychology. There is a great deal which remains to be done. This chapter draws on the