attempt to reach some conclusions about which model best explains the impression formation process.

One more word is in order before we begin. In the research to be described, participants are asked to form an impression about another person on the basis of verbal information supplied by the experimenter. For example, participants might be told that Terry is smart, sensitive, reckless, and disrespectful. Participants then indicate their liking for Terry. Admittedly, this is an artificial way of forming an impression of another person. We rarely learn about others based only on verbal information supplied by a third party. It happens from time to time (our roommate describes her brother to us before he comes to visit), but our impressions of others are usually based on firsthand information of the type discussed in Chapter 3.

Although the experimental procedure is artificial, it does have an important advantage. By providing participants with specific information about an individual, researchers are able to control everything participants know about that person and when they know it. These aspects of experimental control, which were discussed in Chapter 1, increase internal validity and help scientists reach causal conclusions about how various types of information affect our impressions of others.

A. Elemental Models

When forming an impression of another person, elemental models assume that we consider each piece of information separately from the others. Everything we know about a person is treated as a distinct fact. Our overall impression is then an algebraic function of the isolated impressions. From this perspective, there is independence, not interdependence. The whole is nothing more than the various elements that make it up.

Elemental models begin by assuming that an evaluative rating can be assigned to each piece of information we have about a person. For purposes of illustration, consider the items presented in Table 4.1. The entries, taken from N. H. Anderson (1968), show the likableness ratings of eight qualities. Each trait was rated on a 6-point scale (0 = Would dislike a person who possessed these qualities; 6 = Would like a person who possessed these qualities). The values are the mean ratings obtained from 100 participants who completed this exercise.