

The Five-Factor Model In Personality: A Critical Appraisal

Dan P. McAdams
Northwestern University

ABSTRACT This critical appraisal aims to position the five-factor model within the multifaceted field of personality psychology by highlighting six important limitations of the model. These are the model's (a) inability to address core constructs of personality functioning beyond the level of traits; (b) limitations with respect to the prediction of specific behavior and the adequate description of persons' lives; (c) failure to provide compelling causal explanations for human behavior and experience; (d) disregard of the contextual and conditional nature of human experience; (e) failure to offer an attractive program for studying personality organization and integration; and (f) reliance on simple, noncontingent, and implicitly comparative statements about persons. The five-factor model is essentially a "psychology of the stranger," providing information about persons that one would need to know when one knows nothing else about them. It is argued that because of inherent limitations, the Big Five may be viewed as one important model *in* personality studies but not *the* integrative model of personality.

INTRODUCTION

After decades of doubt and defensiveness, traits are back on top. There is a growing consensus in personality psychology that traits exist, en-

I would like to thank Jack Block, Bob Emmons, Harrison Gough, Bill Revelle, Auke Tellegen, Avril Thorne, Steve West, and two anonymous reviewers for their extremely helpful comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript. The views expressed herein are mine and should not be attributed to any of the particular people who have provided commentary and review. Preparation of the manuscript was aided by a grant from the Spencer Foundation. Correspondence should be addressed to Dan P. McAdams, Human Development and Social Policy, Northwestern University, 2003 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208.

Journal of Personality 60:2, June 1992. Copyright © 1992 by Duke University Press.
CCC 0022-3506/92/\$1.50

An offprint from

Journal of Personality

Published Quarterly by the Duke University Press

Duke University Press

Durham, NC 27708

U.S.A.

ture across time and situations, and can be measured reliably and validly, and that measurements of individual differences in traits can be used to great advantage in the prediction of human behavior (A. H. Buss, 1989; Carson, 1989; Conley, 1985a; Costa & McCrae, 1988; Epstein, 1984; Hampson, 1988; Hogan, 1987; Kenrick & Funder, 1988; Rushton, 1990; Tellegen, 1985). Whereas trait measures were relentlessly impugned in the 1950s and 1960s as nothing better than assessments of social desirability and acquiescence (Christie & Lindauer, 1963; Edwards, 1957) and in the 1970s and early 1980s as poor predictors of behavior in most situations (Argyle & Little, 1972; Mischel, 1968; Mischel & Peake, 1982), the last 10 years or so have witnessed a remarkable turnaround. Just over a decade ago, Jackson and Paunonen (1980) wryly observed that "trait theorists" seemed to be viewed "like witches of 300 years ago. . . . [T]here is confidence in their existence, and even possibly their sinister properties, although one is hard pressed to find one in the flesh or even meet someone who has" (p. 523). As recently as 6 years ago, Zuroff (1986) went to great lengths to show that Gordon Allport was *not* a trait theorist in order to "rehabilitate" him (p. 993), as if to suggest that to be called a trait theorist is to be forever disgraced in the eyes of history. Today, no rehabilitation seems to be necessary, as trait theorists and trait theories enjoy newfound confidence and visibility and even begin to display periodic bouts of unabashed hubris.

One major reason for the revival of traits is the emergence and development of the five-factor model, as convincingly evidenced in this special issue of the *Journal of Personality*. First articulated in the pioneering studies of Fiske (1949), Tupes and Christal (1961), and Norman (1963), the five-factor model has become an increasingly influential framework during the last decade for organizing and understanding the universe of personality traits. The reanalysis of classic peer-rating studies undertaken by Digman and Takemoto-Chock (1981), the investigations of personality lexicons conducted by Goldberg (1981; Peabody & Goldberg, 1989), the development of personality inventories designed to assess the five factors through self-report (McCrae & Costa, 1987), the discovery of the five factors in omnibus personality measures such as the Personality Research Form (Costa & McCrae, 1988) and the Adjective Check List (John, 1989), and the empirical demonstration of substantial longitudinal consistency in personality traits subsumed within the five-factor framework (Conley, 1985b; Costa, McCrae, & Arenberg, 1980) have all converged in recent years to provide "a theoretical struc-

ture of surprising generality" and "a good answer to the question of personality *structure*," according to a recent report on personality in the *Annual Review of Psychology* (Digman, 1990, pp. 418, 436). This special issue of the *Journal of Personality* also documents impressive extensions and applications of the five-factor model in several domains.

The five-factor model appears to represent a major conceptual and empirical advance in the field of personality psychology. The five broad factors of (I) Surgency (Extraversion), (II) Agreeableness (Warmth), (III) Conscientiousness (Will), (IV) Emotional Stability (Neuroticism), and (V) Culture (Intellectance, Openness to Experience) have demonstrated considerable generality and applicability across various self- and peer report measures of personality traits. The five factors seem to cover a vast conceptual space that encompasses the central human concerns of power (Surgency), love (Agreeableness), work (Conscientiousness), affect (Emotional Stability), and intellect (Culture) (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989). They appear to subsume the two broad dimensions of the interpersonal circle—Dominance and Warmth—described by Leary (1957) and Wiggins (1979). And they appear to be inherent in a wide variety of standard systems for personality description, including Cattell's 16 factors, Eysenck's "big three," Murray's 20 needs, Guilford's temperaments, Jung's types, and the psychodynamic descriptors contained in Block's (1961) California Q-Set (McCrae, 1989). In one way or another, the five factors seem to indicate or point to a good deal of the most important information one might expect to gather in order to describe an individual's personality. Indeed, the five factors are ultimately derived from and appear to be ingrained within the common language we use to describe persons. As such, the five factors cover fundamental questions we seek to answer about persons. Goldberg (1981) writes:

They [the five factors] suggest that those who have contributed to the English lexicon as it has evolved over time wished to know the answers to at least five types of questions about a stranger they were soon to meet: (1) Is X *active and dominant* or passive and submissive (Can I bully X or will X try to bully me)? (2) Is X *agreeable* (warm and pleasant) or disagreeable (cold and distant)? (3) Can I count on X (Is X *responsible and conscientious* or undependable and negligent)? (4) Is X *crazy* (unpredictable) or sane (stable)? (5) Is X *smart* or dumb (How easy will it be for me to teach X)?

Are these universal questions? (p. 161)

The robust finding that people consistently describe themselves and each other with respect to approximately five fundamental dimensions of individual differences represents a significant development in personality psychology for at least three reasons, as delineated by Briggs (1989). First, the five-factor model provides a compelling framework for building personality measures that seek to represent the domain of individual difference terms broadly and systematically. Second, it enables researchers to locate the myriad constructs and measures in the field within a meaningful conceptual space, enhancing our ability to compare and contrast different constructs and promising to bring clarity and order to an enterprise that was once described as "a disconcerting sprawl" (Adelson, 1969). Third, the model suggests that the five basic dimensions "should merit special attention in the continuing search for the mechanisms underlying individual differences in personality" (Briggs, 1989, p. 247). For instance, investigations into the biological bases of personality might receive critical guidance and fruitful hypotheses from the five-factor model (e.g., D. M. Buss, 1990; Eysenck, 1973, 1990; Rowe, 1989).

Now that the five-factor model is becoming an established dominant framework in the field of personality psychology, it is incumbent upon observers of and participants in the field to assess critically the model's appropriate place and role. Some of the model's staunchest advocates intimate that "the Big Five" will revolutionize the entire corpus of personality study. For example, Digman and Inouye (1986) raise the possibility that "all linguistic conceptions of personality, whether originating in the constructs of personality theories or coming from the language of ordinary discourse, may be found within this five-fold space" (p. 122). And John (1989) says that the five-factor model represents "the accumulated knowledge about personality as it has been laid down over the ages in natural language" (p. 269). For John (1989, 1990), the five-factor taxonomy is to personality what the Linnaean kingdoms of "plant" and "animal" are to biology—the highest-order classification rubrics for all relevant phenomena.

As a counterpoint to the enthusiastic endorsements of the Big Five found in many recent writings (including those in this volume), my appraisal of the five-factor model adopts a more skeptical perspective. I am not trying to undermine the outstanding efforts of the many personality psychologists who have developed, elaborated, and applied the five-factor framework—to suggest, for instance, that their work suffers from a fatal conceptual or methodological flaw. My aim is not to quibble

about *exactly* how many factors there are and what their precise names should be, nor to debate the adequacy of particular factor-analytic solutions and strategies. Rather, in this article I attempt to position the Big Five framework within the complex and multifaceted field of personality psychology. Accordingly, I raise six general criticisms of the five-factor model, each suggesting that the model's place in the field should be delimited to a narrower domain than its strongest adherents appear to suggest. My criticisms challenge personality psychologists to think critically and creatively about the nature of their field, about what personality psychologists *should* be studying. They are roughly arranged in ascending order of importance and (most likely) descending order of "conventionality." In other words, I present my most important, most speculative, and, perhaps, most controversial critique at the end, when I consider the possibility that the five-factor framework is essentially a "psychology of the stranger."

Covering the Universe

Much of the appeal of the five-factor model lies in its presumed comprehensiveness. Allport and Odbert (1936) provided the original source of personality-related terms by listing about 18,000 descriptors found in an unabridged English dictionary. Through a series of steps, Cattell (1943) winnowed the list down to 171 which were then used by people to rate others whom they knew. These were eventually reduced to 35 to 40 clusters of related terms which were then used to construct rating scales for factor analyses of people's ratings of themselves and others. Through factor analysis, Cattell (1947) reduced the variables to at least 12 factors, but subsequent analyses by Fiske (1949) and Tupes and Christal (1961) suggested only five replicable factors. Further support for the Big Five structure of Cattell variables was provided by Norman (1963) and Digman and Takemoto-Chock (1981), while similar five-factor structures based on other sets of variables have been reported by Digman and Inouye (1986) and by McCrae and Costa (1985a, 1987). Further evidence for the model's comprehensiveness comes from McCrae's (1989) success in empirically uncovering the five factors in many other omnibus personality measures, from John's (1989) impressive conceptual integration of many different personality models, and by scattered cross-cultural studies suggesting that the Big Five have been uncovered in at least six languages (English, German, Japanese, Chinese, Tagalog [Filipino], and modern Hebrew). The cross-cultural studies have moved

Digman (1990) to ask, "Is this the way people everywhere construe personality, regardless of language or culture?" (pp. 433–434).

It is clear, therefore, that the model's claims to covering the entire universe of personality traits rest on three separate though related achievements. These are (a) the ubiquity of the five-factor solution in factor analyses of self- and peer ratings; (b) the discovery of the Big Five in the constructs offered by other personality theories; and (c) the replication of the five-factor structure in other languages and cultures. Of these three, the first is surely the strongest achievement, though even here some discrepancies should be noted. As Briggs (1989) points out, the five-factor structure of trait descriptors is recognizable across samples and investigators, but the degree of correspondence is less than ideal. There is some disagreement as to the existence of a sixth factor, with some researchers splitting Surgency/Extraversion into two factors—"sociability" and "activity" (e.g., Hogan, 1986). Factor V has been the subject of a lively debate among those who see it primarily as a factor of intellect (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989), those who consider its essence to be a general openness to experience (encompassing rich fantasy life, aesthetic sensitivity, awareness of inner feelings, need for variety in actions, intellectual curiosity, and liberal values [McCrae & Costa, 1985b]), and those who argue that it is probably both (Digman, 1990). This debate hinges, in part, on the extent to which one wishes to consider intelligence—as rated by others or by the self, but *not* as tested by performance measures such as IQ tests—to be properly within the domain of personality per se. Finally, some factor-analytic efforts have failed to find the five-factor structure, as in H. Linveh and C. Linveh (1989), who employed the Adjective Check List.

A common criticism of factor-analytic studies of personality traits is that they are arbitrary and atheoretical. It is well-known that while factor analysis is a sophisticated quantitative tool, a great deal of subjective and sometimes arbitrary decision making goes into (a) the choice of items, (b) the choice of factor-analytic procedures and rotations, and (c) the labeling of obtained factors. The initial factor-analytic derivations of the Big Five were not guided by explicit psychological theory, and therefore some have asked the question, "Why *these* five?" (e.g., Revelle, 1987; Waller & Ben-Porath, 1987). As Briggs (1989) points out, the original studies leading to the five-factor model "prompted no *a priori* predictions as to what factors should emerge, and a coherent and falsifiable explanation for the five factors has yet to be put forward" (p. 249). Instead, proponents of the model have made the critical as-

sumption that language systematically and adequately reflects social and psychological reality, that the structure of traits is in the structure of everyday language. Goldberg (1981) states the position succinctly:

The most promising of the empirical approaches to systematizing personality differences have been based on one critical assumption: *Those individual differences that are of the most significance in the daily transactions of persons with each other will eventually become encoded into their language.* The more important such a difference, the more will people notice it and wish to talk of it, with the result that eventually they will invent a word for it. (pp. 141–142)

Yet even McCrae and Costa (1985a) concede that such a deep faith in language seems unorthodox for scientific inquiry: "No one would imagine that an analysis of common English terms for parts of the body would provide an adequate basis for the science of anatomy; why should personality be different?" (p. 711).

McCrae and Costa have not to date offered a satisfying conceptual answer to the question they raise. Instead, they have fired a salvo of empirical retorts showing that the same five factors that were originally derived without theory can be readily discerned in personality measures that *do* have a theoretical base (Costa & McCrae, 1988; McCrae, 1989; McCrae, Costa, & Busch, 1986). While these demonstrations are impressive, one should be careful not to conclude that the personality theories offered by Cattell, Jung, Eysenck, Murray, Millon, and Block can now all be integrated under the umbrella of the Big Five. There are at least two reasons for skepticism. First, the particular measures employed to represent various personality theories do not necessarily operationalize the key constructs in those theories in ways that are true to the theories. For example, Jackson concedes that his purported measure of Murray's psychogenic "needs"—the Personality Research Form (PRF)—is really a measure of "traits" (in Costa & McCrae, 1988, p. 259). Motivational psychologists from Murray (1938) onward (e.g., Atkinson, 1981; McClelland, 1980) have made a fundamental distinction between traits and needs, and some have argued that while self-report scales may be well-designed to measure traits, they do not and cannot adequately tap the domain of human motivation. The latter is better assayed, argue some, through content analysis of narrative thought and imaginative fantasy, as in the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; McClelland, 1980).

A second reason to doubt the "authority" of language is more basic.

Personality theories *do more than simply specify traits*. Indeed, with the exception of the specific trait theories of Cattell, Guilford, and Eysenck, the enumeration of particular traits is a secondary function for many personality theories. Trait constructs are what Maddi (1980) calls dimensions of the *periphery* in personality theories, to be contrasted with dimensions of the *core*, which address fundamental issues of human nature and personality organization. Thus, in Freud's theory such concepts as id, ego, superego, Oedipus complex, unconscious motivation, psychosexual stages, and the dreamwork are deemed core characteristics of human functioning, whereas periphery constructs would include the oral and the anal personality types. In general, core characteristics are about human nature, and periphery characteristics are about differences among humans.¹ As I will reinforce below, individual differ-

1. I find Maddi's (1980) distinction between "core" and "periphery" to be very useful, even though it is flawed. The distinction is flawed and somewhat misleading in that the terminology implies that "core" is, in some sense, more important than "periphery." In addition, Maddi goes on to assert that the core is biologically anchored (and unlearned), whereas the characteristics of the periphery are necessarily "learned." Twin studies, by contrast, have provided compelling evidence to suggest that personality traits have a substantial genetic (biological) component. Maddi's distinction is, nonetheless, useful in underscoring the view that the human personality must be understood from two different standpoints—that of universal tendencies or structures and that of particular differences among individuals. The distinction shares conceptual space with that articulated by D. M. Buss (1984) between species-typical characteristics and individual differences, and it underscores the personologist's challenge to understand what is basic and common across all individuals as well as what distinguishes one individual from another. To the extent, then, that traits help to distinguish one individual from another, they promote our understanding of the latter half of the challenge. And though in principle a trait dimension upon which individuals differ might also be conceived as referring to some fundamental aspect of human nature that might qualify as an aspect of Maddi's core, trait constructs rarely seem to address concerns that fall under the first part of the challenge—concerns about species-typical characteristics, about human nature, about fundamental structures and processes in human functioning.

Throughout this article I am referring to traits in the way that I believe they are implicitly conceived for the Big Five framework and understood by most, though not all, personality researchers and theorists. For the purposes of this article, traits are dimensional concepts that refer to how individuals differ from one another. They are typically conceived as linear dimensions, ranging from one "negative" or "low" pole to the opposite "positive" or "high" pole (as in "I scored low on Agreeableness; my friend scored toward the higher end"). Such traits are common (e.g., Extraversion) rather than unique (e.g., "Dan McAdams-ish"), and they are understood primarily within a nomothetic context. There are other ways to think about personality traits, but this general way is by far the most prevalent, and it is at the heart of the Big Five

ences are but one domain within which personality psychologists have traditionally made their inquiries. Such personality theories as those provided by Jung, Adler, Kelly, Kohut, Rotter, Rank, Tomkins, Loevinger, and Erikson are but tangentially concerned with the kind of individual difference dimensions contained within the Big Five. Because it is not designed to address certain core characteristics of human functioning (characteristics that do not naturally conform to linear, trait-like dimensions), the five-factor model unfortunately can never fulfill what Digman (1990) seems to suggest is its manifest destiny: to become the "grand unified theory for personality" (p. 418).

Still, it is no small feat to become the grand unified theory of personality traits, a more realistic goal to which the model may aspire. Here again, the model's success rests on its ability to cover the universe of relevant constructs—dimensional constructs differentiating persons from each other. While I will return to this issue below, I would like to conclude this section by briefly considering the model's claims to comprehensiveness as evidenced in cross-cultural studies. In early studies of Japanese (Bond, Nakazato, & Shiraishi, 1975), German (Borkenau & Ostendorf, in press), and Hebrew-speaking Israeli (Birenbaum & Montag, 1986) subjects, existing English-based measures (Norman's 20 scales, Cattell's 16PF, Jackson's PRF) were translated into the native languages. While these studies succeeded in deriving what appear to be analogues to the English Big Five, their original reliance on items ultimately derived from English lexicons renders these results less than convincing. More recent studies of German, Tagalog (Filipino), and Chinese, however, have started with indigenous trait terms from the native languages. Among Germans (Angleitner & Ostendorf, 1989) and Filipinos (Church & Kaitigbak, 1989), the five-factor structure appears to emerge quite clearly. Among the Chinese (Yang & Bond, in press), the researchers found a one-to-one correspondence between indigenous and imported (English) factors for only two of the Big Five. Clearly, more research is needed before researchers can assess the extent to

taxonomy. I do not think that trait dimensions of this sort—typically characterized in linear, nomothetic, dispositional terms—are generally well-suited to address issues that Maddi identifies as the "core," and we should not indeed expect them to do so. Conventional trait constructs are an indispensable aspect of any legitimate understanding of personality. But there is more to a comprehensive understanding of human personality than traits.

which the five-factor model provides an adequate taxonomy for personality descriptors in other languages and other cultures. This would appear to be an exciting arena for future cross-cultural research.

What We Need In Order to Predict and to Describe

The five-factor model offers an extremely general framework for the classification of trait terms. Each of the five factors defines a large space in the universe of personality descriptors. John (1989) argues that the five-factor model operates at a broadband level to sketch out the main superordinate categories in a hierarchy of all traits. Within each of the five categories, therefore, may be located many different and more specific traits, and many of these traits may be further broken down into their component parts, as traits are nested hierarchically within traits. As one moves from the specific to the general, one sacrifices specific information or "fidelity" for increased generality or "bandwidth." Thus, the general trait of Extraversion subsumes the more specific trait of "sociability" which in turn might subsume an even more specific trait such as "friendliness." John (1989) writes, "The Big Five dimensions represent the broadest level of hierarchy, and in that sense they are to personality what the categories of 'plant' and 'animal' are to the world of natural objects—extremely useful for some initial rough distinctions but of less value for predicting specific behaviors of a particular object" (p. 267). Twenty years earlier, Dahlstrom (1970) made a similar point in suggesting that the most general trait factors in personality are more like "parameter settings in a complex dynamic system than they are component variables in such a system" (p. 8).

Because the Big Five operate at such a general level of analysis, trait scores on such dimensions as Extraversion and Agreeableness may not be especially useful in the prediction of specific behavior in particular situations, though they may be valuable in the prediction of general trends across many different kinds of situations. A. H. Buss (1989) argues that narrow traits are more homogenous and better predictors of behavior in many everyday contexts. Therefore, if one wishes to predict the extent to which a person will smile and converse in a friendly manner at a social gathering one would probably do better to employ a specific trait measure of friendliness than a more general measure of Surgency/Extraversion. Situations, like traits, also vary in breadth, Buss contends. Broad traits are better suited for predicting behavioral

trends in broad, generic situation categories. Narrow traits work better for narrowly defined situation categories. To the extent that psychologists wish to predict the specific act in the specific situation, to the extent that they seek precision in their endeavors to predict and control behavior, narrow trait categories may prove more useful than the generic categories of the Big Five. Accordingly, Costa and McCrae's (1985) standard measure of the Big Five—the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI)—provides component scores on a number of specific subscales within the three general dimensions of Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience.

In a related vein, an adequate *description* of personality functioning may often require more specific information than that which can be gleaned from scores on the five general factors. Briggs (1989) points out that whereas depression and anxiety may be seen as specific and related traits subsumed under the generic category of Emotional Stability (Neuroticism), the distinction between depression and anxiety is likely to be of real descriptive value in clinical settings and of predictive utility in clinical research. Indeed, a rich trait profile may require more dimensions upon which individuals can be said to differ than the basic five. For instance, Simonton (1986) factor-analyzed personality ratings made by experts of 39 U.S. presidents, utilizing a 110-adjective list designed for this unusual sample. The statistical analysis yielded 14 separate trait dimensions—including "wit," "moderation," "poise and polish," and "inflexibility"—that served to differentiate successfully among the presidents, ultimately providing discrete personality profiles. If Simonton had employed only five general traits in his analysis, a good deal of the interpretive richness of his study would have been lost. Therefore, in conducting trait analyses, the personologist needs to consider the preferred level of abstraction of the trait to be assessed as well as the conceptual relevance of the trait dimensions for the particular study at hand (Hampson, John, & Goldberg, 1986). For some purposes and some samples, it may be more appropriate to operate at a level of analysis that is less abstract and more specific and selective than that provided by the Big Five.

It would appear, therefore, that the Big Five are more accurately viewed as five basic *trait categories*, rather than five basic traits. John's comparison to Linnaean taxonomy is especially apt in this regard, and it should not be confused with ostensibly similar taxonomies from other sciences, such as that of the periodic table in chemistry. The Big Five are in no way akin to the basic "elements" of personality. They are

not pure elemental types—basic ingredients, as it were, of personality. Instead, they exist as polyglot generic arenas with fuzzy, overlapping boundaries. Adequate prediction and description in personality studies will usually require a judicious and informed selection of many different constructs within the various arenas.

It may also be necessary to sample *outside* the arenas. For many years, McClelland (1951, 1981) has argued that comprehensive description and precise prediction in personality research require the assessment of at least three different kinds of personality variables: stylistic traits, cognitive values and schemas, and dynamic motives and needs. For McClelland, motivational constructs such as achievement, power, and intimacy and cognitive constructs such as field independence and the strength of one's beliefs in "equality" or "freedom" (Rokeach, 1973) do not fit neatly into the five-factor scheme. These constructs are of a different ilk, he has argued, requiring different kinds of conceptualizations and measurement operations than those typically applied to traits. For instance, McClelland argues that people do not consciously know what their motives are and that self-reports are therefore doomed to failure in the assessment of unconscious or "implicit" motivational trends (see McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). Whether or not he is right, it is quite clear that the Big Five taxonomy leaves little room for the possibility that important dimensions of personality reside outside the person's awareness (and outside the awareness of peer raters, as well). To the extent that unconscious motivational variables are instrumental in personality functioning, the Big Five taxonomy is unable to provide personological information that may be critical for the accurate prediction of behavior and for the adequate description of the single person. Costa and McCrae (1988) have urged that "trait psychologists should consider the explicitly motivational aspects of their constructs" (p. 264). But some psychologists are not convinced that all of the relevant motivational stuff can be found within the five-factor space.

The Problem of Explanation

Revelle (1987) distinguishes between two kinds of trait taxonomies in personality psychology. *Descriptive* taxonomies, like the Big Five, provide surface characterizations of recurrent behavioral patterns that are readily observed. *Causal* taxonomies, by contrast, provide deeper explanations of the reasons or causes of human behavior. Examples of causal taxonomies, according to Revelle, are Eysenck's characteriza-

tions of Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism and Gray's dichotomy of Impulsivity and Anxiety. Both Eysenck and Gray have endeavored to root their trait constructs in the physiology of the central nervous system. For Eysenck and Gray, what provides their taxonomies with ultimate legitimacy—and what enables their constructs to provide explanations that are "causal"—is their biological underpinning. Whether or not these constructs are adequately encoded in everyday language is beside the point. Revelle's (1987) research on anxiety, impulsivity, and task performance documents elegant and precise linkages among individual differences on Gray's constructs, levels of arousal, and performance on cognitive tasks varying in complexity.

While Revelle's distinction between descriptive and causal taxonomies may not be as clean as he suggests, it raises the classic problem of explanation in trait psychology, as well as the ontological status of the Big Five dimensions. May the Big Five be considered causal entities in any sense? Revelle brings to mind theorists such as Wakefield (1989) who argue that a complete explanation of human behavior must ultimately include material-cause and efficient-cause statements derived from biology. From this point of view, all important traits in human functioning must be represented as neuropsychic entities of some sort, a point that Allport (1937, 1961) perennially endorsed. This requirement may seem overly stringent and even unnecessary for some personality psychologists, who argue that personality variables may be justified at other (equally "deep") levels of analysis and perhaps in terms of what Rychlak (1981) has called "formal-cause" and "final-cause" explanations. In any case, proponents of the Big Five have not been explicit concerning the extent to which their broad dimensions, which appear to be useful for prediction and description, may also be useful for explanation.

To the extent traits explain anything, they have been traditionally utilized to explain *consistency* in human behavior. Zuroff (1986) distinguishes among four different kinds of consistency for which traits might be invoked. The first form is a pervasive, cross-situational consistency as indicated by the average of all pair-wise correlations of the occurrence of a given behavior between situations. This position is something of a straw man in personality psychology—attributed by "situationists" to those naive "trait theorists" that Mischel (1968) supposedly exposed—for it insists on consistency at very high levels and across most situations. Zuroff contends that no real trait theorist adopts this view. A second position insists on a high level of consistency within a delimited

range of situations and permits inconsistency and even contradiction outside that range. Zuroff sees this as an "interactionist" position on traits—people are consistent in certain situations—and he believes that this was essentially Allport's position on traits throughout his career. A third position sees consistency in terms of a person's average level of response over a given range of situations. Studies which aggregate behaviors over time and across a range of situations in order to show that trait measures account for significant amounts of behavioral variance seem to work from this premise (e.g., Epstein, 1984; Moscovitz, 1988). The fourth position is that of Buss and Craik (1984), whose act-frequency model views traits as mere summary categories of acts that are related for their family resemblance. From this perspective, traits do not explain anything; they simply exist as categories of related acts aggregated over time.

From Zuroff's perspective, it would appear that the general dimensions provided in the five-factor model have been implicitly conceptualized in terms of his third position on consistency. General traits such as agreeableness and emotional stability would be expected to account for average levels of behavior as aggregated across situations and over time. (It is, therefore, surprising that very little research has been done relating Big-Five factors to behavioral counts sampled across a range of situations.) Zuroff's second position—consistency across a delimited set of situations—appears to be too specific for the broadest factors, but it might be invoked in considering certain narrower traits subsumed under or within the main five factors. Still, a trait measure's ability to "account" for behavioral variance is not quite the same as its ability to "explain." From the perspective of psychologists demanding deeper explanations of behavior, "traits themselves require further explanations; they are, after all, only promissory notes (for causal explanations)" (Briggs, 1985, p. 17).

Context, Conditionalities, and the Role of Middle-Level Units

In their search for trait universals, proponents of the five-factor model in personality have, out of necessity it would seem, disregarded the pervasive roles of situational, cultural, and historical contexts. Context suggests specificity and conditionality, whereas the Big Five are viewed to be transcontextual, transhistorical, and, at best, vaguely conditional. In an article entitled "Personality Is Transcontextual," McCrae and

Costa (1984) inveigh against contextualism as the wrong-headed legacy of social learning theory, humanistic psychology, and some versions of life-span developmentalism (e.g., Levinson, 1978). Contextualism encourages "the belief that individuals may be constantly reshaped by their experiences, by interventions designed to promote personal growth, or by intrinsic aging and progress through life stages" (McCrae & Costa, 1984, p. 176). From the standpoint of McCrae and Costa, however, life conditions change, but traits remain constant. Context does not directly influence the Big Five personality traits, though it may alter somewhat the way in which traits are expressed. The proper model of personality development in adulthood is that of a relatively unchanging person confronting a changing environment. McCrae and Costa (1984) write: "The life course, then, can profitably be studied as the interplay of enduring dispositions and changing contexts" (p. 178). To support their view, they cite longitudinal studies documenting high retest correlations on trait measures over spans of up to 12 years.

While such transcontextualism may be a welcome antidote to the once-trendy view that persons are constantly changing, growing, transcending, and so on from one situation to the next and over time and never-ending stages, the claim that personality is, therefore, transcontextual is too extreme and profoundly unsatisfying for many researchers, theorists, and practitioners. Because they operate at such a general level of analysis, the Big Five trait categories pay virtually no homage to contextual variables of any kind. Extraversion is extraversion is extraversion, whether it's among African-American men or German women, in 19th-century London, or among the Australian aborigines last week. Yet, if any good lesson is to be drawn from the tiresome "trait versus situation debate" of the 1970s, it is that personality needs to be seen in contextual terms (McAdams, 1990a, chap. 8). Context appears to be necessary for accurate prediction, detailed description, and comprehensive understanding.

It is intriguing to observe, therefore, that while the field of personality has moved toward an acceptance of general, decontextualized traits like the Big Five, it has also moved vigorously, in recent years, toward developing units of personological analysis that are explicitly contextualized. D. M. Buss and Cantor (1989) refer to these as "middle-level units" in personality inquiry, and they include such constructs as "personal projects" (Pals & Little, 1983), "personal strivings" (Emmons, 1986), and life tasks (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987). These kinds of constructs focus explicitly on a person's conscious articulations of what

he or she is trying to do during a given period of life, what goals and goal-based concerns occupy salient positions in everyday consciousness. Such constructs are explicitly motivational and contextual. They are embedded in and defined by the particularities of the single human life. Consequently, personal projects and life tasks are not traits, though their expression may be influenced by traits (e.g., Little, 1989). One major advantage such constructs have over and against general traits is that they provide "forceful attention focused on the everyday texture of people's lives" (D. M. Buss & Cantor, 1989, p. 2).

Cantor (1990) argues that the Big Five cover well the "having" side of personality, "explicating an underlying dispositional structure to individual differences, to the attributes individuals 'have'" (p. 735). But general factors like Extraversion and Agreeableness say little about the "doing" side, about how dispositions are cognitively expressed and maintained in social interaction. To examine the doing, the personality psychologist should focus on such middle-level units as schemata, tasks, and strategies:

Three types of units—schemas, tasks, and strategies—compose the cognitive substrate of personality. *Schemas*, or organized structures of knowledge about particular domains of life and of the self, serve Kelly's basic channeling function. That is, they provide each person with unique cognitive filters that color the perception of events, determining the very ways in which events are "seen" and remembered. Moreover, individuals set *tasks* for themselves, distilling from the many culturally prescribed and biologically based demands of social life and survival a set of personal life task goals for which to strive. In constructing their tasks, individuals transform their social realities in the mind's eye, temporarily overcoming the control of current stimulus forces by looking toward alternative possibilities for the self in the future. Then, as Rotter understood so well, the full creativity of personality emerges in the *strategies* that individuals embrace as they attempt to gain control and make progress on their significant tasks. In their strategies, individuals ingeniously combine processes of anticipation, monitoring, and retrospection to direct their behavior in context. (pp. 736–737)

While Cantor is willing to concede that dramatic transformations in Big Five traits are not likely to occur in most human lives over time, she submits that personality does nonetheless change, and even develop, over time and as a product of context, but that such change occurs at

the level of "doing" rather than "having." In other words, it is with respect to the intricate and contextually embedded microstructure of schema, task, and strategy that personologists are most apt to witness important development in personality, as studies by Stewart and Healy (1985, 1989) and by Norem (1989) have shown.

Thorne (1989) has written provocatively of the importance of "conditional patterns" in personality studies. Conditional patterns are explicitly contextualized personality characteristics, and they are often revealed in people's open-ended descriptions of themselves. They may be contrasted to such unconditional attributes as general traits. Thorne writes:

By unconditional attributes, I mean traits such as dominance and extraversion, moods such as happiness, and behaviors such as talking and smiling. These kinds of concepts can be contrasted with explicitly conditional categories such as: My dominance shows when my competence is threatened; I fall apart when people try to comfort me; I talk the most when I am nervous. (Thorne, 1989, p. 149)

From this description, Thorne's conditional patterns seem similar to what Zuroff (1986) views as consistent traits across a delimited range of situations (his second form of consistency described above) and what Wright and Mischel (1987, 1988) have described as "conditional hedges" and the "local predictability of social behavior." In this sense, persons qualify trait descriptions of themselves by specifying under what particular situations a general disposition is likely to influence their behavior.

However, Thorne's (1989) approach may have wider appeal and broader implications even still. In her empirical efforts to "extend conditional patterns backwards in time" (p. 153), Thorne underscores the richness and complexity of persons' conditional statements about themselves and their lives. She shows that when people talk about who they are they do not speak in expressly dispositional terms. Instead, complexly contingent self-attributions appear in an inherently episodic and narrative framework. This is not because respondents lack the clarity of thought needed to dissect their lives into noncontingent dispositional units. When asked to do so, most people have little trouble in complying, as every trait theorist knows. Rather, individuals cannot express the *coherence* of their personality—to themselves or to others—in noncontingent, dispositional terms. Coherence emerges in the particular episodes and contingent stories that the subject presents in order to convey

his or her own phenomenal experience. I have made a similar point in my work (1985, 1990b), when I posit that adults provide their own lives with a sense of unity and purpose—what Erikson (1959) would term an “identity”—by consciously and unconsciously constructing over time a dynamic narrative of the self, a highly contingent and richly contextualized *life story* that integrates their reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future. Like Emmons (1986), Palys and Little (1983), and Cantor (1990), Thorne and I advocate an experience-near brand of personology. Such an approach might complement well the decontextualized, experience-distant analysis provided by the five-factor model. Such an approach is *not* likely to be subsumed, furthermore, within the hierarchy of the five-factor model.

The Organization of Personality: The Whole Person

How is personality organized in the five-factor model? And where is the person? Essentially, personality is organized as a hierarchy of nested individual difference terms (John, 1989). The person is a stable set of scores on generic traits. The end result of a trait analysis is what Allport called a “psychograph.” Allport was not very fond of the psychograph:

In three important ways differential psychology fails to be an adequate method for the study of individuality. (1) Its interest, like that of general psychology, centers in the function or attribute that is isolated for study and not in the men [and women] possessing these functions. The individual is only a means; not an end. (2) The approach is as distinctly elementaristic as is traditional psychology; it is “from beneath” in terms of the elements of mind, and not “from above” in terms of their organization and patterning. In this respect differential psychology differs markedly from characterology. (3) The implication is that the sum-total of an individual’s scores on the isolated functions constitutes his [or her] individuality. The psychograph, with its separate plottings, is the utmost that the psychology of individual differences has achieved in depicting the organization of mind. (Allport, 1937, pp. 8–9)

In the 1930s, Allport saw clearly that if anybody in the social sciences was going to position the individual person at the center of scientific inquiry it was going to have to be the personality psychologist. Other branches of psychology were too elementaristic (e.g., physiological

psychology, sensation and perception, learning and conditioning) or too concerned with external factors (e.g., social psychology), and other social scientists were operating at different levels of analysis. Thus, while Allport found some value in the study of common traits and the production of differential psychographs, he believed that what distinguished the personality psychologist from all others was his or her emphasis on individuality, or what Murray (1938) called “the whole person.” Unfortunately, Allport’s endorsement of individuality became entangled within the controversy over idiographic and nomothetic approaches to studying the person (Holt, 1962). As the nomothetic view assumed the status of a religious canon, many personality psychologists in the 1960s and 1970s seemed to adopt the pessimistic assessment of Fiske (1971, 1974), who discouraged anybody from believing the romantic notion that the person could be studied as an integrated whole. Despite eloquent appeals for a psychology of the individual that might transcend lists of trait scores (e.g., Tyler, 1959), the field of personality psychology seemed to become more deeply entrenched in a conceptual and methodological orthodoxy centered around self-report personality trait scales. The conventional minimalism of the day prompted Carlson (1971) to pose her trenchant question, “Where is *the person* in personality research?”

There is strong reason to believe that personality psychology has begun to move in the direction of the whole person again, as recent years have witnessed a flowering of integrative theoretical offerings and methodological innovations (for reviews, see McAdams, 1990a; Runyan, 1990; Singer & Kolligan, 1987; West, 1986). Of special conceptual interest in this regard are the new developmentally informed and socially contextualized theories emphasizing the primacy of *affect* and the *storied* nature of human experience, as in Tomkins’s (1987; Carlson, 1988) script theory, Hermans’s (1987) valuation theory, my (1990b) life-story model of identity, and various “textual” conceptions of self and identity (e.g., Sarbin, 1986; Shotter & Gergen, 1989). These approaches, among others, are explicitly concerned with the *integrative* and *organized* nature of personality. Furthermore, like those approaches discussed above which focus on conditional middle-level units in personality study, these new approaches to studying human individuality seek to uncover and analyze the personally meaningful aspects of human lives in their own conditional and idiographic terms. These approaches flow in a very different direction from those encompassed within the Big Five.

In that the final result of a Big Five analysis is essentially a psychograph of independent traits, the five-factor model of personality would not appear to be well positioned to shed light on the organization of personality in the whole person. Historically, personality psychology would appear to have assumed three related intellectual missions: (a) the identification and assessment of individual differences; (b) the investigation of the internal springs of human action, or human motivation; and (c) the study of the whole person, internally organized and contextualized within society and history (Hall & Lindzey, 1957; McAdams, 1992). The five-factor model has focused primarily on the first of these three, and it may have some modest implications for the second. But the third appears to be outside its purview. If, like A. H. Buss (1989), one circumscribes the definition of personality psychology solely to the study of traits, then the Big Five appear to be one plausible framework for the entire field. But if one examines the historical legacies of the field as well as the rich diversity on the contemporary scene, one is likely to adopt a grander vision for the field, and therefore to delimit markedly the influence and relevance of the Big Five. Like Craik (cited in Helson & Mitchell, 1978), one may view a personality psychologist as "an expert in using the personality paradigm, which is one of the several strands of normal science within psychology" and which "takes the person as the basic unit of analysis, studies the organization of the individual's behavior, specializes in the description of persons, and studies the relationships between dimensions of personality and social and behavioral outcomes" (p. 556). And like Murphy (1947), one may envision a "general psychology of personality which deals with the universal facets of organization, and awareness of such organization and individuality, the sense of personal identity, continuity, distinctiveness, responsibility" (pp. 2-3).

A Psychology of the Stranger

The success of the five-factor model of personality traits reflects the success of self- and peer rating methodologies in American psychology. Out of the many correlations of ratings with ratings on thousands of personality adjectives or simple verbal items, the five factors consistently emerge as general dimensions of meaning. People rate themselves and others in ways suggesting a common understanding of what these dimensions are and of their importance in social judgment and personality attribution. Further, the ratings indicate more than mere consistency in

implicative meaning of various trait terms (Norman & Goldberg, 1966; Passini & Norman, 1966; Wiggins, 1973). The ratings are *valid*, for the most part: People know themselves well enough to provide ratings that enable researchers to predict with some accuracy what different people will subsequently do; and people also know their spouses, friends, and close acquaintances well enough to provide scores that enable the researchers to predict their behavior, too. The old criticism (Mischel, 1968; Shweder, 1975) that traits are merely "convenient fictions" in the minds of raters, with no bearing on real social behavior, can be laid to rest (e.g., Funder, 1983).

Repeated demonstrations of the reliability and validity of trait ratings, however, should not lull personality psychologists into believing that they have now found the whole truth and nothing but the truth about personality, and that the truth can be packaged in fives. To assume that dimensional ratings of personality provide a comprehensive picture of what personality "really" is is tantamount to concluding that dimensional ratings of intelligence, made by the self or by others, adequately reflect the domain of intellectual functioning. McCrae and Costa (1985a, 1985b) point out that ratings of intelligence do not correlate highly with scores on intelligence tests. In other words, intelligence from the standpoint of the generic rater is a different construct from intelligence as measured on performance indices. Might not the same thing be said with respect to personality? Kagan (1988) argues that investigators of personality have come to rely so heavily on self-report instruments in recent years that they appear "indifferent to the possibility that the theoretical meaning of a descriptive term for any quality is derived from its source of evidence" (p. 614). Kagan criticizes the practice of treating personality concepts as unchanging essences that transcend all assessment contexts. The critical conclusion that must be drawn is straightforward: Trait psychology is *method-bound*. The meanings of Extraversion and Conscientiousness are intimately tied to their context of assessment.

On first glance, the five-factor model of personality would appear to be immune to this criticism. Indeed, a great strength of the model is that the same factors emerge across so many different samples and assessment contexts and that scores from one context correlate significantly with scores from another. For example, spouse ratings on the Big Five correlate highly with self-ratings. The correspondence among different sorts of ratings, however, should not disguise the fact that it is *ratings and only ratings* that are being considered. Of course, ratings predict

behavior, too, as when self- or peer ratings of Extraversion predict outgoing and friendly behavior aggregated across many situations. But Extraversion is directly measured through the ratings, not the behavior; the behavior is a correlate, a manifestation or expression of Extraversion. American psychologists depend primarily on paper-and-pencil rating scales of various sorts to provide them with trait scores. Included here are standardized personality inventories, such as the PRF. Alternative approaches, such as thematic analysis of imaginative stories (McClelland, 1980) or earliest memories (Bruhn & Last, 1982), are generally considered unconventional or unreliable (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1984).

The methodological limitation is not so much an issue of "self-report" or "peer report." The key issue is *ratings*. Ratings are tremendously useful in the assessment of individual differences in personality (e.g., Block, 1981). But two limitations of most rating procedures need to be acknowledged. First, if they are to be reliable, ratings must be *simple*. Rating scales and single items on self-report personality questionnaires are usually expressed in a generic language that is either non-conditional or implicative of vague, generic conditions. For example, adjectives such as "friendly" or "sociable," used to assess individual differences in Extraversion, are virtually unconditional, failing to specify under what conditions such behavior is displayed. Now, of course, one may argue that a certain kind of conditionality is implied. A person cannot be "sociable" when he or she is completely alone; therefore, the Extraversion item connotes an interpersonal context. However, in that rating items are virtually always single adjectives or simple sentences on personality scales, it is virtually impossible to provide an explicit and richly nuanced context or set of conditions for a descriptor in the assessment of traits through ratings. This is true even with respect to such clinically relevant rating procedures as the California Q-set. Each item or scale must be structured such that a rater can make a categorical (yes/no) or linear (Likert scale, etc.) judgment about a *single*, noncontingent thing. For Extraversion, the subject might rate how "friendly vs. aloof" he or she is; for Conscientiousness, how "careful vs. careless." On the NEO-PI, the subject is asked to rate him- or herself on a 5-point continuum (from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree") on such items as "It takes a lot to get me mad" and "I have a very active imagination." Subjects and their testers play an oversimplifying and economizing game in which the ground rules are quite clear from the outset: We are here to get a general, superficial, and virtually unconditional picture of your personality. Therefore, answers like "it depends"

are not meaningful, or they are to be incorporated into middle ratings of "neutral."

A second limitation concerns the presumed comparative nature of rating responses. As Lamiell (1981) has pointed out in a different context, items on self- and peer report trait scales implicitly force the respondent to compare him- or herself to others. Thus, when a man rates himself on the item "I am not a cheerful optimist" (NEO-PI), he is judging the extent of his own "cheerful optimism" in comparison to the cheerful optimism of people he knows or has heard about, or perhaps even the assumed average level of cheerful optimism of the rest of humankind. Ratings like these must have a social referent if they are to be meaningful. Subjects know this well, and this is why all but the most recalcitrant among them have little trouble doing trait ratings. And all but the most skeptical psychologists have little trouble interpreting these scales. Indeed, the psychologists administering the measures have the same comparative purpose in mind. Like their subjects, they are comparing people to each other on general dimensions whose conditional parameters are quite broad or vague. Despite Mischel's early (1968) protestations, we all know what traits are, as folk concepts. Through everyday life and casual observation, we all believe that people differ from each other in very general and modestly consistent ways. If we did not all know this, there could be no Big Five.

However, it behooves us to consider critically what kind of psychology we are creating when we base our entire formulation on self- and peer report ratings. It is obvious and problematic that the five-factor model is grounded in simple and comparative ratings, ratings of subjects who are either the objects of other observers (peer ratings) or the objects of their own comparative observations (self-ratings). As Hogan (1987) concludes, personality psychologists have, in the five-factor model, "a major scientific finding to report" in the domain of personality *from the standpoint of the observer*. "We now can specify with some confidence the structure of the vocabulary that observers use to describe actors—put another way, we have a replicable model of the structure of personality from the viewpoint of an observer" (p. 85). The Big Five, therefore, provide an outline to organize a person's overall "social reputation" in the eyes of his or her observing peers. The Big Five, however, have nothing to say about Hogan's second realm of personality psychology—*personality from the standpoint of the actor*:

From the perspective of an actor—the reader—personality consists of the inner psychological structures, qualities, and characteristics

that cause him or her to generate his or her unique reputation. We can speak with some confidence about the parameters of a person's reputation. About the causes of that reputation, however, we must be a good bit more cautious. Causes lie in the domain of *verstehen*, of hermeneutics, of interpretation. This is the great, uncharted frontier of personality psychology; it is the region of the self-concept, of social aspiration and personal despair, of public claims and private reservations, of hopes, doubts, and self-delusion. This domain presents formidable obstacles to scientific analysis because of its inherently ipsative or idiographic nature. But it is the domain to which virtually everyone's attention seems compulsively drawn, and we badly need to have something persuasive to say about it. (Hogan, 1987, pp. 85–86)

We have already seen that the Big Five taxonomy is not especially useful for the study of personality organization and of the contingent nature of human individuality, both of which would appear to fall under Hogan's domain of personality from the standpoint of the actor. Beyond these limitations, moreover, it is worth considering exactly what kind of "observations" are implicitly being made in the five-factor model with respect to Hogan's domain of personality from the standpoint of the observer. In essence, the five-factor model provides a workable framework for organizing a plethora of simple, comparative, unidimensional, and virtually nonconditional observations about others (or about the self) into five general classes. Why five? Digman (1990) has speculated that the number five (plus or minus two) works well for a personality taxonomy because of the limitations of human information processing. Five, plus or minus two, pieces of general information about another person provide a concise and easily remembered nutshell of that which is important to know. Note the nature of Digman's justification of the number five. It is a justification *from the standpoint of the observer*. Digman's is an argument about observers, not about actors. Personality is well described in terms of five traits *because five traits are what the observer is likely to know!* If five is right for the observer, can we assume it is also right for the actor?

Proponents of the Big Five would answer the last question, "yes." After all, the Big Five emerge in *self-ratings*, as well. But aren't self-ratings just like peer ratings, in that they are generally simple, comparative, and only vaguely conditional? In rating one's own personality traits on a typical paper-and-pencil measure, isn't the subject adopting

virtually the same perspective he or she adopts when rating another? In other words, trait ratings require a particular observational stance in which he or she who is rated becomes an *object* of comparison on a series of linear and only vaguely conditional dimensions. Such a perspective constitutes a legitimate paradigm for social observation. It is an especially efficient and comprehensive paradigm for getting an "initial read" on or global outline of that which is to be rated. It is a paradigm for observation that we are most likely to use, it would seem, when encountering a *new* phenomenon, that is, a new person—a *stranger*. Recall Goldberg's (1981) rationale for mining the English lexicon in search for personality universals: "They [the five factors] suggest that those who have contributed to the English lexicon as it has evolved over time wished to know the answers to at least five types of questions *about a stranger* they were soon to meet!" (p. 161, italics mine). The Big Five constitute a psychology about the observations of strangers. They encapsule those most general and encompassing attributions—simple, comparative, and virtually nonconditional—that we might wish to make *when we know virtually nothing else about a person*. We make such attributions about ourselves and about those whom we know well only when we are asked to do so by a trait psychologist, or when we are trying to paint a very quick and simple portrait for somebody to whom the subject is indeed a stranger.

Therefore, Hogan's distinction between actor and observer may not go far enough. The Big Five provide us with a taxonomy of attributions for our most general observations of strangers. But as people get to know "strangers" better, their observations become more nuanced and contextualized. Thus, we might conclude that Hogan's "personality from the standpoint of the observer" might be bifurcated into (a) a simple dimensional realm which is best suited for observing strangers and other relative "unknowns" and (b) a second realm of explicitly conditional and more complex attributions about persons who are observed from the standpoint of "known others." The better we know persons, the more contextualized and nuanced the attributions. A worthy goal of a sophisticated personality psychology from the standpoint of the observer would be to progress well beyond the need for a superficial Big Five, to know the object in enough detail such that he or she is no longer a stranger. It is not that we are trait theorists when analyzing other people's behavior and situationists when analyzing our own, as certain social psychologists have traditionally claimed. Rather, we are trait theorists when we have nothing else to fall back on—when the object

of our inquiry is new and as yet unpredictable. As the object becomes better known, however, we naturally move beyond traits to more personally meaningful constructs such as goals, strivings, schemata, strategies, and the integrative narratives that provide coherence to the private personality, and we come to consider in detail the history, context, and intricate conditionalities of the individual person's behavior. This kind of broad and deep analysis in personality psychology need not sacrifice rigor and scientific legitimacy. It need not abandon all that is nomothetic for the uniqueness of the single case. What it must forswear instead are a superficiality that comes with exclusive reliance on general ratings—be they ratings of self or other—and a satisfaction with knowing little more than what, after an initial meeting, one stranger might know about another.

Beyond Hogan's division of personality into the standpoints of the observer and the actor, another distinction that may be worth refining is Cantor's (1990) aforementioned division between personality as "having" and personality as "doing." As Thorne (1989) has shown, when people talk naturally about who they are they tend to describe those characteristics that they "have" in terms of conditional patterns that are embedded in episodic, narrative accounts. From the standpoint of both the observer and the actor, we "have" more than our nonconditional traits. In describing themselves and people whom they know well, human beings do not rely on a mere "lexical" approach to personality. They use words, to be sure. But it is not the single word—the decontextualized unit from the lexicon—that in itself describes the person well. Single words, like single test items on a self-report trait scale, are unidimensional and relatively unqualified. When describing persons who are not strangers, however, words are naturally used *in stories* and other open-ended accounts to convey the richness of human experience and the organization of personality. Each person *has* his or her own stories, developmental histories, values and schemata, hopes and goals, reconstructed past, and anticipated future. Rather than traits, these are the structural units of personality that persons naturally consider to be "their own." They are the naturally generated self-defining features of persons. They are what provide a person with a sense of inner sameness and continuity, an identity of the self, which resides at the heart of personality (McAdams, 1990b). And they are those features that a person will convey to another (an "observer") in order to be known and to be understood by the other as more than a mere stranger.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of the five-factor model of personality traits is an important and positive development in the field of personality psychology. The extent to which it may be seen as a monumental advance, however, depends on the breadth of one's vision for the field. If the field of personality psychology is conceived as the study of observers' dimensional trait ratings, then the Big Five have succeeded in providing a comprehensive framework for organizing the lion's share of individual differences research. If, however, one broadens slightly the definition of the field to include observers' attributions about individual differences that go beyond dimensional generalities, then the five-factor model becomes less central, and one is compelled to think in more sophisticated terms about how observers understand the behavior of persons whom they know at a more informed level than that of "stranger." If one broadens the field even further to encompass Hogan's "personality from the standpoint of the actor," Cantor's "having" and "doing" domains in the study of personality, and the strong historical mandates for the field—the emphasis on the whole person, the study of personality organization and development, the focus on human motivation—which one may trace back to Allport and Murray and forward to a strong contemporary resurgence of interest in these integrative areas in the study of persons, then the potential long-term influence of the Big Five scheme seems to shrink substantially. From the standpoint of a multifaceted personology, the five-factor model is one important model *in* personality studies, not *the* integrative model *of* personality. This is not to downplay the value and the validity of the five-factor model; it is but to contextualize this significant contribution within an extremely broad and complex field of study which has yet to discover its one dominant and overarching theoretical viewpoint.

REFERENCES

- Adelson, J. (1969). Personality. In P. H. Mussen & M. R. Rosenzweig (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 20, pp. 217–252). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Allport, G. W. (1937). *Personality: A psychological interpretation*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Allport, G. W. (1961). *Pattern and growth in personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Allport, G. W., & Odbert, H. S. (1936). Trait-names: A psycho-lexical study. *Psychological Monographs*, 47(1, Whole No. 211).

- Angleitner, A., & Ostendorf, F. (1989). *Personality factors via self- and peer-ratings based on a representative sample of German trait descriptive terms*. Paper presented at the first European Congress of Psychology, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- Argyle, M., & Little, B. R. (1972). Do personality traits apply to social behaviour? *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 2, 1-35.
- Atkinson, J. W. (1981). Studying personality in the context of an advanced motivational psychology. *American Psychologist*, 36, 117-128.
- Birenbaum, M., & Montag, I. (1986). On the location of the sensation seeking construct in the personality domain. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 21, 357-373.
- Block, J. (1961). *The Q-sort method in personality assessment and psychiatric research*. Springfield, IL: Thomas.
- Block, J. (1981). Some enduring and consequential structures of personality. In A. I. Rabin, J. Aronoff, A. M. Barclay, & R. A. Zucker (Eds.), *Further explorations in personality* (pp. 27-43). New York: Wiley.
- Bond, M. H., Nakazato, H. S., & Shiraishi, D. (1975). Universality and distinctiveness in dimensions of Japanese person perception. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 6, 346-355.
- Borkenau, P., & Ostendorf, F. (in press). A confirmatory factor analysis of the five-factor model of personality. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*.
- Briggs, S. R. (1985). A trait account of social shyness. In P. Shaver (Ed.), *Review of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 6, pp. 35-64). Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Briggs, S. R. (1989). The optimal level of measurement for personality constructs. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 246-260). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Bruhn, A. R., & Last, J. (1982). Early childhood memories: Four theoretical perspectives. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 46, 119-127.
- Buss, A. H. (1989). Personality as traits. *American Psychologist*, 44, 1378-1388.
- Buss, D. M. (1984). Evolutionary biology and personality psychology: Toward a conception of human nature and individual differences. *American Psychologist*, 39, 1135-1147.
- Buss, D. M. (1990). Toward a biologically informed psychology of personality. *Journal of Personality*, 58, 1-16.
- Buss, D. M., & Cantor, N. (1989). Introduction. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 1-12). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Buss, D. M., & Craik, K. H. (1984). Acts, dispositions, and personality. In B. A. Maher & W. B. Maher (Eds.), *Progress in experimental personality research* (Vol. 13, pp. 241-301). Orlando: Academic Press.
- Cantor, N. (1990). From thought to behavior: "Having" and "doing" in the study of personality and cognition. *American Psychologist*, 45, 735-750.
- Cantor, N., & Kihlstrom, J. F. (1987). *Personality and social intelligence*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Carlson, R. (1971). Where is the person in personality research? *Psychological Bulletin*, 75, 203-219.
- Carlson, R. (1988). Exemplary lives: The use of psychobiography for theory development. In D. P. McAdams & R. L. Ochberg (Eds.), *Psychobiography and life narratives* (pp. 105-138). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Carlson, R. C. (1989). Personality. In M. R. Rosenzweig & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 40, pp. 227-248). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Cattell, R. B. (1943). The description of personality: Basic traits resolved into clusters. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 38, 476-506.
- Cattell, R. B. (1947). Confirmation and clarification of primary personality factors. *Psychometrika*, 12, 197-220.
- Christie, R., & Lindauer, F. (1963). Personality structure. In P. R. Farnsworth, O. McNemar, & Q. McNemar (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 14, pp. 201-230). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Church, A. T., & Katigbak, M. S. (1989). Internal, external, and self-report structure of personality in a non-Western culture: An investigation of cross-language and cross-cultural generalizability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 857-872.
- Conley, J. J. (1985a). A personality theory of adulthood and aging. In R. Hogan & W. H. Jones (Eds.), *Perspectives in personality* (Vol. 1, pp. 81-116). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Conley, J. J. (1985b). Longitudinal stability of personality traits: A multitrait-multimethod-multi-occasion analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49, 1266-1282.
- Costa, P. T., Jr., & McCrae, R. R. (1985). *The NEO Personality Inventory*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Costa, P. T., Jr., & McCrae, R. R. (1988). From catalog to classification: Murray's needs and the five-factor model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 258-265.
- Costa, P. T., Jr., McCrae, R. R., & Arenberg, D. (1980). Enduring dispositions in adult males. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38, 793-800.
- Dahlstrom, W. G. (1970). Personality. In P. H. Mussen & M. R. Rosenzweig (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 21, pp. 1-48). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Digman, J. M. (1990). Personality structure: Emergence of the five-factor model. In M. R. Rosenzweig & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 41, pp. 417-440). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Digman, J. M., & Inouye, J. (1986). Further specification of the five robust factors of personality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 116-123.
- Digman, J. M., & Takemoto-Chock, N. K. (1981). Factors in the natural language of personality: Reanalysis, comparison, and interpretation of six major studies. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 16, 149-170.
- Edwards, A. L. (1957). *The social desirability variable in personality assessment and research*. New York: Dreyfus.
- Emmons, R. A. (1986). Personal strivings: An approach to personality and subjective well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1058-1068.
- Epstein, S. (1984). The stability of behavior across time and situations. In R. A. Zucker, J. Aronoff, & A. I. Rabin (Eds.), *Personality and the prediction of behavior* (pp. 209-268). New York: Academic Press.
- Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York: Norton.
- Eysenck, H. J. (1973). *Eysenck on extraversion*. New York: Wiley.
- Eysenck, H. J. (1990). Genetic and environmental contributions to individual dif-

- ferences: The three major dimensions of personality. *Journal of Personality*, 58, 245-262.
- Fiske, D. W. (1949). Consistency of the factorial structures of personality ratings from different sources. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 44, 329-344.
- Fiske, D. W. (1971). *Measuring the concepts of personality*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Fiske, D. W. (1974). The limits of the conventional science of personality. *Journal of Personality*, 42, 1-11.
- Funder, D. C. (1983). The "consistency" controversy and the accuracy of personality judgments. *Journal of Personality*, 51, 346-359.
- Goldberg, L. R. (1981). Language and individual differences: The search for universals in personality lexicons. In L. Wheeler (Ed.), *Review of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 141-166). Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Hall, C. S., & Lindzey, G. (1957). *Theories of personality*. New York: Wiley.
- Hampson, S. E. (1988). *The construction of personality* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hampson, S. E., John, O. P., & Goldberg, L. R. (1986). Category breadth and hierarchical structure in personality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 37-54.
- Helson, R., & Mitchell, V. (1978). Personality. In M. R. Rosenzweig & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 29, pp. 555-586). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (1987). The dream in the process of valuation: A method of interpretation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 163-175.
- Hogan, R. (1986). *Hogan Personality Inventory*. Minneapolis: National Computer Systems.
- Hogan, R. (1987). Personality psychology: Back to basics. In J. Aronoff, A. I. Rabin, & R. A. Zucker (Eds.), *The emergence of personality* (pp. 79-104). New York: Springer.
- Holt, R. R. (1962). Individuality and generalization in the psychology of personality: An evaluation. *Journal of Personality*, 30, 377-402.
- Jackson, D. N., & Paunonen, S. V. (1980). Personality structure and assessment. In M. R. Rosenzweig & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 31, pp. 503-552). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- John, O. P. (1989). Towards a taxonomy of personality descriptors. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 261-271). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- John, O. P. (1990). The "Big Five" taxonomy: Dimensions of personality in the natural language and in questionnaires. In L. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality theory and research* (pp. 66-100). New York: Guilford Press.
- Kagan, J. (1988). The meaning of personality predicates. *American Psychologist*, 43, 614-620.
- Kenrick, D. T., & Funder, D. C. (1988). Profiting from controversy: Lessons from the person-situation debate. *American Psychologist*, 43, 23-34.
- Lamiell, J. T. (1981). Toward an idiothetic psychology of personality. *American Psychologist*, 36, 276-289.
- Leary, T. (1957). *Interpersonal diagnosis of personality*. New York: Ronald Press.

- Levinson, D. J. (1978). *The seasons of a man's life*. New York: Knopf.
- Linvech, H., & Linvech, C. (1989). The five-factor model of personality: Is evidence for its cross-measure validity premature? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 10, 75-80.
- Little, B. R. (1989). Personal project analysis: Trivial pursuits, magnificent obsessions, and the search for coherence. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 15-31). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Maddi, S. R. (1980). *Personality theories: A comparative analysis* (4th ed.). Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.
- McAdams, D. P. (1985). *Power, intimacy, and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity*. New York: Guilford Press.
- McAdams, D. P. (1990a). *The person: An introduction to personality psychology*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- McAdams, D. P. (1990b). Unity and purpose in human lives: The emergence of identity as a life story. In A. I. Rabin, R. A. Zucker, R. A. Emmons, & S. Frank (Eds.), *Studying persons and lives* (pp. 148-200). New York: Springer.
- McAdams, D. P. (1992). *A conceptual history of personality psychology*. Unpublished manuscript.
- McClelland, D. C. (1951). *Personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- McClelland, D. C. (1980). Motive dispositions: The merits of operant and respondent measures. In L. Wheeler (Ed.), *Review of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 10-41). Beverly Hills: Sage.
- McClelland, D. C. (1981). Is personality consistent? In A. I. Rabin, J. Aronoff, A. M. Barclay, & R. A. Zucker (Eds.), *Further explorations in personality* (pp. 87-113). New York: Wiley.
- McClelland, D. C., Koestner, R., & Weinberger, J. (1989). How do self-attributed and implicit motives differ? *Psychological Review*, 96, 690-702.
- McCrae, R. R. (1989). Why I advocate the five-factor model: Joint factor analyses of the NEO-PI with other instruments. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 237-245). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1984). Personality is transcontextual: A reply to Veroff. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 10, 175-179.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1985a). Updating Norman's "adequate taxonomy": Intelligence and personality dimensions in natural language and in questionnaires. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49, 710-721.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1985b). Openness to experience. In R. Hogan & W. H. Jones (Eds.), *Perspectives in personality* (Vol. 1, pp. 145-172). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1987). Validation of the five-factor model of personality across instruments and observers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 81-90.
- McCrae, R. R., Costa, P. T., Jr., & Busch, C. M. (1986). Evaluating comprehensiveness in personality systems: The California Q-Set and the five-factor model. *Journal of Personality*, 54, 430-446.

- Mischel, W. (1968). *Personality and assessment*. New York: Wiley.
- Mischel, W., & Peake, P. K. (1982). Beyond déjà vu in the search for cross-situational consistency. *Psychological Review*, 89, 730-755.
- Moskowitz, D. S. (1988). Cross-situational generality in the laboratory: Dominance and friendliness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 829-839.
- Murphy, G. (1947). *Personality: A biosocial approach to origins and structure*. New York: Harper.
- Murray, H. A. (1938). *Explorations in personality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Norem, J. K. (1989). Cognitive strategies as personality: Effectiveness, specificity, flexibility, and change. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 45-60). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Norman, W. T. (1963). Toward an adequate taxonomy of personality attributes: Replicated factor structure in peer nomination personality ratings. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66, 574-583.
- Norman, W. T., & Goldberg, L. R. (1966). Raters, ratees, and randomness in personality structure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 681-691.
- Palys, T. S., & Little, B. R. (1983). Perceived life satisfaction and the organization of personal project systems. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 1221-1230.
- Passini, F. T., & Norman, W. T. (1966). A universal conception of personality structure? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 44-49.
- Peabody, D., & Goldberg, L. R. (1989). Some determinants of factor structures from personality-trait descriptors. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 552-567.
- Revelle, W. (1987). Personality and motivation: Sources of inefficiency in cognitive performance. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 21, 436-452.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York: The Free Press.
- Rowe, D. C. (1989). Personality theory and behavioral genetics: Contributions and issues. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 294-307). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Runyan, W. M. (1990). Individual lives and the structure of personality psychology. In A. I. Rabin, R. A. Zucker, R. A. Emmons, & S. Frank (Eds.), *Studying persons and lives* (pp. 10-40). New York: Springer.
- Rushton, J. P. (1990). Sir Francis Galton, epigenetic rules, genetic similarity theory, and human life-history analysis. *Journal of Personality*, 58, 117-140.
- Rychlak, J. F. (1981). *Personality and psychotherapy* (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Sarbin, T. R. (1986). (Ed.). *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. New York: Praeger.
- Shorrock, J., & Gergen, K. J. (1989). (Eds.). *Texts of identity*. London: Sage.
- Shweder, R. A. (1975). How relevant is an individual difference theory of personality? *Journal of Personality*, 43, 455-484.
- Simonton, D. K. (1986). Presidential personality: Biographical use of the Gough Adjective Check List. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 149-160.
- Singer, J. L., & Kolligan, J., Jr. (1987). Personality: Developments in the study of private experience. In M. R. Rosenzweig & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 38, pp. 533-574). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.

- Stewart, A. J., & Healy, J. M., Jr. (1985). Personality and adaptation to change. In R. Hogan & W. H. Jones (Eds.), *Perspectives in personality* (Vol. 1, pp. 117-144). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Stewart, A. J., & Healy, J. M., Jr. (1989). Linking individual development and social changes. *American Psychologist*, 44, 30-42.
- Tellegen, A. (1985). Structures of moods and personality and their relevance to assessing anxiety with an emphasis on self-report. In A. Tuma & J. Maser (Eds.), *Anxiety and the anxiety disorders* (pp. 681-706). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Thorne, A. (1989). Conditional patterns, transference, and the coherence of personality across time. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 149-159). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Tomkins, S. S. (1987). Script theory. In J. Aronoff, A. I. Rabin, & R. A. Zucker (Eds.), *The emergence of personality* (pp. 147-216). New York: Springer.
- Tupes, E. C., & Christal, R. E. (1961). Recurrent personality factors based on trait ratings (Tech. Rep. Nos. 61-67). Lackland, TX: U.S. Air Force Aeronautical Systems Division.
- Tyler, L. A. (1959). Toward a workable psychology of individuality. *American Psychologist*, 14, 75-81.
- Wakefield, J. C. (1989). Levels of explanation in personality theory. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 333-346). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Waller, N. G., & Ben-Porath, Y. (1987). Is it time for clinical psychology to embrace the five-factor model of personality? *American Psychologist*, 42, 887-889.
- West, S. G. (1986). (Ed.). *Methodological developments in personality research: A special issue of the Journal of Personality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wiggins, J. S. (1973). *Personality and prediction: Principles of personality assessment*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Wiggins, J. S. (1979). A psychological taxonomy of trait-descriptive terms: The interpersonal domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 395-412.
- Wright, J. C., & Mischel, W. (1987). A conditional approach to dispositional constructs: The local predictability of social behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 1159-1177.
- Wright, J. C., & Mischel, W. (1988). Conditional hedges and the intuitive psychology of traits. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 454-469.
- Yang, K., & Bond, M. H. (in press). Exploring implicit personality theories with indigenous or imported constructs: The Chinese case. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.
- Zuroff, D. C. (1986). Was Gordon Allport a trait theorist? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 993-1000.

Manuscript received August 6, 1990; revised December 4, 1990.