
A New Big Five

Fundamental Principles for an Integrative Science of Personality

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Despite impressive advances in recent years with respect to theory and research, personality psychology has yet to articulate clearly a comprehensive framework for understanding the whole person. In an effort to achieve that aim, the current article draws on the most promising empirical and theoretical trends in personality psychology today to articulate 5 big principles for an integrative science of the whole person. Personality is conceived as (a) an individual's unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of (b) dispositional traits, (c) characteristic adaptations, and (d) self-defining life narratives, complexly and differentially situated (e) in culture and social context. The 5 principles suggest a framework for integrating the Big Five model of personality traits with those self-defining features of psychological individuality constructed in response to situated social tasks and the human need to make meaning in culture.

Keywords: personality, traits, life stories

After surviving a near-death experience in the 1970s, personality psychology has made a strong comeback in the past two decades. Critics of the field once argued that situational factors swamp personality variables in accounting for what people actually do (e.g., Mischel, 1968). But today evidence for broad consistencies in individual differences, their stability over time, their psychobiological underpinnings, and their efficacy in predicting important behavioral trends and life outcomes is pervasive and convincing (e.g., Hogan, Johnson, & Briggs, 1997; Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2003; Wiggins, 2003). Once an endangered scientific species, the concept of the personality *trait* now enjoys a privileged status among personality researchers and an increasingly prominent role in studies done in social, developmental, cultural, and clinical psychology (Matthews et al., 2003). Bolstering the scientific standing of traits today is the widespread acceptance of the five-factor model of personality, often called the Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 1994; Goldberg, 1993; John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five organizes broad individual differences in social and emotional life into five factor-analytically-derived categories, most commonly labeled *extraversion* (vs. *introversion*), *neuroticism* (negative affectivity), *conscientiousness*, *agreeableness*, and *openness to experience*. The new trait psychology heralded by the Big Five is arguably the most recognizable

contribution personality psychology has to offer today to the discipline of psychology as a whole and to the behavioral and social sciences.

But personality psychology should be offering more. Despite its recent revival, personality psychology still falls somewhat short because it continues to retreat from its unique historical mission. That mission is to provide *an integrative framework for understanding the whole person*. The field's founders (Allport, 1937; Murray, 1938) and its early textbook authors (Hall & Lindzey, 1957; Maddi, 1968; McClelland, 1951; Wiggins, 1973) argued that personality psychology is uniquely positioned to focus its attention on human individuality—that is, on the individual human person. What did this mean? First, personality psychologists might conduct intensive case studies of the individual person's life (Runyan, 1982; R. W. White, 1952). Second, they might keep the individual person in mind when designing nomothetic studies, validating constructs, and articulating theories, seeking to understand how different aspects of human individuality are organized and integrated at the level of the whole person. In a passage that has come to assume canonical status in personality psychology, Kluckhohn and Murray (1953) wrote that every person is like all other persons, like some other persons, and like no other person. To be true to its historical mission, personality psychology should provide integrative frameworks for understanding species-typical characteristics of human nature (how the individual person is like all other persons), individual differences in common characteristics (how the individual person is like some other persons), and the unique patterning of the individual life (how the individual person is like no other person).

Personality psychology's reluctance to offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the whole person is especially apparent in the field's textbooks. Personality texts typically come in two varieties. One large group of texts still presents the field of personality psychology as a

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parade of alternative grand theories, beginning with Freud and the psychoanalytic theories and running successively through humanistic/phenomenological, trait/type, social learning, and evolutionary/biological theories (e.g., Pervin & John, 2001; Ryckman, 2004). Quite often, the books are organized in terms of one theory per chapter. Each theoretical tradition is seen as offering its own first principles, specifying its own structural units of psychological individuality, spelling out its own principles of personality development and change, and generating its own hypotheses and research programs. The implicit message behind this kind of textbook is that personality psychology offers a plethora of irreconcilable frameworks for making sense of persons, and the reader should pick his or her favorite. A second kind of textbook offers up a smorgasbord of research topics and issues but provides no overarching conception for making sense of it all (Derlega, Winstead, & Jones, 2005; Funder, 2004; Larsen & Buss, 2005). Whereas textbooks of the second type usually do a good job of covering contemporary research areas, they share with the first set of books a failure to commit to an integrative point of view. Both kinds of textbooks, therefore, view the field of personality psychology as lively but scattered, balkanized into autonomous regions of inquiry.

To help consolidate the gains personality psychology has made in recent years and to bring its many regions together within an elegant theoretical frame, we propose five big principles for a new integrative science of personality. Drawing explicitly from writings by Hooker (2002; Hooker & McAdams, 2003), McAdams (1994, 1995, 2006a), Sheldon (2004), and Singer (2005) and from recent advances in five-factor theory (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1999), these five big principles sketch a new framework for organizing contemporary research and theory in personality

psychology itself and for making sense of disparate findings on persons from many different fields of psychology—from social and clinical psychology to cognitive neuroscience. The principles subsume the five-factor model of personality within a broader framework that goes well beyond the concept of the personality trait in spelling out what we need to understand if we are to understand individual persons. Taken together, the five principles assert that dispositional traits articulate broad variations in human functioning that are recognizable, in part, for their evolutionary significance but that more contextually nuanced and psychosocially constructed features of personality move well beyond traits in speaking directly to how human beings respond to situated social tasks and make meaning out of their lives in culture. In addressing the issues of personality continuity, change, and adaptation, furthermore, the five principles suggest implications for clinical practice and counseling (Singer, 2005). Finally, the five principles suggest ways in which personality psychology can open up new dialogues with fields outside of psychology proper, including the other behavioral and social sciences and certain branches of the humanities, such as the study of biography (Schultz, 2005). In sum, the five fundamental principles suggest a broad outline of what scientists, practitioners, and other informed scholars should be thinking about when they seek to make psychological sense of the individual human life.

Principle 1: Evolution and Human Nature

Human lives are individual variations on a general evolutionary design. An integrative framework for understanding the psychological individuality of persons must begin with human nature and with the ways in which every person is like all other persons. Among the grand personality theories developed in the first half of the 20th century, first principles were typically taken as matters of faith—unquestioned assumptions about what human beings are fundamentally like and what, at the end of the day, drives or guides them to do what they do and be what they are. For Freud and the psychoanalytic theorists, human beings are fundamentally conflicted and driven by forces over which they have little control. For Rogers, Maslow, and the humanistic theorists, a sunny, self-actualizing nature lies behind human individuality. The behaviorists like Skinner and Bandura invoked Locke's *tabula rasa* to suggest that human nature is almost infinitely malleable. Each of these first principles reflects venerable intellectual traditions in Western thought, as well as partial projections of the theorists' own personalities (Demorest, 2005). For researchers, therapists, and students of personality, choosing a grand theory to believe in may boil down to deciding which first principle simply "feels right." For people who have experienced a great deal of intrapsychic conflict in life, psychoanalytic theories may feel right; blissful optimists may find favor in Maslow.

Most of the grand theories are faith-based systems whose first principles are untested and untestable (Mendel-



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sohn, 1993). In contrast, we contend that an integrative science of persons should be built around a first principle that enjoys the imprimatur of the biological sciences. Personality psychology begins with human nature, and from the standpoint of the biological sciences, human nature is best couched in terms of human evolution. To the extent that the individual person is like all other persons, that deep similarity is likely to be a product of human evolution. Contrary, therefore, to the implicit claims made by many personality textbooks even today, evolutionary personality psychology should not be seen as merely one alternative theory, perspective, or topic among many—to be compared and contrasted, say, with psychoanalytic, humanistic, trait, and cognitive–experiential approaches to personality, as if all were equally viable and one need merely pick his or her favorite. Rather, evolutionary theory must provide *the* first principles for any scientific understanding of persons, for it simply makes no scientific sense to speak of the species-typical characteristics that constitute human nature without considering how and why those characteristics evolved (Buss, 1991; Pinker, 1997; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992).

Over the course of human evolution, human beings have been designed by natural selection to engage in behaviors that ultimately make for the replication of the genes that determine their design. Every human being living today is an individual variation on that general design. But what is the design? Personality theorists who begin with evolution and human nature have typically looked to the environment of evolutionary adaptedness (EEA) to formulate ideas about basic human design (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Buss, 1991). They describe particular adaptations that may have evolved to address a wide range of specific challenges faced by roaming hunters and foragers living together in small groups during the Pleistocene epoch. They empha-

size modularity and what Pinker (1997) called the *cognitive niche*. Human nature is a constellation of loosely organized *modules*, each designed by natural selection to solve a particular problem in adaptation that, in one way or another, can be traced back to survival and reproduction. Therefore, certain modules may have evolved to address the problem of finding a sexual mate; others may have evolved to assure that offspring are protected and nourished; still others may have evolved to detect cheating and social infractions. Among those adaptations that may distinguish human beings from most other species are cognitive programs and potentials that enable them, for example, to plan attacks, forge alliances, adjudicate conflicts, predict the intentions of others, develop language, and (taken together) create culture.

According to Sheldon (2004), species-typical universals, designed through evolution, constitute the first of four different levels for analyzing personality. At this first level, Sheldon grouped basic physical needs (e.g., nutrition, water, oxygen, sleep), innate social–cognitive mechanisms (e.g., sensitivity to cheaters, tendency to classify others into in-group or out-group, decoding of facial expressions of emotion, inferring mental states), psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, competence, relatedness), and sociocultural practices (e.g., cloth making, animal domestication, religion). Of prime interest for personality are psychological needs. Drawing from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991), Sheldon suggested that many different adaptations may serve at least three organismic psychological needs crucial to social life in the EEA: needs to sustain a basic sense of self (autonomy), to manipulate the environment in order to achieve instrumental goals (competence), and to form cooperative relationships with others (relatedness). In a similar vein, Hogan's (1982) socioanalytic approach to personality posits that adaptive social life in the EEA—that is, behaving in ways that maximized the chances of survival and reproduction—involved *getting along* and *getting ahead* in the complex and ritualized exchanges that make up social life in groups. Social acceptance (*getting along*) and status (*getting ahead*) are prime dimensions around which human social life is organized, both in modern societies and in the EEA.

Evolution is the ultimate context for human individuality, suggesting universal design features against which individual adaptations vary. The general design privileges the tendency to learn, articulate, and engage in ritualized social encounters involving both *getting ahead* and *getting along* (Hogan, 1982); well-developed tendencies both to compete and to cooperate in social life; and behavioral expressions that can be strongly aggressive (Wilson, 1978) and/or exquisitely altruistic (de Waal, 1996). The general design may also privilege a broad and varied collection of additional social tendencies, such as the tendency to develop religious beliefs and practices in culture (Irons, 2001; Kirkpatrick, 1999), that enhanced inclusive fitness for group life in the EEA.

At the same time, evolutionary conceptions of personality may also suggest what kinds of basic variations to expect in psychological individuality (Gangestad & Simp-

son, 1990). The broad design variations that human beings are most likely to note may be those holding the greatest general significance for meeting the many demands of social life in the EEA. Although human evolution has, in a sense, come to allow for wide variations on many features of psychological individuality, those features that people in many different cultures are most likely to notice, talk about, and base personal decisions on (Should I marry him? Should I avoid her? Should I form an alliance with them?) may provide a broad sketch of basic personality differences—a rough cut or first read on personality variation. Human beings may have evolved to perceive and find especially noteworthy those broad variations in people's social behavior that have implications for the kind of group living that human beings have evolved to do (Buss, 1996). A full consideration of human evolution, then, helps to spell out the general design of psychological individuality against which variations exist and suggests what particular variations on that design are most likely to be noticed. Those most salient variations, noted by people in the same way in many different cultures (Church, 2000), may be viewed as comprising a core set of dispositional traits.

Principle 2: The Dispositional Signature

Variations on a small set of broad dispositional traits implicated in social life (both in the EEA and today) constitute the most stable and recognizable aspect of psychological individuality. Dispositional traits are those broad, nonconditional, decontextualized, generally linear and bipolar, and implicitly comparative dimensions of human individuality that go by such names as *extraversion, dominance, friendliness, dutifulness, depressiveness, the tendency to feel vulnerable*, and so on. From Allport (1937) to Eysenck (1952) to the Big Five, traits are generally viewed as broad dimensions of individual differences between people, accounting for interindividual consistency and continuity in behavior, thought, and feeling across situations and over time. At their best, dispositional traits speak to the overall style of a person's adjustment to and engagement of the social world—how a person does things, how a person typically thinks, how he or she usually feels about things in general. If the momentary constellation of any person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors make up his or her current *state*, then traits may be seen as the most common kinds of states that a person experiences across situations and over time (Fleeson, 2001). Personality traits provide a rough outline of human individuality, a first cut, a recognizable signature that a person tends to express in a range of situations (though not in all) and over a relatively long period of time (though not necessarily forever).

It is hard today to imagine a personality psychology without traits. How might one begin to describe individual differences between people—how every person is like some (but not all) other persons—without employing trait terms? A number of personality and social psychologists tried to do so anyway in the 1970s, during what came to be

known as the *person–situation debate*. Most famously, Mischel (1968, 1973) argued that broad traits are mainly stereotypes in the minds of observers rather than dynamic forces in the lives of actors, that human behavior is more situationally specific (contingent) than cross-situationally consistent (traitlike), and that scores on trait scales are weak predictors of what people will actually do in particular situations. Although the critiques launched against the trait concept raised important issues in the field and helped to produce important advances (Kenrick & Funder, 1988), one of the big lessons learned from the person–situation debate was that personality psychology cannot get along without traits. Not only did the concept of the trait survive the attacks, it emerged as stronger than ever before. The strong comeback stemmed from at least five major developments in the field of personality psychology.

First, researchers conducted a number of studies showing that personality trait scores often do predict important differences in observed behavior at surprisingly strong statistical levels, especially when behavior is aggregated across different situations (e.g., Epstein, 1979; Moskowitz, 1990). Although trait scores may prove to be but modest predictors of what a person will do in a single (e.g., laboratory-based) situation (Mischel & Peake, 1982), traits generally work well in predicting behavioral trends across situations and over time. They also prove to be robust predictors of important life outcomes like work performance and occupational success (Barrick & Mount, 1991), the quality of social relationships (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998), psychological well-being (Diener, Sandvik, Pavot, & Fujita, 1992), and even longevity (Friedman et al., 1993).

Second, data from a number of longitudinal studies were published in the 1980s and 1990s showing long-term stability in individual differences for personality traits (Conley, 1985; Costa & McCrae, 1994; Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). Test–retest correlations on self-report trait scales over periods of the adult life course for as long as 30 years were so robust that one set of authors suggested that William James may have been close to right when he asserted long ago that personality is “set like plaster” after about age 30 (Costa & McCrae, 1994). Substantial continuity in trait scores has also been demonstrated between the childhood years and early adulthood (Caspi et al., 2003).

These findings dovetail conceptually with those related to the third reason for the resurgence of the trait concept—that is, studies showing substantial heritability for trait scores. Studies of twins have consistently produced heritability quotients around 50% for most personality traits (e.g., Bouchard, Lykken, McGue, Segal, & Tellegen, 1990). At least half of the variability in trait scores appears to be a result of genetic differences between people.

Fourth, research has begun to document links between certain traits and the functioning of the brain. Researchers have suggested that individual differences in extraversion, for example, link up with a behavioral approach system (BAS) in the brain, a system conceptualized as regulating positive approach behavior, the pursuit of rewards and incentives, and/or positive affect (Gray, 1987; Zuckerman,

1995). Implicated in the complex functioning of the BAS are dopaminergic pathways in the brain (Depue, Luciana, Arbisi, Collins, & Leon, 1994) and the activation of the left frontal cortex (Davidson, 1992; Sutton & Davidson, 1997). By contrast, neuroticism may be associated with what has been called the behavioral inhibition system (BIS), conceptualized as regulating avoidance behavior and negative affectivity. The BIS may subsume certain aspects of the amygdala's functioning (LeDoux, 1996) and activation of the right frontal cortex. Although research on the neuroscience of traits is still in its infancy stage and results to date are still sketchy, there is every reason to believe that this area of study will yield many important findings in the coming years regarding the biological bases of basic personality traits.

Fifth, there is the Big Five itself. About 25 years ago, London and Exner (1978) published an influential edited volume that devoted one chapter to each of 13 dimensions of personality. In explaining why they arranged their chapters in alphabetical order (from "achievement strivings" to "trust"), the editors wrote that no reasonably less arbitrary organizational scheme seemed to exist. Going back to Allport and Odbert (1936), who identified over 18,000 trait words in an English dictionary, personality psychologists have wondered if it would ever be possible to develop a comprehensive, nonarbitrary list of the most important trait dimensions. Although the Big Five may not be the final word, a strong consensus today suggests that the five factor-analytically-derived categories that constitute the model do a reasonably good job of summarizing and organizing the universe of trait descriptors. Furthermore, factor solutions quite similar to the original English-based Big Five continue to be obtained in a growing number of trait studies conducted in many different societies and in different languages (Church, 2000; McCrae & Costa, 1999).

Goldberg (1981) was one of the first psychologists to suggest that the five factors consistently emerging in comprehensive studies of personality traits may address universal questions about human adaptation. In the EEA as well as today, Goldberg argued, human beings have wanted to know the answers to questions like these regarding a stranger they might meet: Is X socially dominant (extraverted)? Is X inclined to be negative, moody, and unstable (neuroticism)? Is X likely to be friendly and cooperative with me (agreeableness)? Can I trust X and count on X's commitment to work with me (conscientiousness)? Can I teach X things; is X open to change and learning (openness to experience)? The Big Five factors seem to address the big questions that are likely to arise in the kind of socially intensive patterns of group life that human beings have evolved to live (Buss, 1996). It makes good sense to suggest, therefore, that whereas human evolution has permitted wide variation on the Big Five traits, human beings have evolved to make special note of those variations, especially when sizing up people upon a first meeting. The Big Five scheme, therefore, may provide what is in effect an evolutionarily grounded *psychology of the stranger* (McAdams, 1995).

By sketching out the universe of broad trait dispositions that people in many different cultures commonly use to refer to the most general variations in psychological individuality, the Big Five offers a comprehensive system for organizing basic personality tendencies that have proven to evoke consequential differences in social life for many thousands of years, even going back to what evolutionary psychologists describe as the EEA. But a more fine-grained analysis of social life requires a move beyond basic tendencies—beyond the broad consistencies that may be noted even in the behavior of a relative stranger—to consider more particularized features of psychological individuality contextualized in time, situations, and social roles.

Principle 3: Characteristic Adaptations

Beyond dispositional traits, human lives vary with respect to a wide range of motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental adaptations, contextualized in time, place, and/or social role. Characteristic adaptations include motives, goals, plans, strivings, strategies, values, virtues, schemas, self-images, mental representations of significant others, developmental tasks, and many other aspects of human individuality that speak to motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental concerns. Little (1999) grouped many of these features under the label *personal action constructs* (PACs). Buss and Cantor (1989) spoke of *middle-level units* in personality—situated between general traits and specific behavior.

Although there exists no definitive, Big Five–like list of these kinds of constructs, and although the distinction between dispositional trait and characteristic adaptation may not be perfectly clear in every case, many approaches to personality explicitly or implicitly invoke a domain of human individuality that is more closely linked to motivation and cognition than are traits, that seems more amenable to environmental and cultural influences than are traits, that specifies features of human individuality that are more likely to change over time and through therapy than do traits, and that may be more implicated in situationally anchored personality processes and everyday personality dynamics than are traits. For example, Cantor (1990) distinguished between the "having" side of personality—in the sense that people "have" their traits—and the "doing" side, which connects to those contextualized and contingent features of personality (she singled out schemas, strategies, and tasks) that are most directly implicated in the dynamics of goal-directed, cognitively mediated, role-anchored, and/or developmentally informed everyday behavior.

Many of the classic theories of personality from the first half of the 20th century paid but incidental attention to dispositional traits. For Freud, oral passivity and anal compulsiveness might indeed qualify as broad traits, but the psychoanalytic concepts that most stirred the imagination (and informed research and practice) were things like the Oedipus complex, defense mechanisms, and the interpre-

tation of dream narratives. Carl Jung might be nearly forgotten today if his only contribution to psychology were his reworking of the ancient distinction between extraversion and introversion. The richness of the Jungian approach lies instead in concepts like the archetype, the anima, and the process of psychological individuation. Adler, Horney, Fromm, Erikson, Rogers, Maslow, Kelly, Rotter, Bandura—none of these personality theorists showed more than passing interest in dispositional traits. Instead, they emphasized motivation and the dynamics of behavior, social learning and cognitive schemata, strategies and coping mechanisms, developmental challenges and stages, and the ever-changing details of individual adaptation to the social world. What do people want? What do they value? How do people seek out what they want and avoid what they fear? How do people develop plans, goals, and programs for their lives? How do people think about and cope with the challenges they face? What psychological and social tasks await people at particular stages or times in their lives? These are the kinds of questions that psychotherapists, counselors, and other practitioners in the helping professions are especially interested in. They are the kinds of questions that many personality psychologists today address through research and theory on characteristic adaptations.

Research on characteristic adaptations is booming today in personality psychology and in areas where personality interfaces with social, developmental, life span, cognitive, cultural, political, and health psychology (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Emmons, 1999; Freund & Baltes, 2000; Higgins & Kruglanski, 1996; Lewis, 1999; Little, 1999; Sears, Huddy, & Jervis, 2003). Research has also examined possible linkages between dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations. For example, Roberts and Robins (2000) divided goals into those emphasizing economic, hedonistic, esthetic, religious, social, relationship, and political concerns and found that certain categories of goals correlated with certain Big Five traits, but not at a level that would lead one to conclude that traits subsume goals or vice versa.

Costa and McCrae (1994) introduced the term *characteristic adaptation* to refer to specific patterns of behavior that are influenced both by dispositional traits and by situational variables. Characteristic adaptations are

characteristic because they reflect the enduring psychological core of the individual, and they are adaptations because they help the individual fit into the ever-changing social environment. Characteristic adaptations and their configurations vary tremendously across cultures, families, and portions of the life span. (McCrae & Costa, 1999, p. 144)

Whereas we agree with these authors that characteristic adaptations are typically more specific and malleable than are dispositional traits and that traits likely exert *some* influence on the development of *some* characteristic adaptations, we do not see all characteristic adaptations as simple by-products of the interaction between basic traits and environments. Some characteristic adaptations—say, an internalized model of secure relationships, a strong

desire to save the world, a preoccupation with intimacy concerns in the emerging adulthood years, a hatred of men who remind one of one's father, strong generativity concerns at midlife, the tendency to value one's family life over commitment to one's community—may have a kind of life of their own, developing in ways that are only remotely, if at all, related to one's Big Five profile. Compared with traits, furthermore, characteristic adaptations more closely map onto the social ecology of everyday life. They are activated in response to and ultimately shaped by the everyday demands of social life. The fact that they are situated in particular contexts and may change markedly over time does not make them any less important for personality than are dispositional traits.

Psychologists have yet to map the vast and variegated terrain covered by motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental adaptations. It seems highly unlikely, however, that the geography will look like the Big Five scheme for traits. With respect to their role in an integrated science of persons, furthermore, characteristic adaptations would appear to function in ways very different from traits. If traits sketch an outline of human individuality, characteristic adaptations fill in some of the details. If traits speak to broad consistencies across situations and over time, characteristic adaptations spell out some of the contextualized particularities of human lives and address how those particularities can change, in both predictable and unpredictable ways, over time. If traits address the question of *what kind* of person a particular person is, characteristic adaptations begin to move the inquiry to a more existential question: *Who* is the person?

Principle 4: Life Narratives and the Challenge of Modern Identity

Beyond dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations, human lives vary with respect to the integrative life stories, or personal narratives, that individuals construct to make meaning and identity in the modern world. Over the past two decades, the concept of narrative has emerged as a new root metaphor in psychology and the social sciences (Bruner, 1990; Howard, 1991; Sarbin, 1986). Narrative approaches to personality suggest that human beings construe their own lives as ongoing stories and that these life stories help to shape behavior, establish identity, and integrate individuals into modern social life (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; McAdams, 1985; Singer & Salovey, 1993; Tomkins, 1987). The sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) argued that under the complex social and psychological conditions of cultural modernity “a person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*” (p. 54). *Narrative identity* is indeed that story the person tries to “keep going”—an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that incorporates the reconstructed past and the imagined future into a more or less coherent whole in order to provide the person's life with some degree of

unity, purpose, and meaning (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1985; Singer, 2004).

If dispositional traits sketch the outline and characteristic adaptations fill in the details of human individuality, then narrative identities give individual lives their unique and culturally anchored meanings. The topic of narrative identity has captured considerable research attention in many different subfields of psychology and in other branches of the social sciences. Cognitive psychologists have explored the role of episodic memory and autobiographical reasoning in the construction of an autobiographical self (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). Developmental psychologists have traced the origins of narrative identity to early conversations between children and caregivers (Fivush & Haden, 2003). Social psychologists have studied how different interpersonal conditions and contingencies influence self-storytelling and the memory for what is told (Pasupathi, 2001). Cultural psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have examined how individuals appropriate and resist a society's dominant myths and shared systems of meaning in the construction of narrative identity (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). Clinical psychologists have described narrative in therapy as a joint venture between therapists and clients to edit, reframe, and co-construct self-narratives (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Lieblich, McAdams, & Josselson, 2004). Industrial-organizational psychologists have explored the role of myths and storytelling in the evolution of groups, companies, schools, and other complex organizations (Gabriel, 2000). Criminologists have looked to narrative identity to explain desistance from crime and personal reform among career criminals (Maruna, 2001).

Among personality psychologists, research on narrative identity has focused on the identification of structural characteristics and content themes in life stories and the examination of their relationships to traits, motives, and mental health. For example, Blagov and Singer (2004) identified certain dimensions of self-defining autobiographical memories associated with traits of self-restraint, defensiveness, and distress. King, Scollon, Ramsey, and Williams (2000) showed that self-narratives incorporating foreshadowing and hopeful endings were predictive of ego development and well-being among parents of Down's Syndrome infants. McLean and Thorne (2003) explored different types of self-defining memories about intimate relationships and their role in adolescent identity development. Drawing on Tomkins's (1987) script theory of personality, de St. Aubin (1996) found that different emotional tones in life-narrative accounts mapped onto particular political and religious belief systems. McAdams (2006b; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997) identified a constellation of themes—called *the redemptive self*—that is especially prevalent in the life stories constructed by midlife American adults who score very high on measures of generativity. The redemptive self is a particular kind of life story—one that portrays a gifted protagonist who is ultimately delivered from suffering to

enhanced psychological or social state—that appears to reinforce and make especially meaningful a highly productive, caring, and prosocial approach to adult life in America today.

The process of putting life experience into a meaningful narrative form influences psychological growth, development, coping, and well-being. For example, King and colleagues (King et al., 2000; King & Raspin, 2004) have shown that adults who are able to translate difficult life transitions into fully elaborated stories—narrative accounts that explore the details of their lost selves and the vicissitudes of personal change—tend to show increases in ego development over time. In a similar vein, Pals (in press) has found that exploratory narrative processing promotes personality development by mediating the impact of openness to experience (a dispositional trait) on developmental outcomes. Individuals high in openness to experience showed developmental gains when their narrative accounts of difficult life experiences revealed high levels of exploration and accommodation. With respect to psychological and physical well-being, Pennebaker and others (e.g., Hemenover, 2003; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999) have shown that when people write about traumatic experiences and reorganize these experiences into coherent and meaningful narratives, they increase in psychological well-being and experience improved psychological health.

Although a number of the grand theories of personality from the first half of the 20th century hinted at the importance of life stories and the process of self-narration (e.g., Jung, Adler, Murray, Erikson), contemporary narrative approaches have made much more explicit the ways in which storytelling shapes self-making, the kinds of stories that are commonly told, the relations between life stories and other features of human individuality, the impact of narrative processing on growth and well-being, and the complex interplay between narrative identity and culture. It is with respect to narrative identity, furthermore, that personality psychology's commitment to showing how every person is like no other person is most readily accomplished. Every life story is unique. The rich texture of human individuality is best captured in the intensive examination of the individual life story (Nasby & Read, 1997; Singer, 2005). At the same time, common patterns across life stories, especially within given cultures, can be identified, and these common patterns can speak to important and measurable individual differences between people. Individual differences in narrative identity are not reducible to differences in dispositional traits or characteristic adaptations. But research has documented important empirical relations between the levels—ways in which traits and motives, for example, relate to narrative identity (e.g., McAdams, 1985; McAdams et al., 2004). A full accounting of a person's life requires an examination of the unique patterning of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and life narratives that characterize that life, all grounded ultimately in the evolutionary demands of the species and, at the same time, complexly influenced by culture.

Principle 5: The Differential Role of Culture

Culture exerts different effects on different levels of personality: It exerts a modest effect on the phenotypic expression of traits; it shows a stronger impact on the content and timing of characteristic adaptations; and it reveals its deepest and most profound influence on life stories, essentially providing a menu of themes, images, and plots for the psychosocial construction of narrative identity. If human evolution is the ultimate, distal context for human individuality (Principle 1), then culture, society, and the environmental arrangements of everyday life make up the more immediate, proximal contexts within which individual lives find their characteristic designs. The person–situation debate of the 1970s reinforced a hackneyed truism in psychology: Behavior is a product of the interaction between persons and environments. One of the great challenges in personality and social psychology has always been to find nontrivial ways to examine this complex interaction. A key to this challenge is understanding that the environment means many different things—from the immediate social situation to a cultural ethos—and that it impacts different aspects of personality in different ways. For personality psychology, a traditionally underappreciated dimension of the environment is *culture*, or the rich mix of meanings, practices, and discourses about human life that prevail in a given group or society (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993).

In their five-factor theory of personality, McCrae and Costa (1999) argued that dispositional traits are relatively impervious to social and cultural influence. To support their claim, they pointed to behavior-genetics studies showing that at least half of the variance in true trait scores is accounted for by genetic differences between people, whereas shared environmental effects appear minimal, and they reviewed the growing body of research on the cross-cultural replicability of the five-factor scheme. Although we do not fully endorse the view that traits are resistant to environmental influence, we see the influence as generally modest and subtle, and we believe it is shown in at least two very different ways. First, even if half or more of the true variance in trait scores may be accounted for by genetic differences between people, the long-term process whereby early, genetically determined temperament tendencies gradually evolve into fully articulated adult traits involves complex, bidirectional transactions between proximal environments and dispositions, described by Caspi (1998) as *developmental elaboration*. Second, cultural forces likely shape the *phenotypic expression* of traits. Japanese extraverts growing up in Kyoto express their sociability and positive affectivity in ways that may differ dramatically from how their equally extraverted middle American counterparts express the same tendencies in Peoria, even if cultural factors have little impact on precisely “how much” extraversion a person ends up with. In other words, the meaning systems and practices that constitute culture may turn out to account for very little variance in true trait scores, but culture does provide demand characteristics and display rules for the behavioral expression of

traits. Neuroticism is neuroticism, wherever and whenever it plays itself out in a human life. But whereas highly neurotic young women in the United States may suffer from bingeing, purging, excessive rumination, or ill-advised sexual adventures, their counterparts in rural Ghana may tend to express their negative affectivity in other ways, such as somatic symptoms, magical thinking, or avoidance of the many enemies they perceive in their lives (Adams, 2005).

By their very definition, characteristic adaptations are situated in particular social, cultural, and developmental contexts. Goals and interests reflect personal investments in activities, programs, and life trajectories that society makes available for the individual. Values and virtues reflect selective commitments to particular ideals that have been passed down in families and through religious, civic, and educational institutions. Coping strategies, competencies, expectancies, and the like are typically couched in domain-specific, situational terms. More so than traits, characteristic adaptations are contoured by social class, ethnicity, gender, and even historical events (Pettigrew, 1997; Stewart & Healy, 1989). Characteristic adaptations are expected to change over time, with changing life circumstances and role expectations and with maturation over the life course (Elder, 1995).

Different cultures may emphasize different patterns of characteristic adaptations. For example, the well-known distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures hypothesizes culturally shaped differences in personality that exist mainly at the level of characteristic adaptations. Markus and Kitayama (1991) identified independent self-construals, and associated goals and values that prioritize independence, with individualist cultures like the United States; they suggested that interdependent self-construals, and corresponding goals and values that prioritize interdependence, are more prevalent in collectivist cultures like China and Japan. Although these distinctions are useful, they should not be taken so far as to imply that individuals passively acquiesce to the dominant values and goals of their given society. Gjerde (2004) argued that the relation between characteristic adaptations and culture is complex and often contested. People sometimes resist the norms to construct individual life patterns that defy cultural convention. Gjerde (2004) wrote that “culture can be said to exist as contested representations situated in public domains or institutions in which power is both exercised and resisted” (p. 146).

The complex interplay between culture and human individuality may be most evident at the level of narrative identity. Life stories are at the center of culture (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). Indeed, a person’s life story may say as much about the culture wherein the person lives as it does about the person who lives it and tells it. Life stories draw on the stories that people learn as active participants in culture—stories about childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and aging. Stories capture and elaborate metaphors and images that are especially resonant in a given culture. Stories distinguish between what culture glorifies as good characters and vilifies as bad characters, and they present

the many varieties who fall in between. Stories depict full and fragmented lives that are exciting, frightening, infuriating, enlightening, admirable, heroic, dignified, ignoble, disgusting, wise, foolish, and boring. Stories teach people how to live and what their lives may mean.

Culture, then, provides each person with an extensive menu of stories about how to live, and each person chooses from the menu (McAdams, 2006b). Because different people within a given culture have different experiences and opportunities, no two people get exactly the same menu. Furthermore, a person cannot eat everything on the menu, so narrative choices spell out a person's relationship to culture. When the food comes from the kitchen, people doctor it to their own tastes. They add pepper and salt; they mix things up and throw some things away; they nibble from somebody else's plate; they may even send the order back and ask to see the menu again. This is to say that individuals select and *appropriate* in the making of narrative identity. They choose from competing stories, rejecting many others, and they modify the stories they choose to fit their own unique life, guided by the unique circumstances of their social, political, and economic worlds, by their family backgrounds and educational experiences, and by their dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations. A person constructs a narrative identity by appropriating stories from culture. Self and culture come to terms with each other through narrative.

Table 1 summarizes relations between dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and life stories on the one hand and culture on the other. The bottom-line message of the table is this: The influence of culture and social environments on personality is complex and multidimensional, and it depends greatly on what aspects of personality are chosen. At the level of dispositional traits, culture provides display rules and demand characteristics for behavioral expression, but culture has little impact on the magnitude or strength of traits. At the level of characteristic adaptations, culture sets agendas for the timing and content of goals, strivings, relational patterns, and the like. Culture has its strongest impact at the level of life narrative, providing a menu or anthology of narrative forms from which individuals draw in making meaning out of their lives.

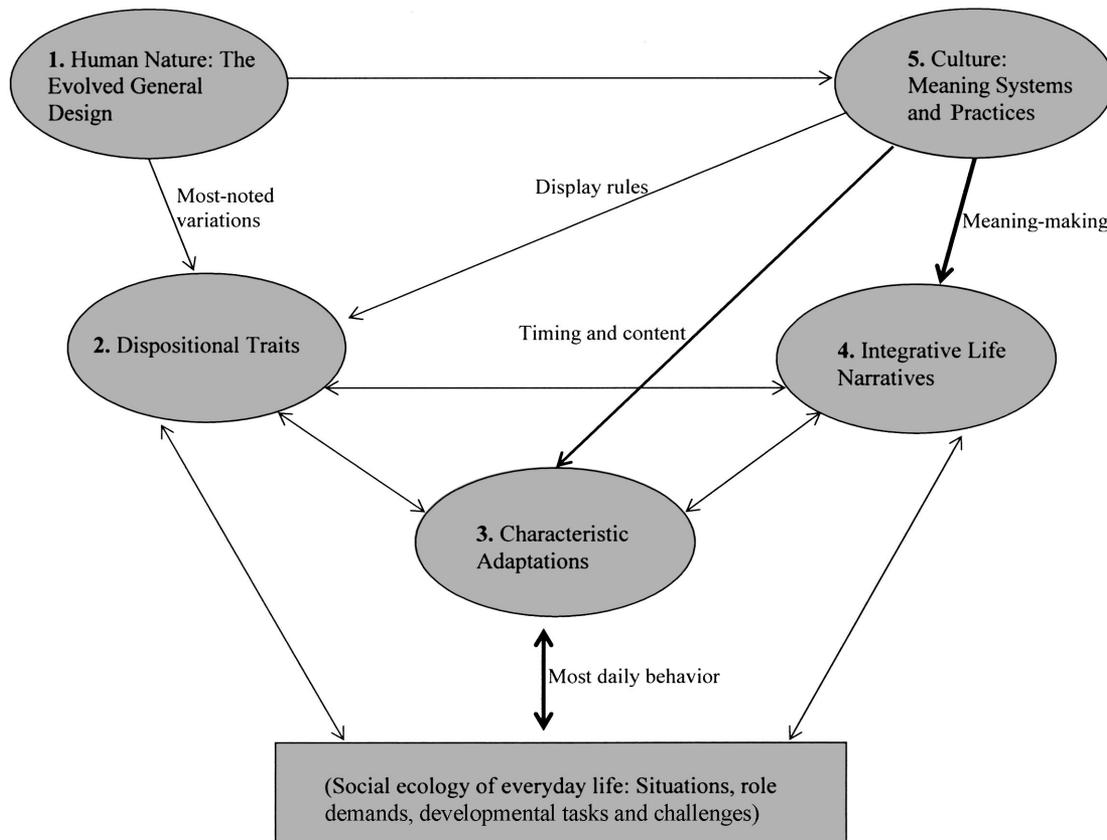
Conclusion

Personality is an individual's unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and integrative life stories complexly and differentially situated in culture. Figure 1 illustrates the five principles and their relationships to each other. Evolution provides the general design for psychological individuality (Principle 1) against which the socially consequential variations in human lives can be conceived. Human beings have evolved, furthermore, to take note of those variations

Table 1
Three Levels of Personality and Their Relations to Culture

Level	Definition	Function	Relations to culture
1. Dispositional traits	Broad individual differences in behavior, thought, and feeling that account for general consistencies across situations and over time (e.g., extraversion, the Big Five). Interindividual differences in traits are relatively stable over time.	Dispositional traits sketch a behavioral outline.	Similar trait labels and systems found across many different cultures and languages. But culture influences how traits are expressed.
2. Characteristic adaptations	More specific motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental variables that are contextualized in time, situations, and social roles (e.g., goals, values, coping strategies, relational patterns, domain-specific schemas, stage-specific concerns). Some characteristic adaptations may change markedly over the life course.	Characteristic adaptations fill in the details of human individuality.	Cultures differ somewhat on their most valued goals, beliefs, and strategies for social life. For example, cultural <i>individualism</i> and <i>collectivism</i> encourage different patterns of characteristic adaptations, respectively.
3. Integrative life narratives	Internalized and evolving life stories that reconstruct the past and imagine the future to provide a person's life with identity (unity, purpose, meaning). Individual differences in life stories can be seen with respect to characteristic images, tones, themes, plots, and endings. Life stories change substantially over time, reflecting personality development.	Integrative life narratives tell what a person's life means in time and culture.	Cultures provide a menu of stories for the life course and specify how stories should be told and lived. In modern societies, many different stories compete with each other. Persons must choose some stories and resist others.

Figure 1
Five Principles of Personality Psychology: A Schematic



that are most important for group life, summarized at the broadest level in terms of individual differences in dispositional traits (Principle 2). Whereas traits provide a dispositional sketch or signature, characteristic adaptations spell out many of the details of psychological individuality as contextualized in time, situations, and social roles (Principle 3). Goals, strivings, coping strategies, values, beliefs, representations of salient relationships, and other motivational, developmental, and social-cognitive versions of characteristic adaptations are activated in response to and ultimately shaped by everyday social demands. More than do broad traits, characteristic adaptations speak to how individuals meet situational, strategic, and developmental tasks in the social ecology of a person's life. Integrative life narratives (Principle 4) address how a person makes sense of his or her life as a whole. The psychosocial construction of narrative identity moves personality from broad trends (dispositional traits) and the specific responses to daily life demands (characteristic adaptations) to the challenge of making meaning out of one's life in a complex world. Culture (Principle 5) influences the development of traits, adaptations, and life narratives in different ways: by providing display rules for the phenotypic expression of trait

tendencies, by influencing the content and timing of characteristic adaptations, and by providing the canonical narrative forms out of which people make meaning of their lives.

The five big principles articulated in this article organize the best research and theory in personality psychology today, including the Big Five taxonomy for personality traits, while picking up many other important advances in personality psychology over the past two decades and some of the most important themes running through the grand personality theories from the first half of the 20th century. The principles integrate approaches to personality assessment and research drawn from different intellectual traditions (Wiggins, 2003). The principles also suggest new ways to teach personality psychology as an integrated field (McAdams, 2006a)—pedagogical approaches that can replace the outdated surveys of grand theories and the random lists of scattered topics in personality research. Students may best appreciate the value of personality psychology by first considering how evolution has shaped human nature and then considering in sequence how individual differences in traits, adaptations, and life narratives play themselves out in culture.

Most important, however, the five principles revive personality psychology's historical mission to provide the discipline of psychology, and the social and behavioral sciences more generally, with an integrative framework for comprehending, assessing, and studying the whole person (McAdams, 1997). Allport (1937) and Murray (1938) believed that personality psychology might best serve the rest of the discipline by suggesting ways in which findings from a wide spectrum of subfields—from biopsychology to clinical practice—might be integrated with respect to their relevance for understanding the individual person. The “new big five” principles attempt to do just that. Taken together, they suggest a framework for human individuality that may prove useful for empirical psychologists and practitioners of many different stripes and for other social and behavioral scientists.

For example, cognitive psychologists have long been interested in schemas, scripts, and autobiographical memory. Personality research on characteristic adaptations and life narratives may have something to contribute in this regard (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Singer, 2004). In addition, the well-known distinction in cognitive science between semantic and episodic memory (Tulving, 2002) parallels the trait/narrative dichotomy in personality. The Big Five traits are akin to broad semantic categories of self-knowledge; integrative life narratives, by contrast, take a more episodic form. Some researchers have suggested that semantic and episodic aspects of selfhood may be processed very differently in the brain and may have less functional relation to each other than common sense suggests (e.g., Klein, Cosmides, Constible, & Mei, 2002). A comprehensive framework for understanding human individuality, therefore, should run the semantic/episodic gamut, expressing the complexity and richness of both self-relevant thought and selves themselves.

In their pursuit to understand social influences on behavior, social psychologists in recent years have become increasingly interested in self-processes and individual differences (Higgins & Kruglanski, 1996). Yet they seem rarely to look to personality psychology for guidance and inspiration (Baumeister, 1999). The framework suggested by the five principles provides an organizational scheme for understanding different aspects of human selfhood and suggests important distinctions among individual-difference variables that should be of considerable relevance to social psychology.

For example, the five principles may help to clarify ways in which certain programs of research in social psychology articulate the dynamics of personality. As a case in point, take Higgins's (1998) theory of regulatory focus. According to Higgins, goal-directed behavior is guided by two distinct systems—a promotion system aimed at obtaining positive outcomes and promoting growth and a prevention system aimed at avoiding negative outcomes and promoting safety. Research on regulatory focus has shown that people display chronic individual differences in their tendencies to be promotion or prevention focused. At the same time, these cognitive-motivational strategies can be primed by situational influences, and their cognitive, affective, and

behavioral implications may vary depending on the characteristics of the particular context in which they are used. As such, promotion and prevention focus may be best conceptualized as characteristic adaptations (Principle 3) and are clearly contoured by culture and the social ecology of everyday life (Principle 5). However, these motivational systems also seem to have clear evolutionary underpinnings (Principle 1), implications for how basic traits such as extraversion (promotion focus) and neuroticism (prevention focus) operate (Principle 2), and even potential manifestations within narrative identity (Principle 4). With respect to the last point, Bauer, McAdams, and Sakaeda (2005) showed that people's narrative interpretations of past experiences differ in whether they emphasize growth (e.g., “I found out how to make our relationship better”) or safety (e.g., “I hope that never happens again”). The example of regulatory focus demonstrates how social psychology's microlevel analysis of person-within-situation dynamics represents not so much a competing alternative to personality psychology as a complementary perspective that is relevant to a broadly integrative view of personality science.

Developmental and life span psychologists study meaningful and orderly change over time. The Big Five trait taxonomy provides one valuable take on personality development, but the emphasis is mainly on the stability of dispositional traits over time. The framework described herein points to other features of personality—characteristic adaptations and narrative identity—that are likely to show considerable change over time, in accord with shifting developmental demands and maturation. More so than trait models, furthermore, approaches that feature characteristic adaptations and narrative identity can shed light on processes and mechanisms of developmental change.

In a similar vein, clinical and counseling psychologists may find in this article's framework an organizational scheme for sorting through what aspects of personality should be targeted for change in psychotherapy (Singer, 2005). Most therapeutic approaches do not aim to change basic personality traits. Yet therapy often exerts important changes in personality, typically with respect to selected motivational, social-cognitive, or developmental adaptations and/or the client's narrative understanding of self. Recent approaches emphasizing narrative therapy, furthermore, explore in detail the ways in which therapists and their clients co-construct self-narratives and negotiate narrative meanings over the course of therapy (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Lieblich, McAdams, & Josselson, 2004; M. White & Epston, 1990). Furthermore, psychopathology and problems in living can be conceived as operating with respect to different levels of personality. Depression, for example, may manifest itself in certain traitlike expressions, as characteristic patterns of thought and motivation situated in social roles and developmental periods, and through a particularly depressogenic life story featuring, for example, themes of loss and contamination (Adler, Kissel, & McAdams, 2006).

From cognitive neuroscience to psychological biography, any scientific or scholarly endeavor that explores the

variegated nature of human selfhood could conceivably benefit from a revitalized personality psychology that takes seriously its historical mission to provide psychology with an integrative framework for understanding how every person is like all other persons, like some other persons, and like no other person. Taken together, the five principles articulated in this article mark a newfound effort on the part of personality psychology to assume a central and integrative position within the discipline of psychology and in the social sciences more generally. For too long now, personality psychologists have shirked their responsibility to do so.

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