Personality Psychology: Havings, Doings, and Beings in Context

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Introduction: Voices in the Cafeteria

Imagine that we are listening in on a conversation between three students in the college cafeteria. Their discussion weaves around many topics but the dominant theme is their common project of applying to graduate school in psychology. Speaking animatedly and downing her third cup of coffee, Eve declares that she is only applying to her top three choices and she's

looking forward to dragging her boyfriend to Ann Arbor. She suddenly bolts from the group realizing she's late for her stats class. Adam says little, nods often, and is wondering whether he really is grad school material. Besides, his parents want him to go back home after graduation to work in the family business. Nikki isn't really listening at all; she's hung over again, hadn't realized grad application deadlines were coming up, and frankly is fed up with Adam and Eve and the whole human condition. She mumbles something they can't quite hear and heads for the restroom.

If you are sitting in the adjacent booth in the cafeteria, would you linger a bit, intrigued by the differing styles, contrasting concerns, and singular stories you hear emerging in the snatches of conversation? If so, then you probably have a natural affinity for personality psychology. This chapter surveys the past and present state of personality psychology as a core specialty within psychology and examines how it goes about understanding the lives of the Eves, Adams, and Nikkis of this world.

The field of personality psychology is flourishing. In many respects the current buoyancy of the field reflects important shifts, both methodological and conceptual, that have occurred over the past two decades. Some of these changes arose in response to conceptual crises within the field, particularly the Great Trait

Debate that occupied much of the field in the seventies. (Mischel's (1968) critique, which launched the debate, and reactions to it are discussed in a later section).

Other shifts reflect the gradual maturing of intellectual agendas that were present at the modern inception of academic personality psychology in the nineteen thirties (Craik, 1986). After sketching very briefly the nature and challenges of the field of personality psychology, I will present a perspective (admittedly an idiosyncratic one) on some of the currently active research programs in the 'new look' in personality psychology.

The Core Project of Personality Psychology: The Integrative Challenge

Within the social and behavioral sciences, personality psychologists have chosen to specialize in comprehensiveness (Little, 1972). As an intellectual field its scope of inquiry is inordinately extensive. Personality psychology seeks to integrate diverse influences on human conduct ranging from the genetic and neurophysiological underpinnings of traits to the historical contexts within which individual life stories can be rendered coherent. Pervin (1996) has provided a thoughtful definition of personality which, in part, characterizes it as "the complex organization of cognitions, affects, and behaviors that gives direction and pattern (coherence) to the person's life" (p.414). The study of personality

seeks to understand how individuals are like all other people, some other people, and no other person (to revise slightly the classic phrase of Kluckhohn & Murray, 1953, p.53). It formulates theories about the nature of human nature, the role of individual differences, and the study of single cases. Personality psychology provides one of the core basic sciences underlying many of the fields of applied psychology, including clinical, counseling, health, and organizational psychology.

Classical Voices and the Conceptual Foundations of Personology

Even a cursory history of the classical theoretical and methodological perspectives in personality psychology exceeds the limits of this chapter, but fortunately two recent reviews provide authoritative and concise accounts of the history of personality psychology (McAdams, 1997; Winter & Barenbaum, 1999). But it will advance the purpose of this chapter if we have some major historical figures in the field, metaphorically descend (or ascend) from their places in posterity to offer their perspective on the cafeteria conversation with which we began this survey. Their role will be like that of the Greek Chorus in classical drama that offered commentary about the ongoing action. (Except that none will speak in Greek and some won't speak, but sing. Or hum.) They will introduce some of the concerns and admonishments of classical

personology and provide a bridge to contemporary discourse about the field.

Let us start with a Freudian chorus (perhaps the Vienna Old Boys Choir?). There is little doubt that psychoanalysis has had a profound impact on the intellectual climate of the twentieth century. Many in fact would claim that its impact has been greater in the arts and humanities than in the social and behavioral sciences. In essence the Freudian psychodynamic perspective held that unconscious wishes and the vicissitudes of their expression comprised the core integrative concepts necessary to understand the complexities of both normal and abnormal personality. Thus the reach of psychoanalytic theorizing extended from the clinical couch to the psychopathology of daily life, from the deepest neuroses to the seeming innocence of typing misrakes. Through the theoretical lenses provided by Freudian theory, Eve's tardiness, Adam's ambivalence, and Nikki's petulance might reflect the subtle operation of unconscious wishes and defenses against them. Such influences would likely be sexual or aggressive at root. A Freudian chorus might choose Nikki as the most obvious case for explication of the possible influences of unconscious and destructive forces in human personality because of the welling up of impulses that compromise her ability to muddle through this particular Monday. But they would also have comments to make about why Eve is late only for her stats

class and why Adam has never fully been able to break away from the Edenic security of his home.

The Personological Chorus would feature Henry Murray with counterpoint commentary by Gordon Allport, both of whom would be draped in Harvard Crimson. Like Freud, Murray would insist that the motivation of the students would run deep. Rather than focusing exclusively upon sex and aggression, he would insist that there are diverse needs that underlie human motivation, such as the need for affiliation or need for achievement. He would voice concern that the environments within which human motives play out should also receive our attention, and that for each need operating in personality there is a corresponding "press" in the environment that can facilitate or frustrate its achievement. Finally, Murray would be concerned that we expand the time line to look at "serials"–the sequences of action that extend over longer periods of time and without which the significant motivational agendas of people's lives may be given shorter shrift than they deserve.

Allport would generally concur, but would suggest that traits are the substantively real and dynamic sources of human personality and that both the nature and organization of such dispositions are patterned idiosyncratically. He would also argue that although pursuits may originally be undertaken for one set of motives, they may

eventually become independent or “functionally autonomous” of the originating motivation.

For these personologists, the ways in which the three students are approaching their last weeks as undergraduates may reflect different patterns of needs and the ways in which the environments are fulfilling or frustrating the achievement of the needs. Eve may be primarily concerned with a need for power, and her seeking admission only to the elite schools may help her to develop influential connections. This would contrast with her classmates, high in achievement motivation, who may apply to a greater range of schools to optimize likely success. (See Winter (1996) for an excellent description of need research in the tradition of Murray and his followers such as McClelland). Adam may have a strong need for self-abasement–a need his parents are only too happy to satisfy when he broaches the topic of heading off for grad school. Nikki might be particularly intriguing to the personologists. Not satisfied to dismiss her behavior simply as aggressive or neurotic, they may see her as a complex person–perhaps a highly creative personality whose needs are being systematically frustrated by environmental press that keeps her from exploring ideas that she and others find strange and disturbing.

We might hear next from the Behaviorist Chorus comprising the early learning theorists and

joined by those such as Dollard and Miller who attempted to translate psychodynamic theory into behaviorist principles and of course Skinner whose clear voice of confidence about the power of operant conditioning would likely drown out the rest of the Chorus. The behavioral analytic units would be stimulus-response bonds that would allow an integration not only of human personality but the behavior of all organisms. This perspective placed considerable emphasis upon the shaping of personality by environmental contingencies, particularly by the rewards and punishments that reinforced behavior. For the behaviorists, the differences between our three students, Eve's ascendancy, Adam's diffidence, and Nikki's emotionality (and drinking problems), arise from differences in their reinforcement histories and the commonalities arise from their desire to avoid painful stimulation and seek out rewards.

A third distinctive voice can be heard in the cafeteria: that of George Kelly. At the same time as behavioral theories were in ascendancy in psychology, Kelly proposed an original and audacious theory. His integrative mission was to weave theoretical, assessment, and clinical concerns into a seamless model of human personality. Kelly postulated that to understand individuals was to understand the personal constructs through which they viewed their worlds. Kelly saw each of us as a "lay" scientist–testing out hypotheses about ourselves and our worlds

and revising those hypotheses (constructs) in the light of experience. These personal constructs are organized into systems such that some of them become core role constructs, centrally important to the lives of individuals. Their preservation and continued validation have a profound effect on emotional experience. For example, according to Kellian theory, threat is awareness of an imminent and comprehensive change in one's construct system. Guilt is awareness of being dislodged from one's core constructs, aggression is the expansion of core constructs to subsume new domains, and hostility is the attempt to extort validation for a construct one already feels has been invalidated (Kelly, 1955). So how would the Kellian Chorus in the cafeteria (more likely an Irish tenor solo) attempt to understand our three students? Kelly would likely see all three students as feeling threat at the prospect of being in transition between undergraduate life and their futures. Adam may feel guilt in that he is being dislodged from a core construct of being loyal to his family. Eve may be aggressively pursuing confirmation of her construct of herself as successful. Nikki, we can now disclose, has experienced a series of abusive relationships. She may have experienced what Kellians refer to as serial invalidation of her core constructs, in which each attempt to anticipate her world is painfully disconfirmed. Her only strategy left is to attempt to extort validation of her worth by

acting abrasively toward those who have failed to notice her pain. For Nikki, only a worthy person has the temerity to tell her friends to “piss off”. Or so she tells herself.

These classic voices from personality psychology each approach the integrative task by developing overarching theories of considerable scope, though each selectively highlights a particular aspect of human conduct as its integrative center. Thus classical psychodynamic theory is primarily concerned with emotional experience, learning theory with overt behavioral processes, and Kellian theory with the cognitive systems through which personality unfolds. Yet each extends the range of its theoretical constructs to include phenomena that are of more focal concern for alternative perspectives. Indeed, within psychodynamic theory, a major historical progression involved a shift from emphasis upon unconscious motivation, to a conflict free domain in which conscious goal pursuit could be carried out without being subordinated to the pressures of irrational impulses and wishes. Thus, psychodynamic theory was able to push its conceptual agenda into an area that would be regarded as more the domain of cognitive psychology. Similarly, learning theorists over the century have moved from drive-reduction and peripheralist theories to cognitive social learning theories (e.g., Bandura, Mischel), in which the influence on human action has shifted from classical and operant conditioning,

or rewards and punishments to more cognitive concerns, such as schemata, encoding skills etc. (e.g., Mischel, 1990).

Critical Voices: Challenge and Restoration in Personology

The field of personality psychology was thrown into considerable conceptual turmoil with the publication of Walter Mischel's (1968) Personality and Assessment. Mischel mounted a detailed critique of broad dispositional traits as units of analysis in personality psychology. Specifically, he argued that there was little evidence for broad-based generalities of trait dispositions (e.g., an Adam may be submissive around his fellow students and his parents but assertive and confident when playing in his jazz band). He also provided evidence that specific tests of personality traits had little predictive validity in accounting for actual behavior and seldom exceed a "personality coefficient" limit of .30. Thus, Mischel's attack was antagonistic to the classical personological perspectives and particularly to those who offered fixed traits as analytic units for the field. His allies, interestingly, were rather strange bedfolk: behaviorists (who by then were transforming into cognitive social learning theorists) and personal construct theorists–a direct reflection of Mischel having been a student of George Kelly's. Mischel's central contentions were that human action was finely attuned to situational influences, and that such action was less the prod-

uct of fixed traits than of the personal constructs or conceptual lenses through which individuals viewed the world.

The impact of Mischel's critique was pivotal for the field of personality in three ways. First, it had a major effect upon personality testing by calling into question the validity of such tests. Second, it encouraged greater collaborative linkages with social psychologists, who had traditionally regarded the major sources of human action to lie in the situations and environmental contexts with which individuals were confronted (Endler & Magnusson, 1976). Finally, and most significantly, it stimulated an immediate, protracted, and eventually successful defense of the orthodox trait model by personality psychologists. While feeling that the strengths of the personological tradition had been underestimated by Mischel, they also conceded that greater conceptual grappling with some of the foundational issues in personality measurement were now urgently needed (Wiggins, 1997). The result of the clash between these critical voices was an enrichment and broadening of the conceptual base of personality psychology. The social cognitive learning alternative, espoused by Mischel, continues to generate considerable research (e.g., Cervone & Shoda, 1999; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). But a full scale restoration of trait psychology also came about as a result of the Great Trait Debate and, as we shall see, it now constitutes one of three major contemporary

perspectives in the field. It is to these contemporary voices that we can now turn.

Contemporary Voices: Three Tiers for Personality Psychology

Contemporary personality psychology is multifaceted, complex, and dynamic. One particularly helpful way of organizing this complexity for expository purposes has been proposed by McAdams (1995). I will adopt this as a starting point to review three different levels at which personality psychologists are exploring the nature of human nature and explaining the ways in which individuals live out their lives.

The first level of inquiry in contemporary personality research is that of relatively fixed features of individual differences emphasizing personality traits. The second level explores more contextually sensitive and dynamic units of analysis that McAdams labels personal concerns. (McAdams includes many more constructs at this level than I will treat in this chapter. I have tried to make the case that the central integrative units at this level are Personal Action Constructs (PAC units) (Little, 1989, 1996)). The third level addresses individuals' life stories and the narrative identities that people construct to make sense of their lives. Invoking terms introduced by Allport and re-introduced by Cantor (1990), we can refer to Levels 1 and Levels 2 as reflecting the "having" and "doing" aspects of human personality respectively.

“Having” refers to that which we are endowed with and carry with us and “doing” refers to that which we intentionally perform. Because Level 3 is concerned with identity and the sense of self that individuals construct, and to preserve the gerundial form of depicting the field, we can refer to this as the “being” aspects of personality. Collectively this structure of the contemporary field of personality research can be thought of as exploring the havings, doings, and beings of individuals.

For initial expository purposes, we can conceive of these three levels as different tiers or floors of a house. Thus, personality psychology can be thought of as having trait psychologists on the ground floor exploring the nature of stable dispositions. On the second floor are a group of psychologists who are interested in people’s personal concerns, and carry out research with PAC units, such as current concerns, personal strivings, personal projects, and life tasks (Little, 1996, 1999a). On the third floor are the narrative theorists and psychobiographers who are examining identity and life stories. As I have suggested elsewhere however, (Little, 1996), the “house of personality” would be incomplete unless we added a basement in which would be housed two other active groups of contemporary personality psychologists, psychodynamic theorists and evolutionary psychologists. I wish to turn now to a description of some of the important questions, methodological tools, and re-

search findings on the three main levels of personality psychology. We shall deal with the cellar in due course.

Level I ("Havings"): Traits as Enduring Dispositions

Stable traits of personality were not only a foundational unit of analysis in academic psychology, they have been invoked ever since humans have communicated about their lives and those of others. The notion that stable individual differences arise out of differences in bodily humors is an ancient one and there has been an enduring interest in attempting to classify and predict individuals on the basis of traits assumed to be part of the constitutive nature of human beings. These have often been thought of as aspects of people that they "have" and that they carry with them through the contexts, challenges, and pivotal moments of their lives.

The Big Five: Major Factors of Personality Traits

Consensus has gradually emerged that stable features of human personality can be adequately described by five factors of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (e.g., McCrae & John, 1992; Wiggins, 1996). Neuroticism is characterized by attributes such as being nervous, worried and feeling emotionally insecure. Extraversion is depicted by attributes such as excitement seeking and activity level. Openness

entails broad interests and imaginative dispositions. Agreeableness involves tendencies toward being good natured and trusting. Conscientiousness is associated with characteristics such as being organized and disciplined.

Thus, at first blush, Eve, in our opening image, might be described by others as being a rather extraverted, open individual; Adam could be regarded as agreeable and conscientious, while Nikki might be seen as at least incipiently neurotic.

Much of the current conceptual and empirical research in the field of personality is concerned with the descriptive, explanatory, and predictive implications of the five factor model. The five factor model is seen by most psychologists as primarily a taxonomic description of personality structure rather than a causal model that precisely predicts behavior. Indeed, there are a number of different explanatory models for each of the big five factors of personality, two of which in particular, extraversion and neuroticism, have been well developed. As one example, extraversion has been postulated by Eysenck (1970) as a dispositional tendency to seek out stimulation, particularly social stimulation, as a result of chronically low levels of activation in the neo-cortex.

A somewhat different model of extraversion formulated by Gray (1981), assumes that extraverts are particularly sensitive to reward cues, while introverts are more sensitive to punishment cues (particularly so if the individuals in both cases are also high in neuroticism). Both these and other models of extraversion based on a biological model have been bolstered by evidence that there appears to be a strong genetic base underlying extraversion as well as the other big five factors.

Thus, under these models, we might expect the extraverted Eve of our example to be particularly keen to seek out stimulation and to absorb herself in the conversation about grad school, and not to notice that it was time to go to class. We might also predict that she would be more likely than her introverted peers to need a good dose of caffeine in the cafeteria to sustain her through her stats class. And we might anticipate that she may not yet have thought through some of the down side issues in applying for graduate school ("Hey, what are these GRE thingies we're supposed to take"?).

As well as having descriptive and explanatory functions, traits are increasingly being used for purposes of prediction in applied areas. For example, there is evidence that conscientiousness is a robust predictor of success in many areas where achievement is important, particularly achievement based on conformity to clearly

specified goals (see Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp,& McCloy, 1990). However, there appears to be one intriguing exception. Hogan and Hogan (1993) have reported that conscientiousness is negatively correlated with peer rated success among Tulsa jazz musicians. Given that the ability to “jam” involves being able to “flex” to the shifting cadence and intonations of others, the goal-oriented persistence of the conscientious person may become a liability. This exception may not, in fact, be so exceptional. It is interesting to speculate whether organizational life, particularly in fast-paced high tech companies, is more likely to require the skills of juggling and jamming than those of dogged linear pursuit. So even though traits may be fairly stable, the personality psychologists using them as predictive instruments are fully aware of the need to monitor their predictive validity in domains that are changeable and dynamic.

How might our three students be understood in terms of the Big Five trait approaches to contemporary personality psychology? Eve would appear to be an open, agreeable extravert, seeking stimulation, confident in her expectations, and generally engaged in zestful project pursuit. Adam might be seen as more introverted and conscientious. He seems to be agonizing over the question of grad school and is trying to balance it against other claims on his life. We might see Nikki as distinctly neurotic:

she is angry, anxious, hurting, and inexpressibly sad.

Level II ("Doings"): Personal Projects, Tasks, and Strivings

Over the past couple of decades, another family of conceptual units of analysis in personality psychology has arisen which complement, and in some ways challenge, trait units. They have as a common focus an emphasis upon personal action: on the doing side of personality (Cantor, 1990; Little, 1999a). These personal action constructs (or PAC units) include personal projects (Little, 1972, 1983; 1989), personal strivings (Emmons, 1986), and life tasks (Cantor, 1990).

Personal projects are extended sets of personally salient activity that can range from short bursts of action, such as "meeting Adam for coffee" to the defining commitments of one's lifetime, such as "try to respect my parent's wishes." Projects are conceived of as middle level units in personality (Little, 1987, 1989) in that they are influenced by superordinate goals such as core values, and they generate subordinate acts through which the project is implemented. Though projects are action units, the fact that they are personal means that they cannot be directly inferred from mere observation of an individual's acts. Personal projects typically proceed through the stages of project inception, planning, action, and termination. However, the fact that they are embedded in a

daily ecology that involves flu bugs, returning boyfriends, irate roomates and computer system crashes (sometimes simultaneously) means that projects are in continual flux and their successful management involves a blend of tenacity and suppleness. Quintessentially, personal projects analysis is about the social ecology of muddling through.

To illustrate, let's follow Adam for a while. We catch sight of him as he arrives on campus on Wednesday morning. He sits alone in the cafeteria, skims a few pages of his Personality text, and heads off to a Physics lecture. He sits frozen faced, trying to suppress his yawning, leaves quickly after class, pauses momentarily in the hallway, and then slowly walks along the river to his residence. He slams the door, puts on a CD, and starts to cry: What's up?

From a trait perspective we might say that he is showing signs of introversion by avoiding much contact with others and perhaps that he is a bit neurotic (his crying might be seen as dysphoric). But at Level II his behavior is approached rather differently. From a personal projects perspective we would ask the crucial question "What have you been up to today" to which he may well respond with "trying to get a date with Jennifer". The outward and visible signs of his behavior may have made little thematic sense until we get that crucial piece of personal construing. His cafeteria stop prior to class had

been a reconnaissance mission to see if Jenn was there that morning. His boredom in class may have made more sense to the physics professor (who may have been attributing unwarranted “thickness” to the student) if he had known that Adam wasn’t even registered in the course: the only reason he was there was to be near Jennifer, a physics major. Adam’s dithering in the hall was a failed implementation of his intention to approach Jennifer, who only knows him as a rather “wimpy” person who seems to be following her around. His emotional release back in residence was in frustration that once again he lacked the courage to ask her out.

Research on personal projects involves asking people what their current personal projects are, and then to appraise each project on a set of approximately twenty dimensions that have both theoretical and applied importance for personality psychology (e.g., enjoyment, stress, control). These ratings, which can be appraised at both the individual level of analysis and normatively, can be summarized as falling under five major theoretical factors: project meaning, structure, community, efficacy, and stress. Research to date confirms the proposition that subjective well-being is related to the extent to which people are engaged in personal projects that are worthwhile (meaning), managed effectively (structure), supported by others (community), likely to succeed (efficacy), and not unduly

onerous (low stress) (Little, 1989, 1999a, b, 2000a, b).

The content of personal projects has also been shown to be important. For example, being engaged in intrapersonal projects, those dealing with trying to change or deal with aspects of one's own personality (e.g.,"be less subservient to my parents", "try to figure out why I am always so angry", "be more outgoing"), is positively associated both with a tendency to experience depressive affect but also with the Big Five factor of Openness to Experience (Little, 1989). From a personal projects view then, Nikki might be expected to be engaged in a number of such intrapersonal projects. But whether she sees them as likely to succeed or not might well influence whether she flourishes as a creative intellectual or becomes immobilized in self-hatred.

Two other PAC units, each in part derived from personal projects methodology, have stimulated considerable research interest. Nancy Cantor and her colleagues (e.g., Cantor, 1990) have examined personal action in the context of what they term "life tasks". Life tasks are undertakings that are important to accomplish at different stages of life. Cantor explored these in her influential study of the transition of University of Michigan students through undergraduate life (Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston, & Brower, 1987). Students generated lists of per-

sonal projects which they then categorized in terms of alignment with several types of life task deemed important for university students. Subjects were able to categorize many of their projects as being in the service of life tasks such as “getting independent of parents,” “forming friendships,” or “succeeding academically.”

Cantor’s research has shown how the successful management of life tasks requires social intelligence, particularly the sensitive deployment of appropriate strategies through which tasks can be successfully accomplished (Cantor & Fleeson, 1994). Two such strategic approaches have been identified by researchers on life tasks: defensive pessimism and illusory glow optimism (Norem, 1989). The former strategy involves envisaging a worst case scenario (“I’m going to fail this exam”) and harnessing the anxiety to motivate studying and task persistence. The opposite strategy involves imaging best case scenarios (“I’m going to ace this exam!”) and having this positive incentive motivate studying. The life task researchers have shown some intriguing implications of the adoption of these two strategies. They seem to be equally effective in terms of actual academic attainment, but the defensive pessimists seem to incur social costs in terms of being more of a burden on others. Thus, Nikki’s repeated bemoaning of the difficulties of finishing up term without falling apart may work just as well as a

motivational strategy for studying as Eve's optimism. But friends start to tune Nikki out and potentially valuable resources for her appear not to be answering their phones at college that month.

Another PAC unit that has stimulated considerable research activity is that of Emmons' personal strivings (Emmons, 1986). A personal striving is something that a person is typically trying to do. Thus, Adam's acts of listening empathetically to Nikki and writing a letter home may be in the service of the personal striving of "being nice to people." Emmons and his colleagues have shown that human well-being is enhanced to the extent that personal strivings are appraised as likely to be accomplished and are not in conflict with each other. If Adam's "Be nice" striving is in conflict with a "be intellectually tough" striving, his well-being is likely to be compromised (Emmons & King, 1988).

Clearly, these three PAC units are closely related, though each has a particular zone of applicability that suggests it is worthwhile to preserve the subtle distinctions between them (cf. Krahe, 1992). My own perspective sees personal projects as middle level units that can be in the service of both personal strivings and life tasks. Eve's personal project of completing her stats assignment may serve both her striving of "competing with her brother" and the normative life task of "doing well in academic tasks." But

she may also be involved in personal projects that are only loosely coupled with a personal striving or life task such as “talking to Nikki about the way she dresses.”

Nikki’s whole project system at college may be a protracted exercise in meaningless pursuits, unlinked to superordinate goals, and bereft of intrinsic meaning. Each of the PAC perspectives would see this state of affairs to be problematic. It should also be noted here that one of the major differences between the Big Five and PAC units is that the former are postulated to be relatively unchangeable after about the age of thirty (Costa & McCrae, 1994). So, while there may be some latitude left for Nikki to change her trait of neuroticism as she stumbles through her early twenties, there is greater tractability for change in her personal projects, and perhaps in her life tasks and personal strivings . At the very least there is the possibility of helping to clarify them and enhance the likelihood of them being pursued effectively. And, unlike traits, these reformulations and transformations can be tried on throughout the life-span–even when Nikki gets old and wobbly.

Level III (“Beings”): Life Stories and Personal Narratives

A third major growth area in contemporary personality theory and research is the narrative turn that has occurred in recent years (Sarbin, 1986). The major thrust of this perspective is

that humans have a deeply rooted need to construct narratives within which their lives make sense. We construct stories not only about our relationships, our achievements, and our aspirations, but we also tell stories in order to establish an identity, to establish validation about the type of “being” we are or are becoming.

McAdams (1993) has developed an elegant theory of personality in which life stories form the central focus. Life stories are built around various representations of self. Indeed, the very process of “selfing” as McAdams calls it, emerges only in the construction of a compelling life story that meets certain critical features such as being coherent. A key element of the life story is the development of “imagoes” which are like stock characters in a story and are often personifications of the themes of agency and communion.

The narrative theorists in contemporary personality psychology would have much to say about our cafeteria conversations. First and most obviously, the students are conversing! During conversation we typically tell each other stories about how things are going, what’s up, who’s doing what (and where and why). Second, the stories we tell as we talk with others enable us to tie together personally salient information from the other two levels of personality research. Eve doesn’t just list her trait characteristics or her projects, she casts them in narra-

tive form (“I know I’m too pushy with Eric, and he really doesn’t want me to go to grad school, but I think he’s fooling himself and I’ll straighten him out before the end of April. More coffee Adam?”) In these conversations and story telling, Eve’s imago seems to be a blend of agency and communion–perhaps seeing herself as the Directive Therapist. Eric, on the other hand, may see her as Eve, the Avenging Traveler.

A third consequence of the narrative perspective to personality is that the mere telling of our tales can have a salutary effect. Pennebaker (1989) has shown that when students are asked to write personal narratives that deal with previously unshared painful material, there is an initial increase and then a long term decrease in measures of autonomic arousal. The effect is particularly notable with students who choose to tell deeply revealing stories. These results are consistent with the research of Wegner (1994) who has shown that “not thinking” about certain things can be taxing. (Wegner directs his subjects, for example, to not think of a White Bear. I admonish the reader not to think about this example.) Thought suppression actually increases the likelihood of thinking about the suppressed image and can extract an autonomic cost. If Nikki, then, were finally to get the chance to unload, to open up and tell her story, she may be less likely to anesthetize herself against the unspoken aspects of her life.

Voices from the Cellar: Psychodynamic and Evolutionary Perspectives in Personality

We have tried to capture the kind of theoretical conversations that we would hear at each of three different levels in the house of personality. In some respects, the metaphor is fitting– often the research being carried out on one floor is done in ignorance (not necessarily willful) of work going on at the other two levels. I also think that the second floor offers ways of "listening in"on conversations on the narrative upper deck and down below with the trait-ers. But, to extend the metaphor one level further, I think there is a need to acknowledge some very strong rumblings from the basement cellar. Here is where power plants and sump pumps are chugging along and the kind of discourse going on down there about personality is similarly foundational and, some would say, earthy.

I see two basement areas operating at this deepest level of personality: psychodynamic theory and evolutionary psychology. The first provides a line of continuity with the modern origins of personality theory. The second provides a link with the Darwinian roots of modern life sciences.

A spirited treatment of the contemporary revival and sustained relevance of psychodynamic theory for personality psychology can be found in Westen (1990). One of the most noteworthy ac-

complishments of contemporary psychodynamic theory has been wide spread acceptance of one of its most basic assumptions: the pervasive impact of unconscious influences on personality functioning (Erdelyi, 1974). For example, when patients are exposed to subliminal stimuli that are symbolically related to their particular problem, there appears to be some relief of symptoms (Silverman & Weinberger, 1985). That such messages are not consciously recognized yet have a discernible impact on human functioning means that at least some of the dynamics going on in the college cafeteria are not accessible to the participants or to their personality research professors (not unless armed with hidden portable tachistoscopes). A general sense of tension and pervasive unease between Nikki and Adam, for example, may be the result of the continuous influence of impulses that each has imperfectly repressed. To an astute psychodynamicist, there may be subtle hints revealed in gesture and the parapraxes (such as slips of the tongue and memory lapses) that lead to mixed messages and missed meetings. Such influences are perplexing and their detection requires probative work that is both demanding and subtle.

On the other side of the basement are the evolutionary psychologists. David Buss (1991), in particular, has pioneered the study of how evolutionary adaptation has shaped human personality. The essential argument of this perspective

is that in the course of evolution various strategies which conferred adaptational advantage were selectively retained and transmitted to the next generation. Though these adaptations evolved in adaptive landscapes radically different from those that confront us today, the mammalian brain still shows evidence of these primordial adaptations.

One of the important claims of the evolutionary perspective is that there will be sex differences in the criteria that guide selection of future mates. It is argued that women will place a premium on the status of prospective mates, while men will regard the physical attractiveness of mates as differentially important. Note that it is not being claimed that these will be the most important or the only important criteria, in fact pleasantness of personality is the top criterion in mate selection for both sexes. But it is argued that the sexes should differ in the rankings of these attributes for evolutionary reasons. Physical attractiveness serves as a marker of potential fecundity in the female, and status cues serve as markers that a male will be able to provide resources that will support the viability of offspring.

Evolutionary personality theory also posits that there will be important sex differences in emotions, such as jealousy. Males are more jealous when their mates engage in sexual infidelity

and women more if their mates establish emotional romantic interests in another woman.

An early and similar perspective to the evolutionary personality psychologists is Hogan's (1982) socioanalytic theory. Hogan was one of the first to emphasize the significance of the fact that human personality evolved in the context of group life. Group living requires that individuals be particularly sensitive to two key issues–establishing social bonds with others and negotiating the power hierarchy: in short of "getting along" and "getting ahead" (Hogan,1982).

Like psychodynamic forces, those arising from evolutionary principles may have an influence that eludes awareness. Adam may not have consciously chosen to ask Jennifer out because she was "drop dead gorgeous" (let alone likely to bear his child), though she is sure that this is the main reason he keeps hanging around. He may well have consciously formulated the goal of taking her out because she seemed nurturing and responsive at a party in September. Meanwhile Eve will feel deep frustration when Nikki asks her why she wore provocative clothes when Professor Buss gave a colloquium in their department. "Give me a break" says Eve, and rolls her eyes, while Nikki responds with a smile that is part twinkle, part smirk.

My own view of the evolutionary perspective in personality theory is that it provides some intriguing hypotheses about the distal roots of human personality that otherwise seem inexplicable. My concern is that we not underestimate the importance of another achievement of mammalian evolution–the development of a neocortex that allows us to formulate and carry out core projects that can override the primitive motivational processes of more ancient origin. In my view, peoples' accounts of what they are doing should take initial priority particularly when we are dealing with things that are important to them in their lives. Thus, I would be more inclined to believe Adam's explanation of his reasons for pursuing Jennifer than those that might be offered under the evolutionary hypothesis. Such a "credulous" approach, which is consistent with Kelly's view of the individual as co-scientist, works well within the normal boundaries of daily conduct. If, however, there is consistent evidence that all of the people Adam finds nurturing just happen to be beautiful women, I would be inclined to look to evolutionary theory to help explain why this is so. Perhaps it is in the dark passages of personality and the extreme edges of human conduct that both the psychodynamic and evolutionary perspectives deservedly attract our attention. The prevalence of violent jealousy and the pervasiveness of "powerful man, nubile woman partnerships" reminds us that we are, after all, an

evolved mammalian species with adapted minds and that this heritage has the potential to influence us in powerful ways. (Do not think of a White House.)

Personality in Context: Situations, Places and Environments

One of the central tenets of behaviorism, as well as the Mischellian critique of traits, was that human conduct is often generated by the context within which it is embedded. Murray, too, it will be recalled, insisted on the need to appraise the press of the environments within which human needs were satisfied or frustrated. A brief word, then, about the role of contextual features in contemporary personality. How do the theorists on the three levels view the environments within which personality processes are played out?7

On the first floor, trait psychologists are concerned with the extent to which there is an appropriate degree of “fit” between persons and their environments. Extraverts, for example, require stimulating environments for optimal functioning, while more introverted individuals require more structured and modulated environments. While Eve may thrive on a week filled with parties and recreational diversions, Adam may find walking by the river for getting his thoughts together about Jennifer, his folks and the upcoming GRE exams. Along with tools for the assessment of personality characteristics,

there are abundant scales and inventories for the appraisal of the “personality” of environments, so that there are practical ways of determining the degree of fit between people and their contexts along a number of key dimensions. Such tools allow us to formulate and answer the essential question about persons and environments talked about on the first floor:”got a match”?

On the second floor, the PAC theorists are more concerned with the extent to which environmental contexts serve to generate, facilitate, or frustrate personal action. The pursuit of one’s core projects, cherished strivings, or vital life tasks requires an environment within which such pursuits are valued, or at the very least not impeded. Personal contexts may be the major source of the projects that people regard as worthy of exploration , but they may also proscribe the kind of pursuits that people even dare to consider. Eve’s home environment may have been such that the thought of doing anything other than pursue a graduate degree after college was simply not an option. Nikki’s home environment may have been one in which the possibility of graduate school brought blank stares of incredulity and the blunt question of “who the hell is going to pay for that?” Unlike trait perspectives, then, second floor theorists are more likely to look at the environment less in terms of “fit” than in terms of ecological factors such as affordances, resources, imped-

ances, and constraints (Little, 1999b; Phillips, Little & Goodine, 1997).

The third floor narrative theorists are positioned to view the environment with a broader sweep and they are particularly interested in locating individual life stories in their historical contexts. Sarbin provides a fascinating analysis of how life trajectories can be entrained to the cultural myths that define a particular historical time and place–for example, the pervasive myth of the avenging hero who sacrifices his life to avenge wrongs done against his people in the past (Sarbin, 1996).

Linking Levels: A Contemporary Example of Meeting the Integrative Challenge

Personality theorists have argued that the enduring mission of personality psychology has been to provide both theoretical and methodological tools for integrating the diverse system of influences affecting the lives of individuals and accounting for their differences. We have also shown that much of contemporary personality research is taking place in three relatively independent sectors concerned with traits, action, and narratives, each of which has its own integrative task. Trait psychology provides an impetus for integration of taxonomic work on stable personality characteristics with, as just one example, neurophysiological research thus providing an integrative bridge to the neuro-

sciences. Personal action psychology, particularly in the focal role given to the concept of goals, provides a natural bridge to cognitive science as well as to social ecological perspectives that explore the ways in which goal pursuit is embedded in and contributes to middle level dynamic contexts. Narrative psychology provides a natural bridge to the humanities and to a broad corpus of literary, historical, and political scholarship that charts the larger currents of thought, tradition, and myth that define culture.

Although we may well have horizontal integration within each of these three levels of contemporary personality research, is there a way of vertically integrating them so that we might bridge the full spectrum of influences on human personality? Not only do I think the answer is a strong “yes, indeed”, I also think that it is precisely in this bridging research between levels in personality that some of the most interesting new findings are emerging. Such bridging or linking research should also allow us access to the theoretical insights of the classical perspectives in personality whose voices guided us through the early history of the field.

Not surprisingly, given my own theoretical orientation, I feel that it is on the second floor–where the action is–that we are offered the best opportunity for conceptual commerce with the trait-ERs downstairs and the narrative theorists up in the loft. We shall even show how our un-

derstanding of personal projects can be enriched by taking a trip down to the basement on occasion. I want to illustrate this by showing how research on personal projects allows us to move through each of the different levels of research in personality and, in this way, to continue to struggle with the broad band integrative challenge that defines our field.

To illustrate this, let's return to the cafeteria and take "Getting into graduate school in psychology" as a prototypical personal project and one shared by all three students. Research studies from several different theoretical perspectives and levels of analysis in personality have addressed the content, appraisal, and dynamics of personal projects.

We can start in the basement. Although the evidence from this level is more indirect than at the other levels, it offers one of the most intriguing areas of interlevel influences on personality and one of the most challenging areas for future research.

Unconscious Influences: Particularly at the inception stages of a personal project, it is likely that unconscious processes may play a subtle, even powerful role, in directing its course of including whether the project is even considered in the first place. For example, Baldwin, Carrell & Lopez (1990) reported an intriguing study in which graduate students at the University of

Michigan appraised the likely success of their research projects for the next term. For half the students, prior to their ratings, a tachistoscopic image was flashed of the scowling face of a highly distinguished and rather threatening Michigan professor. For the other half, the smiling face of a less threatening post-doctoral fellow was flashed. Those exposed to the threatening face rated the likely success of their research projects to be lower.

In other words, pre-conscious images that involve threat may lead us to evaluate our projects in powerful ways. Indeed, such images may actually serve to proscribe a project as something that one simply cannot do or should not do. Thus Adam's ruminations about grad school as he walks by the river, may well be guided by the image of his parents' disapproving looks and snippets of conversation about grad school being a waste of time.

Do the other cellar dwellers have relevance to the pursuit of our students' projects? Though more speculative, I think the evolutionary perspective offers some intriguing possibilities for explaining project choice (see Buss, 1989). When we look at the content of the projects generated in the listing of our student research collaborators, it is easy to see projects that represent quintessential evolutionary tasks of mate selection, competition, social bonding, etc. It would be possible to create an evolutionary task

template (based on relevant project appraisal dimensions such as the extent to which this project involves competing with other males, etc.) that would allow a researcher to estimate the degree to which appraisals of projects can be explained by their match with the theoretical expectations of evolutionary theory.

Moving up a level to that of the trait psychologists, there has been extensive research showing the relationships between traits and the content and appraisal of personal projects (e.g., Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992; Salmela-Aro, 1992). Among the most robust findings have been that conscientiousness is strongly related to the personal project factors, such as efficacy and absence of stress. Perhaps more surprisingly is the consistent evidence that conscientiousness is also strongly related to the perceived meaningfulness of projects, particularly to its enjoyment. The image of someone who is highly conscientious as a rather joyless creature slogging away on her ANOVAs at the computer terminal is more myth than reality. If Eve happened to score high on conscientiousness, her seemingly cavalier tactic of applying only to three schools may not be so cavalier at all. She may already have thrown herself into researching the schools, having email correspondence with prospective advisors, and actually visiting the campuses before sending off her applications. And our research would suggest that for Eve these projects would be a delight, not a

drag. Nikki, on the other hand, has probably procrastinated again, and regards the whole application process as a Royal Pain. This pattern likely reflects Nikki's status on another of the big five dimensions, neuroticism. Salmela-Aro (1992) has provided important evidence that depression is significantly associated with the tendency for personal projects to be pursued with less effectiveness and less likelihood of successful completion, and Pychyl's extensive program of research on procrastination and well-being provides clear evidence of the deleterious effects of Nikki's style of dealing (or not dealing) with her projects (e.g., Pychyl & Little, 1998).

Two aspects of environmental influences have also been shown to be associated with appraisals of our personal projects. For example, Ruehlman and Wolchik (1988) have explored the extent to which people in our social networks can both help and hinder the likelihood of successful project pursuit. Eve's project of going to Ann Arbor may be frustrated by Erik's apparent disapproval, but facilitated by the fact that beyond any one else, Erik has challenged her intellectually and given her the confidence to aspire well beyond where she had thought possible in September. The reason we choose to undertake certain projects rather than others has been approached in a very imaginative way by Ogilvie and Rose (1995) who, after grappling with the difficulties of categorizing projects in

terms of content, realized that projects fall neatly into four categories that are rooted in classical learning theory: whether the project is a positive or negative goal and whether it is something that is being sought or avoided.

Omodei & Wearing (1990) provided a clear demonstration of the relationship between the classical Murrayan needs, personal projects, and well-being. They had respondents rate each of their current personal projects on dimensions that represented each of the major needs posited by Murray as central to individual differences, and found that the extent to which projects were satisfying their needs, overall life satisfaction was higher. Indeed, they were able to show that need satisfaction of personal projects served as an excellent proxy for overall life satisfaction ratings. Thus, Nikki may be deeply unhappy at this point in her life because she has been unable to formulate and act upon personal projects that satisfy some of her most important needs. Though changing the needs may be very difficult, finding projects through which they might be met may offer greater tractability for Nikki at this stage in her life (Little & Chambers, 2000).

Finally, there are also compelling theoretical reasons to see personal projects as interpenetrating with the narrative level of personality theory and research. Sarbin (1996), in tracing through the importance of cultural myth and its

impact on lives, suggests that tragically conceived projects, such as terrorist campaigns, may derive their motivational force from the myths to which children are exposed from an early age, and which are reinforced by media attention and the collective stories about heroes and villains which saturate our cultural landscape. Under such a view, and depending on one's belief systems, another Adam's project ("Do not eat that Apple") may be seen as a generative proto-project of humankind.

The Prospects for Personology: Consolidating the Integrative Center in Psychology

It should be apparent that I feel that the field of personality psychology is an exceptionally exciting place in which to take up permanent residence. I see its aspiration to provide the integrative center for psychology as a continuing challenge. The three levels that we have discussed in this chapter, will, I believe, continue to grow in importance and yield insights that will advance both theoretical understanding and applications in fields such as clinical, health, and organizational psychology. So too, undoubtedly, will the personologists in the basement continue to expand our understanding of the remote roots of human conduct. In addition to these, I think there are five areas that deserve to be promoted to positions of importance in our collective research agenda.

First, I think there are rich possibilities for expansion of our understanding of the biological base of personality traits, particularly given the rapid advances in techniques for monitoring brain activity on-line. Though there is a fairly substantial research literature on the neurophysiological substrates of extraversion and neuroticism, work on the rest of the big five dimensions is still in the early stages. Recent advances in the neurobiology of temperament (with its own Big Three factors) seems particularly promising (Clark & Watson, 1999).

Second, I think that non-human studies of personality, particularly among the higher primates, but involving a whole range of species, will pay very rich dividends in understanding how evolutionary forces have shaped human personality. There are already signs that an emerging animal personality psychology research agenda is well under way (Gosling, in press). Given my conviction that project pursuit is an inherently mammalian propensity, I do not see such research as restricting itself to trait-like behaviors. Extended sets of salient activity in the pursuit of valued goals applies to Nikki's cat as well as Nikki. While we will never be able to herd either Nikki or her cat, I think the comparative psychology of unpredictability is itself an intriguing focus for collaborative research between ethologists and personality psychologists.

Third, particularly at Level II, I believe there is considerable scope for expanding personality psychology's intellectual collaboration with the fields of ethical philosophy, legal theory, and the philosophy of action (Little, 1987, 1999a). Scholars in these areas are already grappling with questions of how the nature of our ground projects or core tasks bear upon issues of ethics and of different conceptions of justice. (For a compelling treatment of such issues see Nussbaum (1992). Nussbaum looks at various Hellenistic philosophies through the eyes of Nikidion–a probably fictitious student of Epicurus, who is seeking instruction on living a flourishing life. Nikki in the present chapter is a modern descendent of Nikidion. Some day I hope to take her on a more extensive trip through what contemporary personality psychology can say about human flourishing.) I believe that such discourse will be enriched by the importation of empirical work of personality psychologists, and that our work will be enriched by the conceptual precision afforded by philosophical inquiry.

As one example of this kind of interdisciplinary analysis, I have recently been exploring the concept of free traits, which I see as trait-like behavior carried out in the service of a personal project even though it may run against one's "first nature". For example, some of us are "pseudo-extraverts," by which I mean we are Eysenckian introverts who, because of profes-

sional duty or love, act extravertedly in order to accomplish valued goals. I believe such apparently disingenuous behavior can extract a toll on the autonomic nervous system and that this can lead to burn out. However, such a consequence can be mitigated by the availability of restorative niches in which we can, every now and then, indulge our first natures (Little, 1999b, 2000a). One of the intriguing questions raised by such an analysis (which integrates research from Levels I and II), is whether such disingenuous behavior is, in fact, a “bad thing” (not only in the sense of possibly being stressful, but in terms of being unnatural, even phony). If Adam decides to go back to the family business and forego grad school, how should we think about the tradeoff between fidelity to family and honesty to oneself? Clearly these are questions of value that can not be exclusively adjudicated by empirical inquiry. But I strongly believe they can be informed by such inquiry, and personality psychologists are ideally positioned to provide precisely the kind of rich textured information about the complexities of people’s lives.

Fourth, I believe the narrative perspective in personality will continue to flourish and I hope that the traditional ways of getting individuals to tell their stories will be enriched by adoption of new technologies and methodologies. For example, simply asking individuals to tell about their daily lives by providing us with images and

captions from an imaginary videotape (called an idio-tape machine), allows individuals some adaptive flexibility in bringing into conceptual focus concerns and elements of emotional significance to them (Little, 2000a). Similarly, just as computing science and cognitive psychology have proceeded in virtual lock step, I believe that the field of personality can benefit from joining forces with the "New Media", including the imaginative use of interactive multi-media to assist individuals in exposing and exploring their personal wishes, needs, projects, traits, and life narratives. For example, Nikki has been depicted throughout this essay as someone who has pain beyond words. Perhaps by using media that do not rely solely upon words, she will be able to construct images and scenarios with greater richness and precision. Such multi-media meditations might help her both express and expunge some of that hurt.

If students ask me if I think they should pursue graduate work in personality psychology, I usually schedule two meetings. In the first meeting I tell them that I cannot think of a more fascinating area of research and proceed to tell them much of what has been compressed into this chapter.

They occasionally ask me how I got into the field of personality psychology. Depending on how much time they have to indulge what I call my "anecdotage", I tell them the following. I

have long felt a strong attraction to both the humanities and the biological sciences, with classics and microbiology being among my favorite undergraduate courses. When it came time to choose a major, psychology seemed to be the most likely field in which I could maintain a joint focus on ions and Ionians. Though I had originally been accepted at Berkeley to study neuropsychology, a chance event in the library just prior to leaving for graduate school launched me on another trajectory. I was searching for a book called the Stereotaxic Atlas of the Brain when I accidentally pulled down a wayward copy of George Kelly's Psychology of Personal Constructs. I leafed through the first few pages, developed a very severe intellectual itch and have been scratching it ever since. I do not recommend to my students that they take this random walk through the stacks as a strategy for choosing their specialties in psychology, though it is an honest account of how our professional lives can sometimes wind their ways along unpredictable paths (Bandura, 1982).

In the second meeting, I am usually rather more cautious. Personality psychology is a fundamentally intellectual pursuit–it is concerned with themes that go back to antiquity and challenges its serious students to ponder issues that cut across the full spectrum of the humanities and sciences. I point out that if the student's overriding concern is with a particular

practical problem, such as abuse or depression or occupational success or criminal behavior, then that student should seriously consider going into an applied field such as clinical or organizational psychology. But if they are interested in how all of these disparate phenomena are linked together, then they may well have found an intellectual home. We usually discuss where the strong programs are in personality psychology and I direct them to the splendid website called the Personality Project run by Bill Revelle at Northwestern. I am also delighted as of a few months ago, to be able to direct them to the Association for Research in Personality website and urge them to join the Association immediately. The philosophy and sense of excitement for the personality field in this new Association overlaps exactly with my own and I see it as a major source of stimulation and support for the field in the future.

If the student comes back for a third meeting, I know that the line of succession from Freud, Murray, Allport, Kelly, and all the secular saints of personology will likely remain unbroken. But if that particular student doesn't come back, I can take some solace from knowing that there are three other students waiting outside at this very moment. They want me to go have a coffee with them in the cafeteria and chat about grad school. In fact there's loud banging on my door even as I wrap up this chapter. Hang on, Nikki, I'm coming.