Who am 1?

Origins of personality and personality theories.

Arjen Noordhof (a.noordhof@uva.nl)

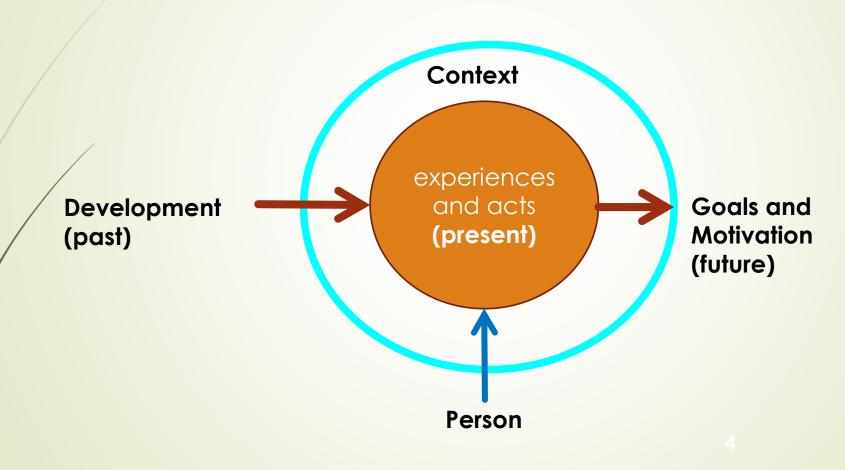
Today

- What are theories of personality about?
- II. Quick overview of the course
- III. The historical origins of personalities
- IV. An organism in nature
- V. A person in a culture
- VI. The subject of your life
- VII. How to become engaged?

"Look at the person as a whole"

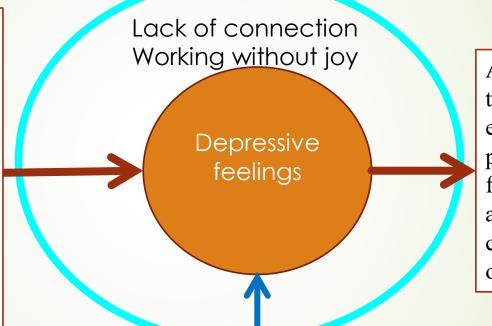
I. What are theories of personality about?

Who is this person and how did (s)he become that way?



"My depression taught me about the meaning of connection."

"I found it difficult to consider myself important. At our home one was easily regarded as selfish and that was not allowed. It had to be cozy; "Tell me how much fun it was at school?" If I was sad, it was quickly brushed aside. After primary school I went to gymnasium and then I studied biology. Not because I had to, it's the combination of my character and upbringing that made me make my choices.



After the therapy I wanted to start again. I was an editor, but that was not my passion. It gave me a good feeling to work with people and that is why I took the course 'Working with my own experience'.

Who I am as a person has been out of the picture for too long. (...)
They said things like, 'You're way too preoccupied with others. What's going on with you?' Because of all the confrontations with others it felt like a mirror maze. I found that intense but instructive. I learned to be vulnerable, that my emotions are allowed to be there and how I can connect with others.

Questions for discussion

What are theories of personality for? (Why) should we have them?

What should be included in such theories? What themes and topics should it cover?

How can personality theories be developed? What do we need for that?

Personalities and their problems

II. Quick overview of the course

Continuity of 'normal' and 'abnormal'

Personality theories

- In any clinical situation the question "who is this person and how did (s)he become that way?" is crucial. And as a clinician you need to ask yourself that question again and again.
- Personality theories involve concepts, structures and ideas to help you ask the right questions and find partial answers to them.

Personality disorders

- Clinical problems can be understood as expressions of negative experiences in the relation between persons and the world they inhabit.
- When such problems have a certain pervasiveness and persistence they may be regarded as personality problems or diagnosed as disorders.

Personality disorders

Lecture 2: introduction and overview by Sophie Ramecker.

■ Lectures 4, 5 & 9: Theory and research on personality syndromes.

Lectures 8, 11 & 12: Different treatment models for personality syndromes: DBT, MBT, SFT

Personality theories

- Scientific theories
- Personal narratives
- Cultural perspectives
- Your own development as a person

Three broad topics

Week 1: Nature and culture

Today: Origins of personality and personality theories

Lecture 3: Observing personality

Week 2: Bodies, affects and intersubjectivity

Lecture 6: Affect, movement and motivation

Lecture 7: Attachment, mentalization and epistemic trust

Week 3: Subjectivity and identity

Lecture 10: identification and separation

Exam

Multiple choice questions and 2 open questions.

Personality theory:

- Focus on central theoretical concepts
- Cultural materials and narratives are part of the exam. (no details to be learned by heart)
- Some complexity and many details in the literature. On CANVAS instructions on learning and reading for each article.
- Non scholae, sed vitae discimus
 - I know very well that grades and diplomas are important.
 - Still, Exam grade are only one aspect of academic education.

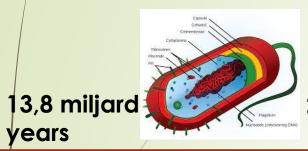
Nature - Culture - Subjectivity

III. On the historical origins of personalities

History and narratives

- Human groups get cultural histories due to the continued transmission of conventions
- Cultures develop oral and then written traditions and stories about who 'we' are and how 'we' came to be.
- By telling these stories and reflecting on them we change our understanding of who we are.
- The histories of individuals can be located within these larger histories of the multiple 'we's' to which we belong.

Origins of personalities



>300 miljoen



3.3 miljoen



Vandaag



4 miljard



>7 miljoen



>5500



Big Bang No personalities

First living
Organisms
On earth

A new type of organisms:

Last Common ancestor of humans and Bonobo's/ chimpanzees Oldest artefacts found

Cultural origins

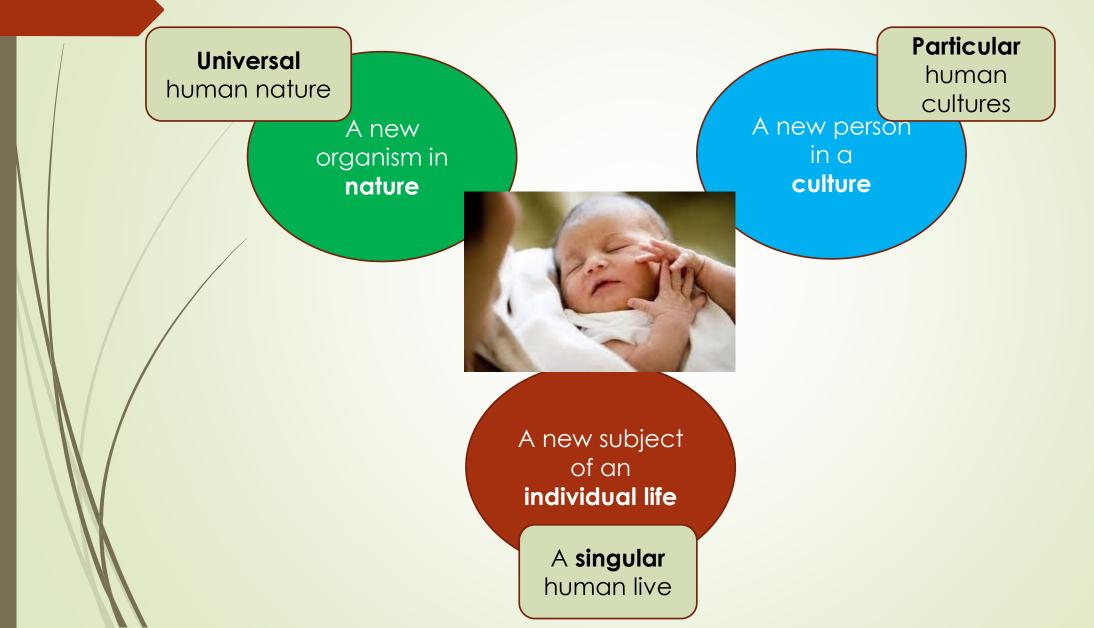
Beginning ofwritten history

Every second a new personality emerges

Natural origins

Individual origins

Three perspectives on personality



Some common confusions and mistakes

- Naturalizing cultural categories.
 - E.g. treating race as a natural kind.
- II. Reducing every aspect to cultural narratives
 - E.g. not taking seriously the evolved physical body and brain as important limits on what is culturally possible.
- III. Forgetting about the cultural and subjective position from where the author speaks.
 - Any theory that is narrated is influence by the narrator.
 - His or her particular position in history, in culture, in society matters a great deal.
 - In many aspects of personality theories this cannot be erased.
- IV. Treating all accounts as equally subjective opinions.

So, these lectures are an account of personality from my perspective

- I am a human being, I read a lot, I know quite some scientific results and theories.
- I am also a white Dutch man in a priviliged position. Brought up in a protestant family, influenced by statistical methodologies, by psychoanalysis, by some difficult life experiences, by a particular way of being taught psychology, etc.
- And as a subject I take a particular position and speak from a certain ethical perspective on the world. I cannot fully erase that, but I can critically reflect on it and so can you.

Two Key Steps in the Evolution of Human Cooperation

The Interdependence Hypothesis

by Michael Tomasello, Alicia P. Melis, Claudio Tennie, Emily Wyman, and Esther Herrmann

IV. On being an organism in nature

Step 1: Obligate collaborative foraging

- Humans have developed very strong skills for collaborating with each other
- Crucial in this is the strong tendency of already very young children towards joint intentionality. Humans have a great capacity for shared goals and shared mental states (intersubjectivity).
- Within this context shared meanings and shared stories can come into existence.
- Humans are from birth particularly attuned to sharing mental states with other humans.

Adaptive collaboration and altruism



Joint intentionality and intersubjectivity



Step 2: Group-mindedness

Given the strong possibility of shared intentionality, humans also develop a capability for conventions.

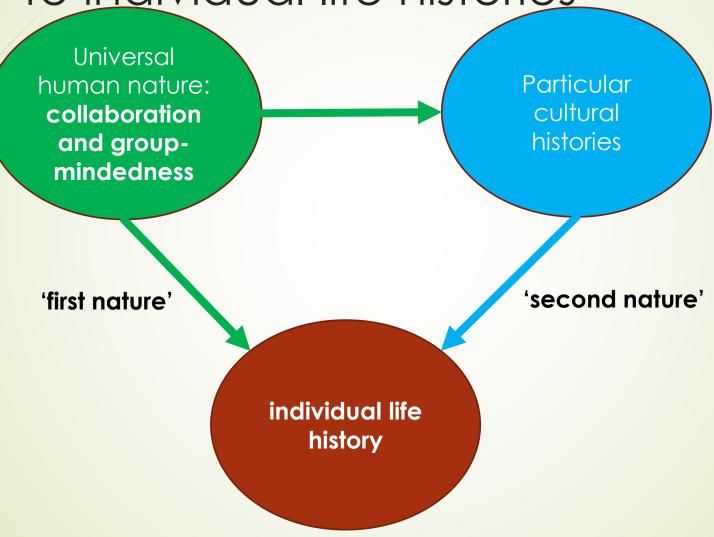
> Cultural practices are different from behavioral traditions because their practitioners understand them as "shared" in the group; that is, they understand them as conventional. We have all "agreed" to do them in a particular way, even though we all know that there are other ways we could do them. It

- Thus children from then on are born in a world full of pre-existing conventional structures that they grow into and only later and partially become aware of.
- In this they are introduced into a pre-existing 'symbolic order': the universe of signs and meanings typical for human societies.

Entering a 'symbolic order'



From natural history to cultural histories to individual life histories



The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author

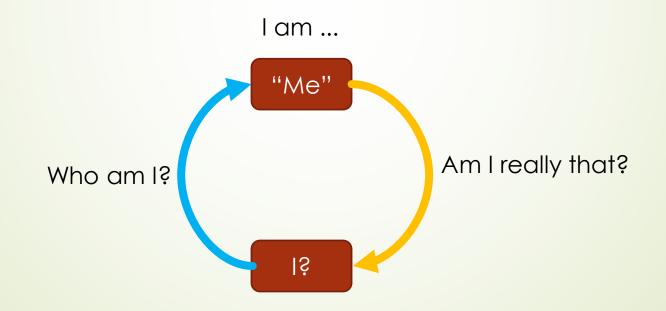
Dan P. McAdams

Department of Psychology, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL

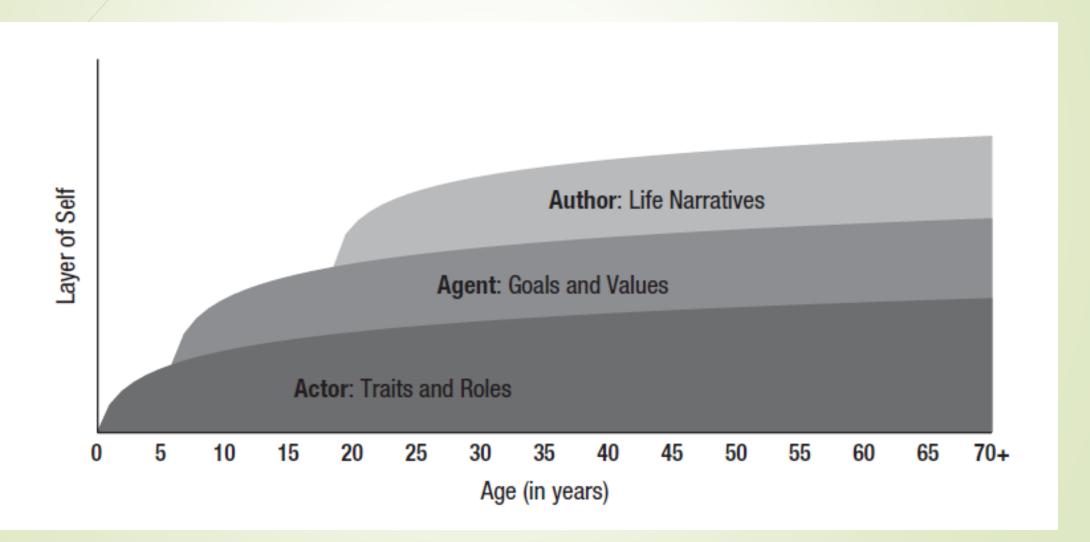
V. On being a person in a culture

What is the psychological self?

The psychological self may be construed as a reflexive arrangement of the subjective "I" and the constructed "Me," evolving and expanding over the human life course.



Development of the self according to McAdams



The self as actor

(in the present)

First we discover what society says we are; then we build our identity on performance in that part. If we uphold our part in the performance, we are rewarded with social affirmation of our identity. It is hardly an exaggeration, then, to say that we are created in the performance. If we bungle the performance, show that we do not merit the part, we are destroyed—not figuratively but literally (Becker, 1971, p. 99).

Personage: the self as an actor

- McAdams (2013): "... the self as social actor, encompassing semantic representations of traits, social roles, and other features of self that result in and from repeated performances on the social stage of life."
- Persona = masker & karakter = allereerst wat je betekent voor anderen.
- Appearance, i.e. the way one appears to others. Which may well be disconnected from subjective experience.



The self as agent

(towards the future)

To be an agent is to make choices and, as a result of those choices, to move forward in life in a self-determined and goal-directed manner (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Human agency suggests intention, volition, will, purpose, and some modicum of personal control in life. It is clear that

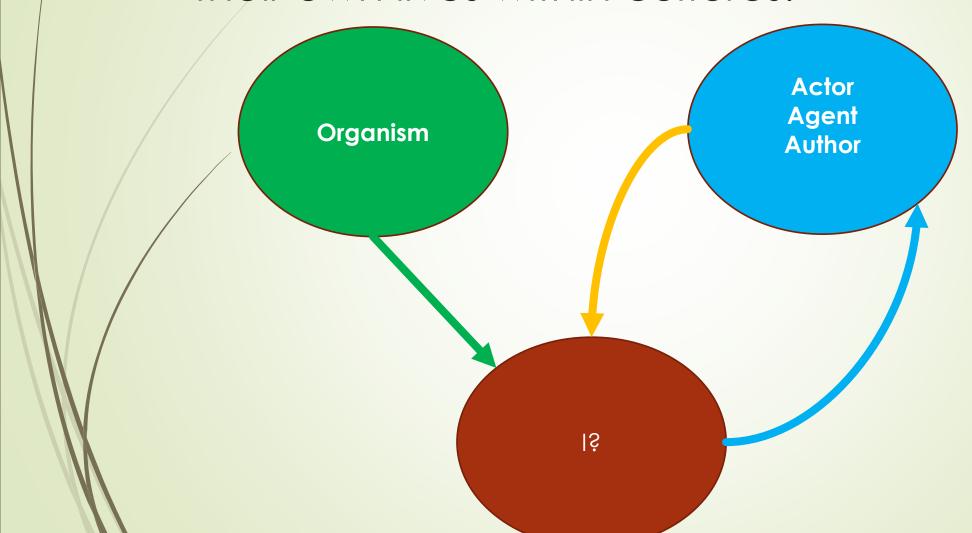
the future. In other words, even though infants can be seen to express agency, human beings do not consciously and reflexively understand themselves as motivated agents in a full sense until much later-

The self as author

(integrating and reflecting on past, present and future)

The I becomes an autobiographical author; the Me becomes the story it tells. The internalized and evolving amalgam of self stories—what is now typically referred to as a *narrative identity* (McAdams & Pals, 2006)—aims to integrate the reconstructed past, experienced present, and imagined future.

Humans are organisms that experience themselves as actors, agents and authors of their own lives within cultures.



The Life Story Interview

Introduction

This is an interview about the story of your life. As a

A. Life Chapters

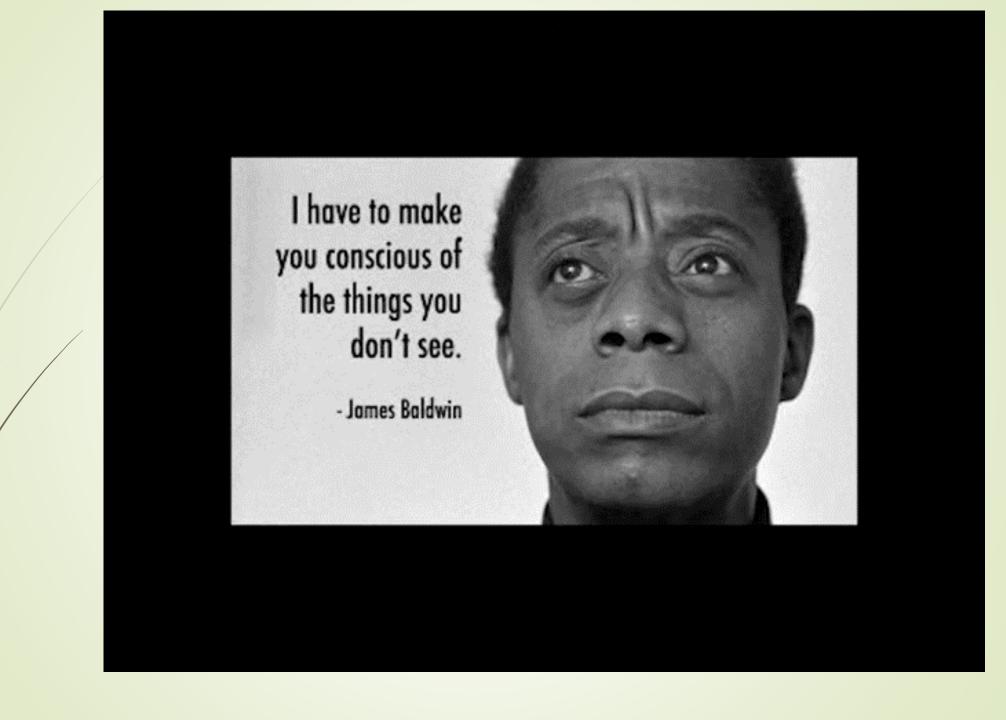
Please begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book or novel. Imagine that the book has a table of contents containing the titles of the main chapters in the story. To

B. Key Scenes in the Life Story

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your life, I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in the story. A key scene would be an event or specific incident that took place at a particular time and place. Consider a key scene to

James Baldwin The Fire Next Time

VI. On being the subject of your life



A. Life chapters

I underwent, during the summer that I became fourteen, a prolonged religious crisis.

When I watched all the children, their copper, brown, and beige faces staring up at me as I taught Sunday school, I felt that I was committing a crime in talking about the gentle Jesus, in telling them to reconcile themselves to their misery on earth in order to gain the crown of eternal life. Were only Negroes to gain this crown? Was Heaven, then, to be merely another ghetto? Perhaps I might have been able to reconcile myself even to this if I had been able to believe that there was any loving kindness to be found in the haven I represented.

tions, 'I left the church twenty years ago and I haven't joined anything since.' It was my way of saying that I did ot intend to join their movement, either.

'And what are you now?' Elijah asked.

I was in something of a bind, for I really could not say — could not allow myself to be stampeded into saying — that I was a Christian. 'I? Now? Nothing.' This was not enough. 'I'm a writer. I like doing things alone.' I heard myself saying this. Elijah smiled at me. 'I don't, anyway,' I said, finally, 'think about it a great deal.'

B. Key scenes in the life story

was thirteen and was crossing Fifth Avenue on my way to the Forty-second Street library, and the cop in the middle of the street muttered as I passed him, 'Why don't you niggers stay uptown where you belong?' When I was ten, and didn't look, certainly, any older, two policemen amused themselves with me by frisking me, making comic (and terrifying) speculations concerning my ancestry and probable sexual prowess, and for good measure, leaving me flat on my back in one of Harlem's empty lots. Just

And if one despairs – as who has not? – of human love, God's love alone is left. But God – and I felt this even then, so long ago, on that tremendous floor, unwillingly – is white. And if His love was so great, and if He loved all His children, why were we, the blacks, cast down so far? Why?

The summer wore on, and things got worse. I became more guilty and more frightened, and kept all this bottled up inside me, and naturally, inescapably, one night, when this woman had finished preaching, everything came roaring, screaming, crying out, and I fell to the ground before the altar. It was the strangest sensation I have ever had in my life - up to that time, or since. I had not known that it was going to happen, or that it could happen. One moment I was on my feet, singing and clapping and, at the same time, working out in my head the plot of a play I was working on then; the next moment, with no transition, no sensation of falling, I was on my back, with the lights beating down into my face and all the vertical saints above me. I did not know what I was doing down so low, or how I had got there. And the anguish that filled me cannot be described.

On entering a 'symbolic order'

He must be 'good' not only in order to please his parents and not only to avoid being punished by them; behind their authority stands another, nameless and impersonal, infinitely harder to please, and bottomlessly cruel. And this filters into the child's consciousness through his parents' tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved; in the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear heard in his mother's or his father's voice when he has strayed beyond some particular boundary. He does not know what the boundary is, and he can get no explanation of it, which is frightening enough, but the fear he hears in the voices of his elders is more frightening still. The fear that I heard in my father's voice, for example, when he realized that I really believed I could do anything a white boy could do, and had every intention of proving it, was not at all like the

fear I heard when one of us was ill or had fallen down the stairs or strayed too far from the house. It was another fear, a fear that the child, in challenging the white world's assumptions, was putting himself in the path of destruction. A child cannot, thank Heaven, know how vast and how merciless is the nature of power, with what unbelievable cruelty people treat each other. He reacts to the fear in his parents' voices because his parents hold up the world for him and he has no protection without them. I defended myself, as I imagined, against the fear my father made me feel by remembering that he was very old-fashioned. Also, I prided myself on the fact that I already knew how to outwit him. To defend oneself against a fear is simply to insure that one will, one day, be conquered by it; fears must be faced.

This course is (also) about you.

VII. How to become engaged?