Personality architecture and dynamics: The new agenda and what's new about it☆

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ABSTRACT

This overview of the psychology of personality dynamics locates contemporary trends within the field's long history. Investigators of the 19th and 20th centuries are recognized as having identified scientific challenges that must be addressed today if one is to attain a comprehensive understanding of personality architecture and dynamics. We outline four themes that were highlighted by investigators of the past. We then consider how theoretical and methodological challenges associated with these themes are addressed by two contemporary models of personality architecture, dynamics, and functioning: the Knowledge-and-Appraisal Personality Architecture (KAPA model) and the social ecological perspective of Personal Projects Analysis (PPA).

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At one time, at least as I understood the quest, personality psychology aspired to understanding the dynamics of intraindividual functioning; it was not just the study of individual differences, of which there can be no end.

[Block (2010, p. 22)]

If you have been tracking the psychology of personality over the past 1–2 decades, the scholarly trend highlighted by the present *Special Issue* may strike you as a novel step forward. For years, our field seemed entangled in its foundational concern: establishing a descriptive taxonomy of broad personality traits. But today, investigators are setting a new agenda. They explore psychological dynamics that can provide an explanatory account of individual's distinctive thoughts, emotions, and actions.

If you are as old as Methuselah and have been tracking intellectual developments over the past *fourteen* decades, our opening paragraph may strike you as confused. In the long view, explanatory psychological dynamics are not a "new" agenda item but an old one – in fact, the field's oldest. Mental dynamics – processes involving will, consciousness, disturbances of memory, and the integration of multiple psychological systems into an integrated, whole self – have been targeted since the contributions of 19th-century investigators whose work formed "the basis of the modern psychological study of personality" (Lombardo &

Foschi, 2003, p. 125). Intra-individual personality architecture and dynamics remained core concerns throughout most of the 20th century, as is evident from textbook coverage (e.g., Cervone & Pervin, 2016).

It is true that instruments designed to measure inter-individual differences have been available since World War I (see Cervone & Caprara, 2017). But the construction of individual-difference taxonomies did not become the field's primary focus until roughly a half-century ago when, as Kagan phrased it, "a young cadre of technically trained psychologists . . . declared that factor analysis of the answers provided by young adults . . . would reveal the fundamental dimensions of personality" (Kagan, 2002, p. 181). This reorientation accelerated thanks to the availability of computers, which not only speeded calculation of factor-analytic results but also attracted new researchers to the discipline. Consider the case of John Digman, who contributed substantially to the development of the Big Five taxonomy. As Goldberg relates, Digman was "an experimental psychologist with no interest in … personality." When "the first computer was coming to the University of Hawaii" in the 1960′s, he wanted "to learn to program it" and accessed personality data merely "to test his ability to program the new machine" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 28). Did such investigators appreciate the degree to which the new agenda, establishing individual-difference taxonomies, would deflect attention from the field's original focus, intraindividual personality dynamics? Our opening quote from Jack Block suggests not.

Both views of our history – the 1–2 decade and the Methusalaic – are correct in their own ways. There has, in fact, been a significant shift in focus recently (e.g., Baumert, Schmitt, Perugini, & Johnson, in press). Yet the longer view has an advantage: "Standing on the shoulders of giants" of the past affords a better view of the terrain one must cover today. We may find early investigators' theories and methods to be inadequate. Yet the intellectual domain they marked out – the

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phenomena requiring scientific explanation and the associated demand for methodological tools – still must be traversed to obtain a science of personality architecture and dynamics that can claim to be comprehensive.

We therefore provide a brief history. We then review two contemporary models of personality architecture and dynamics. But first we define our terms.

1. Personality architecture and dynamics: the terminology

Terminology can be tricky in many fields, and personality science is no exception – in fact, it might be a "worst case scenario." When describing individual differences and modeling mental life, personality psychologists commonly employ terms (e.g., "traits," "expectations," "goals") that originated in the natural language (see Cervone & Lott, 2007). Different groups may employ such words in subtly different ways, which makes our field more prone to linguistic ambiguity than one whose terminology (e.g., "quarks," "mesons", "hadrons") arises within the discipline. Even when personality psychology borrows a term from another science – "dynamics" is an apt example – its meaning changes in ways that, again, may cause confusion. Definitions thus are in order.

By "dynamics" we refer to psychological processes that unfold across time. The time period may be relatively long (e.g., the formation of identity; Marcia, 1980) or short (e.g., processes contributing to conscious awareness; Dennett & Kinsbourne, 1992). Processes may occur serially or in parallel (Kuhl, Quirin, & Koole, 2015). Yet in all cases, dynamics "have duration and a course" (Wittgenstein, 1980, §836). Note that this usage of "dynamics" is much broader than its meaning than within psychodynamic theories, which highlight dynamic processes involving conflict and unconscious mental mechanisms.

Defining "*personality* dynamics" requires a definition of "personality." At the level of phenomena – what one hopes to explain – investigators generally agree that "personality" attributes are marked by (1) distinctiveness: personality characteristics distinguish individuals in any given society or culture from one another, and (2) coherence: across time and place, people display patterns of experience and action that are consistent or are meaningfully, coherently interrelated. At the level of psychological systems that provide explanation, *personality dynamics* are psychological processes that causally contribute to individual's enduring and distinctive patterns of action and experience, including the experience of possessing a coherent sense of self and social identity (Cervone, Fajkowska, Eysenck, & Maruszewski, 2013). This definition incorporates a wide range of phenomena that can be understood at both psychological and biological levels of analysis, including neural systems such as those underlying anxiety, vigilance, and the passive avoidance (Gray & McNaughton, 2000); attentional processes that govern awareness of stimuli (Eysenck, 2013; Winer, Cervone, Newman, & Snodgrass, 2011) and enable people to overcome stimulus-triggered impulses (Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989); cognitive processes through which people plan, execute, and evaluate courses of action (Bandura, 1986; Baumann, Kazén, Quirin, & Koole, 2017; Carver & Scheier, 1998); and dialogical and narrative processes that foster a coherent sense of self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Pals, 2006). Dynamical systems analyses that reveal how psychological mechanisms can organize into coherent, stable personality systems (Nowak, Vallacher, & Zochowski, 2005; Vallacher, Michaels, Wiese, Strawinska, & Nowak, 2013).

Finally, *personality architecture* refers to the overall design and operating characteristics of those psychological systems that comprise a person (Cervone, 2004, 2005). Personality architecture includes stable psychological elements within which dynamic personality processes take place. Earlier in our field's history, one could refer to these stable intra-individual elements as personality "structures." But "personality structure" is a case of linguistic ambiguity (see Cervone, 2005); it has been used to reference both intraindividual structures of mind and inter-individual statistical dimensions that summarize variation in the population.

2. Our dynamic past

Interest in mental architecture and dynamics is ancient. Aristotle distinguished among mental capacities and thereby sketched an architecture of mind, and discussed causal principles relating mental activities to external events, thus addressing phenomena we now call psychological dynamics (Wedin, 1993). However, it was in the 19th century that inquiry acquired a contemporary scientific look.

2.1. The dynamic psychologies of personality: a brief history

As the historians Lombardo and Foschi (2003) explain, experimental psychologists in France began to discuss personality as early as 1870. Their interests included relations among personality, memory, and consciousness, and the dynamics through which people achieve an integrated self that transcends individual "parts" of the person. By the mid-1880's, personality had become "one of the busiest research fields" (Lombardo & Foschi, 2003, p. 130) among the country's psychologists. Their efforts were complemented by those of French medical professionals who helped to forge a "dynamic psychiatry" (Ellenberger, 1970).

Soon after, there arose a model of personality dynamics familiar to the reader: Freud's. Limitations of psychoanalytic theory have long been well known; it fares poorly regarding both personality-and-prediction (Mischel, 1968) and experimental tests (Eysenck & Wilson, 1973), and some core claims are difficult to reconcile with basic principles of evolution (Epstein, 1994). Yet it is still worth considering the *types* of intellectual tools that Freud provided: a model of mental structures; a conception of dynamic motivational processes that was integrated with the structural model; an analysis of dynamic interactions between mental contents and objects in world; and an assessment method (free association) sensitive to idiosyncrasy. We may have discarded Freud's tools, but we still need these types of tools.

Also noteworthy is Freud's recognition that variations in behavior across context, rather than exclusively average tendencies, reveal underlying personality structures (cf. Mischel & Shoda, 1995). If Freud observed hostile acts toward one parent and warm cooperativeness toward another, he would not average them together to compute global "trait agreeableness."

Freud inspired subsequent investigators who continued to explore the dynamics of personality. For example, Murray and colleagues (1938) posited intra-psychic structures with causal force and explored their activation by social contexts. They focused squarely on dynamics: "None of [psychology's] proper formulations can be static. They all must be dynamic in the larger meaning of this term" (Murray, 1938, p. 36). His group's goal was not to describe individual differences in the population; their "object of study" was "individual organisms" (p. 38). Finally, Murray's proposal that people respond to situations as "patterned meaningful wholes" (p. 40) not only contrasted with the stimulus-response theories of his day; it also anticipated a research theme, meaning construction, that today is central to the psychology of personality dynamics (Cervone & Bartoszek, 2013; Kreitler, 2017) and psychological science more generally (Bergen, 2012; Markman, Proulx, & Lindberg, 2013).

We conclude our history with reminders of three other pioneers of the first two-thirds of the 20th century. The great Polish psychologist Kurt Lewin[1] created a personality theory that was explicitly dynamic (Lewin, 1935). Lewin modeled personality structure as a collection of

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[1] Although educated in Germany, Lewin was raised in a Polish society in a region that, in post-WWII political geography, is in central Poland (Stachowski, 2006).