Research Article

GLOBAL TRAITS:
A Neo-Allportian Approach
to Personality

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Abstract—*This paper outlines a theory of global traits based on the seminal writings of Gordon Allport and 50 years of subsequent empirical research. Personality research needs to refocus on global traits because such traits are an important part of everyday social discourse, because they embody a good deal of folk wisdom and common sense, because understanding and evaluating trait judgments can provide an important route toward the improvement of social judgment, and because global traits offer legitimate, if necessarily incomplete, explanations of behavior. A substantial body of evidence supporting the existence of global traits includes personality correlates of behavior, interjudge agreement in personality ratings, and the longitudinal stability of personality over time. Future research should clarify the origins of global traits, the dynamic mechanisms though which they influence behavior, and the behavioral cues through which they can most accurately be judged.*

> But let us not join the camp of skeptics who say an individual's personality is "a mere construct tied together with a name"—that there is nothing outer and objectively structured to be assessed. No scientist, I think, could survive for long if he heeded this siren song of doubt, for it leads to shipwreck. (Allport, 1958, p. 246)

One of the most widely used concepts of intuitive psychology is the global personality trait. Almost everyone is accustomed to thinking about and describing the people one knows using terms like "conscientious," "sociable," and "aggressive." Traits like these are *global* because each refers not just to one or a few specific behaviors, but to *patterns* of behavior presumed to transcend time and specific situations. Historically, the global trait used to be an important part of formal psychological theory as well. Gordon Allport (1931, 1937) wrote extensively about traits more than a half century ago, and for a time many research programs either developed general trait theories (Cattell, 1946), or investigated in detail specific traits (Witkin et al., 1954).

In recent years, however, theorizing about dispositional constructs such as global traits has been at a relative standstill. As Buss and Craik (1983) pointed out, "the field of personality appears to have set its theoretical gears into neutral" (p. 105). One cause of this inactivity may have been the field's two decades of immersion in a distracting debate over whether significant individual differences in social behavior exist at all (Mischel, 1968). Although, in the end, the existence of important individual regularities was reaffirmed (Kenrick & Funder, 1988), a lingering effect of the controversy seems to be an image of traits—most especially global ones—as old-fashioned, rather quaint ideas not relevant for modern research in personality. Indeed, when global traits do appear in the literature nowadays, it is usually to play the role of straw man. The recent literature has seen a plethora of "reconceptualizations" of personality each of which begins, typically, by announcing its intention to replace global traits.

Modern reconceptualizations differ from global traits in at least three ways. First and most obviously, many constructs of the new personality psychology go out of their way *not* to be global. The range of life contexts to which they are relevant is specified narrowly and specifically, and this narrowness is touted as an important virtue. For instance, the recently promulgated "social intelligence" view of personality "guides one away from generalized assessments . . . towards more particular conclusions about the individual's profile of expertise in the life-task domains of central concern at that point in time" (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987, p. 241).

Second, and just as importantly, many modern personality variables are relatively *esoteric*—they are deliberately nonintuitive or even counterintuitive. For instance, in the place of trait terms found in ordinary language, one prominent investigator has offered person variables such as "self regulatory systems," "encoding strategies," and the like (Mischel, 1973).

Third, some modern reconceptualizations go so far as to eschew an explanatory role for personality variables altogether. For instance, the act frequency approach treats personality dispositions as little more than frequency counts of "topographically" (i.e., superficially) similar acts (Buss & Craik, 1983).

The intent of these reconceptualizations is laudable. Each is designed to correct one or more of the problems of overgenerality, vagueness, and even philosophical confusion to which trait psychology has sometimes been prone. The present article, however, is motivated by a belief that the movement away from global traits, however fashionable it may be, entails several dangers that are not usually acknowledged.

Briefly, the dangers are these. First, when we use dispositional terms that are framed *narrowly*, we discard any possibility of generating statements about individual differences that have real explanatory power. Second, when we use dispositional terms that are *esoteric*, we fail to make contact with personality as used in everyday social discourse. [...]

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standing and evaluating lay trait judgments, and discard the vast lore of common sense and wisdom that they embody. And third, when we are content to define traits as *frequencies* of superficially similar behaviors, we run the risk of being fundamentally deceived when, as often happens, the causes of behavior turn out to be complex. Each of these points will be expanded later in this article.

What follows is a brief outline of a modern, *neo-Allportian* theory of global traits, presented in the form of 17 assertions. The term "neo-Allportian" is meant to emphasize that this approach to personality is fundamentally based on the seminal writings of Gordon Allport (especially Allport, 1937), but also to acknowledge that his basic theory was published more than a half-century ago and so is ripe for updating and reinvigoration (Zuroff, 1986). As it turns out, Allport's basic ideas look remarkably sound even with 53 years of hindsight, and yield a large number of implications for conceptualization and research in modern personality psychology.

DEFINITIONAL ASSERTIONS

Traits Are Real

This assertion is the most fundamental of Allport's assumptions, one he believed was essential for subsequent research to be meaningful. He held this position in the face of objections that it was philosophically naive and arguments (still heard today) that traits should be regarded not as entities that have objective reality, but merely as hypothetical constructs (Carr & Kingsbury, 1938). Allport believed that this idea made about as much sense as astronomers regarding stars as hypothetical constructs rather than astronomical objects. He failed to see how any science, including personality psychology, could proceed without assuming its subject of study to be real.

More specifically, Allport (1931, 1966) said traits are "neurodynamic structures" (1966, p. 3) that have "more than nominal existence" (1966, p. 1). If it is obvious that all behavior originates in the neurons of the brain, and that does seem obvious, then it follows that stable individual differences in behavior—to the extent they exist—must similarly be based on stable individual differences in neural organization.

Unfortunately, a method to assess the neural basis of personality is not yet in sight. The presence of a trait can only be *inferred* on the basis of overt behavior. For all practical purposes, therefore, a global trait must refer to two things at the same time: (a) a complex pattern of behavior from which the trait is inferred, and (b) the psychological structures and processes that are the source of the pattern. When we call someone "friendly" or "aggressive" or "generous," we are saying something both about how the person behaves (or would behave) in certain kinds of situations *and* about the functioning of his or her mind. The next assertion follows as a consequence.

Traits Are More than Just Summaries

A viewpoint prominently expressed in recent years is that "dispositions" (a.k.a. traits) should be considered as no more than summaries of behavioral frequencies, or "act trends" (Buss & Craik, 1983). An individual's generosity then becomes the frequency, over a specified unit of time, of his or her superficially generous acts.

This definition deliberately abdicates any explanatory role. Dispositions are treated as circular constructs in which a generous act implies generosity, and the attribution of generosity is used to predict future generous acts *solely* "on actuarial grounds" (Buss & Craik, 1983, p. 106).

However, the appearance of behavior can be misleading (Block, 1988). As Allport pointed out:

A bearer of gifts may not be, in spite of all appearances, a truly generous person: he may be trying to buy favor. . . . Pseudo-traits, then, are errors of inference, misjudgments that come from fixing attention solely upon appearances. The best way to avoid such errors is to find the genotype that underlies the conduct in question. What is the individual trying to do when he brings his gifts? (Allport, 1937, p. 326)

The Meaning of a Behavior Depends on Two Kinds of Context

A single behavior, considered out of context, is frequently ambiguous. Depending on the intention with which the act was performed, there may be multiple possible and plausible alternatives for the traits that might be relevant. This is not to deny that there are interpretational defaults. The act of gift-giving might be interpreted as generous, all other things being equal. All other things are seldom equal, however, so the gift-giving might also reflect insecurity, Machiavellianism, or even anger, depending on the situational circumstances, the gift-giver's behavior in other situations, and what together they imply about the gift-giver's inner state and motives.

Two kinds of context help disambiguate an act. The first is the immediate situation. The giving of a gift becomes more interpretable if one knows whether it was given to a subordinate who performed a job well, or to a superior considering the promotion of the gift-giver. The usefulness of this kind of situational information has been discussed in detail by attribution theorists within social psychology (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967), but has been taken into account less often by personality psychologists.

The other kind of context is just as important, but is mentioned even more rarely. Acts become less ambiguous to the extent they fit into a pattern of the individual's other acts. A consistent pattern of generous behavior provides a more plausible context in which to infer that generosity is the trait underlying the gift-giving than does a consistent pattern of mean, nasty, and sneaky behavior. (Indeed, an act that seems inconsistent with the actor's past patterns of behavior is commonly called suspicious.) A pattern of sneaky behavior might lead to an attribution of Machiavellianism that would explain, in turn, why the person gave a lavish gift to his worst enemy.

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSERTIONS

Traits Are Learned

Global traits are manifest by patterns of perception and action in the social world; therefore, they must be a product of

how one has learned to interact with that world. The process of learning that produces a trait almost certainly involves an interaction between one's experience (in one's particular social environment) and one's genetic endowment (Scarr & McCartney, 1983). Thus, two people with identical environments, or two people with identical genes, could and often do have very different traits.

Because traits are learned, they are not necessarily immutable. Anything learned can in principle be unlearned. Global trait theory is not necessarily pessimistic about possibilities for either personal or social change.

However, traits are relatively stable. Presumably, the difficulty in unlearning a trait (the amount of retaining or new experience required) will be proportional to the amount and salience of the experience through which it was learned in the first place. Genetic predispositions, and perhaps even species-specific characteristics, may also make some traits easier to learn and harder to unlearn than others (Buss, 1984). But the present analysis asserts that because all traits are, in the final analysis, learned, all traits can, in theory if not always in practice, be unlearned.

The Process of Learning a Trait is Complex

Such learning is far more than a simple matter of reward and punishment or S and R. That simple kind of learning can produce, at most, the narrow patterns of behavior that Allport (1931) called "habits." Traits are the result of complex patterns of experience and of higher-order inductions the person makes from that experience. Kelly (1955) believed that *any* pattern of experience could lead a person to any of at least a large number of behavioral outcomes (just as any pattern of data can always lead a scientist to more than one interpretation). Kelly believed that the ability to choose between these alternative outcomes provided a basis for free will. The comedian Bill Cosby has described his childhood neighborhood as a place where adolescents were all on the verge of deciding whether to be killers or priests. The point is that similar patterns of past experience do not necessarily produce similar outcomes.

When *fully* analyzed, every person's pattern of behavior will be every bit as complex as the unique pattern of endowment and experience that produced it. Again, in Allport's (1937, p. 295) words: "Strictly speaking, no two persons ever have precisely the same trait. . . . What else could be expected in the view of the unique hereditary endowment, the different developmental history, and the never-repeated external influences that determine each personality?"

But there are commonalities among people that are useful for characterizing individual differences. A trait like sociability is relevant to behavior in a set of situations regarded as functionally equivalent by people in general: specifically, situations with other people in them. Hence, it is *generally* meaningful to rank-order people on their overall sociability. Allport acknowledged this point as well: "The case for the ultimate individuality of every trait is indeed invincible, but . . . for all their ultimate differences, normal persons within a given culture-area tend to develop a limited number of roughly comparable modes of adjustment" (1937, pp. 297–298).

Still, the list of social situations that are functionally equivalent for people in general is unlikely to fully capture the situations that are regarded as functionally equivalent by any *single* individual. To capture general trends or gists, and to detect things that are true of people in general, one always loses the details of each individual case. This tradeoff between nomothetic and idiographic analyses can be and often has been lamented, but it is inevitable.

FUNCTIONAL ASSERTIONS

A Behavior May Be Affected by Several Traits At Once

The chief danger in the concept of trait is that, through habitual and careless use, it may come to stand for an assembly of separate and self-active faculties, thought to govern behavior all by themselves, without interference. We must cast out this lazy interpretation of the concept. . . . The basic principle of behavior is its continuous flow, each successive act representing a convergent mobilization of all energy available at the moment. (Allport, 1937, pp. 312–313)

The fact that every behavior is the product of multiple traits implies that disentangling the relationship between a given trait and a given behavior is extremely difficult. It also implies that the ability of any particular trait to predict behavior by itself is limited. Ahadi and Diener (1989) showed that if a behavior is totally caused by only four traits whose influence combines additively, the maximum correlation between any one trait and behavior that could be expected is .45. If different traits combine multiplicatively, which seems plausible, the ceiling is even lower.

A third implication is that modern research on traits should conduct a renewed examination of the way traits combine in the determination of behavior. Investigators should more often look beyond the traditional research question of how single traits affect single behaviors, to how multiple traits interact within persons (Carlson, 1971).

Traits Are Situational Equivalence Classes

In a trenchant phrase, Allport wrote that traits have the capacity "to render many stimuli functionally equivalent" (1937, p. 295). The tendency to view different situations as similar causes a person to respond to them in a like manner, and the patterns of behavior that result are the overt manifestations of traits.

The template-matching technique (Bem & Funder, 1978) provides one empirical approach to the study of situational equivalence classes. The technique looks for empirical ties between behavior in real-life situations that subjects' acquaintances have viewed and interpreted, and laboratory situations in which subjects' behavior is measured directly. To the extent higher-order similarity or functional equivalence exists, correlations will be found. The experimental situations are then interpreted, or in Bem and Funder's words, the subjects' "personalities assessed," based on the equivalence classes thus established.

For instance, in one of Bem and Funder's first studies (1978), the parents of nursery school children provided judgments of the degree to which their children were cooperative with adults. These ratings of cooperativeness turned out to correlate highly with minutes and seconds of delay time measured directly in our delay-of-gratification experiment. We inferred that our experimental situation must have been in some way functionally equivalent to the situations at home from which the parents had judged cooperativeness. Our final conclusion was that delay time in our experiment was a symptom of such cooperativeness as much as it was of self control or anything like it. The equivalence class to which the delay experiment seemed to belong consisted of other cooperation situations, not necessarily other self-control situations.

Access to One's Own Traits Is Indirect

The interpretation of a trait as a subjective, situational-equivalence class offers an idea about phenomenology—about what it feels like to have a trait, to the person who has it. It doesn't feel like anything, directly. Rather, the only subjective manifestation of a trait *within* a person will be his or her tendency to react and feel similarly across the situations to which the trait is relevant. As Allport wrote, "For some the world is a hostile place where men are evil and dangerous; for others it is a stage for fun and frolic. It may appear as a place to do one's duty grimly; or a pasture for cultivating friendship and love" (1961, p. 266).

Certainly a friendly person (ordinarily) does nothing like say to him- or herself, "I am a friendly person; therefore, I shall be friendly now." Rather, he or she responds in a natural way to the situation as he or she perceives it. Similarly, a bigoted person does not decide, "I'm going to acted bigoted now." Rather, his or her bigoted behavior is the result of his or her perception of a targeted group as threatening, inferior, or both (Geis, 1978).

But on reflection one can indeed begin to come to opinions about one's own traits (Bem, 1972; Thorne, 1989). One might realize that one is always happy when there are other people around, or always feels threatened, and therefore conclude that one must be "sociable" or "shy," respectively. But again, this can only happen retrospectively, and probably under unusual circumstances. Psychotherapy might be one of these: when "on the couch," one is encouraged to relate past experiences, and the client and therapist together come up with interpretations. Whether called that or not, these interpretations often involve the discovery of the client's situational equivalence classes, or traits. Certain profound life experiences might also stimulate conscious introspection.

In rare cases, explicit, volitional self-direction toward a trait-relevant behavior might take place. For example, one might say to oneself (before going to an obligatory party attended by people one detests), "now, I'm going to be *friendly* tonight," or, before asking one's boss for a raise, self-instruct "be *assertive*." As a matter of interesting psychological fact, however, in such circumstances the resulting behavior is *not* authentically a product of the trait from which it might superficially appear to emanate. The other people at the party, or the boss, probably would interpret the behavior very differently if they knew about the individual's more general behavior patterns and certainly would interpret it differently if they knew about the self-instruction.

Traits Influence Perceptions of Situations Through Dynamic Mechanisms

Different situations may be rendered functionally equivalent through at least three kinds of mechanism. One kind is *motivational*. A person who is hungry arranges situations along a continuum defined by the degree to which food is offered. A person who is dispositionally fearful sees situations in terms of potential threat. A person with a high degree of sociability approaches most situations where other people are present in a positive frame of mind. Another way to say this is that one's perception of the world is partially structured by one's goals (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987).

A second kind of mechanism concerns *capacities* and *tendencies*. A person with great physical strength will respond to the world in terms of situational equivalence classes that are different than those experienced by one who is weak. Situations containing physical obstacles may appear interesting and challenging rather than discouraging. Similarly, a person with a tendency to overcontrol motivational impulses will behave differently across a variety of motivationally involving situations than a person whose tendency is towards undercontrol. The overcontroller will restrain his or her impulses, whereas the undercontroller will tend to express them (Funder & Block, 1989).

A third kind of mechanism is *learning*. Perhaps one has been rewarded consistently in athletic settings. Then one will approach most new athletic-like settings with an expectation of reward, with direct consequences for behavior. (This learning experience might itself be a function of one's physical prowess, an example of how these mechanisms can interact.) Perhaps one has been consistently punished for risk-taking. Such an individual is likely to perceive situations involving risk as threatening, and behave across them in a consistently cautious manner.

An important direction for future research is to specify further the dynamic mechanisms through which global traits influence behavior. Several modern approaches bypass trait concepts on the way to examining goals, perceptions, or abilities. Instead, or at least additionally, it might be helpful to ascertain how people with different traits perceive and categorize situations. In turn, it might be useful to explore how these perceptions and categorizations can be explained through motivational mechanisms, abilities and capacities, and learning.

ASSESSMENT ASSERTIONS

Self-report Is a Limited Tool for Personality Assessment

Because people are not directly aware of the operation of their own traits, their self-reports cannot always be taken at face value. Such reports might be wrong because of errors in retrospective behavioral analysis—including failures of mem-

ory and failures of insight. Both kinds of failure are very common. Self-reports are also subject to self-presentation effects, the desire to portray oneself in the most favorable possible light.

This is one point where the present analysis diverges from previous and traditional presentations of trait theory. Self-reports have been and continue to be the most widely used tool for trait measurement (see McClelland, 1984, and Block & Block, 1980, for notable exceptions). This is unfortunate because, according to the present analysis, the person is in a relatively poor position to observe and report accurately his or her own traits, except under exceptional circumstances. Indeed, certain important traits may be almost invisible to the persons who have them. Imagine a chronic repressor asked to rate him- or herself on the item, "tends to deny one's own shortcomings."

This analysis helps account for one of the best known findings of attribution research. Observers of a person's behavior are more likely to report that it was influenced by traits than is the person him- or herself. Traditional accounts of this finding have assumed this is because the observers are, simply, wrong (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). The present analysis views the actor-observer effect as a natural result of the person being in a relatively poor position to observe his or her own traits. A more objective, external point of view is necessary. This leads to the next assertion.

The Single Best Method of Trait Assessment Is Peer Report

As was discussed above, traits are manifest by complex patterns of behavior the precise nature of which have by and large gone unspecified, as personality psychologists focused their attention elsewhere. However, our intuitions daily utilize complex *implicit* models of how traits are manifest in behavior. Making explicit these implicit understandings is an important but almost untouched area for further research. In the meantime, such intuitions are there to be used.

The intuitions available are those of the person being assessed, and those of the people who know him or her in daily life. Self-judgments of personality are easy to gather, and research suggests that by and large they agree well with judgments by peers (Funder & Colvin, in press). Nonetheless, self-reports are also suspect for a number of reasons, as was discussed earlier.

The impressions a person makes on those around him or her may provide a more reliable guide for how he or she can be accurately characterized. Peers' judgments have the advantage of being based on large numbers of behaviors viewed in realistic daily contexts, and on the filtering of these behavioral observations through an intuitive system capable of adjusting for both immediate situational and long-term individual contexts (Funder, 1987). Moreover, as Hogan and Hogan (in press) have observed, "personality has its social impact in terms of the qualities that are ascribed to individuals by their friends, neighbors, employers, and colleagues" (p. 12). For social traits at least, it is hard to imagine a higher court of evidential appeal that could over-rule peers' judgments, *assuming the peers have*

had ample opportunity to observe the target's behavior in daily life. If everyone you meet decides you are sociable, for instance, then you *are* (Allport & Allport, 1921).

This assertion implies that an important direction for future research is to find out more about how judges of personality perform (Neisser, 1980). A better understanding of the cues that are used by everyday acquaintances in judging personality, and the circumstances under which those cues are accurate, will lead to progress regarding two important issues: (a) how personality is manifest in behavior, and (b) how personality can most accurately be judged. My own current research focuses on these topics (Funder, 1987, 1989).

EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSERTIONS

For Purposes of Explanation, the Most Important Traits Are Global (but for Purposes of Prediction, the Narrower the Better)

It appears to have become fashionable in the personality literature to eschew generality by constructing individual difference variables that are as narrow as possible. Cantor and Kihlstrom (1987) espouse a theory of "social intelligence" that regards the attribute as central to personality but *not* a general individual difference. Rather, it is viewed as a collection of relatively discrete, independent, and narrow social capacities, each relevant to performance only within a specific domain of life. A related viewpoint is that of Sternberg and Smith (1985), who suggest that different kinds of social skill are relevant only to extremely narrow classes of behavior, and that as a general construct "social skill" has little or no validity (but see Funder & Harris, 1986).

The use of narrow constructs may well increase correlations when predicting single behaviors, just as at the same time (and equivalently) it decreases the range of behaviors that can be predicted (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974). But beyond whatever predictive advantages narrowly construed variables may have, they are often presented as if they were somehow *conceptually* superior as well. They are not. Indeed, explaining behavior in terms of a narrow trait relevant to it and little else represents an extreme case of the circularity problem sometimes (unfairly) ascribed to trait psychology in general. If "social skill at parties" is a trait detected by measuring social skill at parties, and is then seen as a *predictor* or even *cause* of social skill at parties, it is obvious that psychological understanding is not getting anywhere.

Global traits, by contrast, have real explanatory power. The recognition of a pattern of behavior is a *bona fide* explanation of each of the behaviors that comprise it.[1] Indeed, the more global

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1. A reviewer of this paper expressed concern that it fails to distinguish sufficiently "between trait words as descriptions of regularities in others' behavior, and trait words as explanations of those regularities." My position is that the identification of a regularity in a person's behavior *is* an explanation of the specific instances that comprise the regularity, albeit an incomplete explanation (i.e., the next question will always be, What is the source of the regularity?). Thus, rather than confounding the the two meanings of trait, the present analysis does not regard them as truly distinct.

a trait is, the more explanatory power it has. Connections between apparently distal phenomena are the most revealing of the deep structure of nature. For instance, if a general trait of social skill exists (see Funder & Harris, 1986), then to explain each of various, diverse behavioral outcomes with that trait is not circular at all. Instead, such an explanation relates a specific behavioral observation to a complex and general pattern of behavior. Such movement from the specific to the general is what explanation is all about.

This is not to say the explanatory task is then finished—it never is. These general patterns called traits should be the targets of further explanatory effort. One might want to investigate the developmental history of a trait, or its dynamic mechanisms, or its relationships with other traits, or the way it derives from even more general personality variables. But traits remain important stopping points in the explanatory regress. To *any* explanation, one can always ask "why?" (as every 4-year-old knows). Still, between each "why" is a legitimate step towards understanding.

The Source of Trait Constructs Should Be Life and Clinical Experience, as Filtered by Insightful Observers

It has often been argued that personality constructs should be formulated independently of, or even in explicit avoidance of, the constructs used by ordinary intuition. Indeed, this is one point upon which investigators as diverse as R.B. Cattell and Walter Mischel have found common ground. Often, mechanical procedures (e.g., factor analysis, behavioral analysis) have been touted as ways to construct personality variables uncontaminated by erroneous preconceptions. The results can be quite esoteric, having ranged from Cattell's (1946) favored variables of "alexia," "praxernia," and the like, to Mischel's (1973) cognitive social-learning variables of "subjective expected values," "encoding strategies," and so forth.

However, the theory of global traits asserts that trait constructs *should* be intuitively meaningful, for three reasons. First, intuitively discernible traits are likely to have greater social utility. Many global traits describe directly the kinds of relationships people have or the impacts they have on each other. More esoteric variables, by and large, do not.

Second, psychology's direct empirical knowledge of human social behavior incorporates only a small number of behaviors, and those only under certain specific and usually artificial circumstances. Restricting the derivation of individual difference variables to the small number of behaviors that have been measured in the laboratory (or the even smaller number that have been measured in field settings) adds precision to their meaning, to be sure, but inevitably fails to incorporate the broader patterns of behaviors and contexts that make up daily life. Our intuitions, by contrast, leapfrog ahead of painstaking research. The range of behaviors and contexts immediately brought to mind by a trait like "sociable" goes far beyond anything research could directly address in the foreseeable future. Of course, our intuitions are unlikely to be completely accurate, so traits as we think of them informally and as they actually exist in nature may not be identical. However, to be useful in daily life our intuitions must provide at least roughly accurate orga-

nizations of behavior, and provide a logical starting point for research (Clark, 1987). Corrections and refinements can come later, but to begin analysis of individual differences by eschewing intuitive insight seems a little like beginning a race before the starting line.

Third, the omission of intuitively meaningful concepts from personality psychology makes study of the *accuracy* of human judgments of personality almost meaningless. People make global trait judgments of each other all the time, and the accuracy of such judgments is obviously important (Funder, 1987). However, unless one wishes to finesse the issue by studying only agreement between *perceptions* of personality (Kenny & Albright, 1987), research on accuracy requires a psychology of personality assessment to which informal, intuitive judgments can be compared. Gibson (1979) has persuasively argued that the study of perception cannot proceed without knowledge about the stimulus array and, ultimately, the reality that confronts the perceiver. This point applies equally to person perception. A theory of personality will be helpful in understanding judgments of people for the same reason that a theory of the physics of light is helpful in understanding judgments of color.

EMPIRICAL ASSERTIONS

Global Traits Interact with Situations in Several Ways

Every global trait is situation specific, in the sense that it is relevant to behavior in some (perhaps many), but not all, life situations. Sociability is relevant only to behavior in situations with other people present, aggressiveness when there is the potential for interpersonal confrontation, friendliness when positive interaction is possible, and so forth. Our intuitions handle this sort of situational delimitation routinely and easily.

The delimitation of the situational relevance of a trait is sometimes called a "person–situation interaction." The empirical and conceptual development of this idea is an important achievement of the past two decades of personality research, and a valuable byproduct of the consistency controversy (Kenrick & Funder, 1988). The kind of interaction just described has been called the ANOVA or "passive" form (Buss, 1977). All that is meant is that different traits are relevant to the prediction of behavior in different situations. A child whose cooperativeness leads her to delay gratification in a situation with an adult present may be the first to quit if left alone (Bem & Funder, 1978).

At least two other, more active kinds of interaction are also important. The first is situation selection. Personality traits affect how people choose what situations to enter (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). A party might contain strong, general pressures to socialize, pressures that affect the behavior of nearly everyone who attends. But sociable people are more likely to have chosen to go the party in the first place. Thus, the trait of sociability influences behavior in part by affecting the situational influences to which the individual is exposed.

Traits can also magnify their influence on behavior through another kind of interaction. Most situations are changed to some extent by the behavior of the people in it. The presence of a sociable person can cause a situation to become more socia-

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bility-inducing. An aggressive child can turn a previously peaceful playground into a scene of general mayhem.

However, certain situations are *not* freely chosen, being imposed arbitrarily, and some situations will *not* change, no matter what the people in them may do. By short-circuiting the two kinds of person–situation interactions just discussed, such situations limit severely the influence traits can have on behavior. A prototypic example is the psychological experiment. Experiments assign subjects to conditions randomly, and the experimenter works from a set script. The subject's personality then cannot influence which situation he or she is exposed to, nor can his or her actions change the nature of the situation into which he or she is thrust (Wachtel, 1973).

But even in experiments like this, the influence of global traits is frequently detected; many examples could be cited. Consider the delay-of-gratification experiment already discussed (Bem & Funder, 1978). Nearly all the children who happened to be enrolled in a certain nursery school class entered this situation, and the experimenter worked from a set script that did not vary as a function of what the child did. Even so, the children's delay-of-gratification behavior had many and meaningful ties to their global personality traits, as assessed by their parents.

Evidence Concerning Personality Correlates of Behavior Supports the Existence of Global Traits

Findings such as those summarized in the preceding paragraph have been obtained again and again. Numerous studies report correlations between behavior in arbitrarily imposed, implacable situations, and personality traits judged on the basis of behavior observed in real life. These correlations constitute powerful evidence of the important influence of personality traits on behavior, even under circumstances where one would expect their influence to be weakened.

Most of this evidence has accumulated since 1937, and so was not available to Allport, but has been summarized many times in the course of the person–situation debate. Reviews can be found in articles by Funder (1987), Kenrick and Funder (1988), and many others.

Evidence Concerning Interjudge Agreement Supports the Existence of Global Traits

Another form of evidence for the existence of global traits is the good agreement that can be obtained between judgments of traits rendered by peers who know the subject in diverse life situations, and between such judgments and the subject's own self-judgments. Allport regarded evidence of this sort as especially persuasive:

What is most noteworthy in research on personality is that different observers should agree as well as they do in judging any one person. This fact alone proves that there must be something really there, something objective in the nature of the individual himself that compels observers, in spite of their own prejudices, to view him in essentially the same way. (Allport, 1937, p. 288)

Fifty-three years later, the evidence is even stronger. Acquaintances who are well-acquainted with the people they judge can provide personality ratings that agree with ratings provided by other acquaintances as well as by the targets themselves (see Funder & Colvin, in press, for a review). This issue being settled, more recent work has focused on the circumstances that make interjudge agreement higher and lower, including level of acquaintanceship and the nature of the specific trait being judged (Funder, 1989).

Evidence Concerning the Stability of Personality across the Lifespan Supports the Existence of Global Traits

Allport lacked access to well-designed longitudinal studies that examined the stability of personality over time. Today, a vast body of research convincingly demonstrates that general traits of personality can be highly stable across many years. Data showing how behaviors can be predicted from measures of traits taken years before, or "post-dicted" by measures taken years later, have been reported by Funder, Block, and Block (1983), Funder and Block (1989), and Shedler and Block (1990). Similar findings from other longitudinal studies have been reported by Block (1971), Caspi (1987), McCrae and Costa (1984), and others.

DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

As a fruitful theory should, the theory of global traits raises a host of unanswered questions that deserve to be the focus of future research. They include matters of definition, origin, function, and implication.

Definition. How many global traits are there? Allport (1937, p. 305) reported finding 17,953 terms in an unabridged dictionary. Fortunately, these can be partially subsumed by more *general* constructs. Personality psychology seems to be achieving a consensus that most trait lists boil down to about five overarching terms (Digman, 1990). This does not mean there are "only" five traits, but rather that five broad concepts can serve as convenient, if very general, summaries of a wide range of the trait domain. They are Surgency (extraversion), Neuroticism, Openness (or culture), Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness.

Global traits may also be partially reducible to more narrow constructs. Perhaps friendliness is a blend of social potency and positive affect, for instance. The reduction of global traits into more specific (and possibly more factorially pure) constructs is a worthwhile direction for research. But the position taken here is that the appropriate level of analysis at which investigation should *begin*, and which more specific investigations should always remember to *inform*, is the level of intuitively accessible, global traits.

Origin. Developmental psychology has been dominated in recent years by studies of cognitive development, with the term "cognitive" sometimes construed rather narrowly. The theory

of global traits draws renewed attention to the importance of investigations, especially longitudinal investigations, into the genetic and environmental origins of personality traits.

Function. The dynamic mechanisms through which global traits influence behavior remain poorly understood. As Allport hinted, they seem to involve the way individuals perceive situations and group them into equivalence classes. But the exact learning, motivational, and perceptual mechanisms involved, the way that different traits interact within individuals, and the circumstances under which a person can become consciously aware of his or her own traits are all issues needing further empirical examination.

Implication. Given that a person has a given level of a global trait, what kinds of behavioral predictions can be made accurately, into what kinds of situations? This *deductive* question will require further and more detailed examination of person-situation interactions. And, given that a person has performed a certain pattern of behavior across a certain set of situations, what can we conclude about his or her global traits? This *inductive* question will require close attention to the behavioral cues that laypersons use in their intuitive judgments of personality, and an empirical examination of the validity of these cues. Progress toward answering this question will help to provide a valid basis by which human social judgment can be evaluated and, therefore, improved (Funder, 1987).

In the current literature, these issues receive much less attention than they deserve. A neo-Allportian perspective may lead not only to a renewed examination of these central issues, but to progress in the study of personality's historic mission of integrating the various subfields of psychology into an understanding of whole, functioning individuals.

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