

## **Does Personality Provide Unique Explanations for Behaviour? Personality as Cross-Person Variability in General Principles**

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### *Abstract*

*I propose that personality does not provide unique explanations for human behaviour. Two principles, accessibility as a 'cognitive' principle and regulatory focus as a 'motivational' principle, are used to illustrate how personality can be reconceptualized as a cross-person source of variability in the functioning of general psychological principles that have situational sources of variability as well. For each of these principles, evidence is presented that 'persons' and 'situations' as sources of variability have similar effects. I then provide some other examples of psychological principles having similar effects when either persons or situations are the source of variability. I discuss the utility of a 'general principles' perspective for understanding the many ways that persons, groups, and situations can contribute to manifesting the same pattern of principles, and how some patterns are more adaptive than others. The implications of there being multiple ways of manifesting the same pattern are then considered for the classic issues of when personality is revealed and what is its range of applicability.*  
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### **INTRODUCTION**

People are fascinated with personality—their own and others'. What is the object of this fascination? It is not simply individual differences in behaviour that fascinates people. The simple fact that some individuals display more of a particular behaviour than others, such as greater cleanliness, is more likely to be interesting to people than fascinating. What people find fascinating is the existence in some people of a powerful and hidden psychological force that manifests itself in a wide variety of different behaviours. Such a force is fascinating because it reveals a commonality among behaviours that otherwise seem quite separate. Cleanliness becomes linked not only with neatness, tidiness, and punctuality, for example, but also with stubbornness and

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stinginess. Such connections are fascinating because they cannot easily be explained in simple terms, such as generalization of a rewarded or modelled behaviour. Moreover, because the various types of behaviour are manifested in very different kinds of situation, it seems obvious that a 'person' explanation is needed, like the 'anal personality', rather than a 'situation' explanation. This is what makes personality fascinating.

It *is* fascinating when individuals behave differently from others in a variety of different ways that can be understood as manifestations of the same psychological force. Are 'personality' principles needed to understand such forces? More generally, does 'personality' provide us with unique explanations for human behaviour? The traditional answer would be a resounding 'Yes!'. The purpose of this paper is to propose, and attempt to justify, an alternative answer (see also Higgins, 1990, 1999).

It is common to think of personality as providing one kind of explanation for people's behaviours, whereas other areas of psychology, such as social psychology, provide other kinds of explanation. In order for the area of personality to provide its own unique explanations, it needed to develop its own unique principles to describe and account for psychological states. Indeed, over time the area of personality has developed its own set of psychological principles, such as personal constructs (Kelly, 1955) and achievement motives (Atkinson, 1964; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark and Lowell, 1953). It was assumed that these principles were personality principles of psychology that provided unique 'person' explanations for people's psychological states, in contrast with social psychological principles, such as cognitive dissonance or obedience to authority, that provided unique 'situation' explanations for people's psychological states. Historically, 'person' explanatory principles have been distinguished from 'situation' explanatory principles. What has varied among personality theories is how 'situations' have been treated.

In order to study cross-situational effects of just 'person' principles alone, the personality 'traits' or 'dimensions' perspective controls for or removes the influence of situations on behaviour (see Epstein, 1979; John, 1990). The 'psychoanalytic' perspective emphasizes the organization of interacting personality processes (see Blatt and Auerbach, this volume), such as characteristic conflicts and defenses, that reside within the person (see Westen, 1990). Socialization styles and other situation variables are transformed into personality principles, such as a negative fixation at the anal stage. These two classic perspectives on personality differ from one another in major respects, but they both emphasize 'person' principles to predict behaviour.

The 'interactionist' perspective differs markedly from these perspectives because interactions of 'person' variability and 'situation' variability are examined as combined influences on behaviour (see Endler, 1982; Magnusson, 1990; Magnusson and Endler, 1977). Usually these 'person'  $\times$  'situation' effects on behaviour (e.g. Magnusson and Endler, 1977; see also Endler, this volume) are conceptualized as interactions between distinct sources of variability, each with their own underlying principle, comparable to the interactive effect of the nature of a material and situational stress on elasticity (see, for example, Endler, 1982). A central concept in the classic 'interactionist' perspective is 'reciprocal determinism' (see Magnusson, 1990). This concept highlights both the assumption that 'person' and 'situation' forces influence each other *and* the assumption that 'person' and 'situation' explanatory principles are distinct.

In a new version of the 'interactionist' perspective, Mischel and Shoda (1995; see also Mischel and Shoda, this volume) propose that each individual has a stable pattern of varying disposition-related behaviours across different situations—stable profiles of 'situation-behaviour' relations. From this perspective, situational differences becomes part of personality rather than being separated from it. Variability in behaviour across persons and situations is understood in terms of a general 'social-cognitive learning' perspective that has its roots in the work of Murray (1938), Kelly (1955), and Rotter (1954). This 'social-cognitive' version of the interactionist perspective attempts to link personality to individual differences in construals, expectancies, strategies, and so on (see also Bandura, 1986; Cantor and Zirkel, 1990; Mischel, 1973). However, the distinction between 'person' principles and 'situation' principles is retained. Both psychological principles that vary across persons are identified, such as personal construals or encoding styles, and separate principles that vary across situations are identified, such as positive versus negative social interactions with adults versus peers.

I believe that 'person' and 'situation' variables can be understood in terms of the same set of general psychological principles. I propose that *one* set of general principles be identified for which both persons and situations are sources of variability. I propose a '*general principles*' perspective on personality that reconceptualizes personality as an across-person source of variability in the functioning of psychological principles that have other sources of variability as well, including variability across momentary situations, cultures, age, and so on (see also Higgins, 1990, 1999).

Let me begin by discussing what I mean by a 'source of variability'. Imagine that a group of psychologists examined the psychological states of a large sample of Americans engaging in many different activities. Personality psychologists would investigate how the psychological states varied across individuals; social psychologists would investigate how the psychological states varied across situations; cultural psychologists would investigate how the psychological states varied across ethnic groups; and so on. Note that each investigation compares people's psychological states. Moreover, each investigation includes precisely the same sample of psychological states of the same persons. The only difference among the investigations is the choice of comparison. What differs among the areas of psychology is the source of variability in the data that is of interest to them. Personality psychologists are interested in how individuals differ and thus choose to investigate variability across persons.

When psychologists in an area choose a particular source of variability to examine, it naturally influences how they describe differences among the psychological states. Each description becomes a special phenomenon of interest to psychologists in that area. Each area is then tempted to discover the *unique* explanations and related psychological principles that underlie their own *special* phenomena. But the fact that there are different sources of variability does not mean that different sets of principles underlie each source. The same set of principles could underlie variability across individuals, situations, and ethnic groups.

In sum, it is not so much differences in the data that differentiates areas in psychology as the fact that each area has a special interest in one kind of variability in the data. Although this difference in what interests each area yields different descriptions of the data, it does not mean that the psychological principles underlying the data are different for each area. Given that the basic data are the psychological

states themselves and these states are just surface manifestations of underlying principles, I believe that the same set of general principles underlies the data across different areas of psychology.

Thus, interest in one or another source of variability in psychological states must be distinguished from understanding the general psychological principles that produce the basic states themselves. As psychologists, we need to understand the nature and functions of these general principles and not seek unique explanations and principles for each description of one kind of variability. By identifying such common or general principles, we would improve the economy of principles in psychology, provide a common language of principles across psychological areas that would facilitate examining their interrelations, and enrich our understanding of how each principle functioned across a broad range of conditions.

The first two sections of this paper illustrate how a personality difference can be just one source of variability in the functioning of a general psychological principle that has situational sources of variability as well (see also Higgins, 1990, 1999). For this purpose of illustration, I have chosen two principles that I have investigated for several years now—*accessibility* as a general ‘cognitive’ principle of knowledge activation, and *regulatory focus* as a general ‘motivational’ principle of self-regulation. I will describe how these principles, like other principles discussed later in the paper, have similar effects when either persons or situations are the source of variability. I conclude by considering the advantages for and implications of psychology taking a ‘general principles’ perspective. I discuss the utility of this perspective for understanding the many ways that persons, groups, and situations can contribute to manifesting the same pattern of principles, and describe how some patterns are more adaptive than others. I then consider the implications of there being multiple ways of manifesting the same pattern for the classic issues of when personality is revealed and what is its range of applicability.

### ACCESSIBILITY AS A GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF KNOWLEDGE ACTIVATION

Knowledge structures built up from past experiences are a major determinant of how people represent and categorize external stimuli (e.g. Bartlett, 1932; Hebb, 1949; Kelly, 1955; Bruner, 1957). Much of the research inspired by the ‘New Look’ in perception of the 1940s was concerned with how people’s long-term values, attitudes, and needs influenced the accessibility of stored constructs, where ‘accessibility’ denoted the ease or speed with which a given input is coded in terms of a given category (Bruner, 1957). This early research, then, treated accessibility mostly as a personality variable, and this personality emphasis became explicit in the work of George Kelly (1955) who noted that ‘construct systems can be considered as a kind of scanning pattern which a person continually projects upon his world. (p. 145).’ Inspired by Kelly, Mischel (1973) suggested that individual differences in the subjective meaning of social events may be especially evident in the personal constructs individuals employ and that these personal constructs may show the greatest resistance to situational presses (see also Sarbin, Taft and Bailey, 1960). There is a long history, then, of treating accessibility as a personality variable. But is accessibility *just* a personality variable?

Knowledge cannot be activated or brought to mind unless it is present in memory. 'Availability' refers to whether or not some particular knowledge is actually stored in memory. *Accessibility is the activation potential of available knowledge* (see Higgins, 1996). The general idea of accessibility as a personality variable has been part of the psychological literature for a long time. The defense mechanism of 'projection' described in the psychodynamic literature includes the notion of heightened responding to others in terms of chronically accessible thoughts or feelings (see Cameron, 1963). The basic notion behind the Thematic Apperception Test, developed by Murray (1938) and used extensively to measure individual differences in need achievement (e.g. McClelland and Atkinson, 1948), was that thoughts which were related to a strong motive of a person should be chronically accessible (see Sorrentino and Higgins, 1986). It is clear from the work of Kelly (1955) that there are differences across persons in the relative accessibility of different kinds of stored construct. One line of research inspired by the 'New Look' examined how chronically accessible values influenced responses to stimulus information, such as subjects with strong religious versus economic values perceiving tachistoscopically presented pictures differently (Bruner, 1951).

Subsequent research examined in more detail the nature and consequences of individual differences in chronically accessible constructs. Higgins, King and Mavin (1982) asked participants to list the traits of a type of person that they liked, disliked, sought out, avoided, and frequently encountered. For a given trait-related construct, individuals were considered to be 'chronic' on a construct if they listed that construct first in response to one or more questions or listed it frequently, and they were considered to be 'non-chronic' if they did not mention the construct at all. About one week later, each subject read an individually tailored essay containing trait-related descriptions of a target person. Each subject was chronic for half of the traits and non-chronic for the other half of the traits. In both their impressions and recollections of the target person, the subjects were significantly more likely to include information related to their chronically accessible traits. Bargh and Thein (1985) found evidence of the processing efficiency expected with automatic processing for subjects' chronic constructs but not for their non-chronic constructs. Higgins and Brendl (1995) investigated the effects of chronic accessibility as a continuous variable with multiple levels of chronicity and found a strong positive relation between higher chronicity scores for a construct and stronger construct-related impressions of a target person.

Even this brief review of the literature makes clear that construct accessibility varies across persons and is thus a personality variable. It is just as clear, however, that construct accessibility varies across situations and, thus, is not only a personality variable. Because extensive reviews of across-situation variability in accessibility are available in the literature (e.g. Higgins, 1996), I will provide only a few examples here.

An early demonstration of how accessibility varies across situations was provided in a study by Higgins, Rholes and Jones (1977). Subjects were initially exposed to one or another set of trait-related constructs (the priming manipulation) as an incidental aspect of a supposed study on 'perception'. The subjects later participated in an ostensibly unrelated study on 'reading comprehension' where they were asked to characterize the ambiguous behaviours of a target person. The study found that the subjects were significantly more likely to use primed than non-primed constructs to categorize the target person's behaviours. Other situational variables that influence accessibility and moderate its effects on judgment include the delay from priming to

stimulus exposure (e.g. Higgins, Bargh and Lombardi, 1985; Higgins and Brendl, 1995; Srull and Wyer, 1979, 1980), and the frequency of priming (e.g. Smith, Stewart and Buttram, 1992; Srull and Wyer, 1979, 1980).

The central question for this paper is whether accessibility has similar effects when it varies across persons as when it varies across situations. One way to address this question is to examine what happens when both 'person' and 'situation' sources of variability in accessibility are combined. Bargh, Bond, Lombardi and Tota (1986), for example, selected participants who were chronic or non-chronic on the construct 'kind', and then weeks later either primed 'kind' or not during the experimental session. Bargh *et al.* (1986) found independent effects of chronicity and priming on judgments. Higgins and Brendl (1995) also found that chronic accessibility as a 'person' variable and priming as a 'situation' variable had similar and independent effects on judgment.

Priming and chronic accessibility can also be pitted against one another. Bargh, Lombardi and Higgins (1988), for example, selected participants who were chronic on either 'inconsiderate' or 'outgoing'. During the experiment weeks later, the participants were primed with whichever of these constructs was not their chronic construct. Following the priming, there was either a brief or a long delay prior to the target presentation. The subjects' judgments reflected the primed construct more than the chronic construct after the brief delay, but the reverse was true after the long delay. Does this mean that accessibility functions differently as a 'person' versus a 'situation' variable? Before drawing this conclusion, one needs to examine what happens when recent priming is pitted against frequent priming as two situational variables. Higgins *et al.* (1985) primed two alternative constructs—one frequently and the other only once but most recently. They found that participants' judgments reflected the recently primed construct more than the frequently primed construct after the brief delay, but the reverse was true after the long delay. Thus, this study involving only 'situation' sources of variability in accessibility found a similar reversal as that obtained in the study pitting 'situation' and 'person' sources of variability.

In sum, accessibility is, indeed, a personality variable, but it is not just a personality variable and it does not function differently as a personality variable. Instead, both 'persons' and 'situations' are sources of variability for accessibility as a general principle of knowledge activation. The next section asks again about the uniqueness of personality—this time for regulatory focus as a general principle of self-regulation.

### **REGULATORY FOCUS AS A GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF SELF-REGULATION**

What general principles underlie how people approach pleasure and avoid pain? One classic answer concerns *regulatory anticipation*. Freud (1950/1920) described self-regulation as a 'hedonism of the future' involving anticipations of pleasure to be approached (wishes) and anticipations of pain to be avoided (fears). Similarly, Atkinson (1964) distinguished between the approach tendencies of individuals with a 'hope of success' and the avoidance tendencies of individuals with a 'fear of failure' (see also Mowrer, 1960). A second classic answer concerns *regulatory reference*, which concerns desired end-states versus undesired end-states as the reference point for self-regulation (e.g. Carver and Scheier, 1981, 1990; Gray, 1982; Lang, 1995). Self theorists

distinguish between good selves as positive reference values and bad selves as negative reference values (e.g. Erikson, 1963; Markus and Nurius, 1986; Sullivan, 1953). Social psychologists distinguish between positive reference groups and negative reference groups (e.g. Kelley, 1952; Newcomb, 1950). Whereas regulatory anticipation concerns expectancies, regulatory reference concerns standards independent of expectancies (see Higgins, 1997).

Recently, *regulatory focus theory* has been proposed as a third general answer to how people approach pleasure and avoid pain (see Higgins, 1997, 1998). Regulatory focus theory distinguishes between *promotion focus* and *prevention focus*. The same desired goal, such as receiving an 'A' in a course, can be represented as an accomplishment in a promotion focus or as security in a prevention focus. People tend to use approach strategies for goal attainment when in a promotion focus (e.g. pursuing all means of advancement) and avoidance strategies when in a prevention focus (e.g. carefully avoiding any mistakes). Regulatory focus theory describes how socialization differences can produce chronic individual differences in regulatory focus (see Higgins, 1987, 1998; Higgins and Silberman, 1998). Parents' social regulatory style, for example, can foster promotion or prevention, respectively, by bolstering versus safeguarding to meet desired end-states or by withdrawing love versus criticizing when desired end-states are not met. These different social regulatory styles communicate distinct concerns about getting along in the world. Promotion social regulation is concerned with *advancement, growth, accomplishment* (the presence and absence of positive outcomes)—'This is what I would ideally like you to do' or 'This is *not* what I would ideally like you to do'. Prevention social regulation is concerned with *protection, safety, responsibility* (the absence and presence of negative outcomes)—'This is what I believe you *ought* to do' or 'This is *not* what I believe you ought to do'.

These socialization differences illustrate how regulatory focus can be treated as a personality variable. Indeed, there is evidence that individual differences in regulatory focus relate to specific kinds of emotional vulnerability. Higgins, Shah and Friedman (1997) hypothesized that individuals with stronger goals would experience more intense emotional responses and that their chronic strength of regulatory focus would determine the type of more intense emotion they experienced. To test these hypotheses, a computer measure of actual self, ideal, and ought attributes was developed that was similar to the original Selves Questionnaire used to test self-discrepancy theory (see Higgins, Bond, Klein and Strauman, 1986). The Selves Questionnaire asks respondents to list attributes for their actual self, their ideal self, and their ought self. The actual self attributes are compared to the ideal or ought attributes to determine which attributes in the actual self match or mismatch the ideal or ought attributes. Each *self-discrepancy score* is basically the number of mismatches minus the number of matches. Consistent with previous work on attitude accessibility (e.g. Fazio, 1995), ideal and ought *self-guide strength* was conceptualized and operationalized in terms of the chronic accessibility of ideal attributes and the chronic accessibility of ought attributes, respectively.

Success in a promotion focus reflects the presence of positive outcomes underlying cheerfulness-related emotions such as feeling happy or satisfied, and failure reflects the absence of positive outcomes underlying dejection-related emotions such as feeling disappointed or discouraged. Success in a prevention focus reflects the absence of negative outcomes underlying quiescence-related emotions such as feeling calm or relaxed, and failure reflects the presence of negative outcomes underlying agitation-

related emotions such as feeling tense or uneasy. Higgins *et al.* (1997) predicted: (a) an interaction of ideal self-guide strength and ideal discrepancy, such that the correlation between ideal discrepancy and experiencing dejection-related emotions (or ideal congruency and experiencing cheerfulness-related emotions) would increase as ideal accessibility increased; and (b) an interaction of ought self-guide strength and ought discrepancy, such that the correlation between ought discrepancy and experiencing agitation-related emotions (or ought congruency and experiencing quiescence-related emotions) would increase as ought accessibility increased. Three studies tested these predictions for frequency and intensity of experiencing different kinds of emotion. All three studies supported the predictions.

Higgins, Roney, Crowe and Hymes (1994) examined whether individuals varying in regulatory focus prefer different strategies of goal attainment. Predominant ideal concerns was operationalized by greater actual/ideal than actual/ought discrepancies, and predominant ought concerns was operationalized by greater actual/ought than actual/ideal discrepancies. An initial phase of the study identified friendship tactics that reflected a strategy of approaching friendship matches (e.g. 'Be generous and willing to give of yourself'), and another set of tactics that reflected a strategy of avoiding friendship mismatches (e.g. 'Stay in touch. Don't lose contact with friends'). Each participant was asked, 'When you think about strategies for *friendship*, which THREE of the following strategies would you choose?'. This question was followed by three approach strategies and three avoidance strategies. The study found that approach strategies were selected more by individuals with predominant ideal than predominant ought concerns, whereas the reverse was true for avoidance strategies.

It is clear from even this brief review that regulatory focus varies chronically across persons and is related to individual differences in emotional vulnerability and strategic self-regulation. Thus, regulatory focus is a personality variable. There is evidence, however, that regulatory focus also varies across situations and, thus, is not just a personality variable. Indeed, my colleagues and I have routinely tested regulatory focus theory by varying regulatory focus across both persons and situations (see Higgins, 1997, 1998). To illustrate, I will describe some studies that tested whether situational manipulations of regulatory focus produce emotional and strategic effects similar to those found when regulatory focus varies across persons.

In their research on emotional responses to success and failure, Higgins *et al.* (1997) also used a framing technique to manipulate regulatory focus as a situational variable. The framing kept constant the actual consequences of attaining or not attaining the goal, as well as the criterion of success and failure, but varied the focus of the instructions. The task involved memorizing trigrams. For the promotion focus, the participants began with 5 dollars and the instructions were about gains and non-gains (e.g. 'If you score above the 70th percentile, that is, if you remember a lot of letter strings, then you will gain a dollar'). For the prevention focus, the participants began with six dollars and the instructions were about losses and non-losses (e.g. 'If you score above the 70th percentile, that is, if you don't forget a lot of letter strings, then you won't lose a dollar'). Following performance of the task, the participants were given false feedback that they had either succeeded or failed on the task.

It was predicted that feedback-consistent emotional change, i.e. increasing positive and decreasing negative emotions following success and decreasing positive and increasing negative emotions following failure, would be different in the promotion framing versus prevention framing conditions. Feedback-consistent change on the

cheerfulness/dejection dimension should be greater for participants in the promotion than the prevention framing condition, whereas feedback-consistent change on the quiescence/agitation dimension should be greater for participants in the prevention than the promotion framing condition. This predicted two-way interaction was obtained. Thus, the same basic findings concerning the relations among regulatory focus, goal attainment, and intensity of different kinds of emotions were obtained when regulatory focus was a 'situation' variable as when it was a 'person' variable.

Other recent programmes of research have directly addressed the difference between promotion and prevention focus in goal attainment strategies and motivations. In each case, the effects of regulatory focus were examined both when it was a personality variable (i.e. chronic individual differences in promotion strength and in prevention strength) and when it was situationally manipulated (i.e. promotion versus prevention framing). One research programme studied the classic 'goal looms larger' effect of increases in motivational strength with decreases in goal distance. Forster, Higgins and Idson (1998) predicted that strategic approach motivation would increase as goal distance decreases for a promotion focus, whereas strategic avoidance motivation would increase as goal distance decreases for a prevention focus. In a second research programme, Idson, Liberman, and Higgins (2000) predicted that individuals would feel better from promotion success (a gain) than prevention success (a non-loss), whereas they would feel worse from prevention failure (a loss) than promotion failure (a non-gain). In a third research programme, Liberman, Idson, Camacho and Higgins (1999) examined two situations involving choice between stability and change: (1) task substitution, where people choose between resuming or substituting for an interrupted activity; and (2) endowment, where people choose between an object they already possess and a new alternative object. It was predicted that a promotion focus would be associated with openness to change, whereas a prevention focus would be associated with a preference for stability. The predictions for each of these research programmes were confirmed. Most important for the present paper, similar results were found when regulatory focus was situationally manipulated as when it was a personality variable.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF A GENERAL PRINCIPLES PERSPECTIVE ON PERSONALITY**

Knowledge accessibility and regulatory focus provide two examples of general psychological principles whose effects are similar when treated as a 'person' variable and as a 'situation' variable. Although an exhaustive review of other general principles is not possible here, a few additional examples will illustrate the breadth and significance of such principles.

Gestalt psychology emphasized people's need for organized and coherent knowledge. To organize their knowledge, people must first construct it. The psychological principles that underlie knowledge construction have broad applicability and significance. One such principle is the need for (nonspecific) closure (see Kruglanski, 1989; Kruglanski and Webster, 1996). When people desire a firm answer to a question and are averse to ambiguity, they have a need for closure. This need varies along a continuum from a strong need for closure to a strong need to avoid closure. When in a 'need for closure' state, individuals 'leap' to judgments that reduce ambiguity, 'seize' anything that provides an answer to a question, and 'freeze' on their current views.

When in a 'need to avoid closure' state, individuals are reluctant to commit to a definite opinion, suspend judgment, and seek alternatives to current views. Research has shown that these states influence information processing, information seeking, hypothesis generation, and decision making. In addition, the effects found in these studies were similar when need for closure was examined as a personality variable and when it was situationally manipulated (see Kruglanski and Webster, 1996; Webster and Kruglanski, 1994).

Need for closure and need to avoid closure are two distinct epistemic goals. Other goal distinctions also have general psychological significance. Performance goals and learning goals, for example, have been distinguished in the achievement domain (see Dweck and Leggett, 1988). When individuals pursue performance goals, they perceive achievement situations as tests of their competence. When individuals pursue learning goals, they perceive achievement situations as opportunities to improve or extend their competence. Research has found that individuals who pursue a learning goal seek challenges, persist under difficulty, and experience positive affect more than individuals who pursue a performance goal. Moreover, the effects found in these studies were similar when type of achievement goal varied across persons and when it varied across situations (see Dweck and Leggett, 1988).

Self-control is another important aspect of goal striving. Self-control includes effective strategies for resisting current temptations in order to maintain future goal-directed actions. There is evidence that individuals vary in their use of effective strategies when confronted with a delay of gratification task (e.g. resisting a less valued treat available now in order to attain a more valued treat in the future), and those who perform better as young children tend also to perform better later in life. There is also evidence that the same effective and ineffective self-control strategies on a delay of gratification task can be situationally induced (see Mischel, 1996; Mischel, Shoda and Rodriguez, 1989).

In addition to goal selection and goal striving, effective self-regulation requires monitoring or evaluating one's goal attainment progress. For each goal or desired end-state, such monitoring involves comparing one's current state to the desired end-state (see Bandura, 1986; Carver and Scheier, 1981, 1990; Higgins, 1987). This goal attainment comparison process has been found to vary in effectiveness as a function of attentional focus. Increased attentional focus enhances the comparison process, thereby increasing the thoroughness with which individuals behave in ways that match or suit their goals (see Carver and Scheier, 1981; Duval and Wicklund, 1972). There are chronic differences in the extent to which individuals focus on themselves as objects. Moreover, there are two relatively independent kinds of self-consciousness. Individuals high in private self-consciousness are aware of their own covert thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and motives. Individuals high in public self-consciousness are aware of their overt, publicly displayed self-attributes and are cognizant of how others view them (see Carver and Scheier, 1981; Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss, 1975). But private and public self-consciousness can also be manipulated situationally (see Carver and Scheier, 1981), as by having people observe themselves in mirrors (private self) or be observed by audiences (public self), and the situational effects on attentional focus are similar to the personality effects.

These various aspects of self-regulation illustrate how the functioning of general psychological principles with major significance for behaviour can vary across both 'persons' and 'situations'. These principles are neither personality principles nor

social psychological principles. They are general psychological principles with multiple sources of variability. One major advantage of this general principles perspective is that it provides a common language for the different areas of psychology (see Higgins, 1990). Such a common language is certainly economical for psychology as a discipline. In addition, it facilitates examining the interrelations among different sources of variability of the same general principle and patterns among principles. It is this latter advantage that I wish to emphasize in the remaining discussion (for a discussion of other kinds of advantage, see Higgins, 1990, 1999).

All psychological principles involve trade-offs (see, for example, Higgins, 2000). The promotion focus inclination to ensure 'hits', for example, has the benefit of being open to change, such as considering new career options, but it also has the cost of failing to reject poor alternatives, such as wasting time pursuing mediocre career options. The secret of effective self-regulation is to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs. One way this might occur is by combining one principle with another. From a personality perspective, for example, it might be effective for individuals with a chronic promotion focus to also have a chronic need for closure because the latter predisposition would provide a useful 'stop' function on the tendency of the former predisposition to continue generating alternatives beyond some threshold quality. In contrast, a person combining chronic promotion focus and need to avoid closure might waste time generating alternatives well beyond their usefulness.

An important implication of a general principles perspective is that considerations of effective and ineffective combinations should not be restricted to just those within one person. What matters is the state produced by a combination of principles—not that the sources of a state all be within one person. For example, an individual with a promotion focus might function effectively by selecting situations high in need for closure. The situation could be certain types of activity, such as those with clear time limits, or a relationship with another person who is high in need for closure. From this perspective, one could reconsider what personalities complement each other in close relationships, what personalities work well together in teams, or what personalities fit best with which environments.

When a state reflects the interrelations among three or more principles, one can speak of a psychological *pattern*. It is possible that traditional personality differences reflect such patterns. The classic distinction between individuals high in 'motive to succeed' and individuals high in 'fear of failure', for example, could be reconceptualized as involving different patterns of regulatory anticipation, regulatory reference, and regulatory focus. Individuals high in 'motive to succeed' anticipate pleasure, approach a desired end-state, and have a promotion focus. Individuals high in 'fear of failure' anticipate pain, avoid an undesired end-state, and have a prevention focus.

Social psychological states described in the literature also reflect psychological patterns. In classic cognitive dissonance studies, for example, an experimenter induces participants to behave in a manner that is incompatible with their personal values under the illusion of free choice. Consistent with the characterization by Cooper and Fazio (1984) of dissonance as 'feeling responsible for an aversive event', this psychological state could be characterized in terms of the experimenter priming situationally appropriate normative guides (e.g. 'good experimental subjects help out the experimenter') that motivate participants to behave in a manner that is discrepant from their self-guides (e.g. 'thou shalt not lie'), while making explicit the absence of

any social pressure demanding the behaviour (e.g. 'Of course, you do not have to do this behaviour. It is up to you.').

Another implication of a general principles perspective is that traditional personality and social psychological concepts need not be restricted to one area. For example, because regulatory anticipation, regulatory reference, and regulatory focus can also vary across situations, social psychologists could study the effects of situations high in 'motive to succeed' versus high in 'fear of failure'. Even more exciting, each psychological pattern can be examined with respect to multiple sources. A promotion focus person in a situation that makes desired end-states accessible and future outcomes optimistic would be in a state of high 'motive to succeed'. A group that has strong positive group goals, focuses on group advancement and accomplishments, and is optimistic about its future success would also be in a state of high 'motive to succeed'. Extending social psychology to personality, a prevention focus person who has illusions about self-control and a tendency to perceive outcomes negatively would be especially vulnerable to states of cognitive dissonance.

To further exemplify the implications of a general principles perspective, let us take this perspective to reconsider the classic issue of when personality is revealed (see Epstein, 1983; Pervin, 1985; Snyder and Ickes, 1985). One proposal is that personality is most likely to be revealed when the influence of situations on behaviour is relatively weak (see Snyder and Ickes, 1985). The argument is that one can more confidently attribute behaviours to personality forces when situational forces are weak. A similar argument can be made, however, for persons and situations as alternative sources of one psychological pattern. When the situation source of a pattern is weak, the contribution of the personality source to the formation of the pattern must be greater. From this perspective, it is not some unique personality explanation for behaviour that is revealed. Rather, the role of personality as one source contributing to a psychological pattern is demonstrated.

An alternative proposal for when personality is revealed concerns increasing rather than decreasing situational forces. In this proposal, personality is revealed when situational pressures are increased to the point where the self-regulatory demands exceed the usual range of coping strategies, as when aggression is used to cope in high-demand social interactions (see Wright and Mischel, 1987). The notion here is that there are common ways of dealing with the normal pressures of everyday life, but when the pressures become unusually strong, the responses become uncommon. It is self-regulatory breakdowns, i.e. vulnerabilities, that reveal a person's true personality. In classic psychodynamic theory, for example, breakdowns produce different kinds of defense mechanisms that reveal personality types (e.g. Freud, 1937). But one need not conceptualize strong situational forces in terms of exposing vulnerabilities. Rather, in order to form a psychological pattern that produces uncommon behaviours, a combination of strong situational and personality sources may be necessary. For example, an aggressive response in an interaction is more likely when one's partner is perceived as threatening, and combining situational and personality sources of accessibility for threat constructs could make even vague events appear threatening (e.g. Higgins and Brendl, 1995).

Although the second proposal seems quite different from the first proposal because stronger rather than weaker situational forces are emphasized, both proposals are similar in judging personality to be revealed when a person behaves differently from 'the average person' in a situation. Either one needs to remove the demands of the

situation that force everyone to behave similarly (the first proposal) or one needs to increase the demands of the situation to the point where everyone no longer behaves similarly (the second proposal). The notion that personality concerns being different than the average person is also found in the theory of Jones and Davis (1965) about when perceivers make 'person' rather than 'situation' explanations for behaviour. Such attributional models assume that 'person' is a unique kind of explanation. It is possible, however, that perceivers attempt to determine how much each source of variability contributed to the psychological state that produced the behaviour. If so, it is not necessary for an individual to possess a distinctive disposition. It is sufficient for an individual to have a stable, enduring tendency. Indeed, this was the classic view expressed by Heider (1958) that was later modified by Jones and Davis (1965).

A third proposal for when personality is revealed concerns comparing behaviours under different situational forces rather than increasing or decreasing the force of one situation. Classic examples of this proposal are achievement personality being revealed by behaviours on challenging versus easy tasks (e.g. Atkinson, 1964), authoritarian personality being revealed by behaviours with high versus low status partners (e.g. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford, 1950), and the 'interactionist' perspective more generally (see Endler, 1982, 1997; Magnusson and Endler, 1977). A more recent version of this kind of proposal is the description by Mischel and Shoda (1995) of personality as stable profiles of 'situation-behaviour' relations. This latter proposal recognizes that different relations between person and situation reveal personality. The general principles perspective differs from it in emphasizing person and situation as alternative sources of the same psychological pattern, without restricting 'person' to one variable and 'situation' to a different variable underlying the pattern. For example, if a 'motive to succeed' psychological pattern included promotion focus and anticipating pleasure as elements in the pattern, then either 'person', 'situation', or both could be the source of each element.

The general principles perspective reconceptualizes when personality is revealed. It suggests a different answer to how studying personality contributes to understanding and predicting human behaviour. No longer is personality considered as providing unique explanations for human behaviour. Instead, personality is just one source of variability in general psychological principles that would provide the explanations. But personality is an important source whose contributions to significant psychological states need to be understood and investigated.

The general principles perspective also suggests a need to change the range of applicability of personality. Historically, for example, social scientists have used concepts like 'national character' and 'corporate identity' to describe chronic differences in psychological states across nations or across companies. It is as if the choice were only between social psychology with its momentary states and personality with its chronic states, and thus any chronic difference is conceptualized as 'personality'. But situations can become chronic through institutionalization, and it is the chronic situations that predispose states in a nation or corporation. Thus, it is misleading to apply the concept of personality to these cases. There are cases, then, where the range of applicability of personality should be reduced. On the other hand, there are cases where the range of applicability of personality should be increased. How cognitive dissonance influences behaviour, for example, is as much a personality issue as a social psychological issue. Any issue that has been restricted historically to social psychology can be reconsidered as involving some psychological state for which

personality is also a potential source of variability. In this way, the role of personality in understanding human behaviour can be, and should be, expanded.

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