**Preface for the Chinese Edition of *The Person: An Introduction to the Science of Personality Psychology* (5/e)**

Dan P. McAdams

In this new Preface, I am very happy to welcome new readers for *The Person: An Introduction to the Science of Personality Psychology*. The Chinese edition of this college textbook opens up the field of personality psychology to a broad new audience. For students and teachers alike, I very much hope you enjoy reading my book and that you find the material inside to be useful to you, both as a scholar and as a human being.

*The Background*

The book in front of you is the fifth edition of *The Person*, released in the United States in the year 2009. But the origins of the book go back to the 1980s, when I was a young assistant professor at Loyola University in Chicago. I wanted to teach a class in personality psychology at that time, but I could not find a textbook that corresponded to my own vision for what the field of personality psychology should be. My view was that personality psychology should be the scientific study of *the whole person*. As such, personality psychology should focus on what makes any particular person a unique human being, how one individual person is different from other persons.

Back in the 1980s, however, textbooks on personality tended to come in one of two different forms, neither of which was very appealing to me. One version was the historical survey of grand personality theories, with each chapter devoted to one of the great theorists (like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung) from the first half of the 20th century. The second version was organized topically, with each chapter devoted to a research domain. Books of the first type could be interesting from a historical or philosophical point of view, but they failed to address current research in the field of personality psychology. Books of the second type chopped the person up into pieces, failing to comprehend the person as an integrated whole.

Therefore, I decided to write a textbook myself. It was a crazy idea, as I would soon learn, for there was too much to learn and to do – and at that time in my life I was very busy, with my new job at Loyola University and my two new daughters at home. But I had lots of energy back in the 1980s, and support from my colleagues, so I managed to complete the first edition of the book in about 3 or 4 years. It was published in 1990. The first edition brought to the forefront ideas and topics that had never before appeared in an undergraduate personality textbook. For example, I devoted large sections to psychobiography, the use of case studies in personality psychology, the philosophy of personality research, the debate between trait approaches and situationist approaches to personality, sociobiology and evolutionary approaches to personality psychology, the use of projective assessments, like the Rorschach Inkblot Test and the Thematic Apperception Test, new research on “the Big Five” personality traits, new research on personal goals and strivings, and the emerging line of scholarship on life stories and narrative.

In 1990, I believed that personality psychology could be viewed from four different and competing paradigms or perspectives. The first paradigm conceived of the person as an *intrapsychic mystery*, challenging us to find the hidden meanings behind the surface of every life. The second focused on what I called *interaction episodes*, conceiving of personality as a series of events in life within which internal dispositions, like traits, interact with the external world of situations. The third examined *interpersonal stories*, or the ways in which each person creates a narrative for his or her own life, and how psychologists create stories of persons. And the fourth approach examined *interpretive structures*, which I viewed as cognitive schemas or frames for making sense of life and the world. My belief at the time was that these four perspectives were each unique and incompatible with the others. You needed to choose which perspective appealed to you, and then stick with that perspective.

I changed my mind, however. Over the next two decades, personality psychology evolved in many important ways, with new empirical breakthroughs and the development of many creative theoretical approaches. I began to see how the different approaches to personality psychology could indeed be reconciled into a broad synthesis. Science is cumulative and integrative, and it aims to provide a broad explanation that is true and useful. Back in 1990, I was skeptical about the idea that the science of personality psychology could provide an intellectual space to integrate the four different perspectives that I observed at the time. But I am no longer so skeptical. I now believe that much of what goes by the name of personality theory and research can be reconciled within the broad model of the person that I present in the current version of the textbook, the fifth edition, which you are reading today.

The key to understanding the whole person from a broad integrative perspective is the idea of *layers*. There are three layers of personality, developing over time. The first layer forms the person as a *social actor*. Human beings evolved to live in complex social groups, as actors who perform our roles in the presence of each other. Each of us performs his or her roles with a unique style. Those differences in the actor’s style are captured in basic personality traits, of the sort I describe in Chapters 4-6 in this book. Basic dispositional traits, such as extraversion and conscientiousness, sketch a broad psychological outline of the person.

In order to fill in the details, you need to move to the second layer, the person as a *motivated agent*. To be an “agent” in life is to make plans and to set valued goals, and then to strive to realize those plans and goals. The idea of motivated agency focuses the person on the inner life of will, desire, choice, and prospection. As motivated agents, we look to the future as we aim to accomplish long-term ends. Whereas our dispositional traits describe *how* we act with each other, our motives and goals tell us *what* we want in life and *why* we strive to get what we want, and to avoid what we do not want. In Chapters 7-9, I describe theory and research on persons as motivated agents, using the term “characteristic adaptations” to refer to the many different kinds of motives, goals, and values that persons develop over the human life course.

The third layer of personality refers to the person as an *autobiographical author*. As we move into adolescence and young adulthood, many of us seek to discover or formulate a broad meaning for our lives. The great psychoanalytic theorist Erik Erikson described this process as the exploration of *identity*. We begin to ask ourselves questions like these: Who am I? How do I fit into the adult world? What gives my life meaning and purpose? In Chapters 10-12, I entertain the idea that people create *stories* for their lives in order to answer questions like these. The central idea here is *narrative identity*, which I define as the internalized and evolving stories of the self that people construct to explain how they have become the unique persons they are, and who they may be in the future. Your narrative identity combines your selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past (how you remember your life as a story) with the anticipation of an imagined future (how you imagine the story to develop in the future).

In sum, personality is a dynamic arrangement of (1) dispositional traits (the social actor), (2) characteristic goals and values (the motivated agent), and (3) integrative life stories (the autobiographical author), developing over time and situated in culture and history. Each of us is a unique amalgamation of traits, goals, and stories.

*The Present and the Future*

Since the publication of the fifth edition of *The Person*, the field of personality psychology has continued to purse the topics and the challenges that I lay out in this book. Research on dispositional personality traits (the person as social actor) has continued to flourish. Chapter 6 sets forth the strong evidence for genetic determinism when it comes to individual differences in basic personality traits. There is little doubt that genes matter. But environments also matter, and research in recent years has redoubled the efforts to find environmental effects on traits. Some of the most promising studies examine how landmark developments in young adulthood – such as getting married, having children, attaining a job – may exert important influence in the development of basic traits such as conscientiousness and agreeableness. While some trait researchers have examined situational effects, others have looked inside the brain to discover the neurological underpinnings of personality. In recent years, neuroscientists have focused a great deal of attention on the role of particular brain circuits and the role of the chemical dopamine in the functioning of extraversion.

A great deal of research has also appeared, over the past decade, in the area of life stories (the person as autobiographical author). Personality psychologists have developed a newfound fascination with the narratives that people construct to make sense of their lives. This line of research tends to bring the topic of *culture* into the conversation. Every culture has its own repository of folk tales, historical anecdotes, religious myths, ideas and motifs in popular discourse, and other stories to suggest what the favored plots, themes, characters, and images of a good or worthy life narrative should be. Each of us draws upon culture in fashioning our own narrative identities. To take one broad example, theory suggests that creating a narrative identity under the cultural norms of individualism (traditionally associated with North American and certain European societies) may encourage a person to celebrate autonomy and independence in life, and to find redemptive meaning in life’s suffering. By contrast, creating a narrative identity under the cultural norms of collectivism (traditionally associated with East Asian societies, such as China, Japan, and Korea) may encourage a person to affirm social solidarity and harmony in the development of self, and to persevere through the inevitable suffering that accompanies a human life. In addition, as with dispositional traits, neuroscientists have also begun to focus attention on life stories, examining the areas of the brain that are routinely involved in processing information about the self and telling self-related stories.

If I were to write a new (sixth) edition of *The Person*, I would further elaborate on the actor/agent/author framework that I have described above. It is now my strong conviction that the framework implies a clear developmental sequence for personality (McAdams, 2013, 2015; McAdams & Olson, 2010; McAdams, Shiner, & Tackett, 2018).

Traits begin to develop first. By the time an infant is one month of age, you can observe consistent differences in basic temperament dispositions, which will morph over the lifetime into full-fledged personality traits. We enter the world as newborn social actors. In childhood, we become motivated agents, too. Between the ages of about 3 and 9 years, children develop the cognitive and psychological infrastructure needed to formulate goals and values. Further brain development and changing social arrangements usher in the autobiographical author in our teens and 20s. Personality, therefore, *thickens* over developmental time. We start out with one layer – the social actor. As that layer continues to develop, we add a second – the motivated agent. Eventually, we add a third, as well – the autobiographical author. As adults, we have all three layers: We perform our social roles in accord with our dispositional personality traits; we continue to strive for valued goals, orienting toward the future with a motivational agenda; and we create stories in our minds to make sense of it all, to explain why we do what we do and strive to achieve what we strive to achieve, making narrative sense of our remembered past, experienced present, and imagined future.

*A Chinese Audience*

You are the first Chinese readers for this book. I will be interested to learn what your responses to the book are. I have drawn mainly from research and theory in personality psychology that has been done in the United States, Canada, and Europe, for the most part. As an American, my own cultural perspective surely impacts how I conceive of human personality. I am quite certain, therefore, that the book reveals many Western biases, some of which you may be in a good position to identify. I do, however, try to read as much as I can on the cross-cultural study of personality. An explicit emphasis on culture can be found in Chapter 3 of the book, and in parts of Chapter 10.

A major question in the study of personality across cultures is this: What features of personality are universal and what features are, instead, shaped strongly by culture? The question is oversimplified, of course, because it is probably true that every feature of a personality has some relation to culture. After all, human beings evolved to create culture; we live amidst culture, and therefore it probably makes little sense to conceive of any aspect of human psychology that is absolutely devoid of cultural impact. Still, there may be differences in the extent to which, and the ways in which, personality and culture interrelate. For example, research in many different societies has shown that people tend to construe personality dispositions within a small number of broad categories, typically five or so. For that reason, a number of personality psychologists have concluded that these basic categories for traits – often called the Big Five – are a universal feature of human nature. In the most popular framework, the Big Five breaks down into (1) extraversion, (2) neuroticism, (3) conscientiousness, (4) agreeableness, and (5) openness to experience. While it may be the case that each of these traits is displayed in a different way depending on culture, most cultures still exhibit these five traits – that is these five, or variations on them, tend to be expressed as meaningful individual differences in many societies around the globe. In this case, you might say that cultural differences are not especially strong in determining the kinds of traits that appear in different societies.

By contrast, human goals and values (the person as motivated agent) and life narratives (the person as autobiographical author) would appear to be more strongly and deeply contoured by cultural differences. I have already mentioned the common distinction made between individualist and collectivist cultures. A great deal of research in personality suggests that these differences play out especially prominently at the level of people’s characteristic goals and values. Whereas autonomous self-expression might be an especially valued goal in an individualistic society like the United States, collectivist societies (like China) may emphasize values like social solidarity and interpersonal harmony. There is a danger here in painting these differences in strokes that are too broad. Both collectivist and individualist societies promote both sets of values and goals; but the broad differences between the two many still show up in slight but significant personality differences as a function of culture.

The effect of culture may be strongest on life narratives. In my book, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (2006), I brought together psychological research with historical and cultural analyses to argue that Americans tend to admire strongly redemptive life stories – that is, stories in which the protagonist endures suffering but emerges from the pain with new insights and positive outcomes. In American society, there are many cultural models for living a highly redemptive life story – models that are rooted in American history, politics, literature, cinema, and popular culture. Other societies may also value the kinds of redemptive stories I described in that book, but there is probably a great deal of variation in valued narratives from one culture to the next. With this in mind, you might want to ask yourself: What are the most valued stories in my society? In what ways do people I know try to model their own lives around those narratives?

The world is shrinking – and this can be a good thing. With increased trade and travel, with immigration and intercontinental communication, people from different societies and cultures are learning more and more about each other. The fact that this book, written in the United States mainly for American students, is now translated into your language is a testament to a shrinking and more deeply interconnected world. In that spirit, I hope that you find something useful in what I have to offer, coming to you from the other side of the globe.

Dan P. McAdams

Chicago, IL

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