

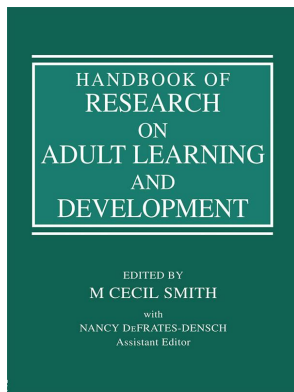
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M Cecil Smith, Nancy DeFrates-Densch

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Cory R. Bolkan, Patricia Meierdiercks, Karen Hooker

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ON
ADULT LEARNING
AND
DEVELOPMENT

EDITED BY
M CECIL SMITH

with
NANCY DEFRADES-DENSCH
Assistant Editor

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Addressing Stability and Change in the Six-Foci Model of Personality

Personality Development in Midlife and Beyond

Cory R. Bolkan, Patricia Meierdiercks, and Karen Hooker

The idea that personality is vital to understanding human behavior captured the attention of life-span researchers during the last half of the twentieth century. During this time, some researchers focused attention on relatively stable aspects of the broad construct of personality while others focused on those that were not. The complexity of determining continuity, change, and development within and between individuals has led to a myriad of studies and a multitude of findings. In this chapter, we provide an overview of personality research by relying on a comprehensive framework called the *six-foci model* of personality (Hooker & McAdams, 2003). We will highlight key linkages between personality and quality of life outcomes while also emphasizing the potential for personality growth during the second half of life.

We begin by drawing attention to why personality matters. We then provide a historical overview of the study of personality, synthesizing key empirical findings and addressing controversies and problems in personality development throughout the middle and later years. A discussion of current research follows, and we focus throughout on important questions as to how and why certain aspects of personality change or remain the same, how personality serves as both a risk and protective factor, how it influences the aging process, and how it influences the capacity to flourish during the second half of life.

Why Personality Matters

Personality matters because it is the vehicle through which we reveal our innermost selves. Inextricably intertwined with self, personality produces uniquely patterned ways of being human in the natural world. Fused, yet conceptually distinct (Allport, 1937, 1955; Hooker, 1999; Markus, 1983), personality and self shape who we are, how we become, what we do, where we are going, and help to explain why some people flourish and others do not. As unique individuals, we have idiosyncratic ways of interpreting, engaging with, and responding to different opportunities and constraints. As a result, heterogeneity increases within and between individuals over time. Consequently, heterogeneity in personality, health, cognition, and abilities tends to peak during the later adult years. Identifying the personality structures and processes that contribute to increasing heterogeneity can provide researchers with insight into linkages between personality and important life outcomes such as the link found between neuroticism and mortality, which we will discuss later in the chapter. This notion also highlights how personality acts as a guiding force that allows us to participate in our own development and adaptation across the life span (Bandura, 2001; Brandtstädter & Lerner, 1999; Ford, 1987).

Personality and self also contribute to our sense of well-being. Recent evidence suggests that individuals who lack a coherent sense of self amass cumulative negative effects across the life span and these effects have great impact on adults during their later years

(Diehl, Hastings, & Stanton, 2001). McAdams (2006), for example, found that adults with a weak sense of self-coherence were vulnerable to low self-esteem and depression. More positively, a coherent sense of self precludes the need for reinventing ourselves with each new day, contributing to the predictability of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors across contexts and situations. As a result, having a coherent sense of self facilitates our interface with the world and frees personal energy for more meaningful endeavors.

Personality is commonly used to illustrate the individual and distinct characteristics that differentiate one person from another. For example, knowledge about seemingly stable dispositions (e.g., responsible, outgoing, introverted, gregarious) people display can help us to relate and interact with others. It enhances our understanding of who they are and helps us to predict their behavior. Although this global, established knowledge of personality disposition is clearly useful in knowing another person, it is evident that it cannot possibly fully explain and describe the complexities of one's true self. For instance, because one is introverted at the office meeting, does not necessarily indicate this same person will be introverted at the office picnic. Humans are multi-faceted, influenced by time and context, and capable of personality change. This opportunity for change is particularly exciting because it means that we are capable of continued growth in this domain well into later life.

Two distinct lines of personality research (trait research and social-cognitive research) have emerged to help scientists gain a better understanding of personality structures and processes. We will briefly discuss both of these lines of research in the subsequent section; however, it is at the confluence of these two distinct paths that we hope to find who we are and what can be expected of our aging self. The convergence of both trait and social cognitive lines of personality research will be reflected in our discussion of the *six foci model* of personality.

How the Science of Personality Came to Be

The study of personality development began with Freud's theoretical work on psychosexual development (for a general overview of Freudian theory, see Westen, 1990). Today, the field of personality psychology embodies a vast complex of theoretical frameworks, research methods, topics, and issues. Dispositional traits, identity and self-processes, coping strategies, emotions, and affect regulation are just a few of the topics subsumed under this research umbrella. Traits have received a great deal of attention, leading some to assume traits define personality (Allport, 1955; McAdams, 1995). The widespread acceptance and prevalent use of the "five-factor" and "Big Five" models of personality (Goldberg, 1993; McCrae & Costa, 1994) played a key role in shaping this definition. Many critics, however, argued for a definition of personality that emphasized its dynamic, organized, internal, psychophysical properties, one not dominated by fixed and stable properties.

Traits versus Whole Persons

Trait research has advanced our understanding of personality development. Nevertheless, theorizing about *whole* persons becomes problematic using this line of research. Humans are more than the embodiment of dispositional traits. Cantor (1990), for example, strongly opposed the idea that people simply "have" personalities and noted that what they "do" was often overlooked. What people try to do within their own unique contexts and situations influences the person they are and want to become. Personality

researchers need to account for the ways in which personal characteristics and active processes shape a person's world, and how, in turn, these interactions influence social cognitions and the personal meanings people construct (Markus, 2004). Idiographic research, describing individual differences rather than generalizing across populations, will play an important role in advancing current theories of adult personality development. Furthermore, by moving even more toward an *idiothetic* approach (Lamiell, 1981), combining idiographic (i.e., individual trajectories) with nomothetic (i.e., generalize across persons) methodological techniques (Nesselrode, 1990), scientists can provide a more accurate accounting of these interactions and outcomes.

Need for an Integrative Framework

Friction emerged in the field because of incongruities in the domains studied, frameworks applied, and methodologies used. These incongruities sparked years of debate as to whether personality was consistent or capable of change. Today, researchers have moved toward a more integrative perspective of personality, one that accounts for and clearly describes the whole person. Current personality researchers need integrative definitions and frameworks that allow for a full and rich accounting of individuals as unique whole persons. McAdams and Pals (2006) proposed five principles (referred to as the “New Big Five”) to facilitate this integration. These principles include accounting for the dynamics that take place between (a) an individual's unique patterning of dispositional traits, (b) the characteristic ways in which individuals adapt to the world, (c) the themes individuals use in life narratives, (d) the evolutionary demands placed on the human species, and (e) the culture in which these demands are embedded. In addition, Hooker and McAdams (2003) developed the integrative *six-foci model* of personality; the emergence of this model (Hooker & McAdams, 2003), in addition to the “New Big Five” principles (McAdams & Pals, 2006), hold promise for nudging the conversation toward an amicable resolution.

Theories of Adult Personality Development

We have learned much about how structural and contextual factors (e.g., socioeconomic status) influence human adaptation. We know less, however, about how dynamic transactions between individuals, person-related variables, and different types of supporting or constraining environments shape human development. Knowing an individual's personality type and the ways in which she or he responds to specific contexts and social situations provides important information about health-related behaviors across the life span (e.g., social support, coping strategies, exercise, and nutrition). This information becomes especially important to later life development when the cumulative effects of these transactions become most pronounced.

Originators of Seminal Ideas

William James (1890), the founder of American psychology, stated “personality is set like plaster by age 30” (p. 126), which implied that personality did not develop beyond early adulthood. Many preeminent scholars, such as Jung (1933), Erikson (1959), and Labouvie-Vief (1982), disagreed with this line of thinking and developed theoretical frameworks for understanding personality development throughout adulthood. Jung (1933), for example, emphasized self-preoccupation and self-discovery as age-graded

developmental tasks extending beyond childhood. Erikson (1959) developed an eight-stage model of psychosocial development linking development to age-related tasks and psychosocial crises; he was the first to propose a model of development that spanned from infancy to old age. He also coined the term *generativity*, or one's concern of establishing and guiding the next generation, which emerges in middle to later adulthood. We will discuss this concept in detail later in the chapter. Finally, Labouvie-Vief (1982) extended Piagetian theory into the adult years. More specifically, she refuted the notion that abstract skills first emerged in adolescence and were indicative of cognitive maturation. Instead, she has argued that adults continue to build on these skills to develop further rational thought well into adulthood.

The work of these early scholars provided a catalyst for the continued empirical study of personality development beyond childhood. Bernice Neugarten, another pioneer of gerontological research, also challenged researchers to reconsider traditional views of aging. She, along with University of Chicago colleagues such as Robert Havighurst, launched the Kansas City Studies of Adult Life, in which they explored age norms and constraints. She drew attention to the variability of life patterns, expectations, timing, and timetables by introducing concepts such as "social clocks" and noted that chronological age can be a poor indicator of biological, psychological or social age (Neugarten, 1996; Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976). The collected work of Neugarten (1968, 1979, 1996) highlights a contextual and sociocultural perspective in which both social roles and the sequencing of life events influence normative adult development into later life. Neugarten urged researchers in the field to challenge commonly held beliefs about adult development and how people age. Today, most life-span researchers of personality take for granted the once controversial notion that personality development extends beyond childhood. This new image of adults and the aging process opened doors to new lines of inquiry (see Caspi, 2000; Caspi, Bem & Elder, 1989; Light, Grigsby, & Blich, 1996; Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2001, 2003; Scarr & McCartney, 1983).

Problems and Controversial Issues

Personality has always been an elusive concept, which explains the inconsistencies in its various conceptualizations. These inconsistencies make interpreting research findings both challenging and confusing. Psychodynamic theorists, for example, explain behavior primarily in relation to personality structures formed early in childhood whereas behavioral theorists do so primarily in terms of an individual's cumulative experience. These different worldviews fueled an historic debate in the field of personality, providing the impetus for many contemporary personality researchers to move toward a more assimilated and balanced perspective. Personality research has currently moved toward integration, ever mindful of the contrasting sentiments that once disunited the field. In this section, we draw attention to some of the key debates.

Nature versus Nurture. Researchers in the 1970s, concerned about the limitations of the research approaches then in use, argued that environmental factors shaped personality and accounted for human behavior (e.g., Mischel, 1968, Fiske, 1974). Their critiques accentuated the differences between research programs, diminishing interest in personality as a science (West, 2003). Since then, major contributions to personality and psychological research have reinvigorated the field. Empirical evidence from dispositional trait research indicated that general consistencies in individual personality differences did exist, were stable, and could predict life outcomes (Hogan, Johnson, & Briggs, 1997;

Matthews, Deary, & Whiteman, 2003). Furthermore, evidence in support of the relative importance of genetic factors for certain traits emerged among older twins in the Swedish Adoption/Twin Study of Aging (Pedersen, Plomin, McClearn, & Friberg, 1988). Today, the study of dispositional traits continues to play a vital role in psychological research, becoming one of the most visible contributions of the personality psychology field.

The “Big Five” traits framework (i.e., openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—OCEAN) provides clarity and has thus been well received. Moreover, empirical evidence supports the universality and stability of these factor-analytically-derived global traits across all periods of the adult life span. Cross-cultural studies using the trait framework have corroborated these findings (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005). Even so, many researchers argue that personality psychology should offer more to the discipline of psychology. They specifically call for a more comprehensive framework that can provide in addition to clarity, the means for understanding the *whole* person throughout the life span (Hooker & McAdams, 2003; McAdams & Pals, 2006).

In response to an increasing awareness of this problem, the study of personality has moved toward adopting a general life span developmental approach (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Life-span developmental theorists examine both consistency and change in personality (or growth and decline) recognizing that processes of adaptation throughout one’s life span can result in wide variability in human development as individuals age. We will further highlight the complexity of ascertaining personality stability and change as we segue into methodological issues.

Theories, Methodologies, and Measures

Theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches influence what and how stability and change are measured. Incongruent theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches drove the schism that divided the field. Cumulative evidence indicated that personality traits were consistent over time when based on the stability of correlation coefficients (McCrae & Costa, 1999; Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000), yet critics argued that normative stability in personality traits should not be interpreted as a lack of individual change (Nesselrode, 1990). Semantic problems also muddled the discourse. Roberts, Walton, and Viechtbauer (2006), for example, found that key terms such as “stability” and “change” were used broadly despite being derived from different indices of continuity and change that were largely independent of each other (Block, 1981; Mortimer, Finch, & Kumka, 1982).

The field is moving away from the “stability versus change” debate and toward a more nuanced conception of change as an individual difference variable with its own distinct merit (Mroczek, Spiro, & Griffin, 2006). Longitudinal personality studies have often used rank-ordering as a means of measuring personality consistency despite the limited information this approach can provide. Rank-ordering can only provide information about an individual’s placement within a group when ranked on a specific outcome that is measured over time. Although many important personality studies have relied on this method (see Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000; see Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006), rank ordering is limited in what it can reveal about individual stability and change. An individual can maintain rank order consistency within a group, for example, despite experiencing significant individual changes not captured by the resulting correlation coefficients. Widespread reliance on repeated-measures means in longitudinal studies

has likely led some researchers to make stronger statements about personality stability than would have been warranted had they used a more progressive analytic technique.

Complex statistical models today, such as latent growth curve modeling or structural equation modeling, are more sophisticated than ever before, capable of measuring change with greater precision. These recent innovations keenly position researchers to advance knowledge of individual differences in personality change (McArdle, 1991; Nesselroade & Featherman, 1991; Nesselroade & Ram, 2004). Longitudinal studies are now capable of demonstrating that personality consistency and change, although conceptually and empirically independent of one another, do simultaneously exist (Roberts et al, 2006; Roberts, Helson, Klohnen, 2002). Incorporating these disparate synchronies into a single integrative framework has proved a challenge for the field.

An Integrative Framework

With the intent of accounting for both stability and change, Hooker and McAdams (2003) designed the *six-foci of personality* model of personality development. This model integrates personality processes and structures within a levels-of-analysis framework. It incorporates well-known trait and social-cognitive approaches, allowing for simultaneous examination of stability and change as well as structures and processes. Founded on Developmental Systems Theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992), this model emphasizes the plasticity, multidirectionality, and organizing properties of persons, which parallels life-span developmental psychology (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998). Consequently, the full complexity of personality as experienced by unique individuals is taken into consideration, which helps to explain how dynamic transactions between individual personalities and contexts continuously shape the contours of individual lives (e.g., see Mroczek & Spiro, 2003).

The Six Foci of Personality

Structures, Processes, and Levels of Analysis

The six foci represent an essential element of either a *structure* (i.e., trait, personal action construct, or life story) or a *process* (i.e., psychological states, self-regulation, or self-narration) in linked pairs that parallel one another on separate analytical planes. Structures are rooted in trait approaches whereas processes derive from the social-cognitive approaches.

These three paralleling structure-process pairs characterize each of the three levels of analysis. The levels represent the idea that *all* people fall on a continuum of a relatively universal set of traits (Level I); that particular goals and developmental tasks are relevant to *some*, but not all people (Level II); and that life stories are *unique* to each person (Level III) (Hooker & McAdams, 2003). This model reflects the current direction in the personality field by demonstrating that both idiographic and nomothetic approaches can be integrated into one personality framework (Hooker & McAdams, 2003). We organize our discussion of the model and of contemporary personality research along these three analytical planes.

Level One: Traits and States

Dispositional traits, a structure construct, accounts for broad consistencies in behavior across time and situations (e.g., agreeableness, neuroticism). States, a process construct,

include the intraindividual processes that bring about dynamic change (e.g., emotions, mood). Fleeson's (2001) research integrates both structure and process along the line of reasoning that if states represent a person's everchanging and on-going thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, then traits might be the most common type of state experienced across time and situations. Global traits reveal valuable information about a person and can be useful for understanding certain human behaviors, critics contend, however, that traits provide only general labels (McAdams, 1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006).

Traits. Costa and McCrae's (1980) five-factor model (FFM) of personality has been well received in the gerontological literature because of its clarity and extensive research on the universality and stability of global traits across the life span. As noted earlier, within the field of psychology, personality traits have arguably been one of the most recognizable contributions of the personality field (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Trait theorists maintain that the FFM traits remain virtually unchanged throughout the life span because of the stability of the biological origins from which they derive. Most personality scientists agree that stable global traits exert important influences on a person's sense of identity, but discussions become more contentious when topics turn to central issues such as whether traits comprise the core of personality or whether experiences (e.g., culture, social roles, and relationships) make substantial contributions to personality development.

Numerous studies (cf. McCrae & Costa, 1990) have revealed moderate to high levels of stability on the "Big Five" traits across periods spanning up to 30 years. Nevertheless, psychologists are beginning to question their assumptions about the stability of traits. Meta-analyses of personality trait research have revealed the simultaneous coexistence of both stability and change in traits (Roberts et al., 2006). These findings align with the tenets of life span developmental theory in that development occurs within biopsychosocial changes elicited by any combination of normative age-graded, history-graded, or non-normative life events.

Age-graded experiences such as starting a family or launching a career have been linked to mean level differences in "Big Five" traits when comparing younger and older adults. Roberts, O'Donnell, and Robins (2004), for example, found higher levels of trait conscientiousness and agreeableness expressed when individuals engaged in work or marriage-related goals compared to times when these goals were not pursued. These shifts in the expression of personality traits coincided with the respondents' specific goal pursuits. Similarly, Martin and Mroczek (2004) found lower levels of trait extroversion and agreeableness expressed during midlife when family and work overload were present compared to times when they were not. Negative affect, often correlated with trait neuroticism, showed a decreasing trend across midlife in another study in which positive affect showed the opposite trend (Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998). These findings draw attention to ways in which goals and life circumstances can influence the level of personality trait expressed, especially during midlife and beyond.

In general, neuroticism, extraversion and openness to experience tend to decrease with age (McCrae & Costa, 2003) whereas agreeableness and conscientiousness tend to increase throughout adulthood (McCrae & Costa, 2003; Mroczek & Spiro, 2003). Mroczek and Spiro (2003) also found a tendency toward increased emotional stability and social dominance that continued into old age. These studies, as well as studies on centenarians, indicate that traits are malleable even among the oldest old (Adkins, Martin, & Poon, 1996).

Roberts and DelVecchio (2000) report that trait stability appears to peak in middle

age, when most individuals have been able to assimilate more experiences into their identities and have achieved the ability to choose environments that fit well with their identities. This finding is also reflective of research regarding adults' ability to self-regulate; with age, individuals are more adept at emotion regulation and adjusting to life tasks. We will further address self-regulatory processes in a later section.

Helson, Jones, and Kwan (2002) proposed viewing personality as consistent yet adaptive to changing biological and environmental context. The five-factor model has limitations in predicting specific behaviors, especially with respect to describing an individual's contextualized life (McAdams, 1992). Models that focus exclusively on the first level of analysis create what McAdams (1992) termed a "psychology of the stranger," a psychology based only on what we need to know about a person when we know nothing about them at all. The "Big Five" model of personality is in prominent use today, despite falling short on the task of limning whole persons.

States. Moods, fatigue, hunger, and anxiety are a few of the constructs typically studied within this domain. States are transient processes involving short-term change. Because of the transitory nature of states, research methods must account for state's inherent lability. Researchers studying traits expect stability with minimal change (Nesselrode, 1987; Nesselrode & Featherman, 1991) in contrast to those studying affective states who expect them to display considerable change. Analyses of states require intensive, repeated measurements capable of capturing intraindividual variability. Inherent methodological challenges may explain the relative dearth of empirical literature on personality states juxtaposed to volumes on traits.

Despite methodological challenges, researchers studying moment-to-moment changes within individuals contend that this research provides valuable information. For example, a construct typically thought to be stable (i.e., temperament, traits), may reveal ordered patterns of change when using methodological approaches designed for its capture (Fleeson, 2001; Nesselrode, 1990). Fleeson (2001), for example, empirically demonstrated that, despite wide inter-individual variability, individuals report a full spectrum of behaviors for different traits when measured over a period of several weeks. His studies revealed that some individuals felt extroverted one day, but less so the next. Similarly, between-individual differences in levels of traits correlated with the daily frequencies of actions consistent with that trait (Fleeson, Malanos, & Achille, 2002). These studies demonstrate that research on states hold promise for capturing intraindividual personality processes, but also demonstrate the need for studies that track variability over long periods.

Level Two: Personal Action Constructs and Self-Regulatory Processes

Personal action constructs (PACs) represent an individual's goals, developmental tasks, and personal motivations (Little, 1983) contextualized within time, place, and social roles. *Self-regulatory processes* represent the parallel process construct situated on this second analytical plane. These processes (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectancy) relate to specific domains such as work or family (Bandura, 1997, Lachman, 2004) and serve as the means by which people actively direct their own lives (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Together, PACs and self-regulatory processes shed light on individual goals, strivings, and possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). To know a person well entails more than knowing a personality quotient; it means reconciling the difference between what a person sees as important—wants, goals, plans, and strivings—and the contexts and situations that

life provides (McAdams, 1992). PACs strongly affect the course of events and provide a candid portraiture of adult personality.

Personal Action Constructs. PACs represent the motivational aspects of human behavior embedded within time, place, and social role. PACs, defined as goal constructs, reflect certain states people seek to obtain, maintain, or avoid (Emmons, 1996). They exemplify what people want during particular times in specific domains; they are the strategies, plans, and defenses people use to secure longings and avoid detestations.

Individuals achieve outcomes via cognitive-behavioral strategies (e.g., self-regulatory processes), but only to the extent that contextual factors (e.g., person-environment interactions) tolerate such goals. Many researchers conceptualize motivation in terms of PACs or personal goals but differ in the terms used in their operationalization. Little's (1983) *personal projects*, Emmons' (1986) *personal strivings*, Markus's (1983) *possible selves* and Cantor's (1990) *life tasks* are just a few of the constructs currently serving as representatives of PACs. Each construct measures motivation from a slightly different perspective (i.e., level of abstraction or temporal frame), yet there are commonalities among them (Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2002). Each emphasizes individual motivations and directions of behavior (Allport, 1961; Emmons, 1986). These constructs remain malleable across the life span, existing within an organized hierarchical system of motivational structures (Emmons, 1986) and adapting in response to person-environment interactions. Researchers can capture the dynamic transactions that occur between cognitions, emotions and environments through PACs (see Mischel & Shoda, 1998).

Possible selves may prove to be one of the most promising new areas of inquiry in relation to PACs. They represent *hoped-for selves* (i.e., what people are trying to become) and *feared selves* (i.e., what people are afraid of becoming). These highly personalized images of a person provide insight into the incentives directing individuals toward goals they should pursue, avoid, or abandon. Possible selves tend to remain stable long enough to be measured with scales that are psychometrically sound (Hooker, 1999; Ryff, 1991), yet change in response to efforts at personal growth (Cross & Markus, 1991; Frazier et al., 2000; Hooker, 1992). Younger adults, for example, often envision a greater number of possible selves related to career, whereas older adults tend to envision greater numbers related to health (Cross & Markus, 1991). Possible selves change in correspondence with normative developmental tasks (Hooker, 1999) and in concert with the functions of Baltes and Baltes' (1990) selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) theory. As such, possible selves may play a key role in successful adult development.

Self-Regulatory Processes. Self-regulatory processes such as self-efficacy and sense of control (a construct associated with self-efficacy) have been studied extensively over the decades. Researchers in the field of adult development and aging have been particularly interested in sense of control (Langer & Rodin, 1976; Schulz, 1976) in relation to specific developmental domains and outcomes (Lachman, 1986; Lachman & Weaver, 1998). This line of research has produced numerous studies demonstrating a link between rates of mortality in institutionalized older adults and sense of personal control (Langer & Rodin, 1976; Eizenman, Nesselrode, Featherman, & Rowe, 1997). Feeling a sense of mastery has also been linked to the effectiveness of stress reduction strategies used by adults facing a complexity of midlife challenges (Lachman & Bertrand, 2001).

The most consistent finding regarding age differences in self-regulation pertains to studies on resilience. People maintain and regain levels of subjective well-being and adjust to life tasks more effectively as they age (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005). Self-

evaluation, emotion regulation, and goal setting are among the most potent of these self-regulatory processes (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005). Heckhausen's (2001) research, for example, draws attention to the way middle-aged adults use compensatory strategies and adaptive behaviors to maintain resilience in the face of age-related loss. Despite the increased likelihood of encountered instead of elicited experiences in old age, most older-aged adults maintain their sense of control and personal agency (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005).

The SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes & Carstensen, 1999; Freund & Baltes, 2000) explains the maintenance of self-regulation across the life span in terms of three processes—selection, optimization, and compensation—regarded by life-span researchers as the universal principles of developmental regulation. These universal adaptive processes include selecting goals or outcomes, optimizing the means to achieve these goals or outcomes, and compensating for loss so that successful outcomes can still be achieved (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). This model provides a general framework for understanding adaptive processes across the life span as well as across multiple domains. Baltes and Carstensen (1999), for example, applied the SOC model to the goal processes older adults use in their social relationships. They found that many older adults select goals related to maintaining family relationships, optimize these goals by investing more time in family relationships (compared to other types of relationships), and compensate for the loss of friendships and other relationships by maximizing salience of family ties.

Time abrogates from each of us resources once taken for granted. As such, aging brings with it the challenge of balancing potential resource gains (e.g., practical knowledge, material belongings) with those involving losses (i.e., physical decline). The strategic selection and pursuit of goals that maximize gains and minimize losses helps to enhance our ability to adapt as we age (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Riediger, Freund, & Baltes, 2005). Research on personal action constructs and the processes of self-regulation not only provide insight into adult personality development, but also play a key role in optimal aging.

Level Three: Life Story and Self-Narration Processes

Life stories are the internalized structures reflective of an individual's contextualized life; it is here that the narrative unfolds in kinship with experience and self-understanding. People create life stories by reconstructing the past and anticipating the future and in so doing, engender a sense of meaning, unity, and purpose in their lives. True to narrative form, these internalized stories give license to plots, characters, images, themes, and scenes, with each act of revision a window into self-understanding. Narrating the life story to others through remembering, reminiscing, or storytelling entails inducing certain social cognitive processes. Human individuality and the uniqueness of each individual will most likely to be revealed within this third level of the six-foci model.

Life Story. Life stories continually evolve as new themes within relationships emerge and interweave with changing plots and life settings. Consequently, identity and creation of self elicit empirical attention throughout the adulthood years (e.g., Labouvie-Vief et al., 1995; Whitbourne & Connolly, 1999). The life-narrative approach is an emergent field of study in the science of personality development. We can learn much about personality by discovering how and why individuals select and reconstruct experiences to align with present goals and perceptions as viewed through the lens of an uncertain but anticipated future. When woven together these richly textured threads create a unified and coherent

structure, what McAdam's (1995, 2006) christened the revitalizing life myth. These life myths facilitate the integration of life experiences into a coherent identity structure.

The life-narrative approach uses life stories to peer into personality and surmise the structures and processes that inhere in its core. The main characters in life stories represent idealizations of the self. Integrating these various aspects of self becomes a major challenge during middle and later adulthood when attention often turns toward creating a satisfying ending. When well crafted, endings provide the means through which self can leave a legacy and foster new beginnings. Life stories in middle and older adults have a clear quality of "giving birth to" a new generation, a notion essentially identical to generativity (Erikson, 1959; McAdams, 1995). Generativity marks the attempt to create an appealing story "ending," one that fosters new beginnings in generations to come. People derive personal meaning from being generative by constructing a life story or narrative that helps them create a particular identity (Whitbourne, 1999). The changing personality identity, as reflected in the conveyance of emotions in the narrative of a person's life story (e.g., from tragedy to resilience), is paramount to understanding the person. Life stories provide the means by which people prove to themselves and others that they have either changed or remained the same, identifying specific events to support their claims.

Whitbourne (1987), a pioneer in identity research, believes people construct their own ideas about how their lives should proceed. Her research on identity assimilation (i.e., using existing identity) and accommodation (i.e., adjusting existing identity) found that identity assimilation was used prominently among older adults but also that identity accommodation was more prominent among adults in their earlier years (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). Moreover, identity assimilation helped older adults minimize negativity, which also tended to be associated with maintaining and enhancing positive self-regard. In contrast, identity accommodation in older adults was associated with poor psychological health. The ability to integrate age-related changes into one's identity and maintain a positive view of self is crucial to aging successfully (Holahan, 2003; Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). This emergent field of identity development relies on life narratives, the internalized and evolving story that integrates past, present, and future into a coherent and vitalizing myth (McAdams, 1995, 2001). Self-narrative processes guide the telling of these stories.

Self-Narration Processes. Remembering, reminiscing, and storytelling evolve within the social contexts of people's everyday lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979), attesting to self's co-constructed nature. In essence, the audience either affirms or refutes who we think we are by their reactions to us during social interactions. These dynamic transactions subsequently influence the way the narrative evolves and how identities of both narrator and audience become co-constructed. Reciprocal interactions between autobiographical memories (i.e., long term memories) and self also influence the narrative process.

Current evidence suggests that differences exist between younger and older adults in relation to autobiographical memories. Older adults, for example, may be more likely to preserve self-relevant and emotionally intense memories than younger adults (Dijkstra & Kaup, 2005). Moreover, what a person remembers and tells about their personal history may change to align with current realities such as audience or current situational environment (Wilson & Ross, 2003). Autobiographical memories promote self-continuity, which can be important to goal-striving, self-knowledge, and well-being.

Contextual factors play a role in influencing a person's ability to secure an audience to listen to one's life story. Because memory is constructive, the narration of a person's

life history evolves through a dynamic process of interaction with social partners. Consequently, developmental level, audience, or social context may change the ways in which individuals tell their stories (Adams, Smith, Pasupathi & Vitolo, 2002; Bartlett, 1932; Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, & Rimmer, 1995; Pasupathi, 2001).

In summary, despite the complexity of the *six-foci model*, the advantages of relying on such a comprehensive model of personality development cannot be ignored. This model captures the simultaneous development of both stability and change as they operate in tandem to create a coherent sense of an embodied self that we can then present to world. This model also accounts for both perspectives of stability and change, providing a foundation for the development of a common language, which in turn will strengthen the science of adult personality (Hooker & McAdams, 2003).

The Importance of Personality

Gerontologists have identified health-related behaviors, such as maintenance of proper nutrition and daily exercise, as key determinants in one's ability to age optimally. Although demographic variables (e.g., education, socioeconomic status, or gender) may serve as key risk or protective factors in predicting certain health-related behaviors, the individual person within whom these factors reside is also a critical antecedent to successful aging. For example, the type of person one is (e.g., reliability, warmth) and what an individual is attempting to accomplish (i.e., personal goals) will likely influence most behavioral outcomes such as social support, coping strategies, stress, or exercise (Hooker & McAdams, 2003). Consequently, increased understanding of how personality interacts with behavior will enable us to predict health outcomes with improved accuracy. This notion links us back to the beginning of this chapter in which we proposed why personality matters. As we begin to conclude this chapter, we will continue to underscore the importance of personality, by focusing on how it affects health, well-being, and behavior.

Health. The idea that personality is strongly linked to health and longevity is long-standing (for reviews see Aldwin, Levenson, & Gilmer, 2004; Contrada, Cather, & O'Leary, 1999; Smith & Gallo, 2001). This line of empirical inquiry highlights the importance of having an understanding of the intersection between disease processes, personality, and aging (Siegler, 1989). The research in this area is broad and remains an important topic in personality psychology, health psychology, and behavioral medicine disciplines. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to include a review of all personality, health, and aging research, we will provide some evidence of the magnitude of these associations.

Early studies on personality and health previously relied on subjective measures, which made the interpretation of this association difficult (Costa & McCrae, 1987). Current studies, however, that focus on definitive methodological approaches, include prospective designs, and well-validated measures of both personality and health outcomes, provide a more objective assessment of identifying the influence personality can have on health (Smith & Spiro, 2002; Wilson et al., 2004). Researchers have examined this relationship in numerous studies, primarily relying on personality traits as predictors.

Previous research has established both neuroticism and conscientiousness as predictors of longevity, disease progression, and mortality (Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Wilson et al., 2004, 2005). Even after controlling for the confounding effects of socioeconomic status and lifestyle factors, older individuals who were more neurotic almost doubled

their risk of death (Wilson et al., 2004, 2005). Additionally, the more stable the pattern of neuroticism or increasing neuroticism over time, the greater the likelihood of compromised health in later life (Mroczek & Spiro, 2007; Wilson et al., 2004). High levels of conscientiousness, on the other hand, were strong predictors associated with survival and inversely related to all risky health-related behaviors (Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Weiss & Costa, 2004). More specifically, older adults with high conscientiousness scores cut their risk of death by half (Wilson et al., 2004).

Although neuroticism is associated with poorer health outcomes, we should not discount the potential beneficial effects of such a common personality trait. For example, high trait anxiety (similar to neuroticism) was associated with an increased risk of non-accidental death in later life, despite its association with a decreased risk of accidents and accidental death in early adulthood (Lee, Wadsworth, & Hotopf, 2005). Theoretically, neuroticism is indicative of increased sensitivity and fear of potentially dangerous situations, thereby reducing the risk of accidental death early in life. Finally, the direction of change in neuroticism, particularly if it continues to increase over time, may be more important in predicting mortality than simply possessing this particular trait (Mroczek & Spiro, 2007).

Personality traits are also strong antecedents to additional health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease. For example, hostility assessed during late adolescence was associated with increased likelihood of smoking, excessive alcohol intake, and higher depression up to 30 years later (Siegler et al. 2003). Interest in this area grew from research on Type A and Type B personalities in which hostile Type A behavior patterns were linked to coronary disease (see Friedman & Rosenman, 1974) and research into this phenomenon continues to flourish (see Smith & Spiro, 2002). Finally, there is additional evidence that personality traits may also be associated with specific chronic conditions and other lifestyle choices such as tobacco use (Munafo & Black, 2007).

Although these findings indicate that personality traits have a stable and cumulative effect on both health and longevity, disentangling a direct causal pathway between personality and health can be challenging. Research that includes nonlinear effects of personality traits as well as the within-person variability (rather than focusing on average effects) is necessary to clarify these relationships. Because the majority of empirical results exploring the relationship between personality and health have relied primarily on trait measures of personality, we encourage readers to also consider the role that personality processes (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, goals) likely play in important health outcomes. For example, mastery and sense of coherence are associated with lower rates of mortality from all causes, even after adjusting for chronic physical disease (Surtees et al, 2006).

Well-Being. The importance of personality processes and health is evident in psychological well-being outcomes. The fact that unique people faced with diverse life circumstances claim to experience similar levels of well-being, highlights the complexity of analyzing individual well-being. Markus, Ryff, Curhan, and Palmersheim (2004) suggest that well-being is intimately tied to people's understanding of themselves, their actions, and their places in the world. Additionally, their perception of the world is determined by the opportunities and constraints associated with their individual lives. Well-being reflects and requires the sense that one fits in, belongs, or is a member in good standing in some set of communities, so any measurement of well-being may also require an assessment of these contexts. Most midlife Americans believe that social relations and health are necessary aspects of a good middle and future life (Markus, Ryff, Curhan, & Palmersheim, 2004). Two other concepts they reported as central to well-being included

developing aspects of the self (e.g., loving the self, pursuing goals, experiencing autonomy) and enjoying life as it progresses (Markus, Ryff, Curhan, & Palmersheim, 2004).

Multiple studies have demonstrated that there is a minimal decrease in life satisfaction and subjective well-being in old age (Diener & Suh, 1998; Kunzmann, Little, & Smith, 2000). Because the likelihood of experiencing a chronic condition or decline in physical functioning increases with age, the stability of subjective well-being is an interesting phenomenon. This finding highlights the role of developing aspects of the self, self-regulation and resilience to achieving successful aging. Having a sense of coherence, or an integrated self, is an important element to well-being in older adults (Schneider, Driesch, Kruse, Nehen, & Heuft, 2006) and may offset age-related losses.

Ryff (1989, 1991) has been a pioneer in research on well-being in adulthood. Her work has resulted in the identification of six dimensions of psychological well-being for adults: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Distinctive personality traits have been associated with each aspect of well-being; for example, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and purpose in life were linked with neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). Other personality traits (i.e., optimism, extraversion) are strong predictors of most components of well-being (Diener & Lucas, 1999; McGregor & Little, 1998; Wilson et al., 2005). In fact, positive affect has predicted survival up to six decades later in life (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen., 2001).

The effects of personality disorders may also be useful in demonstrating how crucial a well-functioning personality is for mental health and well-being (Widiger, Verheul, & Wim vanden Brink, 1999). It has been argued that mental health symptoms are an extreme manifestation of normal personality traits (Claridge & Davis, 2003). When personality traits become maladaptive and inflexible, it can result in significant functional impairment and subjective distress. In this scenario, one may need clinical intervention to alleviate this distress. This highlights the value of a malleable versus rigid personality to achieve mental health.

Some research suggests a general continuity of personality characteristics across the life span, with some decline in impulsivity (Molinari & Krunik, 1999) and potential decline in personality disorders in adulthood compared to adolescence (Johnson et al., 2000). This is reflective of the general trends for better emotion and self-regulation with age. Similar to research on physical health outcomes, however, the association between psychological wellness and personality is strong, but also quite complex.

Counseling and Adult Learning

Personality can play an important role in counseling and adult learning domains. Individuals' future goals (such as their possible selves) are one specific aspect of personality that demonstrate potential for positive effects on both counseling and adult learning. As described previously in the chapter, possible selves are a potentially useful motivational tool for affecting change in individuals. A valuable feature of the possible selves construct is the way it links motivational, cognitive, and emotional self-systems. When an individual's goals for the future are represented as possible selves, one may be more motivated to work toward this goal (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In addition, one's ability to select and pursue goals is closely tied to emotions, which in turn can guide individual daily action (Hooker, 1999).

Researchers have already begun integrating the use of possible selves into such fields as occupational counseling, school achievement, adult learning, and substance abuse

counseling with some preliminary success (Martz, 2001; Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002; Packard & Nguyen, 2003). The need for ongoing, future research regarding this construct and its usefulness in improving the quality of human lives is still necessary. Counselors and therapists, for example, might obtain more insight into their clients' distress by eliciting their possible selves and self-regulatory processes (Dunkel, Kelts, & Coon, 2006). Additionally, they might be able to better motivate clients to adhere to treatment plans if they had a clearer understanding of their clients' volitional processes. Future studies designed to explore the practicality and usefulness of integrating this construct into counseling and clinical domains are needed (Allen, Woolfolk, Gara, & Apter, 1996).

Other lines of research are exploring how possible selves may be useful in adult learning (Cox, 2006; Fletcher, 2007). Because the attainment of possible selves occurs in a social context, Fletcher (2007) asserts that mentoring relationships are one means of helping individuals reach their goals. Mentors can help adult learners create a more detailed and well-defined possible self to motivate individuals toward more purposeful and intentional behavior. Possible selves are particularly useful in this domain because they enable people to see and articulate a vision of who they are, who they want to become, as well as how, and what they want to learn.

Summary and Future Directions

As emphasized throughout this chapter, personality matters. It is a crucial human element and can provide insight into human behavior. Additionally, personality is a multifaceted construct. It encompasses an individual's unique enduring traits, ephemeral states, goal processes, self-regulation, integrative life stories, and self-narration processes. Each of these features is represented in the six-foci approach to understanding personality, which provides a useful model for addressing the complexity of personality science. Because the discipline of personality is so expansive, we were unable to address all areas of the field, however, we provided ample evidence that each element of personality plays a vital role in optimal aging and that both personality stability and change are universal aspects of personality.

The field of personality and adult development is flourishing and we anticipate that it will continue to thrive, in part because it shows promise as an area in which adults have the potential for growth well into later life. Through midlife and beyond, adults are capable of striving for and experiencing gains in integrity, self-transcendence, and wisdom, as well as creating and attaining personal goals to promote optimal aging across the life span. Personality variables are a driving force behind these gains. Studying personality with a triangulated approach and from a life span developmental perspective will allow us to continue to answer interesting questions about how we change, learn, develop, or even remain the same over time.

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