

script or subconsciously modulates his voice to the ambient noise. There must be a mediating process.

This does not imply that identifying the relation between entering a library and lowering one's voice is a trivial issue. On the contrary, it can be an example of a functional relation between elements in the environment and behaviour and qualifies as an explanation (*explanans*) at that level of analysis while being something that needs explanation (*explanandum*) at another level. One could understand personality as an emerging property that captures how

individuals differ in the way they choose or shape, respond to and are shaped by their environments (Perugini, Costantini, Hughes, & De Houwer, 2015). The question is how this happens; that is, what are the mediating processes? This is the 'cognitive' level of analysis. It can be very enlightening and exciting and might identify one or more explanations. There are no reasons that different levels of analysis must be in opposition to one another. On the contrary, we believe there is a lot to gain from distinguishing different levels of analysis and trying to bridge them.

## The Situation Through an Interpersonal Lens

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*Abstract: We focus on three of the Rauthmann et al. assertions with which we agree: (i) psychology needs guiding principles of what situations are and how they operate, (ii) we should tailor different situational taxonomies to our research needs and (iii) psychological experiences of situations matter. These assertions are embodied in the 'interpersonal situation', a fundamental orienting construct of interpersonal theory, providing an interactional-dynamic perspective on the situation that is variable-centred and dimensional, focuses on characteristics of situations, synthesizes objective and subjective perspectives, and is applicable to multi-method, multi-informant, multi-timescale assessment. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology*

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) synthesize a comprehensive general framework for conceptualizing and studying situations that integrates objective and subjective perspectives and accounts for inter-individual and intra-individual differences in situation perception. There are many points of entry, and limited space to comment. We focus on three key assertions, with which we agree: (i) psychology needs guiding principles of what situations are and how they operate, (ii) we should tailor different situational taxonomies to our research needs and (iii) psychological experiences of situations matter.

Traditional conceptualizations of personality traits have emphasized stability and cross-situational generality; thus, research has prioritized studying the structure of between-person differences (Fleeson, 2012). In contrast, clinical theories of personality functioning and intervention often describe dynamic within-person processes (Beck, Freeman, & Davis, 2004; Clarkin, Yeomans, & Kernberg, 2006; Pincus & Wright, 2011) that involve transactions between people and the situational contexts within which their behaviours/symptoms emerge (Pincus, Lukowitsky, Wright, & Eichler, 2009).

We suggest that the DIAMOND taxonomy (Rauthmann et al., 2014) could be fruitfully buttressed by contemporary interpersonal theory and assessment (Pincus, 2005; Pincus & Ansell, 2013; Wiggins, 2003). Interpersonal theory asserts that (i) situations involving two or more people (proximal or mentally represented) are among the strongest situations we experience and (ii) the important psychological characteristics of these situations are the perception of others' agentic

(dominant–submissive) and communal (warm–cold) behaviours in relation to the self within and across social interactions. This framework can be used empirically to contextualize cognitive, behavioural and affective dynamics across a variety of timescales unfolding in daily life and across the lifespan (Ram et al., 2014; Roche, Pincus, Rebar, Conroy, & Ram, 2014). Moreover, this interpersonal lens on situations embodies many of the Rauthmann et al. recommendations. It is an interactional-dynamic perspective (see their Table 2) that is variable-centred and dimensional (Wiggins, 1979, 1991), focuses on characteristics (i.e. perceived cues) of situations (Roche, Pincus, Hyde, Conroy, & Ram, 2013), synthesizes objective and subjective perspectives (Hopwood, Wright, Ansell, & Pincus, 2013; Lukowitsky & Pincus, 2011), and is applicable to multi-method, multi-informant, multi-timescale assessment *in situ*, *juxta situm* or *ex situ* (Pincus et al., 2014).

The *interpersonal situation* is a fundamental orienting construct in interpersonal theory (Hopwood, Pincus, & Wright, in press; Sullivan, 1953). Pincus and Ansell (2003) summarized the interpersonal situation as 'the experience of a pattern of relating self with other associated with varying levels of anxiety (or security) in which learning takes place that influences the development of self-concept and social behavior' (p. 210). Therefore, it is the dynamically unfolding context in which social learning takes place across the lifespan, promoting personality organization, development and adjustment. Interactions with others develop into increasingly complex patterns of interpersonal experience that are encoded in memory, giving rise to mental representations

of self and others as well as to enduring patterns of adaptive or disturbed interpersonal relating. Individual variation in learning occurs because of transactions between the developing person's level of cognitive maturation and the facilitative or toxic characteristics of the interpersonal situations encountered. In both proximal interactions and mental representation, the affective valence associated with an interpersonal situation is a function of one's ability to satisfy basic motives for interpersonal security and self-esteem. When needs for security and self-esteem are met, the transaction is pleasant and the behaviour is reinforced; when these needs are frustrated, it is unpleasant, prompting dysregulation and distress and a need to cope and adapt.

In Figure 1, we present a model of the interpersonal situation (Hopwood et al., in press) that is highly similar in structure to Figure 1 of Rauthmann et al. It incorporates dimensional circumplex models of interpersonal behaviour and affect to account for the structure of interpersonal situations. Both self and other are depicted, and both include their own self and affect systems. The *self-system* is organized by underlying agentic and communal interpersonal motives (Grosse-Holtforth, Thomas, & Caspar, 2011; Horowitz et al., 2006) that lead to interpersonal behavioural styles, aversions, problems and capabilities via social learning. Identity, self-concept and self-worth vary according to the degree to which interpersonal motives are satisfied. The *affect system*, which is structured by affective arousal and valence (Posner, Russell, & Peterson, 2005), has a highly sensitive and dynamic relationship with the self-system that is indicated by the bidirectional arrows between the interpersonal and affective circles within the self and the other. For instance, emotional experiences provide critical feedback

regarding motive satisfaction that can colour and intensify or dull situation perception and behaviour in response. In turn, interpersonal behaviour modulates affective experiences via the achievement of interpersonal goals.

The *interpersonal field* encapsulates the relationship between the self and other. Each person's independent perceptions of self (curved arrows) and other (unidirectional arrows) are represented as inputs, perceived in terms of their agentic and communal behaviours and impacts. The specific behaviours enacted within the field (which are simultaneously output and input) are indicated by the bidirectional arrow between self and other. Overall, the integration of structure and process of the interpersonal field is best captured by the entirety of the interpersonal situation as indicated by the box outlining the figure. Perceptual processes, as indicated by arrows in Figure 1, moderate the functioning of the self-system, affect system and behaviour.

The interpersonal situation inherently represents an interactional-dynamic perspective on persons and situations. It provides an organizing theory based on empirically validated trait structures (interpersonal and affect circles) and empirically validated dynamic interpersonal processes (reciprocal patterns/complementarity—see Sadler, Ethier, & Woody, 2011). Research using the interpersonal situation framework (e.g. Roche, Pincus, Conroy, Hyde, & Ram, 2013; Roche et al., 2013; Roche et al., 2014; Sadler, Ethier, Gunn, Duong, & Woody, 2009; Wang et al., 2014) specifies inputs, mediators, and outputs of clinical interest and importance and provides a systematic lexicon to organize objective and subjective perspectives (Heck & Pincus, 2001; Lukowitsky & Pincus, 2011). We encourage future research to employ the interpersonal framework in the integrative study of persons and situations.

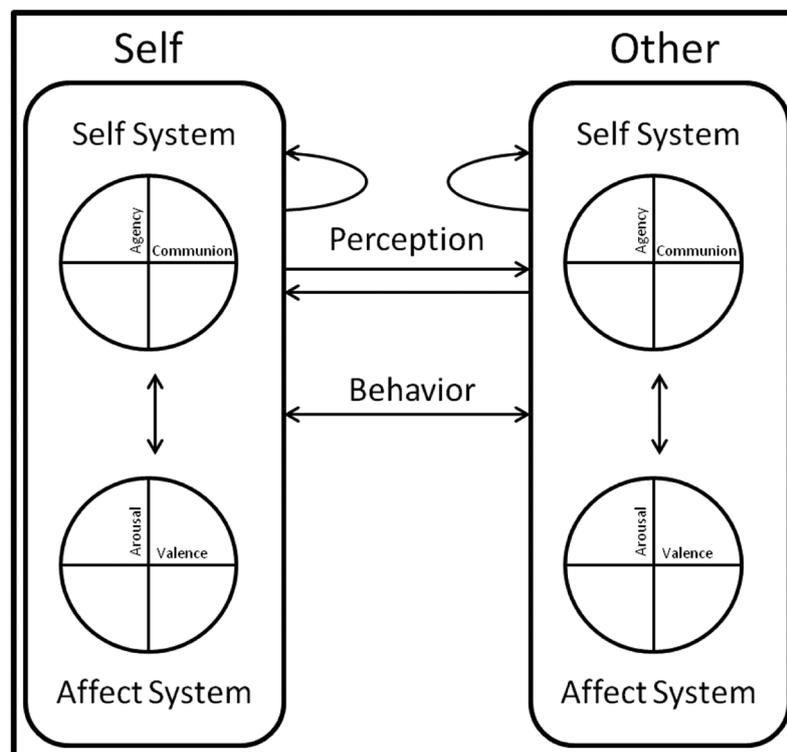


Figure 1. The interpersonal situation.