

## Conceptualizing and assessing personality: New approaches to fundamental questions

We propose an expert meeting on new ways of representing and assessing personality. We hope that a meeting joining researchers who focus on the a) conceptualization and b) assessment of personality will allow for a multi-perspective debate on some of the fundamental questions of current personality research. The proposed workshop will be a collaboration between the EAPP and the European Association of Psychological Assessment (EAPA, represented by Matthias Ziegler, Johnny Fontaine and Samuel Greiff) and will entail a joint special issue of their respective journals, European Journal of Personality (EJP) and the European Journal of Psychological Assessment (EJPA).

### Background and goals of the expert meeting

Having allowed for an accumulating body of robust findings, the paradigm of broad and short-term static personality traits, represented most prototypically by the Big Five, has served personality research well. Among other things, we know beyond reasonable doubt that:

- Individual differences in thinking, feeling, behaving and wanting coalesce into pervasive patterns, with broader patterns breaking down into more specific patterns;
- These patterns are relatively and increasingly stable from childhood to at least middle adulthood, with normative changes towards greater social adaptiveness;
- Their variability is moderately reflective of genetic differences between individuals, only modestly reflective of what whatever in childhood tends to make siblings alike, and robustly linked to few, if any, specific environmental variables/genetic variants;
- Their variance is robustly if weakly linked with almost any life outcome such that desirable traits go with desirable outcomes.

However, there are several important novel directions for the currently dominant paradigm to develop. At the proposed expert meeting, we will focus on two of these.

1. The mechanisms that underlie the phenomena described above are mostly not understood. For instance, the patterns (traits) themselves need to be explained: *why* tendencies to feel, think, behave and want in particular ways coalesce and vary over time and across situations in the way they do? Baumert and colleagues (2017) distinguished between correspondence and emergence, but work is needed on outlining the specific testable hypotheses that follow from either type of explanation and what kinds of data are required for testing them. Do we need experiments, intensive time-series data, qualitative data, or just more of typical questionnaire data? Which kinds of statistical models are required for representing such data? Also, a case could be made that mathematically formalized conceptual models (as opposed to loose verbal descriptions currently embraced) could facilitate scientific progress. If so, could computational models help? And what form should such models take? These are questions that ought to involve both personality theorists and methodologists. **As one outcome, the proposed meeting will provide a tentative list of concrete suggestions as to how empirical research could progress to distinguish between the correspondence and emergence explanations of trait coalescence.**
2. The ‘coarseness’ of the broad self-report trait dimensions may have started to limit our ability to comprehensively describe the development and life-course associations of personality. Desirable traits tend to go with desirable outcomes as far as traits such as Big Five are concerned, but why do they do so and is there more to be learned? Some

researchers may wish to explore more molecular levels of self-report data (referred to variously as *facets*, *aspects*, or *nuances*) but empirically based taxonomies for these levels are yet to be established (e.g., there is no widely accepted comprehensive system of facets), posing a major obstacle. Delineating such taxonomies is likely to require very large datasets in terms of measured characteristics (in order to avoid being constrained by existing pre-conceptions) and thereby (to allow for robust findings) large samples; this almost inevitably presumes collaborative, multi-lab efforts. Other researchers may prefer theoretically motivated (rational) personality unit taxonomies (e.g., based on functional analyses). Yet other researchers may prefer to move beyond questionnaire self-reports and harness advances in online data collection, mobile/wearable technologies, textual analysis and other methods (collectively called Big Data) to capture personality variation. These approaches do not only require advanced tools for data processing (for collection and analysis), but also need a solid conceptual basis: what constitutes personality in such data and how should these operationalizations be linked with other approaches to personality? For example, should personality in Big Data be thought of as corresponding to the properties which correlate most with self-reported Big Five scales, or does this conception unnecessarily constrain our ability to use Big Data in personality research? **An intended outcome of the proposed meeting will be to provide a tentative list of concrete suggestions as to how empirical research could better delineate more fine-grained representations and move personality representations beyond self-report data. The latter should especially be informative with regard to measurement questions. Another desirable outcome of the meeting would be collaborative projects between the participants.**

## Participants

This is a tentative list of participants, grouped by topics (potential participants will be approached sequentially per topic). The list includes both younger and more senior researchers and spans several countries.

Anna Baumert (Max-Planck-Institute for Research on Collective Goods), Małgosia Fajkowska (Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities) (burning conceptual questions regarding personality trait coalescence)

Dustin Wood (University of Alabama) (functionalist approaches to creating novel personality representations)

David Condon and William Revelle (Northwestern University) (collecting big self-report data and using it to elucidate personality models; SAPA project)

Michal Kosinski, Sandra Matz (Stanford University), Samuel Gosling, Gabriela Harari (University of Texas) (using big data beyond self-reports to understand personality processes)

Ryne Sherman (Florida Atlantic University), Cornelia Wrzus (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz) (experience sampling and wearable technology)

Giulio Costantini (University of Milan – Bicocca), Angelique Cramer (Tilburg University) ([experimental] network analyses to develop and test predictions regarding personality coalescence)

Sacha Epskamp, Eiko Fried (University of Amsterdam), Laura Bringmann (University of Groningen) (statistical models that allow for simultaneously decomposing time-series variables into

contemporaneous and lagged within-individual and between-individual associations; the scalability of such models to big data)

Daniel Briley, Brent Roberts (University of Illinois), Eric Turkheimer (University of Virginia), Elliot Tucker-Drob (University of Texas), René Mõttus (University of Edinburgh) (behavioural genetic and computational models for representing person-environment interplay and coalescence of traits)

Wendy Johnson (University of Edinburgh) (harnessing qualitative analyses for understanding trait coalescence and gene-environment interplay)

David Hill (University of Edinburgh) (quantitative genetic models for dissecting the aetiology of traits)

Aidan Wright (University of Pittsburgh), Johannes Zimmermann (Medizinische Hochschule Berlin) (using time-series data to understand psychopathology and what it can tell for general personality research)

Anna Brown (University of Kent), Eunike Wetzel (University of Konstanz), Ulf Bockenholt (Northwestern University), Sasha Chernyshenko (Business School Singapore) (modeling response sets and styles; innovative methods of test construction)

Delroy Paulhus (University of British Columbia), Richard Roberts (ACT Next), Martin Bäckström (Lund University), Beatrice Rammstedt (GESIS, Germany) (trait concepts and innovative approaches to measurement)

Roger Azevedo (North Carolina State University) (connecting different approaches to measurement (physiological, questionnaire, game based))

Stephane Vautier (University of Toulouse II) (alternative ideas regarding measurement)

Mitja Back (University of Münster) and Samuel Greiff (University of Luxembourg) as editors of EJP and EJPA.

## **Outcomes**

1. The expert meeting will be accompanied by a call for papers for a joint special issue of the EJP and EJPA on “Modern approaches to the conceptualization and assessment of personality traits”.

An outcome of the meeting would be lists of tentative suggestions for addressing the two overarching questions presented above; these lists could be published in the joint special issue. These lists could also be circulated in EJP- and EJPA-related social media.

Also, participants will be strongly encouraged to contribute to an empirical or non-empirical paper to this special issue, possibly based on their presentations and the feedback on this.

2. The meeting would facilitate collaborative research projects (e.g., large-scale data collections/analysis for a new generation of personality models, or multi-lab projects for testing hypotheses regarding trait coalescence, or development of computational models).

3. The meeting would stimulate increased cross-talk of personality and assessment researchers and might help to initiate a stronger connection of the EAPP and the EAPA and their two journals, respectively.

### **Organization and costs**

The meeting could be organized at the University of Edinburgh Department of Psychology (possibly in either June or September 2018, depending on which time suits most participants best). The meeting would last three days, with the last day dedicated to writing the outputs.

There would be costs for catering (the university has well-established routines for this) and accommodation (2 nights), and possibly for flights. No room rent would be required.

Assuming a final list of 20 attendees, a breakdown could be as follows:

	Cost in £ (pp)	Cost in £ (20 people)	Cost in € (20 people)
Lunches	25	500	588
Snacks	10	200	235
Accommodation*	180	3600	4235
Dinners	25	500	588
Contribution towards travel costs	250	5000	5882
<b>Total</b>			<b>€11528</b>

\* Because some participants will be local, no accommodation is needed for them. We included them in the costs, however, which gives us some leeway with costs elsewhere.

The EAPA has agreed on contributing €5,000. Therefore the total amount of costs applied for amounts to about €6,500.

René Mõttus (University of Edinburgh)  
David Condon (Northwestern University)  
Dustin Wood (University of Alabama)