

Author's Response

Further Integration of Social Psychology and Personality Psychology: Choice or Necessity?

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the Reynolds et al. paper was to advance understanding of the points of connection between personality and social psychology and to open up and stimulate new lines of theory and research. We believe that those reading the paper and commentaries, whether in agreement or disagreement, will find the experience thought-provoking and stimulating. Major issues at the heart of both fields have been identified, debated and discussed. In the paper, we sought to investigate whether the self-categorization theory of the self-process, and related work in personality psychology on dynamic interactionism, can provide a more integrated explanation of the person and behaviour. This task is complicated by the need to orient the arguments to personality and social psychology audiences and the complexity of the issues involved, many of which have long been debated in both fields. Our mission in this rejoinder is to build on these commentaries and to focus the debate and discussion on issues of substance. We, therefore, in the next few pages seek to highlight points of consensus, address misunderstandings and map out future directions.

COMMENTATORS' REACTIONS TO THE REYNOLDS ET AL. PAPER

The commentaries offer valuable insights and there is much to reflect on for our own work. There is agreement that the paper makes a valuable contribution. **Haslam and Reicher** recognise the importance of a non-reductionist analysis of individual differences and an

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approach that ‘acknowledges that people are formed in social relations and that the way people are formed shapes their social relations’. **Guimond, Chatard and Kang** agree that ‘self-categorization theory provides extremely important insights into the nature of individuality and personality’. They spell out, though, in more methodological and conceptual detail the role of social comparison and the emergent self-categorization (personal and social) on the self and trait assessments. Commentators also point out that the paper will ‘generate interesting new questions’ (**Donnellan & Robins**) and that it ‘goes far beyond the many instances of lip service that have been paid to interactionism since Cronbach’s (1957, 1975) plea to bridge the gap between the two disciplines of psychology’ (**Schmitt & Baumert**). **Brooks, Buhrmester and Swann** found much to agree with (‘we found very few individual passages with which we disagreed’) but wanted to know more about the self-structure in the points that were outlined. **Jackson, Hill and Roberts** agree with a more integrated approach but would have liked more recognition of the role of genes and personality traits, especially as a potential brake on ‘variability’ in the self-process as outlined in self-categorization theory (see also **Donnellan & Robins**).

The commentaries also raise a number of pertinent points in relation to methodology. Many of the comments, though, are as relevant to the paper as they are to many approaches within personality and social psychology. The limitations of self-report and the need for multi-method approaches are ones that have been emphasised on a number of occasions in the personality domain (e.g. test–retest, rank-order stability). Also the idea that personality responses should be assessed with respect to other behavioural outcomes is well-received (e.g. ‘health, achievement and relationship function’ see **Donnellan & Robins**). These ‘gold’ standards, though, in our view should be applied both to research that confirms the zeitgeist and to that which challenges it. It also seems that demands for these ‘gold’ standards grow louder where the social self is concerned.

Part of the issue, we believe, is difficulty in accepting that the social self is part of the ‘real’ self. Often the methods and measures that are used in existing personality work assume supremacy of one (e.g. individual) self and serve to reinforce one particular view of the person. In contrast to the views of some commentators, there is evidence that actual performance on intelligence-type measures (and not just self-report) are affected by whether one’s individual or social identity is salient (e.g. African American or Female; e.g. Steele & Aronson, 1995). These same patterns are observed on other cognitive and behavioural indicators (e.g. working memory capacity; see Schmader & Johns, 2003). Such findings confront the question of which is the real self and which is the real measure of ability (see **Guimond et al.**) – issues that are widely discussed in the paper.

Many other worthwhile points also are raised, all of which cannot be addressed in the space available in this rejoinder. We have instead identified a number of themes that emerge across all, or a number of, the commentaries that relate to the main ‘fault lines’ and points of controversy that exist. Below we describe each theme and then expand on each in turn. Our aim is to move beyond stereotypes and the recycling of old arguments (e.g. situationalism, denial of genes and dispositions) that have long characterised and impeded our understanding of the relationship between personality and social psychology.

THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING DYNAMIC INTERACTIONISM: WHAT IS ‘NEW’?

The commentators rightly point out that there is work in the personality field that has an explicit emphasis on culture, society and social roles (**Jackson et al.**) and there is wide

recognition that social contextual factors (the situation or environment) can affect perception, cognition and behaviour in important ways. While providing useful and worthwhile first steps, this existing work does not explain the process through which relevant aspects of the person's environment come to shape the mind and behaviour and vice versa. How is it that 'social context' comes to affect not only particular attitudes, motivations, emotions and cognitions, but also fundamentally shape who 'I' am (or who 'we' are) – at the relatively observable, behavioural level, but also at the level of the brain structure and function, and the molecular (epi)genetic level?

The contribution of the self-categorization perspective is in explaining such a process (or at least making a serious attempt at doing so). As the paper explains more fully, this contribution is particularly notable in three domains: the idea of the social self (being just as 'real' as the individual or personal self), the way in which fluidity in the self concept shapes understandings and interpretations of the 'environment' (i.e. what are the psychologically meaningful or relevant environmental or contextual cues) and the process of social influence (i.e. how such understandings come to be socially shared and re-interpreted). These points have implications for how personality psychology theorises about the nature of the person and psychological functioning.

In the commentaries social and group factors (culture, society, roles) at times are described as if they are part of the environment 'outside' the self and the functioning of the mind. As the Reynolds et al. paper outlines there is a large body of work that recognises that systems of meaning, shared rules, and theories about the world (e.g. cultural frameworks, group-based values and ideologies) develop within groups and are internalised, shaping the functioning of the mind and behaviour (e.g. see also Barrett, Mesquita, & Smith, 2010; Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Kitayama & Uskul, in press). It is widely accepted that such shared meanings define and impose structure or arbitrary form on the person which shapes his or her goals, what she/he attends to and sees, the way meaning is derived from experiences and events, and his or her behaviour.

As the paper highlights, in self-categorization theory 'shared' meanings (e.g. symbol systems) are not necessarily only the product of culture and cultural frameworks but emerge in social groupings more generally. It is recognised that society is comprised of both individuals and groups and therefore that people can self-categorise as an individual who is unique and different from others ('I' or personal self) and as a member of a social group ('we' or social self). It is also the case that as a result of a reality where individuals and groups are interacting in dynamic and interconnected ways, it makes sense that a person cannot only develop 'shared meanings' through their group memberships but that these can vary as their group memberships (or their defining aspects) also change. In this way, people are able to orient the self appropriately to the (potentially) dynamic features of the environment (see Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994, for a more detailed discussion).

A fundamental point highlighted in the paper is that once it is recognised that the self can be defined in relation to a sense of 'I' or 'we' and that such processes are responsive to dynamic aspects of reality, it is necessary to explain the fluidity in the self and when a particular self-categorization will come to the fore. It is argued that through the workings of the categorisation process the mind comes to determine which elements of the social context constitute the 'environment' at a given point in time. A specific situation (including the self) is given 'meaning' both as a function of the ongoing knowledge, experience, theories and so on (e.g. 'symbol systems') a person brings to the situation (perceiver readiness) and the features of the specific situation being cognised (normative and

comparative fit; for more detail see Turner et al., 1994). It is this process that the paper argues is of particular relevance to the personality field because it helps explain features of dynamic interactionism and the formation of the LSp or 'life space' (e.g. $B = f(PE) = (LSp)$; e.g. Lewin, 1952). Furthermore, the paper makes clear that this 'psychological' environment can be defined in ways that incorporate, and respond to, both individual and group aspects of the self.

Links between social categorisation (and comparative judgments of similarity and difference) and social influence also are explained in the paper. It is this process that explains why, when and how group aspects affect the mind and behaviour. The process of categorisation is at the heart of the self-categorization theory analysis of how certain understandings come to be socially shared (e.g. the development and internalisation of certain social meanings) and how they can come to be re-interpreted. Categorisation of the person and others as 'similar' opens up possibilities for these others to become an important source of information about the social world affecting the nature of particular attitudes and behaviours (e.g. social norms, values, beliefs). Through social influence others shape the functioning of the mind and the psychological resources a person uses to make sense of the world. It is in this way that Reynolds et al. argue that similar 'others' can come to shape the person in important ways leading to possible person change. Whether these changes are the product of 'repeated' exposure to particular settings or whether they are slow and incremental or immediate and dramatic is not at issue (see **Donnellan & Robins, Jackson et al.** and **Schmitt & Baumert**). The focus is on developing a theoretical analysis of the underlying processes at work.

THEME 2: A NON-REDUCTIONIST ANALYSIS OF STABILITY IN THE 'SELF-SYSTEM': WHEN IS THERE STABILITY AND WHEN IS THERE CHANGE AND WHAT IS THE EXPLANATORY PROCESS?

As Reynolds and colleagues point out, any discussion of stability and variability in the person confronts arguments surrounding the genetic 'essence' or 'core' of the person. We were indeed, right. A number of the commentators state that they are unsure about where 'existing' stability in the person is represented in the analysis offered by Reynolds et al. The commentators use different terminology to refer to this stability. Brookes et al. use terms such as 'stability in self-knowledge', and 'type of self-structure', **Schmitt and Baumert** discuss the 'long-term development of personality traits' and **Donnellan and Robins**, and **Jackson et al.** seek explicit recognition of genetically based factors in shaping traits and the person (dispositions, personality).

A number of the commentators seek to convince us that the genetic facts and the existence of a stable 'core' are undeniable. They point us in the direction of papers on the molecular psychology of personality and twin research. Although we have engaged with the relevant literature we cannot see any evidence of a simple, direct or strong relation between any given gene and personality, and behaviour in a given situation. Along these lines, Canli (2008) reports a move away from a focus on genes (e.g. genotype) in trying to explain self-reported personality and behaviour (e.g. phenotypes) because of small and difficult to replicate effects (despite over a decade of research; also see Krueger, South, Johnson, & Iacono, 2008). The emphasis is shifting to cognitive processes or isolated brain mechanisms such as attention, perception, memory and emotional arousal that are argued to be more proximally related to the genotype or phenotype. These types of studies and the

associated findings remain unclear and are still subject to debate. It is also the case that once the focus shifts to areas such as attention, perception, memory and emotional arousal, we find that these are undoubtedly affected by socially mediated processes (e.g. what is considered important in the environment and what is not). There is clearly much more work to be done at the intersection of these bodies of work.

The self-categorization analysis (and other related work) also makes us cautious with respect to conclusions that can be drawn from twin research. As outlined above, it is argued that shared meanings exist in particular groupings (e.g. cultures) and these affect people's attitudes, behaviour and actions in important co-ordinated ways. This analysis also argues that others who are defined as 'like us' or 'similar to us' are important agents of influence affecting attitudes, reactions, understandings and so on. These ideas in combination raise questions about the 'equal environment assumption' in twin research (an assumption that is central to twin methodology and statistical analyses and which has long been debated; Joseph, 2002).

We know that the existence of shared beliefs and expectations means that members of society (or groups within it) respond in similar ways on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, attractiveness, height and health (e.g. weight). Monozygotic (MZ) twins (even if raised apart) are likely to share these socially produced experiences and to be affected by them in similar ways especially given their similar or identical appearance. MZ twins (raised together and raised apart), therefore, share a more equal environment than dizygotic (DZ) twins raised together and apart.

On the matter of self-other similarity and influence one would expect MZ twins to have important processes of mutual influence at work in their own relationship (and also tensions for self-differentiation and uniqueness), especially perhaps when raised together. The impact of an identical versus non-identical sibling on the self, in conjunction with influence processes means that the environment for MZ and DZ twins raised together are in fact far from equivalent. Often also even if raised apart there are important points of contact between twins and these can continue across the life span, meaning that self-other influences may be stronger in MZ than DZ twin relationships. There is also emerging evidence that despite identical genes, gene expression can vary in important ways between MZ twins (Wong, Gottesman, & Petronis, 2005). There are complexities involved in these points but they offer explanations for similarity in personality traits that leave us less sanguine in relation to the evidence for the role of genes *per se*.

To add to the confusion, despite calls by commentators for the role of genes to be more explicit in the Reynolds et al. analysis, they state that a person can change in fundamental ways (including personality, traits and biology) as a function of their circumstances. There is a recognition that the relationship between biology and the context/environment is not necessarily one way and that an individual's experiences, and we would add the way they are 'interpreted and given meaning', can impact on both biology and traits. There is also recognition that while genetic factors are considered to play a role in explaining personality they 'are of course relatively distal influences on behaviour that transmit their effects through more proximal affective, motivational, physiological and social cognitive processes' (Donnellan & Robins). In the commentaries there is an emphasis on the gene-environment interaction and epigenetic processes as important directions for future enquiry (also discussed by Reynolds et al.). To some extent these arguments (e.g. the impact of genes as fact, the role of genes is distal, aspects of genes can change due to environment) point to the need for a theoretical framework that can explain both person stability and change (even at the molecular level) in ways that are less reductionistic (but at the same time do not discount genetic factors).

We agree there is self-continuity but our aim is to explain it in a way that incorporates both personal and social aspects of the self and is consistent and parsimonious with the variability that is evident. The focus of the Reynolds et al. paper is on explaining the process of how and when continuity and discontinuity of the self will occur. There can be continuity as a product of people (a) having unique characteristics and combinations of individual and collective experiences, (b) developing ongoing knowledge about the 'self' that is socially validated and interpreted, (c) building up knowledge about the world across the life span such that views formed earlier may affect those that form later, and (d) having relatively stable cultural and social circumstances. Much of such continuity is captured through the concept of perceiver readiness (as outlined by Reynolds et al.) without the need to 'reify a fixed personality structure', or for a pre-formed fixed self-concept or fixed relationships between category knowledge and attributes (e.g. boxology).

Through social processes, social norms and social identities it is argued in the paper that there should also be opportunities for continuity to be replaced by discontinuity. The implication is that if particular self-views become chronically salient for an individual (whether due to incremental or more instantaneous processes), one could expect an impact on the personality system. The centrality of these identity processes to the person and the degree to which it affects all aspects of his or her life will play a role in how dramatic one could expect the impact to be (e.g. radicalisation and extremism, see **Haslam & Reicher**).

There is much evidence in the personality field that can be (re-)interpreted in light of these points providing a more integrated analysis of self-continuity and self-change (e.g. Roberts & Caspi, 2003; Roberts & Jackson, 2008). At present, though, there is very little information gathered in the personality domain on group memberships, social identity, social norms and processes of social influence. Creative naturalistic and experimental studies are needed; ones that do not discount this stability (or reduce it only to genetic factors) but work to explain it as well as the variability that is observed.

THEME 3: THE (NON-)ORTHOGONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Many commentators suggest that understanding dispositions, traits and abilities may be orthogonal to Reynolds et al.'s main focus on explaining the self, identity and behaviour. Part of this issue surrounds terminology and definitions of personality as 'dispositions or genes' or 'traits that emerged across the life span' or 'self-structure'. There is a need for further systematic conceptual clarification of these fundamental concepts. Despite this issue, given the theory and research outlined in the Reynolds et al. paper and related work, such an orthogonal (and therefore mechanical) approach has in fact hindered, not helped, progress in both fields.

Calls for orthogonal trajectories of theory and research on the person and behaviour, in our view, look to the past and are at odds with (a) more dynamic models of the intersection between environment (ongoing as well as moment-to-moment), biology, traits and states (e.g. brain plasticity, sociogenomic model of personality), and (b) the evidence that core aspects of the person are, at least in part, a product of a person's social experiences and social relations (see **Guimond et al., Haslam & Reicher**). The emerging areas of interest in personality and social psychology are aimed at explaining how and why social context (or the environment) comes to impact on the person – areas where the points raised in the Reynolds et al. paper (and related work) are particularly relevant.

One clear example of the possibilities ahead is the emerging evidence on epigenetic processes 'where life experiences can moderate DNA methylation and therefore gene expression' (see Canli, 2008, p. 312). There has been much research in the area of stress and how the experiences of stress (e.g. maternal stress in rats) can turn on and off certain gene expression in offspring and that these effects can be transgenerational (e.g. Ogren & Lombroso, 2008). Krueger and Johnson (2008) highlight preliminary work that takes more of a dynamic interactionist view of the relationship between gene and environment where the two are not independent contributors but are mutually interdependent in explaining personality and behaviour. There is work that shows that the impact of genes on vulnerability to depression seems to be ameliorated by social support (e.g. Kaufman et al., 2004). Also in other research, findings suggest that self-rated religiousness can impact on the role of genetic factors in smoking behaviour (e.g. Timberlake et al., 2006). In addition, adolescents' perceptions of their parental relationship (level of conflict, regard) have been shown to impact on the relative importance of genetic and environmental factors in explaining positive emotionality (e.g. Krueger et al., 2008).

In light of such work, Krueger and Johnson (2008) argue that in thinking about 'environment' there needs to be greater focus on a person's 'psychological experience of the world' (see p. 298). Human beings do not respond to their environment in a passive, disengaged way, they are active agents (see also Bandura, 2001) who interpret their experiences and give them a particular self-aspect. It is also the case, as highlighted by Reynolds et al.'s discussions of the social self and social influence, that others 'similar to us' play an important part in establishing and making sense of one's circumstances (e.g. What situations are stressful and why? What do others 'like me' think I should do? How should 'we' behave? What is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour? How do others 'like me' respond and cope in this situation?). Is it really possible, then, to explore the 'psychological' environment and the impact on the person without factoring in how experiences are given 'meaning' and become socially validated? Is it possible to discuss the impact of parent-child relations, religiosity and social support (and related areas) on the person, without understanding social identities (e.g. role groups, sense of belonging), social norms, and social influence? Is it possible to explore the functioning of the mind (attention, perception, memory and emotional arousal) without understanding aspects of the self-process and what is attended to, when and why? In our view, it is at the very intersection between the self, identity and behaviour, and dispositions, traits and abilities, that important advances will be made.

IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD: MINDSETS AND METHODOLOGIES

Many of the commentators recognise that without viable models for how to investigate a more dynamic interactionist approach it will be difficult to move forward. Investigating the formation and workings of the self-process outlined in Reynolds et al. is difficult, not in the least because the organisms being studied often already have existing self-systems. Also much of the existing research is focused on the individual and is conducted where people typically live, work and play under relatively stable psychological and social conditions (stable experiences, stable societies, stable 'meanings', stable relationships, stable social influences) – a situation exacerbated by asking the same person to complete the same measure in similar social contexts. Given this, observed reliability in personality measures across time may reflect such situational invariance rather than being an indication of the 'real' self or 'core' of the person.

Making these points explicit gives us some clues on how to investigate further the self-categorization theory analysis as it relates to personality processes. The aim is to better understand both self-continuity and self-discontinuity and to do so it is necessary to investigate the (a) workings of the self-categorization process and the role of social comparison (at the individual and group level) and (b) interplay between group and personality processes.

Questions are raised about the extent to which the methods used by researchers produce or accentuate the stability they are seeking to investigate and explain. The commentators highlight that social comparison will impact on self-reported personality (e.g. the average person versus Nobel prize winner; see **Donnellan & Robins**) but fail to acknowledge that within current measures certain social comparisons also are made salient ('think of yourself across time and situations' or 'think of yourself compared to others who are the same gender and age as you'). If changing the frame of reference (e.g. 'compare yourself to others who are the same gender as you and you like', 'compare yourself to others who are the same gender as you and you dislike', 'compare yourself as an Australian to Americans'; see **Guimond et al.**) produces different self-views, what does this mean for the impact of the measure itself (and the social comparison that it invokes) in (re-)producing a particular outcome? Based on the workings of the self-categorization process, when asked to make similar comparisons similar self-views are likely to emerge. In this way, existing methods may enforce a view of the person only as an individual and certain stability by holding constant a particular social comparison or frame of reference (e.g. see **Guimond et al.**). Modifying these social comparison contexts (allowing for both individual and group comparisons) offers one avenue to investigate ideas that one's self views are always comparative and are the product of social categorisation processes at work.

To date also there has been limited engagement with the interplay between the group and personality processes. Much of the focus in social psychology, for example has been on demonstrating the distinction between the personal self and the social self and the impact on one's self-views and behaviours (see **Guimond et al.**). Less work has focused on the interdependence between these two levels of self-categorization and the way the nature of individual members may shape the group and the way the nature of the group may shape individual members in particular ways (see one-sided comment by **Brooks et al.**). In personality work, as the paper highlights, the impact of group life on the person has received scant attention and the underlying processes at work are under-conceptualised. More work is needed in these areas. Possible paths forward could include the following:

- More research along the lines already discussed, concerning the gene-environment 'interdependence' which includes an analysis of social identity processes, group norms, and social influences (e.g. religiosity and smoking; belonging and well-being).
- The use of longitudinal designs where both personality and social identity-related measures are included. It then will be possible not only to investigate 'fault lines' in a person's life that are more likely to have a significant impact on the person (e.g. promotion, divorce, illness, loss) but to investigate the interrelationship with associated changes in social identity, social support and sources of influence (see **Jackson et al.**'s call for an exploration of the 'crucial environments responsible for long-term change in personality').
- A closer exploration of group processes and intergroup relations (e.g. social protest, variations in social status, social change, system or regime change) that may create 'fault lines' (or not) in a person's life and as such come to have a more or less significant impact

on personhood and generate change. The impact could be varied and include producing changes to social identity (e.g. 'who we are' and 'who we are not') as well as shaping motivations to create change (e.g. through collective action). **Haslam and Reicher** focus on the radicalisation of groups and their leaders and the factors that explain self-selection into such settings. They outline the transformations that may occur for the person through joining, being a member of, and exiting such groups and how other aspects of the person (other identities) affect such processes. There are some indications that such avenues of research could be worthwhile. Agronick and Duncan (1998), for example, found that openness and ambition were personality traits that predicted women's level of involvement in the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s but also that openness and ambition increased as a function of involvement in the movement. It is possible that such changes at least in part are due to changes in identity for these women – that is changes in the social meaning of what it meant to be a woman compared to a man during this time of structural reform and social change for women.

These empirical ideas provide a possible starting point. What is on offer is a different analysis of the person, incorporating the personal self and social self and an explanation of processes that underpin both continuity and discontinuity. It requires rethinking many fundamental assumptions that underpin current approaches. In practice, while there are challenges in fully investigating these theoretical ideas, we believe much advance can be made with a different mindset and the creative use of existing and new methodologies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Engaging with the commentaries and writing this rejoinder have reinforced in our own minds that the task of further integration between personality and social psychology is a difficult one. There are important differences at work in approach, terminology and methods. Despite these differences, both fields (perhaps, more by default than design) have moved in directions where there now is more commonality in the research agenda. There is a (growing) shared interest in explaining how and when the social context or the 'environment' comes to impact on the person and behaviour and vice versa. There is also (growing) recognition of, and focus on, the 'environment' as psychologically apprehended by the perceiver in explaining the relationships between genes, traits, and behaviour. The Reynolds et al. paper outlines how dynamic interactionism and self-categorization theory contribute to understanding these same relationships. It is our view that for those who are serious about understanding the mind and behaviour, further integration of these bodies of work is not a matter of choice but of necessity.

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