Let's Get Together: Toward an Integration of Personality Psychology and Distinct Emotions Research

Eric J. Mercadante[1] , **Aaron C. Weidman**[2] , **and Jessica L. Tracy**[2]

[1]Management and Organizations Department, New York University Stern School of Business, and
[2]Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia

Abstract

Emotions play a prominent role in personality psychology, yet personality researchers most frequently study them as broad dimensions (e.g., negative affect) rather than distinct emotions (e.g., fear). We argue that a greater incorporation of distinct emotions into personality research would enrich our understanding of personality. We highlight four ways in which personality research can be expanded by considering distinct emotions as inputs driving personality processes, mediators and moderators of relationships between personality factors and life outcomes, and outputs of personality processes. We then discuss how a personality-based methodological approach might enhance distinct emotions research and highlight an area in which the integration of distinct emotions has already benefited personality science. We conclude by reviewing methodological tools that personality researchers can use to measure distinct emotions empirically.

Keywords

personality psychology, distinct emotions, affective science

The study of emotions has long been a central component of personality research. Consensually defined as brief states involving coordinated patterns of subjective feelings, nonverbal expressions, and physiological changes evoked by a specific situation (Keltner & Shiota, 2021), emotions have been considered an important part of personality since the field's inception (e.g., Allport, 1921). Indeed, scholars have defined personality as "a person's characteristic pattern of . . . thoughts, *feelings* [emphasis added], and motivation" (Baumert et al., 2017, p. 527) or as "relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, *feelings* [emphasis added], strivings, and behaviors that distinguish individuals from each other" (Bleidorn et al., 2021, p. 3). As these definitions indicate, personality psychology is more than the study of traits. In fact, a survey of personality psychologists found that numerous topics are frequently studied within personality science, including health, stress and coping, developmental changes after childhood, and other stable dispositions such as values (Tracy et al., 2009). Personality psychology is therefore best understood as a broad field aimed at understanding countless aspects of human life, including humans' rich emotional experiences.

Emotion spans both trait-like propensities to feel certain emotions over time and across situations, as well as transient emotional experiences (see Fig. 1). For both forms, we propose that emotion and personality exert bidirectional causal forces on each other. Emotions serve as (a) inputs of personality when emotional experiences influence personality processes, (b) mediators when emotions link personality to behavioral and life outcomes, (c) moderators when personality processes lead to different outcomes depending on the emotions they generate or act upon, and (d) outputs when emotional experiences result from personality processes.

Distinct emotions such as anger, amusement, disgust, and pride are often studied as evolved, functional adaptations designed to solve salient problems or take

Corresponding Author:
Eric J. Mercadante, New York University Stern School of Business
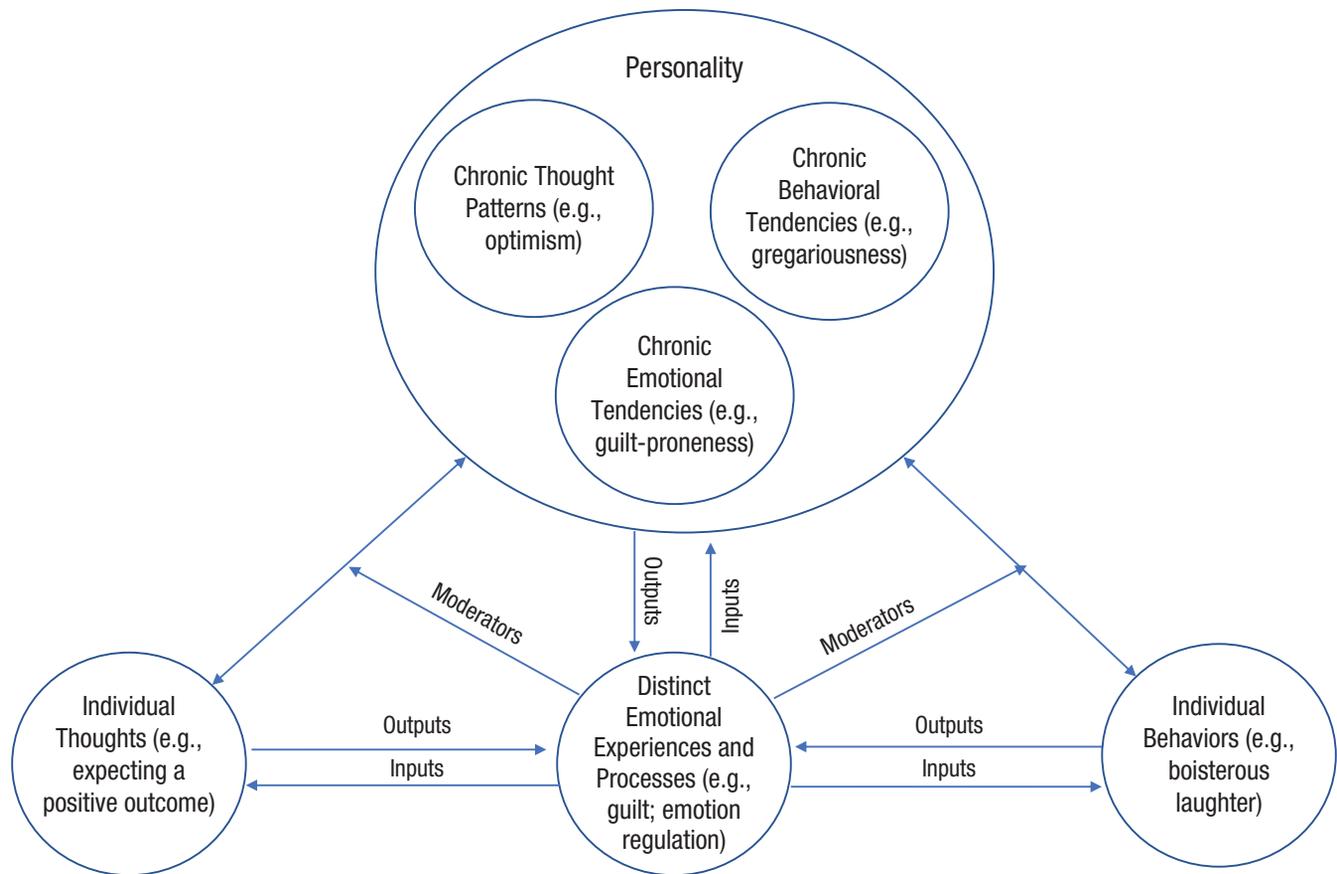Email: ejm512@nyu.edu

Fig. 1. The relationship between personality and emotions. The arrows represent causal relationships between nodes. Distinct emotions serve as mediators when a psychological process travels along the "outputs" path and then along one of the "inputs" paths. Unlabeled arrows indicate paths between nodes in the model that are unrelated to emotion.

advantage of opportunities by eliciting unique patterns of subjective feelings, physiological changes, neural activity, cognitive appraisals, and behaviors (Tracy, 2014). For example, feelings of anger precipitate behaviors such as administering punishments that motivate the target of anger to behave differently (Sell et al., 2009). Feelings of disgust motivate avoidance of potential toxicity (Oaten et al., 2009). Feelings of pride motivate people to work strategically toward goals (Williams & DeSteno, 2008) or cheat to get ahead (Mercadante & Tracy, 2022). Feelings of fear cause people to search for and avoid situational threats (Susskind et al., 2008). Feelings of gratitude facilitate cooperation and relationship formation (Algoe et al., 2013). The view that distinct emotions help regulate behavior relevant to countless interpersonal and intrapsychic goals has become widespread in affective science (Weidman et al., 2017). One might therefore expect that personality research would regularly examine how distinct emotions shape the patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that constitute personality.

Surprisingly, however, distinct emotions are often neglected within contemporary personality psychology. Only two chapters of the fourth edition of the *Handbook of Personality* (John & Robins, 2021) directly address distinct emotions in depth (i.e., Keltner & Shiota, 2021; Tracy & Weidman, 2021), and this edition is the first to include any chapters on distinct emotions or how personality processes might vary across different emotions. This absence may stem in part from the prominence of the dimensionalist perspective in emotion research (e.g., Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991; Tamir, 2005)—the view that emotional experience can be described adequately using broad dimensions such as positive and negative affect (Watson et al., 1988).

Quantitative analyses of the personality literature corroborate this conclusion. A search for references to distinct emotions[1] in the titles and abstracts of every article published from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2022, in three leading outlets, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Personality Processes and Individual Differences*, *Journal of Personality*, and *Journal of*

Research in Personality, uncovered only 8.6% of articles (162 of 1,874) referencing a distinct emotion. Notably, this is likely an overestimate because many distinct emotion terms (e.g., surprise, interest) are used in article titles and abstracts for reasons other than naming a distinct emotion under study. It therefore seems possible that contemporary personality research is losing touch with an entire branch of human experience, one that likely plays a considerable role in shaping personality and its effects.

The Current Proposal

We propose that more widely incorporating distinct emotions into theories and models in personality psychology would promote new insights in the field. We focus on several prominent areas of personality research that were chosen on the basis of symposia presented at the 2017 and 2019 meetings of the Association for Research in Personality. For each domain, we identify established findings that might benefit from better incorporating distinct emotions.

Our selection of topics does not represent an exhaustive list of domains in personality psychology that might benefit in this way, nor do we provide a comprehensive review of either personality psychology or affective science. Instead, we chose this set of topics as particularly illustrative of areas in which personality psychology might fruitfully incorporate distinct emotions and how such an integration might be accomplished. We hope this broad overview is generative, leading others to apply our thinking to additional topics that would benefit similarly. All topics that we address either explicitly meet consensual definitions of personality (e.g., Baumert et al., 2017) or represent adjacent concepts frequently studied by personality psychologists (e.g., person perception).

Our suggestions are organized into four sections: emotions as inputs, emotions as mediators, emotions as moderators, and emotions as outputs. In each section, we provide one primary and one secondary example of how incorporating distinct emotions could lead to novel advances in the field. We also provide additional examples in the Supplemental Material available online. Table 1 provides a summary of the topics covered and our suggestions, both those that appear in the main text and in the Supplemental Material. Following these sections, we discuss a topic in affective science— the recognition of emotion expressions—that would benefit from an integration of methodological approaches developed in personality psychology. We then provide an example of successful integration in a prominent area of research: narcissism. We conclude by highlighting tools researchers can use to put these suggestions into practice.

Emotions as Inputs: How Do Distinct Emotions Influence Processes Within the Person?

Building on the notion that distinct emotions serve proximate social functions relevant to navigating one's environment (e.g., Tracy, 2014), in this section we consider how personality psychologists might generate novel insights by examining the functional consequences of distinct emotions on personality processes.

Distinct emotions can enhance or hinder accurate personality judgments of others

A substantial body of research shows that certain personalities tend to be judged accurately by others (i.e., the "good target"; Wallace & Biesanz, 2021). In contrast, empirical progress has been much more limited regarding the "good judge," or characteristics that increase individuals' ability to accurately judge others' personalities. Although some studies have uncovered individual differences in judgment accuracy (Rogers & Biesanz, 2019), questions remain regarding the specific characteristics and traits that consistently facilitate accurate judgments and thus make a person a good or bad judge (Letzring et al., 2021).

One unexplored possibility is that certain distinct emotions may improve personality judgments by enhancing perceivers' ability to detect and utilize relevant cues. The realistic accuracy model (Funder, 1995) posits that accurate personality judgments result when personality-diagnostic cues of the target are detected and utilized by perceivers. On the basis of this framework, fear might increase accuracy by enhancing the detection of personality-diagnostic cues. Features of fear experiences (e.g., heightened vigilance, widened eyes) increase sensory acuity and attention (Susskind et al., 2008), which might help people detect subtle personality-relevant cues (Capozzi et al., 2020). Fear might be especially likely to increase judges' accuracy in group settings in which peripheral visual cues are more relevant. Out of the corner of one's eye, a fearful judge might notice a target smirk, check their phone, or laugh subtly, each of which might inform a personality impression. This hypothesis is consistent with the finding that adults with social anxiety disorder (i.e., those likely to experience fear in group settings) perform better than controls at a perceptual judgment task in a social situation, presumably because their hypervigilance in these situations enables greater detection of subtle differences among task cues (Dillon et al., 2021).

Awe also might increase personality judgment accuracy by enabling better utilization of personality-diagnostic cues (Funder, 1995). Awe promotes accommodation, or adjusting one's beliefs to account for new

Table 1. Proposed Areas for Integration Between Distinct Emotions and Personality and Corresponding Predictions

Section	Topic area	Prediction(s)	Example(s)
Emotions as inputs	Characteristics of the "good judge"	Certain distinct emotions might increase or reduce personality judgment accuracy, yielding characteristics of "the good judge."	Fear might enhance the detection of subtle personality cues.
	Treating personality disorders	Interventions targeting distinct emotions may be effective treatments for certain personality disorders.	Awe might effectively treat the grandiosity associated with NPD.
Emotions as mediators	Processes that promote trait change	Distinct emotions might mediate relations between social role transitions and personality change.	Increased regulation of distinct emotions that benefit work outcomes might help explain why employment leads to increased conscientiousness.
	Contradictory judgments of romantic partners' personalities	Different forms of love might explain why individuals show both positivity bias and accuracy when judging their partner's personality.	Romantic love may lead to a positivity bias; nurturant love may lead to accuracy.
	Mechanisms linking personality and physical health (see SOM1 in the Supplemental Material)	Distinct positive emotions might motivate specific health-related behaviors, explaining the association between positive affect and physical health.	Gratitude might promote improved physical health by strengthening social ties.
Emotions as moderators	Costs of suppression	The costs of emotion suppression might vary across distinct emotions, contexts, and the personality traits of the suppressor.	Suppressing anger during a conversation with one's romantic partner may benefit the interaction. Suppressing gratitude may be harmful.
	Understanding and enhancing subjective well-being	Distinct positive and negative emotions might have different effects on well-being. Subjective well-being interventions may be improved by eliciting distinct positive emotions based on the target's trait experiences.	Anxiety may be less detrimental to subjective well-being than shame. A person who rarely feels awe might benefit more from an awe intervention than a person who feels awe often.
Emotions as outputs	Emotional output of normal and maladaptive personalities	Examining distinct emotions might reveal emotional components of agreeableness and openness despite these traits' weak associations with generalized positive and negative affect. Personality disorders might be distinguished from one another by unique emotional features.	Agreeableness may show specific associations with distinct positive emotions such as sympathy but not with global dimensions such as positive affect. Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder might be characterized by high guilt proneness, unlike other Cluster C personality disorders.
	Changes in emotional goals across the life span	Examining how distinct emotions shift across the life span might help explain mixed support for the valence-based predictions of the SST.	Older adults might feel greater levels of positive emotions related to social goals (e.g., amusement) but lower levels of positive emotions related to knowledge-acquisition goals (e.g., interest).
	Establishing validity of life stories (see SOM2 in the Supplemental Material)	Life narratives might elicit distinct emotional experiences and downstream consequences.	When reflecting on one's life story, a narrative involving career success might elicit pride, whereas a narrative involving relationship success might elicit romantic love.
	Link between situations and emotions (see SOM2)	Broad dimensions in existing situational taxonomies might be composed of lower order facets that capture distinct emotions.	The negativity dimension of the DIAMONDS and CAPTION taxonomies might have a lower order structure of situations likely to elicit anger, anxiety, etc.

Note: NPD = narcissistic personality disorder; SST = socioemotional selectivity theory.

information (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). By motivating people to consider new information that conflicts with existing schemas, awe might decrease inaccuracy due to stereotypical judgments (Gosling et al., 2002). Other emotions such as compassion and sympathy might also enhance accuracy by boosting judges' motivation and ability to understand targets' internal states.

In contrast, pride might decrease accuracy by preventing the detection of personality-diagnostic cues. Pride is associated with subjective feelings of power and socially dominant behaviors (Gronau et al., 2017). Those who experience a subjective sense of power are often less focused on others (Cheng et al., 2010), which could reduce judgment accuracy (Kraus et al., 2010).

Distinct emotions as treatments for personality disorders

Personality disorders are notoriously difficult to treat. This difficulty may stem, in part, from a widespread categorical perspective in which personality pathology is clustered into distinct groupings that often oversimplify any given individual's pathology (Trull & Widiger, 2015). Several clinicians have therefore suggested targeting specific cognitive, affective, or behavioral symptoms of disorders instead of targeting treatments based on diagnosis (e.g., Monaghan & Bizumic, 2023). In this spirit, we suggest considering interventions targeting distinct emotions.

Fostering distinct emotions is known to help treat other psychopathologies, including depression, distorted body image, and generalized anxiety (A. M. Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). More recently, studies have found that increases in positive affect predict positive treatment outcomes for several symptoms and disorders (McNeil & Repetti, 2022), including borderline personality disorder (Harpøth et al., 2021). Positive affect was assessed in a broad manner in these studies, however, so it remains unclear whether treatment efficacy differs across distinct positive emotions.

As one example, several distinct emotions might help treat narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). NPD involves an inflated sense of self-worth, entitlement, and grandiose views of one's competence and control over outcomes (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Experiences of distinct emotions such as awe and humility might directly oppose these inflated self-views because a central component of awe is a sense that the world is more important than the self (Keltner & Haidt, 2003), and a central component of humility is a greater appreciation of others vis-à-vis the self (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013). Although these recommendations might be difficult to implement because individuals with

NPD often resist treatment (Weinberg & Ronningstam, 2022), studies suggest that individuals can change antisocial traits if they want to (Hudson, 2023). Moreover, advances in therapeutic applications of psychedelics (e.g., Lyubomirsky, 2022) and mindfulness meditation (e.g., Perroud et al., 2012) provide novel approaches that might help clinicians circumvent resistance to psychotherapy.

Emotions as Mediators: How Do Distinct Emotions Link Personality to Consequential Outcomes?

Distinct emotions are also likely to mediate personality processes. In particular, they might be crucial mediators in the documented associations between life transitions and personality change. Social investment theory (SIT; Roberts et al., 2008), a highly generative model used to conceptualize personality change across the life span, suggests that personality changes in response to transitions into normative adult social roles (e.g., work, marriage; Dugan et al., 2023). Building on SIT, Bleidorn et al. (2021) argued that an important next step for the field is to uncover the specific mechanisms underlying these changes. We propose that distinct emotions might play an integral mechanistic role in these processes, facilitating the shifting behaviors that help individuals meet new responsibilities. Examining distinct emotions as mediators might also provide a framework for understanding why specific life transitions cause changes in some facets of personality domains and not others.

Transition to employment

Starting a new job tends to increase conscientiousness, and this is thought to occur via personal investment in, and mastery over, one's work (Reitz et al., 2024). This finding is consistent with SIT because the onset of occupational demands requires responsible and industrious behavior, and increased conscientiousness helps people meet these demands (Roberts et al., 2009). In turn, professional success reinforces conscientious behaviors, sparking a feedback loop that leads people to become more conscientious over time (Hill & Jackson, 2016).

Nonetheless, the precise mechanism underlying this pattern remains unclear; that is, what, exactly, does an invested worker experience or enact that increases conscientiousness (Hill & Jackson, 2016)? Di Sarno et al. (2023) found that an increased frequency of conscientiousness-related goals might explain gains in conscientiousness over time, suggesting that the enaction of momentary, goal-directed decisions and behaviors

might underlie increases in conscientiousness. We propose that the regulation of distinct emotions constitutes one component of this goal-related mechanism.

At times, people choose to feel emotions for their useful consequences. For example, individuals report intentional efforts to experience authentic pride—an emotion that spurs effort and diligence (Tracy & Robins, 2007)—when facing tasks requiring persistence (Weidman & Kross, 2021). Intentional up-regulation also occurs for emotions that feel unpleasant; individuals prefer to experience anger (vs. more pleasant emotions) when they anticipate confrontation because they expect anger to be useful (Tamir, 2016).

Invested workers might therefore strategically regulate distinct emotions to help achieve occupational goals. Importantly, however, different occupational roles place different demands on workers, so individuals should show distinct patterns of emotion regulation based on the specific thoughts, feelings, and behaviors considered functional for their role. Using emotion regulation to facilitate goal pursuit is therefore unlikely to produce equivalent gains in all facets of conscientiousness across all workers. Instead, strategically regulating different distinct emotions may cause changes in specific facets of conscientiousness based on the correspondence between the emotion's functional consequences and the relevant facet.

For instance, displaying anger can be useful in negotiations by causing the other party to make fewer demands (van Kleef, 2014). Invested workers who engage in negotiations may therefore strategically up-regulate anger prior to negotiations to foment authentic anger expressions that might cause their counterparts to concede. In contrast, up-regulating anger in other situations can impede success at work, such as during leadership and performance evaluations (Lewis, 2000). Invested workers might therefore down-regulate anger in these situations. Over time, the successful regulation of anger in different situations might enhance certain components of conscientiousness such as self-discipline (Costa & McCrae, 1992) but not others such as organization (Goldberg, 1999).

More consistent regulation of other distinct emotions at work might increase other facets of conscientiousness. For example, interest is a distinct emotion marked by feeling engaged, attentive, and curious about a task (Shiota et al., 2017). One way to better accomplish tedious occupational tasks might be to up-regulate interest by cognitively reappraising the task as important or useful. In turn, strategically up-regulating interest to increase work motivation might promote increased conscientiousness via facets such as purposefulness and efficiency (Goldberg, 1999).

In summary, occupational roles that require different demands might lead to approximately equivalent increases in individuals' conscientiousness as a whole, but these gains may be qualitatively distinct because invested workers enact different kinds of emotion-regulation decisions that lead to distinct changes in certain facets of conscientiousness. A dimensional focus would obscure this possibility given that up-regulating or down-regulating all positive or negative emotions is unlikely to lead to equivalent outcomes.

Transition to parenthood

The transition to parenthood tends to be accompanied by increased neuroticism, particularly facets such as impulsivity and self-consciousness (Leikas et al., 2022), and especially among already neurotic individuals, or those who have multiple children (Denissen et al., 2019). However, other studies have not found these same associations (e.g., van Scheppingen et al., 2016), and evidence for increased neuroticism in response to parenthood is mixed overall (Bleidorn et al., 2021). A possible explanation for these equivocal findings is cultural differences among samples, which are rarely examined explicitly in this domain (Bleidorn et al., 2021). Cross-cultural variation in norms (e.g., normativity of intergenerational housing) or institutions (e.g., paid parental leave) that affect parents' day-to-day lives might contribute to these mixed results.

Setting aside that broader issue, if the transition to parenthood is associated with increased neuroticism, at least in some contexts or populations, the emotional changes that come with parenthood might play a role. In particular, fear and anxiety arise when people appraise events as uncontrollable and uncertain (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988), and each promotes vigilant monitoring for potential threats (Van Bockstaele et al., 2014). As parents navigate greater uncertainty (Nelson et al., 2014), fear and anxiety might lead them to notice more threats in their environment and perceive previously innocuous stimuli as threatening. The aggregation of these experiences over time might culminate in increased neuroticism, specifically facets such as low calmness (Goldberg, 1999) and high vulnerability (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Anger, guilt, regret, and shame are also likely to increase during parenthood. Anger causes people to attribute negative events to the intentional behavior of others (Keltner et al., 1993) and seek more severe punishments (Ask & Pina, 2011). As a result, if angered by children's (normative) unpredictable or noncompliant behavior, parents may behave more punitively, which could lead to subsequent feelings of regret, guilt, and

shame (Hutteman et al., 2014). This cycle of harsh judgment, blame, and punishment, and the associated distinct emotions elicited at each stage, might also contribute to the emotional instability that is core to neuroticism.

In summary, there are good reasons to expect the transition to parenthood to lead to increases in several distinct negative emotions because of the many demands and challenges that new parents face. A distinct emotions approach can therefore help researchers more clearly delineate which specific aspects of the transition lead to increases in which specific facets of neuroticism via the more frequent or intense experience of which distinct emotions. In contrast, measuring new parents' emotions in terms of generalized negative affect hinders researchers' ability to identify and explain these more granular processes. New parents might also experience declines in other distinct negative emotions, such as those associated with loneliness or a lack of meaning in life, like sadness. This is an empirical question that can be addressed only by better incorporating distinct emotions into this research area.

Judgments of romantic-partner personality may be mediated by distinct emotions

Research on romantic partners' personality judgments of one another has produced two seemingly contradictory findings (Fletcher, 2015). On one hand, individuals appear to hold overly positive, idealized views of their romantic partners' personality traits compared with their partners' own self-reports (i.e., *positivity bias*; Fletcher, 2015). On the other hand, individuals show considerable accuracy when judging their romantic partners' aggregate personality profiles (i.e., *tracking accuracy*; Fletcher, 2015).

This raises the question of how an individual can hold—and therefore *feel*—both overly positive and accurate views of their partner. Considering how distinct kinds of love influence partner perceptions could help reconcile the simultaneous existence of positivity bias and tracking accuracy. Love is not a single emotion; it exists in several distinct forms, each of which (a) involves distinct phenomenological experiences, (b) is elicited by distinct causal conditions, and (c) promotes distinct behavioral output (Weidman & Tracy, 2020a, 2020b).

Two distinct forms of love might promote distinct perceptions of romantic partner personality: *romantic* love might promote a positivity bias, whereas *nurturant* love might promote tracking accuracy. Romantic love involves intense passion, excitement, tenderness, and desire for one's partner (Weidman & Tracy, 2020b), and this form of love most consistently and strongly predicts relationship satisfaction (Fehr, 2015). Given that individuals who are highly satisfied with their lives tend to rate peers more positively on numerous traits (e.g., kindhearted/caring, skilled/talented; D. Wood, Harms, & Vazire, 2010), feelings of romantic love and subsequent relationship satisfaction could trigger a similar process, leading partners to judge each other overly positively. In fact, one study found that passionate love, a classic construct that closely resembles romantic love (Berscheid & Walster, 1978), is indeed associated with positivity bias (Mizrahi et al., 2022).

In contrast, nurturant love might elicit more accurate partner perceptions, in line with its purported social function to motivate care for someone in need (Berscheid, 2010). Tracking accuracy would facilitate effective care because accurately understanding one's partner's personality may be necessary both for perceiving their neediness and understanding how best to help. Romantic love, in contrast, might be counterproductive in this situation because an overly positive view of one's partner could prevent individuals from noticing their partner's needs. These hypotheses could be tested by examining fluctuations in these distinct forms of love within romantic relationships, perhaps as a result of recurrent relationship situations that elicit each form of love (e.g., a candlelit dinner vs. consoling one's partner after a negative experience).

Emotions as Moderators: How Do Personality Processes Unfold Differently Based on Distinct Emotions?

A common approach in both personality psychology and affective science is to conceptualize emotional processes and develop theories about them by applying the process to all emotions, or at least to all emotions of similar valence. However, given that distinct emotions, even of similar valence, arise in notably different situations and lead to markedly different consequences (Tracy, 2014), treating them as a cohesive group can overlook the ways in which psychological processes result in different outcomes depending on the emotion at hand. Here, we discuss two research areas at the intersection of personality and affective science, emotion suppression and subjective well-being, that might benefit by considering which distinct emotion is experienced.

Personality-driven patterns (and associated costs) of suppressing distinct emotions

Chronically suppressing one's emotions (i.e., avoiding the expression of an experienced emotion) comes with several intrapsychic and interpersonal costs, including

reduced psychological well-being and lower quality social interactions (Gross, 2015). These costs go beyond isolated interactions; individuals who chronically suppress their emotions across situations experience reduced social support, warmth, and closeness from relationships over time (e.g., English et al., 2012).

Prior work has conceptualized and assessed suppression very broadly (e.g., English et al., 2012; Gross & John, 2003), typically in terms of stable differences in the tendency to suppress any and all emotions across contexts (e.g., "I keep my emotions to myself"; Gross & John, 2003). However, given that emotion expressions serve context-specific functions for both expressers and perceivers (Shariff & Tracy, 2011), two critical implications for emotion-suppression research might be overlooked with these highly general measures.

First, the consequences of suppressing *different* emotions in a given context will vary depending on the emotion-specific communicative function. For example, suppressing anger when interacting with a romantic partner might be beneficial because couples who display less anger toward one another have more pleasant and constructive conversations and more satisfying relationships overall (Gottman, 2014). In contrast, suppressing gratitude might be detrimental because displays of gratitude enhance closeness in relationships (Algoe, 2012), and partner responsiveness to gratitude expressions predicts both current and future relationship satisfaction (Algoe et al., 2013). Second, suppressing the *same* emotion will have divergent consequences across contexts. Suppressing pride, for instance, would be counterproductive in contexts in which conveying status is normative and encouraged (e.g., a job interview; Cuddy et al., 2015). Yet in other contexts suppressing pride might lead to positive social consequences, such as when requesting help (Tracy et al., 2018).

These implications raise the possibility that the consequences of emotion suppression vary between individuals because personality factors predispose people to regularly suppress different emotions based on personality-driven aims. In turn, if the social consequences of suppression vary by distinct emotion, chronic tendencies to suppress different emotions should exert distinct effects on well-being. For example, agreeable people desire to maintain social harmony (Soto & John, 2017), so they might be especially likely to suppress anger. Although chronically suppressing anger comes with psychological and physiological costs (Gross, 2015), there might be countervailing gains to well-being for those high in agreeableness that are achieved through maintaining social harmony. In contrast, people high in social dominance are unlikely to suppress anger because this could lead to behaviors that appear submissive (Sell et al., 2009). These predictions raise the hypothesis that agreeable people suffer less from chronically suppressing anger compared with those high in social dominance.

Distinct emotions contribute to subjective well-being in distinct ways

Subjective well-being is typically measured through three core components: life satisfaction, generalized positive affect, and generalized negative affect (Diener et al., 2018). The most common measure of positive and negative affect is the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988), in which participants report generalized tendencies to feel 10 positive emotion items (e.g., excited, proud, inspired) and 10 negative emotion items (e.g., afraid, hostile, guilty). Measuring subjective well-being as such assumes that all distinct positive emotions are equally beneficial for well-being, and all distinct negative emotions are equally destructive, or at least that averaging across them does not lose important nuance or distinctions.

However, there are stark differences in the antecedents and consequences of distinct emotions of shared valence (e.g., anger vs. fear vs. sadness; Tracy, 2014). As a result, the specific positive and negative emotions people feel might moderate the extent to which their emotional tendencies enhance or harm their subjective well-being. Rather than measuring generalized positive and negative affect, assessing distinct emotions might clarify which emotions best capture subjective well-being and how to enhance it.

Measuring subjective well-being

Certain distinct negative emotions might actually enhance well-being by virtue of increasing meaning in life, contrary to the assumption that negative emotions are equally deleterious for well-being. Experiencing meaning is reliably associated with numerous indicators of psychological well-being, such as life satisfaction and happiness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), and several theories include meaning as a core component of psychological well-being itself (e.g., Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2018). However, the pursuit of meaning in life typically involves frequent negative events, stress, and worry (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Likewise, activities that provide a sense of meaning, such as parenting, often fail to provide momentary benefits in positive affect but lead to greater positive affect months later (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Thus, some of the distinct negative emotions experienced in the pursuit of meaning (e.g., anxiety, frustration) may not jeopardize subjective well-being; instead, they might help people achieve goals that enhance their well-being over time.

In contrast, shame is a negative emotion that might better reflect poor subjective well-being. In Western cultural contexts shame is considered an intensely negative emotion; it is associated with numerous negative outcomes, including several forms of psychopathology (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Unsurprisingly, shame proneness is more strongly related to poor well-being than is proneness to other negative emotions, such as guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). When the impact of shame on well-being is measured with the PANAS, however, shame is treated as one of 10 equally weighted items such that its actual effects are likely underestimated because they are balanced out by less problematic negative emotions.

Enhancing subjective well-being

When developing interventions to enhance subjective well-being, scholars must consider that subjective well-being is not a simple reflection of objective life circumstances; rather, individuals have different "set points" for their well-being that they return to over time despite short-term deviations (Diener et al., 2009). Set points vary widely between individuals and also within individuals for the three components of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 2009).

Given that set points for dimensional positive and negative affect vary within individuals, it is likely that set points for the distinct emotions that make up these dimensions vary as well. If so, distinct emotional set points might moderate the intensity with which events are experienced as positive or negative. For example, career success might not be experienced as especially positive for someone with a high set point for pride because this event does not elicit a large deviation from their set point.

In light of this possibility, personalized interventions designed to elicit the distinct positive emotion(s) that an individual typically lacks might best enhance subjective well-being. Rash et al. (2011) found that a gratitude intervention failed to enhance life satisfaction for participants high in dispositional gratitude but was effective for participants who experience gratitude less often, consistent with this expectation. This result demonstrates how a dimensional approach to positive and negative affect may hinder psychologists' ability to design interventions that effectively enhance subjective well-being.

Emotions as Outputs: How Do Distinct Emotions Vary Across Persons and Situations?

An increased focus on distinct emotions as outputs of personality processes also might enrich personality research. We apply this reasoning first to taxonomies of both normative and abnormal personality and then to research on life-span development.[2]

Distinct emotion output of normal and maladaptive personality

It is well established that the Big Five traits of extraversion and neuroticism are closely and robustly linked to generalized positive and negative affect, respectively (e.g., Anglim et al., 2020; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991; Tamir, 2005; Watson & Clark, 1997). Furthermore, although it has received less attention, a moderate-sized association exists between conscientiousness and positive affect (Anglim et al., 2020).

However, the same cannot be said for agreeableness and openness (Anglim et al., 2020). Nonetheless, these traits might also bear importance for emotion but in ways that are overlooked from a dimensionalist approach. If so, the known associations of positive affect with extraversion and conscientiousness, and negative affect with neuroticism, suggest that these traits are associated with positive and negative affect across situations and distinct emotions, whereas agreeableness and openness are linked more specifically to narrower emotional states and contextualized emotional tendencies that, when aggregated together, result in near-zero correlations with global positive and negative affect.

Agreeableness. Agreeable people are attuned and responsive to others' needs and tend to consider how their actions affect others (Soto & John, 2017). Agreeableness may serve as a buffer against feelings of anger and hostility, as well as acts of aggression, when provoked (Reisenzein et al., 2020). Agreeable individuals also show greater compassion and sympathy toward others. In fact, compassion is so central to agreeableness that it is considered one of its three facets in the Big Five Inventory–2 (Soto & John, 2017).

These examples make clear that agreeableness is associated with emotional tendencies, but identifying these associations requires investigating specific contexts (e.g., provocation) and/or specific distinct emotions (e.g., compassion). Conversely, there are other situations and emotions in which agreeable people likely feel weaker positive emotions than disagreeable people, such as pride in response to success. Pride requires a self-focus that can neglect the importance of others' contributions (Tracy & Robins, 2007), counter to agreeable people's tendency to focus on others. As a result, a dimensional measure of positive affect would aggregate the high level of compassion in one situation with the low level of pride in another to produce a neutral rating of positive affect, belying the true affective profile of agreeableness.

Openness. Openness to experience has been conceptualized as primarily cognitive in nature, reflecting propensities to seek out novelty and appreciate complexity (Soto & John, 2017). Uncovering the affective profile of openness might therefore require focusing on distinct emotions involving aesthetic appreciation and comprehension, such as awe and interest (Weidman & Tracy, 2020a)—two emotions that, at the trait level, are associated with openness across cultural contexts (Reisenzein et al., 2020; Weidman & Tracy, 2020b). Nonetheless, the question remains whether openness is more strongly associated with a propensity to experience awe and interest compared with other traits, and/or more strongly associated with those emotions than other positive emotions.

Abnormal personality. Personality psychologists have made considerable progress integrating models of normal and maladaptive personality such that researchers can explain the 10 personality disorders from the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (APA, 2013) in terms of maladaptive extremes of normative traits (Widiger et al., 2019). Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD), for example, may be an expression of extremely high conscientiousness along with elevated neuroticism (Samuel et al., 2012). From this perspective, exploring the distinct emotional tendencies associated with personality disorders might further improve our understanding of these disorders and delineate important differences among them.

For example, conscientiousness is associated with guilt proneness (Fayard et al., 2012), suggesting that people with OCPD might suffer from pathological guilt, which could explain their preoccupation with rules and perfectionism (APA, 2013). This distinct emotional feature might effectively distinguish OCPD from other Cluster C personality disorders, such as avoidant personality disorder, which diverge on this feature but overlap in other emotional tendencies, such as high anxiety. Lending further support to this approach, four of the 10 existing personality disorder categories are currently defined in part by distinct emotional output (e.g., borderline personality disorder by intense and inappropriate anger; APA, 2013), and distinct emotions are relevant to psychopathologies beyond personality disorders (e.g., depression involves deficits in pride and gratitude; A. M. Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010).

Distinct emotional development across the life span

According to socioemotional selectivity theory (SST; Carstensen, 2021), older adults prioritize emotionally pleasant social interactions over learning and knowledge acquisition because they are aware of their limited time remaining. As a result, older adults should show a greater desire for and experience of positive compared with negative emotions compared with younger adults.

On the basis of the tenets of the SST, however, we would not predict that all positive or negative emotions would show uniform trajectories across the life span. Instead, emotional tendencies might change according to each emotion's functional implications for the adoption of goals central to the SST. On one hand, if older adults place less emphasis on knowledge-acquisition goals, we might expect a decrease in positive emotions that promote persistence and learning, such as interest. On the other hand, if older adults place greater emphasis on relationships, we might expect an increase in negative emotions that lead people to make amends for personal transgressions and thereby enhance relationships, such as guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). In fact, Orth et al. (2010) found that guilt increased across the life span whereas shame decreased, consistent with this reasoning and evidence that shame reduces the desire for social interactions after a transgression to preserve long-term status and inclusion (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

It Goes Both Ways: How Personality Psychology Can Help Improve Distinct Emotions Research

Thus far, we have discussed how personality research might benefit from incorporating distinct emotions. However, personality psychology also has much to offer affective science, both theoretically and methodologically. A complete discussion of the theoretical advances that might be achieved in affective science by better incorporating personality falls outside the scope of this article, but we see this as an important avenue for future research. Here, we describe how greater methodological integration between these two fields might help address a long-standing debate in affective science over the universality of emotion expressions (e.g., Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998).

A large body of research in affective science shows that facial and bodily cues of distinct emotions can be reliably recognized by strangers even across diverse cultures (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1971). This research has led many scholars to conclude that at least some distinct emotion expressions are universal and likely evolved to confer certain physiological or behavioral benefits to expressers as well as important information to perceivers (Shariff & Tracy, 2011; Tracy, 2014).

Yet this perspective has drawn criticism: Typical emotion-recognition studies often lack ecological validity because they measure the forced-choice recognition of static, contextless, exaggerated expressions (Barrett

et al., 2011). Furthermore, despite the reliable communicative power of prototypical facial expressions of emotion, they are not strong enough to overpower competing information, such as the coinciding presentation of linguistic information describing an incongruent situation (Lindquist, 2017).

Although these latter studies have highlighted important limitations of emotion-recognition research, they too are limited in ecological validity, for example, by contrasting inappropriate situational information alongside posed expressions. In light of these limitations, one potential solution would be to have perceivers identify spontaneous emotional displays by targets with whom they are interacting in small group settings. Fortunately, this approach has long been used by personality researchers studying person perception (e.g., Rogers & Biesanz, 2019).

Emotion-recognition studies adopting this approach might place participants in videorecorded interactions and then code each interactant's nonverbal behaviors using standardized criteria. Participants could subsequently review and annotate the videos, identifying the emotions expressed by their partner at each moment. This would provide an ecologically valid test of whether emotions displayed in social interactions can be reliably recognized by interaction partners, and the procedure could be extended to examine recognition across cultures. Of course, this approach would lack the experimental control offered by standard recognition methods, but together the two forms of evidence might produce a more complete understanding of cross-cultural similarity and variation in emotion expression and recognition.

A Successful Union: Research on Narcissism

To illustrate the utility of our proposal, we next consider one area in which personality psychologists have advanced their understanding by incorporating distinct emotions as inputs, mediators, moderators, and outputs: narcissism.

Inputs

According to psychodynamic accounts, narcissism develops in early childhood when parents overidealize their children and simultaneously place unrealistic demands on them (Otway & Vignoles, 2006). Empirical studies support this account; Brummelman et al. (2015) found that parental overvaluation, but not parental warmth, predicts increases in children's narcissism, suggesting that narcissism may develop as a response to emotions elicited by overvaluation (e.g., pride) but not by warmth (e.g., tenderness). Work on narcissistic states (i.e., transient moments when people feel and act narcissistically) suggests a similar pattern; feeling respected and admired leads to increased state narcissism, but feeling socially included does not (Mahadevan et al., 2019).

Mediators

Narcissists respond to negative self-relevant feedback, or "ego threats," by lashing out—typically toward whomever they perceive as responsible for the negative outcome (Kjærvik & Bushman, 2021). This aggressive response is uniquely associated with heightened anger. In contrast, narcissists are less likely than nonnarcissists to respond to negative feedback with other negative emotions such as sadness, fear, or shame (Krizan & Johar, 2015). These studies suggest that the distinct emotion of anger, specifically, mediates the link between narcissism and aggressive responses to provocation.

Moderators

One contemporary theory of narcissism, the Narcissism Admiration and Rivalry Concept (Back et al., 2013), seeks to account for both the high-agency and low-communion aspects of grandiose narcissism. Central to the theory is narcissists' constant striving for admiration from others; when they receive the sought-after admiration, narcissists feel validated that others view them as positively as they view themselves (Back et al., 2013). Notably, narcissists do not strive to elicit other positive emotions, such as tenderness, from close others (Campbell, 1999). These findings suggest that the potential emotional reward (e.g., admiration or tenderness) that can be achieved through a social interaction or relationship moderates narcissists' motivation to excel in those domains.

Outputs

Tracy and Robins (2003) argued that the narcissistic dissociation of explicit positive and implicit negative self-representations create fertile ground for the coexistence of shame and hubristic pride. When negative self-representations are split off from overly idealized positive self-representations, the implicit self becomes globally negative. The resulting globalized negative implicit view of self may necessitate the internal, stable, global attributions following failure that lead to shame (Tangney & Dearing, 2002), as the individual becomes incapable of distinguishing a bad thing done from the bad self doing it.

Just as the implicit self becomes globally negative, the narcissist's dissociated, explicit self may become globally positive and idealized, leading to stable, global attributions following success, with no distinction made between a good thing done and the good self doing it. This leads narcissists to experience hubristic pride, characterized by feelings of arrogance and egotism (Tracy & Robins, 2007). This structural split and co-occurrence of shame and hubristic pride helps explain the seemingly contradictory appearance of both grandiose and vulnerable dimensions of narcissism (Tracy & Robins, 2003).

In sum, by incorporating distinct emotions into the study of narcissism, researchers have made great strides in understanding the structure of narcissistic personality as well as narcissistic individuals' responses to threats and opportunities in their environment. As illustrated throughout this article, adopting a similar approach in many other areas of personality research is likely to lead to similar advances.

How Do We Get Together? A Practical Note on Assessment

Measuring distinct positive emotions

Affective scientists' interest in distinct positive emotions surged considerably following the introduction of Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, as well as the advent of positive psychology (Shiota et al., 2017). Since that time, however, attempts to construct self-report measures of distinct positive emotions have been sparse, especially at the state level (Weidman et al., 2017). Several instruments for measuring distinct positive emotions were developed in isolation (e.g., Emmons et al., 2003; Tracy & Robins, 2007), leaving the field without a comprehensive inventory to assess a wide range of distinct positive emotions.

To address these limitations, Weidman and Tracy (2020a, 2020b) developed a comprehensive taxonomy of subjectively experienced positive emotions and accompanying measures. These scales have several features that make them practical for inclusion across diverse research contexts. First, they are brief and reliable, including only three to five items per positive emotion (average α = .74; Weidman & Tracy, 2020a). Second, they are flexible; scholars wishing to assess positive emotions with more granularity can use full-length versions of each scale (five to eight items per emotion; average α = .81; Weidman & Tracy, 2020b), whereas scholars wishing to tap broader positive-emotion experiences can use high-loading items that emerged in a replicable nine-dimensional factor analysis of these scales (e.g., an other-appreciation factor encompassing admiration, awe, and gratitude; Weidman & Tracy, 2020a).

Third, the scales are interpretable; they ask participants to endorse plain-language statements describing thoughts, feelings, and behavioral-action tendencies that accompany each positive emotion (e.g., "I wanted to express thanks" for gratitude). As a result, they avoid the ambiguity of single emotion terms (e.g., "I felt gratitude"), which can elicit variable interpretation across participants and emotion scholars alike (Weidman et al., 2017). In fact, single emotion terms showed only moderate correlations with the granular, full-length version of each positive emotion scale (Weidman & Tracy, 2020b).

Measuring distinct negative emotions

The study of distinct negative emotions has a much longer history in affective science than the study of distinct positive emotions. Perhaps as a result, several scales have been developed to assess distinct negative emotions at the trait level, including disgust (Haidt et al., 1994), anxiety (Spielberger et al., 1983), envy (Lange et al., 2018), and shame and guilt proneness (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). In addition, Harmon-Jones et al. (2016) used bottom-up analytic approaches to develop four-item scales that capture the distinct negative emotional experiences of anger, disgust, fear/anxiety, and sadness. In subsequent work, Harmon-Jones et al. (2019) demonstrated that these scales were more sensitive to inductions targeting one distinct emotion than broad measures of negative affect. In ongoing work, Ibasco et al. (2025) are using the methods of Weidman and Tracy (2020a) to develop a comprehensive taxonomy of subjectively experienced negative emotions and accompanying measures.

Conclusion

Distinct emotions have, and always will be, an important component of human personality. As a result, many research areas within personality psychology would benefit from their explicit incorporation. We hope this article can serve as an impetus to personality researchers to do so, as well as a potential starting point for what such studies might look like. In closing, we encourage personality psychologists to incorporate distinct emotions into their work to see what advances this union brings to our science.

ORCID iDs

Eric J. Mercadante https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8720-2657
Aaron C. Weidman https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9395-4051
Jessica L. Tracy https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0175-5838

Supplemental Material

Additional supporting information can be found at http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl10.1177/17456916251349819.

Notes

1. This search included the following emotion terms: admiration, amusement, anger, awe, compassion, confusion, contempt, contentment, disgust, embarrassment, envy, fear, gratitude, guilt, jealousy, happiness, hope, humility, love, nostalgia, pride, sadness, shame, surprise, and sympathy. Given the lack of consensus in the field surrounding the exact class of distinct emotions, we drew this list from recent studies aiming to taxonomize and measure distinct emotions (e.g., Weidman & Tracy, 2020a, 2020b).

2. Although age is not a clear-cut constituent of personality, it is typically treated as an intrinsic factor of persons that influences behaviors, thoughts, and feelings similarly to other traits, albeit in a considerably less stable manner across the life span (e.g., Carstensen, 2021). Moreover, personality psychologists, but not social psychologists, consider age-based development an important domain within their subfield (Tracy et al., 2009).

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