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

Research

Eric J. Mercadante[1]*

Aaron C. Weidman[2]*

Jessica L. Tracy[2]

[1]New York University, Stern School of Business

[2]University of British Columbia

* Eric J. Mercadante and Aaron C. Weidman shared first authorship for this manuscript

Abstract

Emotions play a prominent role in personality psychology, yet they are most frequently studied 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 researchers' understanding of personality. We highlight four ways to expand personality research, by considering distinct emotions as (1) inputs driving personality processes, (2) mediators and (3) moderators of relationships between personality factors and life outcomes, and (4) outputs of personality processes. We then discuss how a personality-based methodological approach might enhance distinct-emotion research, and highlight an area where the integration of distinct emotions has already benefitted 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 define personality as "a person's characteristic pattern of... thoughts, *feelings,* and motivation" (Baumert et al., 2017, p. 527; italics added), or "relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, *feelings*, strivings, and behaviors that distinguish individuals from each other" (Bleidorn et al., 2021, p. 3; italics added). 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 Figure 1). For both forms, we propose that emotion and personality exert bidirectional causal forces upon 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 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 like 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* (2021) directly address distinct emotions in depth (i.e., Chapters 21 and 23; 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, in part, stem 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 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 out of 1874) referencing a distinct emotion. Notably, this is likely an overestimate, given that many distinct-emotion terms (e.g., surprise, interest) are used in article titles and abstracts for reasons besides 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.

[Figure 1 here]

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, chosen based on topics 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

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[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, 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).

illustrative of areas where 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: (1) emotions as inputs, (2) emotions as mediators, (3) emotions as moderators, and (4) emotions as outputs. In each section, we provide one primary and one secondary example of how incorporating distinct emotions could lead to novel advances for the field. We also provide additional examples in the SOM. Table 1 provides a summary of the topics covered and our suggestions, both those that appear in the main text and in the SOM. Following these sections, we discuss a topic in affective science—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.

[Table 1 here]

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 explored possibility is that certain distinct emotions may improve personality judgments by enhancing perceivers' ability to detect and utilize relevant cues. According to Funder's (1995) Realistic Accuracy Model, accurate personality judgments result when personality-diagnostic cues of the target are *detected* and *utilized* by perceivers. Based on this framework, fear might increase accuracy by enhancing detection of personality-diagnostic cues. Features of fear experiences (e.g., heightened vigilance, widened eyes) increase sensory acuity and attention (Susskind et al., 2008), and this might help people detect subtle personality-relevant cues (Capozzi et al., 2020). Fear might be especially likely to increase judges' accuracy in group settings where 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 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 like 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 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, wherein 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 (Wood et al., 2010a). 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 (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, 2022). 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 lifespan, 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 and colleagues (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., 2022). 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).

Nevertheless, 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 and colleagues (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 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 and

Kross, 2020). Intentional upregulation 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 upregulate anger prior to negotiations to foment authentic anger expressions that might cause their counterparts to concede. In contrast, upregulating 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, successful regulation of anger in different situations might enhance certain components of conscientiousness such as self-discipline (Costa & McCrae, 1992), but not others like 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 upregulate interest by cognitively reappraising the task as important or useful. In turn, strategically upregulating interest to increase work motivation might promote increased conscientiousness via facets like 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 conscientious. A dimensional focus would obscure this possibility, given that upregulating or downregulating 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 like 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 explicitly examined 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, 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 like 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 due to 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 only be addressed 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 to 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: how can an individual 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., "kind-hearted/caring", "skilled/talented"; Wood et al., 2010b), 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 (Bershcheid & 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 partners' needs. These hypotheses might 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, when interacting with a romantic partner, suppressing anger might be beneficial because couples who display less anger towards 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 where 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, 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 to 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 (PA), and generalized negative affect (NA; 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), wherein participants report generalized tendencies to feel ten positive emotion items (e.g., excited, proud, inspired) and ten 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

Contrary to the assumption that negative emotions are equally deleterious for well-being, certain distinct negative emotions might actually enhance well-being by virtue of increasing meaning in life. 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, like 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 ten equally weighted items, such that its actual effects are likely underestimated, as 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 comprise 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. Supporting this expectation, Rash and colleagues (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. 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 to taxonomies of both normative and abnormal personality, and then to research on lifespan 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

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[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 lifespan (e.g., Carstensen, 2021). Moreover, personality researchers, but not social psychologists, consider age-based development an important domain within their subfield (Tracy et al., 2009).

contextualized emotional tendencies, which, 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 BFI-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 to 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 ten *DSM-V* personality disorders 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 ten 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; Wood et al., 2010a).

Distinct Emotional Development Across the Lifespan

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, compared to younger, adults should show a greater desire for and experience of positive, compared to negative, emotions.

Based on the tenets of 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 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). Consistent with this reasoning, Orth and colleagues (2010) found that guilt increased, while shame decreased, across the lifespan, consistent with evidence that shame reduces the desire for social interactions following a transgression, in order to preserve long-term status and inclusion (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

It Goes Both Ways: How Personality Psychology Can Help Improve Distinct Emotion 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 longstanding debate in affective science over the universality of emotion expressions (e.g., 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 to have 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, by virtue of measuring 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, then code each interactant's non-verbal behaviors using standardized criteria. Participants could subsequently review and annotate 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 over-idealize their children and simultaneously place unrealistic demands upon them (Otway & Vignoles, 2006). Empirical studies support this account; Brummelman and colleagues (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 (Kjaervik & Bushman, 2021). This aggressive response is uniquely associated with heightened anger. In contrast, narcissists are less likely than non-narcissists to respond to negative feedback with other negative emotions like 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 they view themselves (Back et al., 2013). Notably, narcissists do not strive to elicit other positive emotions, like 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 co-existence 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 3-5 items per positive emotion, with 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 (5-8 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 and colleagues (2016) used bottom-up analytic approaches to develop four-item scales that capture distinct negative emotional experiences of anger, disgust, fear/anxiety, and sadness. In subsequent work, Harmon-Jones and colleagues (2019) demonstrated that these scales were more sensitive to inductions targeting one distinct emotion than broad measures of negative affect. In ongoing work, Ibasco and colleagues (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 review can serve as an impetus to future personality researchers to do so, as well as a potential starting point of what such studies might look like. In closing, we encourage personality psychologists to incorporate distinct emotions into their work and see what advances this union brings to our science.

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