OPEN PEER COMMENTARY

From the Psychology of Situations to the Psychology of Environments

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Abstract: The psychology of situations so thoughtfully described by Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder could and should be extended to a psychology of environments (chronic exposure to situations). Most distinctions and principles proposed in the target article can be readily applied to environments as well if individual situations are extended to environmental effects of chronic exposure to situations. This extension could advance research on personality development and behaviour genetics. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

I am deeply impressed by Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s thoughtful and clear distinctions, definitions and principles that together describe nothing less than a new paradigm of psychological research on situations. After reading their article (2015), it struck me that this paradigm can be extended to include environments (chronic exposure to situations) as studied in developmental and behaviour genetic research.

SITUATIONS VERSUS ENVIRONMENTS

Whereas psychological states, situations and social interactions can fluctuate within seconds, personality traits and many environments are more stable; they can change but only over longer periods of time and rarely in response to only one state or one incident. Therefore, occasional use of the term ‘personality–situation transaction’ of Rauthmann et al. is problematic because personality can influence situations but individual situations rarely influence personality traits; even critical life events such as divorce, unemployment or birth of a child comprise more than one individual situation (Luhmann, Orth, Specht, Kandler, & Lucas, 2014). Instead, reciprocal transactions occur mainly between personality and environments (chronic exposure to situations) as studied in developmental and behaviour genetic research.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF ENVIRONMENTS

Cues, characteristics and classes, the building blocks of individual situations, can also be considered building blocks of environments. However, the concept of environment as used in developmental psychology also includes building blocks that are psychologically meaningful but are not cues in the authors’ sense and are processed not only by the nervous system but also by other organs (e.g., certain forms of malnutrition and chronic pollution by lead influence cognitive development). Even broader is the concept of environment in behavioural genetics as it includes everything internal and external to an organism except the genome, and environmental elements can influence an organism at the epigenetic, the neuroanatomical, the neurotransmitter and the hormonal levels without being processed by the nervous system. Nevertheless, chronic exposure to situational cues and characteristics is probably the most important source of psychologically relevant environmental influence, and the distinction between ‘objective’ cues and ‘subjective’ characteristics can be generalized to a distinction between ‘objective’ environmental elements and ‘processed’ environmental elements.

ENVIRONMENT VERSUS PROCESSED ENVIRONMENT

I agree with Rauthmann et al. that the perceived situation is psychologically more meaningful than situational cues. I only wondered why they did not adopt the distinction between situation (as perceived by an actor) and setting (as perceived by others) made in ecological psychology (Barker, 1968). For environments, this distinction suggests that environmental elements as processed are psychologically more meaningful than the elements themselves. A good example for the importance of the distinction between environmental elements and processed environment is the distinction in behaviour population genetics between (objectively) shared environments and shared environmental effects. Shared environmental events such as death of mother often lead to non-shared environmental influences in siblings, and non-shared environments can have shared environmental influences (see Turkheimer & Waldron, 2000).
THREE PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

The three principles of situation research proposed by Rauthmann et al. can be readily applied to environments as well. The Processing Principle states that environments only acquire psychological importance by being processed and by exerting effects on experience or behaviour of at least one organism. However, I use ‘processing’ in a much broader sense (see preceding sections), and ‘processed environment’ is much broader than ‘psychologically experienced’. I suggest that Rauthmann et al. revise the Processing Principle, stating that situations are processed and influence experience or behaviour because situations can exert effects on behaviour outside of conscious awareness.

Consequently, they might also adjust the Reality Principle to this broader concept of situation processing such that non-conscious effects of processing are included. This revision would not interfere with the important distinction between consensual and idiosyncratic meaning of a situation, nor with its corollaries. The revision would only broaden the notion of situation perception to situation processing with effects on experience or behaviour; these effects can be shared or not by different individuals. The revised Reality Principle and its corollaries, then, can be directly applied to environments.

The Circularity Principle is in my view the most important contribution of Rauthmann et al. Confounding measured personality differences with measured situational differences due to shared method variance is still commonplace in personality research, and taking the Circularity Principle seriously would advance the field considerably. Circularity problems are also commonplace in research on personality development when participants report on both their personality and their current or past environment. In behaviour genetics, similar problems arise when participants report on both their personalities and their environments in studies of effects of shared and non-shared environmental elements, gene–environment interaction and gene–environment correlation. Only molecular genetics avoids these dangers of circularity because genes and their building blocks (SNPs) are measured independently of the environment. Therefore, the suggested remedies of using different methods of assessment for personality and the environment would also greatly advance developmental and behaviour genetic research.

I agree Rauthmann et al. that complete independence of assessment is difficult to achieve because sometimes, the person sneaks into the situation or environment in subtle ways that are difficult or impossible to avoid. For example, should we dismiss research on friendships because ultimately only the target person can decide whether someone else is really a friend—not the potential friend, and not third parties? Should we trust parental reports of whether their children are their biological offspring although we know that the rate of cuckoldry is substantial (only genetic testing can reveal the truth)? These more subtle problems of circularity likewise apply to situation and environment assessment, but this should not distract from the great gains possible if researchers would adopt the Approximation Corollary, following the proposed strategy of using multiple judges in situ, juxta situm or ex situ.

On Developing the Study of Social Situations

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Abstract: We discuss Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s framework in relation to an important characteristic of social situations—interdependence. Specifically, we discuss how the proposed framework raises awareness about the need to study how people think about their interdependence with others, such as do people think in terms of dimensions or prototypes of interdependence, and what cues do people use to infer interdependence. Finally, we draw attention to the fact that interdependence is a characteristic of situations that is theoretically related to person variables, such as motivation, goals and values. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Despite the fact that several areas of the social and behavioural sciences claim that situations influence behaviour, there has been little theoretical and empirical advances in understanding situations and their relation to behaviour. Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) provide a framework for researchers to develop theory and broaden empirical research on the problem of situations. Here, we utilize this framework to draw attention to its strengths and weaknesses for understanding of an important characteristic of social situations—interdependence.

Psychologists (Balliet, Mulder, & Van Lange, 2011; Kelley et al., 2003), economists (Olson, 1965; Fehr & Gächter, 2002), sociologists (Granovetter, 1985; Montgomery, 1998) and biologists (Maynard-Smith, 1974; West, El Mouden, & Gardner, 2011) are all interested in how interdependence between individuals and groups influence behaviour. Interdependence is defined as how each person’s behaviour affects own and others’ outcomes in a situation. Interdependence is known to vary dramatically across situations and has been described as part of both the objective situation and subjective construal of situations (Kelley et al., 2003). To date, empirical work on interdependence and social behaviour has been dominated by methods that place people in a specific objective interdependent situation and then observe behaviour. However, in natural
environments, people often do not have knowledge about their objective interdependence with others and must subjectively infer their interdependence with others. Thus, new research is needed to study how people think about interdependent situations and the implications of this perception for behaviour (for an example, see Halevy et al., 2012). However, there are some specific challenges involved in such a programme of research, such as (a) describing the objective similarities and differences in interdependent situations, (b) measuring how people think about different interdependent situations and (c) understanding what cues people use to make sense of their interdependence with others in a situation. Rauthmann et al. provide a pragmatic point of departure for researchers interested in answering these questions.

First, it seems reasonable that objective interdependent situation truly exists, but that this is never directly known to people in any one situation. Indeed, several models have been proposed to describe the characteristics of objective interdependent situations that describe the similarities and differences among interdependent situations. For example, Kelley et al. (2003) proposed six dimensions to describe variation across interdependent situations. In contrast, Rapoport and Chammah (1996) suggested that many forms of interdependence can be reduced to four prototypes of interdependent situations. Unfortunately, very little work has addressed whether people construe interdependent situations according to these dimensions or prototypes. As preliminary evidence, Halevy et al. (2012) showed that people think about situations as specific prototypes (e.g. a prisoner’s dilemma or chicken situation; Figure 1). Yet, according to Rauthmann et al., people may think about situations according to dimensions rather than prototypes or classes. Indeed, even within the prisoner’s dilemma, there can exist variation in several dimensions of interdependence, such as more or less conflicting interests (also see Balliet & Van Lange, 2013). Figure 1 displays two prototypical interdependent situations—the prisoner’s dilemma and chicken situation—and then provides two examples of each type of situation to illustrate how these situations can vary according to their degree of conflict. Importantly, both situations can contain similar amounts of conflicting interests, and conflict can vary with each type of interdependence. Do people think about the degree of conflict or other dimensions of interdependence (such as asymmetrical dependence)? Do people neglect variance in conflict and only associate situations with a prototypical type of interdependence? Whether people actually perceive differences in situations according to dimensions or prototypes is an empirical issue that has yet to be addressed.

Figure 1. Each matrix represents a two-person two-option interdependent situation. Each person (the column player and the row player) can choose between Option C and Option D. The column player’s outcomes are displayed in the upper right of each cell, while the row player’s outcomes are displayed in the lower left of each cell. We note that the prisoner’s dilemmas and chicken situations either high or low degrees of conflict are equal in the amount of conflicting interests that they contain. This can be calculated following Kelley and Thibaut (1978) formulae for covariation of interests that they have in a situation.
How would people infer their interdependence with others? Rauthmann et al. suggest that we need to study how people use specific cues to form subjective construals of situations. We agree and believe that there is a need to understand what types of cues could be used to infer either prototypes and/or dimensions of interdependence. Basically, there is a need to theorize about what cues could potentially covary across situations according to different types of interdependence and then study if people actually use such cues to infer features of interdependence. For example, the perception of other people’s non-verbal behaviours (e.g. emotional expressions, body posture and eye gaze) in a social interaction may be cues used to infer interdependence.

Rauthmann et al. claim that an individual’s goals and values cannot be used to define a situation. However, this is not feasible considering interdependence a characteristic of situations. Properties of interdependent situations are based on the behavioural options available to each person, and the values/utilities assigned to specific outcomes during an interaction. Individual motivations (e.g. goals and values) define utilities for different behavioural options and outcomes during interdependent situations, so personal motivations are inseparable parts of defining the structure of an interdependent situation. The numerical values in the situations in Figure 1 arise naturally from an individual’s values/preferences in a specific situation.

Finally, although Rauthmann et al. cite key papers on interdependence (e.g. Kelley et al., 2003; Reis, 2008), their own model of how people think about situations (DIAMONDS, Rauthmann et al., 2014), includes only a few explicitly social dimensions, including Adversity, Deception and Sociality. While we do notice some potential overlap between these dimensions and dimensions of interdependence (e.g. Sociality = degree of dependence and Adversity/Deception = degree of conflicting interests), other dimensions of interdependence may not be represented in DIAMONDS (e.g. asymmetrical dependence/power). There is a need for future work testing empirically how people think about interdependence and relating this to the DIAMONDS dimensions. We believe that any comprehensive theoretical account of situations must consider variation in interdependence.

Rauthmann et al. pursue a laudable goal of providing a framework for researchers to consider developing and testing ideas about how situations affect behaviour. While the scope of this framework may be challenged by different theories of situations, any social and behavioural scientist will benefit from considering the proposed principles for the study of situations.

Adverse Life Experiences as Unique Situations

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Abstract: We relate the Rauthmann et al arguments to the study of positive personality change in the wake of experience of adversity, or post-traumatic growth. The nature of adversity-relevant situations—and how individuals respond to such situations—may contribute to whether post-traumatic growth ultimately occurs. Additionally, we question whether the strong commitment of Rauthmann et al. to the Approximation Corollary is good for situation research in naturalistic settings. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

We hope that Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s excellent article (2015) will stimulate a new wave of high-quality conceptual, methodological, and empirical work on situations and person-situation transactions. We relate their arguments to the study of positive personality change in the wake of experiences of adversity (Blackie, Roepke, Forgeard, Jayawickreme, & Fleeson, 2014; Blackie, Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Jayawickreme, 2014, or post-traumatic growth (PTG; Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; Blackie & Jayawickreme, 2014). Sherman previously engaged this topic in a thoughtful commentary published last year (Jones, Brown, Serfass, & Sherman, 2014).

POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH AS POSITIVE PERSONALITY CHANGE

Post-traumatic growth is defined as positive psychological change experienced as a result of struggle with highly challenging life circumstances (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). It is typically seen as distinct from resilience, which is generally defined as absence of negative outcomes during or following potentially harmful circumstances (e.g. Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010). PTG is most often measured through retrospective self-reports. While it remains uncertain whether these retrospective self-perceptions correspond to actual changes in behaviour and cognition measured longitudinally (Blackie, Jayawickreme, Helzer, Forgeard, & Roepke, in press); Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; Schueller, Jayawickreme, Blackie, Forgeard, & Roepke, 2015), individuals high in self-perceived PTG report experiencing greater appreciation of life, more-intimate social relationships, heightened feelings of personal strength, greater engagement with spiritual questions and recognition of new possibilities for their lives (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). To the extent these measures are valid (Fleeson, 2014; Frazier, Coyne, & Tennen, 2014), such growth may occur, at least in part, because of changes in situations experienced following adversity. Jones et al. (2014) offered the example of a bereaved parent who experiences new daily situations that act as reminders of the lost child and eventually facilitate PTG. For example, the parent may use time previously devoted to
childcare to seek out new sources of and more frequent social support more frequently, thereby expanding and strengthening social relationships. While this can apply well to adaptation to single traumatic events, many adversities are not one-shot events, but are instead chronic in nature. Such adversities may include unemployment (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004), chronic illness (Tennen & Afleck, 1998) and daily hassles resulting from traumatic events (e.g. lack of sanitation facilities and housing following a natural disaster; Miller & Rasmussen, 2014).

In other words, the adversity to which an individual must adapt may consist of a series of situations. The natures of these situations—and how individuals respond to such situations—may in part affect whether PTG ultimately occurs. The innovative model that Rauthmann et al. propose allows this hypothesis to be tested: researchers could utilize experience sampling to capture the types of situations (‘cues’) that individuals experience after adversity, and examine whether the psychological meaning (‘characteristics’) individuals derive from these situations capture the theorized domains of PTG. Indeed, our own ‘gold standard’ PTG study (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014) should be revised in light of this model to include measurement of situations. However, this method is not without challenges given the distinctiveness of adverse situations, as we will now discuss.

CHALLENGES IN THE STUDY OF SITUATIONS AND PTG

First, researchers will need to investigate the types of situations people are most likely to experience following adversity. Although the ‘Situational Eight’ DIAMONDS model (Rauthmann et al., 2014) does contain an adversity category, coping and coming to terms with a highly stressful experience is likely to extend beyond feeling threatened. The DIAMONDS model may capture many ‘everyday situations’, but adversity is, by definition, unusually harsh circumstances. One factor that often distinguishes adversity-relevant situations from others is that individuals do not choose to be placed in them (i.e. no one actively chooses to be the victim of adversity). Thus, adversity-related situations are generally imposed on individuals, as opposed to individuals selecting them. We agree with Rauthmann et al. that individual response to such adversity-relevant situations may affect whether PTG ultimately occurs. However, adversity-imposed situations may differ in extent of control the individual has to reduce the adversity’s impact. In such instances, being able flexibly utilize the skills associated with primary control (controlling the situation) and secondary control (controlling one’s response to the situation) flexibly depending on the specifics of the situation would be key to the promotion of PTG (Helzer & Jayawickreme, 2015).

QUERYING THE RIGIDITY OF THE APPROXIMATION COROLLARY

Following Jones et al. (2014), we believe that situations should be studied as part of understanding the processes that facilitate PTG, and the ideal longitudinal PTG study design that we described (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014) can be modified to include information about situations. However, such a longitudinal study of people in daily life will most likely only be able to collect the target’s perception of the situation. Rauthmann et al. take a strong stand against having a single rater of any situation: ‘However, a situation should not be defined solely by one person’s perception of it (Approximation Corollary), but validated against or made relative to (knowledgeable) others’ views’ (footnote 13). Such a stance makes the possibility of such research utilizing experience sampling methods in real life before and after the trauma highly impractical.

Moreover, Rauthmann et al. have argued in past work that multiple prior studies in their lab show that the vast majority of the variance in situation ratings is due to the situation itself rather than to participants’ idiosyncratic perceptions (Rauthmann, 2012; Serfass & Sherman, 2013; Sherman, Rauthmann, Brown, Serfass, & Jones, in press). We query why they would take such a strong stance against reliance on single raters here, where one practical outcome would be the discouraging of naturalistic daily life studies examining unique situations vital for understanding their role in such outcomes as PTG.

Towards a State-trait Model of Situations

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Abstract: Situation research would benefit from a more thoroughly parallel conceptualization of persons and situations. This includes (1) understanding the characteristics of situations as situation traits, (2) adapting other models of personality psychology (e.g. state model, latent state-trait models or multi-trait–multi-method models) to psychological situation research, (3) learning from the methods we use for assessing and diagnosing personality traits and (4) considering evolutionary arguments for assuming a parallel structure of personality and situations. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s article (2015) is a long overdue and excellent contribution to the psychology of situations. For decades, psychologists have used the concept of situation without defining it properly. Rauthmann

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et al. take a great step towards better theoretical conceptualization, better psychological description and better measurement of situations. We are particularly pleased that this important contribution and its precursors (e.g., Funder, 2006) were introduced by personality psychologists who have often been (wrongly) accused of showing little interest in situations and the effects of situations on behaviour. Despite our great sympathy for the ideas presented in the target article, we believe that at least some of them leave room for advancement.

We focus on one of the ideas in the article, the proposal to conceptualize persons and situations in parallel psychological terms. We find this idea particularly intriguing but suggest elaborating on it more consequentially. We argue that this can be achieved by adapting personality concepts, models, methods and measures directly to the description and assessment of situation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SITUATIONS ARE SITUATION TRAITS!

Using the Approximation Corollary, Rauthmann et al. argue that the best way to reveal the inherent properties of situations is to aggregate the individual views of several persons. This means that we can best learn about situations if we abstract them from any individual person. What do we do in personality psychology when we assess personality traits? We abstract them from single situations by aggregating the behaviour of persons across several situations and occasions (Epstein, 1984). Applying this logic to situations requires aggregating the behaviours of many persons in the situations we want to measure across many occasions. Consequently, what the authors call situation characteristics are nothing but situation traits. Phrased in the formal language of Classical Test Theory (Zimmerman, 1976): personality traits are the expected values of behaviour (or another indicator, e.g., experience, perception and cognition) given the person. Accordingly, situation traits are the expected values of behaviour (or another indicator, e.g., experience, perception and cognition) given the situation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SITUATIONS CAN ALSO BE STATES!

If we adapt the trait model of personality to situations, it might be useful to determine whether other personality concepts can also be useful for the psychological description of situations. Perhaps the most straightforward proposal is that if situations have traits, they must have states as well. Personality states are conceptualized as behavioural dispositions that are generalized across situations but not time (Fleeson, 2001). They are occasion-specific. Accordingly, situation states can be conceptualized as behavioural dispositions that are generalized across persons but not time. They are occasion-specific as well. Phrased in formal terms: personality states are the expected values of behaviour (or another indicator) given the person and the occasion. Accordingly, situation states are the expected values of behaviour (or another indicator) given the situation and the occasion. As an example of the occasion specificity of situations, people may dance a lot and talk only a little at one party but dance only a little and talk a lot at another party. Given these straightforward parallels, it seems possible and informative to apply personality models such as the latent trait model (Zimmerman, 1975), latent state-trait models (Steyer, Schmitt, & Eid, 1999), multi-trait–multi-method models (Eid, 2000) or multi-trait–multi-method–multi-occasion models (Koch, Ornter, Eid, & Schmitt, 2014) to situations. For this purpose, we can even use the same data, obtained from research designs that fully cross persons, situations, occasions and methods (Schmitt, 2006).

SLIGHT ADAPTATIONS OF PERSONALITY MEASURES ARE SUFFICIENT FOR MEASURING SITUATIONS!

Rauthmann et al. argue that the best way to measure situation characteristics is to aggregate the real behaviour (or another indicator) of multiple participants. We agree that this would be the ideal method. Accordingly, observing the behaviour of individuals in many situations on several occasions would be the ideal solution for measuring personality traits (Furr, 2009). Nevertheless, personality questionnaires have proven to be reliable and valid, and they are certainly more economical than behavioural observations. We can expect the same for situation questionnaires. If we take the parallels between personality traits and situation traits seriously, we can even use different versions of the same questionnaire in both domains. Slight adaptations of available personality questionnaires seem sufficient for measuring situation traits. We will illustrate this proposal with two extraversion items from the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992): Personality Item 1: I like to have a lot of people around me. Corresponding Situation Item 1: In this situation, there are many people around. Personality Item 2: I laugh easily. Corresponding Situation Item 2: This situation makes people laugh.

WE EXPECT IDENTICAL DIMENSIONAL STRUCTURES FOR PERSONALITY TRAITS AND SITUATION TRAITS!

As soon as we have adapted personality inventories that follow the Five Factor Model (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008) or the HEXACO [Honesty-Humility (H), Emotionality (E), Extraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O)] Model (Lee & Ashton, 2008) to situations, can we expect the same dimensional (factor) structure for personality traits and situation traits? The DIAMONDS model suggests that we cannot or at least not precisely (Rauthmann et al., 2014). We find this surprising. Personality traits have evolved over the phylogenetic history of humankind. They entail adaptive resources that contribute to individual and group survival. Importantly, the social and
natural challenges and the behavioural expressions of personality traits that are needed to meet these challenges occur in the same situations. Challenges and coping behaviour must have direct relations with each other. Behaviours and individual differences in behaviours that were not adaptive for meeting the challenges that confronted people in specific situations were rendered extinct through evolution. Accordingly, challenges and behaviours have symmetrical natures. Because they necessarily occur and meet each other in the same (types of) situations, we propose that identical structures are to be expected for personality states/traits and situation states/traits.

The Science of Situations and the Integration of Personality and Social Psychology

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Abstract: Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) provide a solid foundation for future research concerning the psychology of situations. Inspired by their work, we offer two extensions. First, we suggest that efforts be directed towards developing a working taxonomy of situational characteristics. Second, we suggest that experiments, particularly those rooted in classic experimental social psychology, may prove to be very useful for testing whether situational cues truly cause situational characteristics and ultimately behaviour. In sum, we think that their article provides a template for integrating personality and social psychology. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Personality psychologists have developed and validated sophisticated taxonomies to classify the myriad ways people differ from one another. Although this topic still generates debate, current disagreements rarely overshadow the substantial progress made on this topic. More importantly, trait taxonomies have helped researchers systematically document how dispositions are associated with behaviour and consequential life outcomes (Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007). This sanguine state of affairs does not seem to characterize the science of situations. Fortunately, this is changing as epitomized by the article of Rauthmann et al. Their article is rich, challenging and ultimately successful in outlining a viable conceptual approach and set of principles for studying situations. They have provided readers with a compelling foundation for future research. Inspired by their work, we offer two suggestions.

FOCUS ON SITUATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND LET THE CUES AND CLASSES FOLLOW

Rauthmann et al. describe a tripartite model of situations involving cues, characteristics and classes. We read characteristics as the psychologically relevant attributes of situations that are proximal causes of behaviour. This facet of situations seems to be the most fruitful starting point for building a systematic understanding of the situation. A focus on situational characteristics may even help uncover robust evidence of interactions between situational factors and personality dispositions for predicting behaviour, the Holy Grail for integrating personality and social psychology.

As it stands, we suspect that it will be easier to identify specific cues once researchers have a firm grasp of the psychological dimensions that characterize a wide range of situations. Cues give rise to situational characteristics through information processing systems within individuals according to the Rauthmann et al. model. Accordingly, a well-articulated taxonomy of situational characteristics offers researchers a starting point for identifying cues. In fact, we suspect that it will be difficult to identify cues without some understanding of their psychological effects. Further, the existence of situational classes can be addressed empirically, at least partially, with statistical tools designed to identify latent classes from characteristics (as they noted).

Based on these considerations, we propose this mantra: Identify a useful and reasonably valid working taxonomy of situational characteristics and the cues and classes (if any) will follow. Fortunately, the toolkit of the typical personality psychologist (viz. expertise in psychological assessment) is well suited to this task. Moreover, Rauthmann et al. appear to have made good progress on this front.

EXPERIMENTS HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER

Their Figure 1 is a causal model, and we believe that experiments are privileged methods for bolstering causal inferences. However, we detected some reluctance by Rauthmann et al. to endorse use of experimental approaches for testing their ideas. For instance, they recommend that ‘research on person-situation transactions focus on natural situations’ (p. 31). They seem to argue that because of the processes of selection, evocation, and manipulation (e.g. Buss, 1987), experimentally created situations lack utility for researchers. In contrast, we think that there is a role for creative experimentation for advancing the science of the situation. The caveat is that the kinds of experiments we imagine are more firmly rooted in a working taxonomy of situational characteristics than has typically been the case.

As we see it, an important task for a science of situations is to identify cues that are (a) manipulable by researchers and (b) consistently related to situational characteristics (i.e. cues that generate reasonably similar psychological reactions in many people). People may disagree about the cues that fit...
Taking Historical Time Seriously

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Abstract: Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder specify several principles that will no doubt prove useful in guiding subsequent psychological situation research. Here, I flag two elements inherent in the orientation of Rauthmann et al. in need of further examination. The first refers to the relation between persons and situations, specifically whether persons and situations should be viewed from a split or relational perspective. The second, in contrast, refers to the possibility that these principles the principles recognized by these authors may not hold relevance to all situations (across cultures and time periods). Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) have clearly thought a lot about the many principles, tenets and features involved in studying situations. I focus my comments on two points. First, I note that the orientation they adopted, wherein situations, persons and behaviours may be meaningfully understood through partitioning and isolation from one another, represents an unexamined by-product of a certain intellectual history, one of only many such histories now available to us. Second, I underscore the fact that, although Rauthmann et al. acknowledge that psychological experience of situations is weighted heavily with cultural influences, the applicability of their framework to all situations, across all cultures and all time periods should be questioned rather than assumed. These points are predicated on the need to take historical time seriously. I make them with the implicit assumption that, under different circumstances, much more could and should be said about the Rauthmann and colleagues’ timely and well-conceived article.

FROM PERSONS TO SITUATIONS: DUALISMS LURKING

Processing Principle aside, Rauthmann et al. seem quite comfortable parsing situations from persons and persons from situations. That is, while they concede that situations become psychologically meaningful only when they contain warm bodies, they go on to state that ‘people’s mental and behavioural states should not be considered parts of situations or the situation per se’ (p. 20). This is not without good
reason. However, this interpretive manoeuvre, wherein the conceptual aspects of a psychological phenomenon are meaningfully distinct and appropriately viewed as such, reflects the sensibilities particular to the Judeo-Graeco-Roman-Christian-Renaissance-Enlightenment-Romanticist philosophical tradition (Rorty, 1987, p. 57), rather than the sole and singular way in which the transactions between persons and situations are to be understood.

From mind to body, self to society and, of course, person to situation, ours is a history predicated on dualisms (Chandler & Dunlop, in press). Indeed, despite long ago abandoning the notion that the pineal gland represented a holy bridge between self and soul, a growing number of ‘cognitive scientists’ are contributing to a growing body of evidence supporting the notion that humans are intuitively and innately dualists (see Bloom, 2004). If so, it is perhaps unsurprising that Rauthmann et al. are comfortable placing situations, persons and behaviours in their own water-tight compartments and restricting themselves to consideration of the additive outcome of any two or more of these concepts. The ‘strong’ words of this conclusion, however, represent to others ‘fighting’ words. Although dualisms are bedrocks of Western intellectualism and some now suggest infant and adult alike share a penchant for dualistic thought, there also exists a chorus of scholars challenging the notion that ‘the general imprecise way of observing everywhere opposites’ (Nietzsche, 1988/1880) is an inescapable aspect of human nature, as well as the most appropriate manner by which to explore psychological phenomena.

Overton (1997), one of the most vocal critics of such divide-and-conquer strategies, argued that a common implication of pitching varying concepts into ‘independent, individual, isolated, foundational parts of an aggregate reality’ (p. 327) is that one such part becomes privileged, while the other is treated like an intellectual afterthought. The solution, according to him, is to forsake simple additive interactions in the interest of more synthetic or relational approaches, approaches wherein the relations among, rather than the independence between, concepts become of central interest. This, admittedly, is a somewhat alien notion, one that may or may not be applicable to all concepts relevant to personality psychology. I contend, however, taking a page from the likes of Lakatos (1978) and Laudan (1977), that there exists a subset of concepts that may be meaningfully interpreted from within both relational and more ‘split’ meta-theories. Because of their intertwined nature with persons, situations represent prime candidates to be placed in this category of concepts. It would behove Rauthmann et al. to consider this possibility.

**HISTORICAL ‘WEIGHT’ AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SITUATIONS**

Ending with a level of enthusiasm that should be commended and encouraged, Rauthmann et al. suggest that we undertake ‘innovative and intensive multi-method, multi-time designs that gather longitudinal data from people’s everyday lives, even across different cultures and across different age cohorts’ (p. 36). Presumably, the resulting data are to be interpreted using the many principles and corollaries that Rauthmann et al. have put forth here. I, however, suggest a moment of caution before applying these principles and corollaries full stop to psychological experiences of situations from various cohorts, cultures and time periods. The historical-cultural context in which the applicable situation is considered may be sufficiently different from the Rauthmann et al. ‘western’ context that their concepts and understandings simply will not compute. Illustrating the problem inherent in trying to apply current and culturally embedded perspectives to bygone eras, Murray (1996), in a hypothetical conversation between Herman Mellville and contemporary critics regarding the possibility that marriage represented Mellville’s wall, has Mellville assert,

> Why should I put so private and delicate a matter before the eyes of a “bantering, barren, and prosaic, hearty age,” a generation of censorious, nominally-Christian hypocrites? To my world, with its pride and purity, marriage was a sacred, inviolable institution, guarded and walled-in by the most powerful moral sentiments. You people, with your permissive attitude towards sex and your lenient divorce laws, cannot possibly imagine what it feels like to be in the position I was in in 1850.

The Rauthmann et al. framework, with its three overarching principles, may very well provide the most appropriate footing on which to grasp ‘what it feels like’ to be in position x no matter where (culturally) of when (historically) position x may be. This possibility, however, should be tested rather than assumed.

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**Some Thoughts on Psychological Situations**

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Abstract: Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder provide an excellent conceptual basis for the study of psychological situations. In our comment, we (a) suggest some avenues for future research, (b) argue for the role of cues in situation research and (c) encourage Rauthmann et al. to elaborate on implicit situation perception and situation dynamics. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.
Some years ago, Back, Schmukle, and Egloff (2009) rummated on how to design situations to evoke Big Five-related behaviours optimally. This endeavour would be much easier today—thanks to Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s impressive research program on the structure of situations and person-by-situation interactions (2015; also see Rauthmann, in press; Rauthmann et al., 2014; Rauthmann & Sherman, in press; Rauthmann, Sherman, Nave, & Funder, in press; Sherman et al., in press).

Rauthmann et al. (2015) do an excellent job of illuminating the fundamental importance of situations in personality psychology—and in psychology in general—and in describing the methods for taxonomizing and measuring them. They made it crystal clear that a personality psychology that aims to predict behaviour must study personality and situations and their interactions (Funder, 2006). We wholeheartedly applaud this timely approach. Here, we ask a few questions that came to our minds when reading this comprehensive approach to situations (including its ‘Jamesian’ title), and we suggest some avenues for future research.

As followers of Egon Brunswik (1956) and, consequently, great fans of lens model analyses, we have the impression that Rauthmann et al. may have somewhat underestimated the role of cues in explaining behaviour. We completely agree that cues need to be processed, interpreted and acted upon to create a ‘psychological situation’ in a person’s head. We also agree that these cognitive processes generate important and meaningful between-individual and within-individual variance that should be studied. However, we see the section (and the heading) ‘Contra Cues...’ as too harsh. We believe that measuring and manipulating cues can provide important insights into human behaviour: first, manipulating cues (or combinations thereof) is the only way to establish causality. Second, analysing cues provides a fine-graded, micro-analytical approach to the study of behaviour. Third, cues are the ‘objective’ building blocks of ‘subjective’ situation characteristics. Thus, studying cues is an important addition to more meso-analytical and macro-analytical approaches. See Figure 1 of Rauthmann et al., which shows that cues are the only links between the perspectives of Person 1 and Person 2—a link that is objectively scalable and visible to others.

We see several promising areas in which inspiring thoughts of Rauthmann et al. can be fruitfully applied. To begin, we suspect that relationship research can benefit greatly from incorporating situational information: in addition to (mis)matches on personality traits, consensual interpretation and selection of situations are likely important predictors of relationship satisfaction. More generally, it would be interesting to examine systematic discrepancies in situational appraisals within and between rating sources, rating temporalities and rating materials. Furthermore, are not most mental disorders characterized by an aberrant (‘abnormal’) situation definition—whether definition is based on objective criteria or consensus of others? Is not one of the key goals of psychological therapies to change how situations are interpreted? Is not desire to change behaviour closely tied to creating and approaching new situations and perceiving old ones differently? Does not personality change take place via variations in personality states triggered by alterations in construing, modifying and selecting situations? Here, we see the enormous potential of applying elaborated and well-designed situational taxonomies.

We would like to encourage Rauthmann et al. to elaborate on the implicit (automatic, impulsive and hot) side of selecting, filtering, evaluating and interpreting situation cues (beyond simply citing Strack & Deutsch, 2004): how can these less controlled aspects of situations be assessed? How do they shape behaviour—in addition or in contradiction to reflective processing of situation characteristics (e.g. Hirschmüller, Egloff, Nestler, & Back, 2013)? How important are they in the implementation and the maintenance of behaviour change (Gamer, Schmukle, Luka-Krausgrill, & Egloff, 2008; Riebel, Egloff, & Witthöft, 2014)?

Another issue that we find promising to think about is situation dynamics because construal of situation characteristics is by no means static: situations change as we act in them or think about them. Theory building and study design with respect to this aspect might benefit from the stress/coping and emotion regulation literature: for example, Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) classic work nicely elaborates on the sequence and interaction of primary and secondary appraisals of stressful situations and their effects on instrumental and emotional coping behaviour. Similarly inspiring might be the recent ‘dynamic’ update of the process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 2015) that outlines spirals of situation–attention–appraisal–response circles’ that extend across time.

A last, more basic and pragmatic thought refers to measurement of situation characteristics. We fully subscribe to the Circularity Principle and to the idea that it is challenged when only one person’s perception of a situation is considered. However, when thinking just about the first and second aspects of the proposed optimal ‘real-life multi-method multi-situation multi-time multi-group design’—which is a little threatening, at least to our situation appraisals—we asked ourselves how this could be implemented in practice. It requires assessment of situation characteristics in participants’ everyday lives by more than one judge. Would not we need an EAR (in the sense of an electronically activated recorder; Mehl, Pennebaker, Crow, Dabbs, & Price, 2001) or an EYE (e.g. a video camera integrated in a drone) in every situation that ‘objectively’ registers all aspects from multiple angles to make it possible to obtain a second, independent rating source later? Otherwise, raters have to rely on reports—that are subject to interpretations—of individual participants, even if these reports are intended to assess ‘objective’ aspects of situation.

To conclude, we learned a lot from the inspiring article of Rauthmann et al. We concur with most of its principles and corollaries. However, we insist that cues are alive and well. We encourage Rauthmann et al. to elaborate on implicit situation perception and situation dynamics. With that, we are optimistic that the future of psychological (situation) research will be as bright as DIAMONDS.

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What Are Personality Psychologists Especially Suited to Add to the Study of Situations?

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Abstract: We concur wholeheartedly that research on situations is needed so that personality psychologists can explicate person–situation interactions. Three principles and five recommendations of Rauthmann et al. for situation research provide a sound basis. Given the tremendous existing work on situations, we propose that personality psychologists should focus where they can provide the most value. Two such routes would be employing real-life, multi-method, multi-situation, multi-time and multi-group designs, and studying situation impacts on trait enactments. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

We agree strongly with Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s call (2015) for more research on situations, in particular their call for research of the type intended to advance understanding of person–situation interactions. It is now essential to models of personality traits that they include reactions to situations (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, in press). Research on situations is a key component of this enterprise, so we are grateful for the contribution of Rauthmann et al. towards such research.

There is much to love in their article. It is thoughtful, careful and rich. The three principles of Processing, Reality and Circularity are good bases for thinking about situations. The five recommendations to (i) be careful with terminology, (ii) create multiple guiding taxonomies, (iii) attend to experience, (iv) focus on ‘characteristics’ of situations and (v) study situation perception are strong foundations for future research (although we may not agree with every detail of these recommendations). There are many good ideas, and the article is very provocative. We mean ‘provocative’ in the good sense, of provoking ideas, responses and further developments. Indeed, we have several potential comments that we would enjoy making, but we have only a short space (for example, we loved the matrix of methods of assessing situational information!).

We had to pick just one topic. Thus, we chose to address the question of where personality psychologists can add the most value to the study of situations. Social psychologists and behaviourists (as well as psychologists and social scientists in other fields) have already made tremendous progress in this. Furthermore, they have addressed cues, characteristics, and classes and have carried out much research that would fall within the five recommendations of Rauthmann et al.

They propose one place personality psychologists can add tremendous value: understanding situations could benefit from real-life, multi-method, multi-situation, multi-time and multi-group research. Although psychologists in all areas engage in these types of research to some degree, these types of research are particularly strong in personality psychology and may even be personality psychologists’ forte. Thus, we agree that this type of research is one way personality psychologists can add value to the study of situations.

We propose another particularly fruitful way personality psychologists could add value to the study of situations: by studying how situations influence trait-enacting behaviour. This particular direction builds on personality psychologists’ strengths and provides direct information relevant to understanding situations. We believe the same is true for the ways situations influence goal-pursuit and meaning-making behaviours, but we focus on trait-enacting behaviours here.

This way of studying situations would add value for at least three reasons. First, this direction builds on personality psychologists’ strengths. One strength of personality psychology is its discovery and explication of the Big Five, which are the major dimensions of individual differences in thought, feeling and behaviour (Ashton & Lee, 2012).

Second, such research would provide information about the mechanisms underlying the Big Five. By identifying which situation features affect which displays of which traits, psychologists would discover some of the mechanisms underlying trait-production of behaviour. Third, this research would directly fulfill personality psychologists’ purpose in studying situations. One main purpose personality psychologists have in studying situations is to learn more about person–situation interactions. By studying situations directly in terms of their influence on trait-enacting behaviours, we are directly studying such person–situation interactions.

All five of the authors’ recommendations for future research could be followed with this approach. For example, the authors recommend developing guiding taxonomies. In our proposed direction, personality psychologists would taxonomize situations according to the trait enactments they bring about. In such research, researchers would start with the traits, not with the situations. They would measure the degrees to which each trait was enacted in a variety of situations. They would then generate candidate situation features for each enactment and test the candidate situation features for relations to the enactments. These features could include cues, characteristics or classes. The data could be collected in experience-sampling studies or in several fixed situations. The situation features that successfully evoked trait enactments could then be organized by the trait enactments they evoked.

Indeed, several studies have already followed this logic (e.g. Bleidorn, 2009; Fleeson, 2007; Huang & Ryan, 2011; Minbashian, Wood, & Beckmann, 2010). For example, Fournier, Moskowitz, and Zuroff (2008) found that agreeableness enactments tended to be similar to the degrees of agreeableness of others in the situations, whereas dominance enactments tended to be complementary to the degrees of dominance of others in the situations.
Similarly, this proposed direction of research could test the recommendations to attend to experience and to focus on characteristics of situations. Researchers could directly test whether individuals’ own experiences of situations are more powerful predictors of trait enactments than are consensual or ‘objective’ accounts of situations. Researchers could similarly test whether characteristics, cues or classes of situations are the most powerful predictors of trait enactments.

In conclusion, we applaud the turn towards the study of situations as key to the future of personality psychology. We propose that personality psychologists should consider where we can add the most value in this study of situations. We should start our work by celebrating the amazing advances of other psychologists in their understanding of situations, so that we can be the most efficient in our future studies. In particular, we propose that personality psychologists can add the most value by both employing real-life, multi-method, multi-situation, multi-time, and multi-group designs and studying impacts of situations on trait displays.

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**A New Twist on Old Social Psychology Classics: Revisiting the Situation Under a New Light**

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Abstract: The theoretical framework outlined by Rauthmann et al. permits description of situations with great precision. This is interesting not only for research to come but also to comprehend existent work retrospectively. Here, we show how Milgram’s classical obedience-to-authority experiment can be examined using their approach. We also suggest ways in which future studies could explore this and other experimental situations more thoroughly. Finally, we propose an analogy between situational and visual processing to address the objectivism/subjectivism debate in situational research. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Understanding and measuring how persons and situations interplay is an endeavour of paramount importance for psychological science. Persons and situations have usually been considered separately throughout the history of psychology, although they are actually two sides of the same coin (Fleeson & Noftle, 2008; Funder & Ozer, 1983). Some authors still argue in favour of this separation (Bond, 2005; Cooper & Withey, 2009), but personality and social psychologists have started to recognize these two aspects of human behaviour (Funder, 2007; Reis, 2008). In any attempt to improve our knowledge of the relations between persons and situations, a major and necessary step is conceptualizing these relations. Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) propose a novel, excellent and original model to understand this interplay. One of their article’s most interesting contributions is the distinction between objective and subjective features of the situation, namely cues and characteristics, and this distinction can shed new light on the old personality–situation debate. Dissection of the elements that interplay in a given situation could help to disentangle the effects of personality and situation on behaviour.

From our point of view, this radically new framework should lead to insights into classical social psychology experiments that were put forward as proofs of the power of the situation. Here, we will exemplify how Rauthmann and colleagues’ new perspective can help reconceptualize old social psychology classics. For the sake of brevity, we focus on cues, characteristics and how analogies with close disciplines could inspire future research in this area.

Milgram’s obedience-to-authority experiment (Milgram, 1974) is perhaps the most classic and well-known experiment in social psychology, but it still spurs lively debates in our time (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). While personal variables’ roles in this experiment are still unclear (Funder & Ozer, 1983; Gallardo-Pujol, Orekhova, Benet-Martínez, & Slater, 2015), one could think that situational factors are clearly defined. However, the exact situational variables involved in the observed behaviours have so far been arbitrarily categorized (Haslam, Loughnan, & Perry, 2014) or analysed in isolation (Packer, 2008). Theoretical account of situations of Rauthmann et al. offers a framework to organize these factors.

Aiming to set an example in this direction, we identify some cues and characteristics present in a standard Milgram paradigm from the point of view of the participant. Drawing from Rauthmann et al., some of the cues present in this situation can be as follows:
(a) Persons, relationships and social interactions: experimenter’s status (e.g. professor or student) and physical attributes (e.g. attire, height and voice pitch), previous acquaintance with experimenter, and presence of others aside from learner or experimenter.

(b) Objects: button device to deliver shocks, speakers/screen to monitor the learner and table.

(c) Events/activities: exact script followed by the experimenter (e.g. use of imperative versus suggestive tenses) and the confederate (e.g. only onomatopoetic complaints versus overt pleas to stop the experiment).

(d) Locations: proximity with the learner/experimenter, room dimensions, luminescence and so on.

(e) Time: time of day and year and learner/experimenter speech rate.

Additionally, the DIAMONDS model permits categorization of situational characteristics present in the Milgram paradigm. Participants are likely to experience such situation as very high in Duty (as they are receiving orders), high in Intellect (as they must be attentive to the learner’s mistakes), high in Adversity (as the learner is being exposed to noxious stimuli), low in Mating (as sexual or romantic opportunities with the experimenter or the learner are unlikely), low in Positivity (as it would be unpleasant for most participants to deliver shocks to a defenseless fellow participant), high in Negativity (as participants might experience guilt or other negative feelings), high in Deception (as participants are likely to suspect the real goals of the study and the setting itself) and high in Sociality (as participants must unavoidably relate with other individuals).

Standardized, classic social experiments can be repeated in fixed-situation designs, and classic manipulations of the situations could be portrayed as a cues-manipulation design. As a tip for future experimental research, we suggest adding standardized ratings from bystanders (i.e. the experimenter himself or herself) of the situation, which would shed light on how fixed situations are construed by their actors.

Finally, we want to mention a possible avenue for research in this field, bringing together disciplines, such as social neuroscience, with situation research. Throughout the article, Rauthmann et al. refer to objective or subjective reality. Regarding this, we offer an analogy with visual processing (Zeki, 1994). Similar to the gestalt laws, Rauthmann et al. provide a set of descriptive principles. However, although they provide certainly pioneering but preliminary insights about the psychological and brain processes underlying situational perception, we need to supersede descriptive principles with explanatory ones. Rauthmann et al. provide a gate through which we can enter into the explanatory realm of situational perception, and hence, understand how people process and perceive situations. In the same fashion that certain light types, wavelengths and shape patterns are (objective) cues that are transduced into chemical signals and processed by different brain pathways, it is finally in the brain where all this information is integrated and interpreted in an idiosyncratic (subjective) manner. Could we perceive situations in the same way we perceive a colour or a shape? DIAMONDS predicts behaviour over and above personality (Sherman et al., in press), so they might reflect bottom-up processes that underlie situation perception, as Rauthmann et al. suggest. One interesting question would be, in a fixed-situation design, whether individual differences in Negativity might be processed by areas involved in emotional processing, as long as the Negativity is related to Neuroticism (Rauthmann et al., 2014).

All in all, Rauthmann et al. lay the basis of what can be a fruitful avenue for person–situation research and finally confront persons and situations with each other. Undoubtedly, this will allow for a better understanding of human behaviour and improve our predictions as psychological scientists.

The Best Way to Think About Situations: Process and Reality, Yea; Circularity, Nay

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Abstract: I examine how the authors apparently derived their Process and Reality Principles from the critical realism underlying Funder’s (1995) Realistic Accuracy Model to elegantly explain the interwovenness of persons and situation and to resolve the objective and subjective views of situations. However, I question whether heeding the Circularity Principle is useful for predicting what people will do in a situation. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

The first sentence of Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s article (2015) reads, ‘The person and the situation at any given moment are inextricably interwoven.’ I could not agree more (Johnson, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2009). What I would like to do here is explain why I think that two of their core principles (Process and Reality) respect their interwoven nature, while the third (Circularity) might be a pointless attempt to separate situations from personality.

Their three core principles were apparently derived from an analysis of the longstanding philosophical debate between objectivism and subjectivism. Situation research to date has failed to bridge the divide between objectivism and subjectivism and has therefore remained insular, non-cumulative and non-integrative. Mainstream personality psychology, on the other hand, has resolved the debate by adopting the position of critical realism found in the natural sciences.
(Funder, 1995). Consequently, situation research might also benefit from adopting this approach used so successfully by personality psychology.

The position of critical realism found in the natural sciences (not to be confused with the dialectical critical realism of sociology) holds that objects of study have objective realities apart from our attempts to know those realities; therefore, if people have different judgments of reality, some will be closer to the truth than others. However, given the elusive nature of objective reality, no one can ever be absolutely certain of possessing the truth. The best we can do in personality research is to average multiple measurements of personality (assessing reliability by the degree of convergence) and then explore the construct validity of our averaged measurements by seeing if they predict other observations deemed relevant by theory.

Research on person perception goes even further than employing these basic principles of reliability and validity. Funder’s (1995) Realistic Accuracy Model has identified specific stages in the process of perceiving personality and what can go wrong in each stage. To form an accurate judgment of a target person, the target must first of all make available a sufficient number of behavioural cues that are relevant to the personality trait being judged. Next, the judge must detect those cues and use them appropriately to form an accurate judgment. The failure of the target to make enough relevant cues available or the judge to detect and use the cues properly will result in an idiosyncratic, inaccurate judgment.

Rauthmann et al. propose that we use the same strategy to conceptualize the objective and subjective natures of situations. Critical realism tells us that situations have objective realities that are never known for certain. Their Processing Principle asserts that there is a process (analogous to the process of perceiving persons) that creates a psychologically meaningful mental representation from the cues in an objective environment. Their Reality Principle states that, to the degree that relevant cues are available in an objective situation (physical stratum) and are detected and used the same way by all perceivers, we have what Rauthmann et al. call the ‘consensual stratum’. Differences in the availability of relevant cues or detection and use of cues create an ‘idiosyncratic stratum’.

The Processing and Reality Principles therefore can therefore be seen as applications of Funder’s (1995) Realistic Accuracy Model of person perception to situation perception. But their third core principle—the Circularity Principle—diverges from practices in personality judgment research. Personality psychologists have suggested that the most accurate assessment of personality is usually the average judgment of persons who are well-acquainted with the target (Hofstee, 1994). By analogy, the most accurate assessment of a situation would be the average judgment of persons who are well-acquainted with the situation. But the Circularity Principle holds that measuring situations by the research participants’ judgments of the situation is undesirable because those judgments would be circular and tautological, blurring the personality of the participants with characteristics of the situation (e.g. calling a situation ‘exciting’ if participants feel excited in the situation). The Rauthmann et al. Approximation Corollary advises us to assess situations using at least two rating sources (e.g. confederates or lab raters) rather than just participants. But is it really necessary or even desirable to define situations apart from the persons in them?

In personality research, we use multiple judges to triangulate as best we can on the actual personality characteristics of the people we are studying. We do this because we believe that a person’s objectively real personality characteristics (not just their self-perceptions) have real-life consequences. We can predict, for example, profound differences in the life patterns of those who are high or low on authoritarian impulses—regardless of whether the authoritarians perceive themselves as authoritarian.

But in contrast to objective personality, objective situations alone (e.g. the number of emails in an inbox) cannot predict or explain an individual’s behaviour (e.g. whether someone will respond to a stack of emails). If predicting and explaining behaviour is our goal, we need to know the individual’s perception of the physical stratum, which will inevitably be influenced by the individual’s personality (e.g. his or her degree of conscientiousness). The person and the situation at any given moment are inextricably interwoven.

Whether or not Circularity is something to be avoided depends on our research goals. If our goal is to predict behaviour, and it is an individual’s subjective perception of a situation (however idiosyncratic) that determines behaviour rather than the objective situation, what we want to measure and place in our regression equation is the individual’s perception, not outside judgments of the objective situation. In this case, Circularity is desirable. Only if our research goal is to study how the same objective situation is perceived differently across individuals would we be interested in a non-Circular definition of the situation. At the same time, we would additionally need to measure each individual’s perceptions, so Circularity will never be avoided completely.

Let’s Not Search Just Where the Light Is Good

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Abstract: Understanding how situations impact behaviour and ultimately personality presents many challenges. Rauthmann et al. have outlined the difficulties well, and they offer many thoughtful ideas for addressing them. But I
Psychologists have long wrestled with reconciling the pervasive observations that people’s behaviour varies from situation to situation; there tends to be some consistency in how people behave within situations, but there is also considerable relative behavioural consistency within individuals across situations. Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) have outlined the conundrums, confounds and potentials for circular reasoning involved in this challenge thoroughly. Undoubtedly, a prominent one is all the jingle and jangle in the attempts that have been made so far to meet the challenge, so it is easy to empathize with the Rauthmann et al. goal of getting us all to fall in line with one approach to doing that. Getting this to happen is more difficult though. The devil is in the details of just what that approach should be.

The going-in assumption of Rauthmann et al. in proposing that their approach be the one is that what has worked pretty well in describing how behaviour tends to vary among people will work just as well in describing the behaviours situations tend to elicit. But this misses the fundamental question that any reconciliation has to answer: just what roles do situations play in how people, that is, individuals but also people in general (the two sets of roles may not be the same), behave? We have gotten somewhere in understanding how behaviour tends to vary among people by articulating personality ‘traits’ on which people tend to show consistency across situations and which tend to present a coherent structure. At least when we look across people—the factor-oriented structure we have come almost to revere begins to crack more than a bit when we look at it within individuals. But characterizing situations by the kinds of behaviour they tend to elicit will not work even this well if what we want to understand is what effects they have on our behaviour, and the suggested model of Rauthmann et al. is full of such characterizations. After all, thinking of situations in terms of how people tend to act in them is the very source of the sort of circularity they, appropriately to my mind, warn us to avoid. Rauthmann et al. even go so far as to structure the behaviours they suspect situations of eliciting around the personality traits they consider relevant: we are thus characterizing situations by whether they tend to get people talking, for example, so we can see if in fact the situations do tend to get people talking and whether people who tend to enjoy talking tend to gravitate to those situations.

This is like looking for those keys you dropped at night somewhere in the parking lot just over here where the light is good. If you happen to be lucky enough to have dropped them there (this time), voila, you find them! If the goal of personality psychology is to predict behaviour, we have got a formula for significant results every time. It would actually be rather surprising if we could not observe that situations that expect or demand talking in fact tend to do so, and that people who tend to enjoy such situations more than others tend to spend more time in them. Of course, it is also possible to ‘bundle’ these kinds of situational characterizations together using factor analysis. And because the situational characterizations follow the behaviours whose behavioural consistency is considered to cohere as traits, it is no wonder when the resulting situation-characteristic factors reflect those behavioural traits too. But I do not think this is quite what personality psychologists want to know. What we want to know is what is it about this situation that gets the usually quiet John talking and what does it have to do with what brought John there in the first place, if anything? And is it different from what has got Mary there being her usual highly vocal self? Does it get John to rise all the way to Mary’s level of verbosity this time, or is he still quiet relative to her? Does any of it matter for how either of them will behave tomorrow or next year some time? To get at these questions, it seems to me that we are going to need to think about what constitutes a situation independently of any behaviours we think it might elicit.

Accomplishing this is a tall order, as often what constitutes a situation is just that: some consistent pattern of behaviour among the people in it. Rauthmann et al. could be right that we can make considerable progress at this very early stage of situation-specific research by outlining dimensions along which situations tend to fall. But one thing we should strongly suspect is that, just as the structure of personality traits starts to crack when we try to transfer it from observations across individuals to observations within individuals, the structure of situational dimensions will crack too when we try to transfer it from characterizations across situations to people’s characterizations within situations. That is, if we know anything about situations, we know that people differ in how they perceive them, the emotions they arouse and the behaviours they elicit. This means we better stay far away from characterizing situations especially as ‘Positive’ and ‘Negative’ but also as ‘Adverse’ or inspiring feelings of ‘Duty’ if those are the dimensions on which we are also going to measure expression of behaviour. Instead perhaps we think about the activities going on in the situation: who is present, what are their surroundings, how are they related, what things are present, how are the people dressed and are there particular social protocols or constraints in place. It may not be possible to avoid all sense of emotional or motivational content in characterizing situations, but, at least to me, it seems crucial that whatever bits of this leak in should be independent of the personality trait model used to evaluate behaviours in the situation. You may have dropped those keys anywhere in that night-time parking lot and you will all too often miss them if you look just where the light is good.
Situations Are Not Persons

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Abstract: The argument made by Rauthmann et al. hinges on the idea that situations are sufficiently similar to persons so that methods used to describe persons can be adapted, mutatis mutandis, to the description of situations. They recognize the difficulty of describing situations without also covertly describing people. They propose a multilevel and multivariate framework to overcome these difficulties. The result is a loss of parsimony. I propose instead that, while having a dimension-based taxonomy of situations would be nice, it is not necessary for fruitful experimental psychological work. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) heroically work to bring standards, structure and sanity to the study of (psychological) situations. They do so from the vantage point of personality researchers, who can point to decades of success in taxonomizing what they think must be taxonomized. As they note, personality psychologists of a more benighted era tried their hands at person taxonomies, whereas in recent times, dimensional approaches, such as the Big Five trait model, have been preponderant. Their mission here is to make this dimensional approach work for (psychological) situations.

A simple transfer will not do, however. Whereas it may be useful to describe people in terms of the frequencies or probabilities of certain behaviours they emit, while noting that these behaviours are instances of corresponding personality traits, it is not useful to describe situations in terms of the frequencies or probabilities of certain behaviours they elicit. Whereas it has become acceptable to define the trait of talkativeness in terms of the frequency or probability of a person talking, the same tactic is suspect in the context of situations. To say that a particular situation is one that elicits talking because it is observed that many people talk when in it is circular. It begs the question of what it is in the situation that triggers talking. Rauthmann et al. recognize the threat of circularity and wrestle with it. They do not, however, consider the possibility that the same dragon has not been slayed on their home turf of personality trait research.

Assuming for the moment that dimensions can be found to taxonomize situations, where can they be found? Rauthmann et al. navigate shifting grounds from objective cues to psychological construals, affordances and behaviour. Almost all available candidate variables for describing situations are contaminated by input from the person. If there are pure situation cues, they may be so few and so sparse that they are of little help to the taxonomist. Indeed, if the DIAMONDS model (Rauthmann et al., 2014) is the best effort to capture and describe social situations to date, then much purifying work remains to be done. The list of items in DIAMONDS is heavily loaded with the behavioural trait language typical of personality assessment (Krueger, 2014). Using the language of colour to describe smell does not work well. By analogy, using the language of personality traits to describe situations will either miss the essence of situations if that essence is not behavioural, or it will flirt with circularity if it is behavioural.

The Rauthmann et al. mission rests on the assumption that situations must be taxonomized. Or else—it is implied— experimental research on situations floats in a contourless space. There is no context from which a particular study may derive meaning and generalizability. If I understand this implication correctly—instead of wrongly reading it into their article—I must respectfully disagree. Consider the example of the Cyberball paradigm (Williams & Jarvis, 2006). Arguably, the Cyberball paradigm is an ingenious way to produce a situation of social isolation in the laboratory. The respondent sits at a terminal ostensibly hooked up to the terminals of two other players. A ball is passed around, but after a few passes, the other two players leave the respondent out of the game. This situation can be characterized by its physical properties and also by how it is perceived by most observers. Virtually everyone agrees that the shut-out condition of the game amounts to a situation of social exclusion. This agreement is seen in the manipulation checks, but few experimenters are interested in manipulation checks only. The question of interest is whether the situation of social exclusion has downstream effects on other behaviours, such as cooperation, restitution, aggression and what have you (e.g., Aydin, Krueger, Frey, Kastenmüller, & Fischer, 2014).

Once the conceptualization and operationalization of ‘social exclusion’ has been achieved, the questions of reproducibility and generalizability can be tackled. Often, the design of the initial demonstration becomes a prototype from which alterations and modifications fan out. Together, these treatments may become a recognizable class. In other words, in the tradition of experimental social psychology, classes of situations emerge from theory and research interests. Indeed, an innovative and oft-replicated experimental design is often known (somewhat grandiosely) as a paradigm. In contrast, the tradition of taxonomy finding assumes that a population of situations exists ‘out there’, and therefore, there must be a way to describe them in terms of their invariants and correlated features—because this has worked reasonably well with populations of people. Perhaps this assumption is false.¹

In their quest for standards, structure and sanity, Rauthmann et al. develop a framework with a dizzying

¹When there is a definable population of stimuli or situations, though, representative design is possible and should be implemented (Brunswick, 1955; Dhami, Hertwig, & Hoffrage, 2004).
number of interdependent axioms, assumptions, corollaries and predictions. Perhaps this inflationary complexity is necessary, but it certainly is not parsimonious.

One radical way to restore parsimony would be to bite the bullet and treat situations like persons outright. Take a situation and ask observers to rate it along the big trait dimensions. A profile will emerge! But is it the situation that is being rated or the modal person in it? Also, what are the cues used to select the situation in the first place? Finally, when and where does the situation begin and end? A personality researcher might get frustrated by these questions and return to the study of persons. Persons have the advantage of fitting with the tradition of methodological individualism (Popper, 1950; Weber, 1968). Persons are identifiable units moving through space and time, from situation to situation. Situations are fleeting moments that can live only as abstractions. Experimental social psychologists are not worried by this state of affairs because they can create and terminate situations at will.

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Lessons from Trait Research

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Abstract: There is a well-established tradition of assessing personality traits, and some of its principles may have parallels in assessment of situations. Trait measures are interpreted in terms of norms; situation assessments may require multiple judges to control perceiver effects. Internal consistency is monitored in trait research; inter-rater reliability should be reported in situation research. Personality scales typically assess traits rather than states; situational assessment might profitably concentrate on recurrent rather than one-time situations. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) seem keen to plunge research on situations in media res, advocating the study of natural situations and person-by-situation transactions over time and across cultures. A case could be made for first developing a better understanding of situations themselves, but that task is complicated—as the authors are well aware—by the fact that psychologically meaningful situations are necessarily filtered through the perceptions of persons. The challenge of assessing person and situation separately has already been addressed by trait psychologists. There may be lessons in that long-established research tradition for assessment of situations.

Personality traits are not mechanical habits—uniform, repetitive behaviours that operate in a vacuum. Instead, traits are conditional propensities to respond in characteristic ways to specific kinds of stimuli (Tellegen, 1991). ‘I laugh a lot when I’m chatting with friends’ would be a sensible extraversion item, whereas ‘I laugh a lot when I’m insulted’ would not. Trait psychologists are interested in the degree to which a relevant situation evokes a relevant response: Extraverts presumably laugh more than introverts when chatting with friends.

Of course, it is possible to assess traits without any explicit reference to context. ‘I am very cheerful’ is also a sensible extraversion item, but understanding that item and making an accurate response depend on integrating information from experience across a wide range of relevant situations. Situational context is implicit in such items.

The fact that personality assessment works reasonably well suggests that psychologists who construct scales and laypersons who respond to them must already know a great deal about how traits interact with situations. They presumably gleaned this knowledge from a lifetime of enculturation, personal experience and the observation of others. The challenge is to make this intuitive understanding explicit and systematic.

THE VALUE OF NORMS

Different relevant situations can evoke expression of the same trait in varying degrees—a phenomenon sometimes called item difficulty. ‘I laugh a lot in church’ might be a difficult item, endorsed only by highly extraverted respondents. The chief implication of differences in the difficulty of items is that responses to an item cannot be interpreted in an absolute sense. Choosing disagree to an item about laughing in church does not necessarily mean that one is an introvert; even moderate extraverts might give that response. Responses must be interpreted with reference to norms—data on the mean and standard deviation of responses to an item in a population of interest. A standardized score—e.g. a z-score or T-score—tells us how the person typically responds to the situation relative to the way others respond. (Standardization is normally carried out at the scale level rather than the item level, but the implications are similar.)

It is feasible to have normative information on personality items and scales because identical items are administered to all respondents; norms can then be used whenever the test is administered. This offers a degree of control over situation influences on item responses, and thus a cleaner estimate of person influences. Rauthmann et al. propose a somewhat
similar kind of control by separating perceiver effects (e.g. leniency in attributing a characteristic) from situation effects in their fixed-situations design. This is a powerful argument for preferring fixed-situations to random-situations designs; understanding a situation with data from a random design is as difficult as interpreting a personality assessment without norms.

STUDYING RECURRENT SITUATIONS

The analogy between persons-in-situations and situations-perceived-by-persons can suggest certain research strategies. For example, multi-item trait scales are better than single-item scales because they are more reliable; further, one can quantify reliability as the internal consistency of a multi-item scale. Correspondingly, in assessing the characteristics of a situation, it would be wise to use multiple raters and to report inter-rater reliability.

Another strategy is suggested by the fact that persons have both traits and states. We are generally more interested in the former, because they endure over time and allow us to predict future behaviour. Trait inventories typically ask how respondents generally feel or act in relevant situations, rather than how they felt or acted on one specific occasion. As applied to the assessment of situations, this approach suggests that one might wish to ask respondents to characterize the typical features of recurrent situations—say, Professor Smith’s Psych 101 class or weekly staff meetings at a hospital. Assuming that there is in fact substantial stability of situation characteristics in these nominally recurrent situations—an assumption that surely ought to be tested—this approach would yield generalizable data that might facilitate predictions about the effects of the situation on future behaviour. It would also probably enhance the interpretability of the assessment, because state assessments of situations (e.g. how Professor Smith’s class is perceived on 13 October) might be distorted to an unknown degree by incidental factors such as the weather and looming midterms.

A useful classification might be based on the similarity of profiles of characteristics of recurrent situations. For example, the whole catalog of university courses might be classified as more or less didactic (characterized by high Duty and Intellect) or dialectic (characterized by high Positivity, Sociality and Intellect). Little is to be gained by learning that Mary Jones perceived Professor Smith’s class as romantically charged the day a new student arrived, but it would be very useful to demonstrate that individuals high in Conscientiousness thrive in didactic classes, whereas those high in Extraversion prefer dialectic classes. Social, clinical and educational psychologists study how different groups of people respond to different experimental manipulations, therapeutic interventions or pedagogical methods, but such studies are usually ad hoc. The study of recurrent situations could provide a systematic framework for understanding how different classes of persons react to different classes of situations. Armed with that knowledge, we would be in a better position to tackle person-by-situation transactions as they unfold in the real world.

Situations, Environmental Niches and People Could Be Measured Using the Same Characteristics

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Abstract: Rauthmann et al. offer a welcome attempt to put situation-sensitive personality research on a firmer conceptual and empirical basis. We suggest a clearer distinction between momentary or current or unique situations and more stable or typical components of situations, and describe a methodology that we are developing that would represent within-individual processes and individual differences as well as interactions between individuals and interactions between individuals and their non-social environments in a single framework. We believe that this can optimally be accomplished by measuring situations and people using the same characteristics. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s article (2015) is a welcome attempt to put situation-sensitive personality research on a firmer conceptual and empirical basis. It outlines the basic concepts of such research, suggests how they relate to one another and describes possible methods for quantifying them. We highlight and discuss some points that they address.

First, we suggest a clear distinction between momentary or current or unique situations (à la personality states) and more stable or typical components of situations (à la traits). The latter could also be called chronic situations or, to the extent that they represent person–environment transactions, environmental niches. It makes sense to hypothesize that some situations in which people find themselves reflect almost entirely the typical environments that they themselves have selected or created, while other situations are more unique. If so, it also seems plausible to hypothesize that the degree to which a situation is typical versus unique may have implications for how one’s personality manifests itself in, or changes as a result of, the situation.

Empirically, experience sampling could provide one way of decomposing situations into typical and unique components. For example, individuals could provide samples of their situational experiences over a period of time and/or over
a range of situations. These samples could be random or they could reflect experiences that are tied to particular classes of situations. Each situation could be rated based on a fixed set of characteristics. Of course, obtaining parallel situation ratings from multiple rater such as Rauthmann et al. suggest may prove difficult with this method. Having such data, however, researchers could hypothesize that average ratings of situation characteristics reflect typical situations, whereas deviations from the averages reflect the unique components of particular situations. To allow good decomposition of situational variance and investigations of developmental trends, measurement plans over a longer term than those typically employed in experience sampling studies could be employed. For example, several measurement ‘bursts’ (intensive experience sampling periods) at different ages could prove useful. It may be that the unique aspects of situations matter more for personality manifestations than the typical ones that people are used to. It may also be that individuals differ in how much they vary in their situational experiences or how sensitive their personalities are to the uniqueness of particular situations, for example.

Second, besides decomposing situations into typical and unique components, we believe that personality–situation research can benefit from measuring situations and people using the same characteristics. Situations can be operationalized as affordances for particular personality manifestations. For example, if a situation calls for a particular characteristic, it would have an appropriate positive value for it, whereas a situation that suppresses the characteristic would have an appropriately sized negative value for it. And if a situation has no relevance for the characteristic, it would have a neutral (0) value for it. Assessments of situations and personality manifestations corresponding to each would allow for a direct operationalization of person–situation match (e.g. as a profile correlation). Changes in person–situation match over time and situations, in turn, could represent person–environment transactions such as individuals creating niches for themselves (i.e. the typical situations) that match their (initial) personality characteristics and these niches possibly influencing them back. Influences of other people could then be incorporated as (unique or typical) components of situations as they, too, are assessed on the same characteristics. It seems likely that many psychologically relevant situations contain multiple elements, with some being social (characteristics of other people) and some non-social. Being able to aggregate and decompose these components could have benefits.

We are currently working on a conceptual and mathematical toolbox that would represent within-individual processes and individual differences as well as interactions between individuals and interactions between individuals and their non-social environments in a single framework. In this framework, individuals are represented as interacting person vectors within a dynamic vector space (personality space), which is spanned by the dimensions that correspond to the characteristics on which the individuals are assessed. At any point of time, every person vector has a (potentially unlimited) number of forces acting on it, including, for example, (relatively) invariant genetic influences as well more or less stable environmental influences such as physical environment, culture and other individuals. If all these forces are operationalized using the same characteristics, they can also be represented as vectors in the personality space, similarly to individuals. The force vectors can then interact and combine (with different weights) among themselves as well as influence and be influenced by the person vectors to which they pertain. For example, a person vector tends to be projected towards the resultant of all the forces acting on it at the time, and it can influence these forces by exerting its own force on other persons’ vectors. It appears that these processes can be represented using a relatively simple set of mathematical rules.

We hope that this will be a powerful way to mathematically (and hence rigorously) represent and fine-tune existing ideas about people and their interactions with their typical and unique, social and non-social situations. Moreover, we hope that the framework will serve to generate new ideas. Crucially, the viability of this framework will depend on individuals’ situations being well characterized. As a result, there is a clear overlap between the goals of Rauthmann et al. and ours.

The Roles of Time and Change in Situations

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Abstract: Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder have made a landmark contribution to situation research. However, we propose that their work overlooks the need to incorporate a developmental perspective. This includes the separate but related issues of time and change. Situations often unfold over long periods of time, can bleed together, and are not time-delimited in the way traditional laboratory experiments define them. Moreover, individuals systematically change over time (lifespan development) and their reactions to situations, as well as their personality–situation transactions, develop in tandem. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) have made a landmark contribution to situation research. After several decades marked by lack of consensus, the authors proffer a well-crafted case for consensual approval on key topics in situational research including three overarching principles, many related corollaries and several underlying operational
definitions. We hope the article achieves the desired effect: provision of a solid and much-needed foundation for the field.

We propose, however, that the work of Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder overlooks the need to incorporate a developmental perspective, including the separate but related issues of time and change. To their credit, they do mention ‘cumulative effects that accrue over time’, intra-individual variation in situation experiences, temporality in situation ratings, and ‘multi-time’ assessments of situations and persons. However, none of these directly acknowledges that situations often unfold over long periods of time, can bleed together and are not time-delimited as traditionally defined by laboratory experiments. Additionally, individuals systematically change over the lifespan (develop), with their reactions to situations developing in tandem.

THE ISSUE OF TIME

We illustrate the time component by anecdote: after 50 years of smoking and 2 weeks of discomforting symptoms, one of our parents received a chilling, if not surprising, diagnosis of advanced lung cancer. This news was broken to family members with the familiar phrase, ‘we have a situation’. (We gladly report it is in full remission.)

Consistent with the claims of Rauthmann et al., this situation is well defined by its immediate, flashbulb characteristics. In the DIAMONDS model (Rauthmann & Sherman, 2014), adversity and negativity seem most salient at the time of diagnosis. This situation also serves as an example for the objectivist and subjectivist positions as well as the six theoretical perspectives (review of the particulars is left to the reader). Yet it is most useful for our purposes because it has an unusual half-life.

The fact that this particular situation is neither fleeting nor constant in psychological salience raises a number of questions. Most prominently, is the gestalt experience of the patient valid as a ‘health situation’ despite its protracted nature or must it be evaluated as a series of related, dependent situations? The situational examples provided by the authors are conveniently time-delimited: Cyberball situations last the length of the data collection window; party situations rarely last longer than the hangover; and work situations, although repeated, end at quitting time.

Our health example can be divided into similarly tidy episodes (e.g., the doctor’s office visit where the diagnosis was received, breaking the news to family, the many therapy and consultation appointments). Yet separation of this experience into distinct episodes belies its deeper meaning—the unanticipated necessity of passing through this ‘parcel’ of transactions in close succession. Health ‘situations’, like other significant events across the lifespan, often become so consistently salient over time that they become incorporated into one’s identity, motivations, and personality.

Much of this nuance is lost in the typical study of situations in social psychology. In the usual experiment, situations are artificially truncated to fit convenient time slots. In real life, situations can be long and may bleed into one another. Different people will evoke different situations, prior situations influence later ones, and actors often shape situations through their personalities. This richness is difficult to study in a controlled laboratory experiment, although experience sampling and unobtrusive monitoring (electronically activated recorder; Mehl & Holleran, 2007) can plumb these complexities. Moreover, they are well-suited to illustrate the three principles of Rauthmann et al. with time-informed data, endowing their already-excellent ideas with better depictions of how situations really look as people move through time, be it minutes, days, weeks or years.

THE ISSUE OF CHANGE

Time scale is important in defining situations, but time is not synonymous with development. There is increasing recognition that many variables—personality traits, cognitive dimensions, interpersonal skills and attitudes—develop and unfold over the lifespan (Mroczek & Spiro, 2003; Mroczek, 2014). Situations, by contrast, are often studied under the assumption that they are impervious to developmental changes within the person over the life course. This assumption is likely false. Individuals may respond to the same situation differently at different ages. A situation that, in one’s youth, was particularly anxiety-provoking or led to aggressive behaviour may no longer do so at age 40 years, for most people gain better control over their impulses as they develop from their teenage years into adulthood, midlife and older adulthood.

Personality development that results from systematic changes—those brought on by increases in impulse control, changes in health circumstances or other significant life events such as the experience of having and raising children—alter how we respond to situations. More specifically, they induce profound changes in how we perceive the cues of a given situation (thus the characteristics).

For example, Cyberball experiments highlight the power of social exclusion in shaping feelings and behaviour. However, almost every Cyberball study has used undergraduate samples. It may be that midlife and older adults, who are in general more confident about themselves, more interpersonally experienced and less familiar with virtual social interactions, may not feel especially excluded in these experimental exclusion conditions. Mature individuals may more easily shrug off social exclusion attempts, or even dismiss them, confident that close family and friends are the ones who really matter. Being excluded by strangers is not something to worry about. By contrast, an emerging adult who is less confident and spends much time on Facebook striving to make new friends and form social circles may be devastated by exclusion situations. It seems likely that movement through developmental milestones may dampen the psychologically salient characteristics of some situations and amplify those of others.

Fortunately, we feel the need to incorporate time and change concepts that are so critical in lifespan personality research is not particularly controversial, nor does it constitute a major obstacle to the utility of this contribution. On the contrary, we think the excellent ideas put forth by Rauthmann et al. can be made stronger by incorporation of a developmental perspective.
The Diagnosticity and Repeatability of Situations

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Abstract: Rauthmann et al. are to be commended for their systematic approach to defining, describing and postulating how to study situations. Their article has great potential to advance and bring coherence to the psychological assessment of situations. I argue that at least two additional considerations—the diagnosticity of situations and the repeatability of situations—are worth greater discussion and evaluation. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

‘Are situations to be defined objectively or by the perceiver, are they potential or actual, and do they motivate the organism broadly or trigger specific responses?’ (Pervin, 1978, p. 75)

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) systematically address how to approach the study of situations. They comprehensively define situations (e.g. cues, characteristics and classes), provide a process model for situation perception, offer core principles and corollaries for studying situations and give prescriptions for moving the field forward. There are at least two additional considerations that warrant discussion in studying situations: (1) their diagnosticity (e.g. value of information gained and predictive validity of situations) and (2) their repeatability (e.g. test–retest reliability).

Diagnostics

We encounter countless situations on a daily basis. The sheer volume of situations that a person encounters each day can be daunting—or impossible—for psychology to study.² We know that situations vary in strength and behavioural prediction (Ickes, Snyder, & Garcia, 1997), as well as in meaning and affect. Situations likely predict behaviour and important life outcomes to varying degrees. Working out at the gym or preparing a weekday dinner likely carries different diagnostic values than being on a first date, being at a job interview or being present for the birth of one’s child. A carefully designed intensive intervention should not carry equal diagnostic weight in its potential to affect behaviour compared with situations a participant experiences in ‘real life’. Having an agreed-upon conceptualization of how to approach the study of situations has the potential to advance our understanding of how and why interventions are successful, and why interventions underperform expectations.

Rauthmann et al. briefly touches on diagnosticity by stating that situational ‘cues are frequently assumed to be uniformly powerful in social, cognitive, and experimental paradigms where “stimuli” or “settings” are manipulated within or between groups and differences in affective, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral responses tracked as functions of those manipulations’ (p. 25). Making strong assumptions without directly testing if the assumptions are true is a dangerous way of conducting science (e.g. person–situation debate; Mischel, 1968).

How many situations must a researcher sample within person to predict behaviour or an outcome of interest reliably? Rauthmann et al. rightly state that ‘how the situation is experienced will determine what a person thinks, feels, wants, and acts upon/within it’ (p. 13), and that ‘these experiences may, down the road, also impact social relationships and life stories either because they involve special or drastic life events or life transitions or because they contribute cumulative effects that accrue over time to sizable proportions’ (p. 13). A key challenge for our field is in delineating situations that greatly impact one’s life from situations that gradually accumulate value to foster continuity or change within a person. Taking into account the diagnosticity of a situation does not violate the State Corollary that Rauthmann et al. postulate. One’s mental and behavioural states are distinguishable from the measure of situations, and they should remain that way. But understanding how and when a situation is more or less diagnostic remains an important research consideration.

An example where diagnosticity is important is childcare and parental well-being (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004; Nelson, Kushlev, & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Experience sampling and daily reconstruction method approaches treat each activity/event/situation with equivalent diagnosticity, thus assuming that each set of activities equally contribute to one’s positive affect and cumulative well-being. Researchers working from this perspective often conclude that childcare ranks low compared with other daily activities like watching TV, shopping and housework (Kahneman et al., 2004). Differentially weighting daily activities could yield a better understanding of how particular childcare experiences (e.g. reading to one’s child and playing with one’s child) psychologically differ in meaning and diagnosticity compared with mundane childcare experiences (e.g. changing a diaper, bathing and feeding). Recent work suggests that the experience sampling and day reconstruction method approaches cannot offer global conclusions about one’s well-being (Nelson et al., 2014). If the field can incorporate diagnosticity in our assessments, we can test how momentary assessments affect global behaviours and outcomes.

²I remain optimistic on this front—although I do not have any empirical justification for believing this way.
Repeatability

‘On the other hand, taxonomizing situational information is difficult if we have no criteria or methods to assess it reliably’ (Rauthmann et al., p. 24).

A second consideration in the assessment of situations is whether situations are repeatable and contain identical psychological characteristics when repeated (whether it is the same person experiencing the same situation more than once or different people experiencing the same situation in identical ways3). An early definition of ‘situation’ was that ‘a set of circumstances that is likely to influence the behaviour of at least some individuals and that is likely to recur repeatedly in the same form’ (Frederiksen, Jensen, Beaton, & Bloxom, 1973, p. 22). When a person can ‘experience, construe, maintain, select, evoke, change, and create situations’ (Rauthmann et al., p. 23), being able to demonstrate repeatability may be problematic. Can research adequately demonstrate that situations with a specific set of psychological properties maintain those properties with any kind of consistency? Situations may be too dynamic and variable for establishing test–retest reliability. Researchers have expressed a host of issues pertaining to situation assessment (e.g. Ickes et al., 1997), and figuring out how to establish the repeatability of situations is needed.

With new situational assessments available (e.g. RSQ is the Riverside Situational Q-Sort and EAPP is the European Association of Personality Psychology, Wagerman & Funder, 2009; DIAMONDS, Rauthmann et al., 2014) and with fruitful dialogue about studying situations (e.g. EAPP expert meeting; Reis, 2008) we are in an exciting time to advance knowledge. Being able to speak the same language and avoid the ‘jingle jangle jungle’ allows the field to address a host of meaningful questions and concerns related to studying situations effectively.

The Person Makes the Situation Matter

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Abstract: We argue from the perspective of long-term personality development that persons and situations are inherently intertwined: it is the situation that makes the person matter, and it is the person who makes the situation matter. Similar situations may exert differential or normative effects on personality development depending on, first, their frequency of occurrence and, second, their consensual perception in a reference group. Life events include patterns of similar situations that should also be classified according to these two criteria. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s review (2015) of psychological situations is profound and exhaustive, and makes a strong case for separating the situation from the person. We contend, however, that persons and situations are entwined: it is the situation that makes the person matter, and it is the person who makes the situation matter. This implies a more dynamic view of situations. On the one hand, situations provide opportunities for persons to develop by means of selection, evocation and change processes. On the other hand, persons give meaning to situations as they react to them by means of perceptual and behavioural responses. We know from prior research that the experience of life events, or to use the Rauthmann et al. terminology, establishment of situations with certain cues, can be selective and in turn influence patterns of information processing, for example, in ambiguous situations with one’s romantic partner (Finn, Mitte, & Neyer, 2015). These dynamics may further change the psychological relevance of situations and alter the association between cues and characteristics of every similar situation. In the following, we discuss the dynamics of person–situation transaction with regard to long-term personality development.

We agree that a thorough consideration of situation characteristics (instead of the focus on situation cues or classes of situations) will advance our understanding of environmental effects on personality development, and vice versa. For example, previous research often used categories such as ‘partnership situations’ or ‘relationship events’ or focused on environmental cues (‘a partner was found’ or ‘someone became abandoned by the partner’) without delineating the (consensually or idiosyncratically) experienced situation characteristics. In general, classes of similar situations can have differential or normative effects on personality.

Situations belonging to the same class may evoke varied personality responses because of different (profiles of) characteristics. For example, ‘partnership situations’ vary in their probability to trigger perceptions such as ‘warm’ or ‘threatening’ and as a consequence relate to different behavioural responses. Likewise, individuals differ in their perceptions of such situation characteristics. While some experience a given situation as ‘warm’, others may focus on the ‘threatening’ aspects, thereby creating variance in the effects of situations on personality development that are reflected, for example, in different attachment styles. Even situations with the same cues might be characterized differently by different people, thus creating idiosyncratic environments for personality development.

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Powerful Situations: Some Real Progress but Some Future Considerations

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Abstract: Rauthmann et al. present a tripartite ‘3-C’ classification that assimilates and organizes conceptualizations of situations from extant research into categories: cues, characteristics and classes. They prioritize studying characteristics because ‘[c]ues and classes convey only nominal information and usually tell us little if anything about what situations mean psychologically’ (p. 28). In addition, they formulate principles to tackle disagreements in the long-extending but fragmented literature and develop a methodological matrix for assessing situational information. We question the conceptualization of cues, comprehensiveness of characteristics and methodological implications of the principles. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

We applaud the impressive effort by Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) to advance situation research in personality and beyond. We could easily delineate all we like about their approach, but we think the situation calls for more Duty, Intellect and (mild) Adversity than Positivity.

DO CUES LACK PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANING?

Rauthmann et al. describe cues as physical, objective and not psychologically meaningful. However, cues may include both relatively objective stimuli (e.g. number of chairs present) and stimuli that require some interpretation and do hold psychological meaning, including at least three of the five W-question cues enumerated by Rauthmann et al. (2014): who is present, where they are and what one is doing. The precise meanings of these cues might be insufficiently deduced from the cues alone, but may add to the knowledge provided by characteristics. An example is ‘working from home’ where Duty may be as high as at work, but the home setting (e.g. competing demands and family in adjoining rooms!) may change situational meaning in ways unlikely to be picked up by DIAMONDS. We agree with Rauthmann et al. that ‘it can be helpful to tie cues to (consensually or idiosyncratically perceived) characteristics’ (p. 373), but cues might be useful beyond being correlates or providing fodder for rating characteristics. Indeed, situations’ full complexity may reside in cues–characteristic interactions, partly because cues can reflect psychological meaning. Like characteristics, cues require taxonomization. May we suggest the following princely1 acronym that we constructed from previous work

1 Cues’s psychological meaning: alone or not?
2 Or Prince-ly.
(e.g. Rauthmann, in press); Persons, (time-delineated) Events, Activities, Roles/Relationships, Locations and (self-referential) States (ACME states; Fleeson & Noftle, 2008): PEARLS.

DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH...

Rauthmann et al. suggest that ‘[w]hile the DIAMONDS do not exhaustively cover the entire universe of situation characteristics, they integrate the most often identified dimensions and thus provide a common language (see the Big Five in personality psychology; Rauthmann et al., 2014, Table 15)’ (p. 6). Although DIAMONDS certainly glistens, it seems premature to compare the framework to the levels of comprehensiveness and consensus offered by the Big Five. For example, the cited Table 15 reveals two DIAMONDS that do not correspond to previous taxonomies. Additionally, mappings are mostly conceptual rather than empirical and omit major components of previous taxonomies. For example, only half the Van Heck dimensions are represented, probably because the other five failed to show moderate-sized correlations with DIAMONDS (Table 11; Rauthmann et al., 2014)\(^{ii}\). Furthermore, the DIAMONDS’ origins are notable: they only include about one-third of the RSQ items; moreover, the RSQ was formulated using Block’s fascinating but idiosyncratic California Adult Q-sort. We do think the DIAMONDS is a psychometrically sound tool—and it has already generated a burst of quality research. But we are also ‘critical, skeptical, [and] not easily impressed’ (Block, 1961/1978) and believe it unlikely to provide the final word. Two examples are as follows: (1) DIAMONDS seems to omit important, common situational content related to helping/caregiving, physical activity and aesthetic experience, which are potentially related to DIAMONDS but undistinguishable within that framework from psychologically different situations. (2) Some DIAMONDS are overly broad (e.g. Sociality encompasses interactions ranging from mere acquaintances to closest family). We hope the exciting proliferation of research using DIAMONDS does not prematurely close the door on whether it is an adequate taxonomy.

...BUT MAYBE COGNITIVE APPRAISALS WILL HELP?

One resource to inform ongoing development of a comprehensive taxonomy of situational characteristics is the emotion literature. Decades ago, emotion theorists realized that objective situation features had little to do with elicitation of emotions. This spurred research on cognitive appraisals of the personal meaning of situations (Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 2013), closely fitting James and Sells’ situation definition to which Rauthmann et al. refer. Although they reject affect as a person variable, clearly emotions already inform DIAMONDS. Positivity and Negativity refer to positive affect and anxiety, respectively. Adversity refers to fear and guilt, and so on, but some emotional themes are missing. Fuller coverage could be important. Additionally, situations involving no emotion-linked cognitive appraisal may not be important or psychologically meaningful—and might even be rare.

ARE MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON SITUATIONS ALWAYS NECESSARY?

There is tension between the Processing and Circularity Principles that has methodological implications. The Processing Principle maintains ‘that situations only have consequences for people’s thinking, feeling, desiring, and acting through the psychological processing they receive’ (p. 23). However, the Approximation Corollary posits ‘more than one rating source of situations must be employed to approximate the psychological situation from different perspectives’ (p. 24). Together, these suggest a caveat: if only behaviour is of interest (and not situation perception), we might fully rely on a target’s in situ perceptions, because judgments juxta situm or ex situ—someone else’s psychological processing—should be irrelevant to behaviour. Thus, we believe that including multiple raters is too strict a criterion for all situation research. Certainly, in situ ratings are good predictors of trait-relevant behaviour in Experience-Sampling Method (ESM) (Fleeson, 2007; Rauthmann et al., 2014; Sherman et al., in press). Although target-provided cues from statements within ESM can be rated ex situ on characteristics (Rauthmann, Sherman, & Funder, in press), subjectivity of such cues limits independence between person and situation anyway.

IDEAL? MORE ON GETTING REAL?

The proposed ideal design of Rauthmann et al. is costly and quite difficult; hence, they wisely recommend including two or more attributes of the full five-attribute RLMMSMTMG design\(^{iv}\). While this suggestion is helpful, we suggest it would be beneficial to compare the strengths of Table 4’s 10 designs further, like Furr (2009) did for behaviour.

Only 5 years ago, the personality triad was lopsided, possessing vastly more methods and findings for personality and behaviour than for situations. Across their theoretical and empirical contributions, Rauthmann et al. have advanced the field a considerable distance towards correcting that balance.

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\(^{ii}\) This also questions whether classes are completely subsumable under characteristics as Rauthmann et al. maintain.

\(^{iv}\) Not quite as handy an acronym as DIAMONDS!
Why and How a Functional Perspective on Situations Can Be Integrated with a Personality Perspective

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Abstract: Systematic study of situations is one of the most important tasks for personality research. Rauthmann et al. undertake the endeavour of organizing this line of research by refining terminology and proposing basic principles for guiding future studies in the field. We praise this effort and argue that it would benefit from integrating a functional approach within its principles, with a clearer distinction between functional and cognitive levels of analysis. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

There is much to like in Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s article (2015). They should be congratulated in taking on the herculean task of clarifying what a psychological situation is. It is easy to predict that this article will be a basic reference for several decades of research in this topic. Any work of this caliber and ambition unavoidably exposes itself to as many criticisms as praises. Although we welcome both the overall contribution and many of its specific features, we focus on one outstanding issue with several ramifications: Rauthmann et al. do not mention the functional perspective. By ‘functional perspective’ we mean a focus on the behavioural principles that underlie transactions between environment and behaviour, both in its older Skinnerian formulation as well as in its recent and much more powerful elaborations (e.g. Hughes & Barnes-Holmes, in press).

Briefly, this perspective entails acknowledgement that elements in a person’s current and past environment influence his or her behaviour. Hence, behaviour is a function of the environment. For example, a functional analysis of someone going to a restaurant would examine what elements in the environment influence that behaviour. These elements could be priming (e.g. an advertisement showing people having dinner in a restaurant) or regularities in response to similar past situations (e.g. going to restaurants was fun in the past). The functional perspective would qualify as a blend of ‘objectivist’ and ‘subjectivist’ perspectives. Perhaps the assumption perspective and the behavioural approaches Rauthmann et al. describe include some elements of this perspective, but their presentation is almost caricatured. Stimulus–response is only one behavioural principle whereas a functional perspective includes much more, both in its older (e.g. response–stimulus) and, especially, in its modern variants (e.g. arbitrarily applicable relational responding).

WHAT IS A FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Two of the most established scientific findings are that organisms (including people) respond to features of the environment and that behaviour increases in frequency and intensity if it receives positive reinforcement. If features change or reinforcement becomes negative, behaviour changes. This does not imply that individual differences play no role in transactions between environment and behaviour. Environmental features and behavioural reinforcements must be perceived, and people often perceive things differently; hence, they can behave differently. But this is compatible with and embedded in the functional perspective. Reinforcement is not a circular concept, as Rauthmann et al. suggest. Statements such as ‘the situation was exciting to the participant because he/she found it exciting’ are circular but, first, this is a reward, not a reinforcer (a common misunderstanding), and, second, we suspect that no functional psychologist would make such a statement. Identifying a consequence of a behaviour as reinforcing has a number of implications that can be directly tested.

Moreover, the concept of reinforcement is key to a number of scientific theories such as Darwinian selection, including its modern variants: that behaviour is selected by its consequences is a principle of both operant conditioning and Darwinian selection. Rauthmann et al. suffer similar confusions when presenting their main principles. For example, they claim that accepting the Processing Principle entails rejecting the assumption perspective completely because situations have to be processed by someone. Of course they do. But accepting this mediating principle does not require rejecting that situational elements can cause behaviour.

It is difficult to understand what the Rauthmann et al. Consequences Corollary means. We hope that they did not mean to say that experimentally manipulating ‘situations’ is an inappropriate method of establishing causation. The gold standard to establish causation throughout science is precisely to manipulate a specific feature in the environment (an aspect of the situation; rub your hair on a balloon) and see whether a specific outcome (e.g. a behaviour; the hair stands up) is present in one condition but not another (e.g. control group/situation; the balloon is not rubbed on the hair). There are other examples of incorrect characterizations and unwarranted inferences in the article of Rauthmann et al., but, rather than nitpick, we focus on what we believe is the main (correctable) problem. Briefly stated, they often mix different levels of analysis. The functional level of analysis, which can be inferred to be incorrectly and only partly sketched in their assumption perspective and in the behavioural approaches, focuses on the relation between elements in the environment and behaviour, whereas a ‘cognitive’ level of analysis focuses on the processing of these elements (e.g. people’s experiences). If Eric speaks more softly in a library than he does in a pub, it must be the case that he notices that he is in a library and presumably he either intentionally lowers his voice, automatically enacted a learned
script or subconsciously modulates his voice to the ambient noise. There must be a mediating process.

This does not imply that identifying the relation between entering a library and lowering one’s voice is a trivial issue. On the contrary, it can be an example of a functional relation between elements in the environment and behaviour and qualifies as an explanation (explanans) at that level of analysis while being something that needs explanation (explanandum) at another level. One could understand personality as an emerging property that captures how individuals differ in the way they choose or shape, respond to and are shaped by their environments (Perugini, Costantini, Hughes, & De Houwer, 2015). The question is how this happens; that is, what are the mediating processes? This is the ‘cognitive’ level of analysis. It can be very enlightening and exciting and might identify one or more explanations. There are no reasons that different levels of analysis must be in opposition to one another. On the contrary, we believe there is a lot to gain from distinguishing different levels of analysis and trying to bridge them.

The Situation Through an Interpersonal Lens

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

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

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

We suggest that the DIAMOND taxonomy (Rauthmann et al., 2014) could be fruitfully buttressed by contemporary interpersonal theory and assessment (Pincus, 2005; Pincus & Ansell, 2013; Wiggins, 2003). Interpersonal theory asserts that (i) situations involving two or more people (proximal or mentally represented) are among the strongest situations we experience and (ii) the important psychological characteristics of these situations are the perception of others’ agentic (dominant–submissive) and communal (warm–cold) behaviours in relation to the self within and across social interactions. This framework can be used empirically to contextualize cognitive, behavioural and affective dynamics across a variety of timescales unfolding in daily life and across the lifespan (Ram et al., 2014; Roche, Pincus, Rebar, Conroy, & Ram, 2014). Moreover, this interpersonal lens on situations embodies many of the Rauthmann et al. recommendations. It is an interactional-dynamic perspective (see their Table 2) that is variable-centred and dimensional (Wiggins, 1979, 1991), focuses on characteristics (i.e. perceived cues) of situations (Roche, Pincus, Hyde, Conroy, & Ram, 2013), synthesizes objective and subjective perspectives (Hopwood, Wright, Ansell, & Pincus, 2013; Lukowitsky & Pincus, 2011), and is applicable to multi-method, multi-informant, multi-timescale assessment in situ, juxta situm or ex situ (Pincus et al., 2014).

The interpersonal situation is a fundamental orienting construct in interpersonal theory (Hopwood, Pincus, & Wright, in press; Sullivan, 1953). Pincus and Ansell (2003) summarized the interpersonal situation as ‘the experience of a pattern of relating self with other associated with varying levels of anxiety (or security) in which learning takes place that influences the development of self-concept and social behavior’ (p. 210). Therefore, it is the dynamically unfolding context in which social learning takes place across the lifespan, promoting personality organization, development and adjustment. Interactions with others develop into increasingly complex patterns of interpersonal experience that are encoded in memory, giving rise to mental representations.
of self and others as well as to enduring patterns of adaptive or disturbed interpersonal relating. Individual variation in learning occurs because of transactions between the developing person’s level of cognitive maturation and the facilitative or toxic characteristics of the interpersonal situations encountered. In both proximal interactions and mental representation, the affective valence associated with an interpersonal situation is a function of one’s ability to satisfy basic motives for interpersonal security and self-esteem. When needs for security and self-esteem are met, the transaction is pleasant and the behaviour is reinforced; when these needs are frustrated, it is unpleasant, prompting dysregulation and distress and a need to cope and adapt.

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

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

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

Figure 1. The interpersonal situation.
Just Which Situational Features Are We Taxonomizing?

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Abstract: Rauthmann et al. offer a comprehensive framework for organizing the diverse approaches that researchers have taken, and might in the future take, to conceptualizing about situational taxonomies. This is unquestionably a useful step forward in the quest for a lexicon that will help systematize the vast literature on situational influences on human behaviour. At the same time, their structure does not point researchers towards the properties that are most important in understanding how situations influence behaviour. One of these, I argue, is the relationship context in which behaviour occurs. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s thoroughgoing and all-embracing review (2015) of the principles underlying the study of situations represents a potential game-changer in the longstanding quest for a taxonomy of situations. Over the years, many researchers and commentators have bemoaned the fact that the field does not have a consensually accepted taxonomy of situations. The article of Rauthmann et al. makes clear why this endeavour has resisted the efforts of many accomplished scholars: we will need multiple taxonomies, corresponding to the various perspectives and components that a researcher might want to consider, and once that has been accomplished, we will need a framework for organizing those taxonomies into a coherent model of the extra-personal universe. Their article provides a thoughtful first pass at the latter, although it leaves unstated much of the former (more on that later).

If nothing else—and there is much else—the article of Rauthmann et al. offers a notional machete for entering the ‘jungle-jangle jungle’ of terminology, concepts and often superficial use of the construct of situations. The resulting model is exceptionally complex and multi-layered (for example, Figures 1 and 2), raising questions about whether researchers will use their framework as intended, and whether existing and future work will fit neatly into its various pockets. These questions led me to wonder, as Snyder and Cantor (1998) did almost two decades ago, why identification of situation taxonomies is turning out to be much more complex than the search for personality taxonomies was. After all, examples of the latter, such as the Five-factor (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and HEXACO (Ashton et al., 2004) models, are fairly comprehensive and fairly well-accepted these days.

Several explanations for this difficulty seem plausible. For one, personality reflects the operation of a finite (albeit plentiful) number of operations that occur largely within our brains. Situations, in contrast, encompass everything that exists in the life space—essentially, every other person, object, task and setting encountered. This is surely a far larger and more multidimensional set. Another possible reason is that we have better access to what is going on in our heads, at least experientially, than we do to the forces of agency in the outside world. Yet another reason is that psychological theorizing has been so thoroughly imbued with intra-psychic, individual-centric ways of thinking that we have yet to develop appropriate constructs and models for conceptualizing how entities influence one another, an advance that might be as profound as that undergone by theoretical physicists when they began to theorize about relations between particles, rather than concentrating on the particles themselves (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000).

In providing a framework for taxonomies rather than the taxonomies themselves, Rauthmann et al. leave open the question of which ones might be most fruitful for psychological research. The DIAMONDS model is an excellent candidate, primarily because of its painstaking empirical roots. I nevertheless was disappointed with the framework’s failure to privilege interpersonal relations in its account of cues, characteristics and classes. Human capacities evolved to respond to many features of the external world, but none as complex or vital as interactions with other persons. Many, if not most, evolutionary psychologists recognize that the human mind and body evolved to carry out important tasks involved in living with others, beginning with, but not limited to, recognizing kin, selecting and retaining mates, forming cooperative alliances, understanding the mental states of others, communicating, nurturing offspring and coping with social exclusion. It is evident that nothing exerts as profound an influence on the development and well-being of humans from birth throughout life than our interactions with caregivers and other significant persons (Hartup & Stevens, 1997).

There is, in other words, good reason to believe that a taxonomy of situations will be especially valuable if it classifies in a sensible and insight-generating way the variations in interpersonal relations that constitute everyday life. This can be done for cues, characteristics or classes. For example, people differ in objective features that relate to our transactions with them (cues). The psychological meaning of another person’s actions varies depending on one’s relationship with the source (characteristics), as evident in how people might differentially interpret a pat on the backside from one’s lover, boss, parent or a stranger on the bus. As for classes, I would modestly note that a taxonomy already exists for differentiating interpersonal situations according to the abstract properties of interdependence that define the interactions in which social partners engage (Kelley et al., 2003).
There is perhaps historical irony in the Rauthmann et al. treatment of other people as situational features much like any other feature. In social psychology—the field that often describes itself in terms of the influence of situations—the roots of situational thinking can be found in Kurt Lewin’s (1943) theorizing about force fields. Lewin’s original theorizing emphasized social situations—the forces exerted on behaviour that originated from social sources, although it later morphed into a broader treatment of environmental forces. Likewise, other founders of modern social psychology defined the field in terms of social influence—for example, ‘social psychology is the scientific attempt to explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of other human beings’ (Allport, 1954, p. 5). Although this definition (or a close variant) still appears in most social psychology textbooks, much of the work published in social psychology journals does not fall within it (Carlson, 1984; Reis, 2008). The Rauthmann et al. framework therefore seems consistent with contemporary practice, although perhaps not with the field’s self-definition.

In conclusion, while Rauthmann et al. provide an intelligent and potentially generative structure for organizing the various situation taxonomies that have already been (and, in future research, will be) proposed, it remains to be seen whether their framework will help the field coalesce around a specific set of models that identify and schematize the field’s central concerns.

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Separating Personality and Situation

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Abstract: Rauthmann et al. outline useful aspects of a potential paradigm for the psychology of situations, but potential anomalies remain. There is little clarity about which mental states can or cannot be situations variables, and the force of situational cues in everyday psychology seems underestimated. Moreover, if person and situation variables are to be kept separate, it seems problematic that many measures of personality have items stating situational contingencies, which leads further to this question: to fit within a psychology-of-situations framework, must personality measures be clear of situation-referencing content? Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) delineate a useful framework for the psychology of situations. Indeed, this seems the best approximation to a complete ‘paradigm’ for this domain yet proposed. The term ‘paradigm’ implies consensual acceptance across a whole broad field of inquiry, but we mean a more limited sense, as in ‘mini-paradigm’ or ‘proposed framework’. In Kuhn’s (1962) framework, paradigms organize and stimulate research. Their greatest challenge comes from ‘anomalies’—findings or observed phenomena that appear not to fit it. We observe a few potential anomalies in the Rauthmann et al. framework. Dealing with them—by revising the framework, switching to a better framework or showing they are not truly anomalous—will advance the science.

We begin with a pair of anomalies that lend themselves to quick characterization, before proceeding to one that demands much more explanation.

First, the Rauthmann et al. State Corollary to the Circulatory Principle stipulates that to separate person and situation variables clearly, situations ‘cannot be defined by ongoing mental or behavioral states of persons’ (their Table 3). However, their framework requires a crucial tenet that the psychology of situations hinges heavily on the processing of situational information, that is, an individual’s interpretation of a situation. This interpretation, arguably a belief about a situation, is itself a mental state. Thus, the framework seems to differentiate acceptable mental states (e.g. interpretations) that are part of the situation from unacceptable ones (moods, emotions and states of arousal) that are not. Assuming only cognitions are acceptable, which ones?

Second, the framework stresses not cues but characteristics, that is, dimensional attributes on which situations vary, more than classes that are commonly accepted as descriptions of situations (such as ‘at work’, ‘at home’ or ‘with my family’). Rauthmann et al. persuasively argue for the merits of a characteristics-based approach but seem to miss the potential importance of such cue classes in folk psychology. Saucier, Bel-Bahar, and Fernandez (2007) found unexpected regularities in how respondents completed if-then conditionals when the ‘then’ was high or low levels of a common person-descriptive attribute. Cues like work, home, family and friends were mentioned with high frequency, as were (unacceptable?) affective-state cues such as ‘in a bad mood’. The framework might better account for these strong, perhaps consensual tendencies among laypersons, and whether they arise based on cultures, heuristics, biases or some more objective reality.
But our main focus here is another anomaly. Rauthmann et al. argue that contributions of person and situation should be kept separate, so their distinct contributions can be isolated. This argument has subtly interesting relations with strategies of personality-test construction. Jackson (1971) suggested that questionnaire items be constructed by applying an identified trait tendency to each of a diverse range of situations, so that an overall true score for the domain would consist of personality tendencies averaged across many situations. Taken further, Jackson’s approach suggests a unique way of isolating person and situation effects. For example, if each of 10 traits is systematically varied within the items across 10 situations, the resulting 100 items would have a fully crossed set of traits and situations that could be decomposed into trait and situation variance. However, no previous personality inventory seems to have taken this item-matrix conception to the extreme of crossing all traits with all situations.

Instead, contingencies end up being applied in a more scatter-shot manner. Many commonly used Big Five measures feature items that reference situational contingencies, thus perhaps confounding personality and situation. For example, the commonly used IPIP-50 inventory for the Big Five (Goldberg, 1999) includes an Extraversion scale on which 1/5 of the items mention ‘party’ situations, another mentions strangers and many of the items on the scale (e.g. ‘starts conversations’) imply situations of dealing with unfamiliar people. Its Conscientiousness scale has items referring to duties, chores, work and dealing with one’s belongings. On its Intellect scale, 1/5 of the items essentially reference the situation of exposure to ‘abstract ideas’. The analogous Openness scale on the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992) contains two items referencing reactions to the situation of being exposed to poetry. A prominent six-factor inventory (e.g. HEXACO-PI; Ashton & Lee, 2009) does the same in some items: Openness items reference situations in which art or music are salient, Agreeableness items situations in which someone else does something unpleasant and Honesty items situations where one wants something from another or could get away with a crime; Emotionality items reference various dangerous or difficult situations.

What about the California Adult Q-Sort (CAQ), which Rauthmann et al. recommend as the personality measure that best harmonizes with their Riverside Situational Q-Sort? Even there, items are prone to introduce situational cues into personality descriptions. Various CAQ items mention particular ways of reacting to criticism or an interpersonal slight, frustration and adversity, minor frustrations, being under stress or trauma, humour (from others), domination (by others) and what might be construed as a demand (by others). Other items reference tendencies to interpret situations in a particular manner (e.g. complicatedly, or in sexual terms) and thus concern situation-judgment tendencies specifically.

Our point: separation of person and situation components is incomplete in current personality measures, presenting a source of circularity in the Rauthmann et al. paradigm. How might it be resolved? Perhaps by demonstrating that such item-confounds pose no problem, or by adjusting the framework to account for some confounds between person and situation variables. A more threatening possibility is that personality dimensions are inherently situationally contingent, each concerning a reaction to a particular class of situations; for example, what if levels of Extraversion were mainly a person’s reaction to situations saturated with strangers, or levels of Conscientiousness mainly about high-duty situations? If this is even at least partly the case, a more fundamental reorientation may be needed. But not an impossible one: items that refer simply to one’s level of enthusiasm, anxiety, relaxation, kindness, planfulness or curiosity seem less contingent on particular situations. Does an adequate situation-psychology paradigm demand our use of entirely non-situational personality measures? We leave this question to the field.

The Value of Past and Present Cues: An Evolutionary Perspective

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Abstract: Rauthmann et al. argue that situation research would be best off focusing on perceptions of situation, not on objective cues. In contrast, we advocate the importance of environmental cues by taking an evolutionary standpoint. From an ultimate perspective, cues from the phylogenetic past shaped our perceptual system and can guide the development of a theoretically informed structure of psychological situations. From a proximate perspective, cues are essential factors (beyond conscious perceptions) for the explanation of actual behaviour, in particular when implicit processes are considered.

Developing a coherent framework for research on situations is a Herculean task, and we commend Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) for taking it on. Considering the historical tension between ‘situationists’ and ‘personality psychologists’, it may look paradoxical, but it seems that personality psychologists have the greater inclination as well as the appropriate statistical tools to uncover the psychological structure of situations. This is all the more remarkable as there is an important difference between persons and situations. Whereas a person can be clearly defined as an entity in time and space, when/where a situation starts and ends is ambiguous. It seems safe to say that situations take place outside the boundaries of a person and are somehow limited in time.
and space, but consensus beyond that will be difficult to reach. Therefore, we circumvent the concept of ‘situations’ and simply refer to the environment of an organism. We focus on the benefits of objectively definable components of the environment, or ‘cues’, as termed by Rauthmann et al. Specifically, we highlight (i) how cues from the phylogenetic past shaped our perceptual system and can guide the development of a theoretically informed structure of psychological situations and (ii) why present cues are essential for the explanation of actual behaviour, especially regarding implicit processes.

CUES IN THE PAST: THE ULTIMATE PERSPECTIVE

Human perception can be expected to be tuned to those species-specific aspects of the environment that had consequences for genetic fitness in phylogenetic history. This link between the perceptual system and fitness-relevant aspects of the environment, however, does not imply that evolution shaped perception towards veridicality (i.e. to exact correspondence of perception and environment). Selection pressures can work so that representations of situations (i.e. ‘characteristics’ to Rauthmann et al.) are more adaptive when they are biased (Bischof, 2014; Haselton & Buss, 2000; Hoffman, 2009; Zehetleitner & Schönbrodt, 2015).

The ultimate perspective allows analysis of the structure of situation perception based on its adaptive value and has several implications. First, adaptive misrepresentations underscore the importance of those characteristics that systematically deviate from objective cues. Second, on the other hand, the ultimate perspective emphasizes an objectivist view on the environment. Psychological processing mediates the chain between cue and behaviour, but in the end, it is the objective cue that is fitness-relevant: the proof of the nutritional value is in the objective pudden, not in its perception (which can be misguided by artificial sweeteners). Third, the ultimate perspective suggests that universal as well as differential perceptions of cues have evolved to solve adaptive problems. We agree with Rauthmann et al. that situational taxonomies should be tailored to our ‘research needs’ (p. 25) and add that such systems should be grounded in theoretical considerations informed by an evolutionary perspective (e.g. Penke, Denissen, & Miller, 2007).

CUES IN THE PRESENT: WHAT ABOUT IMPLICIT PROCESSING?

The role of cues in the present refers to the proximate level of behaviour causation and thus to the core business of psychologists. The Rauthmann et al. Processing Principle states that environmental information must first be processed, either explicitly (consciously) or implicitly (non-consciously), to become relevant for behaviour. Furthermore, the Circularity Principle notes that perceptions of situations should be clearly separated from personal states or reactions.

On a conceptual level, we agree with both principles. However, in the elaborations of the two principles, especially regarding their practical application, we missed incorporation of implicit processes. There is a crucial difference between assessment of explicit and implicit perceptions. The latter can only be indirectly assessed via reactions of the organism to environmental cues. Thus, at the operational level, implicit perceptions are inextricably tied to personal states. This violates the Circularity Principle. To avoid such violations, research on implicit processes must use cues rather than characteristics. This approach, however, does not fit well with the Processing Principle, which ‘alerts us that we should attend to people’s experiences’ (p. 17). Hence, the Processing Principle and the Circularity Principle together seem to confine (or at least align) the proposed framework to consciously accessible perceptions of situations. This, however, might only touch the tip of the iceberg of environmental influences.

To untangle the consensual stratum (i.e. the shared perception of several perceivers) from the idiosyncratic stratum (i.e. the unique processing of a single perceiver), Rauthmann et al. suggest variance decomposition via social relation models (SRM). We agree that SRM can be an appropriate tool for situation research. However, in virtually all practical applications, the SRM has only been used with explicit ratings. A notable exception is reported in Krause, Back, Egloff, and Schmukle (2014), who were the first to apply the SRM to an implicit measure of liking. This exciting new approach allows separation of consensual from idiosyncratic reactions at the implicit level, but does not resolve the confound of personal reactions with environmental perceptions. For a clear distinction between person and environment, cues are important complements that deserve a more prominent place in a psychology of situations, in particular with regard to implicit processes.

CONCLUSION

Rauthmann et al. propose that ‘research will be best off focusing on perceptions of situation characteristics’ and that this kind of situation research will be the ‘most productive’ (p. 17). While we agree that processed perceptions are important, we advocate the relevance of cues. First, objective environmental features constituted the selection pressures that shaped our senses and categories. Therefore, we are convinced that a search for the psychological structure of situations will benefit from an evolutionary background. Second, at least at the operational level, the proposed framework confines characteristics

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1We acknowledge that in sexual selection, socially constructed characteristics that are not based on directly fitness-relevant cues could get relevant (cf. ‘Fishierian runaway process’). It is unclear, however, to what extent these seemingly superfluous ornaments typically are correlated with actual fitness benefits (Prokop, Michalczuk, Drobnjak, Herdegen, & Radwan, 2012).

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to consciously processed and reportable perceptions of situations. But whenever implicit processes operate, cues are essential for a clear distinction between person and environment.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**Taxonomy of Situations: The Importance of Objectivity and Parsimony**

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Abstract: I echo the commitment of Rauthmann et al. to pursuing greater conceptual understanding of the concept of situation and taxonomic approaches in psychology, and endorse the plea for real-life, multi-method, multi-situation, multi-time and multiple group designs. I provide examples from prospect theory and interdependence theory to show that it is essential that taxonomies address objective situations, and that the number of categorizations and dimensions is manageable. After all, for theorizing situations, science should favour objectivity and parsimony over subjectivity and complexity. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

It is a real pleasure to read the article by Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015). It focuses on the concept of ‘the situation’, is thoughtful in proposing the building blocks of a taxonomy and is extraordinarily comprehensive in doing so. Here, I focus on the importance of a taxonomy that is simple and that focuses on objective situation. By virtue of my experience and expertise in interdependence, trust and human cooperation, I focus on the social situation.

Why is the objective social situation so important? For actors, this is the situation in which they need to act, in which they can communicate certain motives to others. For ‘recipients’, this is the situation in which they can make sense of another person’s actions. What self-presentation is to the actor is attribution to the recipient. But both need to see behaviours (or behavioural options) in light of the objective situation to be able to make sense of it. Robinson Crusoe only must have started to realize this after Friday came along. Only then did the realities of (human) interdependence come alive, and he must have gathered that by sharing a mango with Friday he was communicating interpersonal motives (e.g. trust and value of friendship) to Friday above and beyond the mango itself. Sharing something of value is closely linked to communicating friendship, while Friday above and beyond the mango itself. Sharing something of value is closely linked to communicating friendship, while failure to do so can mean indifference or perhaps even some form of hostility (Van Doesum, Van Lange, & Van Lange, 2013).

It is often a deviation from what one would expect on the basis of (short-term) self-interest that informs the self and others about the social motives—such as generosity or hostility—that are present. Scientists can get a handle on what people make of a situation if they have an objective understanding of it. This is why we started a so-called Atlas project around 1996, which we completed 6 or 7 years later (Kelley et al., 2003). We identified 21 social situations and provided—as much as we could—objective descriptions of each of these situations. Most of these social situations could be located on six dimensions, including four dimensions: one related to outcomes that people can provide for themselves and others (such as level of dependence and the degree of conflicting interests), and two general ones related to availability of information people have about these outcomes (information) and the degree to which situations extend over time and repeated interaction (time). Together, the dimensions and the situational descriptions constitute a taxonomy of situations.

From a scientific perspective, the most important benefit of this taxonomy is that each of these situations is objectively defined in simple terms. In interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Van Lange & Balliet, 2014), situations are primarily defined in terms of outcomes—which are assigned numerical values expressing positive (gains) or negative (losses) according to whether and to what degrees people are assumed to seek or avoid them, respectively. Based on their prospect theory, Kahneman and Tversky (1979) found evidence that people have systematic tendencies to assign greater weight to losses than to gains (losses loom larger than gains). They could do so because they could show that people transformed subjectively rated their preferences for situations not along a linear dimension in which gains and losses are equally valued but along a dimension resembling an S-curve. Likewise, interdependence theory provides objective situations depicting outcomes for self and others. The importance of the objective social situation is that one could demonstrate systematic preference tendencies (so-called transformations, Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) in the interpersonal domain, such as egalitarianism (maximizing equality in outcomes), cooperation (maximizing outcomes for self and others) and competition (maximizing relative advantage in favour of self).

I describe these transformations in some detail because they help convey two ideals of a good taxonomy. The first ideal is the goal to focus as much as possible on objective situations. One would like to understand as clearly as possible what people make of situations. If one does not know what situations are objective, it would be logically impossible to articulate systematic explanations of ‘what people make of situations’. There would simply be no baseline for demonstrating that losses loom larger than gains, nor for demonstrating that a social preference such as that for egalitarianism exists. Rauthmann et al. acknowledge this very implicitly by outlining objectivist and subjectivist perspectives in the literature. I conclude here that to understand the subjective, we need to know the objective.
Where Is Personality Most Visible?

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Abstract: Where should we look if we want to see the influence of personality? Rauthmann et al. argue that subjectivist approaches to situations emphasize personality effects more than objectivist approaches. We argue, however, that objectivist approaches produce larger individual differences, because subjectivist approaches eliminate a major source of individual differences: situation construal. Despite the fact that uniform objective situations have traditionally been used to demonstrate the power of the situation, they are, perhaps ironically, the best place to look for the power of personality. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

‘While objectivist perspectives tend to underestimate or neglect influences of persons on situations and their perception, subjectivist perspectives tend to exaggerate them. Not surprisingly, research emphasizing situations as “objective forces” has often tried to ascertain the superiority of situation factors over person(ality) factors in explaining behavior’ (p. 10)

Where should we look if we want to see the influence of personality? Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) argue that subjectivist approaches to situations will emphasize personality effects more than objectivist approaches. We suggest, however, that the reverse is true.

Imagine two ways to study people’s reactions to situations. In the first, the objectivist approach, you have each person play an identical game (e.g. Cyberball), and measure people’s reactions (e.g. negative affect). In the second, the subjectivist approach, you ask people to recall a time when they felt rejected (i.e. recall a similar subjective situation), and measure their reactions. Which study will result in larger individual differences in people’s reactions? We suggest that objectivist approaches will produce larger individual differences, because subjectivist approaches eliminate a major source of individual differences: situation construal. That is, by having everyone think of a time they felt rejected, we are removing individual differences in people’s thresholds for feeling rejected—for Simone, all it might take is her dog ignoring her when she comes home, whereas for Wilma, it might take being deserted by her life partner. That source of individual differences is erased when we define situations subjectively, by getting people to think of times they felt rejected. Taken to extreme, if we define the subjective situation as ‘something that makes me really upset’, we might see almost no individual differences in degree of upset. However, if we expose everyone to the same situation, for example, Cyberball rejection, we are likely to see large individual differences—Simone may curl up in a ball and cry, while Wilma considers it a pretty boring computer game. Despite the fact that uniform objective situations have traditionally been used to demonstrate the power of the situation, they are, perhaps ironically, the best place to look for the power of personality. Caspi and Moffitt (1993) made a similar point when arguing that novel, ambiguous situations are, paradoxically, the best place to look for the influence of personality in part because they leave room for individual differences in situation construal.

What does this mean for personality research, and the person–situation debate? If personality is most obvious when we compare people’s reactions to identical objective situations, a corollary of this is that personality is obscured when people are not in the same objective situation, for example, when we compare people who were free to select into or avoid situations. In real life, at least in WEIRD cultures where people have relatively high levels of freedom and agency, people are often free to select, avoid or manipulate situations (Scarr & McCartney, 1983; Kandler, Bleidorn, Riemann, Angleitner, & Spinath, 2012). This means that, in our everyday lives, the influence of personality is somewhat hidden. That is, when we compare everyone in a real-life situation, we are already excluding people who did not select into that situation. The extreme introvert will not be at the party, and the extreme extravert will not be at the library. Because of this, it is rare to be able to observe, in one natural setting, the full range of human extraversion-related behaviour. One of the reasons that other people’s personalities do not hit us over the head more often is because people can
choose their situations, and this self-selection leads to restriction of range in any given situation.

Identical situations are rare, but when they do occur, they can tell us a lot about personality. Think about the 34% of the participants who did not obey Milgram in his famous experiment. To be included in that group, participants had to insist three times, to a Yale professor’s face, that they would not continue shocking the learner. That says a lot about them. Would we know that they had this unique characteristic if we had not been able to compare their reactions to those of others in this standardized situation? Probably not. Even if we had observed the entire sample in their daily lives for months or years, we likely could not have observed such clear individual differences in stubbornness (or moral backbone, or empathy, or whatever trait you think refusing to obey Milgram represents).

Do these kinds of uniform objective situations ever happen in real life? Not much, but sometimes, there are close substitutes. For example, take editing an academic handbook. You send identical instructions, with identical deadlines, and identical payments to a group of authors (who are already pretty self-selected—these are people who are successful enough in this narrow area to be invited, and conscientious enough to have read and responded to the invitation). Yet, as any editor of a volume will tell you, their reactions vary wildly, from the author who apologizes for submitting the chapter 2 days “late” (i.e. after the first deadline, which was meant as a decoy and no one else actually observed it) to the last author to submit who writes “don’t fret, I never hold up the show.” Here, we see personality in all its glory.

Does this mean personality researchers should be studying personality in controlled situations (e.g. the laboratory) more often? If the main goal is big effects, yes. And for some questions, holding the objective situation constant and observing individual differences in people’s responses is the most appropriate approach (for ‘natural experiments’, see, for example, Bleidorn, 2012; Jackson, Thoemmes, Jonkmann, Lüdtke, & Trautwein, 2012). But for many research questions, we agree with Rauthmann and colleagues and favour studying what William James called “the rich thicket of reality”—that place where persons and situations are blurred. However, we should remember that this ecological approach, while giving more realistic estimates of how personality influences behaviour and outcomes in the messy real world, in some ways underestimates the power of personality.

Suggestions for Building upon a Strong Foundation for Situation Research

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Abstract: Development of systematic research on situations has been hampered by a lack of conceptual clarity and inconsistent measurement. Rauthmann et al. propose an impressive and coherent organizing framework for studying situations that has the potential to remedy these deficits and provide a strong foundation for future research. We offer a number of suggestions for expanding upon this framework. Although our suggestions are likely to add complexity to the discussion, we believe that the inherent richness of situation research warrants such nuance. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) provide a strong foundation for situation research in psychology. We find much to like and little to quibble regarding the organizing principles and corollaries they propose. Yet, as Rauthmann et al. admittedly kept the ‘messages of this target article simple’ (p. 34), we offer some suggestions intended to expand upon their framework without introducing too much complication. Specifically, we elaborate on the following three opinions: (i) the nomothetic–idiographic distinction carries larger implications for situation research; (ii) characteristics may be best conceptualized as being inextricably nested within cues and classes of situations; and (iii) study of cues, characteristics and classes may benefit from considering the overarching environments in which they occur.

We believe that development of the DIAMONDS model (Rauthmann et al., 2014) for assessing characteristics will prove to be a watershed event in situation research. When studying situations at the level of characteristics, we advocate a more nuanced approach that acknowledges the possibility that the structure of characteristics may vary across individuals. Rauthmann et al. touch upon this idea with their discussion of idiosyncratic personal reality; however, they do not flesh out the implications of this nomothetic–idiographic distinction. The DIAMONDS characteristics were derived using nomothetic procedures that by definition result in a group-level factor structure that represents the constructs that people commonly use to construe the world. Yet, any individual’s construals may differ from the group-level structure as a function of the relative importance that that person places on particular cognitive appraisals (Cervone, 2005). This is reminiscent of Kelly’s (1955) recognition that people have unique ways of viewing the world. Acknowledging this, each person distorts the DIAMONDS structure of situation construals in an idio- graphic manner that might that have important consequences for behaviour.

Both classic and modern statistical techniques may be applied to the study of the nomothetic–idiographic distinction.
as it relates to situation characteristics. Klirs and Revelle (1986) used the Individual Differences in (Multidimensional) Scaling algorithm (Carroll & Chang, 1970; see also Wish, Deutsch, & Biener, 1970) to show that combining nomothetic and idiographic approaches to studying situation appraisals was superior to using either approach in isolation for predicting cross-situational behavioural variability. That is, each individual’s set of appraisals could be represented as a unique systematic distortion from a consensual group space. Wilt, Funkhouser, and Revelle (2011) used multilevel modelling techniques to show that individual differences in the correlations between threat and challenge appraisals of situations related to individual differences in the within-person structure of affect. Future research may benefit from employing person-specific factor analytic techniques (Molenaar & Campbell, 2009) to the study of situation characteristics. Such techniques have the capability to identify models that more accurately represent how characteristics are structured at the level of the individual.

Rauthmann et al. prefer characteristics (over cues and classes) as the conceptual unit of situation description; however, we believe that characteristics might be best understood as being nested within and transacting with cues/classes. For instance, the DIAMONDS characteristic of perceived Adversity might take on different meaning in the contexts of speciﬁc situations related to individual differences in the within-person structure of affect. Future research may benefit from employing person-specific factor analytic techniques (Molenaar & Campbell, 2009) to the study of situation characteristics. Such techniques have the capability to identify models that more accurately represent how characteristics are structured at the level of the individual.

Rauthmann et al. provide some much needed coherence to issues related to conceptualization and measurement of situations, yet we believe that research on the kinds of situations that they list (cues, characteristics and classes) may benefit from considering more closely the natural environments in which they occur. By analogy, we reason that, just as weather is to climate, so is emotion to personality (Revelle & Scherer, 2009). That is, different situations are relatively time-delimited instantiations of broader sociocultural contexts. This notion of time can be examined in macro as well as micro contexts. We use the terms ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ to distinguish roughly between sets of environmental circumstances that extend for relatively long durations such as days to years (macro context) and those that last relatively short periods such as milliseconds to several minutes (micro contexts).

Integration of specific kinds of situations over time and space form recognizable macro contexts—a person’s under-graduate years, the pre-tenure years of a professor—in which each instance of such situations is expected to share similar features. Therefore, consideration of macro contexts is likely to aid in predicting the kinds of situations a person will encounter during a speciﬁed timeframe. For example, one’s undergraduate years are likely to include attendance at lectures (cue) that afford opportunities for Intellectual (characteristic) in academic settings (class), and those specific situations will be interspersed with parties (cue) that afford opportunities for Mating (characteristic) in recreational settings (class).

At a much more micro-level, idiosyncratic interpretation of situations needs to include an individual’s past experiences as well as present goals. Consider a number of people sailing small boats in a harbour with a moderate wind. To some, this situation is one of terror of capsizing, to others, the challenge of controlling the boat. To those with the goal of racing, this situation is competitive and exciting, to those with the goal of cruising, enjoyment and relaxation. These differences in perceptions, experience, and goals and the resulting behavioural effects can be assessed only in situ by the individual and not by bystander or ex situ ratings.

We hope that these considerations and suggestions will stimulate further discussion about how to build upon the impressive framework of Rauthmann et al. for studying situations.

Situation Cues, Characteristics and Classes—Understanding Their Links to Understand Situations’ Associations with Personality and Behaviour

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Abstract: Rauthmann et al. informatively demarcate cues, characteristics and classes of situations, but barely address how they are linked to each other. I argue that more work is necessary on the associations between cues, perceptions and classes. The three kinds of situational information possess shared and unique values for developing interventions and understanding personality–situation transactions. I thus challenge their claim for superiority of perceptions and point out methodological ways to improve assessment of situations. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015) advance psychological research on situational influences on people’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour in (at least) two ways. First, they demarcate situations’ cues, characteristics (i.e.
perceptions) and classes on two dimensions: *abstractness*, from specific cues to broad classes; and *meaning-making process*, cues generate characteristics, which assemble into classes. Second, they decompose situation perceptions into situation, perceiver and unique effects, which correspond to decomposing interpersonal perception (Kenny, 1994). These distinctions help to organize situational information assessed with different measures (see Rauthmann, in press) and can advance theories of how situational factors transact with people’s characteristics in influencing behaviour. Still, further work is necessary to link cues, characteristics and classes. I offer some considerations.

**LINKS BETWEEN CUES AND CHARACTERISTICS**

Rauthmann et al. assume linear, bivariate associations, but often observed minor associations between situational cues and perceived characteristics (Rauthmann et al., 2014). These small associations may be due to (a) insufficient cue taxonomy or incomplete assessment of relevant cues or (b) nonlinear associations among multiple cues and perceived characteristics. For example, perceived *duty* may be higher when simultaneously carrying out formal work activities with colleagues (i.e. interaction effect), although the main effects of simply being at work or with colleagues predict perceived *duty* weakly (Rauthmann et al., 2014). Furthermore, cues might predict the situation component of perceptions best (cf. social relations lens models, Back et al., 2011a,b, Back et al., 2009), so cues might correlate weakly with situation perceptions that additionally include perceiver and unique components. Rauthmann et al. indicate this possibility in their Agreement Corollary. Thus, future research could focus on (a) deriving (groups of) cues theoretically linked to perceived situation dimensions (e.g. DIAMONDS, Rauthmann et al., 2014), (b) developing rules of cue utilization to explain which cues pass different perceptual filters, and (c) modelling nonlinear associations between multiple cues and the situation component of perception.

**LINKS BETWEEN CHARACTERISTICS AND CLASSES**

Rauthmann et al. explain that situation classes group situations with similar characteristics (see also Rauthmann, in press). For example, several situations described as high on *duty* and low on *matiing* may belong to the class *work*. Two issues remain open. First, how exactly do multiple characteristics form a class (e.g. do characteristics interact)? Profiles of situational characteristics could be a beginning for informative classes; however, completeness of such an empirical approach depends strongly on the people sampled. For example, daily situations sampled from unemployed/retired people will not generate a *work* class. Second, is it possible to derive a (some) finite set(s) of classes that describes people’s daily situations exhaustively? At what level of abstractness? For example, personality types proved valuable for several research areas (Alessandri et al., 2014) including predictions of major life outcomes such as stable partnership or full-time employment (Asendorpf, Denissen, & van Aken, 2008). Consequently, a ‘situation-centred’ approach through classes (similar to a person-centred approach through types) can supplement variable-centred approaches. An interesting question is whether general characteristic profiles (i.e. the consensual stratum) or within-person situation-characteristic profiles (i.e. the idiosyncratic stratum) more successfully capture meaningful classes. For example, a situation may be moderate on *duty* for one person compared with other situations encountered, thus belonging to a *work* class (within-person perspective). However, the same situation may be low on *duty* compared with situations encountered by others or from others’ perspectives, accordingly not belonging to a *work* class (between-person perspective).

**THE VALUE OF SITUATIONAL CUES AND CHARACTERISTICS AND CLASSES FOR INTERVENTIONS AND RESEARCH ON PERSON–SITUATION TRANSACTION**

These considerations challenge the Rauthmann et al. claim that ‘situation research will be best off focusing on perceptions of situation characteristics’ (Rauthmann et al., 2015, p. 373). I agree that perceptions are the active ingredients of situations (Wagerman & Funder, 2009), such that perceptions reflect the noticed situational cues, which are already ‘in people’s heads’, and can elicit behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Often, this may lead to obvious associations. For example, when people perceive negativity in situations (item from RBQ-B8, Rauthmann et al., 2014: *situation is anxiety-inducing*), it would be odd if people did not feel anxious. This seeming circularity between situation perceptions and outcomes indicates the separate values of cues and characteristics. For example, stress research (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) distinguishes stressors (i.e. cues) and stress perceptions. Usually, both elicit stress reactions. Yet, sometimes strong reactions occur without intense stress perception, and sometimes stress occurs without (severe) objective stressors. Associations among stressor occurrence, perception and reaction differ among people, for example, related to neuroticism (Suls & Martin, 2005). Interventions can target both successfully by reducing objective stressors and by altering stress perceptions. This may also apply to other situations.

Furthermore, considering cues, characteristics and classes can foster the understanding of person–situation transaction: at what level do people select situations? Do people seek specific cues or comprehensive classes? Does this differ among individuals or vary with personality characteristics? For example, affiliation motivation predicted the occurrence of situations based on cues and characteristics (e.g. sociality; Duffner, Arslan, Hagemeyer, Schönbrodt, & Denissen, in press), whereas impulsivity evoked situational classes rather than specific cues (Emmons, Diener, & Larsen, 1986). This is somewhat surprising because cues should form classes (and characteristics), yet I argued before that characteristics and classes may reflect nonlinear combinations of cues. Hence, for some personality characteristics, people may
Discussion

would mean collecting experience-sampling data from job
other ratings of the situations. For personnel selection, this
study participants in different situations over time along with
in applied contexts. It will be dif-
vincing from a research perspective, it poses severe problems
assessing situational perception. While this might be con-
dictions of human behaviour.

From an assessment perspective situational perception as
select classes (comprising several cues and situational char-
acteristics) instead of single cues.

Finally, two methodological issues are important: situati-
onal characteristics and classes can be meaningful only
when based on situations from the general population. For ex-
ample, DIAMONDS describe students’ daily life quite well,
but daily life in the general population less well (Rauthmann
et al., 2014, Table 3 samples A–D vs G). Furthermore, partic-
ipants’ subjective descriptions of situations may bias external
ratings, if the ratings shall represent situational cues objec-
tively. Instead, situational cues should be captured directly
to avoid biases, for example, using smartphone sensing
(Wrzus & Mehl, in press). To conclude, understanding the
links among cues, characteristics and classes advances com-
prehension of the dynamic transactions between persons
and situations, development of successful interventions in
several fields and conceptualization of connected taxonomies
of situations that cover most of people’s everyday situations.

Better Understanding of Psychological Situations: Opportunities and Challenges

for Psychological Assessment

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Abstract: Rauthmann et al. offer a multitude of arguments and ideas that make great theoretical contributions. At the same
time, the principles that they outline have some implications for psychological assessment. We want to advocate the use of
hypothetical situations in applied contexts to avoid low acceptance. Moreover, we point out the importance of the number
of situations assessed based on the implications of the Reality Principle. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Person-
ality Psychology.

Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder’s article could be a fund-
amental step forward in the person–situation debate. The the-
eoretical framework and the common language suggested could
help to unite a research area in its pledge to provide a better un-
derstanding of inter-individual differences in human behaviour.
We are convinced that the article has the potential to achieve
the goals it sets if enough researchers acknowledge the theore-
tical arguments and subsequently follow them.

One of the areas that they tackle is assessment of situ-
tional perception. The goal is a more complete way to predict
human behaviour. It is surprising how little impact the situ-
uation aspect has had on test construction or test validation
strategies. We point out some implications for these areas
that go along with the principles and corollaries suggested
by Rauthmann et al.

ASSESSMENT OF SITUATIONAL PERCEPTION—
NATURAL SITUATIONS AS SILVER BULLETS?

Rauthmann et al. stress the importance of situational percep-
tions. They subsume them under the term ‘situational charac-
teristics’ and differentiate them from ‘cues’ and ‘classes’.
From an assessment perspective situational perception as
they outline, it offers the safest bet for achieving better pre-
dictions of human behaviour.

Rauthmann go on to suggest that natural situations are
preferable to hypothetical or laboratory situations when
assessing situational perception. While this might be con-
vincing from a research perspective, it poses severe problems
in applied contexts. It will be difficult to gather data from
study participants in different situations over time along with
other ratings of the situations. For personnel selection, this
would mean collecting experience-sampling data from job
applicants. The situations would then have to be rated by
others. Thus, we advocate the use of hypothetical situations
in such contexts. In fact, a recent review of emergence of re-
silience as the result of person-by-situation interaction also
suggested use of vignette-based assessments (Pangallo,
Zibarras, Lewis, & Flaxman, 2015). Of course, the cues pre-
sented in hypothetical situations need to be carefully selected
and tailored to the specific applied context, as stressed by
Rauthmann et al. An example of such a tool is the Big Five
Inventory of Personality in Occupational Situations (Ziegler,
2014). This questionnaire uses vignettes of work situations
derived from interviewing human resource managers. Test
takers provide ratings of situational perception and behav-
avour. The test uses a taxonomy of situational characteristics
called the Situation 5 (expectation of results, vitality, mental
and physical load, monotony and cognitive load) whose
scores have incremental validity above Big Five scores.

The article of Rauthmann et al. can thus be seen as a
framework, guiding classification of situational assessments
similar to Cattell’s T-data, Q-data and L-data (Cattell,
1958). Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that neither
of the categories suggested by Cattell outdoes all other cate-
gories in all contexts. The same can be suspected for the test
classification suggested here.

THE REALITY PRINCIPLE AND ITS
CONSEQUENCES FOR RELIABILITY AND
VALIDITY

According to the Reality Principle, situational perception en-
compasses shared and idiosyncratic variance. Rauthmann
et al. suggest variance decomposition approaches to differenti-
te between these variance sources. Generalizability theory
is named as a potential method. Let us assume an assessment of situational perception uses a certain number of situations. In each situation, the test taker is asked to rate the situation with a certain number of items. Clearly, this number has to be limited for test administration to be practical. In the most simplistic example, the items for each situation would only capture one situational characteristic. As outlined by Rauthmann et al., this would allow decomposition of rater (inter-individual differences on shared situational perceptions), situation (inter-situational differences) and rater-by-situation interaction (idiosyncratic variance). Ziegler, Poropat, and Mell (2014) applied this to personality questionnaires. Here, the variance sources were trait variance, item variance and their interaction, directly analogous to the three situational variance sources. Short personality questionnaires showed reduced relative variance contribution from items. They attributed this to the common practice of ensuring high internal consistency even for short scales (see also Ziegler, Kemper, & Kruyen, 2014). For a situational perception test, this could mean that tests with few situations (items) could underestimate the relative importance of inter-situational variance and overestimate the relative importance of shared situational perceptions. This would also impact reliability estimates. Thus, the number of situations to be included in any situation assessment as well as their heterogeneity potentially has important consequences for the relative importance of person and situation.

Rauthmann et al. also suggest that complex structural equation models might be ideally suited to model the different variance sources. It is vital to stress the need for complex models. If we were to test a model for a dataset in which the same people rated hypothetical situations using a specific situational taxonomy, the idiosyncratic variance within the ratings would most likely end up in the residual variances. Thus, large parts of the items’ variances (i.e. the idiosyncratic variance) would remain unexplained. This would negatively impact model fit and impede the usefulness of conventional cutoffs (Heene, Hilbert, Draxler, Ziegler, & Bühner, 2011). One way out is use of more complex models requiring more complex data structures (Geiser et al., 2014). A different option would be to accept different values for conventional cutoffs, especially the Comparative Fit Index, CFI (Ziegler, 2014). Regardless of the option chosen, teasing apart the different variance sources not only affects testing factorial validity. It also bears important implications for the validation strategy (see Ziegler & Horstmann, in press).

To sum up, we commend Rauthmann et al. for providing a theoretical framework and research outlook for researchers interested in situations. We hope that their article’s richness in detail and complexity will inspire researchers from all fields of psychology to consider situational perception in their work and to use a common language based on the framework presented. At the same time we perceive some areas requiring further development to optimize psychological assessment.

**AUTHORS’ RESPONSE**

**New Horizons in Research on Psychological Situations and Environments**

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Abstract: First, we summarize the central and recurring themes in the comments on our article. Second, we address non-controversial and controversial themes and thereby update the three principles we outlined. Third, we provide some suggestions for future research. Together, we hope that our article, the comments and this rejoinder can inspire new horizons in research on psychological situations and environments as well as person–situation/environment transactions. Copyright © 2015 European Association of Personality Psychology.

In our article (2015), we proposed three principles for situation research: (i) situations need to be psychologically processed to affect further mental processes and behaviour (Processing Principle); (ii) situation experiences exist at three types of reality—physical, consensual and idiosyncratic (Reality Principle); and (iii) defining and measuring a situational variable solely via one person’s mental states and behaviours should be avoided in favour of multiple measurements in situ, juxta situm and ex situ (Circularity Principle). In response, 29 comments provided a wide range of perspectives, ideas and questions, and all were thoughtful and constructive. We provide a condensed overview of the comments and address the general themes that emerged from these comments, extending the principles we outlined in the article. Then, we sketch some possible directions for future research.

**OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY OF COMMENTS**

The number of responses to our target article is indicative of the interest in and increasing sense of the importance of psychological situation research. Necessarily, therefore, we address only general themes that emerged across comments (rather than specific points in individual comments).

Figure 1 gives a glimpse of the many topics covered by assembling the top 50 recurring words from all comments (with words used more often appearing larger). Not surprisingly, these align with most of the themes we extracted from the comments. Table 1 contains a short synopsis of each comment. We additionally “scored” the comments on certain dimensions and extracted, for each comment, the main tenets and purpose. As Table 1 shows, 9 comments provided direct...
critiques, 10 applications of our ideas to specific topics, 2 implications of our ideas and 16 extensions to our ideas. These numbers are encouraging, but they also point towards potential refinements of our framework. We attempt to offer some refinements by addressing themes that we grouped as ‘non-controversial’ and ‘controversial’.

We identified six non-controversial themes involving need for our framework to (i) distinguish different situational entities, (ii) acknowledge the interpersonal/social nature of situations, (iii) more strongly incorporate implicit processing, (iv) acknowledge embedding of processing situational information in human evolution, (v) incorporate dynamic aspects (e.g. development, time, change and transactions), and (vi) be compatible with development and use of powerful and sophisticated modelling techniques.

We also identified six controversial themes: endorsement of (i) more objectivist or = versus more subjectivist positions, (ii) use of real-life, multi-method, multi-situation, multi-time and multi-group designs (RL-M-MSTG) or = versus experimental conditions, (iii) the utility of taxonomization, (iv) the Circularity Principle and its corollaries, (v) separation of ‘person’ and ‘situation’, and (vi) person-analogies in the definition, measurement and taxonomization of situational information.

ADDRESSING MAJOR NON-CONTROVERSIAL THEMES

Different situational entities. Several commenters emphasize the need to differentiate among ‘situational entities’, such as (i) sequences, series or (longer lasting) episodes (Blackie & Jayawickreme; Mroczek & Condon); (ii) special, intense and/or important situations as life events (Blackie & Jayawickreme; Neyer et al.); (iii) typical, recurring, or repeated situations of certain consistency or regularity that may be aggregated (McCrae; Möttus & Allerhand; Nave); (iv) environments or niches (Asendorpf; Schönbrodt & Hagemeier); and (v) contexts such as culture and history (Dunlop; Wilt & Revelle). Although some of these entities have also been labelled as ‘situations’ in existing literature, we agree with the commenters that it would be best to distinguish them from each other. Particularly, they differ in degrees of abstraction, duration and stability. Additionally, they may be differentially related to personality; for example, more abstract, longer lasting and stable situational entities may exert more influence on personality and its development (see, e.g. Asendorpf), while personality may exert more influence on more concrete, shorter and fluctuating situations.
| Author(s)                      | Main point(s)                                                                 | Criticisms? | Applications? | Implications? | Extensions? |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Asendorpf                     | Principles could and should be extended to a psychology of environments       | X           |               |               | X           |
|                               | (chronic exposure to situations)                                              |             |               |               |             |
| Balliet and Righetti          | Principles raise awareness about the need to study how people think about     | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | their interdependence with others                                             |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Interdependence is a characteristic of situations that is theoretically related|             |               |               |             |
|                               | to person variables (e.g. goals and values).                                 |             |               |               |             |
| Blackie and Jayawickreme      | Relate principles to the study of positive personality change in the wake of  | X           | X             |               |             |
|                               | the experience of adversity (post-traumatic growth)                          |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Question whether the strong commitment to the Approximation Corollary is      |             |               |               |             |
|                               | good for situation research in naturalistic settings                         |             |               |               |             |
| Blum and Schmitt              | Situation research would benefit from a more thoroughly parallel              | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | conceptualization of persons and situations                                  |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Understanding the characteristics of situations as situation traits           |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Adapting statistical models of personality psychology (e.g. (latent state    |             |               |               |             |
|                               | trait modelling) LSTM and multi-trait-multi-method) to psychological situation |             |               |               |             |
|                               | research                                                                     |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Learning from the methods we use for assessing and diagnosing personality    |             |               |               |             |
|                               | traits                                                                        |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Considering evolutionary arguments for assuming a parallel structure of      |             |               |               |             |
|                               | personality and situations                                                   |             |               |               |             |
| Donnellan and Corker          | Efforts be directed towards developing a working taxonomy of situational     | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | characteristics                                                                |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Experiments, particularly those rooted in classic experimental social        |             |               |               |             |
|                               | psychology, may prove to be very useful for testing whether situational cues  |             |               |               |             |
|                               | truly cause situational characteristics and ultimately behaviour              |             |               |               |             |
| Dunlop                        | Relation between persons and situations: whether persons and situations       | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | should be viewed from a split or relational orientation                       |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Possibility that principles may not hold relevance to all situations          |             |               |               |             |
|                               | (across cultures and time periods)                                           |             |               |               |             |
| Egloff, Hirschmüller,         | Suggest avenues for future research                                          | X           |               |               | X           |
| and Krohn                     | Argue for the role of cues in situation research                              |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Encouragement to elaborate on implicit situation perception and situation     |             |               |               |             |
|                               | dynamics                                                                      |             |               |               |             |
| Fleeson and Jayawickreme      | Employ real-life, multi-method, multi-situation, multi-time and multi-group  | X           |               |               | X           |
|                               | designs                                                                       |             |               |               |             |
| Gallardo-Pujol and Buades-Rotger| Study situations in terms of their impact on trait enactment                    | X           |               |               | X           |
|                               | Show how Milgram’s classical obedience-to-authority experiment can be         |             |               |               |             |
|                               | examined using the framework                                                  |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Suggest ways in which future studies could explore also other experimental    | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | situations more thoroughly                                                    |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Propose an analogy between situational and visual processing to address the   |             |               |               |             |
|                               | objectivism/subjectivism debate in situational research                      |             |               |               |             |
| Harari, Gosling, Wang,         | Smartphones and other forms of mobile sensing are ideally suited to           | X           |               |               |             |
| and Campbell                  | measuring situations                                                           |             |               |               |             |
|                               | Describe how sensing methods can be used to assess situational cues,          |             |               |               |             |
|                               | characteristics and classes                                                   |             |               |               |             |

(Continues)
| Author(s)                     | Main point(s)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Criticisms? | Applications? | Implications? | Extensions? |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Johnson J.                   | • Explain why two core principles (Process and Reality) respect person–situation interwovenness, while the third (Circularity) might be a pointless attempt to separate situations from personality                                                                                                      | X           |               |               |             |
| Johnson W.                   | • We cannot accomplish much of what we wish to accomplish using the same behaviour structures we have used to measure personality traits                                                                                                                                                                                                 | X           |               |               |             |
| Krueger                      | • Situation variables should not be treated in the same way as person variables because situations and persons are (inherently) different entities.                                                                                                                                             | X           |               |               |             |
|                              | • Dimension-based approaches are not necessary for fruitful experimental work.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |             |               |               |             |
| McCrae                       | • Some principles of assessing personality traits may have parallels in the assessment of situations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |             |               |               |             |
|                              | • Situation assessments may require multiple judges to control for perceiver effects.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |             |               |               |             |
|                              | • Inter-rater reliability should be reported in situation research.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |             |               |               |             |
|                              | • Situational assessment might profitably concentrate on recurrent rather than one-time situations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |             |               |               |             |
| Möttus and Allerhand         | • Endorse a distinction between momentary situations and enduring environments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | X           | X             |               |             |
|                              | • Endorse the utilization of sophisticated and powerful mathematical/statistical tools                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |             |               |               |             |
| Mroczek and Condon           | • Need to incorporate a developmental perspective (=separate but related issues of time and change)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |               |               |               | X           |
|                              | • Situations often unfold over long periods of time, can bleed together and are not time-delimited in the way traditional laboratory experiments define them.                                                                                                                                                                                   |             |               |               |             |
|                              | • Individuals systematically change over time (lifespan development) and their reactions to situations, as well as their personality–situation transactions, develop in tandem.                                                                                                                                                               |             |               |               |             |
| Nave                         | • Diagnosticality of situations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | X           |               |               |             |
|                              | • Repeatability of situations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |             |               |               |             |
| Neyer, Mund, and Zimmermann  | • Perspective of long-term personality development: persons and situations are inherently intertwined                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | X           |               |               |             |
|                              | • It is the situation which makes the person matter, and it is the person who makes the situation matter.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |             |               |               |             |
|                              | • Similar situations may exert differential or normative effects on personality development depending on their frequency of occurrence and their consensual perception in a reference group.                                                                                                                                                           |             |               |               |             |
|                              | • Life events include patterns of similar situations that in the future should be classified according to occurrence and consensus.                                                                                                                                              |             |               |               |             |
| Noftle and Gust               | • Question (a) the conceptualization of cues, (b) comprehensiveness of characteristics and (c) methodological implications of the principles                                                                                                                                                                                                 | X           |               |               |             |
| Perugini and Costantini      | • Principles would benefit from integrating a functional approach, with a clearer distinction between two levels of analysis, the functional and the cognitive one.                                                                                                                                               | X           |               |               |             |
| Pincus, Hopwood, and Wright  | • Assertions are embodied in the ‘interpersonal situation;’ a fundamental orienting construct of interpersonal theory, providing an interactional-                                                                                                                                                                                               | X           |               |               |             |
| Author(s)                        | Main point(s)                                                                 | Criticisms? | Applications? | Implications? | Extensions? |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Reis                           | Dynamic perspective on the situation that is (a) variable-centred and         |             | X             | X             |             |
|                               | dimensional, (b) focuses on characteristics of situations, (c) synthesizes   |             |               |               |             |
|                               | objective and subjective perspectives, and (d) is applicable to multi-method, |             |               |               |             |
|                               | multi-informant, multi-timescale assessment.                                  |             |               |               |             |
| Saucier and Conley            | • Properties that are important in understanding how situations influence     | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | behaviour: the relationship context in which behaviour occurs                 |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • Unclear about which mental states can or cannot be situational variables    | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | • Force of situational cues in everyday psychology seems underestimated       |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • If person and situation variables are to be kept separate, it seems problematic |             |               |               |             |
|                               | that many measures of personality have items stating situational contingencies|             |               |               |             |
| Schönbrodt and Hagemeyer      | • Advocate the importance of environmental cues by taking an evolutionary     | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | standpoint                                                                    |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • Cues are essential factors (beyond conscious perceptions) for the explanation|             |               |               |             |
|                               | of actual behaviour, in particular when implicit processes are considered     |             |               |               |             |
| Van Lange                     | • Show that it is essential that taxonomies address objective situations      |             |               |               | X           |
|                               | • The number of categorizations and dimensions is manageable                  |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • For theorizing situations, science should favour objectivity and parsimony   |             |               |               |             |
|                               | over subjectivity and complexity                                              |             |               |               |             |
| Vazire and Bleidorn           | • Objectivist approaches will produce larger individual differences (because   | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | subjectivist approaches eliminate a major source of individual differences:    |             |               |               |             |
|                               | situation construal).                                                         |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • Uniform objective situations are (perhaps ironically) the best place to look |             |               |               |             |
|                               | for the power of personality.                                                |             |               |               |             |
| Wilt and Revelle              | • Suggestions intended to expand upon the framework without introducing too   | X           |               |               |             |
|                               | much complication                                                            |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • Nomothetic–idiographic distinction carries larger implications for situation |             |               |               |             |
|                               | research than discussed                                                       |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • Characteristics may be best conceptualized as being inextricably nested      |             |               |               |             |
|                               | within cues and classes of situations                                          |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • The study of cues, characteristics and classes may benefit from considering  |             |               |               |             |
|                               | the overarching environments in which they occur.                            |             |               |               |             |
| Wrzus                         | • More work is necessary on the associations between cues, perceptions and     |             |               |               | X           |
|                               | classes                                                                       |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • All three groups of situational information possess shared and unique value  |             |               |               |             |
|                               | for developing interventions and understanding personality–situation          |             |               |               |             |
|                               | transactions                                                                  |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • Challenge the superiority claim of perceptions                              |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • Point out methodological issues on how to improve the assessment of situations|             |               |               |             |
| Ziegler and Ziegler           | • Advocate the use of hypothetical situations in applied contexts to avoid low|             |               |               | X           |
|                               | acceptance                                                                    |             |               |               |             |
|                               | • Point out the importance of the number of situations assessed based on the  |             |               |               |             |
|                               | implications of the reality principle                                         |             |               |               |             |
Table 2 summarizes and contrasts seven circumstantial concepts related to situations: (i) occurrence, (ii) situation, (iii) episode, (iv) life event, (v) typical or commonly occurring situation, (vi) environment and (vii) context. One may think of these concepts as being ‘nested’ within each other like layers of an onion: specific occurrences (e.g. a new colleague is shaking hands with you) take place within a situation (e.g. being at your welcome reception as a new coworker), and this situation may be part of a longer episode in someone’s life (e.g. the first day at a new job). Certain episodes can amount to or represent life events (e.g. the first job), if they are significant, intense or enduring enough. Additionally, typical situations (e.g. going to work or doing some grocery shopping near home) may occur with some regularity. Occurrences, situations, episodes, life events and typical situations are all nested within someone’s habitual environment or socio-ecological niche (e.g. the workplace or home), which, in turn, are nested within sociocultural and historical contexts. Transitions from an occurrence to a situation or from a situation to an episode can be gradual, and generally, occurrences, situations, episodes, life events and typical situations may seep into each other (Mroczek & Condon).

Distinguishing among these situational entities underscores the richness of phenomena to be studied and allows greater precision in theories about and measurement of situational information and assessment of person–situation or person–environment transactions (Neyer et al.). As the commenters mentioning these situational entities note (e.g. Asendorpf; Mroczek & Condon; Nave), any recommended principles can (and should) also apply to these additional situational entities, not just to single instances of momentary, fleeting situations.

The interpersonal/social nature of situations. In our article, we did not address the largely interpersonal nature of situations—despite the fact that much social psychological work has focused explicitly on social situations—because we wanted to offer a broader perspective. Several comments emphasized the sometimes central role of social processes (e.g. Pincus et al.) and particularly of interdependent situations (Balliet & Righetti; Reis; Van Lange). Notably, commenters advocating for interpersonal as well as interdependence theories nicely illustrate how our principles could be combined with, applied to and informed by as well as inform social situations (Balliet & Righetti; Pincus et al.; Reis; Van Lange).

Implicit processing. Some commenters call for more attention to implicit processing mechanisms that may operate outside the conscious awareness and experience of articulable situation perceptions (e.g. Asendorpf; Egloff et al.; Schönbrodt & Hagemeyer). As Asendorpf notes, the role of implicit processing can be relatively easily incorporated into the principles. The principles are not limited to consciously experienced situation perceptions; they can also be applied to implicit situation processing that has effects for further (conscious) experiences and behaviour (outside of awareness). As Schönbrodt and Hagemeyer note, it may even be possible to decompose implicit situation representations into consensual and idiiosyncratic components, thus satisfying our Reality Principle.

Evolutionary embedding. A few commenters assert that theory, measurement and taxonomization of situational information could usefully be informed by evolutionary theories (e.g. for characteristics, Blum & Schmitt; for cues, Schönbrodt & Hagemeyer). We agree and see great merit in understanding situation processing (and its outcomes) from a long-range perspective that highlights how perceptual modules to process situational information were shaped, formed and evolved in human phylogenesis (see, e.g. Morse, Neel, Todd, & Funder, in press).

Dynamic aspects. The dynamic nature of situations is emphasized in comments addressing (i) different life stages as well as developmental and growth aspects of the self and personality (e.g. Blackie & Jayawickreme; Mroczek & Condon; Neyer et al.; Wilt & Revelle); (ii) short-term, middle-term and long-term time aspects of situations and environments (e.g. Dunlop; Mroczek & Condon); (iii) stability and change of situations (Egloff et al.); and (iv) transactions between persons and situations (e.g. Asendorpf; Blum & Schmitt; Donnellan & Corker; Flesson & Jayawickreme; Möttus & Allerhand; Neyer et al.; Vazire & Bleidorn; Wrzus). These are all very important areas deserving of more systematic research. As has been noted, transactions (and co-developments) between persons and situations (and environments) may not be linear (Wrzus) and sophisticated models, perhaps inspired by systems theory and synergistics, will have to be employed to study them (Möttus & Allerhand).

Methodological and statistical sophistication. Many commenters concur that powerful methodology and statistical data-analysis tools are needed to study situations as well as person–situation transactions. These include (i) technological advances in natural ecological sampling methods of person and situation information (e.g. Harari et al.; Wilt & Revelle); (ii) sophisticated multi-level and structural equation modelling techniques that are inspired by and most often used in trait research (Blum & Schmitt;...
ADDRESSING MAJOR CONTROVERSIAL THEMES

Objectivity versus subjectivity. Several commentators advocate positions more objectiveist in outlook than ours (e.g. W. Johnson; Krueger; Saucier & Conley; Schönbrodt & Hagemeyer; Van Lange; Vazire & Bleidorn), while other commenters instead press for more subjectivist positions emphasizing the central role of processed or experienced situations (e.g. Asendorpf; Blackie & Jayawickreme; J. Johnson; McCrae; Pincus et al.). Between these polarized points of view fall commentators that (i) integrate both objectivist and subjectivist positions (e.g. Harari et al.; Perugini & Costantini; Wilt & Revelle), (ii) do not explicitly endorse subjectivist approaches but heavily rely on them (e.g. Blum & Schmitt; Fleeson & Jayawickreme; Nave; Ziegler & Ziegler) or (iii) do not clearly favour either position (e.g. Dunlop).

A common thread through these highly diverse comments is endorsement of cues (particularly in experimental manipulations) and their utility for psychological research. Specifically, several commentators promoted use of specific, objective cues (e.g. Schönbrodt & Hagemeyer) and experiments manipulating them (e.g. Vazire & Bleidorn). However, no cue has psychological or behavioural relevance outside of explicit and/or implicit processing (Asendorpf; J. Johnson), and any (objectivist) position that does not acknowledge this basic fact will fall short. A psychology of situations can and must generate taxonomies of cues, characteristics and classes. Like Donnellan and Corker, we believe that we should start with characteristics, but keep in mind how they relate—linearly and nonlinearly—to cues and classes (see Wrezus for excellent suggestions).

Real-life versus experiments. On one hand, several commentators generally welcome our plea for RL-M-MSTG designs (e.g. Fleeson & Jayawickreme; Harari et al.; Möttus & Allerhand; Nave; Pincus et al.; Van Lange), although several question their feasibility and applicability (e.g. Blackie & Jayawickreme; Dunlop; Noffke & Gust). Of course, employing such designs can be challenging and costly, but this should be weighed against the immense advantages and rich insights they promise. We do not condemn designs that do not fulfill at least one or two (or more) aspects of the RL-M-MSTG design, but we would still like to urge use of (variants of) RL-M-MSTG designs as often and routinely as possible.

On the other hand, commenters also endorsed the use and merits of experiments (e.g. Donnellan & Corker; Gallardo-Pujol & Buades-Rotger; Krueger; Vazire & Bleidorn) or controlled and hypothetical situations (Ziegler & Ziegler). Of course, designs using artificial or hypothetical situations can be useful (particularly for economic reasons) and also offer important insights, particularly by examining causal models (see suggestions from Donnellan & Corker). However, we should then empirically test their generalization to the real world (beyond the laboratory or questionnaire). For example, Mroczek and Condon maintain that it is important to attend to situation dynamics (see also Egloff et al.): how situations—over time—flow into each other, cause each other and develop. Additionally, modelling person–situation transactions (as outlined by Neyer et al.) in the laboratory will prove difficult (cf. Vazire & Bleidorn). Thus, RL-M-MSTG designs may be best combined with experimental manipulations.

Taxonomization: yea versus nay. Some commentators see taxonomization as an essential (if not the most essential) part of a psychology of situations (e.g. Donnellan & Corker; Van Lange; Ziegler & Ziegler), whereas others assigned it low priority or even deemed it problematic (e.g. W. Johnson; Krueger). Reis speculates that the reason research on situational assessment fell so far behind research on personality assessment is that situations are more complicated entities than persons (and hence difficult to grasp and study). This is an intriguing suggestion, but will be doubted by personality psychologists who have long believed that the most complicated objects of study in the universe are individual human beings.

Instead, we suggest a more pragmatic explanation for the delayed development of a psychology of situations. Traditional experimental social psychology has never seriously tried to develop one, nor to organize its findings within a working taxonomy or assessment method for any kind of situational information. Typically, objective and single aspects of situations have only been studied one at a time (cf. Vazire & Bleidorn on how these may actually reveal individual differences), chosen solely for (a) susceptibility to experimental manipulation and (b) ability to test narrowly framed hypotheses. As a result, the aspects of situations studied not only have not been the most important ones to understand (far from it), they also have been chosen in haphazard and disorganized manners. Krueger asserts that taxonomies are not necessary for experimental work. However, lack of strong taxonomies, commitment to them and refinement of them over time has led to an often lamented, chaotic literature (Rauthmann, in press) littered with all sorts of manipulations of aspects of situations that may be, in any context other than testing specific hypotheses, trivial. Taxonomies are useful and necessary (for good arguments, see Donnellan & Corker; Van Lange), particularly if researchers care to generalize their results to situations beyond isolated experimental settings into real life.

Circularity Principle: yea versus nay. While Asendorpf sees the circularity principle as perhaps ‘the most important contribution’ of our article, for J. Johnson, it is a weakness. Indeed, the Circularity Principle is the most referenced principle among the three. Although there are endorsements (e.g. Asendorpf; Blum & Schmitt; Egloff et al.; McCrae), several comments show some skepticism or even rejection of the Circularity Principle and its corollaries (e.g. Blackie &
Jayawickreme; Noftle & Gust; J. Johnson; Saucier & Conley; Schönbrodt & Hagemeyer).

Some commentators question why we advocate the Processing Principle and then seem to revoke it by introducing the Circularity Principle (e.g. Saucier & Conley; Schönbrodt & Hagemeyer). The argument goes that we need to assess people’s perceptions of situations (as products of explicit information processing) or their reactions (or reaction times) to stimuli (as products of implicit information processing). The apparent paradox can be resolved by describing the Circularity Principle (and its purposes) more clearly. The State and Consequences Corollaries of the Circularity Principle mean that thoughts (e.g. ‘I was thinking about books’), feelings (‘I wasn’t feeling too well’), desires (‘I really craved some Red Velvet cake’) and actions (‘I was playing basketball’) are not to be used as cues or characterizations of a situation (cf. Balliet & Righetti and Noftle & Gust who nonetheless advocate this), regardless of whether they are assessed during the situation (State Corollary) or afterwards as an effect of people’s (explicit) perceptions of situations—we just do not want these perceptions to contain references to mental and behavioural person aspects as exemplified earlier (although they frequently do so in lay-person language; see Saucier & Conley and Saucier et al., 2007, for empirical evidence).

But precisely because we can sample people’s perceptions (in the broad sense encompassing explicit and implicit aspects)—and the Processing Principle makes a point that we perhaps should do so—we need to address the problem of conceptual and methodological circularity head-on. There are actually two types of circularity to avoid. First, situation perceptions reflect, in essence, person variables, and thus, the situation is actually treated in terms of the person. Circularity is here introduced when one presumes, for example, that ‘the situation’ had an effect on ‘the behaviour’, but actually, both things are the same (e.g. situation=playing basketball, behaviour=shooting hoops). Further difficulties arise when a situation is only defined by one person without any reference point (cf. Blackie & Jayawickreme who make the case that this may, under certain circumstances and research endeavours, be desirable or acceptable). Both difficulties act against the Reality Principle (i.e. the different realities cannot be teased apart) and Circularity Principle (i.e. the situation is only a person variable). As we showed in the article, this can be counteracted by using variance decomposition in fixed-situation designs (see also McCrae) or by using additional rating sources in random-situation designs. Vazire and Bleidorn also note problems with employing one person’s rating in a random-situations design, but those problems are alleviated once juxta situm or ex situ ratings are also collected.

Person and situation separation: yea versus nay. Some commentators note that persons and situations cannot or should not be separated (J. Johnson; Saucier & Conley), but are inextricably interwoven (Neyer et al.). The separation notion may date back to dualistic thinking (Dunlop), but as we explained at length in the article, circularity is a major problem in situation assessment (Asendorpf; W. Johnson). As McCrae notes, there are valuable lessons on situation assessment to be learned from the vast trait assessment literature, including how items may be explicitly or implicitly ‘contextualized’. Notably, though, even if trait assessments do contain situational references (see Saucier & Conley), this is not problematic for situation research so long as we do not purport to assess situations with those items.

Additionally, distinction needs to be made between conceptual and methodological interwovenness of person and situation: persons (with their personalities and behaviours) may find themselves in situations with certain cues and characteristics, depending on their personalities, needs, goals and values (see Ickes et al., 1997). This is the case because, to a certain extent, people can select, maintain, evoke, change and create situations (cf. Blackie & Jayawickreme; Vazire & Bleidorn). Thus, conceptually, persons and situations transact, and such transactions are complex and interwoven. However, if we would like to understand (and mathematically model) person–situation transactions, we need to keep measured person and situation variables as clearly separate as possible. If not, then spurious and inflated associations might ensue because of common method biases (see also Asendorf for examples). Thus, even if one would not subscribe to the Circularity Principle for conceptual reasons, methodological concerns cannot be put aside so easily.

Person-analogies for situations: yea versus nay. While some commentators maintain that situation characteristics (or any situational information) and, by extension, also their assessment are best rooted in our knowledge on person aspects (particularly traits) and how these are assessed (Blum & Schmitt; Fleeson & Jayawickreme; McCrae; Noftle & Gust; Ziegler & Ziegler), other commentators view such ‘person-analogies’ as highly problematic (e.g. Krueger; W. Johnson). We see no problem in using the extensive knowledge that personality psychology has gained (Donnellan & Corker; McCrae) to conceptualize and measure situational information (particularly characteristics) so long as person states (i.e. action, cognition, motivation and emotion) are not used as proxies for situations (or their cues) per se (cf. Noftle & Gust). The former does not violate our Circularity Principle; the latter does. Indeed, we deem it beneficial if trait and situation taxonomies can speak content-wise a common language (see Blum & Schmitt; Möttus & Allerhand). This is particularly true if researchers are interested in studying person–situation transactions (Sherman et al., in press; Rauthmann et al., 2014, 2015) and how situations may be seen as ‘affordances’ that evoke behavioural expression of relevant personality traits (Blum & Schmitt; Fleeson & Jayawickreme; Möttus & Allerhand). Additionally, evolutionary arguments could suggest evolved parallelisms between person and situation perception (Blum & Schmitt; Schönbrodt & Hagemeyer), and interpersonal theory merges person, situation and behaviour variables with a common language and analytical frame so that they can be studied together (see Pincus et al.). Of course, we
should acknowledge that if we adopt content and methods of person and specifically trait assessments (see fruitful lessons summarized by McCrae), then situation research may also inherit some of its weaknesses. In particular, W. Johnson alerts us that we should strive to examine the situation space inclusively and broadly, not just where the ‘good light’ from personality psychology shines right now. Although her approach may seem to speak against parsimony (for proponents, see Krueger and Van Lange), we also believe that situational taxonomies should be comprehensive and not eschew complexity (see also Wilt & Revelle who introduce more complexity with between-person and within-person structures and processes).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Integrating personality and social psychology

Some commenters note that (and even demonstrate how) extant socio-psychological experimental work can be understood in terms of our principles (e.g. Donnellan & Corker; Gallardo-Pujol & Buades-Rotger). However, we would like to raise some caution as to whether we will get a ‘psychology of situations’ out of such exercises. Providing a theory, assessment or psychology of situations has never been the goal of much of experimental social psychology. As we mentioned earlier, the situations studied in that field have not typically been chosen because of their intrinsic importance, but rather on the basis of their putative ability to provide experimental tests of narrowly framed hypotheses. A proverbial ‘psychologist from Mars’ looking at experimental work in social psychology would conclude that most important situations people experience must involve hitting response keys, reading scenarios and filling out attitude measures (see also Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007 for similar arguments concerning behaviour). It may seem ironic that personality psychologists that take such great interest in the study of natural situations (Schönbrodt & Hagemeyer) are perceived to be well equipped to study them (Donnellan & Corker) and have brought forward methods and models that can (and in our eyes should) be extended to situation assessment (Blum & Schmitt; McCrae; Ziegler & Ziegler), even though social psychology should be the discipline to champion research on situations and their influences on behaviour (see Reis). Thus, personality and social psychology will have to work together and inform each other to avoid lopsided discussion of situations. As do Donnellan and Corker, we welcome and wish for a psychology of situations that takes the best out of personality and social psychology.

Towards a paradigm

Some commenters note that our framework may be considered a paradigm in the works (Asendorpf; Saucer & Conley). Although our framework cannot yet be based on years of cumulative research and broad acceptance in the field, it may, however, point towards an emerging paradigm. Paradigms should, among other things, organize and generate ideas (e.g. Kuhn, 1970), quite broadly serving the purposes of (i) defining what is to be studied, and what predictions can and should be made (e.g. Asendorpf; Donnellan & Corker; Pincus et al.); (ii) which questions are to be addressed, and how they should be organized (hypotheses: e.g. Egloff et al.; Neyer et al.; Wilt & Revelle; Wrzus); (iii) how the questions should be answered (methods: e.g. Blum & Schmitt; Harari et al.; Möttus & Allerhand; Ziegler & Ziegler); and (iv) how answers can be interpreted, organized and applied (applications: e.g. Egloff et al.). Thus, any paradigm for psychological situation research should provide (i) a coordination of theory, methods, research and applications as well as (ii) fresh ideas. The generative nature of the current framework can be seen in the many comments. We hope that the commenters, as well as other researchers, will help flesh out a full-blown paradigm with their own, future contributions.

CONCLUSION

We live in exciting times. Psychological disciplines have and continue to become more integrated. This necessitates that we tackle the interwoven complexities that arise in the transactions among and between persons, situations and behaviour. We hope that our article, the comments and this rejoinder provide readers with a sense of how fascinating, rich, and promising research on psychological situations and environments is.

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