

Personality Reported:

Attributions, Dispositional Regularities, and the Meaning of Trait Scores

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Abstract

Personality psychology owes much of its success to self- and informant reports, commonly used to estimate individual differences in personality. This paper argues that reports are also psychological products: task-bounded expressions of how respondents construe themselves or others in personality terms. *The attributional model of personality reporting* (AMPR) distinguishes contextually anchored behavioural episodes; dispositional regularities, estimated as recurrent person-characteristic patterns across episodes, contexts, and time; personality attributions; and reports. General personality attribution is a dynamically maintained representation assigning personality-descriptive characteristics to a person. Local, time-dependent personality attribution represents how a person or their conduct is construed during a particular episode. General attribution may frame local attribution, whereas salient or consequential local attributions may revise it; most do not. General attribution may also be reorganised through broader changes in self-understanding, comparison standards, personality meanings, or social information. Reports may express general, local, or item-cued attributions; they are indicators of attribution and indirect indicators of dispositional regularities. Semantic and evaluative organisation may make report-derived scores structurally robust and predictively useful without directly recovering dispositional regularities. AMPR conceptualises inventories as item-cued attribution tasks and develops several testable propositions.

Keywords: personality traits; personality attribution; personality reports; personality assessment; dispositional regularities

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Personality psychology has long relied on a deceptively simple operation: asking people what they are like (Kline, 2015; Mayer & Bryan, 2024). Respondents are presented with personality-descriptive words or statements (e.g., *talkative*, *organised*, *anxious*, *kind*, *curious*) and indicate how well these descriptions apply to them. Observers may be asked to do the same for a target person. Trait scores derived from such responses underpin much of the field's work on personality structure, development, correlates, and consequences.

This procedure has been extraordinarily productive. The Big Five and related taxonomies (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Goldberg, 1993) have provided an integrative language for describing individual differences. Trait measures predict health, relationship functioning, educational and occupational outcomes, well-being, and social behaviour (Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006; Roberts et al., 2007; Soto, 2019). They replicate across samples and, to a meaningful degree, across languages and cultures (Bond et al., 2020; Möttus et al., 2024). Because these substantive claims depend on scores derived from reports, personality psychology has developed a sophisticated measurement tradition concerned with score reliability and construct validity, as well as the estimation of relations with external criteria (Clark & Watson, 2019; John et al., 2008).

Personality traits, however, are commonly defined as relatively stable regularities in behaviour, affect, cognition, motivation, and experience (DeYoung, 2015; Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015; Wilt & Revelle, 2015). In practice, personality research often proceeds from people's trait descriptions of themselves or others to conclusions about the regularities that those descriptions are assumed to represent (Ashton & Lee, 2025; Vazire, 2006).

This inferential movement makes the question of how trait descriptions are produced theoretically consequential. Survey-response, self-report, self-knowledge, and personality-judgment literatures offer important accounts of how questionnaire responses and person judgments are formed (Funder, 1995; Mayer & Bryan, 2024; Paulhus & Vazire, 2007; Schwarz, 1999; Tourangeau et al., 2000; Vazire, 2010). These literatures have less often been integrated into personality theory as explanations of how dispositional regularities become represented as personality attributions¹.

The present paper undertakes such an integration. Its focal construct is personality attribution; self- and informant reports are treated as occasion-specific acts through which attributions are communicated and studied, as well as possible indicators of regularities. Producing such descriptions can recruit several distinguishable operations: construing trait language; retrieving an established attribution or relevant autobiographical and semantic knowledge; constructing a local fit judgement; applying evaluative or comparison standards; and translating the judgement into the available response format (Acklin, 2020; Schwarz, 1999; Tourangeau et al., 2000). These are possible operations rather than compulsory stages of a fixed sequence.

Because they may affect the resulting report without any corresponding difference in the person's conduct, reports cannot be treated as transparent registrations of conduct or of dispositional regularities estimated across behavioural episodes. Yet mediation is not fabrication: self- and informant reports likely derive much of their utility precisely because the personality attributions they express are grounded, at least partly, in actual conduct (Bader et al., 2025; Fleeson & Gallagher, 2009). The extent of their correspondence with dispositional regularities

¹ The closest formal precursor is Leising et al.'s (2025) analysis of distinct sources of covariance among person judgments.

nevertheless remains an empirical question. Reports are produced through attributional processes in which remembered or observed conduct is interpreted alongside subjectively represented affect, cognition, motivation, and experience. People do not merely act; they also remember, interpret, evaluate, narrate, and communicate who they and others are. These representational processes are not peripheral to personality psychology; they are part of the personality system and therefore require theoretical explanation.

Work on autobiographical memory, personality judgement, self-representation, and multi-rater personality structure provides relevant foundations for the present distinction (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Funder, 1995; Markus, 1977; Wiedenroth et al., 2025). *The attributional model of personality reporting* (Figure 1) formalises the linked but non-equivalent relations among behavioural episodes, dispositional regularities, personality attributions, and personality reports and may thereby contribute to both personality assessment and the interpretation of report-based findings.

The paper develops its argument in four broad stages. First, I define the model's core elements and their dynamic relations. Second, I conceptualise inventory responding as an item-cued attribution task and situate it within wider social-cognitive and self-representational processes. Third, I examine the semantic and evaluative organisation of personality attributions. Finally, I consider the model's implications across several research domains and develop an empirical research programme.

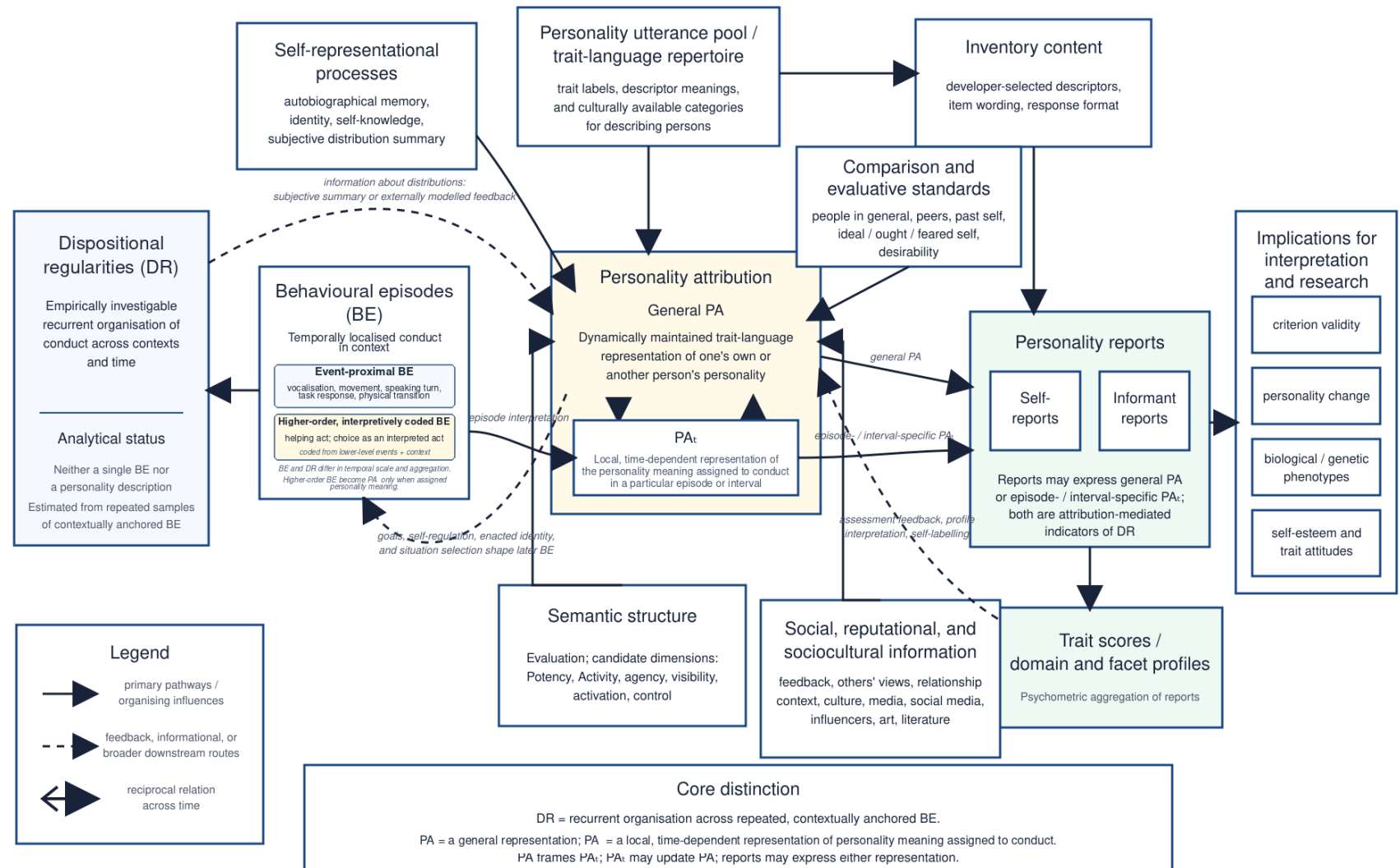


Figure 1. The attributional model of personality reporting

Core Elements of the Attributional Model

The first step is terminological. I distinguish four analytic elements: *dispositional regularities*, *behavioural episodes*, *personality attributions*, and *personality reports*. For readability, I occasionally refer to them below as *regularities*, *episodes*, *attributions*, and *reports*; for the first three, DR, BE, and PA are retained in Figure 1, Table 1, and the formal notation. Regularities are recurrent, person-characteristic patterns in the organisation of conduct, estimated across contextually anchored episodes and time, thus preserving the dispositional core of established trait definitions (DeYoung, 2015; Fleeson, 2001). Episodes are contextually anchored behavioural events. Attributions are target-specific representations that assign personality-descriptive characteristics to the self or another person. Through attribution, regularities and other person-relevant information may be cast in trait-descriptive language, with its semantic and evaluative organisation (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989). Reports are occasion-specific communications produced under particular eliciting conditions, such as responding to personality-inventory items; what is expressed may partly depend on the wording, context, and response format (Schwarz, 1999). These categories are analytically distinguished but neither hierarchical nor ontologically exclusive. A report is itself a behavioural episode when considered as an act of speaking, writing, or selecting a response, but is treated separately because its content purports to characterise a person and is routinely used as personality evidence. Likewise, episodes are accessed through selectively sampled and coded traces rather than transparently observed.

A closely related conceptual point was made by Uher (2013), who argued that personality psychology often defines traits in terms of recurrent behavioural regularities while measuring them through personality attributions. Leising et al. (2025) formalise a closely allied inferential

problem by separating person judgements from substantive target characteristics. Their framework analyses which substantive, semantic, attitudinal, and formal mechanisms generate covariance among judgements and what such covariance warrants about substance. AMPR shares this attributional premise and inferential problem but differs in scope and emphasis. It treats self- and other-generated personality attributions as potentially persistent, personality-relevant representations whose formation, maintenance, expression in reports, revision, and consequences require study. The question is therefore not only how closely reports correspond to regularities, but also how an attribution is formed and maintained, retrieved or locally constructed, revised, and communicated through reports before those reports are used as indicators of anything else.

This distinction also clarifies a common assumption shared by otherwise different trait theories. Five-Factor Theory (FFT; Costa & McCrae, 1994; McCrae & Costa, 2013) and Whole Trait Theory (WTT; Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015) differ markedly in their ontological commitments. FFT treats the five factors as biologically grounded basic tendencies, whereas WTT treats traits as distributions of states together with explanatory social-cognitive mechanisms. Yet both approaches largely preserve the classical interpretation of reports as indicators of a trait reality standing behind the response. In FFT, questionnaires such as NEO inventories are used as measures of basic tendencies. In WTT, global trait reports can be read as estimates of the descriptive side of traits, especially the central tendency of a person's state distribution. From the attributional perspective, this indicator relation is neither rejected nor assumed to be simple. A report may provide indirect evidence about regularities; more proximally, it expresses an attribution activated or constructed under the conditions of the task. Different items, comparison frames, and instructions may sample different regions of an

internally differentiated attributional architecture rather than reproduce a single underlying judgement.

FFT's distinction between basic tendencies and characteristic adaptations is valuable but raises a phenotype problem: basic tendencies are theoretically placed behind adaptations and reports, yet are commonly studied through report-based instruments. The proposal of reflexive characteristic adaptations was an earlier step toward this position: it framed self-reported traits as one viewpoint within a broader system of personality-related opinions and interpretations such as trait attitudes and meta-perceptual traits (Shchebetenko, 2016). AMPR generalises this idea by treating trait reports themselves as attributional products and explicitly separating attributions from regularities.

WTT is especially important as a neighbouring formulation because it conceptualises traits as density distributions of states rather than as static inner substances (Fleeson, 2001; Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015). In WTT, the descriptive side of a trait concerns a person's density distribution of trait-relevant states, whereas the explanatory side concerns the social-cognitive mechanisms that produce those states across situations and thereby give rise to the distribution. This approach brings personality theory closer to occasion-level variation and is therefore highly compatible with the present distinction, but its states should not be equated automatically with AMPR's regularities. For example, "I was extraverted at the party" is an occasion-specific trait-language judgement and thus a local personality attribution; by contrast, a recurrent, person-characteristic pattern of initiating conversations, approaching unfamiliar others, and speaking relatively often across parties exemplifies an extraversion-relevant regularities.

The present account differs, however, in how it interprets the relation between such distributions and reports. WTT can be read as treating global trait reports as estimates of the

descriptive side of traits, especially the central tendency of a person's density distribution. From the AMPR perspective, this inference is not automatic because responding to a personality item is itself an act of social judgement. When respondents answer an item such as "I am talkative" or "I worry a lot," they may sometimes use a subjective summary of a remembered behavioural or experiential distribution to approximate its central tendency. That summary remains an attribution, even when it preserves information about conduct; it is not a regularity itself. As in other social judgements, the response may also be guided by salient exemplars, memorable episodes, category-based expectations, vivid counterexamples, social comparison, self-standards, identity, trait desirability, reputational feedback, or culturally available meanings of the descriptor (Smith & Zárate, 1992; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Whether based on such a summary or on these other cues, the response remains an attributional judgement that may be more or less strongly anchored in conduct.

A related issue concerns what WTT defines as personality states. States are understood as short-lived manifestations of the same affective, behavioural, and cognitive content as corresponding traits; state Extraversion, for example, may be assessed by asking how talkative, bold, assertive, or energetic a person is at that moment or was during a specified brief interval. This temporalisation is valuable because it permits researchers to model within-person variability and distributions across occasions. At the same time, however, these states are defined and measured using descriptors already assigned to the corresponding trait domains. A momentary rating of talkativeness, boldness, assertiveness, or energy is therefore classified as state Extraversion by design; it does not independently establish that conduct across episodes is organised according to the same Extraversion dimension. More specifically, each such rating is a local attribution, rather than an episode or a regularity itself. Repeating these ratings produces a

distribution of local attributions, which may correspond to a dispositional regularity but is not identical to a distribution of event-proximal episodes, such as vocalisation, speaking turns, movement, task responses, response latency, or physical transitions. WTT may therefore temporalise personality attribution without establishing that the resulting state distributions recover the organisation of regularities.

Estimating regularities with greater independence from attributions therefore requires repeated, contextually anchored evidence and may draw on behavioural records, interaction coding, passive traces, and related methods (Conner et al., 2009; Furr, 2009; Harari et al., 2021; Horstmann & Ziegler, 2020). The status of experience sampling in this regard depends on what is sampled: repeated momentary trait ratings or subjective-state judgements remain attributional and do not automatically yield evidence of regularities that is independent of attributions. Event-proximal episodes specified outside trait language and sampled across contexts and time provide comparatively more independent evidence. Even these indicators are neither theory-free nor perfectly unmediated, whereas higher-order behavioural codes, such as *helping*, depend more strongly on conceptual classification and interpretation. With these qualifications, such evidence allows the organisation of regularities (and its correspondence with attributions) to be investigated rather than built into the measurement procedure in advance.

General attributions, by contrast, are dynamically maintained representations of what the self or another person is like. They are articulated through trait language and may include explicit and implicit semantic self-representations (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Schnabel et al., 2008; Semin & Fiedler, 1988). General attributions may be expressed in statements such as “I am extraverted,” “she is conscientious,” “he is neurotic,” or “I worry a lot.” Because personality classifications readily present characteristics as enduring qualities of persons, attributions may

also take an essentialist form (Haslam et al., 2004). Such statements express meaningful classifications that locate a person within a semantic, social, and evaluative space. Local attribution is a time-dependent representation of how the person or their conduct is construed in personality terms during a particular episode or time interval. Thus, “I was talkative today” expresses a local attribution, as may “I kept avoiding conflict” when that conduct is interpreted as personality-relevant. General attributions may frame such local construals, while a sufficiently salient local attribution may contribute to the revision of the general attribution. Likewise, WTT mechanisms such as generalisation across situations, recognition of similarities among behaviours, and abstraction of behavioural principles may describe not only how behavioural regularities develop, but also how people learn to organise personality information into local and general attributions.

Regularities and attributions are intimately related but not identical. A person's self-attribution as extraverted may be grounded in frequent social approach and positive affect, but it may also depend on autobiographical memory, comparison standards, and attitudes toward Extraversion. Likewise, an observer's attribution of Extraversion may be grounded in visible behaviour of the target, yet it remains a reputational judgement expressed through trait language (Hogan & Foster, 2016).

Mechanism-centred approaches introduce a distinction separate from the one AMPR draws between regularities and attributions. Lukaszewski et al. (2020), for example, distinguish evolved behaviour-regulating mechanisms from heuristic trait concepts used in everyday person perception. In the present terms, a proposed mechanism is intended to explain how particular behavioural episodes are generated; recurrent organisation across episodes constitutes dispositional regularities; and heuristic trait concepts supply language for attributions. Descriptor

covariance cannot by itself identify the mechanisms generating conduct, although it may constrain mechanistic accounts. Conversely, identifying a plausible mechanism does not eliminate the attributional level through which its outputs are described.

Personality Attribution as a Dynamic Representation

General attributions are maintained rather than reconstructed from scratch on each reporting occasion. Behaviour unfolds as a continuous stream that scientific observation and everyday social perception may segment into episodes at two levels. Event-proximal episodes include movements, vocalisations, speaking turns, task responses, and physical transitions. Higher-order episodes, such as *an act of assistance* or *a choice*, are interpretively coded from event-proximal episodes and their context. Their boundary with local attributions depends not on the amount of interpretation alone but on what is being classified. For example, coding a sequence in which a person responds to a request by carrying another person's bag as an act of assistance classifies the episode and may remain at the level of behavioural episodes. Judging that the person was compassionate during that episode assigns personality meaning to the actor and constitutes a local attribution.

Regularity estimates describe recurrent organisation across episodes. Such estimates may support expectations about future episodes in comparable contexts without implying that regularities themselves cause those events. The recurrent behavioural distributions described by these estimates may nevertheless reflect species-typical tendencies in conduct as modified to varying degrees by between-person genetic and neurobiological variation (Lukaszewski et al., 2020) and by enduring cultural and historical contexts. Regularities designate the organisation to be explained, not its causal mechanisms. Information about an episode may contribute to general attributions insofar as it is noticed, remembered, interpreted, evaluated, or communicated.

Two related dynamics should be distinguished. These relations can be represented schematically. For an episode or interval t , local attribution may be written as:

$$PA_t = \mathcal{J} [BE_t, C_t, PA_{(t)}, E_t, \dots]. \quad (1)$$

Here, PA_t is a local personality attribution at t , BE_t is the behavioural episode, C_t its context, and $\mathcal{J}(\cdot)$ its attributional interpretation. $PA_{(t)}$, which is a global attribution functioning at t , is included because existing general attribution may frame how the episode is construed, while E_t represents accumulated attributional experience, including prior reflection, social learning, semantic knowledge, and culturally acquired interpretive practices.

Possible revision of general attribution may then be represented as:

$$PA_{(t+1)} = f[PA_{(t)}, PA_t, G_t, \dots], \quad (2)$$

where $PA_{(t)}$ and $PA_{(t+1)}$ denote successive states of general attribution and G_t denotes broader revision processes involving trait attitudes, self-esteem, identity, comparison standards, personality meanings, or social information. Such processes may be precipitated by an event but need not operate through a local attribution tied to that event.

Most local attributions leave general attributions unchanged. Sufficiently salient, repeated, or consequential local attributions may nevertheless produce piecemeal revision, while a particularly consequential ones may sometimes prompt a more dramatic reorganisation of the general attribution between t and $t+1$. The relationship is also recursive over longer periods: general attributions may influence subsequent behavioural episodes through goals, self-regulation, enacted identity, situation selection, and social feedback. Only if these influences produce recurrent changes across later, contextually anchored episodes would they alter the behavioural organisation from which dispositional regularities are subsequently estimated.

General attributions need not, however, be revised only through interpretations of particular episodes. Individuals may deliberately estimate how frequently or characteristically they act in certain ways. Because such a summary directly concerns recurrent conduct, the resulting attribution may correspond more closely to regularities estimated independently from repeated episodes than an attribution based mainly on an established self-view, reputation, or other interpretive resources. It nevertheless remains an attribution rather than direct access to a regularity. An episode recalled by Anthony Hopkins (2025) shows this process in a more personal form. As a schoolboy, Hopkins was told by his headmaster, in front of the other boys, that he was “totally inept.” The headmaster gathered into that word a familiar catalogue of awkward acts: things dropped or broken, a dish fumbled, a handle wrenched loose. Yet Hopkins’s first response was not assent but curiosity: “Interesting word!” In the public library, he opened Webster’s at *I* and found *inept* followed by a procession of definitions and synonyms. The solitary word now opened into a portrait. None of its neighbouring descriptors supplied another episode from Hopkins’s conduct; instead, they showed him what else the word he had received might mean about a person, and therefore about himself. Without establishing that Hopkins accepted this portrait, the recollection illustrates how a socially bestowed attribution may acquire a larger semantic life and become material for general self-attribution. In the model, encounters of this kind are among the broader social and semantic influences encompassed by G_t .

A different situation arises when repeated behavioural events or action records are aggregated through externally produced, sensor-based, or scientific procedures. Such estimates target dispositional regularities, and their limitations arise primarily from the current indicators, sampling design, contextual coverage, and analytical model—limitations that can in principle be

revised while the target remains unchanged. If an externally produced estimate is subsequently communicated to the person, however, it becomes new evidential and social input into personality attributions. Scientific knowledge about regularities can thereby participate in the subsequent construction of personality attributions.

This dynamic account keeps regularities and attributions distinct while specifying the routes linking them. Reports may express general or episode-specific attributions, or an item-cued attribution constructed for the reporting occasion.

Personality Inventories as Item-Cued Self-Attribution Tasks

Standard personality inventories generally operationalise broad domains through sets of personality-descriptive items rather than asking respondents to evaluate Extraversion, Agreeableness, or Conscientiousness directly. The immediate task is therefore to arrive at an item-cued attribution: whether a developer-supplied description applies to the self. Respondents may retrieve or sample an existing attribution, draw on activated memories, semantic associations, or comparison standards, or construct the attribution for the occasion (Acklin, 2020). The item supplies the personality-descriptive stimulus; the selected response constitutes the report.

A domain or facet score is then constructed from item-level reports. During scale development, covariation among such reports helps determine how items are grouped; during administration, the reports are aggregated into a score. That score is therefore not necessarily a direct record of what respondents think about a broad category such as Extraversion or Neuroticism. Some respondents may possess explicit abstract self-concepts corresponding to these labels, but standard inventories do not require such categories to be the immediate units of judgement. Domains and facets remain psychologically and psychometrically meaningful, but

they are higher-order summaries of item-level reports rather than necessarily the immediate psychological units of responding (Costa & McCrae, 1995; DeYoung et al., 2007).

Inventory content supplies the descriptions to be judged. The broader personality-utterance pool likewise matters both as a culturally available repertoire for personality attribution and as the source from which developers select inventory content. Formal response styles are distinct from these upstream processes: scale-use preferences may alter personality reports, and consequently scores (Leising et al., 2025), without altering personality attributions.

This distinction also clarifies the status of direct ratings of broad personality categories. A question such as “How extraverted are you?” may be a weak substitute for a multi-item scale when the aim is to estimate broad regularities (Credé et al., 2012). Yet the resulting report may validly express an abstract general attribution about the self. In this case, the single item bypasses the aggregation of multiple item-cued reports and asks respondents to communicate an already available broad attribution. Its apparent psychometric weakness relative to a multi-item estimate is therefore not simply a defect; it may reflect that the measured construct is the person’s explicit application of a trait category to the self rather than an independently estimated regularity.

Fixed-format inventories are not the only way to study personality attribution. Free descriptions, participant-generated descriptors, descriptor sorting, recognition and memory tasks, and experimental responses to personality utterances can sample its content or organisation with less item-imposed structure. Free descriptions remain reports in the broad sense, but they allow the respondent rather than the developer to supply the personality language. Their psychometric challenges concern the recurrence and semantic organisation of generated content rather than conventional internal consistency alone.

The Social-Cognitive Route to Personality Attribution

Social-cognitive theories of personality provide an important background for AMPR. Mischel and Shoda's (1995) CAPS model conceptualised personality in terms of stable if-then patterns: when a person encounters a particular situation, specific cognitive-affective units become activated, generating characteristic responses. Dweck's (2021) motivational theory similarly places beliefs, emotions, goals, and action tendencies at the centre of personality development, treating traits as recurrent patterns emerging from needs, representations, and characteristic ways of responding to the world.

These accounts are highly compatible with AMPR. They move away from traits as unexplained inner substances and towards personality as organised patterns of interpretation, motivation, emotion, and action. Their principal focus, however, is on how people construe situations, pursue goals, and regulate conduct within them. The present model extends this logic reflexively to how people construe themselves and others in personality terms. Personality reporting is one setting in which this broader attributional activity is elicited and made communicable. When reporting is prompted by an inventory item, the supplied personality description must be interpreted and its fit to the target judged. This judgement may involve several implicit questions: What does the description mean? What behaviours or experiences does it imply? Does it fit the person generally, recently, or only in particular contexts? Compared with whom? Is it desirable or undesirable? What memories, identities, or social feedback does it activate?

Accordingly, response variation not accounted for by an assumed underlying trait need not be dismissed as measurement error. It may also reflect differences in personality attributions and in the autobiographical information or comparison standards recruited during reporting. Such

variation is theoretically informative about how inventory content engages attributional processes.

The social-cognitive route is not confined to questionnaire responding. People encounter claims and explanatory vocabularies about personality in scientific theories, education, therapy, coaching, media, popular psychology, the blogosphere, and everyday communication (Shchebetenko & Mishkevich, 2022). Such information may not immediately alter dispositional regularities, but it can change how trait descriptions are understood and applied to the self or others. Socially supplied personality meanings can thereby contribute to the construction and revision of attributions; revised attributions may, in turn, influence subsequent behavioural episodes through goals, self-regulation, situation selection, and enacted identity. An explanatory vocabulary may therefore fail to identify the mechanisms that generated earlier conduct while nevertheless becoming an input into later conduct once incorporated into attributions.

Self-Processes in Personality Attribution

Recent integrative accounts of personality increasingly emphasise self-processes, including self-regulation, narrative identity, self-conscious emotions, self-verification, and self-enhancement (Denissen et al., 2013; McAdams et al., 2021; Reitz, 2022). This development is important because personality reporting is not merely influenced by self-processes; it is one of the settings in which those processes operate and become observable. Questionnaire responding may retrieve an established attribution or prompt an item-cued attribution sufficient for the reporting occasion, without incorporating it into durable general attribution.

Personality assessment should consequently move beyond asking only which traits are reported accurately or which individuals report them accurately. When the target is a regularity, accuracy remains important and requires comparison with estimates based on independently

sampled, contextually anchored behavioural episodes. When the target is an attribution, however, subjectivity is part of the phenomenon to be explained. A person's tendency to describe themselves as emotionally stable, conscientious, agreeable, or open may be informative not only because it approximates regularities, but also because it reveals how the person organises self-knowledge, retrieves or constructs personality judgements, and accepts or rejects culturally supplied descriptions of persons. Retrieval of existing attributions, local construction of an item-cued judgement, and response production are analytically distinguishable, but AMPR does not posit them as a fixed processing sequence. Their relative prevalence, ordering, and empirical separability remain questions for future research.

This distinction also changes how social desirability should be interpreted. Social desirability is usually discussed in terms of response distortion, impression management, or self-deceptive enhancement (Paulhus, 1984). These concepts remain important, but they capture different possible locations of evaluation within the reporting process. Deliberate impression management may alter the report without changing attributions, whereas self-enhancement, identity, self-standards, or trait attitudes may participate in the construction of attributions themselves. A respondent may therefore endorse a desirable description strategically, defensively, self-deceptively, or sincerely because it fits remembered behaviour and an established self-representation. Social desirability should not be treated only as an external contaminant of personality reports. It is also one manifestation of the broader evaluative-attributional processes through which people interpret trait language, apply it to themselves, and decide what to report.

Semantic Structure of Personality Attribution

Personality descriptors are not neutral labels. They carry semantic, evaluative, and social meanings (Leising et al., 2015; Peabody & Goldberg, 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1968). Standard inventories supply such descriptions and ask respondents to judge their fit. Endorsing “I am responsible” therefore involves more than estimating the frequency of acts construed as responsible: it places the self within a generally valued and socially rewarded region of personality language. Similarly, endorsing “I worry a lot” does more than indicate an affective tendency; it locates the respondent within a more problematic region of personality language. Whether an item retrieves an already available attribution or elicits a new local judgement, the response is made in relation to meanings that personality characteristics have acquired through personal experience and social life.

AMPR proposes that personality attributions are organised partly through a systematic semantic architecture. Their structure may also reflect dispositional regularities and the evolved cybernetic or other functional mechanisms proposed to underlie personality traits (e.g., DeYoung, 2015). The claim is therefore not that semantics imposes order on an otherwise unstructured collection of labels, but that it constitutes one source of the systematicity observed in attributions and reports.

What remains unsettled is the most adequate dimensional specification of that architecture. Osgood’s triad of Evaluation, Potency, and Activity (EPA; Osgood et al., 1957) serves here as a provisional working model. Evaluation concerns the value attached to personality characteristics through histories and expectations of reward, punishment, social approval, criticism, attraction, and rejection; the perceived favourability of a descriptor is one linguistic expression of this broader evaluative history. Potency concerns connotations of strength, efficacy, capacity, presence, or impact, whereas Activity concerns dynamism,

activation, impulsivity, spontaneity, or restraint. These dimensions are treated as coequal coordinates of a possible semantic geometry. Personality domains, facets, descriptors, and individual items may occupy distinctive positions on all three axes, and those positions may vary across persons, social settings, and cultures.

EPA is not proposed as an alternative taxonomy competing with the Big Five or HEXACO. Rather, it provides a different kind of description: a semantic space within which established trait domains and their constituent items may be located. Thus, Evaluation may contribute to the general factor found in personality reports (Musek, 2007; Peabody & Goldberg, 1989; Rushton & Irwing, 2011), but it need not exhaust their broader semantic organisation. EPA therefore offers a compact baseline against which alternative spaces (such as agency–communion and approach–avoidance) can be compared.

If personality reports are organised partly by such dimensions, shared semantic positions may contribute to covariance among items and trait scores, cross-domain associations, opposite-pole asymmetries, and differences between self- and observer-report structures (Leising et al., 2025). This does not mean that the resulting covariance is merely semantic, artifactual, or unrelated to personality itself. The origins of semantic organisation remain open: broad dimensions such as EPA may reflect general metrics of human perception or actually recurrent organisation within dispositional regularities, or both. Report structure alone cannot distinguish these possibilities.

The empirical question is therefore whether independently derived semantic coordinates predict item locations, scale intercorrelations, or pole asymmetries beyond conventional trait membership. Their relationship with regularities must be examined separately using repeated, contextually anchored behavioural episodes specified, as far as possible, outside trait language.

Even when trait terms are avoided, however, higher-order coding of episodes remains interpretive and model-dependent. Correspondence would suggest that similar dimensions organise attributions and regularities; divergence would suggest that semantic geometry is more specific to personality attribution.

Semantic structure is therefore neither an external contaminant of personality reports nor a decorative layer added to otherwise neutral trait content. It is part of the representational medium through which personality descriptions become interpretable, personally applicable, and communicable. AMPR seeks to make this medium explicit while leaving open which semantic dimensions best describe it and how closely their organisation corresponds to regularities.

Self-Esteem as a Global Evaluative Representation

Self-esteem occupies a special place in this account. It is not simply another personality-related variable, but a global evaluative representation of the self (Orth & Robins, 2022). Because many trait descriptors are themselves evaluatively loaded (Bäckström & Björklund, 2013; Leising et al., 2015), self-esteem may function as a central organiser of personality attribution. It may connect broad evaluations of the self with more specific trait-based descriptions, such that “I am a worthwhile person” and “I am emotionally stable,” “responsible,” or “socially competent” become partly coordinated within the same self-representational system. A change in self-esteem may therefore contribute to a broader reorganisation of the general attribution without being mediated by a particular preceding local attribution.

The familiar correlations between self-esteem and self-reported traits (Joshani, 2026; Robins et al., 2001) therefore require careful interpretation. People with high self-esteem tend to endorse desirable trait poles, whereas people with lower self-esteem may more readily endorse undesirable or problematic poles. This pattern can be interpreted in the usual way: individuals

with more adaptive personality regularities may develop higher self-esteem. However, it can also be interpreted differently: global self-evaluation may shape how individuals remember, weight, and describe their personality regularities. More plausibly, self-esteem and trait attributions may co-develop as partially interdependent forms of self-representation.

The same issue arises in studies of life outcomes. Self-reported Emotional Stability, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness often predict self-reported life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, purpose in life, and subjective functioning (Anglim et al., 2020; Busseri & Erb, 2024; Malouff et al., 2010). Such associations may reflect genuine relations between dispositional regularities and life outcomes, but they may also partly reflect a shared evaluative-attributional substrate (Leising et al., 2025). For example, an association between self-reported Neuroticism and life satisfaction may combine correspondence with relevant regularities with shared negative self-appraisal, semantic overlap, response style, and a tendency to construe both the self and life through dissatisfaction or distress. The empirical challenge is to distinguish contributions from regularities, global self-evaluation, descriptor semantics, and broader attributional or response processes. Self-esteem is therefore not merely a nuisance variable to be controlled, but a central construct for explaining how personality regularities become represented, evaluated, and reported.

Informant Reports and Reputational Attribution

Multi-rater designs are often used to address shared method variance (Ashton & Lee, 2025; Campbell & Fiske, 1959). If self-reported personality predicts self-reported life satisfaction, one may ask whether the association remains when personality is rated by informants. Such designs are valuable because they reduce single-rater bias, occasion-specific

noise, and some forms of self-report artefact, while making it possible to distinguish private self-attribution from socially shared reputation.

The Trait–Reputation–Identity (TRI) model provides an especially useful framework for this purpose. TRI decomposes personality ratings into components associated with cross-rater consensus, self-unique identity, observer-shared reputation, and rater-specific residual variance (McAbee & Connelly, 2016; Wiedenroth et al., 2025). From the AMPR perspective, however, the crucial point is that such decomposition remains a decomposition of reports. A factor shared across self- and observer-reports may show that several rating sources converge on the same attribution, but it does not by itself establish that the attribution captures the target’s recurrent conduct on an underlying trait continuum.

Informants therefore observe behaviour, but they do not record behavioural distributions directly. They communicate what a person is like through available trait language (Funder, 1995; Kaurin et al., 2018). Their reports may be more externally anchored than self-reports, especially for visible traits such as sociability, assertiveness, or overt antagonism (Vazire, 2010), but they are also shaped by relationship context, memory, or social stereotypes.

Thus, multi-rater studies can show that an outcome is associated with consensually attributed personality. If life satisfaction is related to both self- and informant-rated extraversion, this is stronger evidence than a purely self-report association because the relation is not confined to one respondent’s self-evaluative system (Dobewall et al., 2013; Möttus et al., 2024). Yet the finding may mean either that satisfied people behave in more socially energetic and positive ways, or that they are represented by themselves and others as socially energetic and positive. Both interpretations are psychologically meaningful, but they refer to different levels: Dispositional regularities in conduct versus consensual personality attributions. The advantage of

multi-rater designs, therefore, is not escape from attribution, but differentiation among private, rater-specific, reputationally shared, and consensual attributions. Independent episode evidence is still required to test their correspondence with regularities.

Predictive Validity and the Level of the Criterion

Personality research is often praised for showing that traits predict important life outcomes (Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006; Roberts et al., 2007; Soto, 2019). This claim is justified in a broad sense. However, predictive validity does not by itself specify what aspect of personality is doing the predicting. The interpretation of predictive associations depends on the nature of both the predictor and the criterion.

A self-reported trait predicting a self-reported outcome is not the same kind of evidence as a trait score predicting archival records, observed behaviour, or repeated state distributions (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Podsakoff et al., 2024). When both predictor and outcome are reports, especially evaluative reports, their association may partly reflect shared semantic, evaluative, and self-attributional structure (Leising et al., 2025).

Accordingly, criterion validity should be interpreted with attention to criterion type. Some criteria remain close to self-attribution, including self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-reported health. Informant reports change the source of judgement but remain attributional. Experience sampling does not by itself provide greater independence: momentary trait-language state ratings remain local attributions, whereas event-proximal episode records, such as speaking turns, movements, or task responses, provide comparatively more independent evidence relevant to regularities. Institutional records and passive traces likewise vary in what they capture and how much interpretation they require. These criteria are not simply “better” or “worse”; they occupy different positions in relation to personality regularities. When the target is a regularity,

the strongest tests require independently sampled episodes rather than further personality appraisals.

Even then, interpretation remains complex. Archival or behavioural outcomes are not pure windows into personality regularities either. Salary, health, relationship status, or occupational success may be influenced by actual behavioural tendencies, but also by social reputation, opportunity structures, discrimination, institutional constraints, and the cumulative effects of how others perceive and treat the person. Thus, moving from self-reported criteria to external criteria improves inference about dispositional regularities, but it does not eliminate the need to specify the level at which the association operates. Personality findings may replicate because of methodological rigour and stable relations involving regularities, but also because broad attributional and evaluative systems are themselves stable (Soto, 2019, 2021).

Comparison Standards in Personality Attribution

Personality reports are usually expressed as though their reference point were self-evident. When a respondent agrees with an item such as “I am sociable,” “I worry a lot,” or “I am disciplined,” the numerical response appears simply to locate the person on a trait continuum. Yet the standard against which the description is judged often remains unspecified. Where comparison enters the judgement, its reference point may be interpersonal, locating the target relative to other people or a salient group; temporal, locating the present self relative to the past or future self; or normative and identity-based, locating the target relative to an ideal, feared, or ought self. These reference frames can remain implicit even when the response format appears to ask for an absolute judgement.

Comparison is therefore one possible route to attributions, rather than a necessary component of every personality judgement (Heine et al., 2002; Higgins, 1987; Schmit et al.,

1995). A respondent may retrieve an already established self-attribution without engaging in a new comparison, but that attribution may itself have been formed within a particular comparative frame. Alternatively, the item may prompt a new judgement of relative standing. Informant reports introduce a related complication because the relevant standard is supplied by the observer's social and relational field, including their experience with the target and their expectations about the categories to which the target belongs. Consequently, identical responses may express psychologically different attributions, while similar regularities may produce different attributions and reports when the operative comparison frame changes.

Making comparison standards explicit would help clarify both the psychological meaning of trait reports and their relation to regularities. Instructions can specify or experimentally vary the reference frame while holding the personality description constant, thereby revealing whether a response reflects perceived relative standing, perceived personal change, identity alignment, or a more directly retrieved attribution. Comparison standards do not transform regularities into trait descriptions; rather, they help determine how well a supplied description is judged to fit the target. A change in reference group or self-standard may therefore alter the attribution (and consequently the personality report) even when the person's regularity has remained unchanged.

Biology, Genetics, and the Phenotype Problem

The same attributional issue applies to biological and genetic research on personality. Many trait and temperament theories assume that personality traits are biologically grounded (Eysenck, 1991; McCrae & Costa, 2013; McNaughton, 2025). This assumption is plausible in a broad sense. Stable individual differences in affect, self-regulation, or exploration are likely to have biological substrates (DeYoung et al., 2022; Rothbart, 2007). The difficulty concerns not

the general claim that personality is biologically embedded, but the specification of the phenotype being studied.

In much biological and genetic research, the phenotype is operationalised through self- or informant-reported traits. The measured phenotype is therefore a scale score constructed from personality reports: it is a proximal indicator of attributions and only an indirect indicator of regularities. A self-reported Neuroticism score, for example, may express attributions concerning anxiety, rumination, or threat sensitivity. These are internal psychological processes or subjectively represented states, not regularities themselves. The score may nevertheless preserve information about recurrent avoidance or other episodes across contexts and time. It may also reflect attributions near a negatively valued pole of the personality lexicon. Large samples, genome-wide analyses, neuroimaging, and sophisticated statistical models can estimate associations with great precision while leaving the psychological status of the measured phenotype underspecified.

This does not make biological or genetic research on personality invalid. It means that the object of analysis should be named carefully. A genetic association with self-reported Neuroticism, or a brain correlate of a report-derived Extraversion score, is most directly an association with a report-based phenotype. Such findings may reflect biological involvement in personality attribution, dispositional regularities, or both. Evidence concerning attribution would require convergence across attributional tasks or reporting formats, whereas evidence concerning regularities would require independently sampled behavioural episodes.

The phenotype problem is therefore not merely methodological. Report-based phenotypes are useful; the problem begins when their attributional character is assumed to disappear after statistical refinement. A more precise approach would therefore treat report-based traits as

meaningful but complex phenotypes and ask how biological and genetic associations vary across operationalisations—from trait reports, which are proximal indicators of personality attributions while also carrying indirect information about regularities, to repeated, contextually anchored behavioural indicators designed to estimate regularities with greater independence from attributions.

Personality Change and Attributional Change

Research on personality change and intervention faces the same issue. Many studies show that people can change, or at least report changes in their traits following deliberate goals, therapy, training, or life transitions (Hudson & Roberts, 2014; Roberts et al., 2017; Stieger et al., 2021). These findings are important. However, their interpretation depends on what kind of change is being observed. A change in a trait report may indicate change in dispositional regularities, change in attributions, or change in the relation between the two.

A person's recurrent conduct may change across contexts and time, thereby changing the regularities estimated across behavioural episodes. Separately, and not necessarily in parallel, they may revise how that conduct is represented in general attributions. The individual may come to see themselves as becoming more sociable, stable, responsible, or open; revise the memories they treat as self-diagnostic; alter the comparison standards they use; or adopt a self-improvement narrative that reorganises identity, effort, and future action.

These levels can interact. A new attribution may motivate new behaviour; repeated behaviour may consolidate a new attribution; social feedback may stabilise both. Conversely, exposure to personality-relevant information may alter the meaning or desirability of a trait without producing immediate behavioural change. For instance, arguments in favour of or against a trait may affect how people evaluate that trait more readily than how they report the

trait itself, especially when no deliberate goal to change their personality is present (Shchebetenko & Mishkevich, 2022). This possibility connects personality change research with the broader problem of how personality-relevant information enters self-reflection.

Evidence based solely on global self-report cannot distinguish these processes cleanly. An increase in self-reported extraversion, for example, may reflect more frequent social approach, a stronger willingness to identify with extraversion, a change in comparison standards, a shift in the perceived desirability of being extraverted, or some combination of these processes. Similarly, the absence of change in self-reported traits does not necessarily mean that no relevant psychological change occurred; attitudes toward the trait, self-standards, local attributions, and even dispositional regularities may have changed without altering the global trait score.

Attributional change is itself psychologically consequential. People live partly through descriptions of themselves: self-attributions help organise what is noticed, remembered, expected, and enacted. In predictive-processing terms, such descriptions may be understood as elements of a self-model that guides perception, anticipates future situations, or selects available actions (Clark, 2013). A change in self-reported personality may therefore be more than verbal relabelling, even when it remains unclear whether the underlying regularities have changed.

An Empirical Research Programme

Among the propositions arising from the AMPR perspective, I develop seven here (Table 1). Each is open to empirical support, qualification, or challenge. The aim is not to oppose “real traits” to “mere reports,” but to determine what each form of evidence permits researchers to infer.

Table 1*Seven Propositions of the Attributional Model of Personality Reporting*

No.	Proposition	Statement	Succinct example of how to test it
1	Attributional-route and comparison-frame dependence	Different attributional routes and comparison frames should activate or sample different regions of existing attribution, or prompt attributions constructed for the occasion, producing corresponding variation in reports.	Administer the same items under instructions invoking recurrent conduct, self-definition, or a specified comparison standard. Compare immediate changes in item-cued judgements and reports, test whether conduct-summary instructions correspond more closely to independently estimated DR, and use follow-up assessments to determine whether elicited judgements become incorporated into durable general PA.
2	Social updating of personality attribution	General PA should be partly responsive to socially supplied interpretations of a person's BE.	Assess $PA_{(t_0)}$, record a standardised interaction, and randomly frame the observed BE as relatively extraverted or introverted. Assess PA_t concerning that episode and subsequently assess $PA_{(t_1)}$; test whether the framing changes $PA_{(t_1)}$ after accounting for $PA_{(t_0)}$ and the recorded BE.
3	Social sharing of personality attribution	Informant reports may express observers' reputational attributions and may be shaped by supplied interpretations of BE, not only by the BE themselves.	Have targets and observers rate the target before and after receiving shared, separate, or crossed interpretations of the same BE; test changes in informant reports and self-observer agreement while controlling for independently recorded BE.
4	Joint adjustment of personality attribution, trait attitude, and self-esteem	Personality feedback may produce coordinated adjustment among what people attribute to themselves, how they evaluate the attributed trait, and how they evaluate themselves overall.	Provide favourable or unfavourable trait feedback and assess PA, trait attitude, and self-esteem before and after it; test whether feedback acceptance, trait revaluation, and self-esteem change are systematically related.
5	Lexical taxonomies are taxonomies of personality attribution, not presumptive taxonomies of dispositional regularities	Lexical taxonomies establish reproducible structures of PA but do not by themselves establish that DR are organised along the same dimensions. Because no universal sampling frame for DR exists, correspondence can be investigated only within explicitly bounded sets of event-proximal BE sampled independently of trait language.	Across several independently constructed sampling frames, repeatedly sample contextually anchored, event-proximal BE without using lexical taxonomies to select, label, or aggregate them. Model the recurrent organisation estimated across each set and examine whether cumulative evidence shows stable convergence with, or sampling-dependent divergence from, Big Five or HEXACO dimensions.
6	Differential predictive functions of personality attribution and dispositional regularities	PA should be especially relevant to deliberate, identity-relevant, and temporally extended outcomes, whereas estimates of DR should be especially relevant to recurrent situated conduct.	Model general PA and prior estimates of DR jointly; test whether PA incrementally predicts deliberate choices or goals, while estimates of DR incrementally predict later event-proximal BE in matched situations.
7	Multidimensional semantic organisation of personality attribution	Personality attributions should partly reflect a multidimensional semantic geometry of personality descriptors that recurs across attributional formats beyond conventional trait-domain membership.	In a separate calibration sample, derive descriptor coordinates from similarity judgements or ratings on semantic dimensions; then test whether those fixed coordinates explain item locations, loading patterns, cross-domain relations, or recurring regions of free descriptions in independent attributional data, beyond intended trait-domain labels.

Note. BE = contextually anchored behavioural episodes; DR = dispositional regularities estimated from recurrent organisation across repeated BE; PA = general personality attribution, a dynamically maintained representation of what the self or another person is like; PA_t = a local, time-dependent representation of the personality meaning assigned to conduct in a particular episode or interval.

Proposition 1: Attributional-route and comparison-frame dependence

Holding item content constant, personality reports should vary when respondents apply the same trait descriptions through different attributional routes or comparison frames. An attributional route specifies what respondents use as the basis for their judgement. For example, participants could be randomly assigned to answer the item “I am talkative” either by considering how characteristically they spoke across specific social contexts or by deciding whether “talkative” fits their established view of themselves. The first route asks for a summary of conduct, whereas the second draws more directly on general attributions. Either judgement may also draw on remembered subjective information. In the meantime, a comparison-frame manipulation could ask respondents to compare themselves with other people, their past self, or an ideal self. Such manipulations may change the immediate judgement and report, as well as their correspondence with estimates of regularities. An elicited judgement may express an already established general attribution, be constructed locally for the occasion, or combine both processes. Whether it subsequently reinforces or modifies the general attribution is a separate empirical question.

The proposition would receive support if changing the instructed route or comparison frame systematically altered judgements and reports elicited by the same items. Where regularities are estimated independently, reports produced through the conduct-summary route should correspond more closely to those estimates than reports produced through the self-definitional route. This immediate effect need not imply a change in general attribution. A short-delay reassessment under neutral instructions could establish whether the elicited judgement persists beyond the original task.

A complementary design could manipulate the accessibility of the personality language itself. In a mixed BFI-2 form, approximately half of the familiar descriptors could be replaced with rare, low-frequency near-synonyms matched as closely as possible for intended trait content and evaluative valence. Subsequent process probes could include objective definition checks with plausible same-valence distractors and an open question asking which familiar word or phrase, if any, respondents mentally substituted for the unfamiliar expression. Because the questionnaire requires a response even when a descriptor is not understood as intended, the resulting reports could reflect misdecoding, evaluative guessing, mental translation into familiar language, retrieval of established attributions, or construction of an item-specific judgement. Comparing the rare and standard items in their functioning, factor structure, and convergence would test whether lexical unfamiliarity changes the attributional route through which personality reports are produced.

Proposition 2: Social updating of personality attribution

Personality attribution should be partly responsive to socially supplied interpretations of one's behaviour. The critical claim is not that a single episode constitutes a dispositional regularity, but that the recorded episode, the interpretation supplied by others, and the participant's own personality construal of that episode are analytically separable. Leising et al. (2025) distinguish manipulations of substance from manipulations of attitudes. In AMPR terms, the proposed design varies the personality meaning socially attached to an already recorded episode rather than the episode itself. For example, a study of social updating in self-attributed Extraversion could first assess general attribution as $PA_{(t_0)}$ and then have participants complete a standardised dyadic interaction. Event-proximal records of the interaction would provide the basis for personalised feedback, with participants randomly told that their recorded pattern was

characteristic of relatively extraverted or introverted people. The personality meaning that participants then assign to this particular interaction would constitute a local attribution. It could be inferred from complementary episode-specific indicators: an open-ended description, coded for whether participants spontaneously characterise themselves as talkative, reserved, assertive, and so forth; and a separate prompted task asking them to select or rate descriptors explicitly restricted to that episode (e.g., “During this conversation, I was talkative”). Convergence would be indicated if the same characterisation emerged across formats. General attribution would subsequently be reassessed as $PA_{(t_i)}$ under common, neutral instructions.

The proposition would receive support if the randomised interpretation altered a local attribution after accounting for $PA_{(t_0)}$ and the recorded behavioural episodes from the interaction. Because the personality meaning assigned to those episodes is experimentally varied, differences in local attribution between conditions could be ascribed to the socially supplied interpretation rather than to the episode alone. Stronger tests could include prior estimates of regularities obtained from repeated episodes in comparable social contexts and examine whether the feedback predicts change in general attribution beyond those estimates and the recorded episodes from the interaction. The mechanism does not require participants consciously to use speaking time or turn counts when describing themselves. Rather, the feedback may make a personality interpretation self-relevant; participants may accept, resist, or revise it when forming a local attribution. A sufficiently salient or consequential local attribution may subsequently become incorporated into general attribution and alter it as $PA_{(t_i)}$, but this is not automatic. PA_t and $PA_{(t_i)}$ should therefore be assessed separately. The basic proposition would be challenged if credible, understood, and self-relevant feedback did not affect the local attribution. If local attribution

changed but general attribution did not, this would challenge only the stronger claim of durable updating.

Proposition 3: Social sharing of personality attribution

Informant reports provide a natural extension of the same logic. Because such reports may express an observer's reputational attribution rather than directly recorded regularities, they should also be responsive to supplied interpretations of conduct. A target and an observer could first provide reports of their respective general attributions of the target and then participate in or observe a standardised interaction in which behavioural episodes are recorded. Continuing the Extraversion example, they could subsequently receive feedback describing the target's interaction pattern as relatively extraverted or introverted. The feedback could be shared with both participants, supplied to only one, or crossed by assigning them different interpretations. The observer's local attribution would then be assessed separately from the observer's post-interaction general attribution of the target; parallel measures could be obtained from the target.

The proposition would be supported if randomised feedback altered the observer's local attribution or subsequent report of the target's general Extraversion after controlling for the target's recorded behavioural episodes during the interaction, preferably using event-proximal indicators specified independently of the trait interpretation. A plausible further hypothesis is that observers with little prior knowledge will update more than longstanding informants, whose general attributions of the target may be more stable and informed by a broader history of interaction, communication, and reputation. Especially diagnostic evidence would be obtained if shared feedback increased self-observer agreement without increasing the correspondence of either person's reports with independently sampled episodes or estimates of regulations. Such a result would indicate socially aligned attribution rather than improved recovery of dispositional

regularities. The proposition would be challenged if credible and understood interpretations affected neither the observer's local attributions nor their subsequent general attributions, with reports instead remaining attributable only to the recorded behavioural episodes and prior general attributions.

Proposition 4: Joint adjustment of personality attributions, trait attitude, and self-esteem

Personality feedback may affect more than the attribution of a trait. It may also affect how the person evaluates the attributed trait and how they evaluate themselves overall. General attribution concerns the question, "What am I generally like?" Trait attitude concerns, "How good or bad is it to be like that?" Self-esteem concerns, "How good or bad am I overall?" When feedback assigns a person to a trait pole they evaluate negatively, they may accept or reject the attribution, reinterpret the episode, revalue the attributed pole, revise their comparison standards, or adjust their broader self-evaluation. Some responses may remain local to the episode, whereas others may prompt a more global reorganisation of general attribution. The dynamic formulation represents such broader revision processes as G_t : changes in trait attitudes, self-esteem, identity, comparison standards, or personality meanings may alter what the person generally takes themselves to be. Personality feedback should therefore not be treated as a simple input into a trait score; it may require adjustment among several related self-representations.

The proposition would be supported if unfavourable but accepted feedback produced systematic relations among changes in general attributions, trait attitude, and self-esteem. Participants might protect self-esteem by revaluing the attributed trait pole more favourably, resist feedback when their prior general attribution is confident or self-defining, or show smaller coordinated shifts across the three representations. Feedback need not, however, be mechanically

incorporated into general attribution. It may alter only a local attribution for the relevant episode, initiate a broader reconsideration represented by G_i , do both, or do neither. The proposition would be challenged if these responses showed no systematic coupling; for example, if accepting an unfavourable attribution were unrelated to trait revaluation or self-esteem change. The exact regulatory routes remain empirical; the core claim is that people interpret what personality feedback means for the self rather than mechanically adding it to their self-description.

Proposition 5: Lexical taxonomies are taxonomies of personality attribution, not presumptive taxonomies of dispositional regularities

Taxonomies derived from the lexical hypothesis, including the Big Five and HEXACO (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Saucier & Goldberg, 1996), are primarily taxonomies of personality-descriptive meaning rather than direct taxonomies of behavioural episodes or dispositional regularities. They organise the ways in which persons are described through trait language and the covariation among responses to personality-descriptive utterances. Their empirical robustness therefore establishes the reproducibility of report-based personality structure, but does not by itself establish that recurrent behaviour is organised according to the same dimensions. There are no automatic grounds for transferring a taxonomy derived from personality language onto dispositional regularities, or for assuming that low-level behavioural regularities should contain clear fingerprints of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness, or Honesty–Humility as already constituted domains.

The proposition would be supported if broad repeated indicators specified without trait-language guidance yielded an organisation that differed materially from report taxonomies in the number, content, boundaries, or relations among dimensions. A convincing test would first model recurrent behaviour without assigning indicators to Big Five or HEXACO categories and

only then examine whether the resulting organisation maps onto those taxonomies. The proposition would be challenged if trait-naïve, broadly sampled regularities consistently reproduced clear, stable, and replicable Big Five- or HEXACO-like dimensions rather than only scattered associations between particular reported traits and selected behaviours.

This distinction is especially important because many behavioural, computational, and digital phenotyping studies continue to use self-reported trait scores as the criterion to be predicted (Kosinski et al., 2013; Stachl et al., 2020; Youyou et al., 2015). Such findings demonstrate that report-based attributions can often be reconstructed from behavioural or digital traces. They do not, however, by themselves establish that the latent organisation of those traces is identical to the organisation of report-based taxonomies. Predicting personality reports from behaviour is conceptually different from demonstrating that regularities themselves are organised according to the same taxonomic structure.

Proposition 6: Differential predictive functions of personality attribution and dispositional regularities

Attributions and regularities should make different incremental predictions of downstream outcomes not used to define either construct. Attributions should be especially informative for choices and commitments in which a person's understanding of who they are is recruited. Regularities should be especially informative for consequences that accumulate from repeated conduct without requiring explicit personality construal. This contrast is probabilistic rather than exclusive. Nor does it imply that regularities cause these outcomes: they summarise patterns of conduct whose continuation may generate them. Testing the proposition requires independent measures of attribution, prior estimates of regularities derived from repeated

episodes, and later criteria distinct from both. Ambulatory and naturalistic methods provide suitable evidence (Conner et al., 2009; Mehl et al., 2001; Stachl et al., 2020).

The proposition would be supported if general attribution predicted identity-guided choices beyond prior regularities, while prior regularities predicted independently recorded cumulative consequences beyond general attribution. For example, attributed Extraversion might predict joining a debating group or choosing a socially intensive role. Regularities in physical activity, sleep, spending, driving, or task engagement might instead predict later health indicators, financial penalties, accidents, or performance failures not used to estimate those regularities. The decisive test is not whether prior conduct predicts corresponding future conduct, but whether its recurrent organisation forecasts downstream consequences beyond what is attributed to the person.

Proposition 7: Multidimensional semantic organisation of personality attribution

Personality attributions should partly reflect the semantic geometry of the descriptors available for describing oneself and others. The relevant claim is that personality meanings are organised along several broad dimensions and that this structure recurs across different manifestations of attribution, not only fixed-format reports. EPA provides one candidate model. Whether the same semantic coordinates correspond to the organisation of regularities remains a separate empirical question.

The proposition would be supported if independently estimated semantic coordinates explained reproducible organisation across structured reports, free descriptions, or other attributional tasks beyond conventional trait-domain membership. Multidimensional scaling is useful because it allows the geometry of personality meaning to be examined directly rather than inferred solely from report covariance. Coordinates estimated from descriptor-similarity

judgements, semantic ratings, or other linguistic data could predict item locations, loading patterns, cross-domain relations, or recurring regions of freely generated description. The proposition would be challenged if the resulting semantic spaces were unstable across methods, instruments, languages, or cultures, or added no replicable explanatory value beyond intended trait-domain labels.

Taken together, these propositions make AMPR empirically vulnerable. Attributional patterns may fail to recur across formats or occasions; reports may prove largely invariant across attributional routes and comparison frames; randomised interpretations may fail to update self- or observer-attributions; recurrent organisation across event-proximal episodes may closely reproduce lexical taxonomies; general attribution may add nothing beyond prior estimates of regularities; or semantic coordinates may explain little across attributional tasks. Each result would narrow the theory. The programme does not depend on any particular semantic model or on attribution being detached from conduct. It depends on the more basic proposition that personality attribution has reproducible organisation and consequences not reducible to any one task, and that its relations to reports, episodes, and regularities can be tested rather than assumed.

Conclusion

Personality psychology has succeeded partly because it developed a powerful language for describing persons. The Big Five, HEXACO, and related models organise a vast field of personality description and provide useful predictions. The point of the present paper is not to diminish this achievement or to suggest that report-based traits are merely verbal artefacts. It is to clarify the psychological status of personality attribution and the evidential role of reports.

Self- and informant reports are not transparent registrations of dispositional regularities but occasion-specific communicative acts through which attributions are expressed. They may communicate an established general attribution, a local attribution, or an item-cued attribution constructed for the reporting occasion.

Personality psychology enjoys an unusual privilege: its essentialism is not merely a scientific temptation but part of the phenomenon it studies. AMPR does not abolish essentialism; it relocates it from a presumptive ontology of personality to an empirical property of personality attributions. Essentialised representations can be psychologically and socially consequential, but they should neither displace nor define in advance the heterogeneous stream of behavioural episodes and the recurrent organisation from which dispositional regularities are estimated.

This attributional character helps explain why personality reports can be both useful and theoretically complex. They may derive part of their utility from information that attributions preserve about recurrent organisation across episodes. Affect, cognition, motivation, and experience may also enter attributions, but as remembered, interpreted, or otherwise represented subjective information rather than as components of dispositional regularities. Reports may therefore reflect not only recurrent conduct but also how conduct and subjective information are remembered, evaluated, compared, named, and communicated. Their stability, replicability, and predictive power may arise from several intertwined forms of stability: stability in recurrent conduct, general attributions, reputation, and the semantic-evaluative systems through which persons are described. These forms of stability need not be reduced to one another. The first concerns recurrent organisation across behavioural episodes, whereas the others concern the representational and social processes through which conduct acquires personality meaning and becomes reportable.

This is where the present account speaks directly to Baumeister's (2016, p. 158) observation that personality psychology can become "boring." Repeatedly showing that favourable personality reports predict favourable reports of functioning is theoretically limited unless the processes producing both are examined. The same associations become more informative when treated as evidence about how people construct personality attributions, coordinate self- and observer-views, and relate these representations to recurrent behavioural episodes. AMPR therefore does not move personality psychology away from social psychology; it reconnects the field with the social-psychological processes through which people interpret, evaluate, compare, and communicate what they and others are like.

The proposed distinction also changes how report-based evidence should be interpreted. Associations between self-reported traits and self-reported outcomes may combine relations involving regularities and life functioning with general attributions, shared evaluation, and common report-production processes. Multi-rater agreement may indicate correspondence with visible behavioural episodes, but it may also reflect socially aligned attributions including a shared reputation. Personality change may involve altered recurrent conduct, revision of general attributions, changes in how particular episodes are construed in local attributions, changes in trait evaluation, or changes confined to reporting. Likewise, biological and genetic findings based on report scores may point towards biological correlates of recurrent organisation across behavioral episodes, but they directly concern report-based phenotypes whose attributional and reporting structure should be made explicit.

The research programme proposed here is therefore not sceptical but differentiating. It examines how dispositional regularities are estimated from repeated behavioural episodes, how episodes and other information are construed within general or local attributions, and how the

organisation of attribution is manifested across reports and other tasks. It also asks when these elements converge, diverge, change, and influence one another over time. The account remains empirically vulnerable: its scope would be substantially narrowed if personality reports consistently behaved summaries of estimated regularities, while attributional, social, semantic, and elicitation processes added little explanatory value.

The broader aim is to place personality attribution alongside recurrent conduct as an object of personality theory. A local attribution is formed or activated when conduct during a particular episode or interval is construed in personality terms, whereas general attribution is dynamically maintained across time. Most local attributions leave general attribution unchanged; sufficiently salient, repeated, discrepant, or consequential local attributions may revise it, while broader reconsideration, represented by G_t , may reorganise it. AMPR therefore treats personality attribution and recurrent conduct as analytically distinct rather than interchangeable, asking when they converge, when they part company, and when change in one is—or is not—matched by change in the other.

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