

# Character Adaptation Systems Theory: A New Big Five for Personality and Psychotherapy

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Although personality theory and psychotherapy were originally closely linked, the past several decades have witnessed surprising gaps between these domains. This article seeks to close that gap via character adaptation systems theory (CAST), which is a formulation derived from Henriques's (2011) unified approach to psychology that links recent developments in personality theory with integrative visions of psychotherapy via the explication of 5 systems of character adaptation: (a) the habit system, (b) the experiential system, (c) the relationship system, (d) the defensive system, and (e) the justification system. This article delineates the nature of these systems of adaptation and how they connect to modern personality theory and the major systems of individual psychotherapy, as well as how they relate to important domains in human psychology and can be applied in the context of psychotherapy.

**Keywords:** characteristic adaptations, unified approach, personality theory, psychotherapy

Psychology has long been characterized as a fragmented field that lacked a clear definition, a clear subject matter, and has struggled fundamentally with its identity. Recent controversies in the American Psychological Association regarding allegations of the field supporting torture and the Hoffman report, along with the now well-documented replication crisis (Pashler & Wagenmakers, 2012) raise significant questions about both the institution and the empirical foundations of the field. For more than a decade, Henriques (2003, 2008) has argued that there is a fundamental problem with psychology, which is that there was no overarching framework that could define the field and define its relationship to other related domains of inquiry, such as biology and the social sciences. To solve the problem, Henriques (2003, 2004) introduced the Tree of Knowledge System, which he argued could both define the field and assimilate and integrate the key insights from the major paradigms into a coherent whole. Henriques (2013) further argued that, if the field was to generate systematic and cumulative knowledge, it was as crucial that attention be paid to the broad conceptual structure and lay out of the field as it was to empirical investigations of particular phenomena.

A central feature of Henriques's (2011) unified approach is that it enables the key insights from the major perspectives (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, and psychodynamic) and dimensions of analysis (i.e., biological, psychological, and social) to be assimilated and integrated into a coherent whole. In this regard, Henriques's system was recently applied to the construct of well-being, and a nested model of well-being was articulated that assimilated and integrated hedonic and eudaimonic approaches (Henriques, Kleinman, & Asselin, 2014) and clarified the relationship between the objective and evaluative components of this

complicated construct. This article continues this line of work by introducing character adaptation systems theory (CAST; Henriques, 2016) as a framework that builds bridges between recent integrative formulations in personality theory and unified visions of psychotherapy.

In *Unifying Psychotherapy: Principles, Method, and Evidence from Clinical Science*, Magnavita and Anchin (2014) delineate the "personality system" embedded in a biopsychosocial matrix that consists of four key "component systems" that are central in understanding personality and how individuals adapt. These component systems consist of (a) the *attachment system*, which refers to the constellation of relational needs and internal working models; (b) the *affective system*, which refers to the emotional feeling states of the individual; (c) the *defensive system*, which refers to the ways in which individuals consciously or unconsciously structure their internal experience to maintain equilibrium and comfort; and (d) the *cognitive system*, which refers to the schema or information processing templates that individuals have for making sense of the world. Paralleling Magnavita and Anchin, recent work in integrative theory in personality have identified characteristic adaptations as key, midlevel personality units (e.g., McAdams & Pals, 2006).

From the vantage point of the unified approach (Henriques, 2011) integrative theories in personality should be deeply connected to integrative perspectives in psychotherapy. Despite what might seem to be an obvious connection, the fact of the matter is that personality psychology researchers and psychotherapists often speak very different languages. As Singer (2005) has noted, the gap between personality theory and psychotherapists has grown remarkably large over the past several decades. Part of the reason for this is that cognitive-behavioral approaches, which have gained much prominence, focus largely on treating disorders (as opposed to the whole person). Simultaneously, personality researchers have focused largely on dispositional traits that presumably were not very amenable to change.

The gap between integrative personality theory and approaches to psychotherapy is one that is well-suited for the broad vision

This article was published Online First January 2, 2017.

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afforded by the unified theory, and this article introduces CAST to do just that. Represented in diagram form in Figure 1, CAST delineates five systems of character adaptation that exist in three broad contexts (bio-physiological; learning and developmental; and sociocultural). The five systems of character adaptation are as follows: (a) the habit system, (b) the experiential system, (c) the relational system, (d) the defensive system, and (e) the justification system. This article explores the nature of these systems in the context of personality theory and the evolution of the nervous system, the manner in which these systems correspond to key insights in the major systems of individual psychotherapy, their connection to key domains in human psychology, and how they can be employed in the context of psychotherapy. In so doing, CAST shows how conceptual bridges can be built between modern, integrative theories of personality and psychotherapy.

### Modern Integrative Perspectives in Personality Theory

Noting the remarkable success of trait theory in saving the field of personality from a “near death experience in the 1970s,” McAdams and Pals (2006, p. 204) argued that the time had come such to move beyond the insight that there are five broad dimensions of human personality traits and return to the original mission of the field of personality psychology, which was to provide “an integrative framework for understanding the whole person” (p. 204). Toward that end, the authors offered an outline of what they conceived to be the fundamental elements for an integrative science of personality that included five principles or domains, which they characterized as follows: (a) an individual’s unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of (b) dispositional traits, (c) characteristic adaptations, and (d) self-defining life narratives, complexly and differentially situated (e) in the cultural and social context. McAdams and Pals’s (2006) framework can be thought of as offering a bio-psycho-social view of personality, such that these principles provide biological and social bookends, respectively, to the more psychological dimensions of personality. McAdams and Pals further conceptualized these as different “levels” of personality, with traits being the basest level (and most tied to biology), characteristic adaptations being “midlevel,” and life narratives or identity

being the most open and malleable, and the most tied to culture and social roles.

It was the trait researchers Costa and McCrae (1994) who first introduced the term “characteristic adaptations” in the context of five-factor theory. The term referenced the unique ways the individuals adjusted to context and emerged via “dynamic processes” arising from the interaction of underlying traits and actual life experiences. McAdams and Pals (2006, p. 208) characterized this dimension of personality as consisting of units that “include motives, goals, plans, strivings, strategies, values, virtues, schemas, self-images, mental representations of significant others, developmental tasks, and many other aspects of human individuality that speak to motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental concerns,” and pointed out that much research and theory in personality, from Freud and Horney to Rotter and Bandura, can be conceptualized as understanding the ways individuals develop characteristic adaptations (see also Sheldon, 2004). Yet they also noted that, unlike the relatively large degree of consensus regarding the presence of five broad personality traits, “there exists no definitive, Big Five–like list of these kinds of constructs,” and, given their understanding, “it seems highly unlikely that there will ever be a geography [of characteristic adaptations] that will look like the Big Five scheme for traits” (p. 209). Part of the rationale for making this claim was that the nature of characteristic adaptations is such that they are presumed to be very fluid, idiosyncratic, and context dependent. Thus, examples of characteristic adaptations might range anywhere from the tendency to review one’s notes before a lecture to distancing one’s self to avoid intimate contact when feeling vulnerable to personal projects that enhance one’s skill in a particular ability, such as dancing or basketball. Given such diversity of content, it is understandable why one might assume that there would not be a clear taxonomy of specific characteristic adaptations.

Yet if one shifts from specific adaptations that are characteristic of an individual to the models of character and character development, the question then becomes the following: What are the underlying processes that give rise to various forms of idiographic adaptation and learning and how and why do these systems work the way they do? Framed this way, the key insights from the major

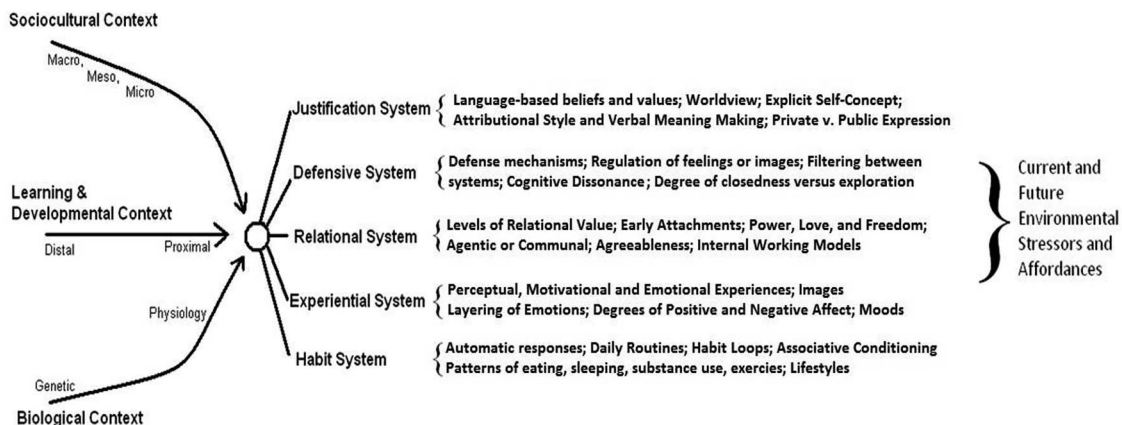


Figure 1. Character adaptation systems theory.

paradigms in psychology can be seen as attempting to elucidate the underlying mechanisms that give rise to characteristic adaptations. For example, traditional learning theory emphasizes the view that characteristic adaptations emerge from the pairing of particular stimulus control variables with responses that have reinforcing or punishing consequences, thus forming a conditioned response. Psychodynamic perspectives emphasize that the manifest outcome (i.e., the observable characteristic adaptation) emerges as a function of latent needs and conflicts between self-conscious and subconscious drives. In the humanistic tradition of Carl Rogers, therapeutically relevant characteristic adaptations are generally theorized to be the result of the relative harmony or disharmony between an individual's intrinsic, organismic, and phenomenological valuing process and the social context of acceptance or criticism.

More recent work in personality theory has attempted to capture the various mechanisms and process that give rise to characteristic adaptations. For example, in the social-cognitive tradition, [Mischel and Shoda \(1995\)](#) developed the Cognitive-Affective Personality System (CAPS) approach, which posits that the personality system consists of a set of *If . . . then* rules are activated in a particular situation. From this perspective behavior is consistent, but is contextually dependent and acquired. Thus, it is not that Johnny has the trait of 'defiance,' but he may be consistently defiant when teachers try to control him. He may well *not* be defiant with his friends or in other kinds of situations. One feature of the CAPS model is that it does not blend particularly well with traditional trait theory. [Fleeson and Jayawickreme \(2015\)](#) have attempted to remedy this limitation with their conception of whole trait theory, which blends social-cognitive features with traits by characterizing traits as "density distributions" of states. Another recent theory of personality that attempts to construct a more "comprehensive, synthetic, and mechanistic explanatory model" has been proposed by [DeYoung \(2015, p. 33\)](#), in the form of a cybernetic big five theory (CB5T). DeYoung's formulation is explicitly congruent with [McAdams and Pals's \(2006\)](#) "New Big Five" and it furthermore characterizes personality as an evolved cybernetic system, such that cybernetics provides the framework to understand characteristic adaptations exhibited by individuals in specific contexts. In CB5T, traits refer to the "cybernetic parameters" that can potentially account for relatively stable patterns of individual differences in emotion, motivation, cognition and behavior.

### **Bridging Personality and Psychotherapy via the Unified Approach**

The recent efforts to generate holistic models of personality that attempt to integrate traits and character adaptations into a more coherent whole are most welcome. However, from the vantage point of the unified approach, some key pieces of the puzzle are missing. The first key insight is the notion that the human mind-brain system is a layered system of neuro-information processing ([Henriques, 2011](#)). That is, any systematic account of how character adaptations emerge in humans must include the notion that there are multiple systems of information processing that are occurring simultaneously and in parallel. Another limitation of modern perspectives is that they do not mesh particularly well with the field of psychotherapy as a whole. That is, most modern

theories of personality such as those described above are not strongly tied to models of psychotherapy and vice versa ([Singer, 2005](#)).

CAST helps make these conceptual linkages by considering both the layered, hierarchically arranged nature of the human mindbrain system and by having the capacity to assimilate and integrate key insights from the various approaches in psychotherapy. The argument is these five systems of adaptation, when placed in the biological, learning and developmental, and social contexts (see [Henriques & Stout, 2012](#)) depicted by the CAST diagram: (a) provide a framework for incorporating the evolution of the nervous system and its hierarchical design in how information is processed; (b) provide a coherent framework for mapping the mechanisms underlying the dynamic intrapsychic processes that give rise to characteristic adaptations; (c) offer a heuristic model that incorporates key aspects of integrative personality theory with a coherent, integrative perspective on psychotherapy; and (d) offer a valuable way for conceptualizing person's psychological functioning and well-being.

### **The Levels of Neuro-Information Processing in the Human Mindbrain System**

In [Henriques's \(2003, 2011\)](#) approach for unifying psychology, behavioral investment theory (BIT) provides the framework for understanding the evolution of mental behavior, which is the behavior of the animal as a whole, mediated by the nervous system ([Henriques, 2004](#)). Mental behaviors include cognition (broadly defined as neuro-information processing), consciousness (the phenomenological experience of being), and overt actions. The basic idea of BIT is the nervous system has evolved as an energy management and investment value system that computes increasingly complex and flexible behaviors enabling the animal to adapt to the environment in progressively sophisticated ways. Crucial to the argument that there are different systems of adaptation, BIT offers a view of the human mindbrain system as consisting of a layered architecture that can be heuristically divided into four different levels of neuro-information processing ([Henriques, 2011; Figure 2](#)).

Level 1 is the "sensory-motor" level and the kind that first evolved. It is called sensory-motor because there is a fairly immediate connection between stimulus and response. Despite its simplicity, basic forms of learning, such as habituation and sensitization, take place at the sensory-motor level. Habituation is a decrease in a reflex response resulting from repeated presentation of an initiating stimulus. It is arguably the most basic form of learning and it is functionally present even in single celled animals, which obviously lack a nervous system completely. Sensitization is essentially the opposite, and refers to the process by which an animal learns to increase its response to noxious or novel stimuli. Habituated responses become embedded in the base of the mind-brain system (e.g., the basal ganglia) and can be elicited without higher thought processes.

The second level is called the "operant-experiential" level, which refers to more fluid, complex, and plastic behaviors than sensory-motor responses, and broadly defined refers to what many in the behavioral sciences refer to as goal-oriented behaviors (see, e.g., [Boutrel, Cannella, & de Lecea, 2010](#)). This level is called operant-experiential in the current model because it is theorized to

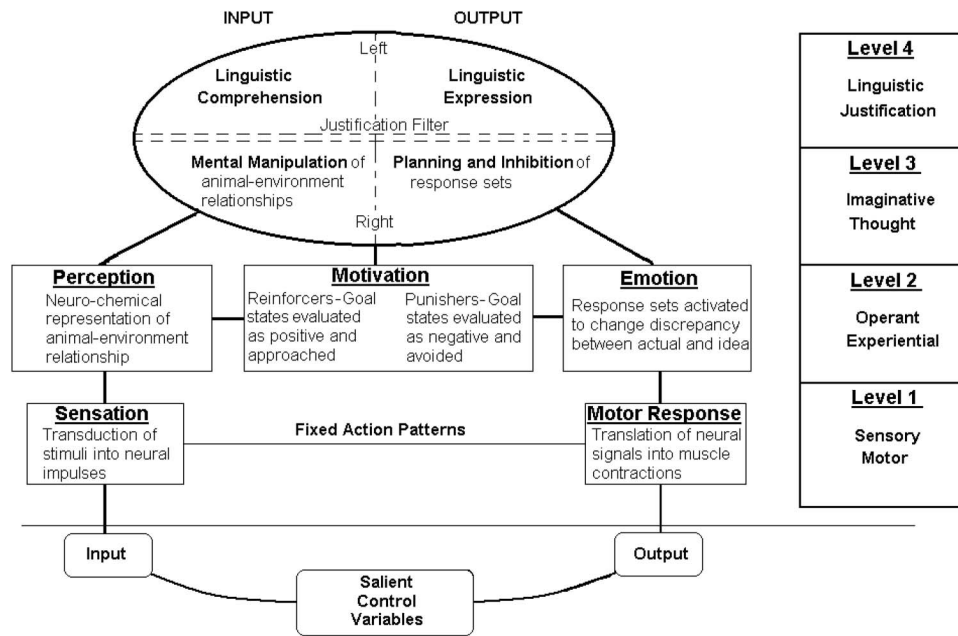


Figure 2. The model of the mindbrain system informed by behavioral investment theory.

be a mental point by which the phenomenological experience of being (i.e., animal sentience) has emerged (cf. Panksepp, 1998). Goal-oriented behavioral patterns are characterized by the unified approach as operating on the  $P - M = > E$  formulation, where the “P” refers to perception, “M” to motivation, and “E” to emotion (Henriques, 2011). Consistent with DeYoung’s (2015) argument that the root of personality is a cybernetic system, this is a control theory equation, with the basic structure being: input—reference goal = output. “P” refers to the perceptual input, and is considered a consequence of the intersection of both bottom-up processing (which refers to the pattern of sensory inputs), and top-down processing (which refers to the individual’s schema, knowledge, memory, and expectations that frame the inputs). Motivation, the “M” in the equation, refers to valued goal states that the animal is working either toward seeking and attaining or avoiding and withdrawing from. The minus sign in the formulation refers to the discrepancy between the “P,” which is the current perceived state, and “M,” which is the state of being to be approached or is an aversive state to be avoided. The discrepancy between perceived and motivated states energizes the animal via emotional activation, the “E” in the equation. Emotions organize the animal’s response set and prepare it to functionally adjust its responses relative to the situation and its needs. Consider, for example, a mouse perceiving the presence of a cat in its vicinity. According to the formulation offered here, perceiving the cat (i.e., the “P”) will activate a prey-avoidance template (the “M”) and the mouse will experience fear (the “E”) and be energized or moved to increase the discrepancy between itself and the cat (i.e., avoidance behavior, which is negatively reinforcing of the loop).

The third level of mental processing in the model is called “imaginative thought” and refers to the ability of the animal to manipulate mental representations into simulations of behavioral investment patterns and then be guided in its decision making by

anticipated outcomes (Redish, 2013). The classic demonstration of higher nonverbal thought in animals was Wolfgang Kohler’s work on insight in chimpanzees. Higher thought processes are especially relevant for social mammals because many evolutionary researchers argue that there is a key, reciprocal relationship between higher thought and social relationships (Jolly, 1985). Consider, for example, the complexity of thought required for parental attachment or developing alliances or assessing and seeking status. An additional feature associated with imaginative thought is the fact that immediate behavioral responses must be inhibited as the animal works through various simulated possibilities. In short, higher order thinking requires at least the preliminary capacity to quell initial impulses to respond in a more planned out way.

The final level, linguistic justification, is considered to be a distinctly human kind of mentation and represents the intersection of language, self-consciousness, reason giving, and culture. According to the unified approach (Henriques, 2011, 2013), although some other animals are capable of complex nonverbal thought including basic elements of self-awareness, only humans come equipped with the capacity to generate a symbolic-syntactical representational system that allows for reason giving and argumentation (i.e., human language). This level of mentation is described in greater detail later in the context of articulating the justification system.

### The Five Systems of Character Adaptation

The five systems of character adaptation delineated by CAST emerged as a function of seeking integrative visions within and between personality theory and psychotherapy. They share close correspondence with the four intrapsychic component systems (affective, defensive, attachment, and cognition) identified by Magnavita and Anchin (2014) in their unified approach to psycho-



therapy. Below the five systems are reviewed with linkages to the layers of neuro-information processing reviewed previously. After this review, the focus shifts to how they are connected to the key insights of the major paradigms in individual psychotherapy, thus setting the stage for a more comprehensive and holistic view of human adaptation that bridges modern personality theory with systems of individual psychotherapy.

### The Habit System

The first and most basic system of character adaptation is called the habit system, and it corresponds to the first level of neuro-information processing. It consists of sensorimotor patterns and reflexes, fixed action patterns, and procedural memories that can operate automatically and be produced without any conscious awareness. As reviewed by [Duhigg \(2012\)](#), habitual responses can usefully be divided up into three elements that form a loop. First there is a stimulus or cue which is followed by an enacted procedure or response, and finally there is a rewarding consequence, which functions to embed the response cycle in the mindbrain system. This is called the habit loop. One of the more remarkable features of the habit system is that virtually anything can become a habit, so long as the procedure has certain fixed elements in it. A classic example of how relatively complicated patterns can become habituated is found in learning to drive a car. New drivers often experience an overload of incoming information when first sitting behind the wheel. Learning how to adjust the seat and mirrors, the correct angle at which to put the key in the ignition and the right way to turn the wheel when backing up all require intense conscious control the first few times they are attempted. However, the sequence becomes automatized in the habit system over time, such that advanced drivers can enact all the above without any self-conscious thought. As this example suggests, virtually any procedural sequence can become ingrained in the habit system so long as it is regularly repeated and elicits predictable consequences.

### The Experiential System

Consistent with work in affective neuroscience ([Panksepp, 1998](#)), the experiential system corresponds to the second level of neuro-information processing and refers to the nonverbal perceptions, motives and drives, and emotional feelings states that make up mental life. Examples of experiential phenomena include seeing red, being hungry, and feeling angry. The unified approach considers such first person mental experiences to be a form of cognitive process, and are emergent phenomena that arise from waves of neural information processing, although how exactly such neurocognitive processes give rise to sentience remains a largely unanswered question ([Henriques, 2011](#)). As articulated earlier in describing Level 2 mental processes, the current approach conceptualizes the experiential system as linking perceptions, motivations, and emotions via a computational control formulation whereby objects and events are categorized and made meaningful by perceptual processes (i.e., what is it, where is it) and are then referenced against motivational goal templates (i.e., drives to approach or avoid certain states) which then result in action orienting affective response tendencies (cf. [La Cerra & Bingham, 2002](#)) and finally behavioral strategies that either are rewarded or

punished depending on their consequences. This formulation connects the experiencing mind to operant behavioral principles (cf. [Staats, 1996](#)).

### The Relational System

The relational system is conceptualized as an extension of the experiential system that emerges both as mentation becomes more complicated (i.e., as animals evolve with increasing cortical functioning) and as animals become more social. The relational system refers to the social motivations and feelings states, along with intuitive internal working models and self-in-relation-to-other schema that guide social mammals in general and people in particular in their social exchanges and relationships. It is important to note, then, that the relational system as considered here is not dependent upon verbal processing, although, of course, in humans verbal processing can dramatically influence the operations of the relational system.

The unified approach offers the influence matrix ([Henriques, 2013; Figure 3](#)) as a workable map of the neuro-information processing architecture of the human relationship system. There are a few salient features of the matrix that are worthy of being highlighted here. First, because it functions as an extension of the experiential system, the matrix is a cybernetic control system and operates on the  $P - M = > E$  formulation. That is, perceptions of social exchanges and processes are theorized to be referenced against social goal states, which in turn lead to emotions that energize particular responses toward approaching or avoiding certain outcomes. Second, the matrix combines several major perspectives on human relational theory, including attachment theory, the interpersonal circumplex, work by psychodynamic theorists such as Adler, Horney and Erikson and socioanalytic formulations by Hogan, and it provides a deep understanding of the centrality of the dialectic between agency and communion (for a more extensive review, see [Henriques, 2011](#)).

Consistent with a sociometer theory view of the root of self-esteem ([Leary & Baumeister, 2000](#)), the matrix posits that the fundamental goal that drives social engagement is relational value, which can be defined as the extent to which an individual feels known and valued by important others. Relational value is represented on the matrix as the central diagonal line, defined via the poles of high (i.e., being desired, admired, respected) and low (i.e., being rejected, ignored, belittled, criticized) relational value. High relational value is theorized to have evolved as a sought after goal state (and the converse of rejection and contempt of important others to be avoided) because it serves as a proxy for the degree of social influence one has (defined as the capacity to influence others in accordance with one's interests, which is a crucial variable associated with survival and reproductive success). The matrix further posits that relational value and social influence are navigated along three relational process dimensions, identified as power (or competitive influence, defined by the poles of dominance and submission), love (or cooperative influence, defined by the poles of affiliation and hostility), and freedom (defined by the poles of autonomy and dependency). These relational process dimensions then relate directly to certain emotional responses that are reliably elicited as a function of changes in relational value that emerge out of certain kinds of social exchanges. For example, pride is the emotional set that emerges when one successfully

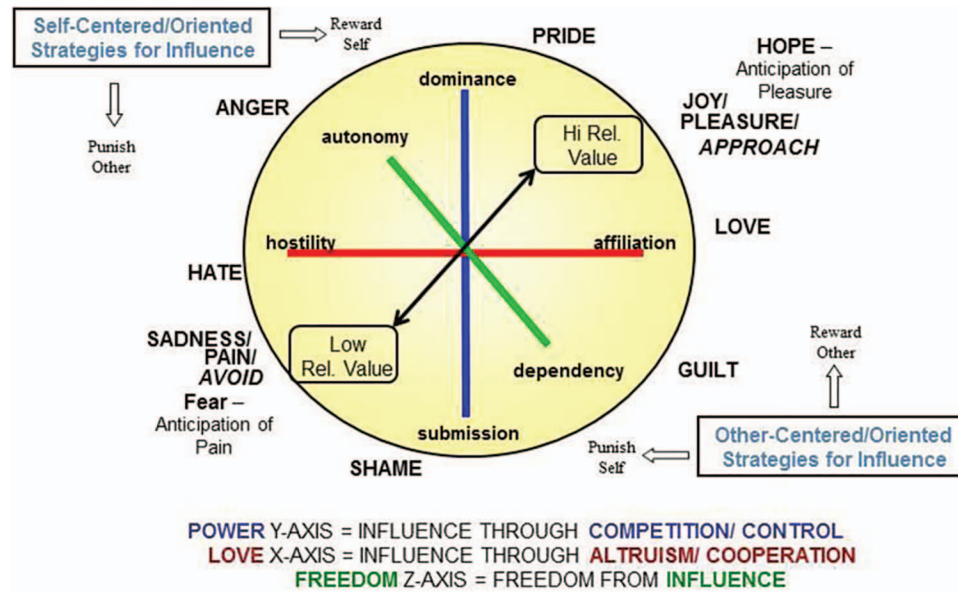


Figure 3. The influence matrix. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

competes and achieves prestige relative to others, whereas shame emerges when one is defeated or shown to be relatively inferior in value or ability. Anger emerges when one's self-interests have been violated, and guilt emerges when one violates the interests of others in the process of social exchange.

### The Justification System

The justification system is the fifth system of character adaptation; however, it is useful to explain this system and then proceed to describe the fourth system, the defensive system, as the shape of the latter is influenced by the organization of the former. The justification system is the seat of verbally mediated thought and symbolic reasoning. It is organized into language-based systems of beliefs and values that an individual uses to determine which actions and claims are legitimate and which are not, to give reasons for one's behavior, and ultimately to develop a meaningful worldview. Although individuals can learn how to engage in analytic reasoning via the justification system, the formulation provided by the unified approach is that the justification system is first and foremost a motivated reasoning system (Kunda, 1990), one that is guided by (although not necessarily dictated by) nonverbal drives, goals, and intuitive frames, and is functionally organized as a reason giving system, rather than a purely analytical reasoning system.

The Justification Hypothesis (JH; Henriques, 2003) offers an evolutionary account of the design features exhibited by human self-consciousness and the functional organization of the human justification system. The JH posits that the evolution of language in general and the emergence of questions in particular created a unique adaptive problem. For the first time in evolutionary history, via language, others had relatively direct access to one's thought processes and, via questions, one had to give reasons to account for one's behavior. The justification system, then, is structured in a way that allows humans to give accounts for their behavior and

develop systems of knowledge that allow them to make sense of the world and others in it (for a detailed review, see Henriques, 2011).

### The Defensive System

The fourth system of character adaptation is the defensive system, and it refers to the ways in which individuals manage their actions, feelings, and thoughts, and specifically the way individuals shift the focus of conscious attention to maintain a state of psychic equilibrium in times of threat or insecurity. The defensive system is the most diffuse of the character adaptation systems; however, it can nevertheless be specified by examining how images, impulses, cravings, and desires from the nonverbal systems (i.e., habit, experiential, relational) are integrated (or not) with the individual's self-conscious justifications for being (for a recent review of psychological defense consistent with the current formulation, see Hart, 2014).

We reviewed the justification system prior to delving into the defensive system because the justification system seeks "equilibrium" such that the individual is in a "justified state of being." A justified state of being is one that is secure and legitimate and thus individuals must manage thoughts and situations that suggest otherwise (cf. Aronson, 2011). Although there are a number of things that people are defended against, we can identify five broad domains, including: (a) death and the idea of death, (b) threats to one's worldview and meaning making systems, (c) threats to one's relationships with others, (d) threats to self-esteem or self-concept, and (e) painful feelings or memories. For an example of how the defensive system works, consider an adolescent who grows up in a household that is hostile toward homosexuality, but starts to experience homosexual urges. Here the justification system (i.e., the explicit belief that homosexuality is wrong) comes into conflict

with the experiential system (i.e., sexual arousal in response to homoerotic material). Consistent with this formulation, [Henriques \(2003\)](#) argued that the JH provides a workable evolutionary account of Freud's fundamental observation regarding the nature of self-consciousness, which is that there are systematic reasons behind the reasons individual's give for their behavior. Specifically, Freud observed that as a function of social pressures and what was deemed socially acceptable, people would filter out (i.e., repress) certain drives, images, or emotions from self-conscious awareness and instead rationalize their actions via more socially acceptable pathways.

### CAST and an Integrative View of Psychotherapy

A central claim of CAST is that the five systems correspond to the key emphases and insights of the major paradigms in individual psychotherapy ([Henriques & Stout, 2012](#)). Specifically, there are four such major paradigms: Behavioral, Experiential/Humanistic, Psychodynamic/Interpersonal, and Cognitive. There are, of course, other approaches to psychotherapy, but they are generally either not anchored to a major psychological tradition, are integrative, or are focused on a different level of analysis, such as the biological (e.g., psychopharmacology) or social (e.g., family systems approaches). This section reviews the way the major systems of individual psychotherapy line up with the five systems of character adaptation.

### The Behavioral Tradition Aligns With the Habit System

As [Zinbarg and Griffith \(2008\)](#) note in their review of the key components of behavior theory and therapy, "The central defining feature of behavior therapy is that it involves the application of the laws of learning to the modification of problematic behavior" (p. 8). Consistent with the current framework for considering the habit system as a procedural system that operates without much conscious thought, the general emphasis in behavior therapy is not on one's inner experience or, traditionally, even one's thought processes. Rather, the focus is on action and the environment and how the individual responds to stimuli (in associative conditioning) or is rewarded or punished for certain actions. These elements line up directly with [Duhigg's \(2012\)](#) popular formulation of the habit loop. Associative conditioning explores the relationship between the cue (stimulus) and routine (response), whereas operant conditioning explores the relationship between the routine and the consequence.

Behavior therapy thus generally conceptualizes both adaptive and maladaptive psychological patterns as emerging out of basic learning processes involving cues, patterns of responding, and consequences. The goal of behavior therapy is either to shift environmental cues, alter response patterns, or shift reward structures with the goal of breaking maladaptive habit loops and replacing them with new and more adaptive learned patterns. Virtually all behavior therapy approaches, from desensitization and flooding to response costs and token economies, can be understood as emphasizing the need to alter the antecedent cue, the response, or the consequence in particular environmental contexts.

### The Experiential Tradition Aligns With the Experiential System

In their review of experiential approaches to psychotherapy, [Pos, Greenberg, and Elliott \(2008\)](#) claimed that the central insight from the experiential perspective is that there are two ways of knowing—(a) conceptual (knowledge by verbal, analytic description) and (b) experiential (knowledge by direct experience)—and that experiential therapies emphasize the importance of using the latter form of knowing when facilitating patient change (in contrast to cognitive therapies, which emphasize the former). These authors further highlight that Carl Rogers was central to experiential approaches because of his general emphasis on phenomenology and the utilization of deep empathy to access aspects of the "true self" that had been hidden, split off, or poorly integrated as a consequence of fear from judgmental others, or internalized self-judgment.

Currently one of the most prominent forms of experiential therapy is emotion-focused therapy (EFT; [Greenberg, 2002](#)), which has as its central focus understanding the way emotions organize experiential consciousness and the process by which such emotional processing is generally adaptive or maladaptive. Consistent with the  $P - M = > E$  formulation, the central thrust of EFT is that primary emotional responses signal key information about core needs (such as the need to be loved or competent). If an individual is attuned to those needs and arrives at those feeling states and integrates what the feeling is communicating into their higher self-consciousness, then one is in a much better place to achieve mental and relational harmony. However, if the primary adaptive emotional response is blocked because it is deemed threatening or confusing or unacceptable and either ignored or replaced with a secondary feeling (e.g., rather than feeling hurt about being rejected, the individual becomes angry at the unfairness of it and says he does not care), then there will be significant disharmony and misalignment between the core needs and emotional expression. In EFT, therapists work to coach clients to understand how to connect to their primary adaptive feelings and work through unfinished emotional business, in which they historically were not able to process their primary feelings.

### Modern Psychodynamic Approaches Align With the Relational and Defensive Systems

In his review of modern psychodynamic approaches, [Magnavita \(2008\)](#) stated that the key psychodynamic insights are that much of our motivation lies outside self-conscious awareness and that we experience conflict from opposing forces or parts of our intrapsychic make-up. He described Freud's structural and topographical models of consciousness, which attempt to characterize how and why some material is readily accessible to consciousness, whereas other material, especially that which is threatening to one's real or perceived status or identity, is often avoided, repressed or filtered out. As described above in CAST, the defensive system exists "in between" the subconscious experiential/relational systems and the self-conscious justification systems. Moreover, the catalogue of defense mechanisms delineated by psychodynamic theorists serves as an excellent starting point for understanding the structure and organization of the defensive system.



In addition to exploring how the psychodynamic view focuses on defenses, Magnavita (2008) also emphasized the “relational turn” that psychoanalysis has taken in the past several decades. For example, he pointed out that rather than the unconscious being seen as a repository for unacceptable sexual and aggressive feelings, it is now considered primarily in terms of subconscious relational schema, scripts, expectations, and desires that people use to navigate the social world. In addition, attachment theory now provides a dominant lens through which early experiences shape social needs and motives. Such shifts in conceptualizing subconscious driving forces are highly congruent with the map of the relational system provided by the influence matrix.

In reviewing the key therapeutic elements, Magnavita (2008) described how the psychodynamic therapist seeks to enter the patient’s relational system and restructure it through a corrective emotional experience and through insight that is achieved via the interpretations made by the therapist. Magnavita reviewed the two Malan Triangles as the central conceptual frames that guide contemporary psychodynamic approaches. The first Malan triangle, *The Triangle of Conflict* with its three poles of impulses/feelings, anxiety, and defenses, provides a basic schema for how the filtering process works in the defensive system. The second Malan triangle, *The Triangle of Persons*, takes into account the internal working models of the individual, how they are formed by important others early in life (and are especially impacted by trauma), and how they are impacted by current relations. That is, the Triangle of Persons provides a general schema of the relationship and interpersonal system. In sum, the psychodynamic approach attempts to understand an individual’s character structure via the lenses of relationship processes and defense and therapy is structured on gaining insight into those processes and fostering adaptive correction in the context of a healing therapeutic relationship.

### The Cognitive Approaches Align With the Justification System

Kellogg and Young (2008) characterize cognitive approaches as *semantic therapies* because the focus and techniques tends to be on the language-based interpretations and belief networks. They note the influential work of Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis and state that what organizes the cognitive perspective is a foundational assumption that “emotional disturbances are seen as emerging from problematic, maladaptive, and/or unrealistic interpretations.” Major forms cognitive therapy can be understood as a systematic approach of becoming aware of, assessing, and changing one’s justification system. For example, traditional Beckian cognitive therapy works by teaching individuals how verbal interpretations and self-talk feedback on feeling states and subsequent actions. Beliefs (i.e., justifications in the current framework) such as, “I will likely fail at this” or “She will never like me” activate feelings of failure and defeat and tend to lead to behavioral avoidance and contribute to maladaptive cycles.

The focus of cognitive therapy is to develop awareness of one’s justification system and to determine the validity and adaptiveness of various beliefs. For example, it is common in cognitive therapy to teach patients to conceive of their verbal cognitive system as consisting of three levels: (a) automatic thoughts, (b) intermediate reasoning, and (c) core beliefs. Patients are then taught to link the content of their beliefs at those levels to feelings and actions, and

then to develop systematic ways, via collaborative empiricism, to determine which justifications are accurate and helpful and which are not.

It is worth noting that there has been a shift in the past two decades toward “third wave” cognitive-behavioral therapies (e.g., ACT; DBT). These approaches tend to take a slightly different approach to relating to one’s thoughts and feelings. Rather than attempting a systematic analysis of whether or not one is making adaptive or maladaptive interpretations as traditional cognitive approaches tended to do, third wave approaches emphasize the need to be aware of and accept one’s thoughts and feelings regardless of their content. The emphasis is less on trying to develop an adaptive control of one’s justification system, as being able to observe and accept one’s stream of conscious thought and not engage in experiential avoidance (defensiveness of unwanted feelings or images). With their emphasis on mindful awareness and acceptance, third wave approaches thus tend to have more conceptual space for the experiential and defensive systems.

A central feature of CAST is the claim that the five systems of character adaptation line up strongly with the primary foci of the various major paradigms of individual psychotherapy. Another integrative feature of CAST is that, by virtue of it being grounded in Henriques’s unified approach, it is a bio-psycho-social model, which is a broad framework that has unifying potential for professional psychology (Melchert, 2015). CAST also lines up with modern personality theory by providing a big five scheme for the mechanisms underlying characteristic adaptations, as delineated by McAdams and Pals (2006). Figure 4 provides a schematic representation capturing these links. Consistent with McAdams and Pals framework, on the left hand side, are the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of complexity which provide a context in which to view the current individual’s ways of adapting. The lines represent the individual’s history across the bio-physiological processes, learning and mental development, and the relational-social-cultural contexts in which the individual has been immersed. In the middle are the five systems of character adaptation, arranged from the most basic (habit) to the most evolutionarily advanced (justification), and on the right is the correspondence between these systems and the major paradigms in individual psychotherapy. With CAST, one can see that the different major paradigms have

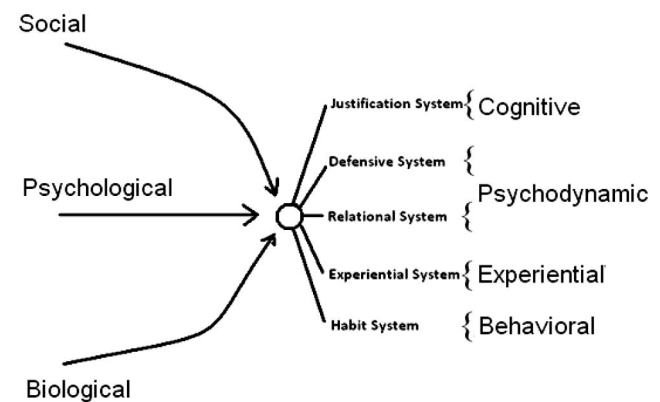


Figure 4. Corresponding CAST with the biopsychosocial dimensions and major paradigms.



emphasized different systems of character adaptation, thus allowing for a much more unified view of psychotherapy.

### CAST and Key Domains of Human Psychology

With linkages forged between the systems of character adaptation and key insights in psychotherapy, the focus can shift back to how the five systems relate to key aspects of human psychology, including personality traits, memory, dual processing models of human consciousness, and identity. When this section is considered in connection with the previous section, one can see how CAST consolidates information and builds conceptual bridges between perspectives in psychotherapy and the science of human psychology. It must be stated these brief summaries offer only an outline and that much future work is necessary to fully capture the complicated relationship between the elements of CAST and these important other domains of human personality and functioning.

### CAST and Personality Trait Theory

Historically there has been much debate, confusion, and controversy surrounding the relationship between personality traits and the actual mechanisms underlying personality (Cervone, 2005). The primary reason for this is because personality traits were identified originally via the lexical hypothesis and subsequently via analyzing individual differences in response sets to self-report items; however, these analytic tools are far removed from specifying actual brain-based or mental mechanisms that enable human behavior to occur under specific circumstances. With its formulation for different systems of adaptation, CAST begins to provide a framework that can potentially connect the findings from trait research with the mechanisms underlying human behavior.

Consistent with the work by Nettle (2006) on the evolutionary psychology of traits, the current framework interprets the big five traits of Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Openness, and Conscientiousness as indicators of individual difference on key parameters of character adaptation. The most basic mental systems in the current model are the habit and the experiential system. As reviewed above, the experiential system is conceptualized as an affectively organized phenomenological system that functions on the control formulation of  $P - M = > E$ , which means that an animal's perception of what the current state is referenced against motivational goal states that, in turn, cultivate energizing emotional states that organize and guide response strategies. BIT posits that there are two broad classes of motivational-emotional systems, one to approach benefits and another to avoid costs. It is here that the linkages to Extraversion and Neuroticism are made. In this view, Extraversion is fundamentally about energy, positive affect, and (social) engagement. That is, the trait of extraversion is conceived as the "set point" for approach in the  $P - M = > E$  formulation, such that individuals high in extraversion are, on average, more likely to see opportunity, are more willing to expend energy to get involved, and have readily activated and responsive reward systems. In a parallel fashion, neuroticism is fundamentally about negative emotions, heightened reactivity, and threat identification. Thus, neuroticism is seen as a "set point" for avoidance, such that individuals high in neuroticism are likely to experience negative emotions more intensely, see problems and difficulties (and thus have a pessimistic cognitive style), and work to avoid such distressing experiences in the future.

In terms of the evolution and layering of the neuro-information processing systems, the relational system comes next. As discussed, the influence matrix provides a map of the architecture of the relational system, which is organized by perceptual schema, relational motives, and emotional responses that guide self-in-relation-to-other in social exchange processes. This formulation suggests that individuals may have different "set points" for social exchange, with some on the "self" side of the equation and others on the "other" side of the equation (Henriques, 2011). This dimension of individual differences on self-relative-other is well described by trait Agreeableness, which essentially characterizes how angry, hostile, and self-focused one is versus how sympathetic, warm, affiliative and other-oriented one is. It should be noted here that because the influence matrix is an extension of the experiential system, it also includes elements of Extraversion and Neuroticism. Neuroticism will relate to how intensely individuals experience threats to low relational value and related emotions of sadness, anxiety, shame, guilt, and anger. Likewise, Extraversion relates to how energized an individual is in seeking social contacts and approaching situations that might lead to high relational value (see Henriques, 2011, pp. 104–106).

The last two systems of character adaptation are the defensive and justification systems and they have functional correspondence to the last two personality traits of Conscientiousness and Openness. In this light, trait Conscientiousness corresponds to the dynamic relation between self-conscious justification and the impulses from the "lower", more base and impulsive emotional systems. That is, someone high in Conscientiousness is readily able to internalize the achievement ideals of society and has the capacity to organize, guide and regulate their impulses across time in a predictable, orderly way. Finally, the defensive system exhibits some clear correspondence to trait Openness. That is, it refers to the extent an individual's justification system is fluid, receptive, and open to new ideas or feelings or is shut off, closed and averse to exploring novel information or experiences.

### CAST and the Three Systems of Memory

In addition to the relatively well-known difference between working memory and long-term memory, over the last two decades much progress has been made delineating different memory storage systems (Squire, 2004). The most basic distinction in memory storage systems is between declarative memory and implicit or procedural memory systems. Procedural memories refer to learned performances' elicited response in particular circumstances and have been found to be quite separate from consciousness and can operate even when conscious memory systems are damaged (Duhigg, 2012). In contrast, declarative memory systems refer to the explicit, conscious recall of various events. In humans, declarative memory systems can be further broken down into episodic memories, which are memories of events the individual has lived through and semantic memories, which are linguistically stored facts about the world (Tulving, 1972). To clearly disentangle these three memory systems, consider the following: Knowing how to ride a bike is stored in the procedural memory system, whereas recalling the first time one rode a bike is an episodic memory, whereas knowing whether or not local laws require one to wear a helmet is stored in semantic memory. CAST posits that these memory systems line up with the major systems of adaptation.

Procedural memory systems correspond to the habit system, episodic memory systems correspond to the experiential (and relational) systems, and semantic memory corresponds to the justification system. In addition, the defensive system links psychodynamic perspectives on how motivation, conflicting drives, and memory can potentially be linked (e.g., via repression).

### CAST, Dual Processing, and Identity

CAST also lines up well with dual processing models of human cognition and consciousness, and recent work on identity. Consistent with much work in cognitive psychology (e.g., Kahneman, 2011), the unified approach largely supports a dual processing view of the human mind. The first mental system, variously called System 1 (Evans & Stanovich, 2013), the experiential system (Epstein, 1994) or automatic processing (Anchin & Singer, 2016), is framed by BIT and corresponds to the habit, experiential, and relational systems, which are nonverbal, behavioral guidance systems that often operate automatically (i.e., without self-conscious deliberative reflection). The second system of mentation, which is referenced respectively by the above scholars as System 2, the rational system, or deliberative processing, corresponds with the justification system.

Identity was one of McAdams and Pals's (2006) big five elements of personality, which was defined as "the integrative life stories or personal narratives, that individuals construct to make meaning" about their lives and the world around them. This lines up well with the justification system in CAST. Moreover, it is worth noting that the unified approach in general and JH in particular offer a framework for human self-consciousness that is directly congruent with McAdams's (2013) conception of the ontogenetic emergence of self and identity. As noted by Henriques and Stout (2012), the private and public justification systems are not clearly separated early in human development. As language develops, specific actions are either inhibited or allowed depending on the strength of the rule, the magnitude of the impulse, and the development of executive functioning. However, the private justification system emerges as speech and dialogue is internalized and in later childhood and certainly by early adolescence there is a distinct, private self-consciousness system that becomes the seat of reflective self-awareness in adults (Henriques, 2011).

This conception is directly consistent with McAdams (2013) formulation of the self as evolving across three phases from social actor to agent to author. Specifically, the early interactions that give rise to the reflective sense of self take place in social exchanges, and as a young child the individual behaves largely as a social actor, claiming what is legitimate and what is not as a function of social roles, rewards and punishments, and other elements that arise from "repeated performances" on the social stage of life. However, as children grow into middle childhood, a different conception of self emerges. Now they become their own audience, judge, and reference point. In other words, they become their own agent where they can reflect and decide on goals, motives, and values and make personal plans for their future. Finally, in adulthood, the agent evolves into an author, such that the adult self-system functions as a reflective storyteller who develops plot lines, themes, and a grand narrative that integrates and justifies their life choices.

As a conceptual map, CAST provides linkages to the major paradigms in individual psychotherapy and it provides a heuristic map to link key concepts in human psychology, such as personality traits, domains of memory and dual processing models of mind. But CAST offers more than just a conceptual guide, as it can provide a framework for thinking about the whole person in the context of a therapeutic setting.

### Applying CAST to Conceptualizing Clients

A conference presentation in 2010 at the annual meeting of the Society for the Exploration of Psychotherapy Integration in Florence, Italy pointed to how a CAST approach might facilitate understanding between psychotherapists who adopt different theoretical orientations. The presentation consisted of Leslie Greenberg (one of the founders of the Emotion Focused perspective) and Paul Wachtel (an integrative psychodynamic therapist) critiquing a videotape series of cognitive-behavioral therapy for perfectionism conducted by Martin Antony (Wachtel & Greenberg, 2010). The patient was a motivated, attractive young woman completing a graduate degree in psychology, who strove for perfection in many areas of her life. She was extremely focused on organizing, planning, and succeeding at everything she did. She also had occasional panic attacks and issues concerning her body image. In the tape, Antony focused largely on the women's habit system (i.e., her day to day actions) and her automatic thoughts, the portion of the justification system emphasized by traditional cognitive psychotherapy. In contrast, her emotions and felt experiences, her relationship processes and internal working models, and her defenses were not the point of emphasis. Perhaps not surprising given their orientations, Wachtel and Greenberg criticized Antony for not addressing these elements.

The position taken here is that if psychotherapists were taught to view clients from the lens of CAST, this contrast in approaches would diminish and individuals from different perspectives would be in a better place to articulate the domains of adaptation they focus on and why they do so. To make that point and to provide clarification for how the CAST approach works, I will offer an example a case presentation, followed by a conceptualization guided by the CAST approach.

*Kenneth is a 28-year-old, African American male who six months ago returned from his second tour in Afghanistan. He received an honorable discharge following an injury to his shoulder, a wound which as healed quite well. He currently works at a food processing factory. He is married with two children, 4 and 7. He was referred via a physician to who reported that Kenneth told him he was depressed, having nightmares and experiencing marital difficulties.*

*Kenneth appeared well-groomed, attractive, and friendly, but also was guarded and uncertain. He initially stated he did not know what he should be talking about. He avoided questions about his tour in Afghanistan and minimized the problems he was having, both regarding symptoms and with his wife. Somewhat surprisingly, a question about his family of origin got him talking. He reported that he was close to his mother although she had bouts of depression after her husband (and his father) left the family when Kenneth was 8. That made Kenneth "the man of the house" as he was the oldest and the only son (two sisters, aged 6 and 3 at the time). He did not see his father much after that and resolved to be strong for his mother and his sisters. He did well in high school, played football and had a number of good friends. He enlisted in the army because there was not enough*

money for college and he felt it provided the best opportunity for him. He was married at 21. He was originally stationed in the states, but then had his first tour in Afghanistan at 24, for 12 months. He was there for 6 months during his second tour when he was shot. It was his first serious injury, although he had seen quite a bit of combat.

From this description, what follows presents an example of how we might translate the case presentation into a holistic conceptualization based on CAST, which orients the practitioner to develop an understanding of Kenneth via consideration of the biological, learning and developmental, and sociocultural contexts, his character via the five systems of adaptation (habit, experiential, relational, defensive, and justificatory), and his current and likely future environmental stressors and affordances.

*It seems Kenneth is at an important transitional stage in his life and it is likely that the avoidance of certain important emotions, beliefs about himself, others and the world around him, and conflicts regarding relational needs have combined with past trauma, lifestyle changes, and environmental and social stressors leaving him feeling powerless, disconnected, alienated and discouraged. Associated with these problems, there is evidence that he shutting down in some areas and may meet criteria for a Major Depressive Episode. In addition, there is good reason to believe he may be experiencing symptoms of posttraumatic stress.*

*Depressive episodes impact brain functioning in a way that makes individuals more susceptible to future episodes and especially because this may be a recurrent episode, it increases the importance of getting symptom relief and thus medication should be considered. Additional biological contextual variables include consideration of the evolutionary history of the species (which is especially relevant here in terms of the basic human need for relational value), the unique genetic make-up of Kenneth, and his current physiology and anatomy. Important in this context are his mother's history of depression, the shoulder injury he sustained in combat, and any other information that might be obtained from his physician.*

*Next, CAST orients the clinician to consider Kenneth's learning and developmental context. This includes his reinforcement and punishment history, his role models, past stressors, patterns of attachment and parental discipline, emotional expressiveness in the family, peer relations, and major life turning points, including triumphs and traumas. In this context it is crucial to consider Kenneth's father leaving the family when he was 8 years old, and his role changing to "the man of the house." Additionally, his football career in high school, peer group in high school, and his later military career support the hypothesis that he has found successes in athletics and more masculine domains and this is where he feels comfortable and gains support and respect from his peers. Important past stressors and watershed moments in Kenneth's life are the abandonment by his father at age 8, the parental role he was required to assume and becoming a caregiver at a young age, his two tours in Afghanistan and injury, and his changing identity from civilian to military then back to civilian life.*

*A final larger context to consider in Kenneth's case is the social and cultural context in which he has lived. This context includes the microlevel social/relational/family environment of the individual, the meso-level community-level influences, and the broader macrolevel societal values. In this context, Kenneth's identity as an African American male and as a war veteran come into play; it would be important to assess what customs, values, roles, and norms he perceives and identifies with in these areas. Additionally, at the community level, his geographic location, his socioeconomic status, and the*

*level of support he feels he has (for instance from the VA) would be crucial. Finally, at the microlevel his identity as husband and father are essential and I would want to know more about his individual relationship with his wife and children. Specifically, I would be interested in how he describes the "marital difficulties" he is having with his wife. Additionally, I would want to know about his current friends and how his military friends view his injury and honorable discharge.*

*In describing who Kenneth is and what he might be experiencing, it is helpful to conceptualize him through the five systems of character adaptation. The most basic of these systems is the habit system. Here we look at Kenneth's daily routines, general activity levels, patterns of eating, sleeping, sexual activity, and exercise, and triggers that evoke particular responses. Additional data are needed regarding these domains. From the vantage point of his general lifestyle adaptation, it is crucial to note that Kenneth has had to transition from military to civilian life directly. His behavioral repertoire was radically different in a previous context and it will be crucial to assess how Kenneth has experienced and attempted to adjust to this lifestyle transition. In addition, sleep and substance use patterns would be crucial to consider, as well as eating and exercise.*

*The second system of adaptation, the experiential system, refers to Kenneth's nonverbal feelings, images and sensory aspects of mental life. Emotions play a key organizing role in this system, especially in their relation to motives and perceptions. Kenneth presented initially as someone who may have a restricted range of emotional expression, wanting to appear "strong" for his family and tough to fit the mold that has been modeled for him through athletics and military service. Thus, he is likely overregulated in many of the negative emotions he experiences and may even be inhibiting or restricting feeling emotions that he equates with weakness, such as sadness and guilt. From an emotion-focused lens, he may often experience anger or frustration or numbness as a secondary emotion to his primary feelings of sadness, guilt, or shame. In addition, it is very likely there are traumatic episodic memories that he is avoiding.*

*The relational system refers to the internal working models and self-other schema that guide Kenneth in his social relationships. By being honorably discharged from the military and now working a food processing plant rather than serving his country it is highly likely that his sense of relational value and social influence has dropped, which likely leaves him feeling empty and adrift. This change most likely causes him to question his role as the provider in the family and he may feel that with his new job he is not respected or valued either in his family or by society at large. Based on this, Kenneth's basic human desire to be known and understood by others (i.e., relational value) is not being met or least not being fully met.*

*In addition, it would be important to explore both his history of attachment, periods in his past that he felt more or less secure and examine the process dimensions of power, love and freedom that operate as he attempts to navigate his feelings of relational value. From his history of taking care of his family of origin, his "team" history in football and the military, and his peer relationships from the influence matrix lens he tends to fall on the more communal/giver dimension in many circumstances. That is, if he can follow an authority toward good end, he tends to be more communal and have a high need for affiliation. In conjunction with his need for affiliation (need for love), Kenneth is likely and willing to be influenced by other people (moderate to low need for freedom). It is also clear that, via his more masculine identity, he also has the need for rank and status. There is a clear conflict in this relational system as Kenneth's affiliation needs are not being met by a group of close peers, as he is not*



longer in the military and surrounded by his friends and he may feel that he no longer can play the role he hoped to serve in his family. Furthermore, now that he is discharged, Kenneth may question his agreeableness and dependency as he questions his social role in a job he sees as having little potential and in his family where he feels he is not playing the role he should. Finally, his dominance needs may be questioned as he cannot play the role he hoped and feels that he has little power. This system is an area where Kenneth may be struggling, as evident by the conflicts with his wife.

The defensive system can be thought of in terms of how people cope with distressing thoughts and experiences, as well as how they filter out certain subconscious processes from full awareness. In the context of discussing his experiential system, it was noted that he likely avoids much of what he feels. It would also be important to explore what he filters from others. I would explore whether Kenneth had any core feeling of guilt or shame or rage regarding his discharge from the military and how that might be affecting his current functioning. Additionally, from a psychodynamic perspective, one can wonder about his experience as a child after his father left and whether there is a part of Kenneth that subconsciously worries about his relationship with his children, after he left them for two tours. He may have a subconscious fear of repeating his father's history and abandoning his children and that they might grow up without a father. These are ideas that may be "unjustifiable" and thus avoided or repressed. In short, it would be crucial to pay attention to how Kenneth deals with images, drives, and experiences that might be anxiety provoking and examine his degree of insight and his capacity to become aware of these structures.

The final system of adaptation refers to the justification system, or the language-based beliefs and values that an individual uses to legitimize actions and develops a meaningful worldview. Kenneth's justification system consists of his expectations for society based on his traditional masculine gender roles and a sense of inadequacy about his current ability to meet those expectations. In the context of the assessment and gathering information, much of that is already filtered through the justification system. However, it is crucial to get a deep sense of both Kenneth's private justifications about himself and others, and what he filters from others in the public sphere. The meaning of his transition from the military to his work in the food processing plant is crucial to explore, as are the meaning of his symptoms, difficulties with depression, and how he thinks about himself. Specifically, does he have an inner critic that is blaming himself for everything that goes wrong? Additionally, his wife may have to go back to work (if she was not working already), thus he may believe that he is failing as the provider and "man of the house." Compared with his own past, Kenneth's new job may not allow him to serve a greater good and may not present as many opportunities for him or his family. From a more cognitive and social psychological view, Kenneth may feel pessimistic about his life trajectory, he may have low self-efficacy regarding his capacity to function as a father or a worker, and that his life is unfolding through an external locus of control. Finally, from a more existential perspective, it would be crucial to assess his identity for themes of agency versus powerlessness and coherence and purpose versus fragmentation and meaninglessness.

This section introduces a way of conceptualizing people grounded in CAST that is congruent with the key insights from the major paradigms in individual psychotherapy and modern research in personality more generally. The point is to show that a CAST conceptualization is feasible, and that it provides a helpful and convenient way to develop a holistic view of a person. The

argument at this stage is that CAST is a helpful, coherent conceptual framework. Although this is an important and worthwhile goal in and of itself, ultimately, the real question for psychotherapists is whether this formulation can improve assessment and interventions.

Work is currently being conducted that utilizes CAST, the Nested Model of Well-being (Henriques et al., 2014), and several other integrative formulations to develop a Well-being Checkup System that evaluates an individual on the domains of functioning identified by CAST to quickly develop a case formulation that points to evidence based recommendations for adaptive change. Thus, via this Well-Being Checkup process, one ascertains a comprehensive picture, and one can then make choices about which domains to intervene. For example, one may decide that the inner critic is very active and thus engage in cognitive or mindfulness strategies or one might see behavioral shutdown as key and focus on enhancing activation, mastery and pleasure or one might see the interpersonal relationship as key and emphasize adaptive growth in that area. Research is currently underway to determine if this comprehensive checkup system grounded in the CAST formulation offers incrementally better outcomes than assessment and intervention approaches grounded in a single theoretical orientation.

### Conclusion and Future Directions: CASTing an Integrative Bridge Between Personality and Psychotherapy

The fields of personality and psychotherapy are vast and consist of almost an endless number of domains, findings, paradigms and techniques for intervention. This terrain can be characterized as being in a state of fragmented pluralism, meaning that the existing frameworks are contradictory or incompatible, often stemming from fundamentally different paradigms. The consequence of this disorganization and fragmentation can be seen in the fact that the ties between modern personality theories and psychotherapy are, according to Singer (2005), as weak as they have ever been. Yet, there is hope because recently there have been scholars in both personality theory and psychotherapy that have recognized the need for integrative models that provide coherent metaframeworks that can organize and consolidate our understanding. CAST seeks to further advance this integration by offering a framework that can build bridges between integrative models of personality theory and integrative psychotherapy.

Although CAST functions to provide a clear conceptual map that integrates across a number of different domains, there nevertheless is much future work to be done. Additional empirical work needs to be done exploring the proposed conceptual linkages between the five systems of adaptation and domains in human psychology such as traits, memory, and identity. For example, CAST makes the prediction that there may be a general adaptive personality type, one that is characterized by effective early adaptation to one's environment that results in an adult that is low in neuroticism, and relatively high in extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness. Although there is some research to suggest this is indeed the case (e.g., Musek, 2007), researchers would need to explore the developmental linkages suggested by CAST to determine if this general factor of character adaptation is valid.



Additional empirical work is necessary to explore the utility of CAST in guiding psychotherapeutic interventions. The argument is CAST provides clinicians with an effective map of adaptive or maladaptive patterns which can lead to a holistic conceptualization that can be readily shared with the patient and lead to effective, evidence based interventions. However, this assertion cannot be made confidently without data to back it up and research programs are currently underway that utilize CAST to develop comprehensive psychological check-ups which lead to formulations about how to foster adaptive outcomes. Specifically, individuals take comprehensive psychological assessments designed to assess the domains delineated by CAST and then are given feedback on their overall psychological functioning, their habits and lifestyles, their emotions and emotional functioning, their relationship functioning, and their identity and coping (which blends the justification and defensive systems). With such a map, individuals can get a much clearer picture of their functioning, grounded in a holistic, integrative formulation.

Psychology has made great strides in its capacity to develop sophisticated research methods and statistics to elucidate causal relationships between broad variables. However, it has not been able to provide clear maps of the discipline in a way that organizes broad domains of inquiry in a conceptually clear and coherent way. To fully advance as a modern, cumulative science, psychology must address its chaos at the conceptual level and this is the problem the unified approach attempts to solve (Henriques, 2013). CAST advances this argument by offering the field a new big five that effectively bridges modern integrative approaches to personality theory and psychotherapy.

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Received July 27, 2016

Revision received November 28, 2016

Accepted December 5, 2016 ■

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