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Personality and the conduct of everyday life

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to present a theory of persons that is rooted in the way persons conduct their everyday lives. The approach and the key concepts in the theory are presented in the second, central part of the paper. This theoretical approach to personhood is unusual. Current research on personality recognizes that personality must be studied in the interplay between person-situation-behavior. In the first part of the paper I present some of the core issues in those studies. The theoretical approach aims at resolving these issues. These issues are one of the two major sources of inspiration for the theoretical approach. The other important source of inspiration are studies of psychological interventions. In the third part of the paper I present a study that illuminates how the theory may provoke and enrich our understanding of interventions.

Key words: conduct of everyday lives, personhood, personality, person-situation-behavior, psychological interventions

1. Unresolved core issues in research on personality

1.1 Person-situation-behavior

Any statement about personality rests on three classes of elements: a) personality factors, b) the situation in which these factors are studied or predicted to manifest themselves, and c) the behavior in which these personality factors are expressed and which affects them. Conscientiousness, for instance, is manifested in this type of behavior in that situation.

The often heated person-situation debate in personality psychology has led to widespread agreement that we must study personality in relation to situations and behavior. But there is no agreement on how to measure the relations between personality-situation-behavior empirically; nor is there agreement on the theoretical weight given to each aspect; nor is there agreement on how to explain the interrelation of these three aspects.

I will here use a critical analysis of key issues in recent research on person-situation-behavior to show that a person's conduct in everyday life plays a central role in personality.

Mischel is a central figure in the person-situation debate (e.g., Mischel, 1968; Mischel, 2004; Mischel & Shoda, 2008). In a classic study by Shoda, Mischel and Wright (1994) 84 children were observed for 150 hours at a summer camp. Shoda and colleagues analyzed their aggressive behaviors and concluded that every child was characterized by a distinctive behavioral personality signature. One child acted aggressively when teased by peers. Another acted aggressively when warned by an adult. Shoda and colleagues maintained that the stable individual patterns emerged from the child's history of being sensitized to particular features of situations. In researching links between person-situation-behavior we must therefore identify which features of situations are psychologically important. Table 1 from their study showed how Shoda and colleagues did this (ibid., p. 676). Reading the table from left to right we can see that they considered a "setting" as holding "nominal situations" which were defined by "the structure of a given ecology (the setting), rather than by their potential psychological impact on, and meaning for, the person" (ibid., p. 675). They also insisted that only particular interpersonal psychological events contained in these nominal situations were psychologically important features of situations. For example, woodworking is "a nominal situation that contains such diverse interpersonal psychological events as being praised, frustrated, teased, and punished" (ibid., p. 675). As the same events can be found in many nominal situations, according to their approach catalogues of general types of interpersonal events can be created across situations. In this way, Shoda and colleagues constructed an ABC of interpersonal events which were held to be unaffected by the setting in which they occurred, for example

Table 1 (from Shoda, Mischel & Wright, 1994)
Examples of Ecological Settings, Nominal Situations, Interpersonal Situations, and Psychological Features

Setting	Nominal situations	Interpersonal situations	Psychological features
Camp	Woodworking	When peer initiated positive contact When peer teased, provoked or threatened When praised by an adult When warned by an adult When punished by an adult	peer, positive peer, negative adult, positive adult, negative adult, negative
	Cabin meeting	When peer initiated positive contact When peer teased, provoked or threatened When praised by an adult When warned by an adult When punished by an adult	peer, positive peer, negative adult, positive adult, negative adult, negative
School	Playground	When peer initiated positive contact When peer teased, provoked or threatened When praised by an adult When warned by an adult When punished by an adult	peer, positive peer, negative adult, positive adult, negative adult, negative
	Classroom	When peer initiated positive contact When peer teased, provoked or threatened When praised by an adult When warned by an adult When punished by an adult	peer, positive peer, negative adult, positive adult, negative adult, negative
Home	Mealtime	When peer initiated positive contact When peer teased, provoked or threatened When praised by an adult When warned by an adult When punished by an adul	peer, positive peer, negative adult, positive adult, negative adult, negative
	Watching TV	When peer initiated positive contact When peer teased, provoked or threatened When praised by an adult When warned by an adult When punished by an adult	peer, positive peer, negative adult, positive adult, negative adult, negative

at camp, at school, or at home. In other words, they studied the psychological features of particular interpersonal events rather than relations between person, behavior and situations in a broader sense. They continued to do this in later studies (e.g., Shoda & LeeTiernan, 2002).

Mischel and colleagues' work is important and interesting but encumbered with the following limitations:

- Shoda and colleagues reduced "situations" to behaviors – in other studies (e.g., Shoda and LeeTiernan, 2002) even traits – of a person in that situation.

- They ignored the psychological significance of material things and of the material and social arrangement of situations (Costall & Dreier, 2006).
- They did not study how events and interpersonal relations were affected by the setting in which they occurred (Dreier, 2008a).
- Like many others, Shoda and colleagues were so keen on illuminating personality factors that they did not study the situational and behavioral factors; nor did they study the interplay between all three factors in a comprehensive and thorough manner. In line with their intuitive notion of personality, they instead sought to capture enduring, personal characteristics underlying individual patterns of variation (Mischel, 2004, p. 1). Fleeson (2004) and Fleeson and Leicht (2006) show a similar interest.
- When they studied a person in more than one situation, they analyzed each situation separately, as if it were unaffected by the other situations in which that person also took part (see also Funder, 2005; Wagerman & Funder, 2009).

Studying the relations between person, situation and behavior is of fundamental importance to personality psychology. But the ways in which personality psychology defines environments and their interactions with persons are marked by important limitations which have been lamented for decades (Funder, 2001; Lewis, 2002). What is meant by a situation and its links with persons and behaviors remains vague. Baumeister, Vohs and Funder (2007) have similarly pointed out that personality research also neglected to study behavior, even during the APAs "Decade of Behavior". The illumination of the relation between behavior, situation and person is limited and skewed.

1.2 Person-situation-behavior in everyday life

Some researchers have sought to compensate for this imbalance and to increase the ecological grounding and validity of personality research. Thus, Mehl, Gosling and Pennebaker saw "an urgent need for observational research that linked aspects of people's personalities to their daily behaviors, environments, and interactions" (2006, p. 864). In the latest *Handbook of Research Methods in Personality Psychology* Craik insisted that we need field studies revealing a personality "through the situated, daily actions of individuals" because "Persons are known through their everyday conduct and experiences" (2007, p. 211) and their "lives are lived day by day, one day at a time, from day to day, day after day, day in day out" (Craik, 2000, p. 234; see also Fleeson, 2004). Some, for instance, Funder (2001, 2005; Wagerman & Funder, 2009) have used direct observational methods. Others, for instance, Craik (2000) used video recordings. The growth of new information technologies has fostered many new methods. Most of these involve

time sampling of naturally occurring behavior, tracking persons for a period of time by means of digital voice recorders, often also gathering information about emotional states, experiences, and situations as in methods of experience sampling (Conner, Barrett, Tugade, & Tennen, 2007; Fleeson, 2004; Fleeson & Leicht, 2006; Mehl et al., 2006). There is also renewed interest in methods of solicited diaries to "capture life as it is lived" (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003, p. 579).

Some of these methods adopt a third person perspective, others a first person perspective. Some researchers are mainly interested in the frequency of occurrence of particular acts or traits (Craik, 2000; Mehl et al., 2006). Thus, Fleeson (2004) found that the variability of an individual person's manifestation of traits across situations was at least as large as the variability of traits across persons. Other researchers are interested in emotions and variations in arousal, and still others focus on grounding issues of personality in relation to everyday time use.

I shall now briefly mention one example from this body of research, a study by Kahneman et al. (2004) who developed a "Day Reconstruction Method." Compared with experience sampling, this is a less time-consuming research method and it is less disruptive to the ongoing activities of the persons studied. Drawing on advances in research on assisted recall, they asked persons to write a short narrative of the day before, divide it into a sequence of episodes and then to answer a number of questions about each episode in a survey format. Kahneman et al. studied 313 working mothers with this method and they found interesting co-variations over the course of the day between their degrees of energy/tiredness, their emotional states and their levels of stress, situations, and activities. From my perspective, their most striking finding was the deep sense of ambivalence experienced by these working mothers upon returning home from work. On the one hand, caring for their children was of the utmost importance for them. On the other hand, they experienced considerable negative affect directed towards both their children and themselves at that time of day.

In relation to the development of theory, we can learn the following from this study:
- Kahneman et al. (2004) studied person-behavior-situations in a time sequence and not in isolated situations.
- This allowed them to capture the fact that that the impact of a situation on a person was affected by its location in the sequence of situations and activities across the day.
- Thus, variations in general emotional states did not simply follow diurnal curves of tiredness.
- But Kahneman et al. took the course of the day for granted. They treated it as a natural unit of activity.

• They did not consider the impact social arrangements have on how persons live their everyday lives.

2. A theoretical proposal

I shall now outline some basic concepts in a theory of persons which goes beyond the limitations in research on personality summarized in the first part of this paper. This theory rests on a comprehensive approach to person-situation-activity. It can guide us when studying persons in and across several situations. It considers situations as parts of the social contexts and practices in which they take place. Persons are viewed as existing in movement across time and contexts. This allows us to grasp how the order of everyday lives affects the functioning of persons. Other theories may also be developed to overcome the above mentioned limitations in personality research. The present theory has the advantage of strengthening the ecological validity of theorizing and of empirical findings by approaching personality from the perspective of the everyday lives of persons. It may also develop our understanding of psychological interventions, as we shall see in part three. The theory was developed as part of my own theoretically motivated studies of psychological interventions in relation to psychotherapy (Dreier, 2008a) and learning (Dreier, 2008b). It is also inspired by similar studies of interventions in other field of practice undertaken by members of my research group on "personal conduct of everyday life and interventions." The presentation of the theory will be briefly illustrated with findings from this research. Where no specific reference is given, the presentation is based on material from Dreier (2008a).

2.1 Order and arrangements

Persons live in societies with a certain social order. An important characteristic of a social order is the arrangement of the social practices through which societies and the lives of persons are re-produced and changed (Schatzki, 2002). One feature of these social arrangements is usually played down in psychology although it is important for the lives of persons. Societies are divided into diverse social contexts such as workplaces, homes, schools, and so forth. These social contexts are socio-material units for social practices. They are often institutionalized and make up the spatial dimensions of everyday life. A social context is a place for carrying out all, or particular parts of, one or several social practices such as work, education, health care, child rearing, and cooking. A social context therefore involves particular demands and responsibilities for the persons who participate in its social practice(s). Social contexts are separated from each other but they are also linked with other social contexts in particular ways which channel how social practices may be pursued across them. Moreover, the arrangement of social

contexts often defines who counts as a legitimate participant in them, due to particular personal backgrounds such as ownership, employment, competences, membership, and kinship. The arrangement of a social context also usually involves particular social positions on which particular persons take part in, in different ways. Some social contexts even include arrangements for when a person may shift to another position in that context or otherwise come to participate in other parts of its social practices over the course of time.

For example, think of schools with age-graded classes, school subjects, timetables, breaks and tracks as an institutional arrangement that shapes and affects the course and dynamics of participation and learning (Dreier, 2008b). While educational practices are mainly carried out in schools, they depend on children's lives in other social contexts and are directed at developing competences for children's participation elsewhere.

Furthermore, a small social context may be nested in a larger social context. A classroom, for example, is arranged in a particular way for carrying out a particular parts of the educational practices in the larger context of a school (Sørensen, 2009). There are also other kinds of social arrangements, such as legislations, recommendations, rules, and agendas.

The activities of persons and the relations between persons are part of social practices which take place in particular social contexts and are affected by their social arrangements. Thus, some activities and relations of a person are part of family practices and arrangements, while other activities and relations are part of, say, that person's work practices. Persons associate different concerns, purposes, and histories with such different activities, relations, practices, and contexts. The meaning and course of particular, delimited events and situations are also affected by the context and arrangements in which they occur.

Finally, there are social arrangements for how we go about living our everyday lives. First of all these social arrangements establish an ordering of when we may, or must, participate in particular social contexts. Think of the ordinary social arrangements that structure our everyday mornings, work-hours, opening-hours, evenings and nights with meals and other breaks scattered across them. Think also of workdays, weekends and vacations. These social arrangements introduce certain rhythms of activity and certain shifts, breaks, and inner tensions in the course of our everyday activities. Thus, family life is divided into one bit in the early morning and another late in the day, with much else going on elsewhere in between. Family members spend time differently at home and at work or in school. Much more could be said about the social arrangement of practices, but this suffices to remind us that we gain a richer, worldlier psychology by including it in our study of persons.

2.2 Situated participation and movement

Like other researchers with similar approaches (e.g., Harré, 1998; McAdams, 2006), I prefer the term person to denote a holistic and agentic approach to personality. As embodied beings, persons are always situated in a location from where their perspectives of experience and their activities reach out into the world. What is more, their activities and experiences are part of their relations with others which depend on and hang together in social practices. They hang together directly in the social context in which these persons are located as well as indirectly through sequences of activities, various technologies, talk and reflections linking what goes on here and now with other times and places. Persons are agents who must develop abilities in order to take part in complex social arrangements and practices and in order to affect them. A person's agency is so deeply entrenched in the social practices one lives in, that it is more adequate to talk about persons as participants and about participation than about agency and activity, action, or behavior. Particular social contexts such as a person's family contain particular relations, co-participants, and scopes of possibilities for participating. Persons associate particular concerns with particular social contexts and have particular things at stake in them. Participants pay attention to particular things, gather particular experiences, are in and nurture particular states of mind, and reflect on their lives in particular ways. But as persons move into other social contexts, such as their school or their workplace, they encounter other arrangements, positions, relations, and co-participants, where they have other concerns and other things at stake, and so their participation takes on other meanings. They pay attention to other things, gather other experiences, are in other states of mind and reflect differently on their lives. In short, the psychological functioning of persons has situated qualities and dynamics, and it varies as persons move from one context into another. This should warn us against over-generalizing assessments of persons based on their conduct in one social context.

Ordinarily, persons live everyday lives which stretch across diverse social contexts. They move across and participate in several contexts. Persons participate in some social contexts every day, in others on a regular basis, and in still others occasionally or just once. After longer or shorter periods of their lives, the combination of social contexts and their meaning to persons may change. Persons usually view a many-sided life with participation in a variety of social contexts offering a variety of relations, activities, and experiences as enriching. This may be reduced for some persons who are excluded from certain social contexts, for instance, due to unemployment or disability. The complexity of persons' lives and the diverse demands made on persons due to their participation in varied social contexts entails a corresponding need to develop diverse personal skills, competencies, and understandings.

In their complex everyday lives, persons pursue many concerns across several social contexts. In doing so, they take into account that different social contexts offer different relations and possibilities for these pursuits. Being good at directing one's pursuits across particular contexts involves being knowledgeable in relation to social arrangements. As we shall see in part three, persons compare similarities and differences between their experiences and results in different social contexts and they take advantage of this in their pursuit of complex courses of change and learning (Dreier, 2008b).

Persons also arrange the ordinary social contexts of their everyday lives to fit their preferred practices. They arrange the rooms in their homes to fit their preferred practices, say, their kitchen to fit their cooking practices, for example rearranging their spice-shelves when their food preferences change (de Léon, 2006). These are personal arrangements in relation to existing socio-material arrangements of, say, apartments. Personal arrangements often rest on agreements and understandings between participants about their preferred practices. They change these arrangements to accommodate changes in their preferences. Persons also arrange different social contexts in accordance with their situated preferences. Gosling et al. (2002) found that persons arrange their offices and bedrooms and that we can read their personalities quite well by taking these arrangements as cues.

2.3 Conduct of everyday life

Furthermore, due to the complexity of everyday lives, conducting an everyday life has become a necessity. Persons strive to get what needs to be done, and what is most important to them, done. They must make their everyday life hang together so that it does not fall apart due to their diverse activities and commitments in many social contexts and relations. Merely coping with each individual demand and situation does not suffice. They must cope with living a complex everyday life as a whole. A personal conduct of life, then, is not simply a matter of spending your time, as seen in studies of time use, or simply a life style, as a characteristic individual way of life. It is something a person must accomplish (Holzkamp, 1995, 1996). In doing so, persons may succeed and fail, more or less, with regard to securing demands and personal preferences. Persons take care of themselves through their conduct of everyday life in relation to their social arrangements. It is a deeply personal endeavor. Weber, who introduced the term a century ago in his study of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1952), emphasized the role of secularized religious values in the conduct of everyday life of the early protestant groups he studied. Religious values may certainly play a role in the conduct of everyday life. But, at a more basic level, a conduct of everyday life is a personal arrangement in relation to the social arrangements of everyday life.

A conduct of everyday life involves persons coordinating their various obliga-tions, relations, and activities with their various co-participants in various social contexts across the day. To do so, persons set up more or less loose agendas and develop more or less elaborate ordinary sequences of activities to be carried out regularly. For instance, the early morning in most families is made up of routines which coordinate and speed up certain activities and relations. While routines or habits assure that persons get what needs doing done, and get more time for other important matters, they also introduce a degree of ordinariness into everyday lives. Moreover, routines or habits are familiar and intimate sedimentations of a preferred way of conducting one's life. They may therefore hold deep personal meaning, even though this meaning is often taken for granted. Holzkamp (1995) points this out in the case of a person returning home after having been in hospital and being struck by the deep personal meaning of many homely routines. Indeed, habits rest on preferences, and they may be changed with changing preferences if the situation and one's co-participants allow it.

But in chasing generalities in the name of science, we must be careful not to overestimate the degree of regularity in everyday lives. Persons also treasure, cultivate, and pursue variations and time-outs in their everyday lives. Too much regularity makes one's everyday life too monotonous, ordinary, and boring. What is more, there are individual differences in the kinds and degrees of ordinari-ness and variation persons prefer in their everyday lives. They are manifested in individual differences in the ways in which persons prefer to conduct their eve-ryday lives. These individual differences are the stuff of many everyday conflicts between persons living in close contact.

Persons negotiate the conduct of their everyday life with various others with whom they share parts of it in various social contexts, thus, hopefully reaching a personally necessary and desired balance of activities and commitments across contexts and days. But a particular shared part of everyday life, such as a fam-ily life, has different meanings to its individual members whose everyday lives involve other social contexts which are not shared. In negotiating and arranging their shared family life, members must take the different cross-contextual compo-sitions of their everyday lives and the different individual meanings of their family life into consideration. This is one reason why arrangements of a shared part of life may vary. Arrangements may be more or less fixed and detailed or more or less loose and open. Loose and open family arrangements make it easier to seize opportunities as they emerge, as when children's friends invite them to join in activities. And more fixed and detailed family arrangements make it more certain that the responsibilities for the many chores in the conduct of everyday family life are fulfilled. Individual persons will therefore prefer different kinds and degrees of arrangements in their conduct of everyday lives. Age and gender differences

and conflicts over preferred kinds and degrees of shared family arrangements flow from this.

By establishing a conduct of everyday life, a person's life becomes marked by his or her "commitments to specific others in rich, concrete social relationships, to specific places and senses of place, to specific activities and organizations of rhythms of life" (Smith, 1987). The self-understanding which a person develops is closely linked to his or her conduct of everyday life. It is an understanding of oneself as a person with certain commitments who leads life a certain way, seizing certain opportunities, responding to situations, challenges, and setbacks, preferring certain activities, rhythms, and relations, and so forth. In other words, a person's self-understanding emerges from his or her conduct of everyday life and guides it (Holzkamp, 1995). It does not consist of a set of decontextualized attributes but develops along with a person's development of his or her conduct of life.

The development of a personal conduct of everyday life involves the learning of skills and understandings. Some of these skills and understandings have to do with how persons get through transitions in relation to shifts and breaks in their everyday activities, relations, situations, and social contexts. This is what the emotional ambivalence of the mothers returning home from work in Kahneman et al.'s (2004) study was about. At the core of this issue lay the relation between social arrangements of everyday lives, the distribution of responsibilities and the ways in which mothers, children and fathers move through the work/home life transition and arrange the course of their family evening.

As people's lives change, they must change their conduct of everyday life and their associated skills and understandings. These changes may be particularly intense and complicated when persons are affected by sudden, disrupting events, such as when a spouse is diagnosed with brain tumor (Madsen, 2011), or a screening program detects asymptomatic breast cancer in a woman (Ryle, 2010) or genetic testing reveals Huntington's disease in a family at risk (Huniche, 2009). But all persons change their conduct of everyday life many times and in many ways throughout their life. It is also particularly obvious in the course of childhood (Dreier, 2009b). The social arrangements for child development involve frequent changes in children's participation in major institutions, and shifts from one institution to another, with differing demands and commitments. This leads to frequent changes in the composition and balance of children's complex everyday lives and in their activities and relations. During the course of this, and as children become less dependent on adult and institutional arrangements of care, they must gradually develop a conduct of everyday life, their own way of taking care of themselves in social practices with the necessary skills and self-understandings.

At this point, I end the outline of a theory of persons based on their conduct of everyday life. This theory may enrich our understanding of human personality by directing our attention toward the real life interplay between person, situation, and activity and toward how persons encounter and address real life situations. It may therefore promote the ecological validity of empirical findings and theorizing in research on personality.

3. Implications for understanding psychological interventions

This section illustrates how this theoretical approach to persons may provoke and enrich our understanding of psychological interventions.

3.1 Arrangement of interventions across contexts

In general, expert practices are arranged so that they take place in a particular social context which is set off or secluded from the ordinary everyday lives of the persons they serve. Education is carried out in classrooms, therapy in sessions, health care in consultations or hospitals, and so forth. Still, these expert practices are meant to have a beneficial effect on the everyday lives of persons. Nonetheless, theories and research about these practices are surprisingly blind to the impact of this arrangement of seclusion on the course and dynamics of the processes they aim to foster. One might assume that this arrangement rests on historical experiences about this being the best way to promote the effects of interventions on the everyday lives of the persons served. And it would be reasonable to expect clear accounts of what it takes for the effects of secluded practices to impact upon the everyday lives of the persons served, as well as of which difficulties this arrangement creates for having an effect. But such accounts are sorely missing. In general, research assumes that the effects of expert practices are brought about in the immediate situation of intervention in classrooms, sessions, consultations, and so forth and afterwards merely transferred by docile pupils and patients into the everyday and applied. This account follows a notion of learning as a process of transmission-internalization-transfer-application (Dreier, 2008b; Lave, 2011). I have worked on reaching a clearer understanding of the interplay between therapy sessions and clients' everyday lives for years. When I started the project now published in the book *Psychotherapy in Everyday Life* (2008a), it soon became clear that this general understanding did not correspond with what actually made therapy work in clients' everyday lives. Besides studying persons changing in their everyday lives, this project also aimed to generate a more adequate understanding of what making interventions work involved.

The project was carried out at an outpatient unit of child psychiatry in

Copenhagen. It involved a small number of long term family therapies with me as a co-therapist. All sessions were audio taped and a research assistant interviewed the families in their homes at regular intervals throughout the period of their therapy and until half a year after its termination. In the interviews the clients were first asked about their everyday lives: what happened in your everyday lives since your previous interview? Did any changes occur? Which and how? What role did you play in them? Did you do things differently than before? Did your sessions influence these changes? And if so how? Only after these questions, were they asked about their experiences of their sessions, their therapists and their participation in sessions. This design reflected a decentered understanding of therapy. Therapy was viewed as flowing from the everyday lives of clients. Sessions were seen as particular parts of their ongoing everyday lives rather than as that from which the effect of therapy flows. The book (Dreier, 2008a) contains an elaborate presentation of the theory of persons and a detailed analysis of the interplay between sessions and everyday lives of a family and its members over a period of one and a half years. I shall mention a few main points from this analysis.

3.2 Pursuits of changes across contexts

Clients must pursue changes to their problems across social contexts because therapy sessions occur in a secluded place outside their ordinary everyday lives while their problems are parts of their everyday lives in several social contexts. They must learn to pursue a resolution to their problems into their sessions and out again into and across the everyday social contexts of their home, school, work, and so forth. To do so well, they must do something different about their problems in these social contexts and learn to combine the different things they do in a coherent manner.

   For instance, the twelve year old younger daughter in the case of family therapy (Dreier, 2008a) suffered from anxiety attacks. In the various contexts of her everyday life, these attacks had different meanings to her and she had different possibilities for doing something to overcome them. Her motives for doing something about the attacks, and her motives regarding what to do about them, differed across contexts. At home her parents helped her out and comforted her. She depended on their doing so and she did not believe that she needed to, and was able to, do something about her anxiety on her own accord. At school, though, she was afraid of being ridiculed and bullied and of losing her friends if they found out about her anxiety. This created many difficulties concerning how she managed her life in school. At one and the same time, it made overcoming the attacks important and difficult. In sessions, she treasured the chance to talk with an adult who was interested in her, but she never understood precisely how talking about anxieties might be a means to overcome them. Nonetheless, if the

therapy was to help her overcome her troubles, she had to learn to combine the different meanings of and possibilities for doing something about her anxieties into one, complex and varied pursuit of change across her various social contexts.

Even though the clients pursued changes across sessions and the various social contexts of their everyday lives, they emphasized that sessions were quite different for them compared with the other social contexts of their everyday lives. To them, sessions offered a strange intimacy, which differed from their intimacies with family and friends, among other things, because their therapists remained intimate strangers to them. They had to become familiar with and make use of the peculiar form of practice in sessions. But they emphatically insisted that at home they never talked with each other like they did in the concerted problem talk of therapy sessions. They never transferred and applied this form of talk to their talks at home. They could not and would not for many reasons. In fact, it seemed that sessions made a difference to them precisely because sessions were different.

The clients used session ideas and advice in situated ways in the diverse situations and social contexts of their everyday lives with various things at stake for them. They fitted these ideas and advice with their abilities and their varying possibilities in relation to varying co-participants in their social contexts. How an idea or a piece of advice from sessions was used and what it took to use it varied. For instance, provoked by their family troubles and the talks about them in sessions, the father in this case realized that he felt pushed around and found it difficult to identify and hold on to what he stood for. He found out that this was a common denominator of his troubles at home, in the therapy sessions with his family and their therapists, and in his workplace in relation to his colleagues and bosses. But what it took to clarify his stances and to hold on to them was quite different in these diverse social contexts. By comparing these issues and opportunities in different social contexts, he found different ways of pursuing this common feature of his troubles in his different social contexts.

Using session ideas and advice adequately often involved learning, and ideas and advice often had to be transformed to become usable. Elsewhere and later clients modified and changed ideas and advice from sessions, sometimes in surprising ways, and in ways that the therapists rarely came to know anything about. For instance, at home after a therapy session, the parents reinterpreted questions by their therapists about the recurrent troubles between their two daughters in the morning as a piece of advice to them as parents not to put up with the trouble their children caused them. This was a radical interpretation of what the therapists had had in mind as well as a radical turn in how these parents usually had reacted to their children's troubles. For some time, it turned the issue of being cross, and of who was really cross, into a major issue at home and in sessions. But this issue was also later transformed. Indeed, the clients kept on modifying session

ideas and advice because their ongoing lives kept changing. Changes in most therapy-related troubles are, in fact, open-ended. They have no definite endpoint or solution, from when on clients can definitively forget all about them and do not need to concern themselves with them any longer. This is so because clients are often initially confused or in two minds about their troubles and what to do about them and go through long-winded processes, where they reconsider and change their minds on where they stand and what they want done about their troubles and ongoing lives. Changes in troubles and changes in self-understandings go hand in hand with more comprehensive changes in clients' everyday lives. The long-winded process of the father finding out what he stood for and his holding on to this, is but one example of this.

3.3 Interventions in everyday lives

All this indicates that an intervention does not work as an effect of what an expert does so that the therapy outcome can be referred back to the expert and his procedures. What happens comes closer to the literal meaning of the word to intervene as

"(1) to come, be, or lie between, (2) to take place between two events, points of time, etc., (3) to come or be in between as something unnecessary or irrelevant, (4) to come between as an influence, as in order to modify, settle, or hinder some action, argument, etc." (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 1997, p. 707)

An intervention gets in between all that which is already ongoing. Psychotherapy research must recognize that therapy never works alone. It always works alongside and in interaction with other environmental influences, and the client's experiences and responses in relation to these influences. How it works, depends on other circumstances and events, as well as on the clients' responses and initiatives and the responses and initiatives of other persons in their ongoing everyday lives. For instance, only when an unexpected opportunity emerged for her much loved activity of horse-riding with a friend far away from home did the younger daughter begin an intense and rapid pursuit of overcoming her anxieties inside and outside sessions. Indeed, clients' everyday lives may be changing for many reasons, which affect the dynamics and course of their ongoing therapy (see also Mackrill, 2008a). That is why we need to know how therapeutic and other influences interact and are combined by clients in their everyday lives.

In clients' everyday lives many things go on at the same time and compete for their time and attention. Therapy-related concerns are therefore pursued in-between much else. They are not continuously on their minds, but interrupted by other important and not so important matters. Therapy-related change processes are discontinuous, or even scattered. They must be picked up again to be

continued, and they risk being neglected and forgotten. Since occasions to pick them up often cannot be predicted, clients must learn to seize them on the spot. They must also often negotiate with others, who must be willing to do their part, when they would agree to pick them up.

3.4 Interventions and conduct of everyday life

In general terms, how interventions work in clients' everyday lives depends on their conduct of everyday life. Thus, it is important to clients, and to those they share their lives with, that addressing troubles does not get in the way of, disturb, or overshadow the things they treasure most and all the other things they must get done in their everyday lives. In this sense, addressing troubles must be fitted into their conduct of everyday life. If an idea or a piece of advice does not fit into a person's conduct of their life, it will probably not be used or it will be dropped again. In other words, what is used from sessions depends on how it may fit into clients' everyday lives. What is called a relapse, often consists in falling back into a former conduct of everyday life which the client did not succeed in changing. An intervention is something extraordinary that must be made part of ordinary life in order to be sustained and not forgotten again after some time.

An existing conduct of everyday life sometimes needs to be changed for interventions to come to work at all. Clients may then change their conduct of everyday life in order to overcome their current troubles. We recognize this from health-care interventions in so-called life-style diseases. In family therapies, as the above case, parents may be shocked to realize that the way they take care of their children makes their children depend too much on them and restricts their development. This issue of love and care is closely linked with how often especially the mother distributes and prioritizes her commitments between her family and other social contexts. It infuses her conduct of everyday life and her self-understanding. Changes in her conduct of everyday life then foster changes in the ways in which her children address their troubles.

Thus, clients sometimes change their conduct of everyday life in order to compensate for what they see as a prior neglect or mistake. This was so for the older daughter in the above case. In the previous years, she had expanded her activities and relations in other social contexts outside the family. But she had become involved in serious trouble with her friends. These troubles normally occurred outside their family but they also occurred when she invited friends home when her parents were away. Things got so out of hand that the owner of the apartment complex threatened the family with eviction. She reacted with strong feelings of shame and was keen on returning to her former conduct of life to restore her family relationships and improve the relations between her life

inside and outside of her family. Children typically expand their activities and relations outside the family in their early school years. This shifts the balance in children's conduct of everyday life, affords explorations of new activities, and leads to new more or less long-standing friendships in peer-relations with new confidences and intimacies which are separated from close supervision by parents. Parents are often uncertain about what goes on and how their children are doing in these relations and activities which they do not come to know much about. They must increasingly practice indirect forms of care for their children from home. If their children run into trouble in their relations and activities elsewhere, the parents' care for them is easily buried behind worries. The older daughter in the above case was going through such rapid changes in the conduct of her everyday life that her self-understanding barely caught up with the ongoing changes. In certain respects, her self-understanding was ahead of herself. She focused on her hopes for the future but took much of what she hoped to be able to accomplish as something she was already capable of and entitled to. In other respects, her self-understanding lagged behind, as she was not fully aware of some of the abilities she had already developed. The issue of what constitutes a realistic self-understanding – or, as seen from her parents' perspective, their recognition of the person she had become – was therefore precarious. Clashes between uncertainty, recognition, trust and distrust then occurred as her parents did not share her beliefs about the person she now considered herself to be and her beliefs about what she was able to, and entitled to, do. In the ongoing changes occurring in the younger daughter's conduct of life, exploring activities and relations with friends meant the most to her, while she set her family commitments on stand-by and did not mind that she was cross at home because, as she saw it, she was bored at home, especially when she missed the company of her friends. The two daughters showed quite different dynamics and had a different primary location of their commitments than their mother whose conduct of life was more family-centered. They therefore put family therapy interventions to quite different uses.

Another project from my research group also illuminated the relations between clients' troubles and their conduct of everyday life. Mackrill (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2011) used solicited diaries to track the relations between counseling sessions and everyday lives of young adults who grew up in alcoholic families. In attempting to overcome their troubles, these young persons drew on many diverse sources. There were also clear indications that their troubles intensified and they sought psychological counseling when they had left home and found it difficult to shape an adult conduct of everyday life of their own together with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

4. Conclusion

It should now have become obvious that the theory of persons I have outlined is deeply inspired by the empirical study of the everyday lives of persons who are subject to expert interventions. Issues of psychological practice reminded me of the relevance of this theoretical approach and guided the direction of its development. The above theory of persons is based on empirical practice research projects which take advantage of the fact that persons who participate in interventions are interested in letting researchers know about their conduct of everyday life because interventions trigger their interests in reconsidering and changing their conduct of everyday life.

This theoretical work has also lead to new perspectives on the practice of psychology. It is my response to the question: Which kind of theory of persons do we need to account for the kind of client changes presented in this paper? It is a response to the theoretical challenges which my study and other similar studies have raised. In developing the theory, I learned important lessons from comparing the phenomena and issues in my own project with the phenomena and issues in the other projects in my research group on "personal conduct of everyday life and intervention."

But the theory of persons which I outlined addresses phenomena of a much more general nature – phenomena that pose questions regarding what it means and takes to be a person. After all, studies of psychological interventions are but one of the two main sources of its development. In more basic terms, the theory opens the study of the subjective dimensions of person-situation-activity and offers a way of linking research on personality with research on the social processes whereby persons conduct their everyday lives. In this sense, the paper argues in favor of a more ecologically valid approach to theorizing about personality within personality psychology.

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