

# THE VICTORIAN FOLK PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSONALITY AND LIFE GOALS

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# Research Question

All literature embodies a folk psychology or implicit theory of human nature (Hogan, 1976). A basic research question in the psychology of literature is the degree to which the folk psychology of an historical period's literature (a) reflects human nature as understood objectively by modern psychologists, or (b) constructs an arbitrary view peculiar to a particular time and place.



The research described here investigates the folk psychology embedded in the behavior of 583 characters in 145 canonical Victorian novels. Characters were rated on the Web by 986 readers of 19th Century British literature.

# Rater Characteristics

- z 1702 ratings contributed
- z 986 different raters
  - z 281 male, 705 female
- z Mean age = 39.7, SD = 14.2
- z Educational Level
  - z 3 less than high school
  - z 27 high school graduate
  - z 102 some college, no degree
  - z 11 associate's degree
  - z 209 bachelor's degree
  - z 274 master's degree
  - z 360 doctorate
- z When they read book
  - z 269 within past six months
  - z 242 within past year
  - z 300 within past five years
  - z 97 within past ten years
  - z 77 more than ten years ago
- z Why they read book
  - z 574 for own enjoyment
  - z 212 for class taken
  - z 199 for class taught



# Character Demographics

✧ 583 characters rated

✧ Sex: 337 male, 246 female

✧ Role

✧ 142 protagonists

✧ 250 friends of protagonists

✧ 103 antagonists

✧ 32 friends of antagonists

✧ 56 indeterminate

✧ Age

✧ 9 1-12 years

✧ 16 13-16 years

✧ 128 17-23 years

✧ 232 24-38 years

✧ 130 39-59 years

✧ 65 60+ years

✧ Physical attractiveness

✧  $M=2.26$ ,  $SD=.76$  on 3-point scale

✧ Marital status

✧ 112 initially married

✧ 255 find a spouse

✧ Goals

✧ Achieving goal a main feature? 295 yes

✧ Success in goal achievement

✧  $M=2.65$ ,  $SD=.98$  on 4-point scale

✧ Root for character?

✧  $M=2.34$ ,  $SD=.84$  on 3-point scale



## Overview of Psychological Variables

- ⌘ **Character's goals.** Participants rated the importance to the character of 12 goals described by evolutionary psychology (Hogan, 1996) and/or Holland's (1997) theory of personality and vocational choice.
- ⌘ **Character's mate preferences.** Participants rated the importance to the character of seven mate preferences studied by Buss (1989).
- ⌘ **Character's personality.** Participants rated the character's personality with the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).
- ⌘ **Emotional responses.** Participants rated the degree to which they experienced 10 possible emotional responses to the character. Evolutionary analyses of emotions (Ekman, 1994; Plutchik, 2002) informed the choice of 10 emotional response scales.

All scales were subjected to a principle components factor analysis at the item level, and factor scores were used in subsequent analyses.

# Rated Importance of Goals

- ⌘ Physical survival
- ⌘ Finding short-term romantic partner
- ⌘ Finding or keeping a spouse
- ⌘ Gaining or keeping wealth
- ⌘ Gaining or keeping power
- ⌘ Gaining or keeping prestige
- ⌘ Obtaining education or culture
- ⌘ Making friends and forming alliances
- ⌘ Nurturing or fostering offspring and kin
- ⌘ Aiding non-kin
- ⌘ Building, creating, or discovering something
- ⌘ Routine tasks to earn livelihood

Importance of all goals rated on 1-5 scale

Principle component factor analysis revealed five factors

- ⌘ *Social Dominance* (acquiring status, power, and resources at the expense of others, in a zero-sum fashion; Hogan's "getting ahead")
- ⌘ *Constructive Effort* (becoming educated while building coalitions and helping others in a nonzero-sum fashion; Hogan's "getting along")
- ⌘ *Raising a Family*
- ⌘ *Bonding in Intimate Relationships*
- ⌘ *Physically Surviving*

# Factor Analysis of Goals

Factor Loadings	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
	Social Dominance	Construc- tive Effort	Raising a Family	Bonding in Intimate Re- lationships	Physical Survival
Power	.87				
Prestige	.85				
Wealth	.76	-.32			
Aiding non-kin	-.44	.54			
Building, creating, or dis- covering something		.79			
Education or culture		.79			
Friends and alliances		.55			
Routine tasks to earn liveli- hood			.63		.42
Nurturing offspring or kin			.62		
Short-term romance			-.70	.41	
Finding/keeping a spouse				.82	
Physical survival					.84

# Long-Term Mate Preferences

- ⌘ Physical attractiveness
- ⌘ Wealth
- ⌘ Power
- ⌘ Prestige
- ⌘ Intelligence
- ⌘ Kindness
- ⌘ Reliability


Desirability of each characteristic in a spouse rated on a 1-5 scale

Principle component factor analysis revealed three factors

- ⌘ *Extrinsic Characteristics* (wealth, power, prestige)
  - ⌘ *Intrinsic Characteristics* (intelligence, kindness, reliability)
  - ⌘ *Physical Attractiveness*
- 
- ⌘ Factor scores used in subsequent analyses

# Factor Analysis of Mate Preferences

	Extrinsic Characteristics	Intrinsic Characteristics	Physical Attractiveness
Power	.87		
Prestige	.90		
Wealth	.85		
Reliability		.83	
Kindness		.83	
Intelligence		.77	
Physical Attractiveness			.96



## Emotional Reactions to Characters

- ⌘ Anger
- ⌘ Disgust
- ⌘ Contempt
- ⌘ Fear of the character
- ⌘ Fear for the character
- ⌘ Sadness
- ⌘ Admiration
- ⌘ Liking
- ⌘ Amazement
- ⌘ Indifference

Reactions rated on 1-5 scale

Principle component factor analysis revealed three factors

- ⌘ *Dislike*
- ⌘ *Sympathy*
- ⌘ *Fascination*
  
- ⌘ Factor scores used in subsequent analyses



# Factor Analysis of Emotional Reactions

	Dislike	Sympathy	Fascination
Anger	.86		
Disgust	.89		
Contempt	.83		
Fear of character	.72		
Admiration	-.73		.30
Liking	-.78		.42
Fear for character		.77	
Sadness		.83	
Amazement		-.67	.47
Indifference			-.86



# Personality

- ⌘ Personality rated with TIPI  
(Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003)
- ⌘ Characters rated on 7-point scale
  1. \_\_\_\_\_ Extraverted, enthusiastic.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Critical, quarrelsome.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ Dependable, self-disciplined.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ Anxious, easily upset.
  5. \_\_\_\_\_ Open to new experiences, complex.
  6. \_\_\_\_\_ Reserved, quiet.
  7. \_\_\_\_\_ Sympathetic, warm.
  8. \_\_\_\_\_ Disorganized, careless.
  9. \_\_\_\_\_ Calm, emotionally stable.
  10. \_\_\_\_\_ Conventional, uncreative.

Principle component factor analysis confirmed the Big Five factors

- ⌘ *Extraversion*
- ⌘ *Agreeableness*
- ⌘ *Conscientiousness*
- ⌘ *Emotional Stability*
- ⌘ *Openness to Experience*
- ⌘ Factor scores used in subsequent analyses

## ANOVAs: Character Type Differences

- ⌘ Character typology defined by
  - ⌘ Sex (male, female)
  - ⌘ Valence (good, bad)
  - ⌘ Status (major, minor)
- ⌘ 2x2x2 ANOVAs examined differences on psychological variables
- ⌘ Age differences in personality analyzed
- ⌘ Predictions from evolutionary theory:
  - ⌘ Both sexes value intrinsic characteristics
  - ⌘ Males value physical attractiveness
  - ⌘ Females value extrinsic characteristics
- ⌘ Predictions from personality research
  - ⌘ on Agreeableness, Females > Males
  - ⌘ on Emotional Stability, Males > Females
  - ⌘ over lifespan, observe increases in
    - ⌘ Agreeableness
    - ⌘ Conscientiousness
    - ⌘ Emotional Stability;
  - ⌘ decreases in
    - ⌘ Extraversion
    - ⌘ Openness to Experience

# ANOVA Results

## ⌘ **Mate Preferences**

⌘ As predicted, main effect of sex on **Extrinsic Attributes**, Females > Males ( $p < .001$ )

⌘ Also as predicted, no sex differences on **Intrinsic Attributes**, but there is a main effect of Valence, Good > Bad ( $p < .001$ )

⌘ Qualified confirmation, Sex x Valence interaction on **Physical Attractiveness**, Good Males > Good Females ( $p < .001$ ) & Good Males > Bad Males ( $p < .05$ )

## ⌘ **Personality Differences**

⌘ as predicted,

⌘ on Agreeableness, Females > Males

⌘ on Emotional Stability, Males > Females

## ⌘ **Age Differences**

⌘ as predicted

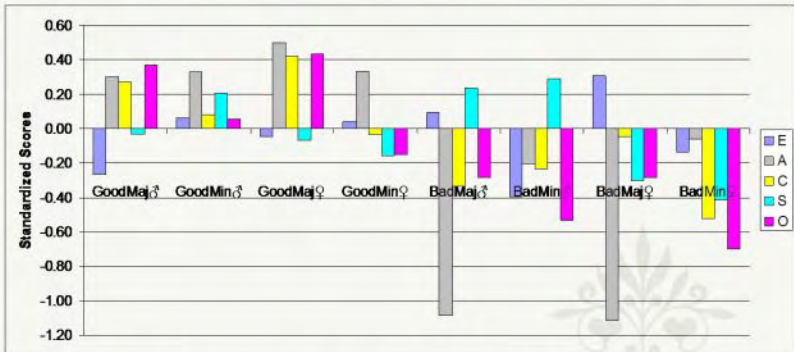
⌘ Conscientiousness and Stability increase

⌘ Openness decreases, but

⌘ Agreeableness decreases, and

⌘ Extraversion curvilinear

# Personality and Valence



Male and female protagonists have very similar personality profiles, marked by peaks on Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness.

Male and female antagonists have similar profiles, distinguished by low Agreeableness and Openness. Bad females are also distinguished by low Emotional Stability.

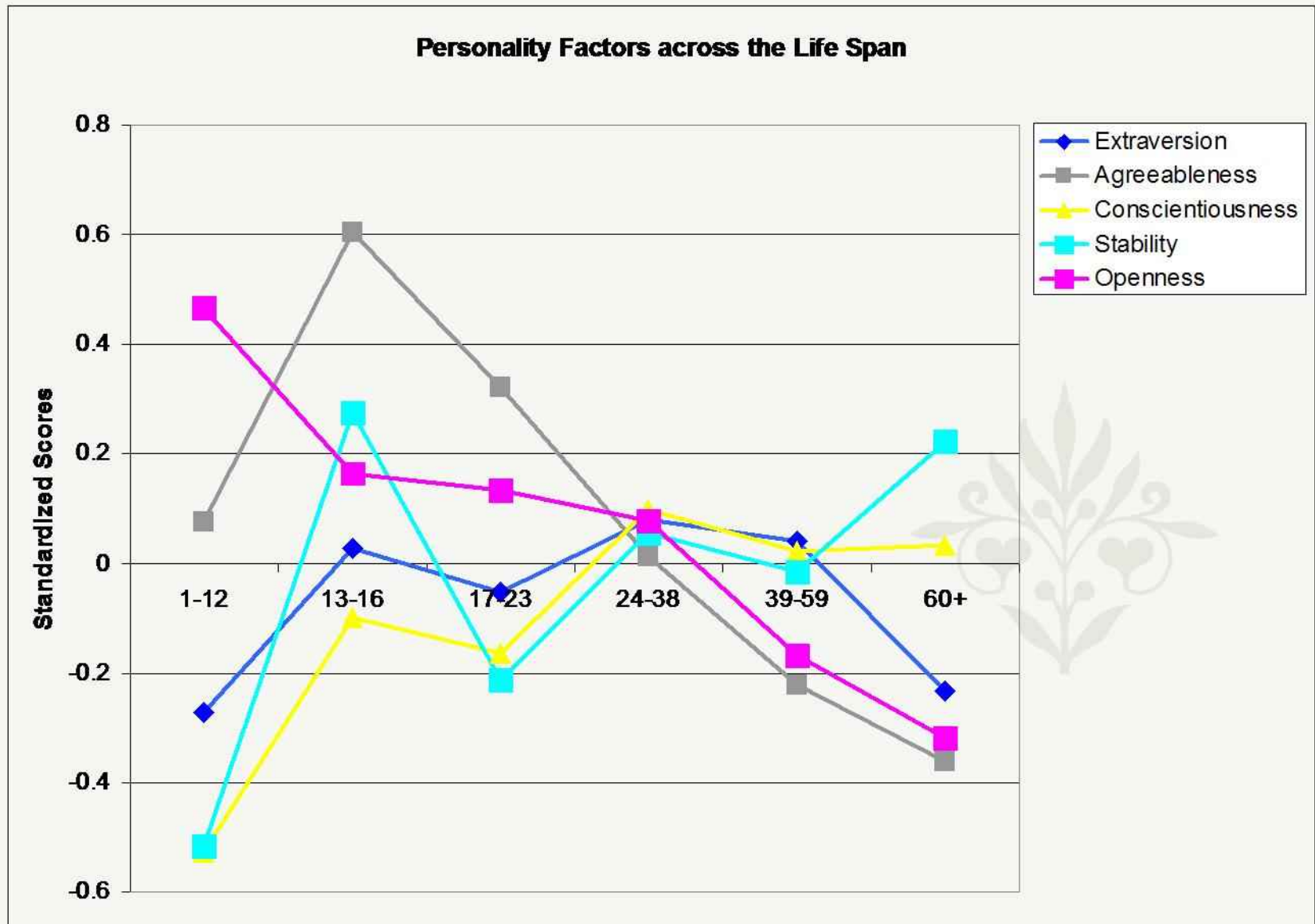
#### Main Effects

Valence on C,  
Good > Bad  
Sex on S,  
Males > Females  
Valence on O,  
Good > Bad  
Status on O,  
Major > Minor

#### Interactions

Valence x Status on E  
Gd Min > Gd Maj

# Personality across the Life Span



# Personality Correlates

## ✧ **Goals**

✧ **Social Dominance** primarily a function of high Extraversion and low Agreeableness

✧ **Constructive Effort** primarily a function of high Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness

✧ **Raising a Family** primarily a function of high Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and low Openness

✧ **Bonding in Intimate Relationships** primarily a function of high Extraversion and Agreeableness

✧ **Physical Survival** not well predicted

## ✧ **Goal Achievement**

✧ Consistent with I/O literature, goal achievement correlates with high Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability. Not predicted was a correlation with Agreeableness

## ✧ **Mate Preferences**

✧ Consistent with sex research literature, **Physical Attractiveness** is important to Extraverts

✧ Extraverted, Disagreeable characters are attracted to **Extrinsic Characteristics**

✧ Agreeable, Conscientious, Open characters are attracted to **Intrinsic Characteristics**

# Personality Correlates

	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Stability	Openness
Goal Interests (N=579; $r = .09$ $p < .05$ )					
Dominance	.21	-.55	.09	.05	-.09
Constructive Effort	.10	.27	.34	.00	.46
Raising a Family	-.11	.23	.31	-.03	-.32
Bonding	.18	.36	.00	.00	-.10
Survival	-.02	.04	.03	-.09	.06
Goal Achievement (N=583; $r = .09$ $p < .05$ )					
	.05	.30	.23	.26	.09
Mate Preferences (N=257; $r = .13$ $p < .05$ )					
Extrinsic Attributes	.13	-.23	-.06	-.08	-.12
Intrinsic Characteristics	-.06	.42	.33	.01	.17
Physical Attractiveness	.15	.03	-.06	.00	.09
Emotional Responses (N=582; $r = .09$ $p < .05$ )					
Dislike	-.02	-.60	-.30	-.16	-.28
Sympathy	-.34	.22	.07	-.27	.21
Fascination	.17	-.03	.08	-.15	.26
Age (N=580; $r = .10$ $p < .05$ )					
	-.02	-.23	.07	.10	-.16

# Personality & Demographics in Regressions

Criterion	Sex		Valence		Status	Age	Physical Attractiveness	Personality					Multiple R
	1=male 2=female	1=good 2=bad	1=good 2=bad	1=major 2=minor				E	A	C	S	O	
<u>Goals</u>													
Social Dominance		-.15	.13					.20	-.49	.13			.64
Constructive Effort		-.15	-.19	-.08				.11	.21	.29		.42	.67
Raising Family			-.10	.11	.16	-.20	-.08	.22	.30			-.27	.80
Bonding / Intimacy					-.16	.21	.11	.27				-.16	.49
Survival		-.18		-.10	-.17	-.16					-.11		.29
Goal Achievement			-.24				.10	.14	.21	.28			.51
<u>Mate Preferences</u>													
Extrinsic		.34					.14	-.19				-.18	.44
Intrinsic			-.13					.34	.28			.22	.58
Attractiveness		-.26				.30							.35
<u>Emotional Response</u>													
Dislike		-.06	.29	-.09					-.43	-.22	-.18	-.23	.79
Sympathy				-.10		.16	-.35	.23			-.29	.17	.57
Fascination				-.22			.18		.09	-.18	.24		.44

# Conclusions –1

1. Victorian folk psychology accurately reflects a number of research findings from personality and evolutionary psychology.
2. Goals pursued by characters cluster into categories deemed important by evolutionary psychology: getting ahead, getting along, raising a family, bonding, and surviving.
3. On mate preferences, females are more concerned with extrinsic characteristics than males, and good males are more concerned with physical attractiveness than good females.
4. Males show more emotional stability than females, and several established age differences in personality were confirmed.
5. Personality correlates of goals pursued, goal achievement and mate preference mirror those found by empirical research.

## Conclusions –2

1. At the same time, some results reflect unique characteristics of Victorian thought rather than empirical relations found in modern psychological science
2. Older characters are more disagreeable than younger characters, a trend opposite the one found in modern research.
3. Valence (whether a character is good or bad) is a very powerful predictor. Protagonists and antagonists have strikingly different personality profiles and draw distinctive emotional responses. Valence overshadowed some expected sex differences in personality and mate preference.
4. The folk psychology of Victorian authors is therefore not merely reflecting psychological facts; it also sends a moral message to which both Victorian and modern audiences resonate emotionally.

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