

Integrating cognitive and affective human dimensions research: The Mental Hierarchy

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**An important goal of Human
Dimensions of Wildlife Research is
to understand, explain, and
predict human thought about and
responses to wildlife**

**Research guided by the
“Cognitive Hierarchy” has
advanced this knowledge**

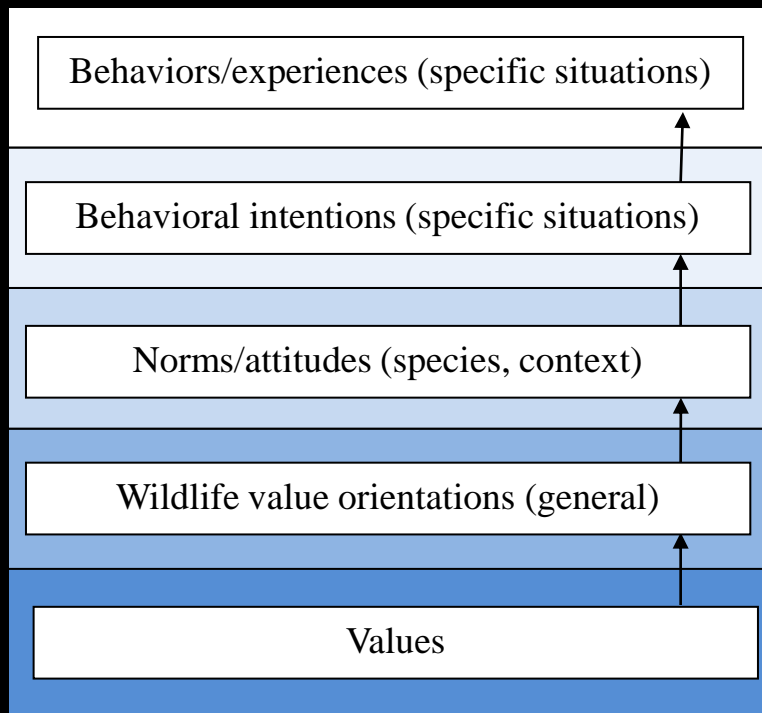
Goal of this presentation

To present a theoretical framework that could:

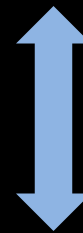
- Guide the study of emotions toward wildlife
- Integrate knowledge about cognitions and emotions

the Mental Hierarchy

The cognitive hierarchy is based on the principle of a hierarchical organisation of cognitions

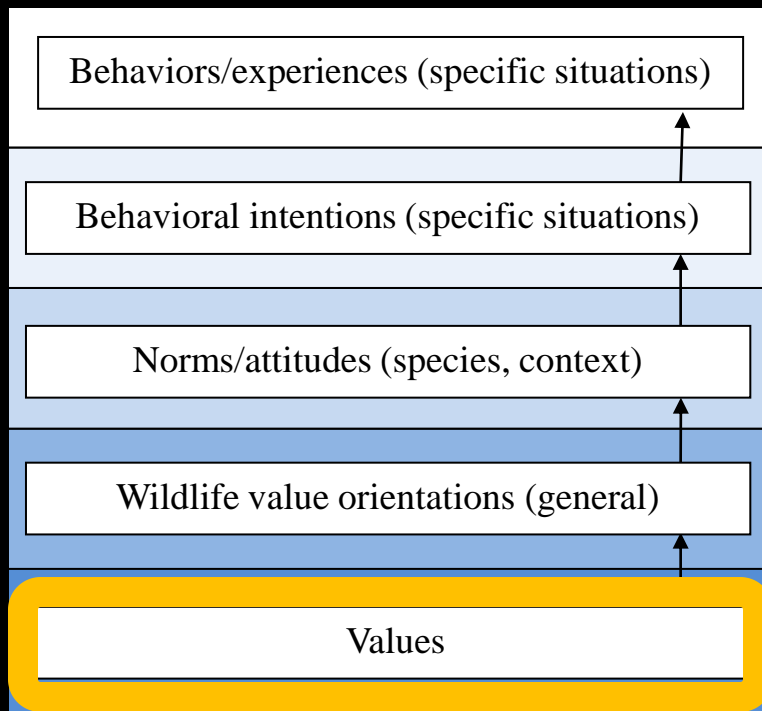


Numerous
Faster to change
Peripheral
Specific to situations



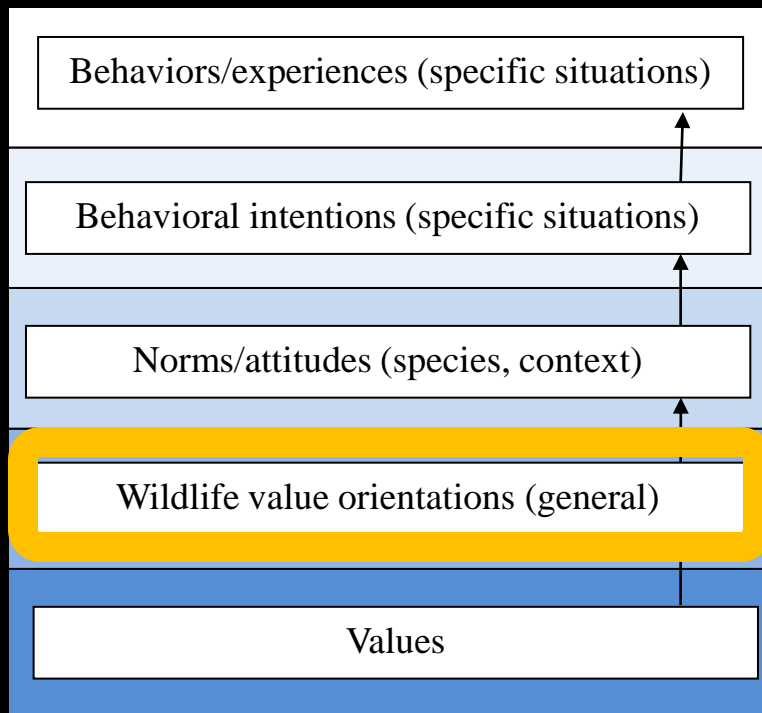
Few in number
Slow to change
Central to beliefs
Transcend situations

Values: desirable end states, modes of conduct, or qualities of life that we find important



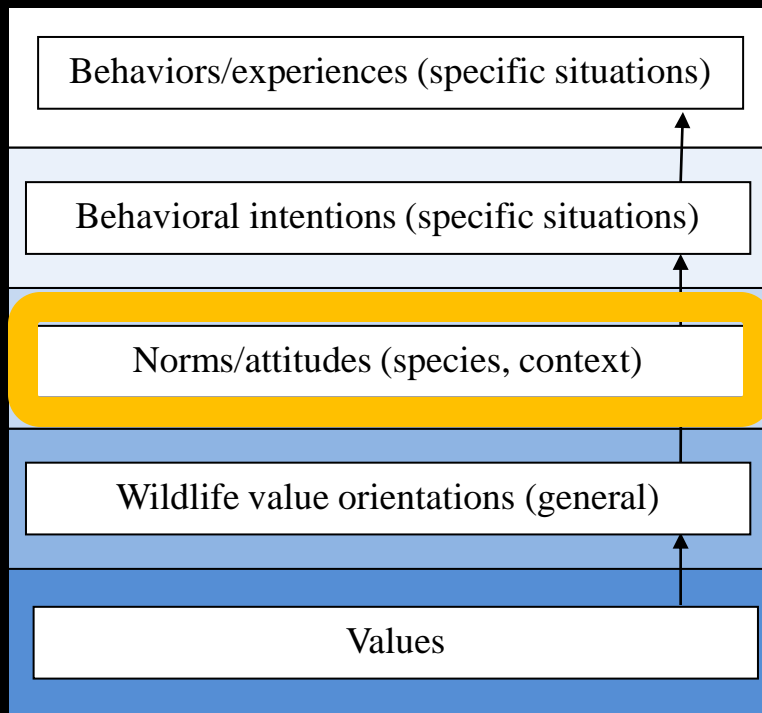
E.g.:
Freedom
Security

Wildlife value orientations: patterns of basic beliefs that give meaning to values in the context of wildlife



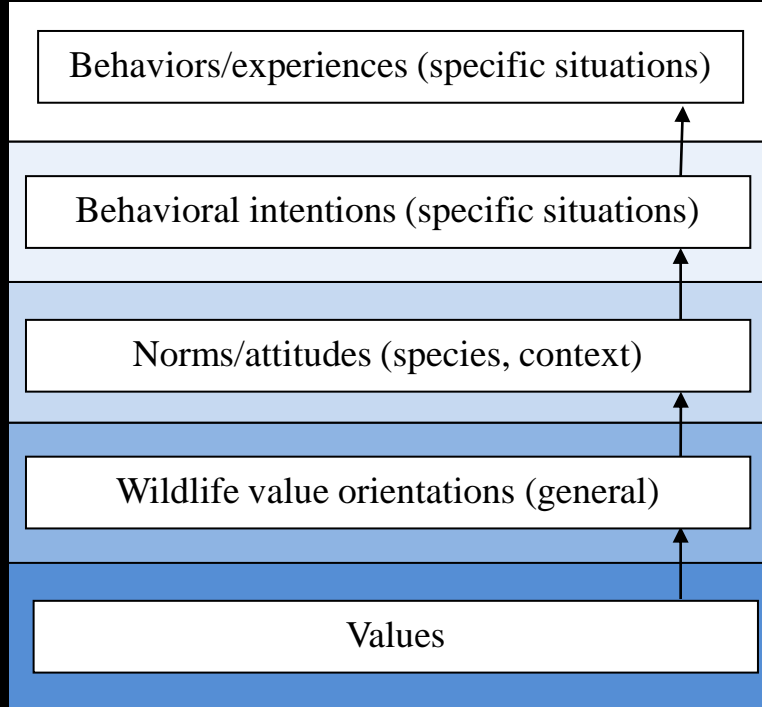
E.g.:
Mutualism
Domination

Attitudes: mental dispositions to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object



E.g.:
Attitudes toward
reintroduction of
wolves in RMNP in
2012 by NPS

Empirical studies have demonstrated that general WVOs predict specific attitudes or norms



E.g.:
Acceptance of management actions, up to 50% of variability explained by WVOs

What about the other 50% or more?













**What about the other 50% or
more?**



Perhaps, emotions?

Principles and questions

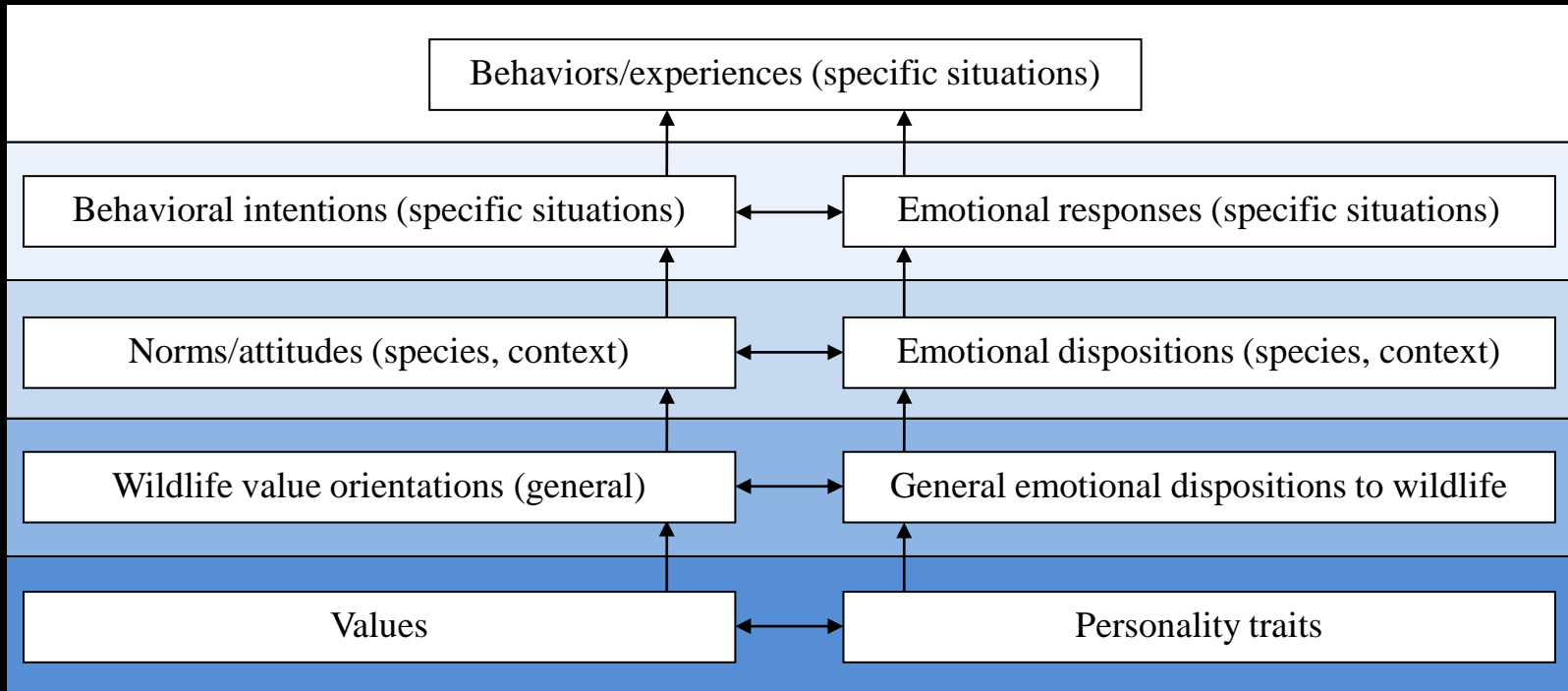
Principles

1. The cognitive and the emotional system are distinctive but interacting systems in the brain
2. The state – trait distinction → emotional responses – emotional dispositions

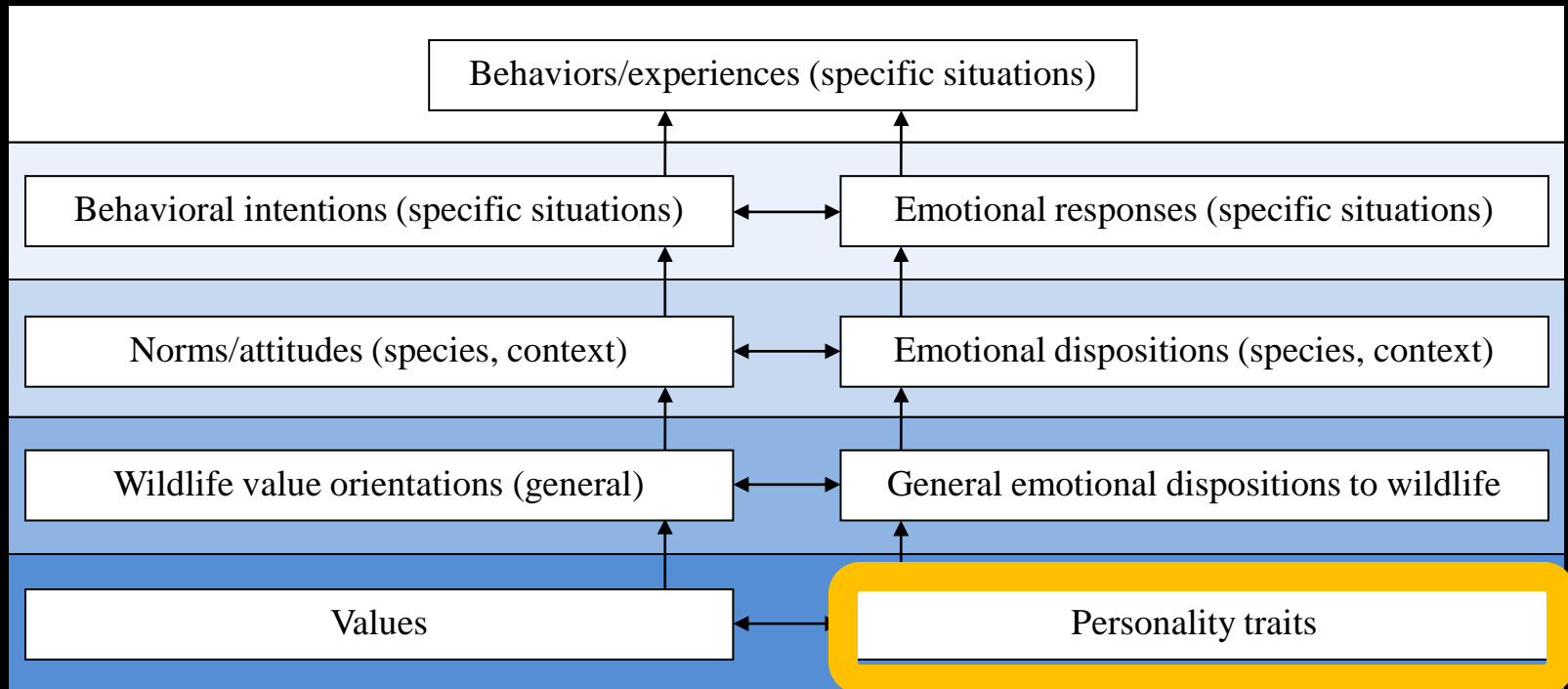
Questions

1. Does the hierarchy principle hold for emotions?
2. Is it possible to integrate an account of emotions with the cognitive hierarchy?

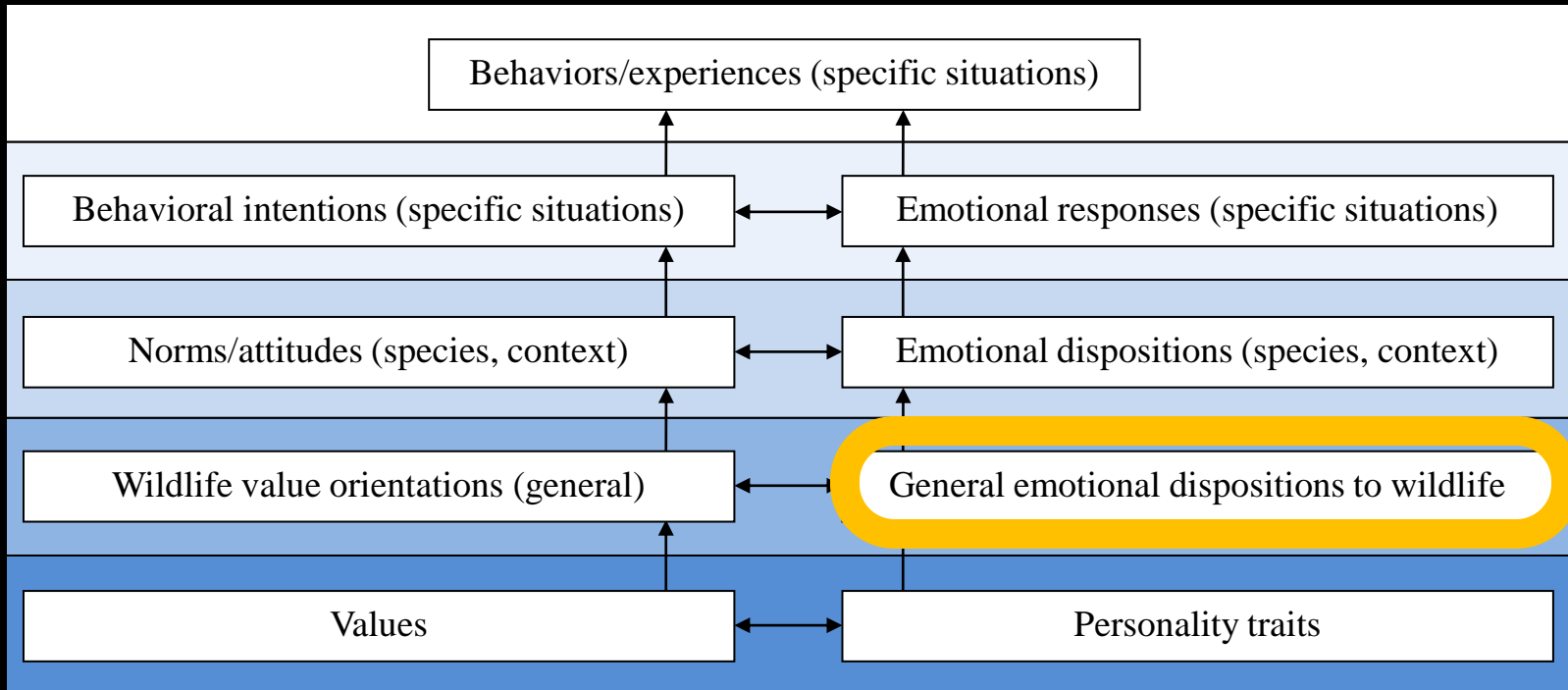
The mental hierarchy



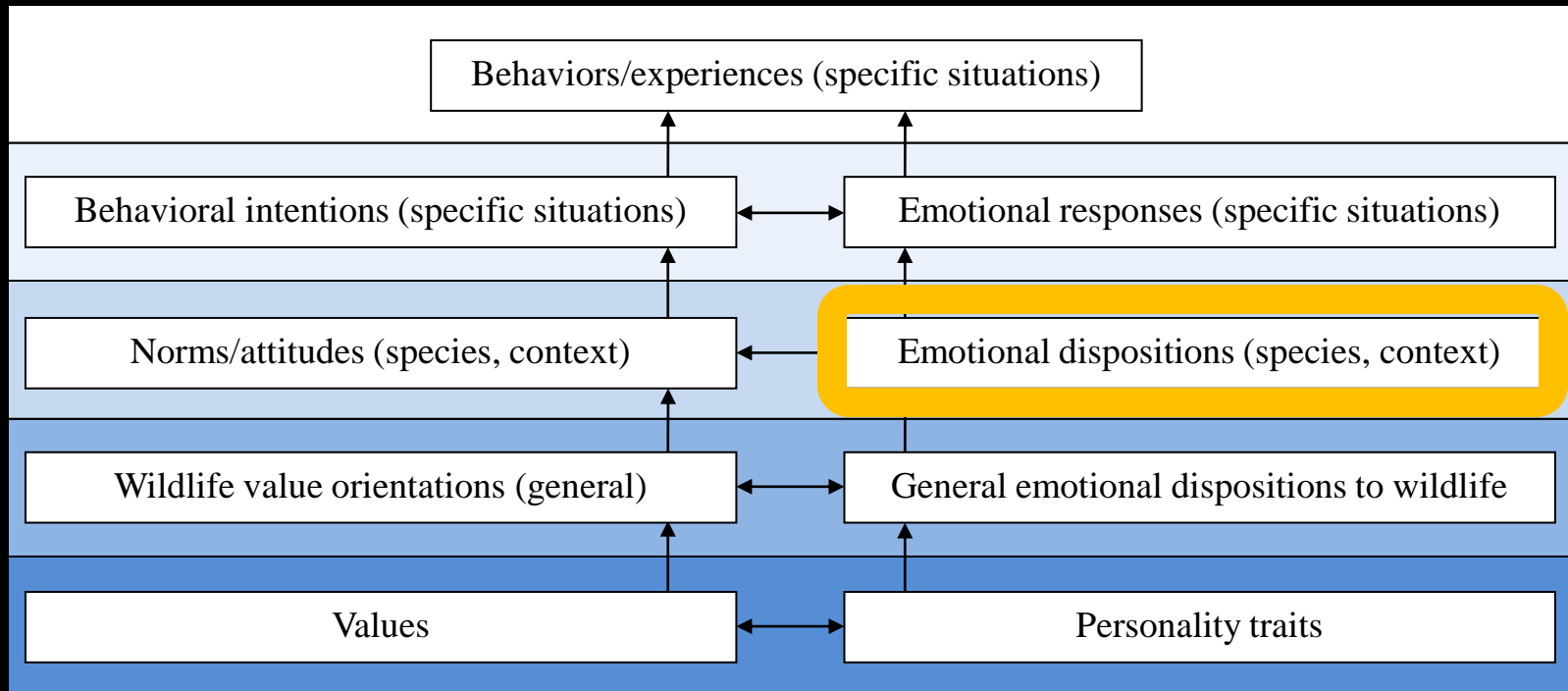
Personality traits



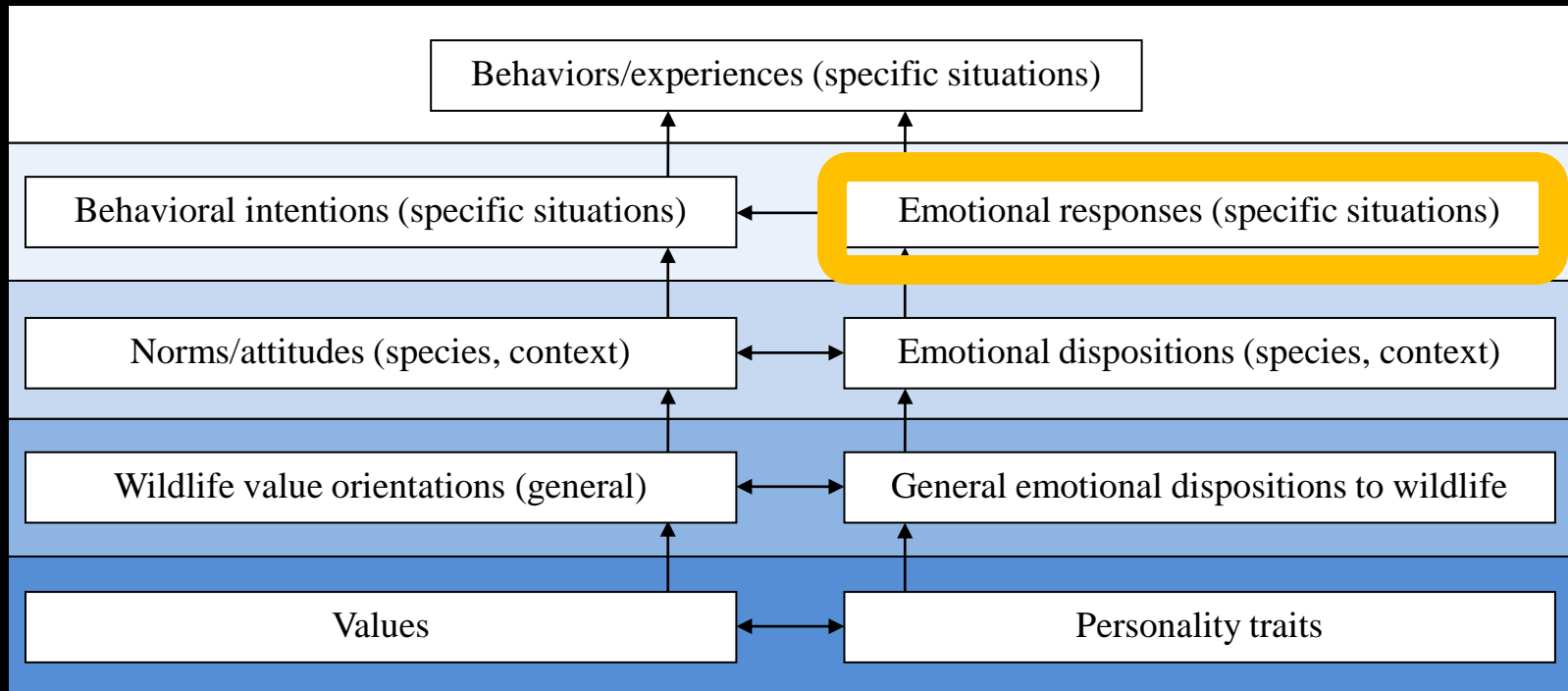
General emotional dispositions toward wildlife



Specific emotional dispositions toward species in context



Emotional responses



Scientific questions

“Vertical” questions, e.g.:

- **To what extent do personality variables influence emotional dispositions and responses?**
- **Do emotional dispositions mediate between personality traits and emotional responses?**

“Horizontal” questions, e.g.:

- **How are emotional dispositions related to cognitions?**

Methodological questions, e.g.:

- **Can general and context-specific emotional dispositions toward wildlife be empirically differentiated?**

Questions and discussion

