



Creativity, OCD, Narcissism and the Big Five



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which measures of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ personality traits predicted creativity, as assessed by the Biographical Inventory of Creative Behaviours and Self-Rated Creativity. In all, 207 participants completed the two creativity inventories and three personality measures assessing the Big Five personality traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness-to-experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness), Narcissism and Obsessive-Compulsiveness. Results revealed similar personality relationships for both creativity measures. In support of previous research, Extraversion, Openness and Narcissism were positively correlated with creativity. Narcissism was most strongly related to self-rated creativity. OCD was unrelated to the self-rating but was correlated with the Biographical Inventory of Creative Behaviours. Collectively, the Big Five and OCD accounted for between, 29 and 32% of the variance creativity. Confirmatory factor analytic examination of the Obsessive Compulsive Inventory Revised (Foa et al., 2002) and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). Limitations were discussed.

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1. Introduction

Personality traits have historically been viewed as fitting into one of two discrete categories, namely, “normal” (e.g. Conscientiousness) or “abnormal” (e.g. Obsessive-Compulsive) traits. However, there has recently been increasing evidence to suggest that abnormal personality can be modelled as extremes of normal personality (Markon, Kreuger & Watson, 2005; O’Connor & Dyce, 2001). For example, someone with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder will be maladaptively high on Neuroticism and Conscientiousness and low on Openness and Agreeableness.

Numerous studies have considered the relationship between “normal” range personality and creativity, in particular the Big Five traits of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness-to-experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Batey & Furnham, 2006). Yet fewer have considered the extremes of personality. Accordingly, this study was designed to extend previous research on the creativity-personality relationship by examining whether measures of trait Narcissism and Obsessive-Compulsiveness are related to and predictive of creativity.

Research has shown that common measures of the Big 5 do not adequately reflect extremity of behaviour at the high ends of Conscientiousness, indicative of Obsessive-Compulsiveness and the high ends of Extraversion and the low end of Agreeableness, which are related to Narcissism (Haigler & Widiger, 2001; Saulsman & Page, 2004). Thus, the possibility that measures of Narcissism and Obsessive-Compulsiveness offer incremental predictive validity, over and above the Big Five ‘normal’ personality traits was examined.

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Previous examinations of the personality-creativity relationship have found significant positive correlations between multiple metrics of creativity and the factors of Extraversion and Openness (Dollinger, Urban, & James, 2004; Feist, 1998; Furnham, Batey, Anand, & Manfield, 2008; Hughes, Furnham, & Batey, 2013; Hoseinifar et al., 2011). Estimates of effect size vary but are generally considered small to medium ($0.15 < r < 0.30$). When considered collectively in regression models, the Big Five traits tend to explain around 20–50% of the variance in creativity measures. Measures of creativity tend to be modestly correlated (Batey & Furnham, 2006) and as such, much of the variation observed in effect sizes and variance explained is likely a function of the use of differing measures of creativity (and personality). Further, it has been suggested that different aspects of personality may relate to different aspects of creativity (James & Asmus, 2001; Wolfradt & Pretz, 2001), and that the correlation with specific personality factors varies between different creative groups, such as scientists and artists (Feist, 1998; Furnham, 2013). In consequence, two different measures of creativity were used in the current study, namely, self-reported creativity and a biographical inventory of creative behaviours which assesses a broad range of everyday creative activities (Batey, 2007).

Despite the variation in effect size and variance explained, Openness and Extraversion have been shown to be generalisable predictors across measures, samples and environments. Accordingly, it was hypothesised that both Openness and Extraversion will be significantly and positively related to both the self-report and biographical inventory measures of creativity assessed here.

Eysenck (1993) proposed variation in the ability to bring together different ideas from memory to create novel ideas and problem is largely a manifestation of a wide concept of relevance. That is, some individuals have a much wider view of what is relevant in a given scenario than others, thus providing them with a 'larger sample of ideas' that can be used in order to make connections between things or ideas that others would not have been considered. He termed this 'over-inclusiveness' and suggested that it is vital in the production of novel and creative ideas. Eysenck argued that over-inclusiveness was related to trait Psychoticism, which in Big Five terms, is high Openness, low Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Psychoticism has also been shown to relate to numerous personality disorders such as Schizophrenia, Borderline Personality Disorder, Anti-social Personality Disorder and Narcissism (e.g. Deary & Peter, 1998).

There is also a considerable body of empirical research investigating the proposed link between creativity and personality and mood disorders (e.g. Lauronen et al., 2004). Examination of schizophrenia and sub-clinical expression of schizotypal traits have tended to dominate research investigating the link between creativity and personality disorder. For example, schizotypal traits have been shown to be predictive of creative achievement (Batey & Furnham, 2008) with creative artists scoring more highly than non-artists (Burch, Pavelis, Hemsley, & Corr, 2006). Further, the offspring and relatives of schizophrenic individuals tend to either show signs of psychosocial impairment or above average creativity (e.g. Heston, 1966; Karlsson, 1970; Kinney et al., 2001). Such evidence has led to the suggestion that the potential genetic link between creativity and psychotic traits may be the reason that such genes have persisted in the gene pool (Karlsson, 1970; Nettle & Clegg, 2006).

Correlations have also been observed between creativity and other personality disorders such as histrionic personality disorder (Kehagia, 2009) and hypomanic traits (Furnham et al., 2008). This study broadens investigations of the relationship between personality disorder and creativity by examining two unrelated personality disorders: Narcissism and Obsessive-Compulsiveness that should according to Eysenck's theory of over-inclusiveness be of relevance to creativity.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is characterised by intrusive, anxiety inducing thoughts (obsessions) which the individual attempts to relieve through repetitive or ritualistic actions (compulsions), which can be either observable behaviours or mental processes (Stein, 2002). In terms of personality, Obsessive-Compulsive individuals tend to exhibit a preoccupation with orderliness and perfectionism at the expense of efficiency, openness and flexibility (DSM-IV-TR, 2000)

If high levels of creativity are linked to flexible, over-inclusive thinking, it would follow that those with particularly rigid thinking styles, such as those high in Obsessive-Compulsiveness (Moritz et al., 2002), would exhibit lower levels of creativity. That is, a concern with neatness, order, cleanliness and perfectionism is almost opposite what is observable among a wide range of creative people, particularly artists (Furnham, 2013). Research has also shown a negative correlation between OCD and the factors of Openness and Extraversion (Saulsman & Page, 2004) suggesting that a similar association will be observed with creativity.

The second extreme personality variant to be assessed here is Narcissism, which is characterised by grandiosity, a sense of entitlement and a belief by the individual that they are special and unique, it is often accompanied by arrogant behaviour and a lack of empathy (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Narcissists believe they have special and unique talents often associated with creativity (Furnham, 2010). Thus one would expect high levels of creativity to be seen when using self-report methods of creativity, as narcissistic individuals are likely to view themselves as highly creative, but not necessarily when using more objective methods (Goncalo, Flynn & Kim, 2010). Indeed it may be that the confidence that narcissists show is very beneficial for people to pursue poorly paid creative tasks as well as popularise and market them.

Research into Narcissism and the Big Five does show a slight positive relationship with Openness and Extraversion (Saulsman & Page, 2004), indicating that those high in Narcissism may actually exhibit higher levels of creativity as well as just reporting them. This idea is supported by research indicating a link between Narcissism and creative achievement (Feldmann, 1989). In using assessing both self-ratings of creativity and everyday creative achievement, the current study can explore the nuances of the Narcissism-creativity relationships.

The aims of the present study were to investigate whether the traits of Narcissism and OCD were predictive of multiple measures of creativity. Further, to examine whether these traits add incremental prediction beyond the established Big Five, in particular, Openness and Extraversion. In addition, the study documents a confirmatory factor analytic examination of

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