Beyond the Big Five: How narcissism, perfectionism, and dispositional affect relate to workaholism

Malissa A. Clark *, Ariel M. Lelchook [1], Marcie L. Taylor [1]

Wayne State University, Department of Psychology, 5057 Woodward Avenue, 7704, Detroit, MI 48202, United States

ABSTRACT

Researchers have suggested that it is important for the field to go beyond just looking at personality using the Big Five in relation to organizational behavior. Heeding this call, the present study investigated how narcissism, three dimensions of perfectionism (high standards, discrepancy, and order), and dispositional positive and negative affect relate to overall workaholism as well as three identified workaholism dimensions (impatience, compulsion to work, and polychronic control) above and beyond the Big Five personality factors. Hierarchical regression analyses indicate that the perfectionism dimensions of high standards and discrepancy, negative affect, and positive affect are significantly related to workaholism above and beyond the Big Five personality factors. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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In today's fast-paced society, it is not uncommon for someone to be described by the popular media as a "workaholic." In recent years there has been a notable surge of interest in workaholism by the research community, perhaps because workaholism has been linked with negative individual and organizational outcomes such as work-family conflict (Bakker, Demerouti, & Burke, 2009) and a decrease in overall job and/or life satisfaction (Aziz & Zickar, 2006). While much research has focused on the outcomes of workaholism, much less is known about the personality variables that are related to workaholism. With the increase in weekly work hours over the past two decades, along with recent theoretical developments on this topic (Ng, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2007), it seems appropriate and timely to explore how related personality traits may be mapped into the nomological network of workaholism.

1. Background and definition

There is some disagreement amongst researchers regarding the conceptualization and measurement of workaholism (McMillan & O'Driscoll, 2006). For example, workaholism has been discussed as an addiction (Ng et al., 2007; Porter, 1996), behavior pattern (Scott, Moore, & Miceli, 1997), set of attitudes about work (Spence

& Robbins, 1992), and a syndrome (Aziz & Zickar, 2006). Part of the disagreement regarding the conceptualization of workaholism is because workaholism is a multidimensional construct and researchers tend to disagree on the main dimensions of workaholism. Although not all definitions would fall cleanly into these categories, many definitions of workaholism include the following themes: working to the exclusion of other life activities (e.g., Ng et al., 2007; Porter, 1996; Scott et al., 1997), being consumed with thoughts and feelings about working (e.g., Ng et al., 2007; Porter, 1996; Scott et al., 1997; Spence & Robbins, 1992), and going above one's assigned roles/duties at work because of internal, rather than external (e.g., financial situation) factors (e.g., Mudrack, 2004; Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008).

2. Personality and workaholism

Ng and colleagues (2007) present a theoretical model suggesting that people can become workaholics because their workaholic behaviors are repeatedly reinforced, their social or cultural experiences facilitate workaholism, or they possess certain personality traits. With the exception of a few studies there has been little research on the personality traits associated with being a workaholic. Researchers have suggested that depending on the specific pattern of workaholic behaviors, some workaholic individuals may be an asset to organizations, while others may be a dysfunctional organizational member (Scott et al., 1997). While Scott and colleagues present a compelling model which discusses certain organizational conditions and situational variables that may influence the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 313 577 2800.
  E-mail addresses: malissa@wayne.edu (M.A. Clark), alelchook@wayne.edu (A.M. Lelchook), marcie_tylr@yahoo.com (M.L. Taylor).
  [1] Tel.: +1 313 577 2800.

manifestation of workaholic behaviors (e.g., opportunities for control), they do not discuss personality in their model, and how different personality traits may relate to different patterns of workaholic behaviors. It is possible that certain personality traits (e.g., positive affect) may relate to what some consider "healthy" workaholic behaviors (e.g., going above and beyond one's assigned work duties), while other personality traits (e.g., negative affect) may relate to dysfunctional workaholic behaviors (e.g., being consumed with thoughts about working). Thus, in the present study, we examine how several personality traits relate to different dimensions of workaholism.

In one of the few studies to examine the link between personality and workaholism dimensions, Burke, Matthiesen, and Pallesen (2006) looked at the relationship between generalized self efficacy, the Big Five personality traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, and Agreeableness) and three workaholism dimensions (drive to work, joy in work, and work involvement). Neuroticism was related to feeling driven to work, Extraversion was related to work involvement and joy in work, and generalized self-efficacy was related to all three dimensions. While demographic variables and situational characteristics accounted for no more than 3% of the variance in any of the dimensions, personality accounted for 10% of the variance in work involvement, 22% of the variance in drive to work, and 11% of the variance in joy in work. In another study, which investigated the relationship between obsessive–compulsive personality and workaholism, individuals scoring higher on measures of obstinacy and superego were more likely to engage in non-required work activities (Mudrack, 2004). While these studies provide some initial perspective on the nomological network of workaholism, unanswered questions remain regarding how personality characteristics beyond the Big Five relate to workaholism. Recently several researchers have stated that it is important for the field to go beyond just looking at the Big Five (e.g., Hough & Oswald, 2008). Heeding this call, we examine the relationship between several personality variables that, for the most part, have been examined very little (or not at all, in the case of narcissism), in relation to workaholism. Thus, our study goal was to examine how narcissism, perfectionism dimensions, and positive and negative affectivity relate to workaholism beyond the Big Five.

Narcissism: Narcissistic individuals have a grandiose sense of their own self-importance, and they often boast or exaggerate their accomplishments (Leonard & Harvey, 2008). Since narcissistic individuals value and pursue power and self-importance, this may lead to a preoccupation with work and succeeding at work, and working to the exclusion of other life activities; however, because narcissistic individuals think very highly of themselves, they are not likely to be plagued by constant feelings of guilt, which is often a driving force behind workaholic behavior. Although some researchers have found narcissism to positively correlate with Extraversion, and negatively correlate with Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Graziano & Tobin, 2001), other researchers have noted that narcissism is not reflected well in the Big Five (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Therefore, we thought it was important to investigate the degree to which narcissism is related to workaholism above and beyond the Big Five.

Perfectionism: Many individuals define perfectionism as having three dimensions: high standards (the degree to which one sets high performance expectations for oneself), discrepancy (the perceived gap between one's performance expectations and self-evaluations of current performance), and order (one's preference for organization and order; Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001). While having high standards and a preference for order are largely adaptive qualities, having high discrepancy has been shown to be maladaptive (Grzegorek, Slaney, Franze, & Rice, 2004). While having high standards may lead a person to go above

assigned role duties, having high discrepancy may cause an individual to feel consumed by guilt and other thoughts about working. Therefore, perfectionism dimensions may relate to different dimensions of workaholism.

To date, the relationship between perfectionism and the Big Five is mixed. For example, high standards and order were found to relate to Conscientiousness, while discrepancy related to Neuroticism (Hill, McIntire, & Bacharach, 1997; Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 2007). However, the dimensions of perfectionism have been shown to provide incremental validity over the Big Five in relation to constructs such as self-esteem and personality pathology (Rice et al., 2007; Sherry, Hewitt, Flett, Lee-Baggley, & Hall, 2007). Thus, we thought it was important to examine how perfectionism relates to workaholism above and beyond the Big Five.

Positive and negative affect: Affective dispositions are stable over time and across situations, and they can be classified into trait positive affect (PA) and trait negative affect (NA). PA is characterized as a general tendency to be energetic, excited, and joyful, while NA is characterized as a tendency to be anxious, afraid, and angry (Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky, 1993).

Researchers have asserted that PA and NA should differentially predict real-world outcomes. For example, using meta-analytic techniques, Thorensen, Kaplan, Barsky, de Chermont, and Warren (2003) found that NA had stronger relationships with negatively-valenced outcomes than PA. Individuals high in NA, who tend to feel high levels of guilt and anxiety, may be more likely to constantly worry about their work. In contrast, individuals high in PA, which has been found to positively relate to job satisfaction and personal accomplishment (Thorensen et al., 2003), may be more likely to go above his or her assigned duties at work. Therefore, PA and NA may be differentially related to workaholism dimensions.

PA and NA have often been shown to relate to Extraversion and Neuroticism, respectively (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1991), and some researchers even treat PA and Extraversion, and NA and Neuroticism, as equivalent constructs (e.g., Thorensen et al., 2003). However, the correlations between PA and Extraversion and between NA and Neuroticism are typically around .40 (Levy, Cober, & Norris-Watts, 2003), which suggests that they are related, yet distinct constructs. Furthermore, Judge and Larsen (2001) argue that PA and NA are more proximal influences on job satisfaction than the Big Five. Therefore, it appears there is merit to investigating the relationships between PA and NA and workaholism, above and beyond the Big Five.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The study consisted of 323 working students at a large urban Midwestern university who worked more than 25 h per week (*M* = 36 h worked per week) and had worked in their current occupation for an average of 4.23 years. The university was located in a metropolitan urban area, and enrolled many older commuter students as well as more traditional younger students. Participants had a mean age of 24, were 51% Caucasian, 27% African American, 7% Arabic, 6% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 5% "other." The sample was 73% women, 57% worked full-time, 87% were not married, and 83% had no children. One case was found to be a multivariate outlier, and was excluded from the analyses, resulting in a final sample of 322.

3.2. Measures

Narcissism: Narcissism was measured using the revised 40-item Narcissistic personality inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). This