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Personality and Individual Differences 28 (2000) 879–886

PERSONALITY AND
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

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The Big Three or the Big Five? A replication study

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Received 2 July 1998; received in revised form 7 April 1999; accepted 12 June 1999

Abstract

This study addresses the question of the dimensionality of personality, in particular comparing the three- and five-factor models and trying to replicate the findings of Draycott and Kline (Draycott, S. G., & Kline, P. (1995). The Big Three or the Big Five — the EPQ-R vs the NEO-PI: a research note, replication and elaboration. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 18, 801–804). The Italian edition of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R) and the Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ) were compared by means of principal component factor analysis and canonical correlation analysis. Results confirm that the EPQ-R and BFQ share much variance, even if only four factors account for the correlations among the eight scales. Eysenck's hypothesis that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are facets of the Psychoticism factor was partially supported. Only by using external criteria (e.g. the correlation with biological variables) can the question of dimensionality be resolved. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Personality; Five-factor theory; Three-factor theory; Factor analysis; Canonical correlation analysis; Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised; Big Five Questionnaire

1. Introduction

Eysenck's three-factor theory (e.g. Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985) and the Big Five theory (Digman, 1990) have emerged as the two most important psychometric theories in the field of personality. According to the first, there are three main factors: Extraversion, Neuroticism and Psychoticism, whereas the Big Five theory claims that five factors are needed to account for

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most of the variance in the field of personality: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience. The Big Five model has derived mainly from the lexical approach to the study of personality (for example, Digman, 1990; John, 1990; McCrae & John, 1992). Subsequently, this approach has been applied to the study of personality by means of self-report inventories.

According to McCrae and Costa (1985), the two models have different aims. The three-factor model has the primary aim of identifying those dimensions of individual differences which are well grounded in biological processes, while the aim of the five-factor model is “the classification of all major sources of individual differences in personality” (McCrae & Costa, 1985, p. 588).

Different authors have suggested the presence of five large, stable second-order factors in factor analyses of various questionnaires. For example, Krug and Johns (1986) factor analyzed Cattell’s Sixteen Personality Factors (16 PF; Cattell, Eber & Tatsuoka, 1970) finding five second-order factors; McCrae and Costa (1989) found four out of the five big personality factors in the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & McCaulley, 1985). Costa and McCrae (1995) found five factors in a validation study of the Eysenck Personality Profiler (EPP; Eysenck & Wilson, 1991). Others have found more support for Eysenck’s ‘giant three’. For example, Saggino and Kline (1996) found the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator scales resemble Eysenck’s three P, E and N dimensions. Indeed, Draycott and Kline (1995) found only three, corresponding to Eysenck’s three factors, in a joint factor analysis of the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI; Costa & McCrae, 1985) and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991). They concluded that “...the NEO-PI does indeed account for variance over and above that accounted by the EPQ-R but that this residual variance fails to form appropriately sized factors representative of the Big Five. Of the variance shared between the two instruments a high proportion of it is attributable to the robust dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism” (Draycott & Kline, 1995, p. 803).

McCrae and Costa (1985) showed that the E and N factors of the NEO-PI were similar to Eysenck’s E and N factors. Eysenck’s P was essentially covered by their Conscientiousness and Agreeableness scales. Eysenck (1991, 1992a) interpreted A and C as facets of the low pole of P, whereas Costa and McCrae considered P as “a relatively arbitrary conflation of two independent dimensions” (Costa & McCrae, 1995, p. 310). Costa and McCrae (1995) considered the pattern of correlations they found between Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, their sum and the facets of the EPP incompatible with Eysenck’s (1991, 1992a) hypothesis that A and C are facets of the Psychoticism dimension.

While many researchers support the five-factor position, Eysenck (e.g. 1991, 1992a) suggests that only three factors are basic and are the best account for personality variance. Furthermore, they are underpinned by biological functioning. According to Eysenck, the remaining factors can be only first-order factors.

Different methods are possible to compare the three-factor and the five-factor systems. It is possible, for example, to conduct joint factor analyses of homogeneous item parcels or joint factor analyses at item level. In the present study we are concerned with the two systems as sets of scales, not as item pools. Therefore, the present paper addresses the question of the dimensionality confronting the three- and the five-factor models at the scale level, comparing the Italian edition of the EPQ-R with the Big Five Personality Questionnaire (BFQ; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni & Perugini, 1993). A second aim of this paper is to verify how the EPQ-R

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