



Relation of the Big Five to Biodata and aspects of the self

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Abstract

Two studies examined McCrae and Costa's system model of personality. Their model suggests the Big Five should have relatively strong associations with life history (measured in Study 1 by Biodata) and with Self-Concept (measured in Study 2 by various Self questionnaires). Study 1—210 participants (143 females) completed Bipolar Big Five Markers and a Biodata inventory. Factor Analyses confirmed the Big Five and revealed seven viable Biodata factors. Multiple regression revealed that most Biodata factors were predicted well by 2 or more Big Five traits. Study 2—199 participants (125 females) completed Bipolar Big Five Markers and an omnibus Self inventory consisting of six previously developed scales. Factor Analyses confirmed the Big Five and revealed eight viable Self factors. Multiple regression revealed that the Self factors were also predicted fairly well by two or more Big Five traits.

Both studies found relatively strong associations between the Big Five and the Biodata and Self factors, which lends support to McCrae and Costa's system model of personality. A consistent pattern of both a primary and secondary trait as joint predictors of Biodata and Self factors suggests that these areas are systematically influenced by multiple traits rather than only single traits. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

McCrae and Costa (1996) have suggested a meta-theoretical framework for organizing many of the recurring issues that any theory of personality must face. Their framework consists of six major elements: Basic Tendencies, Characteristic Adaptations, Self-Concept, Objective Biography, External Influences, and Dynamic Processes. The first five elements refer to domains of variables which personality theories should address. The last element, Dynamic Processes, specifies the nature and types of interactions between these variables.

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Basic Tendencies are inherent dispositions and abilities of individuals. External Influences are the ‘psychological environment’ which an individual interacts with. Characteristic Adaptations are concrete manifestations of an individual’s Basic Tendencies produced by the interaction of Basic Tendencies and External Influences. Self-Concept is a special subcategory of Characteristic Adaptations which consists of knowledge, views and evaluations of the Self. Objective Biography consists of all the behavior in which people engage, the life course that people experience, and the life structure they build during their lives.

In their framework McCrae and Costa tentatively identify ‘personality’ with Basic Tendencies and the Dynamic Processes by which they affect other elements. Personality traits are one important component of Basic Tendencies. Many traits can be accounted for by five major factors. These five factors are the traits Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Factor V. Good arguments have been made for distinguishing the ‘Big Five’, which is derived from the lexical hypothesis, from the ‘Five Factor Model’ which is derived from phrase based questionnaires. The most important distinction between these two potentially different versions of ‘the five factors’ involves the nature of Factor V, which is characterized as Intellect by the Big Five, and as Openness to Experience by the Five Factor Model. There is not enough research to draw any strong conclusions about the differential validity of these two conceptualizations at this time. However, across a variety of tests and scales, whether rated by individuals or observers, whether the scale is lexical or phrase based, a researcher can usually find a five factor solution that generally resembles other five factor solutions. This five factor system has been remarkably successful in assimilating a wide variety of personality tests and scales (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae, 1989). Many personality scales in previously proposed trait systems have been ‘located’ as a subdimension, combination of, or parallel to one of these five factors. One major conclusion from this body of research is that five factors serve as an adequate, although perhaps not a complete, taxonomy of traits.

McCrae and Costa’s meta-theoretical framework suggests that one important task is to determine how basic tendencies, such as traits, are associated with the other elements of their framework. Two exploratory studies were conducted to examine the relation of the five factors (simply called the Big Five hereafter) to Self-Concept and Objective Biography. These domains were approximated by using self-report inventories which focus on past events and self-evaluations. Biographical data, commonly called Biodata, was selected as a criteria representative of Objective Biography. Various measures of the Self and Identity were selected as a criteria representative of Self-Concept. The general research question pursued in these two studies is the extent to which factors derived from questionnaires measuring Biodata and the Self are associated with the Big Five.

1.1. Biodata

Assessing a person’s life history may be done in many ways, such as interviews, background investigations or questionnaires. Among industrial and organizational psychologists the most common form of Biodata assessment has been self-report inventories. Typically an individual is asked to recall and report specific behaviors and experiences during situations occurring earlier in their lives (Nickels, 1994). Common domains assessed for Biodata include interests and attitudes, drug use, educational achievement and involvement, criminal history, organizational

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