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Comparison of the Giant Three and the Big Five in early adolescents

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Abstract

This study examines the robustness of the PEN model and the Big Five model in self-reported personality data of 419 early adolescents, aged 12–14 years. Adolescents filled out the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire for Youth-Revised (JEPQ-R) and a questionnaire designed to assess the Big Five factors. Factor analysis of the combined item set revealed that three factors best represented the data. Direct comparison of both models by exploratory analyses at the scale level seemed to be more in favour of the PEN model, and lent support for the assumption that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are aspects of Psychoticism. Confirmatory factor analyses, however, did not favour one model over the other. The position of Openness/Intellect is discussed and suggestions for future personality research are described.

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1. Introduction

In the past decades two models have dominated in the area of personality research. The first model is Eysenck's hierarchical three factor model, recently described as the Giant Three model (Eysenck, 1994). The second model assumes that personality is best described in terms of five factors, or the Big Five, and is usually referred to as the Big Five model (John, 1990).

Initially, Eysenck distinguished two basic dimensions of personality, which he labelled Extraversion (E), reflecting extraverted tendencies such as sociability, activity, liveliness, and sensation

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seeking, and Neuroticism (N), reflecting neurotic tendencies such as anxiousness, tenseness, guilt feelings, and depression. Subsequently, a third dimension, labelled Psychoticism (P), was added (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975). This factor, which was also referred to as ‘tough-mindedness’, included traits like aggression, egocentrism and impulsiveness. The original P-scale in the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) showed major psychometric weaknesses, most important a low reliability (Block, 1977), and was revised in the EPQ-R for adults (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991), and the Y-EPQ-R for youth (Corulla, 1990; De Bruyn, Delsing, & Welten, 1995; Scholte & De Bruyn, 2001). The EPQ(-R) is now one of the most widely used instruments for measuring the three PEN factors. These factors have been replicated in a great number of studies employing the EPQ(-R) in a wide variety of settings and countries including Finland (Eysenck & Haapasalo, 1989), Japan (Hosokawa & Ohyama, 1993), Italy (Saggino, 2000), and The Netherlands (Sanderman, Eysenck, & Arrindell, 1991).

In the Big Five model of personality, five factors, or the Big Five, are regarded as the basic dimensions of personality organisation. Factor analysis of personality descriptive adjectives (Goldberg, 1990, 1992) as well as personality questionnaire items (Costa & McCrae, 1995; McCrae & Costa, 1985) have revealed more or less the same five factors. Although slightly different terms are sometimes used for these five factors, there is general agreement regarding the first four: I: Extraversion (E), II: Agreeableness (A), III: Conscientiousness (C), and IV: Emotional Stability or Neuroticism (ES or N). There has been some debate about the fifth factor, which has been labelled “Intellect” by Goldberg (1990) and “Openness” (O) by McCrae and Costa (1985). This debate, however, did not question the appropriateness of the Big Five model as a whole.

The Big Five factors have been shown to be robust across methods of factor extraction and rotation. For example, Goldberg (1990) found virtually identical Big Five representations in factor solutions based on five variants of orthogonal and five variants of oblique rotations. Support for the model was also found in a multitrait- multimethod study by Barbaranelli and Caprara (2000). Cross-cultural evidence for the existence of the Big Five factors has come from studies within a number of languages, including Western languages such as German and Dutch (Hofstee, Kiers, De Raad, Goldberg, & Ostendorf, 1997), Spanish (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998), and Italian (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Perugini, 1993). The Big Five factors have also been found in Asian languages like Chinese (Trull & Geary, 1997).

Even though the Big Five model is probably predominant in personality assessment research to date, it is recognised that the model has limitations (see Block, 1995; John & Robins, 1994; McCrae & John, 1992) and that the “Big Five model is not fully developed” (Goldberg & Saucier, 1995, p. 221). Indeed, some studies have reported on the existence of seven factors or the Big Seven (Almagor, Tellegen, & Waller, 1995). Two of these factors were evaluative or valence factors but the other five factors corresponded to the Big Five. Other studies question the cross-cultural generalizability of the Big Five factors. In a number of Italian studies on the Big Five factors, some factors with slightly different meanings tended to emerge, even if the same samples and variable selection procedures were used as in other studies. For example, in studies by Caprara and Perugini, (1994) and Di Blas and Forzi (1998) a Big Five factor structure emerged in which Emotional Stability was only marginally represented. Perugini and Ercolani (1998) reported that the fifth factor in their study was better characterised as Autonomy than as Openness.

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