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Personality and Individual Differences 37 (2004) 1519–1530

PERSONALITY AND
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

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Big five personality variables and relationship constructs

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Received 4 August 2003; received in revised form 5 January 2004; accepted 20 February 2004

Available online 10 May 2004

Abstract

Associations between the personality variables of the five-factor model and close relationship variables (love styles, relationship satisfaction, and intimacy) were explored. Participants ($N = 196$) from committed relationships were administered the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised, the Love Attitudes Scale-Short Form, the Relationship Assessment Scale, the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships, and a demographic questionnaire. Correlation and regression analyses revealed that neuroticism was negatively associated with and predictive of satisfaction and intimacy. The association between neuroticism and relationship satisfaction was completely mediated by possessive, dependent love for females. Extraversion and agreeableness were positively associated with relationship satisfaction and intimacy, especially for males. Conscientiousness was positively correlated with intimacy for males. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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Keywords: Five factor; Personality; Love styles; Relationship satisfaction; Intimacy

1. Introduction

Links between personality and relational constructs may seem self-evident. Personality expresses much of who we are as humans, and one forum for that expression is our intimate relationships. Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that humans have a fundamental “need to belong” within close relationships. One individual’s “identity” (i.e., personality) connects with another individual’s “identity” in an intimate relationship. It is thus not surprising that some

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relationship scholars (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1988) include personality among factors influencing relationship satisfaction. The current research seeks to extend understanding of the links between personality (assessed by the five-factor model) and romantic relationships (love styles, intimacy and relationship satisfaction).

2. The five-factor model of personality

The five-factor model of personality consists of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, each in turn consisting of six facets. Neuroticism includes anxiety, depression, hostility, impulsiveness, self-consciousness, and vulnerability. Extraversion is characterized by warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking, and positive emotions. Openness includes openness to fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values. The facets of agreeableness include altruism, compliance, modesty, straightforwardness, tender-mindedness, and trust. Conscientiousness includes achievement striving, competence, deliberation, dutifulness, order, and self-discipline (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

The five-factor model is not a theory, but rather adopts the premises of trait theory, in that persons can be characterized by individual differences that are stable over time, consistent across situations, and involve patterns of thought, affect, and behavior (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1984; McCrae & Costa, 1996, 1999). The argument for a strong genetic component to such factors as extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, long viewed as “temperamental” traits (Eysenck, 1990) is supported by parent, behavioral genetic, cross-cultural, and animal comparative studies (Digman, 1990; McCrae et al., 2000). Additionally, the five factors have proven to be generally stable over long periods (Digman, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1994) and across diverse cultures (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Finally, the five-factor model posits that traits are organized hierarchically from broad constructs (i.e., the five factors) to specific constructs (e.g., facets of each factor) (McCrae & Costa, 1996, 1999).

3. Relationship variables

3.1. *Love styles*

The love styles or attitudes are types of love that come from Lee's (1973) classification system. The six major love styles include Eros (passionate), Ludus (game-playing), Storge (friendship), Pragma (practical), Mania (possessive, dependent), and Agape (altruistic) love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). The love styles are related to relationship satisfaction and to some extent to relationship continuation (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988).

3.2. *Satisfaction*

Relationship satisfaction is an important aspect of individuals' overall life satisfaction. It has been studied extensively by relationship researchers and is an important construct for couple therapists. It has been associated with both personality characteristics and other relationship

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