



## Supernumerary personality traits beyond the Big Five: Predicting materialism and unethical behavior

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### ABSTRACT

Despite its comprehensiveness, the Big Five model of personality does not adequately assess socially malevolent traits. Its ability to predict certain criteria related to materialism and unethical behavior, for example, may be curtailed. In the present study, several supernumerary traits known to fall outside the Big Five factor space were posited to provide incremental validity in predicting such criterion outcomes. Using self- and informant-reports, we found that supernumerary traits such as seductiveness, (low) thriftiness, and (low) integrity explained variance in relevant criteria not explained by the Big Five factors. These associations persisted even when the criterion variables were assessed 6 months later. Our data support the call to routinely consider variables beyond the traditional Big Five personality factors in order to optimize the prediction and understanding of human behavior.

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### 1. Introduction

Establishing a comprehensive structural framework of personality traits has been a longstanding objective among personality researchers. In that regard, the Big Five model (or the Five-Factor Model) has emerged as a promising system with which to document and organize almost all human behavior, along five broad dimensions commonly known as Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (McCrae & John, 1992). The Big Five model has been instrumental in synthesizing the vast literature on personality correlates of a vast array of criterion outcomes (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006). However, questions about its purported comprehensiveness for the purposes of prediction have been raised (Ashton et al. 2004; Paunonen & Hong, in press; Paunonen & Jackson, 2000). Along those lines, the main objective of the present article is to demonstrate that the Big Five model is insufficient in its coverage of some traits, particularly those of a socially malevolent nature, and that important outcome criteria can be incrementally predicted by these traits that supposedly fall outside the Big Five factor space.

The approach adopted in this current investigation focuses on 10 specific supernumerary traits that presumably occupy a factor space distinct from that of the Big Five. These supernumerary traits, identified by Paunonen and Jackson (2000; see also Saucier & Goldberg, 1998), include conventionality, seductiveness, manip-

ulativeness, thriftiness, humorousness, integrity, femininity, religiosity, risk-taking, and egotism. They have been operationalized by Paunonen (2002) in a 150-item questionnaire called the Supernumerary Personality Inventory (SPI). Descriptions of the 10 SPI traits are presented elsewhere (Hong & Paunonen, 2009; Paunonen, Hadlock, Forsterling, & Keinonen, 2003). Although that questionnaire was not developed specifically to assess socially malevolent traits, some of its scales are conceptually aligned with such antisocial tendencies. The SPI traits of seductiveness, manipulativeness, integrity, risk-taking, and egotism, in particular, ostensibly have relevance to maladaptive interpersonal relationships (Paunonen, Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, Leikas, & Nissinen, 2006; Paunonen et al., 2003).

#### 1.1. SPI and socially malevolent traits

Veselka, Schermer, and Vernon (2011) explored the relations between SPI traits and socially negative traits such as Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, commonly referred to as the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), using a large twin sample recruited in North America. Phenotypic analysis revealed substantial overlap between the two sets of variables. Specifically, Machiavellianism was strongly associated with integrity and manipulativeness; narcissism with egotism, manipulativeness, and seductiveness; psychopathy with integrity, manipulativeness, seductiveness, femininity, and risk-taking (all absolute  $r$ s > .40). Multivariate behavioral genetic analyses also pointed to the substantial roles of genetic and nonshared environmental factors in

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accounting for the phenotypic overlap of the SPI traits with both narcissism and psychopathy.

An alternative perspective on socially malevolent traits stems from the HEXACO model of personality, articulated by Lee & Ashton (2004; see also Ashton et al., 2004). That structural framework proposes the existence of a sixth personality trait dimension beyond the Big Five, labeled as Honesty–Humility. The six-factor model of personality came about from reanalysis of several cross-cultural lexical studies (Ashton et al., 2004), and it has been proposed to be superior to the customary five-factor solution. The Honesty–Humility dimension is defined by lexical adjectives such as sincere, fair, unassuming, and modest versus dishonest, sly, greedy, pretentious, and boastful (Lee & Ashton, 2004).

The relevance of the HEXACO Honesty–Humility dimension in a structural personality framework is its ability to capture socially exploitative traits that are not well-represented in the Big Five model. Lee and Ashton (2005) demonstrated that the Dark Triad traits of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy were strongly and negatively associated with the Honesty–Humility dimension ( $r_s = -.57, -.53, \text{ and } -.72$ , respectively). In predicting several outcome criteria putatively associated with Honesty–Humility (i.e., materialism, unethical behaviors, delinquency, sexual harassment), Ashton and Lee (2008) subsequently demonstrated that the HEXACO model provided improved predictive validity over the Big Five model. Because of the strong overlap between Honesty–Humility and several SPI traits (i.e., Seductiveness, Manipulativeness, (low) Integrity, Risk-taking, and Egotism; see Lee, Ogunfowora, & Ashton, 2005), we propose that the SPI should also have relevance in predicting outcomes associated with these socially malevolent traits.

## 1.2. The present study

The preceding review of the literature suggests that (a) several supernumerary traits are strongly associated with the Dark Triad personalities and with the HEXACO Honesty–Humility factor, and (b) these variables all appear to lie largely outside a Big Five representation. The omission of these socially malevolent traits in the Big Five model thus raises questions about its adequacy for the prediction of certain criteria. The goal of this study was to address these questions about predictability from the perspective of the SPI supernumerary traits.

The SPI traits have demonstrated incremental value over the Big Five in predicting health-risk behaviors (Hong & Paunonen, 2009) and workplace deviance (O'Neill and Hastings, 2011). In this study, we focused on two important criterion outcomes: materialism and unethical business decision making (cf. Ashton & Lee, 2008). Materialism is broadly defined as a value orientation that places a strong emphasis on the acquisition of wealth and material possessions (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialistic individuals have been shown to experience less life satisfaction (Kasser, 2002), in part due to their poor relationships with other people and unrealistic expectations about standards of living (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Sirgy, 1998). Unethical business decision making refers to the willingness to engage in ethically unsound business practices for one's own benefit. From a moral standpoint, engaging in such unethical behaviors is undesirable as it violates notions of fairness, resulting in personal gain at the expense of someone else's loss. Considered together, materialistic individuals are likely to condone unethical behavior and to endorse intentions to engage in such behavior themselves (Vitell, Paolillo, & Singh, 2006).

We hypothesized that materialism would be predicted by certain personality traits supernumerary to the Big Five; specifically, by the SPI trait scales of Seductiveness, Manipulativeness, Thriftiness, (low) Integrity, and Egotism. With respect to the willingness to engage in unethical behaviors, we hypothesized that SPI

Manipulativeness, (low) Integrity, and Risk-Taking would be crucial predictors. We made these predictions on the basis of past research reviewed earlier and on our understanding of the SPI variables. It was further hypothesized that these SPI traits would increment the prediction of the criteria beyond that achieved by the Big Five factors. This prediction was made even though past research has indicated links between the Big Five factors and these criteria (e.g., Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and low Neuroticism with workplace ethical behavior; see Sackett & Wanek, 1996).

In this research, the personality assessments of participants were obtained from two independent sources – the participants themselves and knowledgeable informants. The inclusion of informant-reports was important on three accounts: (a) to determine convergence of results with self-reports, (b) to reduce common method variance because the criterion measures were assessed by self-reports, and (c) to provide personality assessments less influenced by self-deception or impression management tendencies on socially desirable characteristics (Paulhus, 1984). In addition, we measured the criterion variables twice over a six-month period, to determine whether personality-criterion relations found concurrently would remain significant when prospective relations were examined.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 246 undergraduate students from the National University of Singapore who participated for course credit or a token cash stipend. Their mean age was 20.6 years ( $SD = 1.47$ ) and the sample was predominantly female (74%). The ethnic breakdown was 82% Chinese, 5% Malay, 8% Indian and 5% "Others". They completed a battery of questionnaires assessing personality and criterion variables during an initial session at Time 1 (T1) and a follow-up session 6 months later at Time 2 (T2). Questionnaire administration (via an online survey) was done in English as that was the first language of Singaporean students.

During the T1 testing session, each participant was asked to bring along one person who knew him/her well, to act as a personality informant. The informants were instructed to provide information on the participants' personality characteristics by responding to the personality inventories in a standard peer rating format. The majority of these informants were friends to participants (63%), having known the participants for an average of 6.3 years ( $SD = 6.22$ ). On an acquaintanceship closeness rating scale, ranging from 1 (*Not close at all*) to 9 (*Very close*), the informants reported themselves to be very well-acquainted with the participants ( $M = 8.0$ ;  $SD = 1.15$ ). Six informants who knew participants for 6 months or less were omitted from subsequent analyses. At T2, 207 participants returned and completed questionnaires on the criterion variables only. Attrition analyses revealed no differences between those who returned in T2 versus those who did not.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Big Five personality variables

The Big Five personality factors were assessed using the NEO Personality Inventory – Revised (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992). The NEO-PI-R is a widely-used Big Five instrument with well-established psychometric properties (Costa & McCrae, 1992). It contains 240 items that constitute five factor scales of 48 items each.

#### 2.2.2. Supernumerary personality variables

Ten supernumerary traits were measured using the 150-item SPI (Paunonen, 2002), with 15 items per trait scale. The SPI is an

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