



## Sensation seeking, risk-taking, and the HEXACO model of personality

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### ABSTRACT

Previous research has related sensation seeking and risk-taking to the Big Five or Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality. Recently, based on a reanalysis of the main lexical studies, a six-dimensional HEXACO model of personality has been proposed. In three studies, the Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) and the IPIP Risk-Taking scale are related to the factor and selected facet scales of the (Revised) HEXACO Personality Inventory. In agreement with the FFM, sensation seeking and risk-taking are significantly related to Openness to Experience, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness. However, sensation seeking and risk-taking are also significantly related to HEXACO Honesty–Humility and Emotionality. Based on the findings, a HEXACO Sensation Seeking Scale is designed from the facets Fearfulness, Unconventionality, Creativity, Fairness, Prudence, Social Boldness, and Sociability, which is found to have strong convergent correlations with the SSS and IPIP Risk-Taking in all of the studies.

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### 1. Introduction

Sensation seeking and risk-taking have been associated with a plethora of important behaviors and outcomes in daily life. For instance, sensation seeking has been found to be an important correlate of a range of high-risk behaviors, such as drinking, smoking, drug use, and risky sexual behaviors (Zuckerman, 2008). Although some have argued that sensation seeking and risk-taking constitute an important personality dimension on their own (Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Joireman, Teta, & Kraft, 1993) or lie beyond the Big Five (Paunonen & Jackson, 2000), others have argued that they share a substantial amount of variance with Big Five or Five Factor Model (FFM) measures (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The latter stance seems to receive most support. Various studies have shown that, in terms of the Five Factor Model, sensation seeking and risk-taking share a substantial amount of variance with Openness to Experience and Extraversion, and to a lesser degree with Conscientiousness and Agreeableness, while Neuroticism or Emotional Stability has been found to share almost no variance with sensation seeking or risk-taking (Aluja, García, & García, 2003; Dahlen & White, 2006; Zuckerman et al., 1993). When rephrased in terms of the Big Five, compared to people low on sensation seeking, people high on sensation seeking seem to be characterized by a higher level of Openness to Experience and Extraversion and a somewhat lower level of Conscientiousness and Agreeableness, but no differences in Emotional Stability or Neuroticism.

Recently, a new structural model of personality has been proposed that posits six instead of five main dimensions of personality. This model, the HEXACO model of personality, is based on the same

lexical studies that have given rise to the Big Five model (Ashton et al., 2004). The HEXACO acronym stands for the following six dimensions, Honesty–Humility (H), Emotionality (E), Extraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O). Compared to the Big Five, some similarities and changes can be observed in the HEXACO model. The HEXACO model is similar to the Big Five model with respect to the three dimensions Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience. The most important change is the addition of a new personality dimension, Honesty–Humility, which represents individual differences in tendencies to be sincere, fair, and unassuming versus manipulative, greedy, and pretentious. The second most important change is the rotation of the Big Five dimensions Agreeableness and Emotional Stability. In the HEXACO model, variance associated with irritability, which in the Big Five model is associated with low Emotional Stability, is assigned to HEXACO Agreeableness instead. As a consequence, HEXACO Agreeableness represents individual differences in tendencies to be cooperative, patient, and lenient versus to be critical, irritable, and unforgiving towards others. Variance associated with sentimentality, which in the Big Five model is associated with Agreeableness, is assigned to HEXACO Emotionality instead. As a consequence, HEXACO Emotionality represents individual differences in the experience of anxiety, sentimentality, and empathy versus fearlessness, detachment, and independence. Evidence thus far shows that the HEXACO model is a robust model, with high levels of cross-cultural correspondence of the six lexical dimensions in 12 languages with the six HEXACO dimensions (Lee & Ashton, 2008) and significant and meaningful incremental validity of Honesty–Humility in the prediction of integrity-related criteria over and above Five Factor Model measures (Ashton & Lee, 2008).

The abovementioned changes may have some implications for the ability to explain variance in sensation seeking or risk-taking.

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Compared to the Big Five model, no big differences are likely to be observed in the relations between sensation seeking or risk-taking and Openness to Experience, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness, because these three dimensions show a strong overlap with the Big Five dimensions. However, compared to the Big Five model, there may be some changes in the relations with sensation seeking or risk-taking due to the different rotational positions of Agreeableness and Emotionality, and due to the addition of Honesty–Humility in the HEXACO model of personality. First of all, the different rotational position of HEXACO Agreeableness and Emotionality may have some implications for the relations of these dimensions with sensation seeking and risk-taking. Sensation seeking and risk-taking have been associated with impulsiveness and fearlessness (Arnaut, 2006). In the FFM or Big Five model, Neuroticism (or low Emotional Stability) pertains to a mix of irritability (i.e., low patience) and Fearfulness. Interestingly enough, this mix may counteract the possibility to find significant relations between Neuroticism and sensation seeking or risk-taking because Neuroticism may be positively associated with sensation seeking through its irritability or lack of impulsivity component while it is at the same time negatively associated with sensation seeking through its Fearfulness component. In the HEXACO model, as explained above, these two components are aligned with two different dimensions. HEXACO Agreeableness contains the lack of irritability (patience) component which may be negatively associated with sensation seeking (i.e., disagreeableness or impatience may be positively associated with sensation seeking), while HEXACO Emotionality contains the Fearfulness component, which may create a negative association with sensation seeking or risk-taking.

Secondly, the addition of Honesty–Humility may offer incremental variance in the prediction of sensation seeking or risk-taking. Sensation seeking has been found to distinguish criminal offenders from the general population (Herrero & Colom, 2008) and to be related to a general deviance factor, which includes law abidance, sexual risks, and drug use (Zuckerman, 2007). Of the subscales of the Sensation Seeking Scale, Disinhibition has been noted as one of the most important components in the explanation of counternormative behaviors. Jonah, Thiessen, and Au Yeung (2001) found Disinhibition to be most strongly related to violations of traffic norms and rules. Disinhibition has also been found to be one of the most important sensation seeking predictors of illegal drug use (Andrussi, Archer, Pancoast, & Gordon, 1989). Disinhibition and the related construct Impulsiveness have been found to be related to verbal and physical aggression in school children (Joireman, Anderson, & Strathman, 2003; Wittmann, Arce, & Santisteban, 2008). All of these counternormative activities involve rule-breaking behaviors and violations of societal norms, which may indicate that Honesty–Humility, which has been negatively associated with antisocial and counterproductive behaviors (Lee, Ashton, & de Vries, 2005), is involved.

To sum up, this study will investigate the relations of the HEXACO model of personality with sensation seeking and risk-taking. We are specifically interested in the relations between HEXACO Emotionality and Honesty–Humility with sensation seeking, its subscales, and risk-taking. To investigate these relations, we have conducted three comparable studies. In the first study, which was conducted in a student sample, the HEXACO-PI (Lee & Ashton, 2004) was investigated together with the Dutch version of the Sensation Seeking Scale of Zuckerman (Van den Berg & Feij, 2002; Zuckerman, 1979). In the second study, conducted in a community sample, we administered the HEXACO-PI together with the Sensation Seeking Scale and the IPIP Risk-Taking scale (Goldberg, 1999; Jackson, 1994). In the third study, we employed the Revised HEXACO-PI (HEXACO-PI-R) together with the Sensation Seeking Scale and IPIP Risk-Taking.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Samples and procedures

#### 2.1.1. Study 1

Undergraduate psychology and educational science students filled out the Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) and, a week later, the HEXACO-PI. A paper-and-pencil version of the SSS was returned by 339 students. One week later, 349 respondents completed the HEXACO-PI through the internet. The questionnaires were matched on student numbers. A total of 304 matched students (82.9% women), with a mean age of 20.6 years ( $sd = 3.4$ ), filled out both questionnaires.

#### 2.1.2. Study 2

Community respondents were recruited through the internet in return for the possibility to obtain a personality profile and the chance to win a gift voucher. Respondents willing to participate were provided with two internet links. The first one linked to the HEXACO-PI and background variables and the second one, which they received a week after the first one, linked to the SSS and IPIP Risk-Taking. The sample consisted of 276 participants, of whom 263 (60.8% female) filled out all questionnaires. The mean age of the final usable sample was 38.3 years ( $sd = 12.1$ ) and consisted of respondents with the following educational levels: 0.8% junior high school, 7.2% high school, 8.4% lower-level occupational training, 34.2% middle-level occupational training, 32.3% higher-level occupational training, and 17.1% University.

#### 2.1.3. Study 3

As in Study 1, the sample consisted of first-year psychology and educational science students. A total of 169 students (85.2% women), with a mean age of 20.1 ( $sd = 2.3$ ), filled out the HEXACO-PI-R, the SSS, and the IPIP Risk-Taking scale.

### 2.2. Instruments

#### 2.2.1. HEXACO-PI and HEXACO-PI-R

The HEXACO Personality Inventory is a questionnaire operationalization of the HEXACO six-dimensional personality model (Lee & Ashton, 2004). The HEXACO-PI, which was used in the first two studies, consists of 208 items, divided among four facets for each of the six main scales, plus two additional facets, Altruism and Negative Self-Evaluation (Lee & Ashton, 2006). These two additional facets measure so-called ‘interstitial’ regions in the HEXACO model, that is, they pertain to blends of two or more factors in the six-dimensional personality space. The HEXACO-PI-R, which was used in the third study, consists of 200 items and deviates from the HEXACO-PI in the replacement of the Extraversion Expressiveness facet by the facet Social Self-Esteem and by the removal of the interstitial Negative Self-Evaluation facet. All items in both questionnaires were rated on 1–5 (disagree–agree) scales. The psychometric properties of the Dutch HEXACO-PI scales are reported in De Vries, Lee, and Ashton (2008). In all of the three studies the psychometric results were very much in line with earlier findings with the English version (Lee & Ashton, 2004; Lee & Ashton, 2006). The internal consistency reliabilities of the HEXACO-PI(-R) factor scales ranged between 0.86 and 0.92 (median  $\alpha = 0.90$ ) and none of the correlations between the factor scales exceeded the 0.35 level (the median interscale correlation was 0.00 and the median absolute interscale correlation was 0.11).

#### 2.2.2. SSS

Sensation seeking was measured using the Dutch selection version of the Sensation Seeking Scale (Van den Berg & Feij, 2002;

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