



The Dark Triad and an expanded framework of personality

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ABSTRACT

Presently the conventional structure of personality, the Five-Factor Model (FFM), has faced criticism for inadequately capturing the full range of existing traits, particularly those reflecting antisocial behavior. The FFM has also not received sufficient application of genetically informed analyses to its extraction and validation. We explored these criticisms, and carried out four behavioral genetic studies which employed the Dark Triad personality cluster as a microcosmic representation of the antisocial personality domain, to assess the comprehensiveness of the FFM and the fit of socially malevolent traits within it. Results from these studies revealed significant phenotypic, genetic, and environmental correlations between the Dark Triad traits and variables measured by the NEO Personality Inventory, the Supernumerary Personality Inventory, the Defining Issues Test-Version 2, and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. It is concluded that the FFM does not provide a complete model of personality and that behavior genetic approaches to the study of individual differences can contribute to a more comprehensive theory.

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1. Introduction

A prevalent theme in personality research has been the pursuit of a sound framework of human traits. To date, numerous structures and hierarchies have been proposed, each offering a unique perspective on the potential manner in which traits can be organized (Allport, 1937; Cattell, 1946; DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002; Digman, 1997; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1976; Lee & Ashton, 2004; Musek, 2007). The Five-Factor Model (FFM; Costa & McCrae, 1992), a variation on the Big Five model of personality (Goldberg, 1990), is currently the most popular of the proposed frameworks, and the conventional means by which the structure of personality is presently understood. According to the FFM, five orthogonal dimensions – Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness – can account for all individual differences in human personality traits, and behavioral genetic studies of the framework have shown that variance in these dimensions is almost exclusively attributable to genetic and non-shared environmental factors (Johnson, Vernon, & Feiler, 2008; Plomin & Caspi, 1999).

Despite the considerable volume of empirical evidence supporting the FFM (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1997; McCrae, Costa, del Pilar, Rolland, & Parker, 1998; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996; Saucier & Goldberg, 1998), critical investigations of this model have raised two key issues that call into question its validity as a sound

personality structure. First, the model has been deemed to be limited: failing to account for the full range of personality traits that exist, and therefore falling short of its goal to provide a comprehensive summary of all individual personality differences (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Paunonen & Jackson, 2000). Noticeably absent from the model are socially malevolent traits that may have once been considered impolite, and which were therefore not sufficiently captured in the lexical taxonomies upon which the FFM is based (Block, 2010). Furthermore, it has been argued that there is an overreliance on factor analytic methodology in deriving and replicating the FFM, and simultaneously an insufficient application of genetically informed analyses to these investigations (Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001; Boyle, 2008; Boyle, Stankov, & Cattell, 1995; Heath, Madden, Cloninger, & Martin, 1999; Johnson & Krueger, 2004). This supposed analytical rut has resulted in a poor understanding of the inherited structure of personality and of its etiological underpinnings, as well as in the potential popularization of an incomplete framework of personality (Heath, Cloninger, & Martin, 1994).

In the present review, we discuss several studies that we have conducted in an effort to begin to address the outlined limitations of the FFM, and to move toward a revision of the conventional personality model. As a focal point within these investigations we have used the Dark Triad personality cluster (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), which comprises Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. This group of sub-clinical traits appears in the personality literature as a valid collection of unique but overlapping antisocial dimensions that can be tested in conjunction with other

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models and variable sets. As a result, it is ideal in the assessment of socially malevolent constructs in the FFM. Furthermore, behavioral genetic analyses were carried out in all investigations to allow for both a phenotypic and an etiological perspective on the assessed models and associations. By jointly examining antisocial personality traits and genetic and environmental influences in a broader investigation of the FFM, we contribute to a systematic analysis of the gray area between supposedly normal functioning and psychopathology, thereby adding to the growing body of work on a dimensional understanding of human behavior (Cloninger, 2002; Jang & Livesley, 1999; Livesley, 2005; Markon, Krueger, Bouchard, & Gottesman, 2002; Widiger & Trull, 1992).

2. Challenging the conventional Five-Factor Model of personality

2.1. *The Five-Factor Model: sufficiently broad or broadly insufficient?*

Although studies proposing the comprehensive nature of the FFM do exist (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1997; McCrae et al., 1998), an increasing number of researchers are making the argument that the lexical approach employed in the original extraction of the FFM's five factors was not appropriately inclusive. Specifically, this approach did not take into consideration evaluative terms, words describing temporary states, common-language adjectives that were being infrequently employed, and terms considered impolite (Almagor, Tellegen, & Waller, 1995; Block, 2010). Empirical investigations of less conservative methods of deriving a personality framework through this same lexical approach have predominantly shown that not only can additional traits and dimensions be meaningfully added to the present FFM, but also that the nature of these additional constructs is in line with contemporary definitions of socially malevolent behavior (Almagor, Tellegen, & Waller, 1995; Lee & Ashton, 2004; Paunonen & Jackson, 2000).

Ashton et al. (2004) proposed a six-factor HEXACO model after analyzing cross-cultural lexical data. Five of the model's dimensions were conceptually similar to those of the FFM, while the sixth factor of Honesty–Humility was included to implicate traits such as deceit, hypocrisy, conceit, slyness, pretentiousness, and greed. This Honest–Humility factor has exhibited significant correlations with numerous socially malevolent traits (de Vries, de Vries, de Hoogh, & Feij, 2009; Lee & Ashton, 2005; Lee, Ashton, & de Vries, 2005), and therefore appears not only to capture variables missing from the FFM model, but also helps to identify these variables as relevant to prosocial versus antisocial behavior.

Paunonen and Jackson (2000) assessed the data originally used by Saucier and Goldberg (1998) to validate the comprehensiveness of the FFM in order to determine whether important traits were missing from the model. Using a less conservative cut-off score for the inclusion of variables than did Saucier and Goldberg, the researchers identified ten broad dimensions of traits not previously incorporated into the FFM sample space: conventionality, seductiveness, manipulateness, thriftiness, humorousness, integrity, femininity, religiosity, risk-taking, and egotism. Of these ten traits, integrity, manipulateness, egotism, and seductiveness have been linked to the Honesty–Humility dimension of the HEXACO model (Lee & Ogunfowora, 2005), while additional traits have been correlated with negative outcomes (Hong & Paunonen, 2009; O'Neill & Hastings, 2011). Once again, these elements of personality, untapped by the FFM but identified by Paunonen and Jackson, appear relevant to social malevolence, suggesting that, at present, the FFM may not sufficiently account for individual differences in antisocial traits.

2.2. *The Five-Factor Model: organizing phenotypes or clarifying genotypes?*

Most existing personality models have been derived through factor analytic approaches using samples of unrelated participants (Digman, 1990; Heath et al., 1999; Johnson & Krueger, 2004). The Five-Factor structure of traits is no exception to this general trend (e.g., Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1990; Boyle, 2008; Digman, 1997; Goldberg, 1992). Due to this method of extraction, the FFM can be said to comprise dimensions that represent a set of observable characteristics rather than the underlying structure of these characteristics (Heath et al., 1999; Johnson & Krueger, 2004). That is, the model's five factors presently reflect a collection of phenotypes summarizing variance in lexical studies of adjectives used to describe personality across cultures, but not offering a genetically informed picture of the organization of human traits. Despite this limitation, however, Costa and McCrae (1995) have presented the FFM's dimensions as biological entities that cannot be observed directly or accessed fully via introspection.

In efforts to move beyond the phenotypic restrictions of the FFM, numerous studies employing behavioral genetic methodology have reported that individual differences in the five dimensions of the FFM are primarily attributable to genetic and non-shared environmental factors (e.g., Johnson et al., 2008; Plomin & Caspi, 1999; Riemann, Angleitner, & Strelau, 1997). As a result, a clearer sense of the origin of broad personality traits can be deduced from these findings. More rigorous analyses, however, that have assessed directly the genetic and environmental structure of the five-factor framework of personality have cast doubt on the presentation of the FFM as a coherent model of genetic and environmental influences on personality (e.g., Jang, Livesley, Angleitner, Riemann, & Vernon, 2002; Loehlin, McCrae, Costa, & John, 1998; McCrae, Jang, Livesley, Riemann, & Angleitner, 2001). Johnson and Krueger (2004), for instance, employed multivariate models to assess the coherence of the FFM dimensions through an analysis of adjectives describing its five domains. Results of this study revealed that each domain had multiple underlying environmental and genetic determinants, and was therefore complex, calling into question the construct validity of the five-factor framework of personality. Taken together, these behavioral genetic investigations have revealed that although some conclusions about genetic and environmental influences on personality can be drawn from the FFM model, the strengths of these conclusions are hindered by the lack of construct coherence that currently exists in the model, reinforcing the need to re-assess and revise the prevailing framework of individual differences in personality.

Moving forward in analyses and revisions of the FFM, there is a recommendation to incorporate behavioral genetic methodology in general, and multivariate behavioral genetic approaches in particular, into investigations of these models, rather than simply relying on phenotypic factor analysis (Heath & Martin, 1990; Heath et al., 1999). Specifically, if the goal is to work toward an understanding of the manner in which normal and pathological traits are mediated genetically and environmentally – a possibility if antisocial traits are to be incorporated into the FFM – then multivariate genetic methods are especially applicable to this domain (Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001; Livesley, 2005; Markon et al., 2002).

2.3. *The Dark Triad and the microcosmic study of antisocial traits in the Five-Factor Model*

Based on the findings outlined thus far, it seems reasonable to propose that there may exist personality variables that are presently not incorporated within the FFM structure, and further to suggest that these unrepresented variables may be particularly relevant to social malevolence. To assess empirically the roles of

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