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Beyond the Big Five

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Abstract

This article aims at a discussion of three controversial issues about the Big Five (1) Is the five-factor model comprehensive? (2) How should the amount of variance accounted for by the Big Five be measured? (3) Are the Big Five orthogonal and do they represent the highest hierarchical level of personality description? Subjects were 115 men and women in the age range from 20 to 63 years. They answered three Big Five measures (1) a German version of the NEO-FFI, (2) 45 bipolar ratings scales, developed by Ostendorf [Ostendorf, F. (1990). *Sprache und Persönlichkeitsstruktur. Zur Validität des Fünf-Faktoren-Modells*. [Language and the structure of personality. About the validity of the Five-Factor-Model]. Regensburg: Roderer.], (3) the Hamburg personality inventory, developed by Andresen [Andresen, B. (1995). Risikobereitschaft (R): der sechste Basisfaktor der Persönlichkeit: Konvergenz multivariater Studien und Konstruktionsexplikation. [Risk preference (R): the sixth basic factor of personality: convergence of multivariate studies and construct explication], *Zeitschrift für Differentielle und Diagnostische Psychologie*, 16, 210–236.], as well as the Trier personality inventory, developed by Becker [Becker, P. (1989). *Der Trierer Persönlichkeitsfragebogen TPF. Handanweisung*. [The Trier personality inventory. TPI. Manual]. Göttingen: Hogrefe.] and the Trier behavior control inventory, developed by Becker [Becker, P. (1995). *Seelische Gesundheit und Verhaltenskontrolle. Eine integrative Persönlichkeitstheorie und ihre klinische Anwendung*. [Mental health and behavior control. An integrative personality theory and its clinical application]. Göttingen: Hogrefe.]. The results of several factor analyses lead to the following conclusions (1) The five-factor model is not comprehensive. At least a sixth factor hedonism/spontaneity can be replicated. (2) The Big Five and the six first-order factors are not orthogonal but oblique so that two higher-order factors (the Big Two), labelled mental health and behavior control, can be found. The loadings of the 33 basic variables and of the six first-order factors on the Big Two have a circumplex structure. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Controversies about the Big Five

During the past years, the field of personality structure has been dominated by a controversy about the value of the five-factor model of personality. This model posits that the structure of personality can be reduced to five (orthogonal) dimensions which are most commonly referred to as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. While the proponents of five-factor models stress the comprehensiveness, cross-cultural replicability and wide applicability of the Big Five, critics remain sceptical and point to weaknesses and open questions (John, 1990; Ostendorf, 1990; Costa and McCrae, 1992a; Eysenck, 1992; Deary and Matthews, 1993; Brand, 1994; Goldberg and Rosolack, 1994; Becker, 1995, 1996a; Block, 1995; McCrae and Costa, 1997; Wiggins and Trapnell, 1997). In the present article, the discussion about the Big Five is confined to three controversial issues.

1.1. *Is the five-factor model comprehensive?*

In a recent review of research about the five-factor model, Wiggins and Trapnell (1997) state: “Interest in the five-factor model derived mainly from the claim that five dimensions might provide an adequate preliminary taxonomy for *all* nontrivial personality traits — those whose importance in human interaction has resulted in a descriptive label in the natural language (e.g. dominant), as well as those reflected in the constructs of personality researchers (e.g. Machiavellianism)” (pp. 756–757). Similar claims for inclusiveness are to be found in other publications (e.g. Ostendorf, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992; Goldberg and Rosolack, 1994; McCrae and Costa, 1997). For instance, McCrae and John (1992) state: “As critics of the FFM have pointed out, it frequently happens that analyses of specific personality instruments show evidence of more than five factors..., but this is probably due to method artifacts, sampling variability, or the particular selection of variables and does not in itself demonstrate the need for additional common factors in personality description... So far, no proposed sixth factor has stood this test” (p. 191).

Indeed, there is a long list of studies in which five factors similar to the Big Five and one or two further factors have been found (e.g. Andresen, 1995; Benet and Waller, 1995; Becker, 1996a,b; Deary, 1996; Jackson et al., 1996; Pawlik, 1968) concluded in a review of factor analytic research that six factors have been replicated, the sixth factor being “Gefühlsbetontheit” (feeling-orientation; pathemia).

Unfortunately, there seems to be little agreement about the content and label of a possible sixth (or seventh) factor. This could mean that there are more than six factors, or that there is no sixth factor that can be replicated in studies using different variables and different subjects. McCrae and Costa (1995) doubt that a basic dimension of personality beyond the five-factor model can be replicated. They demand that such a factor must meet three criteria (a) the new factor must be substantially independent of the first five (b) it must be at a comparable level of generality and thus subsume a number of more specific and mutually discriminable traits (c) it must appear in more than one context.

One aim of the present study is to examine if evidence for a sixth factor that meets these criteria can be provided.

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