



Short Communication

Knowing oneself and long-term goal pursuit: Relations among self-concept clarity, conscientiousness, and grit[☆]Robert E. Fite^{*}, Meghan I.H. Lindeman^{*}, Arielle P. Rogers, Elora Voyles, Amanda M. Durik

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ABSTRACT

Research has been dedicated to exploring the personality variables that facilitate goal pursuit. Conscientiousness and grit are closely related individual difference variables that have been postulated to influence goal pursuit. Conscientiousness refers to self-regulation in the pursuit of tasks or goals. Grit refers to the enduring effort that is applied to long term goals, and can be subdivided into two sub-components: perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. Unlike perseverance of effort which is robustly correlated with conscientiousness, consistency of interest is less strongly related to conscientiousness. The present study examines how a third variable, self-concept clarity, may interact with conscientiousness to differentially predict sub-components of grit. Results indicated that conscientiousness interacts with self-concept clarity to predict the consistency of interest component of grit; however, no interactive effect was found when predicting the perseverance of effort component of grit. The implications of these findings, as well as possible avenues for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

People apply self-regulation towards educational, career, and personal goals, but the degree to which people continue to work towards those goals over the long-term may be supported by the specificity and consistency with which they hold views of themselves. Much research has investigated what determines who keeps working towards their long-term goals and who gives up (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014; Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014; Poropat, 2009). One personality trait that has reliably been associated with goal striving and achievement is the super-trait of conscientiousness (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014; Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009; Poropat, 2009), which can be defined as the self-regulation of impulses in order to plan and pursue goals or tasks (John, Naumann & Soto, 2008). For instance, research has shown that conscientiousness predicts school performance, awards, and academic recognition in high school, all of which require persistence and goal-striving (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014; Poropat, 2009).

A related individual difference variable, grit, has also been posited as an even better predictor of persistence in long-term goals (Duckworth,

Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Grit refers to the long-term pursuit of higher-order goals in the face of obstacles or setbacks and is divided into two sub-components: consistency of interest and perseverance of effort (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit predicts retention of novice teachers in low-income districts (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014), the retention of U.S. Military Academy Cadets during their initial summer of training (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), and high school graduation from inner city schools (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014). Additionally, past research has shown positive correlations between grit and educational attainment (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Strayhorn, 2014).

Although there exists research demonstrating the incremental validity of grit beyond predictors such as conscientiousness and IQ (e.g., Duckworth et al., 2007), the usefulness of grit, as a whole, and its components have been called into question (Credé, Tynan, & Harms, 2016). Some researchers suggest that grit and conscientiousness overlap so much that grit adds little value to the literature (Credé et al., 2016). Moreover, both conscientiousness and grit involve an individual's tendency to persist in goal-related endeavors (MacCann, Duckworth & Roberts, 2009) and, tend to be highly correlated with each other (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Additionally, meta-analytic evidence has demonstrated that both sub-components of grit are strongly associated with conscientiousness (Credé et al., 2016).

The relationship between conscientiousness and the perseverance of effort component of grit is, however, considerably stronger than the relationship between conscientiousness and the consistency of interest component of grit (Credé et al., 2016; for an exception see Meriac, Slifka, & LaBat, 2015). Perhaps one reason for the increased association

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between conscientiousness and perseverance of effort is that both involve striving towards goals that have already been identified. In contrast, the consistency of interest component of grit depends on the extent to which the personal goals are clear and well defined.

Individuals who have well-defined interests are likely to have a clear vision of who they are and what they want, which may depend on self-concept clarity (SCC). It is possible that conscientiousness does not predict consistency of interest as strongly as it predicts perseverance of effort because conscientiousness does not capture features of goal content. The extent to which conscientiousness predicts consistency of interest may depend on an individuals' level of self-knowledge. Along these lines, it is possible that conscientiousness in conjunction with SCC better predicts the consistency of interest component of grit than conscientiousness alone. In other words, conscientiousness may interact with SCC to predict consistency of interest. That is—high conscientiousness combined with an ability to unambiguously and consistently define beliefs about the self (i.e., SCC), may predict the interest component of grit (Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1996). People who have high SCC have a clear vision of who they are, and that vision remains stable over time (Campbell, 1990). It is probable that people who have a clear and consistent definition of their self-concept set goals that are consistent with their interests. Because these goals are more consistent with their self-concept, those goals will continue to be of interest to them in the long-term.

To understand if these possible relationships between conscientiousness, SCC, and the components of grit exist, it would be useful to know if the relationship between conscientiousness and the components of grit become stronger at different levels of SCC. We tested this idea in the current study.

1.1. Present study

In a cross-sectional study, we conducted exploratory data analyses to investigate the relationships between conscientiousness, SCC, and grit. Based on how we thought these constructs might be related, we tested for an interaction between SCC and conscientiousness in predicting each component of grit.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

The sample included 142 participants (62% women) recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online workforce where workers can complete tasks (e.g., research studies) for financial compensation. Participants completed an online informed consent form and were monetarily compensated for their participation. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 73 ($M = 35.98$; $SD = 11.85$). Eighty-one percent of participants reported their ethnicity as White, 7% Hispanic, 4.9% African-American, 4.2% Asian, and 2.8% other. All participants completed the measures described below, which were embedded within a larger battery of items.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. 12 – grit (Duckworth et al., 2007)

The 12-item Grit Scale assessed participants' level of grit. This measure includes two factors: Perseverance of Effort and Consistency of Interest. In past validation work by Duckworth et al. (2007), confirmatory factor analysis of the grit scale evidenced a two-factor solution with acceptable model fit ($CFI = 0.83$, $RMSEA = 0.11$). This study also found acceptable internal consistency for the overall scale ($\alpha = 0.85$), as well as for the Consistency of Interest ($\alpha = 0.84$) and Perseverance of Effort ($\alpha = 0.78$) subscales. Additionally, each factor was found to be equally predictive of relevant outcomes. The Perseverance of Effort factor measures an individual's fortitude in the pursuit of higher-order

goals (e.g., "I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge."). The Consistency of Interest factor measures the extent to which goals and pursuits are sustained over time (e.g., "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one", reverse coded). Participants responded to each item on a 5-point scale from "Very much like me" to "Not like me at all". For analyses, all items were coded such that higher numbers equaled higher levels of grit.

2.2.2. Conscientiousness (IPIP-NEO-Domain; Goldberg, 1999; Goldberg et al., 2006)

Conscientiousness was measured using the 10-item International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) subscale based on the NEO-PI-R. This consists of items assessing the tendency to self-regulate in the pursuit of goals or responsibilities. Participants responded to items on a 5-point scale ranging from *Very Inaccurate* to *Very Accurate*. Examples of items are "I see myself as someone who gets chores done right away." and "I see myself as someone who carries out my plans."

2.2.3. Self-concept clarity (SCC) scale (Campbell et al., 1996)

The SCC Scale consists of 12 items that measure the extent to which individuals have formed stable beliefs about the self. The SCC Scale is a single factor measure, and responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". Examples of items include "On one day I might have one opinion of myself and on another day I might have a different opinion", (reverse coded), and "In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am."

2.3. Analysis strategy

To explore the data, we conducted two separate multiple regression analyses, one having the perseverance of effort component of grit as the dependent variable and the other having the consistency of interest component of grit as the dependent variable. In both analyses, conscientiousness, SCC, and their interaction term served as predictor variables. Both predictors were centered prior to calculating the interaction term. Conscientiousness, SCC, and the interaction term were entered into the regression equation simultaneously. For significant interactions that emerged, follow-up simple slopes analyses were conducted at one standard deviation above and below the mean of SCC.

3. Results

Bivariate correlations and reliability estimates can be found in Table 1.

3.1. Perseverance of effort

Analyses revealed a significant average effect of conscientiousness on the perseverance of effort component of grit, indicating that higher levels of conscientiousness were associated with higher levels of perseverance of effort, $\beta = 0.45$, $t(137) = 8.30$, $p < 0.001$. No significant average effect of SCC on perseverance of effort emerged, $\beta = 0.04$, $t(137) = 0.72$, $p = 0.47$. Further, no significant interaction emerged between conscientiousness and SCC on perseverance of effort, $\beta = 0.09$, $t(137) = 1.64$, $p = 0.10$ (Table 2).

Table 1
Bivariate correlations between all variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Conscientiousness	3.75	0.72	0.87	0.5***	0.49***	0.66***
2. Self-concept clarity	3.43	0.95		0.92	0.43***	0.35***
3. Grit: consistency of interest	2.99	0.78			0.84	0.28***
4. Grit: perseverance of effort	3.74	0.74				0.81

Note. Reliabilities are presented in bold on the diagonal. Significance is indicated as follows:

*** $p < 0.001$.

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