



Short Communication

Are survivalists malevolent?

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ABSTRACT

Survivalist plan and prepare for a major disaster. This research describes construction of the 8-item Survivalist Behavior Questionnaire (SBQ) and its nomological network which highlights that survivalists are disagreeable, low in rationality, and high in psychopathy, Machiavellianism and narcissism. This suggests relatively high malevolence as well as high capacity for self-preservation. They are also fantasizers of sensation seeking, deep learners, and high in entrepreneurial intent which suggests ingenuity and ambition. They are also of lower general ability and lower rationality which suggests some limitations in the way they analyze information. Compared to the general population, survivalists are potentially dangerous in terms of personality (e.g., they are high scorers on the Dark Triad) and behavior (e.g., they may stockpile weapons) but also have strong preservation instincts that might be of benefit, at least to themselves, should disaster strike.

1. Introduction

Although high percentages of people are unconcerned with potential disasters (Feinberg & Miller, 2011), some people seem preoccupied with apocalyptic events such as a major epidemic, meteorite impact, or tsunami. This may be because survival stories are important in modern culture (Mirabile, 2015) or because risks associated with catastrophes can be exaggerated (Kerr, 2007). The aim of this research is to design a Survivalist Behavior Questionnaire (SBQ) in which high scorers plan and prepare for a potential major disaster and then identify the personality correlates of these behaviors. This is important because survivalism is under-researched in the psychology literature and personality characteristics of survivalists might provide important information about people who may be a danger to society.

The SBQ is derived from the literature which advocates survivalists will seek shelter, weapons, food, and trusted friends (Golbeck, 2014; Mirabile, 2015) and survival books in the popular literature such as by Brooks (2003). In terms of personality correlates of survivalist behavior, the academic literature provides few clues. Survivalists might be similar to people with a military background (Mirabile, 2015) but such people do not hoard resources so the association might be minimal (Glicksohn & Bozna, 2000; Glicksohn & Naor-Ziv, 2016). Survivalists might have something in common with explorers (Leon, 1991; Mirabile, 2015) but explorers engage in survival activities for planned events; survivalists for unexpected events.

One group might provide insight. Criminals and survivalists both aim to achieve an unfair advantage through inappropriate acquisition of resources in favor of themselves. Criminality is associated with low

agreeableness (Möttus, Guljaev, Allik, Laidra, & Pullmann, 2012), and high scores on the Dark Triad traits which comprises narcissism, Machiavellianism and sub-clinical psychopathy (Furnham, Richards, Rangel, & Jones, 2014). This suggests survivalist behavior is associated with (H1) low agreeableness (H2a) narcissism; (H2b) manipulateness (H2c); and sub-clinical psychopathy.

Moreover, survivalists are likely engaged in behavior contrary to society's norms. Generally, most people seem unprepared for surviving an apocalypse and potentially believe the state will provide assistance as needed. These insights suggest survivalists are likely to be: (a) spirited because they fantasize about being exciting which is a characteristic of a maverick (Jackson, 2017); (b) deep learners who reflect on how the world works more than most because they draw conclusions about apocalyptic disaster and therefore the need to prepare for it (c) low in rationality because such people have high need for control (Jackson, Izadikah, & Oei, 2012). All this suggests that survivalist behavior is associated with (H3) being spirited; (H4) deep learning; and (H5) low rationality.

Additionally, survivalists may be high on entrepreneurial skills as they intend to turn a difficult situation into one of personal advantage suggesting survivalism is associated with (H6) entrepreneurial intent. Finally, survivalists may be low in general mental ability as planning for an apocalypse is indicative of cognitive failures in efficiently and competently dealing with information (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004) suggesting survivalist behavior is associated with (H7) poor general ability.

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Table 1

Derivation of items in the Survivalist Behavior Questionnaire (SBQ) from the literature.

Item (see Appendix 1 for full item)	Source
1. Stockpiled food and water	Golbeck (2014), Mirabile (2015)
2. Stockpiled weapons	Golbeck (2014), Brooks (2003)
3. Stockpiled equipment and materials	Golbeck (2014), Brooks (2003)
4. Think through in my mind	Brooks (2003)
5. Who would be in my survival group	Golbeck (2014)
6. Know how to get more supplies	Golbeck (2014)
7. Have a plan	Brooks (2003)
8. Attended survival courses	Brooks (2003)

2. Method

2.1. Design of the Survivalist Behavior Questionnaire (SBQ)

To ensure content validity, the SBQ was designed from the limited academic literature concerning survivalist strategies and more generally across several survival handbooks. For brevity just one generalist handbook is referenced (see Table 1). Inspired by this literature, behavioral based items were selected by the author and the final questionnaire is shown in Appendix 1. Half the items are physical behaviors (items 1, 2, 3, and 8) and half planning behaviors (items 4, 5, 6, and 7). Cronbach's alpha of the SBQ is 0.90. Cronbach's alpha of both subscales is 0.87.

2.2. Data collection

Participants ($N = 227$) were 52% male and 48% female aged between 18 and 64 years ($Mean = 34.39$, $SD = 9.33$). They were all full-time managers from the US ($Mean\ tenure = 6.53$ years, $SD = 4.70$; average number of people supervised: 17.43; $SD = 34.85$; Seniority: 6.6% Senior Managers, 25.8% Middle Managers, 67.6% Junior Managers). A subset of 102 participants completed all questionnaires whereas the full sample completed the SBQ. Questionnaires were administered in random order to an online sample collected using the YWeDo laboratory (developed by the author).

Questionnaires used in the study.

The SBQ (see Appendix 1).

NEO-PIIP (50 items; Goldberg, 1999) measuring Extraversion (e.g. "I am the life of the party"), Neuroticism (e.g. "I worry about things"), Conscientiousness (e.g. "I leave my belongings around"), Openness ("I have difficulty understanding abstract ideas (R)") and Agreeableness (e.g. "I feel little concern for others (R)"). Each item is scored on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale.

Hybrid Model of Learning in Personality (HMLP; 75 items; Jackson, 2008) measuring sensation seeking (e.g. "I am excited by what is new in my field"), conscientiousness (e.g. "I usually think carefully before doing things"), mastery (e.g. "I achieve specific goals that I set myself"), rationality ("I often feel a lack of control over the direction my life is taking" (reversed)) and deep learning (e.g. "I enjoy working on a project that involves a great deal of library research"). Each item is scored on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale.

Dark Triad (28 items; Jones & Paulhus, 2014) is widely used to assess narcissism (e.g. "I have been compared to famous people"), Machiavellianism (e.g. Most people are suckers"), and sub-clinical psychopathy (e.g. "Payback needs to be quick and nasty"). Items are scored on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale.

Entrepreneurial Intent (6 items; Liñán & Chen, 2009) is widely used to measure intent to become an entrepreneur (e.g. "I'm determined to start a firm some day"). Each item is scored on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale.

The Maverickism Questionnaire (51 items; Jackson, 2017) measuring five scales of a high performing maverick. Spirited people fantasize about excitement (e.g. "I fantasize about learning to fly a plane"),

Table 2

Items of the Survivalist Behavior Questionnaire (SBQ) in decreasing size of mean.

	Mean	SD
6. Know how to get more supplies	3.07	1.28
7. Have a plan	2.73	1.30
4. Think through in my mind	2.63	1.31
5. Who would be in my survival group	2.63	1.36
1. Stockpiled food and water	2.33	1.35
3. Stockpiled equipment and materials	2.08	1.33
8. Attended survival courses	1.90	1.15
2. Stockpiled weapons	1.85	1.21

Reflective people think deeply (e.g. "When I do things for real, I think carefully before doing anything"), Socially gifted people thrive on social relationships (e.g. "In conversation, I understand the real meanings behind peoples' words"), Enthusiasts love work (e.g. "I always do more than is expected because I really enjoy it") and Individualists put themselves first ("I am not interested in being a team player"). Each item is scored on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale.

Baddeley Reasoning Test (64-item; 3 min test; Baddeley, 1968). It is widely used as an index of general mental ability. Items are answered as true/false.

Scores are summed for all tests and alphas for all scales in the study are > 0.75 (see Table 3).

3. Results

Descriptive statistics of the items of the SBQ are shown in Table 2. Results show it is more common to plan survival behaviors (items 6, 7, 4, and 5) than engage in actual behaviors (items 1, 3, 8, and 2) and that more socially acceptable behaviors (items 1 and 3 concerning general stockpiling) are engaged in more than socially unacceptable behaviors (item 2: stockpiled weapons). At least one person chose the minimum and maximum scale response category for every item. When SBQ items are subjected to principal axis factoring, a unidimensional structure is shown by a scree plot and high loadings of each item on the first factor (see author for details).

Means, standard deviations, and alphas of all scales are shown in Table 3 (based on the subset of participants who completed all scales). All alphas are more than satisfactory. The nomological network of significant personality variables associated with the SBQ is also shown. Support for all hypothesis was found as the SBQ was significantly correlated with low agreeableness, all three Dark Triad scales, spirited, deep learning, low rationality, entrepreneurial intent and low general ability. Two demographic variables are significantly positively correlated with the SBQ: seniority and number of people supervised.

Table 4 presents three regression models predicting the SBQ. In the first column, all independent variables from Table 3 are entered and suggests that only low agreeableness and entrepreneurial intentions are predictive of the survivalist personality. In the second column, the regression is refined by selectively omitting some scales and including the overall Dark Triad scale to reduce the number of intercorrelating variables. In the third column, the optimal mix of independent variables is presented in which selective scales have been removed to reduce effects of multicollinearity. Spirited and entrepreneurial intentions are squared as this improved significance. In this analysis, seniority, psychopathy, low rationality, spirited and entrepreneurial intentions predict SBQ.

4. Discussion

The SBQ is designed from the literature. High scorers stockpile weapons, equipment and material essential for survival and prepare plans for survival. People more commonly make plans than actually collect equipment, which makes sense given the costs, time and possible

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