Personality and Individual Differences 64 (2014) 147–151

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Short Communication

Evidence for the general factor of personality as social-effectiveness

Curtis S. Dunkel [a,*], Dimitri Van der Linden [b]

[a] Western Illinois University, Department of Psychology, Macomb, IL 61455, USA
[b] Erasmus University Rotterdam, Institute of Psychology, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 10 October 2013
Received in revised form 15 February 2014
Accepted 18 February 2014
Available online 19 March 2014

Keywords:
General factor of personality
Social-effectiveness
Social-desirability

ABSTRACT

The general factor of personality (GFP) has garnered significant attention by personality researchers in the last six years. The underlying nature of the GFP has been the focus of much research and debate. A cache of research findings suggest that the GFP is simply socially-desirable response bias; it is essentially measurement error. There is also a significant set of findings suggesting that the GFP represents something more fundamental; increasingly the GFP is interpreted as reflecting social-effectiveness. However, the social-effectiveness hypothesis has yet to be tested directly. In the current investigation multiple measures of personality (GFPs), socially-desirable responding and social-effectiveness allowed for an examination of the two leading interpretations of the GFP. The GFPs and measures of social-effectiveness were significantly correlated even after controlling for social-desirable responding. A composite GFP and composite measure of social-effectiveness exhibited a strong association and continued to share over 50% of their variance after controlling for socially-desirable responding.

1. Introduction

The general factor of personality (GFP) could either be a fundamental breakthrough in the field of personality or a path that has been down before; well-trodden ground leading to a dead end. Addressing the fundamental theoretical issue of defining the GFP would go a long way in assessing its importance. One answer to the question of the nature of the GFP is that it is simply response bias (e.g., Bäckström, 2007). Individuals vary to the extent that they answer personality scale items in a socially-desirable manner and if this bias is consistent across items and scales it would result in a general factor. While potentially important in differentiating between individuals' tendency to think of themselves in glowing terms, individuals' tendency to want others to think of them positively, and/or important simply in terms of measurement error, this definition of the GFP is far from a fundamental breakthrough. However, an alternative is that the GFP represents something more essential to individual differences than response bias. But the onus of this position is to define what that essential thing is. To this end, based on current research findings, there appears to be a coalescing view that the GFP represents social effectiveness (e.g., Loehlin & Martin, 2013).

1.1. Summary and hypotheses

The purpose of the study was to test the social-desirability and social-effectiveness hypotheses of the GFP. To achieve this, associations between three sets of variables; measures of the GFP, measures of social-desirable response bias, and measures of social-effectiveness were examined. While both the social-desirability and social-effectiveness hypotheses predict that there will be significant associations between the three sets of variables, the social-desirability hypothesis predicts that the association between the GFP and social-effectiveness is due to shared variance with social-desirability. Thus, controlling for social-desirability should lead to a substantial attenuation in the association between the GFP and social-effectiveness. On the other hand, the social-effectiveness hypothesis posits that while some of the shared variance between the GFP and social-effectiveness may be due to social-desirability, the two constructs also share substantial variance that is not accounted for by social-desirability. From this perspective, controlling for social-desirability may slightly attenuate the association between the GFP and social-effectiveness, but the two constructs should still share a significant amount of variance.

2. Methods

2.1. Description of sampling and procedures

Data from the Computer Administered Panel Study (CAPS) were used to test the hypotheses. The CAPS took place between the years

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 309 742 2027.
E-mail address: c-dunkel@wiu.edu (C.S. Dunkel).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.02.030
0191-8869/

of 1983 and 1988 at the University of North Carolina. For those five years a random sample of the undergraduate population was invited to attend an informational meeting about the CAPS project. From those students who expressed interest 96 (evenly split by sex) were selected each year for participation based on scheduling availability. Participants spent one to one-and-a-half hours per week for 20 weeks answering questions presented via a computer. The data analyzed in the current investigation is from the years 1986–1988; the most complete data for the personality measures is available for these years.

2.2. Participants

Two-hundred and eighty-six undergraduate students participated (50% males and 50% females). Two-hundred and thirty-five participants were White (82.2%), thirty-five were Black (12.2%), and 16 (5.6%) self-identified as belonging to another racial group. The participants are described as not differing demographically from the general student population at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. GFPs

California Psychological Inventory (1988): The 480-item inventory produced 16 scales with the first unrotated factor using Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) acting as the GFP. The commonly derived Independence, Empathy, and Communality scales were not available for the full sample. The commonly derived Tolerance scale was not included in the data file at all. The Good Impression scale was not included in the factor analyses because it was developed to measure socially-desirable response bias. The first unrotated factor had an Eigenvalue of 5.43 and accounted for 36.18% of the variance among the scales. The included scales had the following factor loadings: Intellectual Efficiency (.77), Achievement via Independence (.75), Capacity for Status (.75), Sociability (.74), Well-being (.74), Social Presence (.70), Dominance (.66), Self-acceptance (.61), Achievement via Conformity (.54), Responsibility (.53), Socialization (.39), Flexibility (.27), Self-control (.25), Femininity/Masculinity (−.21).

Gough Adjective Checklist (1988): The 300-item inventory produced 15 scales with the first unrotated factor using PAF acting as the GFP. The first unrotated factor had an Eigenvalue of 6.07 and accounted for 39.24% of the variance among the scales. The scales had the following factor loadings: Dominance (.93), Abasement (−.90), Exhibition (.87), Aggression (.82), Deference (−.82), Autonomy (.76), Achievement (.62), Succorance (−.58), Change (.54), Heterosexuality (.53), Affiliation (.39), Endurance (.24), Nurturance (−.19), Order (.12), Intraception (.03).

Hogan Personality Inventory (1988): The 310-item inventory produced six scales with the first unrotated factor using PAF acting as the GFP. The commonly derived School Success scale was not included in the data file. This first unrotated factor had an Eigenvalue 1.40 and explained 23.36% of the variance. The scales had the following factor loadings: Sociability (.72), Ambition (.64), Likeability (.47), Adjustment (.40), Intellectance (.29), Prudence (−.12).

NEO-Personality Inventory (1988): The 181-item inventory produced the Big Five scales of Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. This first unrotated factor had an Eigenvalue 1.07 and explained 21.39% of the variance. The scales had the following factor loadings: Extraversion (.55), Agreeableness (.52), Conscientiousness (.47), Neuroticism (−.44); Openness (.30). Because of the law of large numbers the weights from Van der Linden, te Nijenhuis, and Bakker (2010) meta-analysis were used in computing a GFP, however, the GFP using the Van der Linden et al. (2010) weights correlated with the GFP using the sample specific weights at $r = .99$.

Composite GFP: A composite GFP was computed by converting the GFP scores for each personality inventory into *z*-scores. The NEO-based GFP, CPI-based GFP, Hogan-based GFP were added and the Gough-based GFP was subtracted from that total.

Three additional findings should be noted concerning the GFPs. First, in each PAF, all of the scales loaded in the expected direction. Second, scales with face valid measures of social-effectiveness (e.g., capacity for status, dominance, sociability) displayed especially high loadings. Third, an alternative method for creating the GFPs by unit weighting the scales resulted in GFPs that were highly correlated ($r > .90$) with the factor scores using the PAF.

2.3.2. Social-desirability

Marlowe-Crowne (1988): The 33-item scale produces a total score reflecting individual differences in socially-desirable responding. Participants responded to items such as, "No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener", using a true-or-false format. Split-half reliability was .71.

Scales from the personality inventories: The California Psychological Inventory yields a scale labeled Good Impression and the Hogan Personality Inventory yields a Social Desirability scale. These two scales were used as indices of socially-desirable response bias.

The Gough Adjective Checklist produces a favorable and an unfavorable scale. The two scales reflect the number of socially-desirable (favorable) items or socially-undesirable (unfavorable) items checked as being self-descriptive. These two scales were also used as indicators of socially-desirable response bias. Inexplicitly, it appears, however, that in the data file the favorable and unfavorable are reverse scored because the favorable is negatively correlated with the other measures of social desirable responding and the unfavorable is positively correlated with the measures of socially desirable responding (see Table 1).

Composite social-desirability scale: The totals for the five measures of social-desirability were converted to *z*-scores. The Gough Adjective Checklist favorable *z*-score was subtracted from the sum of the other measures of social desirability to form a composite.

2.3.3. Social-effectiveness (general)

Three measures of social-effectiveness reflect a participants rating of their own social-effectiveness in broad general terms. That is, the referred to social-effectiveness is not within a specified relationship or circumstance.

Texas Social Behavior Inventory (1988): The 32-item scale is a measure of social competence. A sample item, "I have no doubts about my social competence." Items were responded to using a Likert-type scale. The internal consistency was $\alpha = .93$.

Social Avoidance and Distress (1988): The 28-item scale measures social avoidance and distress. A sample item is, "I often want to get away from people." Items were judged by participants as either true or false. The split-half reliability was .90.

Social-Effectiveness Derived from the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1988): A factor-analysis of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967) by Myhill and Lorr (1978) resulted in a five-factor solution. Eight items, including, "I am easy to like", loaded on the third factor which they referred to as social attitude. The total score for these eight items were used as a third measure of social-effectiveness. Items were judged by participants as either true or false. The split-half reliability was .79.

Composite social-effectiveness: To compute a composite measure of social-effectiveness the TSBI, SAD, and Coopersmith S-E were transformed to *z*-scores and summed.