



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

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

Investigating context specificity, self-schema characteristics, and personality test validity[☆]

Marne H. Pomerance^{*}, Patrick D. Converse

School of Psychology, Florida Institute of Technology, 150 W. University Blvd., Melbourne, FL 32901-6975, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 April 2013

Received in revised form 25 September 2013

Accepted 1 October 2013

Available online 1 November 2013

Keywords:

Self-concept clarity

Self-concept differentiation

Personality

Frame of reference

Context-specificity

ABSTRACT

Research indicates that providing a specific context in personality measures (e.g., “at school”) improves predictive validity. This study examined this issue in more detail, investigating a broader range of outcomes and the moderating role of self-concept clarity and self-concept differentiation. University students ($N = 158$) completed online general and school-specific personality measures; questionnaires assessing self-concept clarity and self-concept differentiation; and measures of grade point average, leadership, and health. Results supported the benefits of using contextualized personality measures, with evidence demonstrating incremental validity for contextualized personality measures over general personality measures as well as significantly stronger relationships between contextualized personality measures and relevant criteria. Additionally, hypotheses related to the effects of clarity and differentiation were largely unsupported; however, some patterns suggested that it may be useful to continue to explore these self-schema structural characteristics in future research.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Research has shown that there are consistent relationships between the Big Five factors of personality and important job criteria (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Brown, Lent, Telander, & Tramayne, 2011; Neal, Yeo, Koi, & Xiao, 2012) and academic outcomes (e.g., Farsides & Woodfield, 2003; Heaven, Ciarrochi, & Vialle, 2007; O'Connor and Paunonen, 2007). Despite these findings, there is still concern about the quality of self-report personality measures. While some research has examined intentional faking as a potential issue with self-report measures (e.g., Griffith & Peterson, 2006), less research has examined unintentional factors that can influence the quality of self-reports, such as differing interpretations of personality items.

One area that has attempted to address unintentional factors affecting personality test validity is frame of reference (FOR) research. Personality tests with an FOR use items that specifically reference a location or role (e.g., work, school) when considering the behavior in question (Schmit, Ryan, Stierwalt, & Powell, 1995). The rationale for FOR items is that if behavior tends to differ across contexts (e.g., Roberts & Donahue, 1994) and individuals are not gi-

ven a specific FOR when responding to items, they may rely on more general self-relevant information or they may access information that is at least somewhat inappropriate given the context of interest. Providing an FOR allows the individual to respond to items more accurately if one wants responses that refer to a specific aspect of the individual's life. Results support this idea, in that FOR measures have been found to have greater predictive validity than non-FOR measures (e.g., Bowling & Burns, 2010). In particular, FOR measures may have greater accuracy for relevant settings but less applicability across settings, whereas non-FOR measures may have limited accuracy in any particular setting but broad applicability across settings. The purpose of this study was to examine the FOR (or context-specific) effect in more detail. This study expands on previous research on FOR effects on personality measure predictive validity, examining (a) the extent to which this effect generalizes across outcomes and (b) the influence of self-schema structural characteristics on this effect.

1.1. FOR and response processes

Several studies have explored actively guiding an individual's FOR on personality measures. For example, Schmit et al. (1995) and Bing, Whanger, Davison, and VanHook (2004) found that school-specific personality tests have incremental validity over non-contextualized measures. These findings have been replicated several times (e.g., Hunthausen, Truxillo, Bauer, & Hammer, 2003; Pace & Brannick, 2010), and this effect can be understood in terms of Holden and colleagues' model of personality item responding

[☆] This research is based on Marne H. Pomerance's master's thesis, which was completed at Florida Institute of Technology under the direction of Patrick D. Converse. We thank Richard L. Griffith and Celine Lang for serving as committee members, and Richard Frei from the Community College of Philadelphia for his help in collecting the data.

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 321 674 8104; fax: +1 321 674 7105.

E-mail address: mpomerance2009@my.fit.edu (M.H. Pomerance).

(Holden, Fekken, & Cotton, 1991; Holden, Kroner, Fekken, & Popham, 1992). This model describes the process in which the individual reads the item, gathers its main theme, and then compares the item to the appropriate self-schema to determine what should be put as a response. That is, responding to a personality item involves comparing the content of the item to the content of one's self-schema. This model suggests providing an FOR may improve predictive validity because it guides the individual to the most appropriate self-schema. This study draws from this model to better understand the FOR effect and to examine the role of self-schema structural characteristics in both general and school-FOR personality item responding (as this was examined in the context of students in a university environment).

Previous research has primarily examined GPA when exploring the incremental validity of FOR personality tests in a university context. However, Oswald, Schmitt, Kim, Ramsay, and Gillespie (2004) expanded the criterion domain for university settings, adding interpersonal behaviors (e.g., leadership) and intrapersonal behaviors (e.g., health) to intellectual behaviors (as reflected in GPA). The present study does so as well, examining the outcomes of GPA (intellectual), leadership (interpersonal), and health (intrapersonal) in order to expand on previous FOR findings. Although these outcomes might be predicted by several variables, we focused on one predictor for each outcome based on previous research: Conscientiousness for GPA given McAbee and Oswald's (2013) conclusion that "Conscientiousness demonstrated the strongest criterion-related validity for predicting GPA" (p. 532); Extraversion for leadership given Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt's (2002) characterization of Extraversion as "the most consistent correlate of leadership across study settings and leadership criteria" (p. 765); and Conscientiousness for health given Raynor and Levine's (2009) identification of Conscientiousness as "most consistently associated with a health-promoting lifestyle" (p. 78). Given prior research on this FOR issue, we expected similar results across outcomes.

H1a: School-specific personality tests will have incremental validity over and above general personality tests in predicting school-relevant outcomes.

H1b: The relationships between school-specific personality test scores and relevant outcomes will be stronger than the relationships between general personality test scores and relevant outcomes.

1.2. Self-schema structural characteristics

A limitation of previous FOR research is the underlying assumption that this phenomenon occurs equally across individuals. This study addresses individual differences in self-schema structural characteristics to determine if levels of self-concept differentiation (SCD) and self-concept clarity (SCC) influence the effects demonstrated in previous research.

1.2.1. Self-concept differentiation

SCD is "the tendency to see oneself as having different personality characteristics in different social roles" (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993, p. 834). Prior research has examined differences in characteristics across social roles, such as student, friend, employee, and tennis player (Bigler, Neimeyer, & Brown, 2001; Linville, 1987). SCD involves the extent to which individuals see themselves as differing across these various roles. For instance, someone high in SCD would have fairly distinct personality characteristics as a student (e.g., quiet and compliant) versus as a tennis player (e.g., loud and competitive). Someone low in SCD would have very similar personality characteristics across all of his/her

roles (e.g., the student/tennis player is quiet yet competitive in both roles).

Virtually no research has examined the influence of SCD on responding to self-report personality measures. However, given the nature of this structural characteristic, it seems likely that it will influence the response processes of individuals completing these measures. Based on Holden et al.'s (1991, 1992) model, it may be that providing an FOR on personality measures is more beneficial for those higher on SCD. Specifically, this model suggests that high-SCD individuals would read the school-FOR item and subsequently realize that they should access their "school role" when answering these items. This in turn will aid them in gathering the main theme of the item and comparing the item to the appropriate self-schema to determine an accurate response. Without this FOR information, high-SCD individuals might access a different self-schema (for a different role such as friend) that contains substantially different characteristics, leading to less accurate responses (if the researcher is interested in school-specific characteristics). In contrast, for low-SCD individuals, FOR information may be less important, because the same characteristics are present across roles and thus accessing one self-schema versus another should not affect responses much.

Thus, the main concern regarding SCD is that if the incorrect FOR is activated within a high-SCD individual (e.g., friend instead of student), then the incorrect self-schema is accessed, negatively affecting the validity of the personality test. Therefore, the current study investigated how SCD affects results for school FOR personality test scores, controlling for general personality test scores. For higher-SCD individuals, it was expected that providing a school FOR on a personality test would help them access that particular role in rating themselves, thus increasing the accuracy of their responses. In contrast, lower-SCD individuals would not need a school FOR to improve the accuracy of their responses, because they have similar tendencies across roles.

H2: The relationships between school-specific personality test scores and relevant outcomes are moderated by differentiation, such that these relationships will be stronger for individuals higher in differentiation.

1.2.2. Self-concept clarity

SCC is "the extent to which the contents of an individual's self-concept (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable" (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavallee, & Lehman, 1996, p. 141). For instance, high-SCC individuals should be clear about their characteristics, confident in who they are, and consistent in this over time.

Although previous research does not appear to have examined how SCC can influence responses to self-report measures, given the nature of SCC it seems likely that this characteristic will also influence response processes. Based on Holden et al.'s (1991, 1992) model, it may be that having higher SCC will help when completing personality measures. Because high SCC means that the individual has a clearly defined, internally consistent, and stable self-concept, it might be easier for the high-clarity individual to compare items to his/her self-schema to determine accurate responses. This effect should hold for both general and school-specific versions of the personality test, as more clarity should be helpful overall. That is, high clarity individuals should more easily access and accurately report relevant information from their more clearly-defined and well-organized self-schema, including general information and context-specific information.

H3: The relationships between general personality test scores and relevant outcomes and school-specific personality test

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/890855>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/890855>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)