Do all psychologists agree with the five-factor model of personality?

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Despite the support for the FFM noted in our other articles, not all psychologists and personality researchers have been as positive. For example, Block (1995a) provides a “Contrarian View” of the FFM. With the exception of Hogan’s (1983) contribution, the FFM is descriptive (reports relationships between traits) rather than theoretical (explaining those relationships) and this gave Block (1995a) reason for criticism. Much of Block’s critique is based upon the use of factor analysis as a theoretical decision-making model. Indeed, Horn (1967) provided cause for concern by demonstrating that apparently meaningful factors could be defined through using subjective rotational procedures with random, nonsensical data. However, in their reply, Costa and McCrae (1995, p.217) rebuff Block as having committed “sins of omission”, accusing him of neglecting to cite empirical evidence that was critical to the questions he raises. Costa and McCrae were especially critical of Block’s omission of a review of independent confirmations of the FFM. Goldberg and Saucier (1995) also submitted a response to Block. One of their concerns regarded the lack of analytical alternatives available to personality researchers if factor analysis did possess the purported limitations. Block’s (1995b) reply to these points was brief, however, one may conclude, given the comments presented by all parties above, that although factor analysis does have drawbacks and a number of decisions need to be made in a less objective manner than may be expected of a science, awareness of these issues will reduce the chances of subjectivity and error. Moreover, as alluded to by Costa and McCrae, if one were to accept all of Block’s arguments, potentially, there would be no adequate taxonomy of personality to use as a basis in personality research, clinical assessment and workplace performance prediction.

Block (1995a) has not been the only critic of the FFM. If a theory of personality and the assessment that operationalises that theory are to be useful, they need to apply universally, across cultures. Cross-cultural researchers who have not replicated the FFM in its entirety have been at least somewhat critical of the model and so too have indigenous psychologists who have started to argue (as anticipated by Costa & McCrae, 1992a) that although the FFM may be useful cross-culturally,

there do exist indigenous personality factors that this model has ignored. Moreover, claims have been made that some such indigenous characteristics are applicable across cultures and although derived through regional studies in China, they can inform Western psychology (Cheung, Cheung, Leung, Ward & Leong, 2003; Lin, 2003).

Despite these claims though, the University of Queensland and PsyAsia International have found that a test based on the FFM and Cattell's 16 factor model, when properly localised to the Chinese context actually had superior technical properties than a locally developed indigenous test:

"The data indicates that Western personality tests that have been translated into Chinese can have acceptable levels of internal consistency reliability. Although still indicating a need for further refinement, these can be higher than the levels of internal consistency reliability achieved by tests developed on Chinese samples. Clearly, the reliability and validity of such tests is dependent upon both the test's construction, and the quality of its translation. Furthermore, factor analyses have demonstrated that the Five Factor Model of personality holds up on a Chinese sample, adding further support to the universality of this model. Most notably, the current analyses have indicated that the translated versions of the 15FQ+ and NEO-FFI have, in the main, greater internal consistency reliability and criterion-related validity than does the CPAI-2's indigenously-developed scales, despite this test having been developed on a Chinese population" (Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Newcombe, 2006)

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