

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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in Psychology presented on July 14, 2000

Title: Predicting Interpersonal Problems in a College

Population Using the Five-Factor Model of Personality

Abstract approved: 

The ability of the five-factor model of personality measured by the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) to predict various domains of interpersonal problems as assessed by the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP) was investigated. Participants were 150 university and community college volunteers. A multiple regression analysis indicated that Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Agreeableness were consistent, significant predictors of interpersonal problems. The results showed that Neuroticism was the strongest predictor. This suggests these constructs are measuring traits that are of an interpersonal nature. Openness and Conscientiousness were not significant predictors of interpersonal problems, suggesting that these constructs are measuring traits of an intrapersonal nature.

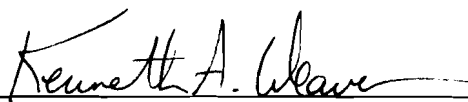
PREDICTING INTERPERSONAL PROBLEMS IN A COLLEGE
POPULATION USING THE FIVE-FACTOR MODEL OF PERSONALITY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Division of Psychology and Special Education
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

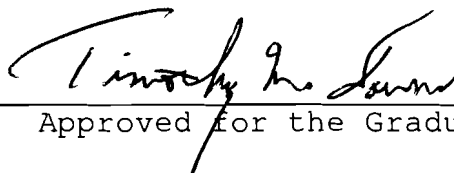
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
David S. Weintraub
August 2000

Thesis
2000
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Approved for the Department of
Psychology and Special Education



Approved for the Graduate Council

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee for their unwavering support for my completion of this project. First, I would like to thank Dr. Weaver for his encouragement and understanding. Second, I would like to thank Dr. Obiakor for helping me to consistently keep things in perspective and for constantly reminding me to "keep your eyes on the prize." Finally, I extend much gratitude to my thesis chair, Dr. Kurt Baker. He has been a pillar of patience, knowledge, and advice, and an excellent mentor throughout my graduate education.

I would also like to thank the following people: Dave Burns for always having faith in me, Dr. Urvashi Pitre for her advice with the statistical analysis, and my parents for not asking me every other day, "Is your thesis finished yet?"

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Brenda Lee, for her unconditional support in this and everything I do. Your gentle encouragement and loving words have seen me through this. I would be so totally lost without you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Personality has been an important topic to psychology since the early 1920s when Freud's theories became popular in America. Two of the most popular personality assessment inventories, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI; MMPI-2) and the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI), have been used extensively both in research and in practice. These tests are designed to assess pathology and aid clinicians in making diagnoses and developing treatment plans. Unfortunately, the MMPI and MCMI are not as useful in describing personality characteristics of normal populations.

In the early 1980s, a five-factor model of personality emerged (McCrae & Costa, 1983). The five factors are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These factors were confirmed with various assessment techniques, such as self-ratings, objective tests, and observers' reports (McCrae & Costa, 1987). These factors distinguish aspects of personality in both children and adults. Moreover, the five-factor model is useful in describing personality characteristics in clinical and normal populations (Costa & McCrae, 1992a).

The five-factor model's relative newness to the field of personality means a limited research base. Current

research focuses on the relationship between these factors and other psychological phenomena (e.g., emotional well-being, depression, anxiety, and self-blame; Jorm, 1987; McCrae & Costa, 1991; Parkes, 1986). To date, few studies have examined the relationship between the five-factor model and interpersonal problems.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the five factors derived from the Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992b) and scores on the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP; Horowitz, Rosenberg, Baer, Ureno, & Villaseñor, 1988). Given that (a) the five-factor model of personality is becoming more popular, (b) the five-factor model is applicable to both clinical and normal populations, and (c) interpersonal problems are not unique to any particular population, this relationship is a topic in need of study.

Establishing a significant relationship between the NEO PI-R and the IIP would enhance our understanding of the five-factor model and its ability to predict interpersonal problems. In addition, it would assist practitioners using five-factor assessment instruments in understanding the types of interpersonal problems their clients are experiencing. This knowledge could then be used in developing and implementing effective treatment plans.

Literature Review

The NEO-PI-R

The NEO-PI-R is a paper and pencil test developed in 1985 by Costa and McCrae and revised in 1992. It is designed to measure five major dimensions of normal adult personality as described by the five-factor model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1987). It also has potential for use in clinical, industrial, and educational settings (Costa & McCrae, 1992b), such as diagnosis and personnel selection. The NEO-PI-R consists of 240 5-point Likert-type items that evenly load on five distinct scales.

The Neuroticism (N) Scale assesses adjustment vs. emotional instability. It identifies individuals prone to psychological distress, unrealistic ideas, excessive cravings or urges, and maladaptive coping responses (Costa & McCrae, 1992b). High scorers worry, feel inadequate, and are nervous, emotional, and insecure. Low scorers are seen as calm, relaxed, unemotional, secure, and self-satisfied (Costa & McCrae, 1992b).

The Extraversion (E) Scale measures the quantity and intensity of interpersonal interaction, activity level, the need for stimulation, and the capacity for joy (Costa & McCrae, 1992b). Individuals who score high on this dimension are sociable, optimistic, active, person-oriented, and affectionate. Low scores represent a reserved

individual who is unexuberant, aloof, task-oriented, and quiet (Costa & McCrae, 1992b).

The Openness (O) Scale assesses proactive seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake. It also measures one's tolerance for and exploration of the unfamiliar (Costa & McCrae, 1992b). High scores describe individuals who are curious, creative, original, untraditional, and have broad interests. Low scorers are conventional, down-to-earth, unartistic, and unanalytical (Costa & McCrae, 1992b).

The Agreeableness (A) Scale measures the quality of one's interpersonal orientation along a continuum, from compassion to antagonism in thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Costa & McCrae, 1992b). High scorers are good-natured, trusting, helpful, forgiving, and straightforward. Low scoring individuals are described as cynical, rude, suspicious, uncooperative, and manipulative (Costa & McCrae, 1992b).

The Conscientiousness (C) Scale assesses an individual's degree of organization, persistence, and motivation in goal-directed behavior. It contrasts dependable, fastidious individuals with those who are lackadaisical and sloppy (Costa & McCrae, 1992b). High scoring individuals are organized, reliable, hard-working, self-disciplined, and ambitious. Low scorers are viewed as

lazy, aimless, unreliable, negligent, and careless (Costa & McCrae, 1992b).

The set of scores an individual receives on the NEO-PI-R is plotted on a profile sheet to see the overall pattern of personality. The most distinctive and relevant traits can then be identified, both within and across the five factors. From this profile, predictions can be made about important aspects of an individual's life, such as coping styles and life satisfaction (Costa & McCrae, 1992b). Profiles are also useful in identifying personality disorders in normal samples (Costa & McCrae, 1990).

The IIP

The IIP is a paper and pencil test developed in 1988 by Horowitz and his associates. The test is designed to aid practitioners in three ways. First, it aids in identifying the most common types of interpersonal problems people bring to treatment. Second, it allows therapists and patients to document progress in therapy by comparing patients' scores at various points in time (e.g., intake session vs. discharge). Third, it aids in differentiating problems of an interpersonal nature and problems of a noninterpersonal nature (e.g., overeating, work habits; Horowitz et al., 1988).

In addition to yielding a total score, the IIP also provides six subscale scores. These subscales represent

categories of interpersonal problems most frequently seen in treatment settings. Four of the subscales relate to behaviors the patient may have difficulty expressing. They are assertiveness, sociability, intimacy, and submissiveness. The remaining subscales measure the patients' beliefs about their need to be responsible and controlling.

In addition to the subscale scores, a factor analysis revealed two dimensions on which a patient's scores could be measured. The first factor corresponded to a hostile-friendly dimension, and a second factor related to a submissive-dominant dimension. These two factors were identical to dimensions hypothesized by previous interpersonal theorists such as Leary (Horowitz et al., 1988).

Personality Traits and Interpersonal Problems

Personality research has often focused on the relationship between various traits and other psychological phenomena. The majority of the studies on traits and the interpersonal domain have focused on friendship, romance, interpersonal styles, and interpersonal orientation (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Glick, 1985; Lorr, Younsiss & Kluth, 1992; Strack & Lorr, 1990). Few studies have examined the relationship between personality factors and interpersonal problems or conflict (Utley, Richardson & Pilkington, 1989).

The following studies examined the relationship between personality factors and those phenomena measured by the IIP.

Ray (1986) indicated that measures of assertiveness correlated with measures of authoritarianism and dominance ($r = .74$ and $.67$, respectively). Schill (1991) reported that women who exhibit self-defeating behavior had greater difficulty with dating and situations calling for assertion. Ramaniah and Deniston (1993), using the NEO PI-R, found significant differences in the personality profiles of assertive and nonassertive individuals.

The personality traits of 69 unipolar and 45 bipolar affective patients were studied (Popescu, Totoescu, Christodorescu & Ionescu, 1985). Depressed individuals were found to be more introverted and submissive than their bipolar counterparts. Kirkcaldy (1990) examined the similarity between subjects' self-image and personality traits measured by the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. Results indicated social impotency and submissiveness were highly related to neuroticism. Watson and Morris (1991) correlated factors from the Narcissistic Personality Inventory with empathy and social desirability. Results indicated that exploitive individuals experience more interpersonal distress and exhibit less social responsibility. Charismatic/Arrogant individuals experience

less interpersonal distress and are more socially responsible.

The relationships among neuroticism, extraversion, locus of control, assertiveness, and aggressiveness were studied in 112 undergraduates (Deman & Green, 1988). Results indicated that aggressiveness was predicted by internal locus of control and extraversion, while assertiveness was predicted by stability as opposed to neuroticism.

Heaven, Connors, and Trevethan (1987) investigated the personality correlates of authoritarian attitudes and submissive behavior among 198 college students. Authoritarianism did not correlate highly with the dimensions assessed by the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire for the whole sample. However, female authoritarians scored high on neuroticism, and anti-submissive behavior was found to be associated with extraversion for women and tough mindedness for men.

Lobel (1987) examined the relationship between personality traits, anxiety, and self-expression. Extraversion was a strong positive predictor of assertiveness, while anxiety was a negative predictor of assertiveness.

Argyle and Lu (1990) predicted that happiness would correlate strongly with extraversion and that this is due to

activities. Results indicated that happiness correlated highly with extraversion, and extraverts enjoyed and participated more in social activities than introverts. A multiple regression analysis showed that half of the variance in happiness of extraverts could be explained by their greater participation in social activities. Deman and Efraim (1988) also reported that the extraversion-introversion dimension was an excellent predictor of social participation.

Cappeliez (1993) studied the relationship between sociotropy/autonomy and the five personality dimensions measured by the NEO PI-R in 73 female undergraduates. Sociotropy was related positively to neuroticism and negatively to openness. Autonomy was positively related to conscientiousness.

Mongrain (1993) examined dependency and self-criticism in relation to the factors of the NEO PI-R in 129 undergraduates. Regression analysis indicated that dependency is positively predicted by neuroticism, extroversion, and agreeableness, and negatively predicted by openness. Self-criticism was positively predicted by neuroticism and negatively predicted by extraversion. These findings suggest that self-criticism is closely linked to depression while dependency may be more closely related to anxiety.

Summary

Previous studies have established significant relationships between the five-factor model and other psychological phenomena. However, empirical data are lacking to support a strong relationship between this model and interpersonal problems. Moreover, no study has simultaneously explored all the dimensions measured by the NEO PI-R as they relate to interpersonal problems. The present research investigated the extent to which the five-factor model predicted interpersonal problems.

The following were hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Agreeableness would be significant predictors of interpersonal problems.

Hypothesis 2: Openness and Conscientiousness would not significantly predict interpersonal problems.

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

Participants

The participants for this study were drawn from undergraduate general and developmental psychology courses at a small midwestern university and from a small southern community college. Participants volunteered for the study in order to fulfill research requirements for undergraduate psychology classes. One hundred fifty participants (62 men and 88 women) were recruited for the study. They ranged in age from 18 to 46 years, with 21.6 years the average for the sample. Of the 150 participants, 69 were freshmen, 40 were sophomores, 25 were juniors, and 16 were seniors.

Measures

NEO Personality Inventory-Revised. The NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is a 240-item questionnaire designed to measure the five major dimensions of normal adult personality. Participants respond to each question on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert scale. Scores range from 20 (very low) to 80 (very high). The test takes 30 to 40 minutes to complete. The five domain scales, Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C), have been extensively researched and validated on samples of adult men and women. The authors report test-retest reliabilities

ranging from .86 to .92 for the domain scales and strong construct validity.

Inventory of Interpersonal Problems. The IIP (Horowitz et al., 1988) is a 127-item questionnaire designed to help patients and therapists identify interpersonal sources of distress that are often the focus of therapy. Items are scored on a 0 (not at all) to 4 (extremely) Likert scale yielding a total score and six subscale scores: assertiveness, sociability, submissiveness, intimacy, responsibility, and control. Scores range from 0 (few problems) to 4 (many problems). The test takes 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The authors report test-retest reliabilities ranging from .82 to .90 and good internal consistency.

Procedure

Permission to conduct the research and collect the data was obtained from the Emporia State University Human Subject Review Board. An informed consent document (Appendix A) was completed by all participants prior to the administration of the test battery. Participants were advised that all materials collected were considered confidential and that the information provided was identified only by a code number. After reading and signing the informed consent document, participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) before completing the

inventories. Participants then completed the NEO-PI-R and the IIP. Measures were counterbalanced in order to control for carry-over effects.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Stepwise regressions were calculated using the five personality traits measured by the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) as predictors of interpersonal problems. One regression was calculated for each of the six subscales of the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP).

The equation was significant for Assertiveness, $R^2 = 0.38$, $F(2,147) = 45.44$, $p < .0001$. Neuroticism and Agreeableness predicted problems with Assertiveness (see Table 1). The more neurotic and agreeable, the more likely the person was to have problems with assertiveness. No other variables entered into the equation.

Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness predicted problems with Sociability, $R^2 = 0.54$, $F(3,146) = 57.39$, $p < .0001$ (see Table 2). The more neurotic, less extraverted, and more conscientious, the more likely a person was to have problems with sociability. No other variables were significant predictors.

The equation for Submissiveness was significant, $R^2 = 0.36$, $F(2,147) = 40.73$, $p < .0001$. Neuroticism and Agreeableness predicted problems with Submissiveness (see Table 3). The more neurotic and less agreeable, the more likely a person was to have problems being submissive. No other variables entered into the equation.

Table 1

Significant Predictors of Problems with Assertiveness

	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Change in R²</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Neuroticism	.04	.21	67.64	.0001
Agreeableness	.03	.17	39.92	.0001
Total		.38	45.44	.0001

Table 2

Significant Predictors of Problems with Sociability

	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Change in R²</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Neuroticism	.04	.44	57.71	.0001
Extraversion	-.02	.08	25.08	.0001
Conscientiousness	.01	.02	4.83	.0295
Total		.54	57.39	.0001

Table 3

Significant Predictors of Problems with Submissiveness

	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Change in R²</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Neuroticism	.03	.30	55.11	.0001
Agreeableness	-.01	.06	12.99	.0001
Total		.36	40.74	.0001

Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Agreeableness predicted problems with Intimacy, $\underline{R}^2 = 0.26$, $\underline{F}(3,146) = 17.54$, $\underline{p} < .0001$ (see Table 4). The more neurotic, less extraverted, and less agreeable, the more likely a person was to have problems with intimacy. No other variables significantly predicted Intimacy.

The equation was significant for Responsibility, $\underline{R}^2 = 0.41$, $\underline{F}(1,148) = 101.20$, $\underline{p} < .0001$. Neuroticism predicted problems with Responsibility (see Table 5). The more neurotic, the more likely a person was to have an exaggerated sense of responsibility. No other variables entered into the equation.

Neuroticism predicted problems with Control, $\underline{R}^2 = 0.23$, $\underline{F}(1,148) = 53.81$, $\underline{p} < .0001$ (see Table 6). The more neurotic, the more likely the person was to think that he or she must be in control of their environment. No other variables were significant.

Table 4

Significant Predictors of Problems with Intimacy

	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Change in R²</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Neuroticism	.01	.18	7.73	.0062
Extraversion	-.01	.05	9.42	.0026
Agreeableness	-.01	.04	7.36	.0075
Total		.27	17.54	.0001

Table 5

Significant Predictors of Problems with Responsibility

	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Change in R²</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Neuroticism	.04	.41	101.20	.0001

Table 6

Significant Predictors of Problems with Control

	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Change in R²</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Neuroticism	.03	.27	53.81	.0001

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between interpersonal problems measured by the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP) and the five personality traits assessed by the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R). Previous research has documented that various personality traits are related to interpersonal problems in adults. However, many of these studies have examined only one or two traits at a time. The goal of this study was to determine the extent to which each of the five personality traits predicted interpersonal problems in an undergraduate sample.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Agreeableness would be strong predictors of interpersonal problems. Neuroticism was a powerful positive predictor for each of the six interpersonal problem domains, accounting for up to 44.4% of the variance in predicting problems with sociability. As Neuroticism scores increased, so did the likelihood that a person will experience difficulty relating to other people. Intense, unpleasant emotions such as anxiety and depression may cause a person to avoid social situations (Pincus & Gurtman, 1995; Strassberg, Adelstein, & Chemers, 1988). Others may avoid

contact with an individual they perceive to be highly neurotic.

Extraversion was a negative predictor of problems with sociability and the strongest predictor of problems with intimacy, accounting for 18.0% of the variance. A person scoring low on the Extraversion scale exhibits more introverted behavior and experiences fewer positive emotions, preferring to keep more to oneself. Thus, an introverted individual is not likely to seek social situations, thereby increasing the inability to open up to others (Hotard, McFatter, McWhirter, & Stegall, 1989; McFatter, 1994; Nemecek & Olson, 1996).

Agreeableness was significant in predicting three of the interpersonal problem domains. Highly agreeable individuals may experience more problems with assertiveness as they tend to be more compliant and trusting. Conversely, less agreeable individuals may experience more difficulty with submissiveness because they tend to be more headstrong and uncooperative. Finally, agreeableness negatively predicted problems with intimacy. That is, the less compliant and trusting an individual is, the greater problems they experience with intimacy. The suspicious and manipulative nature of the unagreeable trait may interfere with an individual's ability to connect with others on a highly personal level (Kosek, 1995; Kosek, 1996).

Hypothesis 2 stated that Openness and Conscientiousness would not significantly predict any of the interpersonal problem domains. Openness refers to one's ability to appreciate new ideas and experiences and was not a significant predictor of interpersonal problems. Perhaps this trait describes an intrapersonal aspect of personality rather than an interpersonal one. This finding is consistent with previous research in that several studies have documented weak or no significant relationships between Openness and interpersonal problems (Barrett & Pietromonaco, 1997; Hill, McIntire, & Bacharach, 1997; Pincus & Gurtman, 1995). Interestingly, Conscientiousness was a weak predictor of problems with sociability, accounting for only 1.5% of the variance of the regression model. Perhaps highly self-disciplined, ambitious individuals experience more difficulty relating to others they perceive as not meeting their standards (Asendorpf, 1998).

Implications

This study suggests that the five-factor model of personality can be very useful in predicting interpersonal problems. The results must be viewed, however, with caution because of the sample used in this study. The sample consisted primarily of freshmen and sophomores attending a small midwestern university and a small southern community college. These dynamic environments provide consistent,

unique opportunities for students to practice their social skills. In addition, the results could be indicative of the turmoil college students face when trying to balance the responsibility for their education, supporting themselves financially, and establishing an adult identity. The generalization of the results to non-college educated adults and clinical populations may not be justifiable. In addition, regression analysis indicates the extent to which variables are related. Thus, cause-and-effect relationships cannot be established. Though personality traits can predict interpersonal problems, they do not account for the full range of variables that may cause these problems.

The findings of this study warrant further research. For example, different samples could be used to maximize the generalizability of the relationship between personality traits and interpersonal problems. Second, it is recommended that the six subscale domains of each personality trait be explored. This would allow for a more refined understanding of the predictive power of each trait.

The relationship between personality and interpersonal problems is complicated and elaborate. These two domains are continuously shaped by our vast experiences. Hopefully, future research will provide psychology with a more thorough, causal explanation for this fascinating relationship.

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Appendix A
Informed Consent Document

Informed Consent Document

This is to certify that I, _____, hereby agree to participate as a volunteer in a scientific study as part of an authorized research program of Emporia State University under the supervision of Dr. Kurt Baker and David Weintraub.

The purpose of this research is to determine how personality factors predict interpersonal problems. The procedure to be followed involves completing two questionnaires which assess these dimensions.

I understand that my responses to the questionnaires are confidential and will never in any way be linkd to me personally.

I understand that I am free to refuse to participate in any procedure or to refuse to answer any questions at any time without prejudice to me. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice to me.

I understand that the research investigators named above will answer any of my questions relating to the research procedures.

Date

Signature

Appendix B
Demographic Information

Demographic Information

Age: _____

Sex: Male Female

Class: FR. SO. JR. SR.

Ethnic Group:

- African American
- Asian/Pacific
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Other (please specify)

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Signature of Author

8/9/00

Date

Predicting Interpersonal Problems in a
College Population Using the Five-Factor
Model of Personality

Title of Thesis/Research Project

Dary Cooper

Signature of Graduate Office Staff

August 11, 2000

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