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Personality Correlates of Passive-Aggressiveness: A NEO-PI-R domain and facet analysis of the HDS Leisurely Scale

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Abstract

Background: This study looked at the relationship between “bright-side” and “dark-side” personality variables by focusing on the controversial trait of *Passive-Aggressiveness*. Around 4,800 British adults completed the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1985) which measures the Big Five Personality factors at the Domain and the Facet level, as well as the Hogan Development Survey (HDS; Hogan & Hogan, 1997) which has a measure of Passive-Aggressiveness called Leisurely.

Aim: To determine to what extent the well-established Big Five traits measured at both domain and facet level can account for the variance in a measure of passive-aggressiveness.

Findings: Correlations and regressions indicated that Leisurely individuals are introverted, closed-minded Neurotics, with particular needs for order and deliberation. Neuroticism facets accounted for most of the variance. Overall the Big Five measured at Domain and Facet level accounted for relatively small amounts of variance, suggesting the divergent validity of this measure of PAPD.

Conclusions: This scale measures something that is not captured by comprehensive taxonomies of personality. Limitations and implications for clinical practice are noted.

Introduction

Debate about the nature, indeed existence of, the many of the personality disorders (PDs) continues particularly with the recent publication of DSM-5 (APA, 2013). This study is about one of the most controversial of the disorders, namely *Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder* (PAPD). The history of the conceptualisation of PAPD is both nuanced and complicated which has many implications for its nomological net.

The history of the PAPD has been documented by Lane (2009) who suggested the concept originated in the American military soon after the Second World War to describe difficult, childlike soldiers who were in effect social dissidents. The originally described behaviours regarding shirking duty by wilful incompetence were then applied by psychiatrists to those in civilian life.

One of the dozen or so PDs listed in DSM-I published in 1952 was PAPD. Within this framework three related types were identified; *passive dependent* who were described as clingy, helpless and constantly indecisive; *passive-aggressive* who were inefficient, pouty, stubborn, prone to procrastination and very obstructive; and *aggressive* who were destructive, irritable and resentful. Sixteen years later the latter two types were merged into PAPD.

It was suggested that people with PAPD snipe rather than confront, and mask their opposition to, and rebellion against, authority. They are noted to shirk responsibility and sabotage others. The list of symptoms grew as the DSM manuals were updated to include behaviours such as apparent forgetfulness, dawdling and intentional inefficiency. However by the third edition of the manual PAPD was dropped because it was thought of not as syndrome or disorder, but a specific behavioural response to particular (work) situations. That is, it was situation specific, not a trait, a response pattern possibly with its origins in childhood socialisation.

By the fourth edition of the manual (DSM-IV) the syndrome was renamed *negativistic*, but was appendicised rather than put in the main text. Many of the behavioural descriptions remained the same, such as resistance to routine tasks, consistent complaints about being misunderstood, sullen argumentativeness, scorn of all those in authority, envy and resentment of the relatively fortunate, perpetual and exaggerated complaints of personal misfortune (Sprock & Hunsucker, 1998).

Various researchers have argued that PAPD has construct validity and that there is evidence that the construct is unidimensional, consistent and reasonably stable (Hopwood, Morey, Marlowitz et al., 2009). Rotenstein, McDermut, Bergman, Young, Zimmerman and Chelminski (2007) found 3% of a population of 1,158 psychiatric patients met the diagnosis for DSM-IV PAPD but were less positive about the evidence of the validity of the concept. Other diagnostic systems have however kept the diagnosis, like the World Health Organisation's ICD-10, and the Millon system where four sub-types are distinguished: Abrasive, Circuitous, Discontented and Vacillating (Millon, 2004).

Nevertheless, books that have popularised the PDs have discussed PAPD in detail. Passive-aggressive leaders are labelled by Dotlich and Cairo (2003) as *Passive Resistant*. They are described as political and duplicitous, carefully fulfilling their own agendas. The essence of this (relatively common style) is saying one thing but doing another; having strictly private, non-shared agendas; always avoiding conflict and rarely openly expressing disagreement; and really caring little what others hope or expect.

Miller (2008) in a popular book about the PDs calls the passive aggressive leader a *Spoiler*. He argued that they feel disadvantaged, vulnerable and as if life has been rigged against them so they carefully and surreptitiously attack others. In essence, they carefully mask their opposition to, and rebellion against, authority. Thus they both shirk responsibilities, while claiming others do so. He notes that their "martyred mewling" is mixed

with a great skill at deflecting blame. They easily destroy team morale and generate a lot of animosity among co-workers. They are also, he concluded, masters of procrastination.

Hogan and Hogan (2001) call these people *Leisurely*. They argued that these types “march to the sound of their own drum”; they are confident about their skills and abilities; cynical about the talents and intentions of others (especially superiors), and they insist on working at their own pace. They tend to get angry and slow down even more when asked to speed up. They tend to feel mistreated, unappreciated and put upon and when they sense that they have been cheated, they retaliate, but always under conditions of high deniability.

Oldham and Morris (2000) claim the following five traits and behaviours are clues to the presence of what they too call the *Leisurely* style. A person who reveals a strong Leisurely tendency will, they suggested, demonstrate more of these behaviours more intensely than someone with less of this style in his or her personality profile. They noted five characteristics: first, Leisurely men and women believe in their right to enjoy themselves on their own terms in their own time; they value and protect their comfort, their free time, and their individual pursuit of happiness. Second, they agree to play by the rules; deliver what is expected of them and no more, but expect others to recognise and respect that limit. Third, they cannot be exploited and can comfortably resist acceding to demands that they deem unreasonable or above and beyond the call of duty. Next, they are relaxed about time and feel haste makes waste and unnecessary anxiety. They are easygoing and optimistic that whatever needs getting done will get done, eventually. Last, they are not overawed by authority.

Inevitably different “schools of psychotherapy” react very differently to the construct and, if they do not wish to abolish it, how to treat it. Thus those from a more psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic tradition wish to explore the childhood and parental origins of the disorder, while cognitive behaviour therapists would advocate confronting and

changing everyday cognitions about how they are treated and perceived, and thence modify their behaviours.

This study is concerned with the PAPD in Big Five factor space. Specifically it is concerned with which of the Five Domains and Thirty Facets (six for each of the five traits) is related to *Leisurely*. In this study a measure of PAPD is taken from the Hogan Development Survey (HDS; Hogan & Hogan, 1997) used increasingly in business settings (Carson, Shanock, Heggstad, Andrew, Pugh & Walter, 2012; Knights & Kennedy, 2006; Harms, Spain & Hannah, 2011; Zibarras, Port & Woods, 2008). In studies where it has been used to understand how dysfunctional traits predict work-related behaviour it has frequently shown to be a significant predictor of work success/failure (Furnham, Trickey & Hyde, 2012; Harms et al., 2011; Zibarras et al., 2008). Precisely how and why this is the case may be better understood by examining some of its “bright side” correlates.

Numerous studies have shown how PAPD individuals have been shown to have poor work performance. Moscoso and Salgado (2004) used a 360-item Spanish version of a PD measure and showed PAPD was negatively correlated with both task and contextual performance. Indeed, after Schizotypal PD, PAPD showed highest negative correlations with supervisor-rated work behaviour ($r = -.37, p < .01, N = 85$). Furnham et al. (2012) using the HDS found PAPD (*Leisurely*) correlated significantly negatively with six work measures including managerial potential ($r = -.24, p < .001, N = 4,042$).

There have also been various attempts to integrate “normal” and “abnormal” personality structures (Widiger, 2011). Indeed there are numerous important papers that attempt to link together these systems (Widiger, Costa & McCrae, 2001; Samuel & Widiger, 2008; Saulsman & Page, 2004) however because PAPD was dropped after DSM-III there are no comparisons. Hence it seems unclear as to the Big Five domain and facet correlates of

PAPD: that is which Big Five domains and facets are the clearest markers of PAPD, as measured by the HDS.

The Current Study

This study used a large adult sample to compare scores on the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1985) and the now extensively used HDS (Hogan & Hogan, 1997), which is a measure based on the PD categories but useful with normal populations and has an PAPD scale (Furnham & Trickey, 2011). Whilst factor analytic studies often suggest a three-factor higher order solution various studies have shown that the Leisurely scale is unique and does not load with any of the other disorders (Carson et al., 2012). The version of the HDS used in this study does not have facets of the Leisurely scale though the latest version does. There are three facets in this updated measure with sample items: *Passive Aggressive* (“I sometimes put off doing things for people I don’t like”); *Unappreciated* (“People at work expect me to do everything”) and *Irritated* (“It irritates me to be interrupted when I am working on something”) (Hogan & Hogan, 2014).

The Hogan “dark side” measure is now used in organisational research and practice to measure dark side characteristics in the “normal population” (Carson et al., 2012; De Fruyt et al., 2009; Furnham 2006; 2008; Furnham & Crump, 2005; Furnham, Hyde & Trickey, 2014; Harms et al., 2011; Hogan & Hogan, 1997). Its aim is partly to help selectors and individuals themselves diagnose how they typically react under work stress. It has the advantage of being psychometrically valid, of measuring all the “dark side” factors and being appropriate for a “normal” population.

The HDS focuses only on the core construct of each disorder from a dimensional perspective (Hogan & Hogan, 2001, p. 41). These dysfunctional dispositions reflect one’s distorted beliefs about others that emerge when people encounter stress or stop considering

how their actions affect others. Over time, these dispositions may become associated with a person's reputation and can impede job performance and career success. The HDS is not a medical or clinical assessment instrument. It does not measure PDs, which are manifestations of mental disorder. Instead, the HDS assesses self-defeating expressions of normal personality. The DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013 p. 647) makes this same distinction between behavioral traits and disorders – self-defeating behaviours, such as those predicted by the HDS, come and go depending on the context. In contrast, PDs are enduring and pervasive across contexts.

An overview of the item selection guidelines can be found in Hogan and Hogan (2001). The HDS has been cross-validated with the MMPI PD scales. Fico, Hogan and Hogan (2000) report coefficient alphas between .50 and .70 with an average of .64 and test-retest reliabilities ($N = 60$) over a three-month interval ranging from .50 to .80, with an average of .68. There were no mean-level differences between sexes, racial/ethnic groups, or younger versus older persons (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). Various relatively small-scale studies have used the HDS and have shown it to be a robust, reliable and valid instrument (De Fruyt et al., 2009; Furnham, 2006; Furnham & Crump, 2005; Rolland & De Fruyt, 2003).

The HDS gives scores that are labelled “no risk, low risk, moderate risk and high risk”. The idea is that high scores can be an indicator of business derailment, because under pressure a successful and functioning person may resort to negativistic behaviour. Understanding the Big Five correlates of PAPD would help selectors, trainers and managers to know what to look for should they wish to detect those with PAPD. Based on the work of Moscoso and Salgado (2004) it was predicted that PAPD/Leisurely would be significantly positively correlated with Neuroticism and negatively correlated with Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. It follows the same analytic strategy of Furnham and Crump (2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2015).

Method

Participants

In total 4,812 British working adults took part in this study of which 3864 were male and 948 female. Their mean age was 40.96 years ($SD = 11.12$ years) with the range being between 23 and 65 years. They were nearly all (over 95%) graduates and in middle class occupations with English as their mother tongue. None, as far as could be established, was diagnosed as PAPD.

Measures

NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is a 240-item inventory, assessing the Five Factor Model domains of Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to experience (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C), with 6 facets (8 items each) structured under the domains. Respondents are requested to provide self-descriptions using a 5-point Likert scale. Its psychometric properties and validity have been well-documented cross-culturally (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005). No item-level information was available for the current sample, but Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the domains with the facets as the indicators were .84, .79, .74, .72 and .82 for N, E, O, A, and C respectively.

Hogan Development Survey (Hogan & Hogan, 1997) is used in this study. The survey includes 154 items, scored for 11 scales, each grouping 14 items. Respondents are requested to 'agree' or 'disagree' with the items. It has a measure of desirable responding. The HDS has been cross-validated with the MMPI PD scales as well as "normal traits" (Furnham & Crump, 2005; Hogan & Hogan, 2001). The Leisurely scale from this inventory was used and its internal reliability was .71.

Procedure

Participants were tested by a British based psychological consultancy over a 10-year period. The measures did not change over this period, nor did trends in the data. Each participant was given personal feedback on their score. They were nearly all employed as middle to senior managers in British companies. They took this test as part of an assessment exercise, run by an external psychological consultancy.

Results

Correlations and regressions were performed. Leisurely correlated with Neuroticism ($r = .24$), Extraversion ($r = -.20$), Openness ($r = -.11$), Agreeableness ($r = -.05$) and Conscientiousness ($r = -.09$), confirming predictions. However because of the N (4,812), though correlations were significant, effect sizes were small even for the two most powerful correlates. Because of the size of the N we split the file into male and female, but the patterns in the data were nearly identical.

A step-wise regression shown in Table 1 was performed: first age and sex were entered, followed by the social desirability scale from the HDS, then the five factors. The demographic factors accounted for none of the variance, and social desirability just 1%. Table 1 shows the results from the inclusion of all eight variables and that a third of the variance could be accounted for primarily through two Big Five factors: Neuroticism and Extraversion.

Insert Table 1 & 2 here

Thereafter a regression was performed with the Leisurely score as the criterion score and the 30 facet scores as the predictor variables (see Table 2). Table 2 shows correlations

with all facets. These were first-order correlations: partial correlations were also performed partialling out sex, age and social desirability but there very few major differences between first order and partial correlations. The pattern is fairly clear: all facets of all the domains except Neuroticism were negative. Four facets were most clearly related to PAPD: N3: *Depression*, E2: *Gregarious*, A1: *Trust* and A4: *Compliance*.

Five further regressions were then done. In each, Leisurely was the criterion variable. First, sex age and social desirability were entered, then the six facets of each of the Big Five Domain/Super factors. The regression for the six *Neuroticism* facets was significant ($R^2 = .09$, $F(9,4065) = 43.82$, $p < .001$). Three of the six facets were significant, the biggest of which were N3: *Depression* ($\beta = .21$, $t(9,4065) = 8.74$, $p < .001$); N4: *Self-Consciousness* ($\beta = .15$, $t(9,4065) = 7.27$, $p < .001$) and N2: *Hostility* ($\beta = -.06$, $t(9,4065) = 39.31$, $p < .001$).

The regression for the six *Extraversion* factors was significant ($R^2 = .06$, $F(9,4065) = 30.57$, $p < .001$). Five of the six facets were significant, the biggest of which were E2: *Gregariousness* ($\beta = -.15$, $t(9,4065) = 7.36$, $p < .001$); E3: *Assertiveness* ($\beta = -.13$, $t(9,4065) = 6.89$, $p < .001$) and E6: *Positive Emotions* ($\beta = -.19$, $t(9,4065) = 4.14$, $p < .001$).

The regression for the six *Openness* factors was significant ($R^2 = .04$, $F(8,4055) = 16.34$, $p < .001$). Four of the six facets were significant, the biggest of which were O4: *Actions* ($\beta = -.14$, $t(9,4055) = 7.92$, $p < .001$) O3 *Aesthetics* ($\beta = -.07$, $t(9,4055) = 3.37$, $p < .001$); and O1: *Fantasy* ($\beta = .05$, $t(9,4055) = 2.80$, $p < .01$).

The regression for the six *Agreeableness* factors was significant ($R^2 = .06$, $F(9,4055) = 29.87$, $p < .001$). Three of the six facets were significant, the biggest of which were A1: *Trust* ($\beta = -.22$, $t(9,4055) = 12.53$, $p < .001$); A4: *Compliance* ($\beta = .18$, $t(9,4055) = 10.36$, $p < .001$) and A2: *Straightforward* ($\beta = -.07$, $t(9,4055) = 3.97$, $p < .001$).

The regression for the six *Conscientiousness* factors was significant ($R^2 = .04$, $F(9,4055) = 17.28$, $p < .001$). Four of the six facets were significant, the biggest of which

were C5: *Self-Discipline* ($\beta = -.16$, $t(9,4055) = 6.91$, $p < .001$); C6: *Deliberation* ($\beta = .08$, $t(9,4055) = 4.32$, $p < .001$) and C4: *Achievement Striving* ($\beta = -.05$, $t(9,4055) = 2.42$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The HDS concept is that most people have a profile of dark side traits which at times may well help them in the workplace (Hogan, 2007; Furnham 2010). The problem arises however when a person comes under pressure or stress and those high-risk traits become pathological and counter-productive.

From the Big Five domain analysis shown in Table 1, it appears that the Leisurely (subclinical PAPD) person has elevated scores on Neuroticism but low on all the other variables. This certainly fits the stereotype of the PAPD person as well as “popular understandings” of PAPD as passive resistant spoilers (Dotlich & Ciaro, 2003; Oldham & Morris, 2000).

The facet level analysis within each domain and overall (see Table 2) provided a more detailed analysis of Leisurely people. It showed the Leisurely person as prone to depression and self-consciousness. All facets of Extraversion showed they were introverted with low assertiveness and positive emotions. They also tended not to be open to experience. This confirms many clinical observations of them being rather “uptight” and anxious (Oldham & Morris, 2000).

There were, however, two particularly interesting findings from the facet level analysis of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Whilst all facets of Agreeableness were predictably negative, particularly Trust and Straightforwardness, Compliance was *positively* associated with Leisurely. Whilst this may at first seem paradoxical an inspection of the HDS manual shows that Compliance is the extent to which this is actually measuring many PAPD

behaviours. Thus one item reads “I hesitate to express my anger even when it is justified” and another reversed item “If someone starts a fight, I am ready to fight back”. This is very much an outward behavioural compliance rather than an internal one. The analysis of the Conscientiousness facets indicated as expected that Leisurely people are low of competence, dutifulness, and self-discipline, though there was some indication of a positive relationship with deliberation. That is Leisurely people are not hasty and impulsive. Items for this subscale include “I rarely make hasty decisions” and “I think twice before I answer a question”. Thus the Leisurely person looks careful and compliant but is often neither behaving as they do as a sign of aggression.

There have been various other studies similar to this which have attempted to ascertain the amount of variance the Big Five can account for in the analysis of a PD (Furnham & Crump, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2015). Thus studies on Schizotypal and Anti-Social PD show that the Big Five at either domain or facet level account for as much as a third of the variance. In this study however the Big Five at domain level only accounted for seven percent of the variance. Thus it may be less possible to identify the Leisurely individual from the “bright side” profile. In this sense traditional Big Five measures may not be able to easily identify PAPD individuals.

It is surprising that work psychologists have not tried to develop a psychometrically valid measure of PAPD given that it is a readily recognisable and undesirable behaviour pattern in the workplace (Dotlich & Cairo, 2003; Oldham & Morris, 1991). Indeed, a recent study shows that PAPD as measured by the HDS scale is negative associated with promotion at work: that is the higher the PAPD score the longer it takes individuals to get promoted to managerial positions (Furnham, Crump & Ritchie, 2013). Clearly, the PAPD pattern of behaviour would suggest that people with high scores would be unlikely to be promoted to, or succeed in middle or senior management positions.

Whilst there are various “quizzes” available on the web, there seem to be no attempts to measure it, and its facets. There is however, an older literature on assertiveness which suggests that passive-aggressiveness is a style of reacting to particular social situations (Epstein, 1980). It is assumed that there is one “healthy” response, which is assertiveness, and three unhealthy responses namely aggressive, passive and passive-aggressive. However it is not clear whether this is thought of as trait-like; namely stable over time and consistent across situations, or else highly situationally specific and open to change.

There are clinical implications of these findings. Clinicians often see patients with chronic negative affect, a term often used synonymously with Neuroticism. However this study suggest that if patients are negativistic and introverted they may be particularly sensitive to all sorts of interpersonal reinforcements and punishments in particular leading them to becoming over time more and more disagreeable. Exploring the origins of various specific behaviours and attempting to change cognitions particularly about authority figures may help them being more successful in relationships particularly in the workplace.

This study like all others had limitations. This was a large, but not a community, sample which has implications for generalisation of the data. Next, the PAPD/Leisurely measure, while reliable and valid was unidimensional and it may be very valuable to explore a multi-dimensional measure. Third, it would have been desirable to investigate other individual differences (values, morality, life-style, self-assessed intelligence and attractiveness) to see to what extent personality factors have incremental validity over and above these measures. More importantly longitudinal studies would help to understand the role of personality traits in the genesis and development of PAPD.

The associations may depict shared variance due to the fact that Leisureliness and Neuroticism are negatively valenced attributes whereas the other four Big Five dimensions are traits with positive valence. Thus, the shared variance may partly display valence

confounds rather than being construct-relevant. Despite these limitations this study hopefully provides an impetus for researchers to continue to explore the PAPD concept and its place in personality space.

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Table 1

Regressions with the Leisurely scale as the criterion scale and demographics and the Bright Side Variables as the predictor scales

	β	t
Gender	.00	.61
Age	.04	2.20*
Social Desirability	.04	2.33*
Neuroticism	.19	10.20***
Extraversion	-.12	6.25***
Openness	-.04	2.35*
Agreeableness	-.02	1.00
Conscientiousness	.02	1.10

Note. $R^2 = .07$, $F(7, 4064) = 41.17$, $p < .001$, *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Table 2

Regression of Leisurely (PAPD) onto the 30 Facets

Model	<i>r</i>	β	<i>t</i>
N1 Anxiety	.21***	.01	.64
N2 Angry Hostility	.10***	.02	1.08
N3 Depression	.27***	.20	8.48***
N4 Self-Consciousness	.25***	.09	4.21***
N5 Impulsiveness	.07***	.04	1.94*
N6 Vulnerability	.16***	-.08	3.45***
E1 Warmth	-.12***	.08	3.36***
E2 Gregariousness	-.19***	-.13	6.30***
E3 Assertiveness	-.18***	-.08	3.65***
E4 Activity	-.12***	-.04	1.81
E5 Excitement-Seeking	-.05***	-.05	2.59***
E6 Positive Emotions	-.14***	-.04	2.03**
O1 Fantasy	-.02***	.00	.17
O2 Aesthetics	-.06***	-.04	2.08***
O3 Feelings	.05***	-.07	3.39***
O4 Actions	-.15***	-.06	3.32***
O5 Ideas	.01	.02	1.15
O6 Values	-.10***	-.02	1.08
A1 Trust	-.18***	-.13	7.26***
A2 Straightforwardness	-.06***	-.10	3.58***
A3 Altruism	-.03***	.06	2.70**
A4 Compliance	.07***	.16	8.18***
A5 Modesty	.00	-.10	5.62***
A6 Tender-Mindedness	-.01	.02	1.38
C1 Competence	-.10***	.02	1.05
C2 Order	-.02***	.00	.04
C3 Dutifulness	-.05***	.04	1.66
C4 Achievement Striving	-.10***	.02	.93
C5 Self-Discipline	-.15***	-.08	3.68***
C6 Deliberation	.01	.00	.38

Note. $R^2 = .17$, $F(10,6742) = 46.62$, $p < .001$ *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$