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The influence of personality factors on well-being through self-esteem: An Italian-Spanish lexical comparative study

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ABSTRACT

Considering the psycholexical approach, this study aimed to test the structure of the Big-five model of personality in Italy and Spain using exploratory structural equation modelling (ESEM) and to use predictive latent models to investigate whether these traits influence hedonic and eudaimonic well-being directly and indirectly, as mediated by self-esteem. ESEM analyses conducted with Italian and Spanish samples, including 400 ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.49$, $SD = 2.35$; 81.5%female) and 602 ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.52$, $SD = 1.93$; 81%female) university students, respectively, found that a three-factor solution (Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness) showed better model fit and more well-defined factors than either a four- (adding Emotional-stability) or five-factor (adding Integrity) solution. Predictive models using the three-factor solution showed that, in both samples, Extraversion indirectly affected hedonic well-being, global eudaimonic well-being, and Effortful-Engagement; Conscientiousness directly and indirectly affected hedonic well-being, but affected eudaimonic well-being (directly and indirectly) only in the Italian sample. The main difference between samples in relation to Agreeableness was that, in the Italian sample, this trait did not affect self-esteem, but directly promoted hedonic well-being. Thus, a psycholexical three-factor solution appeared more stable across languages; moreover, the results provided initial evidence on the generalisability across samples of the effects of personality traits on well-being, both directly and as mediated by self-esteem.

1. Introduction

The Big-five model of personality is an important theoretical model used to explain personality structure (Block, 2010). This model posits that five traits—usually labelled Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience—describe major individual differences in personality. This view of personality was derived from two relevant traditions: one based on psycholexical studies that focus on lexical collection of trait-terms extracted from vocabulary (Goldberg, 1981) and use trait-descriptive adjective lists to identify the five factors (Goldberg, 1992), and the other based on questionnaires composed of short statements (Costa & McCrae, 1992) from which the five factors can be extracted. The NEO-PI and its revised versions (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 2004) are widely used questionnaires to measure personality traits (Boyle, 2008). Both traditions present strengths and weaknesses and often contrast; however, they converge on

one point: the need for cross-cultural studies to support the generalisability of the Big-five model of personality.

Psycholexical studies aim to find personality descriptors among languages capable of identifying basic personality dimensions. They are based upon the assumption that ‘traits or individual differences found important by people are represented in language’ (cf. Goldberg, 1981). Therefore, although specific lexicon used in a language does not necessarily always have a direct equivalent in another, if the Big-five factors are ‘real’, they should be stable across cultures and languages, regardless of what terms are used to describe them. As such, taxonomic investigations have been conducted in several languages, such as Italian (Caprara & Perugini, 1994; Di Blas & Forzi, 1998) and Spanish (Quevedo-Aguado et al., 1996), to identify a stable personality traits structure (see Appendix 1 for more details).

Using the psycholexical approach, only three of the five factors have been found to be replicable across languages (De Raad et al., 2010; Di

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