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Recenzja rozprawy doktorskiej

pt. The relationship between social expectations, basic psychological needs, self-enhancement and perceived changes in personality over the life span

przygotowanej przez mgr Joannę Gutral-Sutherland

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Praca została złożona w języku angielskim, zatem recenzja została również sporządzona w języku angielskim

The reviewed doctoral dissertation comprises a manuscript of a monograph spanning 161 pages, including the bibliography and appendices. The work discusses the findings of a series of four studies. These studies are self-descriptive, with the first three conducted on student samples and the fourth on a nationwide sample. The primary objective of the research was to verify mechanisms explaining observed changes in personality over the life span. These mechanisms include culturally shared expectations regarding personality changes, self-enhancement, and internal motives, such as basic psychological needs and self-actualization. The theoretical expectations were largely confirmed.

STRENGTHS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Well-planned set of studies

A well-planned set of four studies characterizes the doctoral dissertation. These studies form a cohesive and thoughtful sequence in which elements of replication and novelty are effectively balanced. In all of these studies, respondents were asked to assess the extent to which a specific trait characterizes themselves or people in general currently, characterized them in the past, or will characterize them in the future across predefined age intervals. In the first study, the evaluation focused on people in general; in the second study, it focused on the respondents themselves; and in the third and fourth studies, it encompassed both people in general and the respondents. Furthermore, each subsequent study introduced additional variables, namely basic psychological needs satisfaction and self-actualization. This approach allowed for a systematic replication of previous findings while also extending the subject of research and tested hypotheses.

2. Improved quality of successive studies within the set of studies

The first three studies were conducted on student samples, with the first and third studies featuring notably small sample sizes (70 students). Furthermore, in all three of these studies, the samples were heavily skewed toward the female gender (in the first study, there were 70 students with only 18 men; in the second study, there were 181 students with only 18 men; in the third study, there were 70 students with only 18 men). The small sample sizes (especially in the first and the third studies) and gender imbalances in all three studies represent clear limitations. However, it is important to note that this limitation was effectively addressed in the fourth study, which was carried out on a general sample while maintaining some parameters of representativeness. From the perspective of the fourth

study, which significantly replicated the findings of the earlier three studies, the weaknesses in the sample of the earlier studies are no longer the limitations of the entire dissertation. Instead, they can be seen as initial exploratory steps, preparing the main study. One can even say, that in the context of the whole dissertation, the systematic replication of results in unrepresentative and small samples carries an additional value. If a particular effect is replicated multiple times in such biased groups, it indicates the robustness of the effect.

3. Thorough literature review and solid theoretical justification for tested hypotheses

The well-planned set of studies focused on changes in perceived personality traits, both one's own and people in general. The author's comprehensive review of the literature not only informed the formulation of hypotheses but also highlighted the originality and necessity of the research. The author identified basic mechanisms (expectations about changes in personality, self-enhancement, and internal motives) through an extensive literature review in which she precisely identified gaps that were subsequently addressed through her own research. Consequently, the research is firmly grounded in the existing body of knowledge and makes a real contribution to this knowledge on the mechanisms underlying perceived changes in personality traits.

4. Advanced analyses and analytical insight

The author has demonstrated a high-level of analytical expertise throughout the dissertation. She subjected the collected data to various analyses, ranging from basic correlation and variance analyses to multilevel analyses that take data nesting into account. Analytical techniques in psychology evolve rapidly, often faster than theoretical models. Consequently, there is a temptation to employ advanced analyses even when they may not

be necessary. However, in the case of the reviewed doctoral dissertation, the situation is different. The analytical toolbox employed is indeed advanced, but the author consistently chooses analyses that are genuinely appropriate for the research questions at hand. Furthermore, the author provides clear explanations for the chosen methods of analysis, demonstrates their utility, and presents the obtained results in a clear and precise manner. This approach ensures that the analyses are not only robust but also comprehensible to the reader, enhancing the transparency and rigor of the research.

It is also worth highlighting and commending the author's commitment to data sharing, enabling others to verify the accuracy of the conducted analyses or conduct additional analyses if deemed necessary.

5. Analytical integration of own data with data extracted from the literature

An invaluable aspect of this work is using not only collected own data but also data extracted from the literature regarding real personality trait changes found in longitudinal studies. This approach further strengthened the dissertation, particularly given that the own research focused on perceived or imagined personality changes rather than actual changes. The skillful utilization of literature-derived data significantly expanded the scope of inquiry. In utilizing this data, the doctoral candidate also exhibited critical thinking. She identified discrepancies in the analysis description in the work by Roberts et al. (2006) and subsequently initiated correspondence with the authors to clarify uncertainties. As a result, she employed a technically sound procedure, albeit slightly divergent from the one outlined in the article by Roberts et al., which was found to be inaccurate.

WEAKNESSES OF THE DISSERTATION

Certain debatable aspects can be identified in the dissertation, which constitute its weaker elements. I will discuss them below.

1. Problematic assumption of the positivity of the Big Five traits

In order to describe changes in personality, the author uses the model of the Big Five traits. These are fundamental traits intended to provide a comprehensive description of personality: agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, and openness to experience. What is important, these traits were initially conceptualized as relatively neutral traits. Big Five personality traits are something different than, for example, character strengths whose higher intensity is viewed as positive or desirable. However, the author discusses the Big Five traits in a manner that implies they are positive rather than neutral. In various places, she even refers to a "positivity effect", which she uses to describe higher or increasing intensity ratings for these five traits. The assumption made in the work is that these are positive traits, and thus, higher intensity is desirable. This assumption underpins some mechanisms tested in the study (self-enhancement or *primus inter pares*). However, such an assumption about the positivity of the Big Five traits contradicts the notion of their neutrality claimed in the Big Five models.

An additional argument against the author's assumption about the positivity of these traits is the Alternative Model of Personality Disorders, which is currently being developed and is included in both DSM-5 and ICD-11. This model describes personality disorders as extreme expressions of certain poles of the Big Five traits. If the author's assumption about the positivity of the Big Five traits were correct, then personality disorders should be characterized by the low intensity of these traits. However, this is not the case. In both DSM-

5 and ICD-11, low intensity of emotional stability, agreeableness, and extraversion are characteristic of personality disorders. Low emotional stability is negative affectivity, low agreeableness is antagonism (or dissociality), and low extraversion is detachment. However, in the case of openness to experience, high intensity is considered pathological in DSM-5 and referred to as psychoticism. On the other hand, ICD-11 considers both low and high conscientiousness intensity as pathological. Low conscientiousness is disinhibition, and high conscientiousness is anankastia.

In light of the above, it cannot be assumed that the principle of positivity applies to all personality traits (i.e., the higher, the better), which seems to be the case in the dissertation and serves as the basis for the described mechanisms.

2. Lack of reference to the Big Two

In the research presented in the dissertation, the five personality traits from the Big Five model form two groups that differ in trajectories of change. The first group comprises conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability, while the second group includes extraversion and openness to experience. The author commonly refers to the first group as "maturation" and the second group as "youth and energy".

The original intention of the Big Five model was that these five traits would constitute orthogonal dimensions, but research has shown that they are systematically correlated. These correlations, initially demonstrated by Digman (1997) and subsequently by DeYoung (2006) and many other researchers, group the traits exactly as they are grouped in this dissertation. Digman labeled these factors as alpha (grouping conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability) and beta (grouping extraversion and openness to experience). DeYoung popularized the terms "stability" and "plasticity" derived from

cybernetics. The pair of terms "communion" and "agency", introduced by Wiggins and Trapnell (1996) and later by Abele and Wojciszke (2014), represents another set of labels for similar personality characteristics, this time in the realm of social psychology.

Regrettably, the dissertation does not make reference to these dual constructs, especially considering that in the section dedicated to further directions, the author suggests that future research should be conducted in the context of the Big Two. In fact, such research to some extent has already been conducted in this dissertation but remains undiscussed. The cybernetic concepts of stability and plasticity, as well as the social concepts of agency and communion, provide a new, useful and valuable context for interpreting the obtained results.

3. Surprising decision to include only one lower-order trait

In the third study, in addition to the Big Five traits, the lower-order trait of self-dominance, which is a facet of extraversion, was included. Different models of the Big Five distinguish various lower-order traits. For instance, in the model by McCrae and Costa (2003), there are 30 facets; in the model by Hofstee, De Raad, and Goldberg (1992), there are 45 facets, and in the model by DeYoung, Quilty, and Peterson (2007), there are 10 facets, which are conceptually broader than those in the models by McCrae and Costa (2003) or Hofstee, De Raad, and Goldberg (1992). The decision to include only one facet of one trait was somewhat surprising. It would have been advisable to either systematically expand upon a selected lower-order trait model or apply a competitive model to the Big Five, such as the HEXACO model (Ashton, Lee, 200).

CONCLUSION

The weaknesses mentioned above are not significant and rather serve as starting points for further discussion. Therefore, after analyzing the presented doctoral dissertation, I conclude that the thesis prepared by Ms. Joanna Gutral-Sutherland meets the requirements set forth in Article 13 of *Ustawy z dnia 14 marca 2003 roku o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki*. Consequently, it may proceed to further stages of the doctoral process.



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