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Non-self-report measures to assess personality

Self-report measures are the most common ways to assess personality, representing an important research tool in social and personality psychology. Despite its steady popularity and demonstrated utility, assessments of personality have been consistently criticized from the early days of psychological assessment right up to the present for being influenced by factors such as response biases. The concept of developing non-self-report measures of personality has had a long history with researchers such as Raymond B. Cattell, Henry A. Murray, Gerald S. Blum, and Hermann Rorschach. This present special issue presents research devoted to assessing personality without resorting to self-report methods. Below, we briefly present the papers that have been included in this special issue.

1. Non-self-report measures of individual differences in young samples

Fortunato, Tanzilli, Lingiardi, and Speranza (2023) described a new tool, the Childhood Personality Assessment Q-Sort (CPAP-Q), that can be used to assess childhood personality. Specifically, the tool evaluates personality during the developmental ages of 4 to 11 years and through the clinician’s perspective, allows for the identification of personality styles already during childhood. A key strength of the CPAP-Q over other widely used tools (e.g., self-report questionnaires) is the use of clinicians as first raters. The tool enables clinicians to conduct the assessment without the involvement of the child or their family, thereby preserving both the therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic setting. Considering the complexities of conducting developmental research in personality, it is promising to see a paper that focused on developing non-self-report measures to assess personality in childhood.

Similarly, Almiro, Marques, Duarte, Alberto, and Simoes (2023), aimed at improving the assessment of individual differences in younger individuals. Specifically, the study contributed to the validation of the Roberts Apperception Test for Children (RATC) in a forensic sample. The RATC is used to assess children and adolescents’ behavioral, social, and emotional functioning and emotional management strategies. The results highlighted the clinical value of the data obtained from the projection of individual’s thoughts, concerns, conflicts, and problem-solving styles, which are useful in assessing their emotional and behavioral characteristics and psychological functioning.

2. Computer methods to assess individual differences

Westermann and Sibilis (2023) developed and evaluated an interpersonal, generative paradigm that allows participants to interact nonverbally and spontaneously with a computer-controlled “other player” in real-time. In the game-like paradigm, participants appraised most of the game mechanics and computer-controlled other players as intended with interpersonal traits affecting spontaneous behavior towards artificial characters. The results corroborate the feasibility and validity of a generative assessment of interpersonal dynamics beyond self-reports and observer-ratings. The paradigm paves the way for the empirical testing of formal, computational models of dyadic interaction.

Hilliard, Kazim, Bitakis, and Leutner (2023) extended previous work that developed and validated an image-based measure of personality to compare different methods of scoring. Specifically, the study adopted an interdisciplinary approach, comparing machine learning based approaches with other approaches that are more common in psychological research. Furthermore, they have investigated the psychometric properties of their novel assessment by examining how each scoring approach performs in terms of convergent validity, discriminate validity, and generalizability to unseen data. The authors recommend the use of predictive Lasso regression models for scoring forced choice image-based measures of personality over other approaches. The study makes a significant contribution not only in the assessment of non-self-report personality data, but also in the available analytic protocols used to explore such data.

3. The interview method as a non-self-report measure of individual differences

Riegel, Schlosserova, Blum, Waschulin, and Rosova (2023) attempted to test the reliability and validity of the assessment of personality psychopathology based on the Structured Interview of Personality Organization (STIPO) scoring course. The authors concluded that the STIPO is an appropriate tool to facilitate the communication of personality psychopathology between independent experts and highlighted the need for training in the STIPO to enrich the assessment of personality psychopathology.

Dolczewski (2023) developed and presented a semi-structured interview protocol to gather data on self-esteem regulation. The method presented in the paper advances research on the assessment of self-esteem, offering the opportunity to collect both verbal and non-verbal data to gain insights into, for example, emotional states. Furthermore, this work is in line with the growing interest in exploring intrapsychic dynamics such as in the case of personality disorders (Hopwood, 2018).

4. Interdisciplinary and multimethod approaches

On the topic of self-esteem assessment, Schliebener, Kraft, and
Dufner (2023), developed and demonstrate some support for the validity of a physiology-based measure that captures spontaneous affective reactions to the self. This interdisciplinary study used electromyography (EMG) to record changes in facial muscular activity that are indicative of subtle smiling. Importantly for the topic of this special issue, the relations between the EMG responses and likability indicators largely held when the researchers controlled explicit self-esteem. This finding indicates that the novel measure possessed incremental validity over self-reports, highlighting that the EMG approach might be fruitful for the assessment of implicit self-esteem and perhaps other concepts such as personality traits.

Marrero, Gosling, Pennebaker, and Harari (2023) evaluated the potential of using voice samples as non-self-report measures of personality. Specifically, they examined the extent to which linguistic and vocal information extracted from semi-structured vocal samples can be used to predict conventional measures of personality. The findings were very promising showing that voice samples accounted for 10.67% of the variance in personality traits predicting depression, age, and gender. The study offered an easy to use and adaptive methodology to explain moderate variance in personality traits, suggesting a number of opportunities to optimize personality assessment and prediction.

5. Other approaches

Jiang, Paxton, Ramírez-Esparza, and García-Sierra (2023), proposed the dynamic latent state-trait model blending dynamical systems theory and person perception. The results of the study demonstrate the utility and feasibility of the ambulatory assessment method in measuring person perception. The results further show that dynamical systems theory approaches can be leveraged to provide information about person perception at zero acquaintance beyond that of more traditional approaches.

Zhang, Lin, and Perrett (2023) explored cross-culturally how head posture (level, up or down) affects perceptions of cooperativeness. Across three experiments, the authors reported a significant effect of posture on the perception of cooperativeness. Important, this effect appears to be common across cultures (at least for the samples assessed here); however Chinese participants exhibited greater sensitivity to postural cues in their judgments of cooperation compared to American participants, indicating that head posture may be a better predictor of the perception of cooperativeness in many cultures as compared to others.

Ross and Camoïráno (2023) focused their work on the Rorschach test. Specifically, they explored in a within-subject design, the effect of training on proficiency in administering the Rorschach. Even though the Rorschach is one of the most widely studied and used non-self-report measure of individual differences, possibly no empirical studies existed (before this one) investigating what level of expertise is needed to properly collect valid Rorschach protocols. The results showed that a 100-hour Rorschach training course and 10 administrations as practice are sufficient to guarantee an effective Rorschach administration. These results have clear implications for personality assessment providing clear guidelines as to how an established non-self-report measure can be used by non-experts to assess personality.

6. Concluding remarks

Eleven papers are included in this present special issue. It is apparent from the summary above that the papers cover a wide range of methods employed to assess personality and individual differences more generally without the use of self-report measures. Some studies adapted a multimethod approach, others used machine learning and computer methods, interviews, cross-cultural comparisons, or experiments. Some studies focused on the assessment of individual characteristics (e.g., self-esteem), while others focused on prediction of individual differences or improving the analytic protocol of existing methods used to collect non-self-report data. This diversity in the methods, themes and approaches is promising although not without problems. Specifically, it is positive to see that vastly different methodologies are being developed in parallel to offer alternative (to the self-report) methods of assessment of individual differences. However, this wide approach to developing non-self-report measures reveals that a systematic effort and a consensus on “what the priorities should be” are currently lacking. We hope that this special issue will help identify areas of strength and priorities to boost research into this vital topic.

References


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