THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY FACETS IN ADULTS' AGE IDENTITY

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INTRODUCTION

Subjective age identity typically refers to the age that someone identifies with or feels. It can also include the age someone chooses to be or considers to be ideal. Subjective age has been identified as a predictor of adults' health, well-being, social functioning, and longevity in several studies (e.g., Hubley & Russell, 2009; Uotinen, Suutama, & Ruoppila, 2003). The role of personality variables in age identity has been examined in surprisingly few studies (Goldsmith & Heiens, 1992; Hubley & Hultsch, 1994, 1996; Kaufman & Elder, 2002; Montepare & Lachman, 1989; Montepare, 1996). Furthermore, none of these studies has examined the role of Big Five personality factors – at the facet level – in subjective age, which limits our understanding of the role of personality in age identity.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between personality variables, as measured by the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and subjective age identity in adults ages 19 to 78. First, we wanted to know which of the Big Five personality *domains* (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) explained a significant amount of variance in subjective age identity and ideal age scores and, more specifically, the proportion of variance that they explain. Second, we wanted to know which of the 30 Big Five personality *facets* explained a significant amount of variance in subjective age identity and ideal age scores and, more specifically, the proportion of the variance that they explain.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 210 adults (141 women and 69 men) who ranged in age from 19 to 78 years (M = 43.1, SD = 12.8) recruited using convenience sampling from a community population. The sample was 81% Caucasian, 7.1 % East Asian, 3.8% African, 2.4% Hispanic, and 3.4% other groups. The sample tended to be well-educated (e.g., 66.2 % had more than high school).

Measures

The measures used in the present study consisted of:

(1) *Subjective Age Identity Scale* (SAIS; Hubley, 1998, 2004, 2007)

This 7-item scale asks about the age one feels in general, physically, mentally, and socially as well as the age one looks to others and oneself, and the age one would like to be ideally. Six items loaded onto one factor and a total score was computed using those items. The ideal age score did not load on this factor and was treated as a single-item variable.

(2) *NEO-PI-R* (Costa & McCrae, 1992)

This 240 item inventory examines 5 personality domains (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness); each domain contains 6 facets.

(3) *Demographic Questionnaire*

This questionnaire asked about age, gender, education, ethnicity, and self-reported health.

Procedure

Each participant completed the SAIS (see Figure 1), the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and a demographic questionnaire individually.

RESULTS

Factor Analysis

The SAIS was subjected to a factor analysis, using principal axis factoring. Based on these results, a mean SAIS score was computed for each respondent by averaging the scores on the first six items (alpha = .79). Higher scores indicate older subjective age identities. The seventh SAIS item (ideal age) did not load on the overall factor and was treated as a separate variable.

Regression Analyses

Four separate standard regression analyses were conducted:

1. *SAIS mean scores regressed on the NEO-PI-R domains*:

The five personality factors together explained 22% of the variance, $F(5,172) = 9.42$, $p < .001$, but only *Openness to Experience* (ß = -.396) and *Neuroticism* (ß = .175) made significant, unique contributions to the explained variance (see Table 1).

2. *SAIS mean scores regressed on the NEO-PI-R facets*:

Fifteen of the 30 personality facets measured by the NEO-PI-R showed statistically significant bivariate relationships with SAIS mean scores (after a Bonferroni correction was applied to correct for Type I error given the large number of the correlations computed). The 15 personality facets together explained 27% of the variance, $F(15,185) = 4.12$, $p < .001$, but only the one facet of *O2: Aesthetics* (ß = -.246) made a statistically significant, unique contribution to the explained variance (see Table 2).

3. *Ideal age scores regressed on the NEO-PI-R domains*:

Of the five personality domains measured by NEO-PI-R, only *Openness to Experience* showed a statistically significant bivariate relationship with the ideal age scores and, thus, was kept for the regression analysis. *Openness to Experience* explained almost 3% of the variance in the ideal age scores, $F(1,194) = 5.26$, $p = .023$, and made a significant, unique contribution to the explained variance (ß = .163).

4. *Ideal age scores regressed on the NEO-PI-R facets*:

Only two (*N6: Vulnerability to Stress* and *O6: Values*) out of the 30 personality facets measured by the NEO-PI-R showed statistically significant ($p <. 002$) bivariate relationships with ideal age scores and, thus, were kept for the regression analysis. These two personality facets together explained 7% of the variance in ideal age scores, $F(2,199) = 7.30$, $p < .001$, and each of them made a statistically significant, unique contribution to the explained variance (*N6*: ß = -.146 and *O6*: ß = .171) (see Table 3).

DISCUSSION

Similar to previous research, people who scored higher on *Openness to Experience* tended to report relatively younger subjective ages in the present study. Contrary to previous studies, *Extraversion* did not play a role in subjective age and *Neuroticism* did not play a role in ideal age.

Importantly, this appears to be the first study to evaluate the role of NEO-PI-R personality facets in subjective age identity across the entire adult lifespan. The results suggest that, on average, people who tended to appreciate art and beauty also tended to report relatively younger subjective ages. People who tended to reflectively re-examine their own values and those of authority figures tended to choose to be relatively older whereas people who tended to be prone to distress tended to choose to be relatively younger.

Facet level analysis offers a more specific account of how personality variables are involved in age identity. That is, not all facets of a domain necessarily contribute to subjective age or ideal age scores. For example, only one facet (*O2: Aesthetics*) of *Openness to Experience* made a contribution to subjective age. Even when a domain does not contribute significantly to the variability in the dependant variable, one of its facets may. For example, *N6: Vulnerability to Stress*, a facet of *Neuroticism*, contributed to ideal age scores, but *Neuroticism* did not.

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Figure 1: Subjective Age Identity Scale (SAIS)

Sometimes people feel different (older or younger) than they actually are in years. For each statement below, please circle the number that best describes the way you feel about your age right now.

	Much younger than my age	Somewhat younger than my age	About the same as my age	Somewhat older than my age	Much older than my age	This statement makes no sense to me
1. Right now, I feel…….	1	2	3	4	5	9
2. Physically, I feel…….	1	2	3	4	5	9
3. Mentally, I feel……	1	2	3	4	5	9
4. Socially, I feel…….	1	2	3	4	5	9
5. Others tell me I look……..	1	2	3	4	5	9
6. To myself, I think I look…….	1	2	3	4	5	9
7. Ideally, I would like to be…..	1	2	3	4	5	9

Note: One item, "Other people treat me as though I am" was not included here.

Table 1: *Regression of SAIS Mean Scores on NEO-PI-R Domains*

Variable	B	Standard Error	β	Sig	Zero Order Correlation
Neuroticism	.005	.002	.175	.038	.254
Extraversion	.004	.003	.153	.132	-.227
Openness to Experience	-.010	.003	-.396	.000	-.349
Agreeableness	-.004	.002	-.108	.144	-.258
Conscientiousness	-.004	.003	-.149	.087	-.296

Table 2: *Regression of SAIS Mean Scores on NEO-PI-R Facets*

Variable	B	Standard Error	β	Sig	Zero Order Correlation
N2: Hostility	.015	.014	.117	.274	.227
N3: Depression	.006	.010	.054	.535	.223
N6: Vulnerability to Stress	.009	.014	.066	.535	.285
E1: Warmth	3.552E-5	.014	.000	.998	-.297
E4: Activity	-.011	.011	-.092	.329	-.284
O2: Aesthetic	-.026	.010	-.246	.007	-.379
O3: Feelings	.001	.014	.008	.947	-.241
O4: Actions	-.012	.013	-.082	.359	-.315
O5: Ideas	-.005	.010	-.048	.629	-.296
O6: Values	.010	.013	.071	.466	-.252
A3: Altruism	.021	.016	.142	.189	-.245
A6:Tender-mindedness	-.025	.014	-.167	.079	-.295
C1: Competence	-.008	.016	-.056	.622	-.310
C2: Order	-.021	.011	-.167	.059	-.267
C5:Self-Discipline	.003	.012	.026	.806	-.258

Table 3: *Regression of Ideal Age Scores on NEO-PI-R Facets*

Variable	B	Standard Error	B	Sig	Zero Order Correlation
N6 :Vulnerability to Stress	-.019	.010	-.146	.050	-.210
O6: Values	.023	.010	.171	.022	.225