



Getting mad and getting even: Agreeableness and Honesty-Humility as predictors of revenge intentions

Kibeom Lee ^{a,*}, Michael C. Ashton ^{b,*}

^a Department of Psychology, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4

^b Department of Psychology, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, Canada L2S 3A1

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ABSTRACT

HEXACO Agreeableness has been suggested to be the personality dimension that chiefly underlies forgiveness and retaliation, but some evidence suggests that these variables are also related to Honesty-Humility. In this study, self- and peer reports of personality were collected from a sample of 198 students to examine how the HEXACO Agreeableness and Honesty-Humility factors differentially predict responses to a hypothetical transgression. Honesty-Humility was found to correlate more strongly with the intention to commit vengeful acts that are premeditated and calculated than with the intention to engage in immediate retaliation or displaced aggression. In contrast, HEXACO Agreeableness was related to all of these outcome variables, showing no such differential relations.

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1. Introduction

During the past decade, much research attention has been devoted to the personality correlates of revenge and forgiveness. In studies adopting the Big Five model of personality structure, Agreeableness and Emotional Stability have been found to show significant associations with variables related to revenge and forgiveness (e.g., McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). Recently, some authors have investigated such variables in relation to the HEXACO model of personality (Ashton & Lee, 2007), and have found that HEXACO Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness show significant associations with forgiveness-related variables (Perugini, Gallucci, Presaghi, & Ercolani, 2003; Shepherd & Belicki, 2008; Sheppard & Boon, 2012). The present research was conducted to examine further how HEXACO Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness influence the ways in which people react to transgressions and provocations. Before discussing the primary aims of the present research, we first provide an overview of the HEXACO model of personality structure.

1.1. The HEXACO model of personality structure

The HEXACO model of personality structure originated from the results of psycholexical studies, which involve the factor analysis of self- or observer ratings on the familiar personality-descriptive

* Corresponding authors.

E-mail addresses: kibeom@ucalgary.ca (K. Lee), mashton@brocku.ca (M.C. Ashton).

adjectives of a language. Across various languages, a set of six factors has been recovered in similar form (Ashton et al., 2004; Lee & Ashton, 2008). These six factors form the basis of the HEXACO model, which is named as an acronym of those factors: Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience.

The HEXACO model shares its lexical origins with its well-known predecessor, the Big Five factor structure, and these frameworks have many similarities. Specifically, three factors of the HEXACO model, namely Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience, are conceptually very similar to the corresponding factors of the Big Five model. Two other factors in the HEXACO model, Agreeableness and Emotionality, are somewhat similar to the Big Five Agreeableness and Neuroticism (i.e., low Emotional Stability) factors, but also show some important differences from those factors. For example, HEXACO Emotionality subsumes traits of sentimentality and sensitivity that are typically included within Big Five Agreeableness (rather than Neuroticism), and HEXACO Agreeableness subsumes traits of patience and tolerance that are typically included within the low pole of Big Five Neuroticism (rather than the high pole of Big Five Agreeableness). Finally, the HEXACO model includes Honesty-Humility as a sixth dimension, one that is only partially represented within Big Five Agreeableness (Ashton & Lee, 2005). The Honesty-Humility factor captures such traits as fairness and modesty versus manipulativeness and entitlement (see Ashton and Lee (2007) for a review). In the present research, we focus mainly on the HEXACO Agreeableness and Honesty-Humility factors.

1.2. HEXACO Agreeableness and Honesty-Humility as predictors of tendencies to forgive and to retaliate

Several studies have examined forgiveness-related variables in relation to the HEXACO personality factors. In these investigations, Agreeableness has been found to show strong correlations with these variables, and Honesty-Humility has also added some incremental validity in predicting some of these variables above and beyond Agreeableness. In Shepherd and Belicki's (2008) study, Agreeableness correlated .73 with the Trait Forgivingness Scale (TFS; Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005), and Honesty-Humility also showed a correlation of .45 with that variable. Sheppard and Boon (2012) reported that both Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness correlated in $-.40$ s with the Vengeance scale developed by Stuckless and Goranson (1992).

Similarly, Perugini et al. (2003) developed scales measuring personal norms of positive and negative reciprocity, and found that the negative reciprocity norm scale, which assessed the readiness to retaliate, showed a strong correlation with HEXACO Agreeableness ($r = -.64$) as well as a moderately strong correlation with Honesty-Humility ($r = -.45$), a pattern of results similar to those obtained from the two studies described above.¹

The strong and consistent links between HEXACO Agreeableness and the tendencies to forgive and to retaliate are not surprising, given that this personality dimension is conceptualized as governing one's tolerance of transgressions or provocations (Ashton & Lee, 2007). As such, the negative pole of this dimension is primarily characterized by quick-tempereness, argumentativeness, and unforgiveness. In contrast, Honesty-Humility is conceptualized as governing one's reluctance to exploit others; that is, the negative pole of this dimension is primarily characterized by deceitfulness, entitlement, and greed. Thus, the Honesty-Humility factor does not overtly suggest an inclination to respond sharply to transgressions.

A clue as to why persons who are low in Honesty-Humility tend to react strongly to transgressions has been provided indirectly by Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, and Finkel (2006). These authors discussed the relation between Narcissistic Entitlement and unforgiveness, and suggested that because narcissists feel entitled to be treated better than others, they will be especially offended by any real or perceived transgressions. Consequently, narcissists find it particularly intolerable if the offender does not "pay the price" for having mistreated them. Therefore, once provoked or irritated by others, these self-entitled persons would feel a strong desire to teach the offender a lesson, possibly with more severe harm than was originally done to them. Exline et al. hypothesized and found that Narcissistic Entitlement showed incremental validity for a situational forgiveness measure (the Transgression Relevant Interpersonal Motivations Inventory [TRIM-18-R]; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002) above and beyond the Big Five variables. Considering that the narcissistic tendency is strongly and negatively related to the Honesty-Humility dimension (Lee & Ashton, 2005), the consistent link of Honesty-Humility to some forgiveness-related variables can plausibly be explained by the reasoning provided by Exline et al.

Another potential explanation for the link between Honesty-Humility and some responses to transgressions involve antisocial behaviors. Previous research has consistently found that persons who are low in Honesty-Humility are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviors (see e.g., Dunlop, Morrison, Keonig, & Silcox, *in press*). Vengeful acts resemble antisocial behaviors in that deliberate and calculated actions aimed at getting even with others involve harming the offender physically or psychologically, damaging the offender's property or reputation, and so on. That

is, revenge is likely to involve antisocial behaviors, and people low in Honesty-Humility have fewer psychological barriers to committing such acts than do people high in Honesty-Humility.

The two interpretations described above yield some predictions regarding the differential relations of Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness with people's intentions to respond to transgressions and provocations. First, the anger experienced by people low in Honesty-Humility is likely to be specifically directed at the offender, and the ultimate goal in expressing the anger should be obtaining revenge and "settling the score". Therefore, venting their anger through other means would not be a satisfactory outcome for persons low in Honesty-Humility. Therefore, it is expected that those persons low in Honesty-Humility will show particularly high levels of vengefulness, but will not show especially high levels of non-vengeful aggression. For example, such persons would not be expected to show particularly high levels of displaced aggression, whereby one's anger is directed to a third party not involved in the transgression. In contrast, participants low in Agreeableness, which underlies individual differences in emotional and behavioral reactivity to provocations, are expected to show high levels of both vengefulness and displaced aggression.

Beyond this issue of target specificity, Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness are also likely to show differential relations with intended reactions to the transgressor. As mentioned above, because the goal of low-Honesty-Humility people is to make the offender "pay the price", it is important for them to execute the revenge fully. This will lead to a preference for a more premeditated and calculated course of action rather than an immediate angry confrontation with the offender. Agreeableness, however, is less likely to show any sharply differential relations in the preference for immediate or calculated reactions to the transgressor; instead, persons low in Agreeableness are likely to show both kinds of reactions.

In sum, the present research was conducted to examine the differential roles that Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness play in influencing the ways in which people intend to react to provocations. Such a differential prediction has not been (and could not have been) investigated in studies adopting the Big Five model, where the two relevant personality dimensions are not clearly separated. By demonstrating the differential relations involving the Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness factors, the psychological mechanisms leading to people's reactions to provocations can be better understood.

To investigate the issues described above, we collected self-report measures of outcome variables (vengefulness, displaced aggression, and intentions of immediate versus calculated reaction to a provocation) along with self- and peer reports of the HEXACO personality variables. We collected personality variables from both respondents and their close acquaintances—that is, both self- and observer reports of personality—to ensure that the findings obtained from the present research are not simply artifacts due to common rating source variance. For example, some researchers argue that persons tend to respond to survey items consistently such that those responses conform to the persons' implicit theories about personality and behaviors (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Such a tendency might produce the relations that do not necessarily reflect objective behavioral co-occurrences. To relieve the problems associated with common rating source variance, we examined the relations among the study variables using same-source data as well as cross-source data.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

One hundred and ninety eight undergraduate students participated in the present research. Seventy-six percent of the

¹ The Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness scales used in Perugini et al. (2003) were preliminary versions of the scales that were subsequently included in the HEXACO Personality Inventory (Lee & Ashton, 2004).

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