VARIABILITY IN PERSONALITY: A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON EXPLORING CONTEXTUALIZED PATTERNS

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ABSTRACT

Although personality has been predominantly viewed as a stable trait, there has been a growing interest among researchers in examining the diverse patterns of personality that emerge based on different roles and contexts. Although it is thought that this differentiation in personality may reflect the tendency to respond appropriately to a changing environment, some studies show that this variability is associated with various psychological problems. It seems important to examine this issue in different samples and cultures. Current study attempted to preliminarily illuminate the complex relationship between context and personality evaluation by emphasizing the importance of environment in affecting individuals' self-perceptions on their traits. In this first study, it was explored how different social ties influence people's perceptions of their own personality features. 490 participants (294 were female, 196 were male and ages ranged from 18 to 26 ($M = 21.60$, $SD = 1.44$) completed the Basic Personality Traits Inventory (BPTI) for five distinct scenarios (e.g., base (no context), with mother, father, friend, and partner). By employing six one-way repeated measures ANOVAs and post hoc comparisons, these preliminary results showed that participant's general traits (scores without contextual emphasize) were differentiated from the traits reported within a context. Additionally, general personality scores were not the mean scores of the contexts. Participants evaluated themselves as more negatively in base measurement than almost all other contexts. This study provides comprehensive understanding of both the general traits and variability aspects of an individual's personality

Keywords: personality variability, contextualized personality, within personality, contextual variability, personality flexibility

Introduction

The concept of consistency versus variability in personality has been a subject of ongoing debate within the realm of psychology literature. Historically, personality has been predominantly viewed as a stable and overarching personal trait encompassing consistent patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Costa & McCrae, 1986; 1990). However, there has been a growing interest among researchers in examining the diverse patterns of personality that emerge based on different roles and contexts (Dunlop, 2015; Donahue et al., 1993; Roberts, 2007).

Researchers seeking to explore personality variability have focused on understanding the psychological effects of these stability-variability dynamics. The concept of contextualized personality, known by various terms in different theories such as fragmented identities, compartmentalization, cross-role variation, self-concept differentiation, or personality variability (e.g., Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006; Lutz & Ross, 2003a, 2003b; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997), primarily investigates how individuals display distinct behaviors in diverse social roles and contexts throughout their lives, such as being a friend, a daughter, or a student (Donahue et al., 1993; Roberts & Donahue, 1994; Heller, Watson, Komar, Min, & Perunovic, 2007; Wood & Roberts, 2006).

While it is widely acknowledged that individuals demonstrate a certain level of adaptability across different contexts, the contextualized personality perspective underscores the divergence between those who maintain a consistent behavioral pattern across situations and those who modify their conduct in response to situational and role-specific demands (Robinson, 2009; Sheldon et al., 1997).

Psychological Impacts of Personality Variability

Researchers who have emphasized the adaptive nature of variability in personality, implying that this differentiation may reflect a tendency to respond appropriately to a changing environment (Block, 1961; Roche, Jacobson, & Pincus, 2016). 'Functional flexibility' was used as a term to describe one's ability to adapt to changing circumstances (Paulhus & Martin, 1988). It was found that situational people (those with higher personality flexibility) had lower self-esteem than nonsituational people. Additionally, some researchers emphasized that variability of personality was the cause of psychological problems. These studies indicated that higher level of personality variability is related with lower levels of self-esteem (Miller, Davis, & Hayes, 1993), life satisfaction (Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006), positive affect (Diehl, Hastings, & Stanton, 2001), psychological well-being (Adelmann, 1994; Suh, 2002); as well as higher levels of anxiety (Church et al., 2008), depression (Woolfolk, Gara, Allen, & Beaver, 2004), psychical symptoms (Sheldon et al. 1997), and negative affect (Diehl & Hay; 2011). Therefore, several researchers concentrate on investigating potential connections between personality variability and psychological adaptability, including overall well-being.

As parallel with the interest in effects of in/stability in personality, a number of reliable measurement instruments developed. Commonly used instruments are Big-Five Personality Inventory, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, and Dark Triad Personality Trait Scale. These tools provide a thorough framework for capturing consistent personality traits. However, estimating variability is a significant challenge. Variability, unlike stable features, cannot be easily captured within a single measurement (Bornstein, 2022).

Contextualized personality researchers frequently use self-report measures to assess the perception of personality traits within various social situations. Participants in this technique complete trait assessments for the numerous roles they occupy in their lives. For example, researchers may ask participants to rate their attributes in various settings (specific contexts) such as 'friend', 'mother', 'romantic partner', and so on (e.g., Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006; Donahue et al., 1993; Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Blatt et al. (1992) modified traditional "Describe Yourself" approach by asking participants to describe themselves in connection to certain circumstances, such as "Describe Yourself as You Relate to Your Therapist" or "Describe Yourself as You Relate to Your Romantic Partner". Participants in this technique are asked to rate their behavior in various social settings.

Based on these context-specific self-reports, some researchers computed an individual's variability using 'a statistical index of variation' (such as cross-role standard deviation, mean-corrected standard deviation, or unexplained variance of the first factor in a Principal Component Analysis) (Bornstein, 2022; Geukes et al., 2017, p.125). A greater score indicates a more varied personality across social roles, whilst a lower value indicates a more consistent personality. This allows researchers to examine the variations in personality evaluations across multiple roles and see how these variances are related to different outcomes.

Current Research's Background and Aims

The major goal of this study was to investigate personality traits within a contextual framework. This study attempted to illuminate the complex relationship between context and personality evaluation by emphasizing the importance of environment in affecting individuals' self-perceptions on their traits. It was intended to explore how different social ties, such as interactions with family members and partners, influence people's perceptions of their own personality features. The study expected to reveal insights into the variability of personality traits across distinct interpersonal circumstances. In order to measure how people evaluate their personalities in different relationships, they were asked to evaluate their personality traits by considering different relationships. More specifically, after taking a personality assessment to determine how they perceive themselves as a baseline, they were asked to report how they evaluate themselves when they consider their relationships with important people in their lives. Even there is a number of different roles, in the current study we incorporated the most significant interactive relationships as contextual factors, such as relationship with father, mother, partner, and friends. The assessment procedure was detailed as a subsection of the method.

Method

Participants

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants, total of 490 individuals. The participants' ages ranged between 18 and 26 years, ($M = 21.60$, $SD = 1.44$). Among the participants, 294 were female, while 196 were male. Notably, the entire participant group consisted of university students, ensuring a consistent educational background for the study cohort.

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics of the sample ($N = 490$)

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Age (year)	490	21.60	1.44	18	26
Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**			
Women	294	60			
Men	196	40			

Measurements

Demographic Information Form. This form was prepared by the researcher to obtain information about demographic characteristics including gender, age, and education level of the subjects.

Basic Personality Traits Inventory (BPTI). It was developed by Gençöz and Öncül (2012) based on the five-factor model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 2003), to measure personality traits in the cultural structure of Turkey. In its Turkish adaptation, BPTI includes 45 items and measures six basic personality traits (i.e., extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and negative valence). Items of BPTI were rated on a five-point Likert type scale. Internal consistency coefficients for the subscales were found as .89, .85, .85, .83, .80, and .71, respectively. Test-retest reliability of BPTI traits ranged from .71 to .84. Correlations of the dimensions with the relevant measures supported the concurrent validity of the inventory.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee. Subsequently, a booklet containing the questionnaires was meticulously prepared and presented to the participants through online platforms. The completion of the questionnaires required approximately 20 minutes for each participant.

Initially, participants were asked to evaluate their Big Five Personality Traits, aiming to explore their personal, overarching self-perception, referred to as the "base" context. Following this, participants were provided with instructions to assess their personality using the same questionnaire, considering themselves within distinct contexts: Describe yourself in relationship with your 'father', 'mother', 'partner', and 'friend'. That means, participants filled the same inventory five times for five different contexts including baseline (with no context emphasis). This methodology sought to capture the subtleties of personality variations across various social scenarios, offering valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of human behavior and interactions.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations and minimum maximum scores for each trait among the measures of the study are demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2.

Means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum values of variations among personality dimensions

Variability Scores of Personality Dimension	M	SD	Min	Max
Extraversion	71.37	31.05	0	164
Conscientiousness	54.51	29.92	0	148
Agreeableness	47.96	31.26	0	150
Neuroticism	77.32	32.84	0	166
Openness to experience	45.23	22.95	0	120
Negative valance	32.25	21.09	0	114

Contextual Differences of Personality among Interpersonal Relationships

Six one-way repeated measures ANOVA were conducted to examine the contextual differences of personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and negative valence) among 5 interpersonal relations (i.e., base, mother, father, friends and partner). All analyses were conducted with gender as a 2 (gender) X 5(contexts) mix design ANOVAs. Because the Mauchly's Test of sphericity was not met, the values of Greenhouse-Geisser were reported. In all analysis including different personality dimensions, significant effect of the contextual differences on personality was investigated (F $(3.64, 1782.08) = 159.78$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .25$, $d = 1$; $F (3.70, 1811.23) = 11.78$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, $d = 1$; $F (2.93, 1433.89) = 56.12$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, $d = 1$; $F (3.73, 1821.51) = 81.85$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, $d = 1$; $F (3.42, 1673.89) = 77.08$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, $d = 1$; $F (3.72, 1820.07) = 15.71$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, $d = 1$, respectively).

Post hoc comparisons were examined via Bonferroni correction. Firstly, in extraversion dimension, higher scores were reported regarding the relations with friends; which was followed by relations with mothers; then partner, then by father, and finally base scores. All pairwise comparisons were significantly different from each other (p < .000, for all comparisons) except mother-friends comparison in extraversion scores (see Figure 1).

In consciousness dimension, higher scores were found in regarding the relations with partner; which was followed by relations with friends; then mother, then by father, and finally base scores (see Figure 2). Pairwise comparison demonstrated that base, father and mother scores had not differentiated each other, and friend and partner were not also differentiated, but these two groups were significantly different ($p \leq .002$ for all comparisons).

In agreeableness dimension, higher scores were reported regarding the relations with friend; which was followed by relations with mother; then partner, then base, and finally father (see Figure 3). All comparisons were significantly different ($p \leq .02$ for all comparisons) except mother and partner comparison ($p = 1$).

In neuroticism dimension, higher scores were reported regarding the relations with base; which was followed by relations with partner; then father, then mother, and finally friend (see Figure 4). All comparisons were significantly different ($p < .000$ for all comparisons) except father and mother comparison ($p = 1$).

In openness to experience dimension, higher scores were reported regarding the relations with friend; which was followed by relations with mother; then partner, then base, and finally father (see Figure 5). All comparisons were significantly different ($p < .01$ for all comparisons) except father and base comparison ($p = .83$).

In negative valance dimension, higher scores were reported regarding the relations with father; which was followed by relations with base; then partner, then friend, and finally mother (see Figure 6). Only six comparisons were significantly different ($p \leq .05$). Pairwise comparisons for base context, only mother and friend comparisons were significantly different. In addition, pairwise comparisons for father, context, mother, partner, and friend comparisons were significantly different. Also, pairwise comparison for mother and partner was different. Findings of the study indicated that although there was a significant difference between

female and male in some conditions, the general patterns were the same. Since the interest of this research was not to be emphasizing the effect of gender, it was not added to the research; but this information was put on as information for concern.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to explore personality traits within a contextual framework. The study emphasized the importance of taking context into account while evaluating one's overall traits. The significance of contextual personality should not be underestimated, especially considering the positive impact of psychological flexibility on overall well-being. Evaluating contextualized personality should serve as a foundational step in any discourse related to personality traits and disorders. The more insights are gained about significant patterns of personality stability or variability, the better-equipped researchers become in understanding these intricate dynamics. Nevertheless, research on contextualized personality has been relatively limited, with minimal attention given to cultural interpretation and different samples.

According to the findings, participants' general traits, referred to as 'base' or general characteristic scores, displayed variations when compared to their trait assessments in four different conditions. Notably, the base personality scores did not align with the mean scores of the conditions. Participants tended to rate themselves more negatively in the base measurement compared to all other contexts (except for the agreeableness score). This suggests that the base score is not indicative of the average trait score across different contexts.

Detailed analysis for different personality dimensions shows that different patterns are responsible for different dimensions. People reported themselves as more extraverted when they are with their mother and friend and as less extraverted in base ratings and with their father. Participants also reported that they are more consciousness with their partner and friend but less with their mother, father and at base score. Thirdly, they reported high agreeableness when they are with their friend, mother, and partner, but less at base score and with their father. In neuroticism, higher scores were reported at base score, and with partner, but lower with friend. In openness, people rated high scores with friend and mother, but low at base score and with father. Lastly, in negative valance, higher scores found in context with father and at base score, but lower scores with partner, friend, and mother.

These findings are in parallel with contextualized personality perspective in the literature in which traits are assumed to have a variation in different contexts and roles (e.g., Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006; Donahue et al., 1993; Komar, Min, & Perunovic, 2007; Lutz & Ross, 2003a, 2003b; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). Variation in personality characteristic is a flexibility in social settings. Therefore, variation can be developed function as a result of survival tendencies.

For future studies and applications, these findings may shed light on understanding of differences within context related with relations. As one step forward, underlying cause of variation can be searched. That cause can be perceived valued characteristics in different relations or survival value of those traits on continuing relation or losing it. As an example, for the first assumption, there can be an order among characteristics that are acceptable or valued in different contexts. This can be the leading cause of variation. To test this assumption, it can be searched whether highly rated personalities in specific contexts are consistent with perceived importance of that characteristic in that specific setting. Additionally, to test survival value of any trait in a variety of context, manipulation can be conducted to measure effect of traits when there is a risk to lose a bond.

There are some limitations in this study. Participants reported their persona evaluations. There can be a difference in others' evaluations. Secondly, this study is a self-report study. Testing assumptions in an experimental setting will create an opportunity to understand generalizability of the findings. Lastly, participants were university students. Assumptions needed to be tested with different populations.

Conclusion

Current study contributes valuable insights to enhance our understanding of the contextualized personality perspective. It represents a preliminary investigation aimed at comprehending the diversity of personality traits across a wide range of social roles and diverse contexts. The findings offer valuable insights for future research and applications, shedding light on the understanding of contextual variations within relationship dynamics. If personality is a flexible phenomenon within a world saturated with context across all aspects of life, it prompts a deeper consideration of the implications of generalized evaluations. This study highlights the fact that using measurements depending on context can be more beneficial than relying exclusively on broad assessments.

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Ulakbilge
Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi

KİŞİLİĞİN DEĞİŞKENLİĞİ: BAĞLAMSAL ÖRÜNTÜLER ÜZERİNE BİR ÖN ÇALIŞMA

Sinem Baltacı, Sanem Küçükkömürler

ÖZ

Kişilik çoğunlukla sabit bir yapı olarak görülse de araştırmacılar arasında farklı rollere ve bağlamlara dayalı gelişebilen çeşitli kişilik kalıplarını incelemeye yönelik artan bir ilgi vardır. Kişilikteki bu farklılaşmanın, değişen bir ortama uygun şekilde yanıt verme eğilimini yansıtabileceği düşünülmekle birlikte kimi çalışmalar bu değişkenliğin çeşitli psikolojik problemlerle ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu konunun farklı örneklem ve kültürlerde incelenmesi önemli görünmektedir. Mevcut ön çalışma, bağlamın bireylerin kişiliklerine dair öz algılarını etkilemedeki önemini vurgulayarak bağlam ve kişilik değerlendirmesi arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi aydınlatmaya çalışmaktadır. Bu amaçla bu çalışmada farklı sosyal ilişkilerin katılımcıların kendi kişilik özelliklerine ilişkin algılarını nasıl etkilediği araştırıldı. 490 katılımcı (294 kadın, 196 erkek ve yaş aralığı 18-26 (Ort. = 21.60, SS = 1.44), Temel Kişilik Özellikleri Envanteri'ni (BPTI) beş farklı senaryo (temel-bağlamsız, anne, baba, arkadaş ve partner ile) içerisinde değerlendirdi. Altı tek-yönlü tekrarlanan-ölçüm grupları için ANOVA analizi ve grup karşılaştırmaları kullanarak yürütülen analizlerde, sonuçlar katılımcıların genel özelliklerinin (bağlamsal vurgu içermeyen puanlar) bağlama bağlı bildirilen özelliklerden farklı olduğunu gösterdi. Ek olarak, genel kişilik puanları ölçümü, diğer dört bağlama bağlı ölçümün ortalama puanı değildi. Katılımcılar kendilerini temel ölçümde neredeyse tüm diğer bağlamlardan daha olumsuz olarak değerlendirdiler. Bu çalışma, bir bireyin kişiliğinin hem genel özellikleri hem de değişkenlik yönleri hakkında kapsamlı bir anlayış sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: kişilik değişkenliği, bağlamsal kişilik, kişilik içi, bağlamsal değişkenlik, kişilik esnekliği