

THE LINKS BETWEEN TRAITS AND EVALUATIONS OF PAINTING GENRES. DO ATTITUDES TOWARD TRAITS MATTER?

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Introduction

There are many instances where personality traits may be correlates of artistic preferences and activities. Openness to experience is certainly a key player here. It was shown to correlate with art interests, art activities, and art recognition (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2005). It was associated with liking pop art and abstract art, unlike other Big Five traits (Furnham & Walker, 2001). Open individuals rated abstract painters as more talented (ibid.). Artists seem to be more open to new experience as compared to non-artists (Feist, 1998). Open individuals preferred abstract and ambiguous arts (Feist & Brady, 2004). Openness was the only Big Five trait which correlated with preference for heavy metal (Swami et al., 2013). Of great importance is that on a representative British sample ($N = 91,692$) openness was found to be the only consistent personality correlate of preferences for 24 different paintings corresponding to cubism ($r = .21$), renaissance ($r = .18$), Japanese art ($r = .17$), but not impressionism ($r = .01$; Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2009).

However, the remainder of the Big Five occasionally also matters for differences. Conscientiousness was found to negatively correlate with liking of pop art (Furnham & Walker). Aesthetic attitudes correlated, along with openness, with agreeableness and extraversion (McManus & Furnham, 2006). On a huge British sample by Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2009) agreeableness and conscientiousness weakly correlated with preferences for impressionism ($r = .12$ and $.08$), whereas extraversion provided a small relation with preferences for cubism ($r = .09$).

Attitudes toward personality traits are bipolar evaluations of a given trait, without direct reference to any person, including the individual her- or himself. In terms of the five-factor theory (McCrae & Costa, 1996, 2013) attitudes can be treated as characteristic adaptations. As such, they should mediate the links between personality traits and external outcomes. In this vein, extraversion showed an indirect link with sociometric status via attitudes toward extraversion (Balabina, 2015).

The problem. Are attitudes toward traits better correlates of artistic preferences compared to traits? Can the mentioned above relationships between personality traits and artistic preferences be mediated by attitudes toward traits?

Method

Participants

110 participants aged from 20 to 30 years ($M = 24.43$, $SD = 3.53$), including 50 women (45.5%). They were not involved in arts professionally.

Questionnaires

Personality traits were measured with a Russian version (Shchebetenko, 2014) of the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John et al., 1991, 2008), $\alpha = .79, .69, .76, .84, .73$ (for Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness, respectively). To evaluate attitudes toward traits, BFI was modified by changing the instructions, the scale, and various phrases. The following instructions preceded the pool of items: "Please indicate what you think about the personality characteristics listed below. Do you find the characteristic in question to be positive or negative? It does not matter whether you have this particular characteristic or not: simply evaluate it as it is." The participants rated each item on a 5-point scale anchored from 1 (a very bad trait) to 5 (a very good trait). The item wordings were modified slightly to correspond with the scale and the instructions. For example, item 1 was changed from "...is talkative" in the original version to "...talkativeness" in the BFI attitude version and item 2 was changed from "...tends to find fault with others" to "...tendency to find fault with others". The Attitudes toward traits BFI showed acceptable internal consistency, $\alpha = .62, .70, .77, .76, .85$ (for attitudes toward Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness, respectively). The attitudes toward conscientiousness and neuroticism were winsorized due to substantial skew and kurtosis.

Painting reproductions

The participants were presented with 20 pictorial reproductions related to five painting genres including hyperrealism, realism, impressionism, surrealism, and abstract art. They assessed the reproductions using an evaluation scale which included 5 items ("good – bad", "useful – harmful", "convincing – unconvincing", "like it very much – dislike it very much", "of high quality – of poor quality"), for all 20 reproductions, $\alpha > .86$.

Principal component analysis: the evaluations of 14 out of 20 reproductions generated a two-component solution. The first component included 8 paintings of the traditional art (hyperrealism, realism, impressionism); the second component included 6 paintings of the unconventional art (surrealism, abstract art). Two respective evaluation scales were obtained, $\alpha = .78, .81$, for traditional and unconventional arts, respectively.

Results

Evaluations of traditional and unconventional genres did not correlate between each other, $r(110)$ [95% CI] = $.14$ [-.05; .33], $p = .15$. The evaluations of traditional genres were more positive compared to the evaluations of unconventional genres, $t(109) = 13.50$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.70$, $\Delta M = 1.45$ [1.24; 1.66].

Personality traits, attitudes toward traits and painting genres evaluation: correlations.

Traits	Painting genres		Attitudes toward traits	Painting genres	
	Traditional	Unconventional		Traditional	Unconventional
Extraversion	.25 [.06; .41]**	.04 [-.15; .23]	Extraversion	.35 [.17; .50]***	.14 [-.05; .31]
Agreeableness	.27 [.08; .43]***	-.09 [-.28; .10]	Agreeableness	.36 [.19; .52]***	.03 [-.16; .22]
Conscientiousness	.12 [-.06; .30]	-.05 [-.23; .14]	Conscientiousness	.24 [.05; .41]**	.01 [-.18; .19]
Neuroticism	.06 [-.13; .24]	.08 [-.11; .26]	Neuroticism	-.21 [-.38; -.03]*	-.05 [-.23; .14]
Openness	.24 [.06; .41]**	.22 [.03; .39]*	Openness	.38 [.21; .53]***	.19 [.01; .37]*

Note. Confidence intervals based upon normal theory

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ATTITUDES TOWARD TRAITS MEDIATE THE LINKS BETWEEN TRAITS AND TRADITIONAL GENRES EVALUATION.

The attitude toward openness mediated the link between **openness** and the evaluation of traditional arts, indirect B [95% CIs for 5000 bootstrap samples] = $.243$ [.113; .396], Sobel's test $Z = 2.98$, $p = .003$;

the direct link between openness and the evaluation of traditional genres while attitude toward openness was controlled, $B = .05$, $p = .705$;

the direct link between attitude toward openness and the evaluation of traditional genres while openness was controlled, $B = .49$, $p = .001$.

The attitude toward extraversion mediated the link between **extraversion** and the evaluation of traditional genres, indirect B [95% CIs for 5000 bootstrap samples] = $.126$ [.032; .262], Sobel's test $Z = 2.47$, $p = .013$;

the direct link between extraversion and the evaluation of traditional genres while attitude toward extraversion was controlled, $B = .13$, $p = .199$;

the direct link between attitude toward extraversion and the evaluation of traditional genres while extraversion was controlled, $B = .50$, $p = .003$.

The attitude toward agreeableness mediated the link between **agreeableness** and the evaluation of traditional genres, indirect B [95% CIs for 5000 bootstrap samples] = $.203$ [.059; .353], Sobel's test $Z = 2.65$, $p = .008$;

the direct link between agreeableness and the evaluation of traditional genres while attitude toward extraversion was controlled, $B = .11$, $p = .380$;

the direct link between attitude toward agreeableness and the evaluation of traditional genres while extraversion was controlled, $B = .46$, $p = .004$.

ATTITUDE TOWARD OPENNESS DIDN'T MEDIATE THE LINK BETWEEN OPENNESS AND THE UNCONVENTIONAL GENRES EVALUATION, B [95% CIs for 5000 bootstrap samples] = $.095$ [-.117; .288], Sobel's test $Z = 0.90$, $p = .368$.

the direct link between openness and the evaluation of unconventional genres while attitude toward openness is controlled, $B = .26$, $p = .165$;

the direct link between attitude toward openness and the evaluation of unconventional genres while openness is controlled, $B = .19$, $p = .361$.

Conclusion

Attitudes toward personality traits do matter for the evaluation of paintings. At least, when traditional painting genres were considered.

Attitudes toward each of the Big Five traits correlated with the evaluations of traditional genres. The effect sizes of these correlations were bigger as compared to the effect sizes of the correlations obtained for personality traits.

Our findings confirm the recent results (McManus & Furnham, 2006; partly Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2009) in that openness, agreeableness and extraversion are the correlates of aesthetic attitudes, in our case – of the evaluations of traditional painting genres.

However, these correlations were mediated by attitudes toward the respective traits.

When it comes to unconventional painting genres, it was openness to experience which correlated to the evaluations. Moreover, attitude toward openness did not mediate this link.

Therefore, openness as a personality trait is presumably important, when unconventional genres are evaluated by an individual. If we presume that positive attitudes toward the Big Five traits correspond to the normativeness principle (Wood & Furr, 2015), then the correlations between three personality traits and traditional genres evaluations are also explained by normativeness. Traditional paintings are appreciated by those people who appreciate "normal traits" and who, presumably, overestimate normativeness of their own personality. This, in turn, provided the correlations between the traits and the evaluation of traditional paintings.