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Examination of the Big Five and Narrow Traits in Relation to Learner Self-Direction

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Abstract

Self-direction in learning is a major topic in the field of adult learning. There has been extensive coverage of the topic by theorists, researchers, and practitioners. However, there have been few studies, which look at learner self-direction specifically as a personality trait. The present study addresses the relationship between learner self-direction and other personality traits of college students when the traits represented by the five-factor model of personality are derived from narrow personality traits. Analysis of the data revealed five significant partial correlations between specific traits and learner self-direction. Results were discussed in terms of the predictive relationship between personality variables and learner self-direction.

This claim establishes the important contribution of this particular study.

An **abstract** is a brief summary of your paper with an overview of key points. Your topic and research questions should be clear, and you may include the importance of your results in continuing current academic research.

Consider briefly mentioning key terms, participants, methods, analysis, and the final conclusion.

An ideal abstract is one paragraph.

Examination of the Big Five and Narrow Traits in Relation To Learner Self-Direction

Self-direction in learning is a major topic in the field of adult learning. It has been shown

many psychological variables are directly related to learner self-directedness (Oliveira &

This sentence defines the key term and names the overall topic for the entire paper.

An introduction clearly states the focus of the rest of the paper.

There have been few studies that look at learner self-direction

trait. If personality traits are relatively consistent for learners across

and if learner self-direction changes across situations and over time, the

most logical interpretation of why the personality trait—learner self-direction relationship is

relatively consistent within and across such disparate factors as age and returning to college after

Here, the goal of the student's research study and the purpose of their analysis.

the personality traits are driving the relationship. This implies that other

affecting learner self-direction, not that learner self-direction is influencing

other personality traits. The goal of the present study is to try to understand the connection

between personality and self-direction in learning and ascertain to what extent individual

personality traits are related to learner self-direction when the traits represented by the five-factor

model of personality (Digman, 1990) are differentiated from narrow personality traits. The study

draws on and extends the work of Lounsbury, Levy, Park, Gibson, and Smith (2009), who

reported on the development of a valid personality measure of learner self-direction.

This statement acknowledges the work of others on this same topic, showing how this paper fits into the ongoing scholarly conversation on this topic.

See our guide on [Entering the Conversation](#) for more guidance on establishing your contribution to the area of research.

Literature Review

Brockett and Hiemstra (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991) emphasized the importance of self-directed learners being able to plan their own learning program and consistently evaluate

A [literature review](#) is a survey of scholarly sources that provides an overview of a particular topic. It generally follows a discussion of the paper's thesis statement or the study's purpose.

Literature reviews are a collection of the most relevant and significant publications regarding that topic in order to provide a comprehensive look at what has been said on the topic and by whom.

progress. Hiemstra (1994) noted that self-directed learners should be prepared for the “unexpected” and capable of dealing with challenges in learning. Ponton and Carr (2000) state that “The concept of autonomy (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) exists under the personality characteristic rubric of self-directed learning.” (p. 273). A student showing *initiative*, *resourcefulness*, and *persistence* is exhibiting manifestations related to personality characteristics as a learner. Ponton and Carr (ibid) note that Confessore (1991, p. 129) suggests that individuals who exhibit these “conative” factors in their learning activities “possess traits which are essential to successful self-direction in learning” (p.273). These factors are related to Ponton’s (1999) discussion of autonomous learning consisting of five behaviors: *goal-directedness*, *action-orientation*, *active-approach to problem solving*, *persistence in overcoming obstacles*, and *self-startedness* which is consistent with the afore-mentioned conceptualizations of Work Drive (Lounsbury & Gibson, 2010). Again, this aligns with Lounsbury, Gibson et al’s (2004) Work Drive construct as a predictor of performance and Gladwell’s (2008) emphasis on persistence leading to success.

Methods

For this study, the focus is on *learner self-direction* as that can be represented on a continuum from low to high rather than a categorical or nominal variable. We conceptualize and measure learner self-direction as a personality trait reflecting individuals’: preference to be in charge of his or her learning process; ability to conceptualize, plan, implement, and evaluate one’s academic experience; and disposition to be goal-oriented and to work independently or in group settings with little guidance.

In the **Methods** section, your reader should be able to reproduce the methods that you used in order to conduct your research study. What process did you follow in order to accomplish this study?

This first paragraph of the section should give your reader a general idea about what you measured in your research study.

Population and Sample

Within the **Methods** section, include the population(s) you studied, the size and specifics of this population, how they were chosen, and why they were chosen.

Undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course ($n = 1484$) and undergraduate student-mentors in a peer-mentoring program ($n = 618$) at a large southeastern state university were recruited to participate in this study. Of the 2102 participants in this study, 40% were male (60% female). Fifty-seven percent of the participants were Freshmen; 26%, Sophomores; 14%, Juniors; and 5%, Seniors. Eighty-four percent of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian, 9%--African-American, 2 %--Hispanic, 2%--Asian, and 3%--other. The median age of participants was 18-19 years old.

Instrumentation

Also within the **Methods** section, include whether you used questionnaires, did a comparative study or a case study, studied a controlled group and a non-controlled group, created an experiment using specific equipment, etc. Be sure to explain these instruments or methods to your reader to provide a clear awareness of what this method is or involves.

The personality measure

College inventory (RATTC) (Lounsbury & Gibson, 2010). The RATTC is a normal personality inventory contextualized for late adolescents (Jaffe, 1998) and adults through high school and college. It measures the Big Five Traits of Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. The RATTC also measures the narrow traits of Aggression, Career-Decidedness, Optimism, Self-Directed Learning, Sense of Identity, Tough-Mindedness, and Work Drive.

Results

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients

After you explain how you went about your research, you explain what you found using those methods. In this **Results** section, explain your findings. Be sure to avoid commentary or analysis in this section; your results section should focus only on reporting the findings.

direction and the Big Five traits as well as narrow traits of Work Drive and Optimism.

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables are displayed in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, all of the Big Five personality traits are correlated significantly and

positively with inner self-direction, except for Extraversion. Specifically, in descending order

Explain what readers can find within any tables, graphs, or images that you include. See this guide on using [Tables, Graphs, Images, and Appendices](#).

of magnitude, the correlations with Self-Directed Learning were: Openness ($r = .43, p < .01$), Agreeableness ($r = .21, p < .01$), Emotional Stability ($r = .20, p < .01$), Conscientiousness ($r = .20, p < .01$), Extraversion ($r = .01, ns$), and the narrow personality traits also correlated significantly with learner self-direction, with the largest magnitude correlation observed for Work Drive ($r = .49, p < .01$), followed by Optimism ($r = .31, p < .01$).

The next phase of the analysis involved examining the part correlations of learner self-direction with Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability,

Explaining your findings one step, or phase, at a time can be a useful way to organize your results.

and Optimism. A multiple regression analysis was conducted with learner self-direction as the dependent variable, and the remaining variables as predictors entered

simultaneously. The part correlations represent the correlations of learner self-direction with each of the predictor variables, independent of the other predictors. Thus, the squared part correlations give an indication of the unique contribution of each variable to learner self-direction. An examination of the squared part correlations of the five significant variables indicates that Work Drive accounted for 9.6% of the variance, Openness accounted for approximately 4.3% of the variance, Optimism accounted for almost 1% of the variance, and Extraversion and Agreeableness each accounted for less than 1% of the variance in learner self-direction.

All variables were entered simultaneously into a multiple regression to determine the degree of learner self-direction prediction. The overall regression was significant, $F(7, 2094) = 15.19, p < .01$, and these variables accounted for over 52% of the variance in learner self-direction. As can be seen in Table 1, five of the variables explained significant variance in the model: Work Drive, Openness, Optimism, Emotional Stability, and Extraversion (Table 6). The strongest correlate of learner self-direction was Work Drive ($\beta = .37, p < .01$), followed by

The final paragraph of the **Results** section should include an overview of the findings.

Openness ($\beta = .23, p < .01$), Optimism ($\beta = .12, p < .01$), Emotional Stability ($\beta = .07, p < .01$), Extraversion ($\beta = -.05, p < .05$), Conscientiousness ($\beta = .03, ns$), and Agreeableness ($\beta = .02, ns$), which had the lowest magnitude correlation with learner self-direction in the study.

If you can make a table, chart, or visual to help present your findings – do that! It is a helpful component to explaining your research. See this guide on using [Tables, Graphs, Images, and Appendices](#).

Table 1. *Simultaneous Regression*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Correlations		
	B	SE	β	<i>t.</i>		Zero-Order	Partial	Part
Work Drive	.39	.03	.37	15.90	.00	.49	.33	.31
Openness	.24	.02	.23	10.08	.00	.43	.23	.21
Optimism	.18	.03	.12	5.85	.00	.13	.13	.09
Emotional	.11	.02	.07	4.69	.00	.10	.10	.05
Extraversion	-.07	.02	-.05	-3.40	.01	-.08	-.08	-.04

In the **Discussion** section, analyze and interpret your findings. What do the results mean? Explain if you found what you expected to find. In other words: Which of your hypotheses were supported by the findings? Which were not? Explain how your findings support or refute the research of others on the topic.

Discussion

The present study was generally successful in terms of providing validation of the main research propositions. Six of the eight hypotheses were supported, which is both consistent with and extends prior studies (Kirwan, et al., 2010; Lounsbury, et al., 2009) in that learner self-direction was uniquely related to four of the Big Five traits studied as well as and both of the narrow traits examined here. The present findings reinforce and support Lounsbury, Levy et al.'s (2009) study which demonstrated "...the importance and richness of the self-directed learning

construct and ... its role as a personality trait” (p. 417). Considering first the Big Five traits, the significant, positive relationships between them and learner self-direction are consistent with Lounsbury, Levy et al.’s (2009) findings. Regarding the narrow traits, significant relationships between learner self-direction and Work Drive as well as Optimism are supported.

Brockett and Hiemstra (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991) emphasized the importance of self-directed learners being able to plan their own learning program and consistently progress. Hiemstra (1994) noted that self-directed learners should be prepared for “unexpected” and capable of dealing with challenges in learning. Ponton and Carr (2000) state that the concept of autonomy (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) exists under the personality characteristic rubric of self-directed learning.” (p. 273). A student showing *initiative*, *resourcefulness*, and *persistence* is exhibiting manifestations related to personality characteristics as a learner. Confessore (1991) suggested that individuals who exhibit these “conative” factors in their learning activities “possess traits which are essential to successful self-direction in learning” (p.273). These factors are related to Ponton’s (1999) discussion of autonomous learning consisting of five behaviors: *goal-directedness*, *action-orientation*, *active-approach to problem solving*, *persistence in overcoming obstacles*, and *self-startedness* which is consistent with the afore-mentioned conceptualizations of Work Drive (Lounsbury & Gibson, 2010). Again, this aligns with Lounsbury, Gibson et al’s (2004) Work Drive construct as a predictor of performance and Gladwell’s (2008) emphasis on persistence leading to success.

Here we see ample citations and references to other research and the researcher’s discussions and conclusions. After quoting and paraphrasing these findings, explain how your findings support or refute that research.

Discuss how your findings *contribute* to the existing body of research.

There are two primary limitations of the current study that should be acknowledged.

First, this study was limited to a four-month interval of time in a single geographic area at a large, public university, leaving open the question of generalizability to other time periods,

Comment on any limitations of your study. How might your study have been lacking? What might you have overlooked?

geographic areas, and types of universities. Second, most of the study participants were lower-level students; thus, it is not possible to know if the findings are generalizable to primarily upper-level or graduate students.

In the **Discussion** section, you can also suggest additional research your findings could/should lead to in the future.

There are a number of other interesting areas for future research which could clarify and extend the present findings. In addition to the need for replication on different samples, research could be conducted on how the Big Five and narrow personality traits relate to sense of identity and learner self-direction. Another topic for investigation is the relationship between age of students and learner self-directedness. As mentioned earlier, perhaps the most important need for future research is to utilize longitudinal research designs to help clarify the direction of causality for personality traits vis-à-vis self-directed learning and to try to determine how these linkages are established.

The **Conclusion** should be a short section without any new research, findings, or ideas.

In your conclusion, summarize the main points of your research by restating the purpose of your research paper, describing your overall evidence, and stating your main conclusions.

Concluding Remarks

indicate that the Big Five traits as well as the two narrow traits related to learner self-direction, with Work Drive and

Openness accounting for most of the variance in learner self-direction on their own. Taken as a whole, the present findings were interpreted as, in part, confirming and extending the results of Lounsbury et al. (2009) and Kirwan et al. (2010) regarding the Big Five, narrow traits, and learner self-direction, demonstrating the generalizability of personality trait—learner self-direction relationships across a variety of different demographic and personal subgroups of students, and providing some clues that the direction of the causal arrow may be from personality traits to learner self-direction.

In conclusion, it is clear that learner self-direction has multiple connections to personality traits and is not clearly associated with just one of the Big Five traits. In a sense, this pattern of

A good technique is to state the relevance of your research in the final paragraph. Consider what the reader has learned from this research, how your work can expand on the existing research, or what future research could gain from your study.

multiple connections to personality is consistent with the diverse factors learner self-direction has been linked to in the theoretical literature, as, for example, the six vectors of college student development that Chickering and Reisser (1993) posit as leading to identity establishment for college students. Hopefully, further research will extend and clarify the nomological network of personality traits and self-direction in learning across a broad range of settings.

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A **References** list must be included. This list includes citations for all the resources you consulted or cited within your paper (as noted in parenthetical in-text citations throughout). For help formatting your references list, click [here](#).

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