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The applicability of the NEO-PI-R and the CPAI-2 in a South African context.

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ABSTRACT

The trait approach to personality is one of the most influential theories in personality psychology and underlies the development of most objective personality instruments. However, considerable debate exists around the number of traits that adequately describe human personality as well as which traits adequately describe personality universally. Evidence seems to suggest that personality is adequately described by five factors, and currently the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality is widely accepted within personality psychology. Other evidence suggests that, while applicable, the FFM is not wholly replicable in Asian and African cultures. Situated within these debates, this study explored the applicability of two personality instruments, namely the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) and the Cross-Cultural Personality Assessment Inventory - 2 (CPAI-2), in the South African context. Thus internal consistency reliability, test-retest reliability, face validity, construct validity, and aspects of construct, method and item bias were examined for each instrument. A non-probability sample consisting of 425 university students who were in their second or subsequent year of study was used. The research took the form of a non-experimental, cross-sectional research design. A questionnaire incorporating the NEO-PI-R, the CPAI-2, and demographic information – namely age, gender, religious affiliation, population group, home language, English comprehension, and test wiseness – was used.

From the results it was evident that both instruments had adequate internal consistency reliability for the domain/factor scales but some reliability coefficients for facet/subscales were low. Test-retest reliability for both instruments was not ideal but this was conducted on a sample of 10 students. Construct validity for the NEO-PI-R was very good, with the five factor structure replicating in line with that proposed by Costa and McCrae (1992). Some differences were noted at the facet level but this did not detract unduly from the overall suitability of the FFM. Construct validity evidence for the CPAI-2 was more questionable. The four factor model proposed by Cheung et al. (2008) was not replicated. Instead support was better for a five factor model. There were also more subscales in the CPAI-2 than in the NEO-PI-R that were problematic. Evidence for construct and item bias across gender, population group and home language was found in both instruments. These for the most part mirrored findings from other African and South African studies. Some aspects of method bias were also examined in both instruments. The results suggest that response bias may have been influencing responses in both instruments but the effect sizes were too small to merit much attention. Finally, a thematic content analysis was conducted on the responses to the open-ended questions after each instrument. These results indicate that issues of

language, culture, level of education, length of questionnaire and general appropriateness were identified by almost all of the respondents in this study. All the results obtained in this study were discussed in relation to the etic-emic debate, issues of acculturation, national identity and ethos, as well as the FFM and Five Factor Theory.

Keywords: assessment, bias, CPAI-2, Five Factor Model, Five Factor theory, NEO-PI-R, personality, reliability, validity