



Assessing the Shared Facets of Honesty-Humility and Machiavellianism

Implications for a Common Conceptual Core

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Abstract: The strength of the relation between honesty-humility and Machiavellianism has caused some authors to suggest that the two constructs share common facets. We test this notion in the current article using heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios. Our sample included 490 participants recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) that completed a self-report survey. The facets of greed-avoidance and desire for status met HTMT ratio cut-offs expected in tests of convergent validity, and the facets of fairness and amorality closely approached these cut-offs. The honesty-humility facet of modesty also demonstrated very strong relations with many Machiavellianism facets, but none strong enough to indicate that the facets converge. These results indicate that honesty-humility and Machiavellianism share facets associated with a (dis)interest in social status and perhaps (dis)honesty. From these findings, we urge future authors to assess the incremental predictive validity of both honesty-humility and Machiavellianism beyond the other, placing a particular focus on outcomes with close associations to unshared facets. We also propose that these results provide insights into a shared conceptual core of honesty-humility and the Dark Triad. Specifically, (dis)interest in social status and (dis)honesty may be the conceptual link between honesty-humility and the Dark Triad, demanding future research on these facets.

Keywords: honesty-humility, dark triad, Machiavellianism, validity

The HEXACO is among the most popular and empirically supported conceptualizations of personality, and it is composed of six dimensions (Lee & Ashton, 2014). These are Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness. The most notable difference between the HEXACO and its predecessor, the Big Five, is the inclusion of honesty-humility (Ashton et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2013). This dimension represents a tendency to treat others well while avoiding desires of grandeur, and it includes the four facets of sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, and modesty. Some authors have suggested that honesty-humility has strong similarities with certain Dark Triad dimensions (Hodson et al., 2018; McCrae & Costa, 2008; Widiger & Costa, 2012). The Dark Triad is a collection of three malevolent personality traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. A recent meta-analysis supported that honesty-humility is most strongly related to Machiavellianism, and the correlation was large enough to suggest that the dimensions share common facets (Howard & Van Zandt, 2020).

This finding demands that researchers further investigate the relation of honesty-humility with modern conceptualizations of Machiavellianism, such as Dahling et al. (2009). Dahling and colleagues (2009) argued that Christie and Geis's (1970) Mach-IV scale poses several concerns, partially stemming from its underlying conceptualization, and the authors created a new conceptualization of Machiavellianism with four facets: amorality, desire for control, desire for status, and distrust of others. The authors also developed a measure of Machiavellianism with supportive validity evidence, which has been used in a multitude of subsequent studies (Howard & Van Zandt, 2020). The facets of this new measure have significant commonalities with honesty-humility, particularly their associations with interpersonal (mis)treatment and (un)concern for status.

In the current article, we propose that two pairs of honesty-humility and Machiavellianism's facets statistically converge. The first pair is greed avoidance and desire for status, as both refer to a tendency to be (un)interested in possessing signs of high social status (Dahling et al., 2012;

Lee & Ashton, 2018). The second pair is fairness and amorality, as both refer to a tendency to be (dis)honest and (dis)obey interpersonal rules (Dahling et al., 2012; Lee & Ashton, 2018). To investigate these proposals, we apply a modern analysis used to assess the discriminant and convergent validity of measures, heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios (Hair et al., 2020; Henseler et al., 2015). Heterotrait-monotrait ratios compare average construct inter-correlations to average construct cross-correlations, which determines whether the relations of indicators representing the same constructs are significantly larger than the relations of indicators representing different constructs. If this ratio meets or exceeds cut-offs, then the constructs are considered to represent the same conceptual space. Therefore, HTMT ratios can effectively test whether any facets of honesty-humility and Machiavellianism are shared between the two constructs by performing the analysis on each pairing of the facets.

From this investigation, the current article advances the theory surrounding honesty-humility and Machiavellianism in multiple manners. First, the current investigation satisfies calls for focused studies on the facets of the HEXACO and Dark Triad dimensions. Second, identifying shared and unshared facets can produce more directed studies regarding outcomes that are incrementally predicted by honesty-humility and Machiavellianism beyond the other. Third, many authors have debated the manner in which honesty-humility differs – or does not differ – from the Dark Triad’s dimensions. We provide insights into the nature of these differences regarding Machiavellianism, which can progress research toward a conclusion to this broader argument. Fourth, some authors have argued that honesty-humility and the Dark Triad share a conceptual core (Book et al., 2015, 2016), and identifying shared facets with Machiavellianism provides insights regarding the nature of this core. Together, the current article notably impacts current research and opens avenues for future research.

Method

Participants

Participants ($n = 789$, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.17$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.07$, 50% female, 84% North American) were recruited from MTurk and provided monetary compensation. Prior studies have supported the validity of results obtained via MTurk if precautions are taken, such as utilizing time-separated research designs, attention checks, and exclusion criteria (Buchheit et al., 2019; Paas et al., 2018). We applied all three in the current article, and all statistics, including reported sample sizes, reflect the sample after removing those who failed any attention checks. We restricted participants to those

who had previously completed at least 50 MTurk tasks with a 95% or higher approval rate. All data used for the current study is provided in the online deposit (see Open Data section; Howard & Manix, 2022).

Procedure

Participants enrolled in the study via the MTurk online platform, and they immediately completed the first survey of demographic items alone ($n = 789$). One week later, they completed the second survey of personality measures ($n = 490$).

Measures

Participants responded to both measures on a 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 7 (= *strongly agree*) scale.

Honesty-Humility

We measured honesty-humility using the 16-item subscale from the HEXACO-100 (Lee & Ashton, 2018). Ample research has supported its psychometric and validity evidence (Howard, 2020; Moshagen et al., 2019), and an example item is, “Having a lot of money is not especially important to me” (Greed-Avoidance). All items of the HEXACO-100 can be found at the following link: <http://hexaco.org/hexaco-inventory>. We did not administer the entire HEXACO-100, but we instead only administered the 16 honesty-humility items to aid in preventing participant fatigue and subsequent low-quality responses.

Machiavellianism

We measured Machiavellianism using the 16-item scale of Dahling and colleagues (2009). Substantial research has also supported its psychometric and validity evidence (Miller et al., 2015; Rauthmann, 2013), and an example item is, “Accumulating wealth is an important goal for me” (Desire for Status).

Results

Table 1 includes correlations and Cronbach’s α s. We calculated HTMT ratios by applying the recommendations of prior authors (Hair et al., 2020; Henseler et al., 2015), and we used the SmartPLS 3 for our analyses (Ringle et al., 2018). Heterotrait-monotrait ratios and their confidence intervals are outputs from SmartPLS 3 when testing PLS-SEM models, and the software calculates these ratios and confidence intervals for all possible construct pairings. To calculate these statistics, we created a PLS-SEM model with each item loaded onto its respective facet and each facet loaded onto its respective dimension. To estimate second-order composites, we applied a repeated indicator

Table 1. Correlations and Cronbach's α of honesty-humility, Machiavellianism, and their facets

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Honesty-humility	.88									
2. Sincerity	.78**	.83								
3. Fairness	.75**	.48**	.80							
4. Greed-avoidance	.77**	.44**	.37**	.75						
5. Modesty	.75**	.43**	.38**	.55**	.76					
6. Machiavellianism	-.76**	-.47**	-.58**	-.61**	-.68**	.91				
7. Amoralty	-.73**	-.51**	-.70**	-.44**	-.58**	.84**	.91			
8. Desire for control	-.58**	-.40**	-.33**	-.48**	-.57**	.71**	.51**	.82		
9. Desire for status	-.65**	-.38**	-.30**	-.76**	-.59**	.72**	.45**	.53**	.84	
10. Distrust of others	-.40**	-.18**	-.36**	-.30**	-.39**	.78**	.52**	.32**	.38**	.87

Note. Upper-left quadrant includes interrelationships of honesty-humility and its facets; the lower-right quadrant includes interrelationships of Machiavellianism and its facets; the lower-left quadrant includes cross-relationships of honesty-humility and its facets with Machiavellianism and its facets. $n = 490$. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

approach, wherein the second-order composites were estimated from all observed variables of their respective first-order composites (Sarstedt et al., 2019). This resulted in 32 items, eight first-order composites, and two second-order composites. Honesty-humility was modeled to predict Machiavellianism, as all composites must be involved in causal relations for PLS-SEM models to estimate. All HTMT ratios and confidence intervals were identical to when Machiavellianism was modeled to predict honesty-humility. We used 5,000 subsamples to calculate bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrapped estimates.

Table 2 includes the HTMT ratios and confidence intervals. Cut-offs for convergent validity when using HTMT ratios is .85 and/or a confidence interval that includes 1.00 (Hair et al., 2020; Henseler et al., 2015). We only interpreted results regarding the pairing of dimensions or facets, not the pairing of dimensions and facets (e.g., honesty-humility and desire for control). The HTMT ratio of honesty-humility and Machiavellianism met the cut-off for convergent validity, whereas the confidence interval fell short (HTMT = .85, 95% CI [.81, .88]). Similarly, the HTMT ratio of fairness and amorality approached the cut-off for convergent validity, whereas the confidence interval fell short (HTMT = .82, 95% CI [.77, .87]). Both the HTMT ratio and confidence interval of greed-avoidance and desire for status, however, met the cut-off (HTMT = .95, 95% CI [.90, 1.00]). Three HTMT ratios of modesty and Machiavellian facets were very large, including modesty and desire for status (HTMT = .73, 95% CI [.65, .79]), desire for control (HTMT = .72, 95% CI [.63, .79]), and amorality (HTMT = .69, 95% CI [.61, .75]).

Discussion

Our results support that honesty-humility and Machiavellianism (as measured by Dahling et al.'s [2009] scale) share one or more facets. Greed-avoidance and desire for status

represent the same conceptual content and effectively describe the same aspects of personality, indicating that honesty-humility and Machiavellianism share a facet representing the (un)concern for status. Fairness and amorality may also represent the same conceptual content, but the results were not as conclusive. This only suggests that honesty-humility and Machiavellianism share a facet representing (dis)honesty. Modesty did not converge with any one facet of Machiavellianism, but it had very strong relations with amorality, desire for control, and desire for status. This was also the facet of honesty-humility with the largest relation with Machiavellianism, suggesting that it may represent an abbreviated version of the construct. Given these findings, the current article provides notable theoretical implications and directions for future research.

Research moving forward should recognize that honesty-humility and Machiavellianism share aspects regarding the (un)concern for status and possibly (dis)honesty. This association may explain their strong relationship, but it may also indicate that they share a common conceptual basis. That is, each dimension may represent the same core construct(s), but each dimension may also include ancillary facets that cause them not to converge to unity. In the case of honesty-humility, these aspects are sincerity and (perhaps) modesty. In the case of Machiavellianism, these aspects are the desire for control and distrust of others.

Some authors have suggested that honesty-humility and the entire Dark Triad share a common conceptual core (Book et al., 2015, 2016; Hodson et al., 2018; Kaufman et al., 2019), and the current results provide further insights into the possible nature of this basis. The (un)concern for status is shared between honesty-humility and Machiavellianism, but it is also a primary aspect of narcissism. Narcissists have an excessive interest in themselves and a desire for the admiration of others (Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017). The (un)concern for status may also underlie the association of narcissism with honesty-humility, as narcissists demand admiration from others that is reflective of status.

Table 2. HTMT ratios and confidence intervals of honesty-humility, Machiavellianism, and their facets

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Honesty-humility									
2. Sincerity	.92 [.88, .85]								
3. Fairness	.88 [.83, .92]	.59 [.50, .68]							
4. Greed-avoidance	.95 [.89, .99]	.56 [.46, .66]	.48 [.36, .58]						
5. Modesty	.94 [.90, .98]	.55 [.45, .63]	.49 [.38, .59]	.72 [.63, .81]					
6. Machiavellianism	.85 [.81, .88]	.55 [.47, .61]	.68 [.61, .74]	.73 [.65, .78]	.80 [.75, .85]				
7. Amorality	.81 [.77, .84]	.59 [.52, .65]	.82 [.77, .87]	.53 [.44, .60]	.69 [.61, .75]	.93 [.91, .95]			
8. Desire for control	.68 [.60, .75]	.49 [.39, .58]	.40 [.30, .50]	.61 [.50, .70]	.72 [.63, .79]	.82 [.77, .86]	.58 [.50, .66]		
9. Desire for status	.76 [.70, .81]	.46 [.35, .55]	.37 [.25, .47]	.95 [.90, 1.00]	.73 [.65, .79]	.81 [.76, .86]	.51 [.43, .59]	.64 [.54, .72]	
10. Distrust of others	.45 [.38, .52]	.22 [.12, .31]	.43 [.33, .53]	.38 [.26, .47]	.47 [.37, .55]	.87 [.83, .90]	.59 [.51, .65]	.37 [.26, .47]	.44 [.34, .54]

Note. Upper-left quadrant includes HTMT ratios and confidence intervals among honesty-humility and its facets; the lower-right quadrant includes HTMT ratios and confidence intervals among Machiavellianism and its facets; the lower-left quadrant includes HTMT ratios and confidence intervals among honesty-humility and its facets with Machiavellianism and its facets. Bold results indicate HTMT ratios above .80 representing cross-relationships among facets. $n = 490$.

This is supported by the findings of Lee and Ashton (2005), who found that narcissism correlated more strongly with the honesty-humility facets of greed avoidance ($r = -.48$) and modesty ($r = -.62$) than fairness ($r = -.32$) and sincerity ($r = -.22$). This basis may also be evident in psychopathy. Psychopaths act with meanness and disinhibition (along with boldness; Furnham et al., 2013). While meanness and disinhibition are not required to be self-serving, they often are performed for the interests and desires of the actor (Miller, Hyatt, et al., 2017; Patrick, 2018). For instance, psychopaths often lash out at others, a manifestation of meanness and disinhibition, to get their way. Because status is a common goal, especially among those with maladaptive personality traits, these manifestations of meanness and disinhibition may indeed be to achieve status. Therefore, we suggest that the (un)concern for status may be a primary association between honesty-humility and the entire Dark Triad.

The same may be true regarding (dis)honesty. Narcissists are known to be dishonest, such as feigning their accomplishments to obtain the praises of others (Krizan & Herlache, 2018). Likewise, psychopaths are notoriously dishonest, as they are unkind and act on disinhibition (Furnham et al., 2013). Thus, (dis)honesty may be a primary association between honesty-humility and the entire Dark Triad, serving as a common conceptual basis.

These suggestions also coincide with prior arguments regarding the conceptual core of the Dark Triad, which has resulted in several prevailing arguments (Book et al., 2015, 2016). One argument proposes that honesty-humility itself is the core of the Dark Triad, whereas another suggests that interpersonal manipulation and callousness are the core. The current results suggest that both may be correct. The aspects of honesty-humility regarding the (un)concern for status and (dis)honesty may serve as the core of the Dark Triad, which is closely related to interpersonal manipulation and callousness. If the current results can be replicated with narcissism and psychopathy, as discussed below, then prior disagreeing arguments regarding the core of the Dark Triad may have been in agreement all along.

Further, it is important to highlight facets that did not converge. Machiavellianism involves the manipulation of others via deceptive means, but Machiavellianism's facets consistently produced their weakest relations with honesty-humility's facet of sincerity. These relations may have been weakened by the applied Machiavellianism scale, as its items most related to insincerity (e.g., "I believe that lying is necessary to maintain a competitive advantage over others.") are included in the amorality facet with items that reflect general amorality (e.g., "I am willing to be unethical if I believe it will help me succeed."). Dahling and colleagues' (2009) scale also does not include items about false charm or flattery, which are associated with

insincerity. These aspects are relatively central to other conceptualizations and operationalizations of Machiavellianism (Hunter et al., 1982; McHoskey, 1995; Wilson et al., 1996), and the exclusion of these items may have suppressed the observed relations with sincerity. We chose Dahling and colleagues' (2009) scale due to its support and modern usage, but future studies should reassess our results with alternative measures. For instance, the Mach-IV includes facets that more directly reflect deception (including false charm and flattery) such as negative interpersonal tactics (Christie & Geis, 1970), and these facets may particularly relate to honesty-humility's facet of sincerity – if not empirically overlap. Thus, other facets may be shared between honesty-humility and Machiavellianism when applying different conceptualizations and operationalizations.

Likewise, the applied Machiavellianism scale does not include any reverse-coded items. Solely including items with a common coding can inflate internal consistency estimates as well as inflate relations with other measures with the same coding scheme. In the current investigation, this would cause the Machiavellianism facets to all have inflated relations with each other, as none of these facets contain reverse-coded items. For this reason, readers should be aware that other Machiavellianism measures with reverse-coded items may produce smaller internal consistency estimates and interrelations due to a lack of inflation, and researchers should conduct studies using these measures to obtain insights that are free from this potential bias. In conducting these investigations, direct comparisons should be made regarding the shared facets between the present and alternative operationalizations of Machiavellianism, as the present findings using the measure of Dahling and colleagues (2009) may not necessarily generalize to other measures of Machiavellianism. It should be noted that this is not a concern with our applied honesty-humility measure, as it was nearly balanced regarding the items' direction of keying.

Lastly, our results can also suggest which outcomes honesty-humility incrementally predict beyond Machiavellianism (and vice versa). Honesty-humility may relate to outcomes such as cheating behaviors beyond Machiavellianism due to the independence of sincerity (Heck et al., 2018), whereas it may not incrementally predict outcomes associated with modesty due to its strong relation with Machiavellianism. The desire for control and distrust of others were both independent from honesty-humility, and Machiavellianism may effectively predict certain achievement-related behaviors as well as attributions of others (Furnham et al., 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Furthermore, our results can explain prior findings regarding these relative relations. Thielmann and colleagues (2020) meta-analytically showed that Machiavellianism's and honesty-humility's relations with prosocial behaviors are differently

affected by the nature of the behaviors, such as the involvement of conflict or deception. The differences in these relations may lie in their unshared facets, such as sincerity, desire for control, and distrust of others.

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Open Data

The online material is provided in the Open Science Framework (OSF) at <https://osf.io/kgebj/> (Howard & Manix, 2022).

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