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Personality Rhetoric: The Western Bias of the Big Five Personality Model

**Introduction**

Psychology, since the late nineteenth century, has been well accepted and well known as a scientific discipline (Pérez-Álvarez). This label partly is accounted for by the field’s adoption of the scientific method, although this method is “far from being exempt and in itself a guarantee of better science, [it] structures our way of understanding and studying psychological subjects…in a more analytical than holistic manner, mechanist than contextual, causal than mutualist, etc.” (Slife et al. qtd in Pérez-Álvarez). As outlined by Marino Pérez-Álvarez, the reliance on “science” as a legitimizing force in the field of psychology has paradoxically hindered its study of the human mind. Rather than a “contextual” approach to the individual mind, there is an “analytical” approach which permeates much of the production/proliferation of knowledge in the field. If psychology is too “analytical,” the subjective, dynamic experiences we have are not granted the same kind of emphasis. Psychology performed strictly as a “science” can therefore hinder its telos as an investigation into the human mind. Furthermore, the subjective nature of psychological language is also not given adequate emphasis. In his article on the rhetoric of science, R. Allen Harris stipulates: “What scientists do is interpret the empirical domain. What rhetors do is influence one another. What scientists do as rhetors is influence one another about interpretations of the empirical domain” (284). Although Harris defines science as concentrated on “the empirical domain” and rhetoric as concentrated on efforts to “influence” or persuade one another, he asserts scientists become rhetors when they “influence one another about interpretations of the empirical domain.” The field of science, therefore, is not averse to practices of rhetoric despite its insistence on objectivity. To discuss “interpretations” or conclusions on a scientific matter is to utilize rhetorical strategies to legitimize these “interpretations” and conclusions in the minds of others, both in the field and outside the field. Harris further points out “Scientists, for the most part, believe that science is pure logos, but ethos unquestionably plays a very large role” (297), and it is this “ethos” that can be extrapolated from exploring the rhetorical strategies present in scientific fields (Harris). The production and dissemination of scientific knowledge wants to be “pure logos” but in an increasingly multifaceted, postmodern world, that desire is futile. Imbedded in any knowledge production or dissemination are subjective ethics, morals and values of the people involved. Living in a postmodern world, knowledge production is very broadly wrapped up in ideologies, cultural constructions, politics, gender, race and socioeconomic class. Harris also states “psychology [is] for any and all implications concerning [itself with] mental states, rhetoric for any and all implications concerning [itself with] symbolic interaction” (286). If psychology is a social scientific field, then it certainly (like scientific fields generally) is privy to an investigation of its “symbolic interaction” within its investigation of “mental states.” Behind the pursuit of studying and understanding people’s minds, is a subjective kind of “ethos” which influences this pursuit. Thereby, also influencing the production and proliferation of knowledge in the psychological domain. A primary method of deconstructing the rhetoric of a scientific field is obviously to examine its language.

In her academic article, Ira Trofimova declares “Language is an invention of group dynamics, which functions to facilitate socialization, an exchange of information and to synchronize group activity. The social function of language therefore serves the needs of the society more than the needs of an individual” (Trofimova). If language is indeed produced as a consequence of “the needs of the society more than the needs of an individual,” one could argue, as an example, our linguistic conceptions of ourselves/others does not serve the individual interest but rather the interest of the broader culture. Trofimova also states “The existence of language-and emotionality biases in verbal descriptors of human behavior has serious implications for the use of the lexical approach in differential psychology” (Trofimova). And it is this “lexical approach” which underpins the foundation of various personality tests and theories, in particular the Big Five (Widiger and Crego). The Big Five model of personality (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism) “traces its roots to the lexical paradigm, which rests on the compelling premise that what is of most importance, interest or meaning to persons when describing themselves and others will be encoded within the language” (Widiger and Crego). The lexical paradigm further stipulates that over the course of human history, we have developed “more and more words to describe the gradations, variations and nuances of a respective domain” (Widiger and Crego), i.e. a definable trait of personality derived from our English adjectives. These traits are primarily measured through self report surveys, tests and questionnaires. But if this lexical paradigm predicating the description/existence of human personality traits contains biases then, as Trofimova states, it presents “serious implications” on the study of psychology, and more specifically: personality psychology. Thus, the inevitable question surfaces: to what degree is the Big Five personality model, as a piece of scientific thinking and as informed by a broader theory, biased? Furthermore, what kind of rhetoric is utilized in the proliferation of this bias? The Big Five personality model, as informed by five factor theory ubiquitous in the field of personality psychology, advances an image of the ideal, Westernized individual through its rhetoric. An individual who is Western living, open minded, extraverted, organized and people oriented with an educational background and with offspring. This Westernized bias, which advances this kind of personality, is evident in the instability of the lexical paradigm in relation to studying human personality, the test items which bias culturally Western attributes and the lack of sufficient cross-cultural replication of the personality traits. This bias of a well recognized personality model indicates both the rhetorical strategies in the field of personality and the instability of language within a scientific domain of inquiry. This leads to a key question/issue: is any entity in the world stable enough for us to study within our fields of knowledge pursuit?

**The Field of Personality Psychology and the Trait Perspective**

Before commencing with a rhetorical critique of the theoretical foundation, test items and cross-cultural evidence associated with the Big Five, it is useful to provide background on the field of personality psychology, the a priori theoretical framework of the model and the strengths of this model from the perspective of the psychological field/broader culture. Firstly, it is paramount to define personality. There are various perspectives and theories on where personality comes from, how it is formed and how it manifests in the broader world, but it can be generally defined as “consistent behavior patterns and intrapersonal processes originating within the individual” (Burger 4). Personality is both “consistent” and dynamic in this definition, as “intrapersonal processes” originating from a human being will by origin be dynamic, because humans are complex animals. This is likely why we study human personality because humans, by nature, are not easily defined or easily comprehensible. The subfield of personality within the discipline of psychology first came to prominence around the 1930’s (McAdams 4). When psychologist Gordon Allport’s text, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*, was published in 1937, it represented “the formal arrival of personality on the scene of social science” (4). While there had been historical, philosophical dialogues concerning human differences (7) and other psychological publications on personality (4), Allport’s text was the first to firmly establish the subfield (4). In his article outlining the history of the field, Dan P. McAdams emphasizes how “With its triple emphasis on the whole person, motivation, and individual differences, personality psychology has always held a rather tenuous and ambiguous status in American psychology” (5). Some in the field argue that personality should be at the top of grand psychological theory, while others argue the field ought to be “abolished” (5). It is unsurprising personality would emphasize a triad of principal concerns, or that some professionals believe the field is not worthy of existing. Personality, both on the micro level of individuals and the macro level of populations/cultures, is a complex entity to study. Our personalities can manifest depending upon the situation, depending upon our specific culture and even depending upon the state of our stress levels (Burger). Many founding theorists/psychologists developed ideas and theories of personality, like Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erik Erikson and others (Burger) before the publication of Allport’s text. If one were to read a personality textbook from the last several years, one would find chapters covering various perspectives on the psychology of personality. These include but are not limited to: the psychoanalytic approach, the Neo-Freudian approach, behaviourism, the cognitive approach, the humanistic approach, the social learning approach, the biological approach and the trait approach (Burger). As demonstrated from the vast amount of approaches, there is hardly one agreed upon method for measuring/conceptualizing personality without utilizing subjective intuitions or abstractions, but the trait approach comes the closest (Burger 161). It is the trait approach to understanding and studying human personality which gave rise to the development of the Big Five.

Trait psychologists like Raymond Cattell outline how “a trait is a mental structure that may be inferred from observable behavior to account for regularity and consistency in behavior” (McAdams 11). As the scientific domain of investigation is concerned with “empirical” or “observable” phenomena (Harris), personality psychology (from the trait approach), as a social science, seeks to investigate those “traits” or dispositions which can be observed. We can discern certain traits or behavioral tendencies within ourselves and others through language: our friend may be overly *optimistic* and by contrast, we may be overly *pessimistic*. There are two important assumptions underlying the study of personality traits (Burger). According to psychology professor Jerry M. Burger in the tenth edition of *Personality*: the first assumption is that “personality characteristics are relatively stable over time” (136) and the second assumption is that these “characteristics are stable across situations” (136). This means that personality traits are not easily malleable from the prospective of trait psychology. Across a person’s lifetime and across various situations which a person experiences, their personality traits remain “relatively” unchanged. As the Big Five theory traces its roots to the lexical paradigm (Widiger and Crego), trait psychologists, utilizing a technique known as factor analysis, began organizing adjectives and other trait descriptors from the English language into broad categories (Burger 141-142). Some theorists, like Gordon Allport and Raymond Cattell, located between ten-twelve categories (138-143), but as the years went on, five categories began to consistently emerge across this research (143). These broad categories were dubbed as the Big Five (143).

**Theoretical Foundations of The Big Five Personality Model**

Following this outline of the subfield of personality psychology and the assumptions of the trait perspective, it is furthermore useful to outline the theoretical framework/content of the Big Five. The Big Five is informed by what is known professionally as Five Factor Theory, which maintains the premise that “The natural, inherent structure of personality is provided by the empirical relationship among the trait terms, and the structure of the English language has converged well onto the ‘Big Five’” (Widiger and Crego). In the proliferation of personality traits, English adjectives have empirically and linguistically “converged” into their respective five categories. Five Factor theory asserts these five traits must be the “fundamental” traits of personality, inherent in nearly all persons cross-culturally (Widiger and Crego). These traits consist of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism a.k.a. OCEAN. Each trait can be defined through the contrasts of their polar opposite traits. Openness consists of characteristics like “Imaginative versus down-to-earth; Preference for variety versus preference for routine; Independent versus conforming” (Costa and McCrae qtd. in Burger 143). Conscientiousness consists of characteristics like “Well organized versus disorganized; Careful versus careless; Self-disciplined versus weak willed” (Costa and McCrae qtd. in Burger). Extraversion consists of characteristics like “Sociable versus retiring; Fun-loving versus sober; Affectionate versus reserved” (Costa and McCrae qtd. in Burger). Agreeableness consists of characteristics like “Softhearted [sic] versus ruthless; Trusting versus suspicious; Helpful versus uncooperative” (Costa and McCrae qtd. in Burger). And lastly, neuroticism consists of characteristics like “Worried versus calm; Insecure versus secure; Self-pitying versus self-satisfied” (Costa and McCrae qtd. in Burger). According to the theory, each individual possesses varying degrees of these five traits (Burger). For example, someone can be very high in openness but low in conscientiousness, thus they may have innovative ideas but lack the “self-discipline” to enact them. The varying degrees of these five traits thus constitute the make up of one’s personality. As an illustrative anecdote, when I have taken the Big Five personality test, I usually score highest in openness, followed by a high amount in agreeableness, a high amount in neuroticism, a moderately high amount in conscientiousness and a low amount in extraversion. So, according to the Big Five model, I am highly open, highly agreeable, highly neurotic, moderately conscientious and fairly introverted.

**Strengths of the Big Five Model in Western Psychology/Culture**

Now that some contextual background/theory has been established, it is instrumental to explore why the Big Five model is so ubiquitous and held in high regard by personality psychologists. In a critical review of the research literature on the Big Five, Najm Abood outlines three primary hypotheses why the model holds such institutional/ideological power. They outline how there is a wide variety of studies conducted using the theory (Abood 160), the model offers a “broad scope of traits, attitudes, and behaviors related to personality” (160) and finally, they can serve as a starting point for “generalizing” personality traits cross-culturally (160). They furthermore state “Also, the understandability of the [Big Five model] and the easiness of memorizing them represents an opportunity for many people to understand human personality” (160). The Big Five can be constituted as offering a “broad scope” since these five traits can be further broken down into micro sub-traits (Burger). And obviously, they have served as a reasonable starting point for trait psychologists based on the amount of psychological research and the attempts at cross-cultural conversion (Abood). Indeed, the five traits are very easy to grasp, because there are only five of them (Abood). Additionally, Prof. Jerry M. Burger states, trait approaches to understanding personality generally offer mental health professionals, educational psychologists, industrial psychologists and job counselors the ability to evaluate and hire people (161). With the Big Five producing a high degree of research (Abood), igniting understandings of other psychological traits and behaviors (Abood), being generalized to cross-cultural research (Abood), being easy to understand (Abood) and benefiting professionals in other fields (Burger); it is no wonder the model of the Big Five holds so much institutional/ideological power.

As Michael W. Katzo states in his article, “The Rhetoric of Psychological Research and the Problem of Unification in Psychology,” “When the social scope of a theory extends beyond its author, one witnesses a transition from a personal theoretical superstructure to a social organization” (267). What initially began as a personality theory formulated by researchers seeking to further understand human behavior (“a personal theoretical superstructure”), has become extremely ubiquitous in and beyond the field: making it “a social organization.” Not only do we see companies selling personality tests, like the Big Five, to consumers, companies, schools and workplaces (*Truity.com*), but we see the Big Five cementing a firm presence in the broader culture. For example, psychologists, like Todd Grande, have posted numerous, highly viewed videos on their respective YouTube channels outlining the Big Five model (Grande). Dr. Jordan Peterson even sells his own online iteration of the Big Five Personality test (*Understand Myself.com*). Prof. Jerry M. Burger addresses how there are many criticisms of the personality model, especially in regards to cross-cultural evidence (147). Yet, he does assert “the results from numerous studies indicate that the five-factor model does not merely reflect the structure of the English language but appears to be a universal pattern for describing personality” (Burger 147). But, the assumption of a “universal pattern” of personality, reflected in the social scientific model of the Big Five, is precisely the major rhetorical concern of this paper. “Universal” is very often synonymous with the ideological power of the Western world. With the field of psychology already embedded in an obvious Eurocentric, Western context, it is worth analyzing the rhetoric utilized in the subfields it has produced. Even if the Big Five is a widely acknowledged and popular model of personality professionally and culturally, it does not mean we should not investigate the rhetorical practices utilized in its theoretical foundations, test items and cross-cultural evidence.

**The Rhetorical Instability of the Lexical Paradigm**

In his article discussing the relationship between psychology and rhetoric, Michael Billig states “The ability to negate is a universal property of human language and is a feature which distinguishes human language from systems of animal communication. However, much work in the psychology of language, and in cognitive social psychology, has proceeded from the assumption that one of the prime functions of language is to name” (295). The very existence of investigating the rhetoric of science rests on our ability to “negate” or to critique other’s language. Billing outlines how fields like “the psychology of language” and “cognitive social psychology” assume that “to name” is a “primary function of language,” one could include the subfield of trait personality psychology in that assumption. As the Big Five personality model is informed by the lexical paradigm, which maintains humans utilize words to name or describe important features of their environment (Widiger and Crego), it leaves very little room for “negation” or critique of that language use and that underlying assumption. Yet, we can critique this theoretical assumption. Ira Trofimova asserts “The problem with the lexical approach arises when researchers manipulating the lists of verbal descriptors of personality present their models not as an interesting artifact of human verbal cognition or socialization processes, but as revealing a real core of biologically based individual differences in humans” (Trofimova). Trofimova indicates a significant fallacy of the lexical paradigm: the psychologists and researchers assume their study of trait descriptors reflects “biologically based individual differences in humans” rather than merely “human verbal cognition.” Psychologists confuse social human language for innate differences between humans. She also states how the model “was developed based on research that used subjective selection of lexical descriptors, and self-and peer assessment of correspondence between (only these) descriptors and observable behavior. And that is what the Big Five represents: a consistent model of how humans reflect individuality using language, no more” (Trofimova). This “subjective selection of lexical descriptors” along with the “self-and peer assessment” of these specific trait descriptors, casts the Big Five model as reflecting the ways in which we distinguish “individuality using language.” Extending upon Trofimova’s argument, one can see this “subjective selection” in action when one considers the gender and racial identity of these initial trait researchers: primarily white Caucasian, cis men. A different set of traits very likely could have emerged had other identifiable groups been included in the formulation of the theory, especially marginalized groups. It is also extremely likely that much of the early “self-and peer assessments” of the Big Five was conducted with these socially dominant groups. If the lexical paradigm insists that human language is utilized for naming/describing key elements in the environment, rather than critiquing those elements (Billing), and if it insists that trait descriptors are synonymous with human biological differences (Trofimova) (with the selection/testing of these trait descriptors reflecting the subjectivity of the initial, socially dominant researchers); the lexical paradigm is therefore unstable and not truly objective. Its rhetorical “subjectivity” is mistaken for “scientific” objectivity. Thus, since the unstable lexical paradigm informs the very premise of the Big Five model, this indicates a flawed foundational bias in the model. Not only the model itself, but the model’s implying of an ideal personality. The Big Five is rhetorically biased towards subjective descriptions of personality which were selected by Westernized, cis white male researchers, yet it proports to represent innate human personality traits. This persuades us to believe that these English terms constitute an objective, universal model of personality. But in actuality, this model implies a Western dwelling personality that cannot be called “universal.” Just as scientific domains want to be pure “logos” (Harris), the Big Five aims to be “logos,” but the instability of this paradigm highlights some of the Western “ethos” involved. This then begs the question, what specific language is used to further reflect this Westernized bias in the conception of an ideal personality?

**Rhetoric of a Sample Big Five Personality Test**

In order to further understand the Westernized bias inherent in the Big Five personality model’s conception of an ideal personality, it is crucial to examine the rhetoric of a sample Big Five personality test. As R. Allen Harris indicates: scientists aim to persuade other professionals of their findings or interpretations (284), so too can this rhetorical persuasion be extended to convincing human subjects of these findings/interpretations upon completion of a personality test. The items on a questionnaire or survey can indicate not only the type of data being obtained, but also the subjective motivations of the researcher. The test version I am analyzing comes from Truity Psychometrics LLC a.k.a. Truity.com. According to their website, Truity is “a developer and publisher of online personality and career tests. Truity was founded in 2012 and is based in Northern California, USA. Our website serves about 100,000 visitors per day and we maintain an A+ rating with the Better Business Bureau” (*Truity.com*). Not only does this company “develop” personality/career tests but they also “publish” these sorts of tests. They are evidently based in Western, North American culture with “100,000 visitors per day” and maintain an excellent rating with the “Better Business Bureau.” From this description, users get the impression of a reputable, legitimate company with their assertion they “develop” and “publish” personality/career tests, with a large amount of daily Internet traffic and a strong rating with a North American bureaucracy. High traffic, with ample production and ties with a recognized bureaucracy are very synonymous with Western ideals of a successful company within a capitalist culture. Thus, this description utilizes a Westernized rhetoric of success to make themselves appear legitimate to the users. The descriptions of the five traits and the test items themselves further this kind of Westernized rhetoric. Firstly, all the descriptions of the traits (with the exception of neuroticism) emphasize the higher end versus the lower end of inhabiting the specific trait. For example, Conscientiousness is described as

a person’s ability to exercise self-discipline and control in order to pursue their goals. High scorers are organized and determined, and are able to forego immediate gratification for the sake of long-term achievement. Low scorers are impulsive and easily sidetracked. The concept of Conscientiousness focuses on a dilemma we all face: shall I do what feels good now, or instead do what is less fun but will pay off in the future? Some people are more likely to choose fun in the moment, and thus are low in Conscientiousness. Others are more likely to work doggedly toward their goals, and thus are high in this trait. (*Truity.com*)

By utility, most trait descriptions will emphasize the higher end versus the lower end of the trait, however that in turn implies the higher end is always desirable. This description of conscientiousness contrasts the exercise of “self-discipline,” “control”, being “organized and determined” with being “impulsive and easily sidetracked.” The motivations of high versus low scorers are also contrasted: “Some people are more likely to choose fun in the moment…Others are more likely to work doggedly toward their goals” (*Truity.com*). In a Western, capitalistic culture, “working doggedly toward” one’s goals will certainly be seen as more virtuous than “choosing fun.” Thus, like Truity’s company description, there is Westernized rhetoric inherent in the seemingly neutral, objective descriptions of higher and lower scores on Big Five traits.

Furthermore, on the first section of the test, there are many positive sounding statements to select from (*Truity.com*). These include statements like “I have a kind word for everyone, I am always prepared, I feel comfortable around people” (*Truity.com*) versus “I often feel blue, There are many things I do not like about myself” (*Truity.com*). This indicates a bias towards personal positivity as there are more statements like these to agree, disagree or remain neutral on than negative sounding statements. On the second section of the test, there are a very high number of positive adjectives/traits to rate one’s self on like: “original, systematic, soft hearted, inquisitive, agreeable, creative” (*Truity.com*) and very few negative adjectives/traits like: “shy, tense, forgetful, nervous, moody” (*Truity.com*). Once again, we see a ubiquitous amount of what are commonly viewed as positive traits than what are commonly viewed as negative traits. This bias towards personal positivity in the selection of these adjectives and traits (like the descriptions of the Big Five traits) emphasizes inhabiting specific dispositions. These implied dispositions include being highly extraverted (“I feel comfortable around people”), highly people oriented (“I have a kind word for everyone”, “soft hearted”), highly conscientious (“I am always prepared”, “systematic”) and highly open minded (“inquisitive,” “creative”). Western society prioritizes extraversion over introversion, capitalistic pursuits, intelligence and individual compliance, thus to be high in extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness is to fulfill and embody these societal values/priorities. In the final section of the test, the user is asked about their age, gender identity, highest level of education attained and the number of children (if any) that one has (*Truity.com*). Although this information is gathered for the purposes of comparing personality traits across populations (*Truity.com*), it is still a specific rhetorical choice the test creators make. There is a group of people who decides that knowing the gender identities, age, education level and number of offspring of its users is necessary. But what this gathering of information emphasizes is yet again Western values of educational achievement, reproduction and individualization. What the company’s description, the test items and the test’s gathering of information all emphasize is a certain type of personality. Not only a personality who is living in the West (as informed by the lexical paradigm), but a personality who is open minded, extraverted, organized and people oriented with an educational background and with offspring. Therefore, the type of rhetoric utilized in this sample Big Five personality test reflects a Westernized bias of desirable individuality. The language utilized implies the acquisition of these culturally desirable traits and behavioral dispositions. It is not objectively measuring your personality, but again implying an ideal personality. One people ought to aim towards, especially those living within Western structures. This then begs another question: what happens when this model is studied in non-Western cultures?

**How Cross-Cultural Evidence Exposes the Westernized Rhetoric of the Big Five Model**

If the Big Five personality model is predicated on an unstable language paradigm informed by Western culture and with its trait descriptors/test items biasing Westernized values/notions of the ideal personality, it is paramount in this final section of my analysis to look at the cross-cultural “evidence” of the traits. In order for the Big Five to achieve a status of “logos,” just as other scientific fields desire (Harris), it makes sense for trait psychologists and other researchers to try and replicate the model in other cultures. The first aspect to consider is that the five traits have not always been succinctly replicable (Burger 147). Some researchers have found evidence for as many as seven traits, others found three and others found only two (147). Much of this, according to Jerry M. Burger, depends upon the terms utilized in the process of factor analysis (147), indicating again this instability of the lexical paradigm as foundational to the existence/embodiment of these five personality traits. There has been some cross-cultural replication of the traits, as according to Thomas A. Widiger and Cristina Crego the model has “also been replicated within the German, Czech, Dutch, Filipino, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Turkish languages, albeit the replication of neuroticism and openness is not as strong as the replication of the domains of agreeableness, extraversion and conscientiousness” (Widiger and Crego). Although these researchers claim there is evidence for five factors of personality in disparate languages besides English, the fact there is “not as strong” of evidence for the traits of neuroticism and openness indicates that the cross-cultural replication is far from perfect. This ties in with one of the professional criticisms of the Big Five by Dan P. McAdams, when he points out how there is a “disregard of the contextual and conditional nature of human experience” (McAdams). This “contextual” and “conditional” nature is exactly what our own cultures provide for us as human beings: a set of thoughts, locations and ideologies which are “contextual” and “conditional” upon our specific culture, as determined by racial identity, geographical location, family structure etc. Even though there is “some” replication of the five traits, there is certainly not enough to warrant a description of the model as having supreme cross-cultural consistency. In a study conducted in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, the team of researchers assert the majority of Big Five personality research has been conducted in WEIRD (western, educated, industrial, rich and democratic) cultures, with little to no research conducted on non-WEIRD cultures (Gurven et al.). This was the very motivation for their study which examined the Tsimane, an Indigenous tribe of Bolivia (Gurven et al.). The researchers found weak evidence for the prevalence of the Big Five traits, though this tribe does possess their own linguistic methods for describing the various members of their village (Gurven et al.). Based off of their research study, the duo conclusively asserts that “It is in small-scale societies that humans have lived for the majority of their existence; the socioecologies of ancestral hunter–gatherers and horticulturalists are the crucible that shaped much of human psychology and behavior. We therefore urge others to conduct similar studies of personality structure in other small-scale, indigenous societies” (Gurven et al.). The researchers indicate the importance of “hunter-gatherer and horticultural” societies as the norm in human evolutionary history, social structures which they believe “shaped much of human psychology and behavior.” Thus, it is vital to conduct further research outside of WEIRD large-scale societies and inside non-WEIRD small-scale societies. This further demonstrates how The Big Five reflects WEIRD culture and individuals, as even the traits have no firm basis in human evolutionary thought, since humanity certainly did not evolve in large scale, Western like societies. Thus, since there is not strong cross-cultural replication (Widiger and Crego), with an overarching disregard for the contextual circumstances that influence/create human personality (McAdams) and with the weak evidence found in such Indigenous cultures as the Tsimane (Gurven et. al), the Big Five personality model once again reflects a Westernized bias towards an idealized personality. If the model were legitimate and “universal,” there would exist culturally specific terms which correspond with the five traits across *all* cultures. But this is not the case, further indicating a bias which advances a certain type of personality: a person who is living in a Western society fulfilling Western ideals/values. The Big Five only appears to exist in a dominant Westernized framework. Almost as if the notion of a personality trait only exists in this dominant Westernized framework.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Big Five personality model, through the instability of the lexical paradigm (which exposes the Westernized bias inherent in its foundation), the test items themselves (which favour culturally desirable traits like being extraverted, open minded, people oriented and organized over their opposites) and the lack of sufficient cross-cultural evidence, thus perpetuates an ideal Westernized individual through its rhetoric. This ideal personality is Western living, extraverted, open, agreeable, conscientious with offspring and some sort of formal education. Since the Big Five is informed and founded on the primacy of language for outlining personality differences, it is not shocking Westernized rhetorical strategies play a large role in its foundation/proliferation of an idealized personality. The Westernized bias of a well recognized personality model indicates both the rhetorical strategies in the field of personality and the instability of language within the scientific domain of inquiry. The rhetoric of science exposes us to the reality that our knowledge of the empirical world is substantially built on linguistic constructions (Harris). Thus, it is important to ask: is any entity in the world stable enough for us to study in a field of knowledge pursuit? If personality, like other entities in a scientific field, is ripe with culturally biased rhetorical persuasion, how can we formulate any knowledge or conduct research on the tangible/intangible entities we encounter? One could radically say that no type of knowledge is worth pursuing since we cannot possibly pursue “objective knowledge.” But I do not think this is a right or realistic epistemological/pedagogical stance. Speaking from my own bias/experience, I firmly believed the Big Five model was a “universal” pattern of personality. It gave me a language to describe myself and describe other people, which is perhaps not necessarily linguistically ethical. The stability of it made me feel safer in the world, because I was given a model of defining myself and my orientation to the broader world. But after conducting this analytical paper, I not only understand the cultural bias of the model but I understand my own cultural bias. I think one of the initial fears we have of deconstructing our schemas of knowledge is that it will detract from our self narrative and our world narrative. My analysis has not detracted from my interest in personality psychology, it has enhanced it. It is not that we cannot study observable or experienced entities in the world. We can study them, but just as R. Allen Harris indicates the importance and utility of having a “rhetoric of science,” we ought to study rhetoric in all of our domains of knowledge seeking. Performing a rhetoric of any subject area (whether science, personality psychology or even literary studies) does not prevent knowledge exploration, it enhances it. If rhetorical analysis allows our knowledge seeking to be less culturally biased and more culturally inclusive/reflective, so much the better. If knowledge is indeed power, then rhetoric makes knowledge even more powerful in the most ethical fashion. Perhaps one day, rhetoric and our fields of inquiry will be synonymous with each other as a way of global knowledge seeking.

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