

Associations between University Students' Personality Traits and Victimization and its Negative Affect in School Physical Education

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Abstract

Personality traits, affect, and victimization have been linked to participation and motivation in physical activity settings; yet little is known about interactions between these constructs in physical education. The aim of the study was to test a path model from personality traits to victimization through negative affect in school-based physical education. Surveys were administered to 300 university Kinesiology students assessing their trait personality and recollections of victimization and negative affect in school physical education. The results of the study revealed an excellent fit of the data to the proposed model with emotionality, anxiety, organization, and lower extraversion, social self-esteem, and prudence predicting negative affect. Victimization was predicted by negative affect and by lower conscientiousness, fairness, fearfulness, and social self-esteem. This study reveals important new insight into the relationship between negative affect, victimization, and the dimensions and facets of personality traits in physical education. Students that are prone to negative affect in physical education may be those that tend to be more emotional and introverted. More research on these relationships is needed with school-age students in physical education prior to asserting any implications for practice.

Keywords: emotionality, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience

Introduction

Researchers have discovered much about motivation for daily and long-term physical activity levels particularly among adolescents (Yli-Piipari, Watt, Jaakkola, Liukkonen, & Nurmi, 2009) and for students in physical education (Solmon, 2006). For example, individuals who continue participating in sport, physical activity, and physical education, tend to have a positive and better-regulated affect in these settings (Papaioannou, Simou, Kosmidou, Milosis, & Tsigilis, 2009). A generally negative affective state reflects feelings such as irritability, shame, hostility, embarrassment, anxiety, and fear that have been linked to more generalized mood states such as sadness or lethargy (Watson, Clark and Tellegen, 1988). It appears that overtly controlling, alienating, socially competitive, and evaluative aspects of physical education can incite such negative feelings leading to decreased enjoyment and activity levels in youth (Yli-Piipari et al., 2009).

On the other hand, being a victim of bullying can undermine motivation in physical activity settings such as physical education (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Lenskyj & van Daalen 2006). Victimization – typically unprovoked and undesired “repeated exposure to purposeful attempts to injure or inflict discomfort and pain on another individual through words, physical contact, gestures, or exclusion from a group” (Olweus, 1993, p. 1) – has been linked to similar negative feelings in physical education along with more absenteeism (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Lenskyj & van Daalen 2006) and lower retention in subsequent physical education courses (Hurley & Mandigo, 2010). Approximately 20-25% of school-age students either report bullying, being a victim of bullying, or both (Juvonen & Graham, 2014) and 11-14% of high school students in physical education report victimization (Hurley & Mandigo, 2010). Among the negative consequences of victimization in schools are feelings of loneliness, fear, and anxiety, low self-esteem, avoidance of school, substance abuse, illness, depression, suicide ideation, and compromised academic achievement and social relationships (Hansen, Steenberg, Palic, & Elklit, 2012).

Trait personality has received very little attention from researchers of physical education. Personality traits are most commonly represented by five (Costa & McCrae, 1992) or six (Ashton & Lee, 2007) relatively distinct dimensions of “consistent preferences or patterns of behavior” (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2005, p. 7). The six dimensions of the HEXACO model of trait personality are honesty-humility (H), emotionality/neuroticism (E), extraversion (X), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), and openness to experience (O). Sample traits for each dimension (Ashton, 2013) include being over-sensitive, anxious, and clingy (emotionality); outgoing, lively, sociable, cheerful, and confident (extraversion); patient, tolerant,

peaceful, mild, and forgiving (agreeableness); organized, self-disciplined, hard-working, efficient, and precise (conscientiousness); and, intellectual, creative, unconventional, innovative, and inquisitive (openness to experience). Those with lower scores on these personality dimensions would demonstrate relatively opposite characteristics.

Various combinations of these dimensions have been linked to adaptive life outcomes such as health, academic achievement, coping skills, work fulfillment, and exercise (Ackerman, 2013; Ashton, 2013; Allen, Greenlees, & Jones, 2013; Wilson & Dishman, 2015). For example, extraversion has been most strongly associated with increased low-to-moderate intensity physical activity while conscientiousness relates most to more vigorous physical activity (De Bruijn, De Groot, VandenPutte, & Rhodes, 2009) and academic achievement (Ackerman, 2013). Despite these noted links between personality traits and increased participation and motivation in physical education-related settings such as physical activity (Wilson & Dishman, 2015), sport (Allen et al., 2013), and exercise (Courneya & Hellsten, 1998; De Bruijn et al., 2009), little is known about the relationship between trait personality and important constructs in school-based physical education such as affect and victimization. It is the aim of the study to uncover relations between personality traits, victimization, and negative affect in physical education.

The study is framed around three research questions. First, does the collected data fit a proposed path model (Figure 1) from the HEXACO trait personality dimensions to victimization through negative affect? The proposed model applies social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986), particularly its underlying assertion that experiences like victimization can partially result from one's personal characteristics and feelings. In other words, "personality is hypothesized to affect social cognitions (i.e., perceptions, attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy) towards a behavior, which in turn influence the behavior itself" (Rhodes & Smith, 2006, p. 958). The proposed model also hinges on a large body of research (e.g., Watson & Clark, 1997) showing consistent links between personality traits (particularly emotionality/neuroticism and lower extraversion) and negative affect (e.g., anxiety, shame, boredom) including in physical education-related settings such as physical activity (Wilson & Dishman, 2015) and sport (Allen et al., 2013). Further, negative affect is expected to predict victimization because victims are often deemed by bullies to be outside the norm, have lower self-worth, and to be more fearful and vulnerable in physical education (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Flintoff & Scratton, 2005) and other settings (Ashton, 2013; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Second, do the personality dimensions predict victimization? It was anticipated that personality would predict victimization since conscientiousness, emotionality, and honesty-humility have done so previously (Book et al., 2012; Hansen et al., 2012). Third, since trait personality experts have called for more research that examines the facets (sub-scales) of the personality dimensions (Rhodes & Pfaelli, 2012; Wilson & Dishman, 2015), do any of the personality facets predict victimization or negative affect? Hypotheses are not made for this question due to the novelty of research on facets of trait personality in physical education, sport, and physical activity.

Material and Methods

Procedure and Participants

In approximately 15-20 minutes during a required second-year course and an elective third year course, three surveys were completed by 330 consenting (95% participation rate) undergraduate university students majoring in Kinesiology at a university in south-central Canada with 18,000 students. Only one of the surveys (trait personality) and some items from the others (victimization and negative affect) were used for this study. Data screening using excessive Mahalanobis distance values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006) resulted in the elimination of 15 outlier cases and another 15 students majoring in something other than Kinesiology so the final sample was 300 (147 men and 153 women).

Measures

The mean of a six-item victimization scale from previous research (e.g., Volk & Lagzdins, 2009) was used to assess victimization. The scale assesses the frequency of racial/ethnic, verbal, physical, threatening, negative rumoring and sexual victimization on a 5-point Likert-scale (1 = *never* and 5 = *all the time*). The items were modified slightly to apply to the context of physical education with a sample item being: "In the last 4 months in physical education, how often has someone much stronger or popular hit, slapped, or pushed you?" Negative affect was assessed using the 10 negative adjective items (e.g., upset, irritable, ashamed, hostile) from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) using a five-point Likert-response scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely) (Watson et al., 1988). Finally, 96 of the 100 items (the 4-item altruism scale is not included in the assessment of HEXACO trait personality) of the HEXACO Personality Inventory – Revised was used as the measure for trait personality. The measure is available at www.hexaco.org, uses a 5-point Likert-type response scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), and has been previously validated for use in numerous languages and cultures (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Each of the six HEXACO dimensions is assessed through 16 items (four facets or sub-scales of four items each; see Table 2).

Statistical Analysis

The path analyses testing the proposed model (Figure 1) from personality to negative affect indirectly through victimization was performed using AMOS (version 22.0) and the maximum likelihood method for extraction. Criteria for excellent goodness-of-fit for the model were .95 and greater for the CFI, .08 or less for

the SRMR, and .10 or less for the RMSEA (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Remaining analyses were performed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS; version 22.0). Descriptive statistics, internal consistency, and Pearson bivariate correlation coefficients were computed. Finally, linear regression was used to assess the relative prediction of each personality dimension (entered simultaneously) on negative affect and to determine facet (entered simultaneously for each dimension) predictors of negative affect and victimization (Table 2).

Results

Tables 1 and 2 provides the descriptive statistics, correlations, and alpha reliability coefficients ($>.73$) for the HEXACO dimensions and facets. The mean, standard deviation, and alpha reliability for negative affect was 1.52, .49, and .73; whereas, for victimization it was 1.40, .47, and .80. The alpha reliability values were satisfactory for all except two ($\alpha = .58$ for sincerity and .36 for unconventionality) of the 24 personality subscales using the standard of $>.60$ for scales with fewer than 10 items (Loewenthal, 1996). Consequently, the sincerity and unconventionality facets were not included in the facet analyses.

Results revealed an excellent fit of the model to the data (Figure 1) with goodness of fit indices ($\chi^2_{(6)} = 8.62, p = .196$; CFI = .977; SRMR = .0276; RMSEA = .038). Emotionality ($p < .001$) and extraversion (in a negative relationship; $p = .015$) were the sole significant predictors of negative affect; and victimization was significantly predicted by negative affect ($p < .001$). The regression analysis with the six personality dimensions entered simultaneously as predictors of victimization was not significant: $R^2 = .03, F(6, 290) = 1.58, p = .156$; as only lower conscientiousness ($p = .008$) predicted victimization. Finally, to investigate the personality facets that predicted victimization and negative affect, regression analyses were performed each simultaneously entering the four facets of each of the HEXACO dimensions as predictors (Table 2). Facet predictors of negative affect were anxiety ($t = 3.00, p = .003$), organization ($t = 2.31, p = .034$) and lower social self-esteem ($t = -5.04, p < .001$) and prudence ($t = -3.33, p = .001$). Victimization was inversely predicted by fairness ($t = -2.41, p = .016$), fearfulness ($t = -2.33, p = .020$), and social self-esteem ($t = -3.50, p = .001$).

Discussion

This study adds new insight into relations between negative affect, victimization, and the HEXACO trait personality dimensions and facets in physical education. The results of the study revealed an excellent fit of the data to the proposed model from the HEXACO trait personality dimensions to victimization through negative affect. Emotionality and extraversion (in a negative relationship) were the sole significant predictors of negative affect; and victimization was significantly predicted by negative affect. Except for lower conscientiousness, the personality dimensions neither collectively or individually predicted victimization. Finally, facet predictors of negative affect were anxiety, organization, and lower social self-esteem and prudence; whereas, victimization was inversely predicted by fairness, fearfulness, and social self-esteem.

The excellent fit of the data to the path model signals that personality interacts as a personal attribute to exert its influence on victimization through negative affect. The results signal that students who are more susceptible to negative affect in physical education might be those that are more emotional and introverted; and specifically those that are more anxious (i.e., worry over little things even to the point of losing sleep), organized (i.e., prefers to work ahead to keep things tidy and orderly), and less prudent (i.e., behave impulsively based primarily on feelings rather than thoughtful mental planning) and socially-esteemed (i.e., feeling worthy, well-liked, and popular). These findings affirm claims by some (e.g., Rhodes & Pfaelli, 2012; Wilson & Dishman, 2015) that investigating both the dimensions and facets of trait personality can better illuminate links between personality and motivation for physical activity than dimensions alone. The results also align somewhat with those in physical activity and exercise settings indicating links between participation, affect (e.g., enjoyment, motivation, lack of embarrassment for exercise), lower emotionality/neuroticism, and higher conscientiousness and extraversion (Courneya & Hellsten, 1998; De Bruijn et al., 2009; Rhodes & Pfaelli, 2012).

The results of this study also signal that students that may be more susceptible to increased victimization in physical education are those higher in negative affect and lower in conscientiousness; and more specifically, lower in social self-esteem, fairness (i.e., would be dishonest and steal if they could get away with it), and fearfulness (i.e., afraid of emergencies and physical danger). The link between negative affectivity and victimization was expected because of research noted earlier linking bullying to victims that are different, introspective, vulnerable, afraid, and with a lower self-image (Ashton, 2013; Carney & Merrell, 2001; Hansen et al., 2012; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Both conscientiousness (i.e., organized, disciplined, diligent, careful, thorough, and precise) and emotionality/neuroticism (i.e., nervous, over-sensitive, anxious, and clingy) have been previously associated with victimization (Book et al., 2012; Hansen et al., 2012). In a physical education setting, Flintoff and Scratton (2006) found that students who are teased more frequently tended to be shorter, thinner, and less muscular than others their own age and sex. Hansen et al. (2012) summarizes that

... victims of bullying also feel anxious and insecure about themselves. They often feel stupid, like a failure, and shameful. Therefore, a trait like negative affectivity/neuroticism can have important associations with bullying, as it may explain that some children, just by the virtue of their nervous temperament and appearance are at risk of becoming victims of bullying. (p. 384)

It would be useful for future research to assess associations between personality traits and other

adaptive outcomes such as motivational climate or goal orientation in physical education. This is because research has, for example, linked negative affect to ego-based goals, amotivation, controlled (versus autonomous) forms of motivation, and lower perceived competence (McDonough & Crocker, 2007; Papaioannou et al., 2009). Relations between introversion and negative affect in social settings have also varied as a function of whether the setting was chosen or required (Emmons, Diener, & Larsen, 1986). It would also be useful to learn more about how interactions between personality, affect, and victimization in physical education students vary as a function of gender and social support because bullies are more likely to victimize those of their own gender; whereas, victims tend to have less social support and “do not always see the social support they need” (Hansen et al., 2012, p. 386). Jointly investigating victimization and bullying in school-age physical education students would also be useful since research (e.g., Hansen et al., 2012; Hurley & Mandigo, 2010; Olweus, 1993) indicates that some individuals bully while also being victims of bullying (bully-victims).

Limitations of the study include its cross-sectional and correlational design and the use of self-report data from second and third-year university students about feelings related to their previous school-based physical education experiences. Caution is needed as to the transferability of this data to school-age students of physical education because of the potential maturation, personal biases, and flawed recall in the university students of this study. It is also important to note that the correlations between the personality dimensions and both negative affect and victimization in this study were generally low ($r < .20$).

Conclusion

The primary aim of the study was to test a path model from personality traits to victimization through negative affect relative to school physical education. University students in Kinesiology were assessed in trait personality along with their recollections of victimization and negative affect in school physical education. The results of the study revealed an excellent fit of the data to the model. Students that are prone to negative affect in physical education may be those that tend to be particularly more emotional and introverted. Victimization was predicted by negative affect and by lower conscientiousness, fairness, fearfulness, and social self-esteem. The results should stimulate more research with school-age physical education students to corroborate the findings before firm assertions relative to physical education pedagogy can be made. Research in other physical activity settings (Wilson & Dishman, 2015) has resulted in recommending increased attention, encouragement, and support for those with personality trait profiles that are associated with weaker coping responses.

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APENDIX

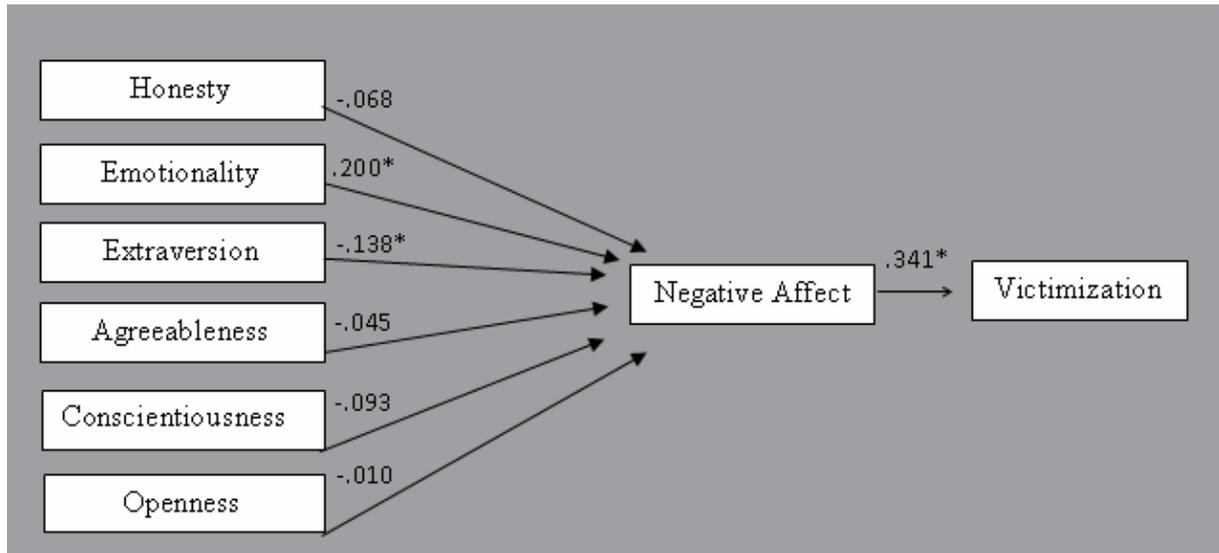


Figure 1. Path analysis.

Note. Standardized values are given. Goodness of fit indices: $\chi^2_{(6)} = 8.62, p = .196$; CFI = .977; SRMR = .028; RMSEA = .038; * $p < .05$.

Table 1
Pearson Bivariate Correlations

Scales	H	E	X	A	C	O	NA	V
H	-							
E	.12*	-						
X	-.02	-.10	-					
A	.21**	-.08	-.06	-				
C	.24**	.15*	.12*	.11	-			
O	.15**	-.12	-.003	.15**	-.02	-		
NA	-.07	.20**	-.17**	-.08	-.10	-.05	-	
V	-.04	.002	-.02	-.06	-.16**	.04	.34**	-

Note. N = 300; H = Honesty-Humility; E = Emotionality; X = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; O = Openness to Experience, NA = Negative Affect, V = Victimization.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Personality Dimension and Facet Predictors

				Victimization			Negative Affect		
				R^2	F	p	R^2	F	p
HEXACO						.158	.08	4.22	<.001
Dimension and Facet	α	M	SD	β	t	p	β	t	p
Honesty-Humility	.81	3.36	.53			.99			.259
Sincerity	.58	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fairness	.73	3.43	.85	-.16	-2.41	.016	-	-	.267
Greed-Avoidance	.81	2.93	.88	-	-	.084	-	-	.885
Modesty	.62	3.73	.62	-	-	.774	-	-	.693
Emotionality	.86	3.21	.61			.635	.20	3.41	.001
Fearfulness	.74	2.86	.79	-.16	-2.33	.020	-	-	.157
Anxiety	.73	3.55	.83	-	-	.768	.20	3.00	.003

Dependence	.78	3.00	.83	-	-	.060	-	-	.737
Sentimentality	.72	3.45	.76	-	-	.989	-	-	.057
Extraversion	.85	3.55	.51			.944	-.14	-.240	.017
Social Self Esteem	.62	3.84	.57	-.23	-3.50	.001	-.33	-5.04	<.001
Social Boldness	.80	3.07	.83	-	-	.250	-	-	.996
Sociability	.70	3.61	.69	-	-	.423	-	-	.108
Liveliness	.75	3.68	.65	-	-	.562	-	-	.499
Agreeableness	.80	3.10	.48			.424			.440
Forgiveness	.69	2.82	.67	-	-	.953	-	-	.737
Gentleness	.62	3.31	.60	-	-	.556	-	-	.100
Flexibility	.62	2.97	.70	-	-	.330	-	-	.252
Patience	.75	3.32	.74	-	-	.106	-	-	.131
Conscientiousness	.80	3.55	.47	-.16	-2.66	.008			.119
Organization	.71	3.56	.81	-	-	.503	.14	2.31	.034
Diligence	.66	3.92	.56	-	-	.669	-	-	.093
Perfectionism	.63	3.44	.65	-	-	.151	-	-	.831
Prudence	.68	3.27	.65	-	-	.273	-.22	-3.33	.001
Openness to Experience	.80	2.88	.56	-	-	.418	-	-	.869
Aesthetic Appreciation.	.61	2.64	.86	-	-	.999	-	-	.111
Inquisitiveness	.60	2.58	.78	-	-	.246	-	-	.090
Creativity	.70	3.06	.83	-	-	.436	-	-	.218
Unconventionality	.36	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. $N = 300$.