

Change over time in the effects of personality traits on divorce from a comparative perspective

Diederik Boertien, Dimitri Mortelmans



Overview

- Theoretical framework
- Hypotheses
- Data
- Preliminary results
- Conclusion

Personality

- Psychology uses personality *traits* to explain variation in individual behavior.
- Personality traits can be seen as a 'preference' for a certain way of behaving in distinct situations
- Traits are stable during adulthood, but some variation exists before reaching that age.
- Many taxonomies BUT since the nineties dominance of the BIG FIVE.

BIG FIVE

1) *Agreeableness:*

Scoring low on setting oneself against others, being mistrustful, skeptical, uncooperative, and unsympathetic.

2) *Conscientiousness:*

Being governed by conscience, self-discipline, being thorough, ambitious, and adhering to plans.

3) *Extraversion:*

Being sociable, fun-loving, affectionate, friendly and talkative.

4) *Neuroticism:*

Being worrying, insecure, self-conscious, and temperamental.

5) *Openness to Experience:*

Being original, imaginative, creative, daring and having broad interests

Personality and divorce risk

- Previous research (on marital satisfaction)
 - POS effect:
 - Agreeableness & Conscientiousness
(better problem solving abilities)
 - Openness to experience
(intellectual approach to problem solving)
 - Extraversion
(positive emotions)
 - NEG effect:
 - Neuroticism
(negative communication patterns)
- BUT Unrepresentative (student) samples

Research questions

- AIM 1: Does the effect of personality change over time?
- AIM 2: Does the effect of personality change across space?

Hypotheses – 1 TIME

- Goode (1962) on social exchange & divorce
 - As divorce becomes more common, social, legal and economic barriers become less relevant.
 - Those with fewer resources will be able to divorce.
- Boertien & Härkönen (2014)
 - **External barriers** to divorce (social stigma or legal barriers) have declined
 - **Personal barriers** such as common investments or attitudes are still important

Hypotheses – 1 TIME

- Where could we find change in divorce risk?
 - Direct benefits of the relationship
 - Internal barriers to divorce
 - External barriers to divorce
 - Alternatives to the relationship.

Hypotheses – 1 TIME

- Change in divorce risks
 - External barriers to divorce
 - Changing legal barriers, lower costs
 - Greater acceptance of divorce
 - Internal barriers to divorce
 - Direct benefits of the relationship
 - Alternatives to the relationship.

Hypotheses – 1 TIME

- Change in divorce risks
 - External barriers to divorce
 - Internal barriers to divorce
 - Decline in religiousness
 - Greater individual acceptance of divorce
 - Common investments, changing commitment
 - Direct benefits of the relationship
 - Alternatives to the relationship.

Hypotheses – 1 TIME

- Change in divorce risks
 - External barriers to divorce
 - Internal barriers to divorce
 - Direct benefits of the relationship
 - Emotional returns > economic returns
 - Alternatives to the relationship
 - Less other barriers = more alternatives

Hypotheses – 1 TIME

- *H1a: Neuroticism* is positively related to divorce risk and its effects do not vary over time.
 - No influence on potential drivers of change in divorce risk (influence on communication patterns)
- *Hypothesis 1b: Agreeableness* is negatively related to divorce risk and its effects do not vary over time.
 - No influence on potential drivers of change in divorce risk (influence on communication patterns)
- *Hypothesis 1c: Conscientiousness* is negatively related to divorce risk and its effects vary over time.
 - Influences internal barriers (keeping up family and social relations; responsiveness to social stigma)

Hypotheses – 1 TIME

- *H1d: **Extraversion** is positively related to divorce risk and its effects vary over time.*
 - Influences access to alternatives to partnerships
- *Hypothesis 1e: **Openness to experience** is positively related to divorce risk and its effects vary over time.*
 - Influences internal barriers due to higher willingness to change

Hypotheses – 2 SPACE

- Crude divorce rates
 - 1980 1.5 in Belgium
 2.6 in Britain
 1.8 in Germany
 - 2010 2.6 in Belgium
 2.1 in Britain
 2.3 in Germany
- H2. The effects of personality traits on divorce are stable across space, and vary only according to the timing and pace of increases in divorce risk.

DATA

- **UK:** British Household Panel Survey (BHPS)
N = **4169** (60 811 person-years)
- **GE:** Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)
N = **9017** (151 496 person-years)
- **FL:** Divorce in Flanders (DiF) study
N = **4377** (80 381 person-years)

Retrospective marital histories in all three datasets

MEASURES

- **BIG FIVE** (3 items per trait)
 - e.g. “I see myself as someone who gets nervous easily”

- Divorce from first marriages since 1972

- **CONTROLS**
 - Education (ISCED 1-2; ISCED 3-4 (REF); ISCED 5-6)
 - Number of children under 18 (except GE)
 - Parental divorce (except GE)
 - Employed (time varying)
 - Cohabitation before marriage (except GE)
 - Marriage cohort

Model

- Discrete-time event history model.
 - Event: divorce or separation from marriage
- MODEL 1: General effects of personality
- MODEL 2: Model 1 with controls
- MODEL 3: Model 1 interaction with marriage cohort
- MODEL 4: Model 3 with controls

Results

Discrete-time event history models explaining divorce

	Germany		UK		Flanders	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR
Agreeableness	0.96*	0.94**	1.05	1.02	0.95*	1
Conscientiousness	0.96	0.96*	0.88***	0.89***	0.95**	0.92***
Extraversion	1.16***	1.14***	1.15***	1.08**	1.2***	1.15***
Neuroticism	1.09***	1.06**	1.11***	1.05	0.98	0.93***
Openness to Experience	1.11***	1.13***	0.96	1.02	1.04*	1.02

Model 2 controlled for number of children under 18, parental divorce, Employed, Pre-marital cohabitation, ISCED 1-2, ISCED 5-6, Age at marriage, Gender

Results (cont.)

Discrete-time event history models explaining divorce

Country	Germany		UK		Flanders	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Agreeableness	0.980	0.961	1.044	1.000	1.00	1.00
Agreeableness*cohort	0.999	0.999	0.999	0.999	1.01	1.05
Cohort	1.021***	1.023***	0.988***	1.001	0.93***	1.01***
Conscientiousness	1.053	1.041	0.928	0.905*	1.00	1.01***
Conscientiousness*cohort	0.995*	0.996	0.998	1.000	0.95*	0.84***
Cohort	1.021***	1.024***	0.988***	1.001	0.92***	1.01***
Extraversion	1.183***	1.178***	1.118**	1.083	1.00	1.00
Extraversion*cohort	0.999	0.999	0.999	0.998	1.16***	1.17***
Cohort	1.021***	1.023***	0.988***	1.001	0.92***	1.01***
Neuroticism	1.033	1.013	1.088	1.037	0.99***	0.99***
Neuroticism*cohort	1.003	1.002	1.000	1.000	1.12***	1.12**
Cohort	1.021***	1.024***	0.988***	1.001	0.93***	1.01***
Openness to Experience	1.223***	1.248***	1.108*	1.145**	0.99***	0.99***
Openness*cohort	0.995*	0.995*	0.990***	0.991**	1.19***	1.21***
Cohort	1.021***	1.024***	0.989***	1.002	0.93***	1.01***

Model 2 controlled for number of children under 18, parental divorce, Employed, Pre-marital cohabitation, ISCED 1-2, ISCED 5-6, Age at marriage, Gender

Conclusion

- In general, personality traits affect divorce risk in a similar manner in all three countries.
 - In 5 of the 6 cases no change over time was observed where **no change** was predicted because traits are primarily related to marital satisfaction
 - In 6 out of 9 possible cases **changes** in effects over time were predicted correctly. They were predicted to be related to alternatives, internal or external barriers
- Change over time seems relatively more important than differences across space.

Future Research

- Underlying change in composition of those who divorce?
- From those responsive to external barriers to those responsive to alternatives and internal barriers?
- Changes in composition more dramatic in Flanders?

Change over time in the effects of personality traits on divorce from a comparative perspective

Diederik Boertien, Dimitri Mortelmans

