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Matters arising from Lee et al. (2022)[☆]

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In a recent article (Denissen et al., 2022), we developed and validated a supplemental Honesty-Humility (H) scale for the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2). We first developed an experimental domain scale that converged strongly with both questionnaire and lexical measures of Honesty-Humility, as well as other criterion measures. Because this scale correlated substantially with Big Five Agreeableness, we instead incorporated a shorter Honesty-Humility facet scale into the BFI-2 Agreeableness domain. In a subsequent article, Lee et al. (2022) also attempted to develop an H domain scale for the BFI-2, concluding that it was “relatively easy to develop an Honesty-Humility factor scale that is reasonably independent from the original BFI-2 factor-level scales.”

Lee et al. deviated from the BFI-2 approach in several respects but the most important difference reflects the extent to which lexical content is incorporated. The standard BFI-2 items incorporate many personality-descriptive adjectives and phrases. Reflecting this approach, our four-item Honesty-Humility facet scale incorporates clear lexical descriptors such as sincere, genuine, humble, cunning, and arrogant. By contrast, Lee et al.'s items do not contain any such descriptors (see their Footnote 6) but instead focus on whether someone would perform dishonest behaviors in hypothetical situations. It might be easy to develop a reasonably independent BFI-2 Honesty-Humility scale if lexical descriptors are excluded, but otherwise it is surprisingly difficult. We therefore discourage researchers who value the lexical approach to personality traits from using their ad hoc scale.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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