

Name and Personality: Is There a Similarity Between You and Others with The Same Name?

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ABSTRACT

Previously, researchers have determined that people tend to attribute certain personality traits with certain names. For this reason, we conducted a research study to determine whether or not a person's name actually has an effect on their personality. We surveyed people with the given name "Ryan" and asked them to take the HEXACO personality trait, which tests for six traits: honesty, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. We averaged our sample's results for each trait and compared them with the HEXACO medians for each trait in the general population. We hypothesized that if name indeed has an impact on personality, people with the same name would have distinctly disparate trait scores than the general population. We found that between our "Ryan" sample and the general population, there was a significant difference in scores for five of six personality traits. Compared to the general population, Ryans are more likely to be more honest, less emotional, less extraverted, more agreeable, and less conscientious. The sixth HEXACO trait, openness to experience, has no statistical significance. Because five of six traits had significance, we were able to conclude that names are likely to have an influence on personality traits.

Background

From birth to death, an individual's given name remains intertwined with their identity. When asked questions such as "Who Are You" or "Who Am I", 63% of college students explicitly referenced their names (Bugental and Zelen, 1950), indicating a strong tie between one's name to their identity. This psychological link raises the question of whether names can influence identity so much that it can impact personality traits.

One's sense of self, whether in the form of self-concept, self-esteem, self-knowledge, or social identity, has been shown to manifest in one's behavior and lifestyle. People make decisions and judgements based on beliefs about themselves, which ultimately manifests in their social behavior. People's dispositions determine what situations they elect to enter or avoid, thus shaping the rest of their identity over time.

Since one's name may affect one's self-concept and therefore their social identity, is it safe to hypothesize that people with the same name tend to have the same characteristics? Indeed, it has been found that other people tend to consistently judge names to be higher or lower in certain personality traits based on the name's phonemes (Sidhu, Deschamps, Bourdage, and Pexman, 2019). For example, sonorant names such as Mona and Owen are rated as being higher in Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Names with voiceless stop phonemes such as Katie and Curtis were rated higher in extroversion. Though other people tend to associate certain names with certain personality traits, whether this is true intrapersonally is not necessarily the case. We hypothesized that one's name does have an impact on one's personality traits.

Research Design

To prove whether one's name has an impact on their personality, we set out to ascertain whether differences in personality traits in people with the same name versus the general population can be attributed to their name.

Participants. In this study, we took one of the most popular boy names, Ryan, and posted a survey on Reddit for voluntary participants named Ryan (nicknames and similar names were excluded from this study). We asked for the participant’s age, ethnicity, and email, before requiring them to take the HEXACO personality test and submitting their results. We originally received 29 responses from our Google form, but then narrowed it down to 24 participants who took part in this study. Participants were excluded if they failed attention checks, submitted their results in an intelligible format, or if we were unable to confirm if their given name was Ryan. Our final sample included 22 white participants, 4 Asian participants, 2 of two or more ethnicities, and 1 who chose not to disclose their ethnicity. The average age of our sample was 20.25, and the median was 18.

Procedure. The HEXACO personality test model was used for its measurement of six major dimensions of personality: Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness (versus Anger), Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience. We used this model of measurement over popular alternatives such as the big-five personality assessment and Myer Briggs’s 16 personality test because of its attentiveness checks and specific values and subvalues that makes for easier analysis. Participants took the test online through the official website: hexaco.org. They completed a 100-question statement-based personality inventory. Each question asked the participant to rate themselves on how much they agreed with a statement, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. These evaluations then converted into a numerical format with decimals that ranged from 1-5 (1 meaning the participant scored low on the given trait). An example statement is: “I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me”. These self-report measures of HEXACO traits have been shown to correspond with peer-reports (Lee, K., & Ashton, M. C., 2018).

We examined whether or not people with the name Ryan has a significant difference in personality values for any of the six traits that the HEXACO model measures by using a one sample T-test comparing the sample personality values of our 24 participants and the median values the general public as provided by the official HEXACO website for all six personality traits. Since the sample size used by HEXACO to obtain these values is extremely large, it is safe to assume that the distribution is relatively normal, thereby permitting the use of the median value as opposed to the mean value, since both would be around the same.

Results

To answer our question of whether one’s name influences one’s personality, we devised a study to discern whether people with the same name have similar personality traits. We collected and averaged our participants’ six HEXACO traits. We then collected data from the official HEXACO website for the 50th percentile for each trait, taken from large samples of male and female Canadian students. Then, we conducted statistical analysis in the form of a two tailed T-test and compared the resulting T-value for each trait to our critical T-value of 2.06866.

Table 1. Sample and population data for six HEXACO traits

	H	E	X	A	C	O
Sample mean	3.43	2.90	2.89	3.37	2.94	3.39
Population median	3.22	3.34	3.50	3.00	3.47	3.31
Sample T-values	2.12	-3.26	-5.35	3.44	-4.17	0.59

Based on our sample T-value, we drew conclusions on whether the difference between our sample means and the population median was significant for each trait. We also interpreted what the significance meant in terms of personality traits of people named ‘Ryan’.

Table 2. Statistical significance and interpretation.

Honesty	Emotionality	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Openness to experience
Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant	Significant	Not Significant
More honest	Less Emotional	Less Extraverted	More Agreeable	Less Conscientious	No Difference

Table 3. Data for boxplot of sample population for six HEXACO traits.

	Minimum	Q1	Q3	Maximum
Honesty	2.50	3.11	3.65	4.38
Emotionality	1.81	2.25	3.43	4.13
Extraversion	1.81	2.60	3.27	3.94
Agreeableness	2.19	3.14	3.71	4.25
Conscientiousness	1.25	2.68	3.28	4.19
Openness to Experience	2.38	2.86	3.95	4.94

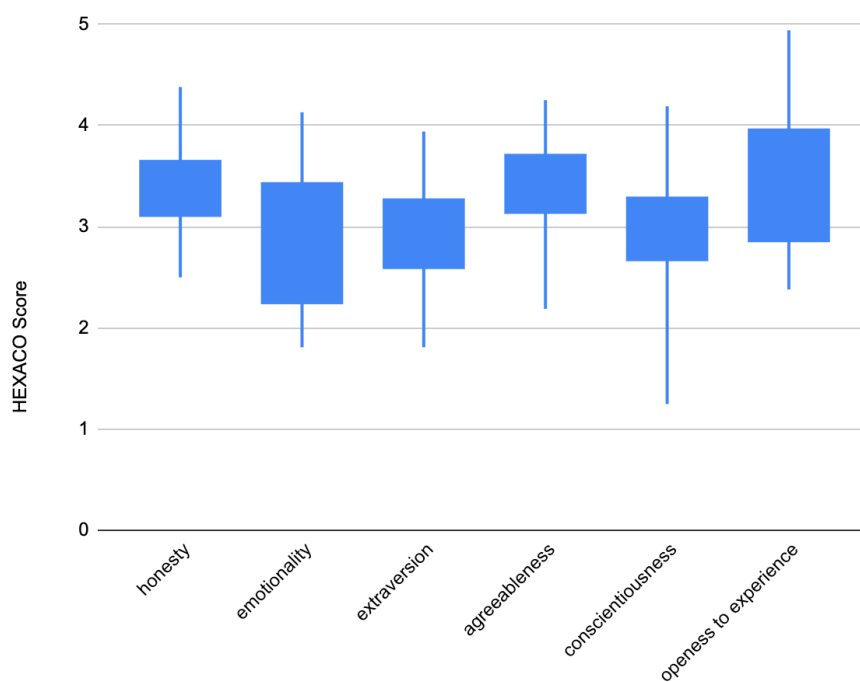


Figure 1. Boxplot of sample population for six HEXACO traits

Discussion

The results of our data analysis demonstrated that people named 'Ryan' were more likely to be similar to each other than the general population, suggesting that names have an impact on shaping one's personality. This is consistent with our hypothesis prior to the study.

For the boxplot as depicted in *Figure 1*, conclusions for each of six personality traits can be determined by the shape of the box and tail of each respective box plot. The largest boxes in the figure correspond with emotionality and openness to experience, suggesting that there is more variation within those two data sets. Those with smaller boxes, such as honesty, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness has less overall variation in the data set. Excluding conscientiousness, the other five personality traits have relatively tame tails that suggest that the range of the data does not reach to the extremes. For conscientiousness, the tail towards the bottom seems to be significantly longer than the rest of the data, which could be an indicator to a potential outlier within the data set.

According to the HEXACO six personality scale, people with higher honesty scales tend to avoid manipulation for personal gain, are generally more rule-oriented, are less motivated by wealth and care less about self-importance. People with less emotionality are less afraid of physical harm, less affected by their emotions and generally feel emotionally detached from others. Having less extraversion usually associates with less emotionality, as people who are more introverted tend to feel awkward when given the social spotlight, indifferent to social activity, and are generally less lively. This could be attributed to where we got our sample from, but this will be further elaborated on in our limitations. Next, having a higher agreeableness scale suggests that a person is more willing to compromise, rarely judges others, and can control their temper with relative ease. Being less conscientious usually associates with people who are less orderly, and are keen on thinking on the fly while avoiding tasks that are too challenging. Finally, there is no difference in the scale for openness to experience. A high score for this area is associated with a love for creative pursuits and a desire for seeking art, nature, and unusual ideas, whereas a low score who find no such joy in artistic works. Since the population mean was 3.31, both Ryans and the population are similarly open to artistic expression.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the approach taken in this study. The first is the small sample size—24 may not be enough people to accurately represent every person named Ryan. The elimination of a few respondents exacerbated this problem as it further dwindled our sample size. Second is that our conclusion can not be generalized with all names; until further research is done with more different names, this conclusion can only be attributed to people with the name Ryan. Third, limiting our recruitment to Reddit may have also skewed the personality traits of our sample, as people who regularly check Reddit are usually associated with more introverted personalities. Fourth, as Ryan is considered to be a gender-neutral name, not accounting for gender could have led to some missed insights that may have affected the personalities of the sample. Our fifth limitation is that the name Ryan has Irish origins, resulting in 81.4% of people named Ryan to be white (My Name Stats). This can lead to bias, as people from the same culture tend to have similar personality traits. The last factor that could impact our research findings is the wide age range. Half of our participants were under the age of 18, so developing personalities may affect what our study is trying to research. Future research should separate participants into two groups, for example, one including people under the age of 20 and the other group over 20. This would reveal whether the stage in one's personality development has an impact on our hypothesis.

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