

# Comment on "The claim that personality is more important than intelligence in predicting important life outcomes has been greatly exaggerated"

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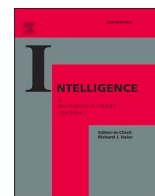
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## Comment on “The claim that personality is more important than intelligence in predicting important life outcomes has been greatly exaggerated”

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### ABSTRACT

We comment on the publication by Zisman and Ganzach (2022). They conduct a replication of one of our earlier papers: Borghans, Golsteyn, Heckman, and Humphries (2016). Replications are valuable and Zisman and Ganzach's (2022) analysis is an interesting and important contribution in its own right. However, their attempt at replication puts emphasis on one of the findings in our work and disregards its main message. In this comment, we restate the main message of our work and consider Zisman and Ganzach's (2022) findings from this perspective.

Zisman and Ganzach (2022), hereafter ZG, conduct a replication of Borghans et al. (2016), hereafter BGHH. ZG use two out of the four datasets that BGHH use, and four additional datasets. ZG apply different measures of intelligence, personality, and life outcomes than BGHH do. They find that their measures of intelligence are more predictive of life outcomes than personality, which supports the claim in the title of their work.

Replications are valuable and ZG's analysis is an interesting and important contribution in its own right. However, their attempt at replication puts emphasis on one of the findings in BGHH, which we qualified, and disregards its main message. In this comment, we restate the main message of our work and consider ZG's findings from this perspective.

In BGHH, we investigate what grades and achievement tests measure. We show that grades and scores on achievement tests, notably the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), are widely used in the literature as measures of cognition. The main point of our paper is that grades and scores on achievement tests are generally poor measures of intelligence because they are partly a consequence of personality. Because both intelligence and personality predict life outcomes, grades and achievement tests are generally better predictors of life outcomes than “pure” measures of intelligence.

This central message is disregarded by ZG.

First, ZG use the AFQT as a measure of intelligence in one of their

analyses. A main message of our work is that this should not be done because achievement tests are determined by intelligence and personality. ZG's findings that the AFQT is a better predictor of life outcomes than personality is not surprising in this light and in fact is in line with our work. ZG disregard our central message when writing that they “preferred relying on the AFQT because it was available for most of the participants, whereas BGHH[’s] measure [of intelligence] was available only for 12% of them.” (p. 2). Later on in the paper, ZG write: “BGHH view that the AFQT is an ‘achievement’ test and the other five tests are intelligence tests. But this narrow view of intelligence is not the standard view in most studies of the relationship between intelligence and success, which view achievement tests as valid measures of intelligence” (P5). The main message of our work is that the AFQT should not be used as a measure of intelligence. This is not a narrow view of intelligence, but the main insight of our work.

Second, ZG claim that we “argue for the superiority of personality over intelligence as a predictor of important life outcomes” (p. 1). In our analysis, personality indeed happens to be more important than IQ when predicting life outcomes, but this side-result is not our central message. We explicitly add the extensive caveat that “the relative importance of IQ and personality varies across datasets. This variation is likely driven by differences in the measures used, the choice of the measures, the populations considered, and the circumstances under which tests are taken [...] The differences may also be driven by the availability of

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outcomes in each dataset, because different outcomes most likely place relatively more or less importance on IQ and personality. [...] Despite variation across datasets, consistent patterns emerge. Personality is a powerful predictor for most life outcomes across all datasets. Grades and achievement tests are more predictive of adult outcomes than IQ” (p. 13357). We are not surprised to see that the relative importance of IQ is different in ZG’s analyses than in ours. ZG use different measures of personality and intelligence than we do. We use Raven Progressive Matrices, arguably one of the purest measures of intelligence, and tests developed to measure IQ. Their measure of intelligence is strongly affected by personality and is not a pure measure of intelligence. In addition, they use two out of the four datasets which we used and four datasets we did not investigate.

Whether personality or intelligence is more important in predicting life outcomes is an important research question. ZG add interesting new evidence to this line of research. This comment on their work does not intend to disregard or devalue these findings. Their work—based on

measures of intelligence that are affected by personality—in fact confirms our work on the power of personality. Their work supports our claims rather than refutes them. It corroborates our message that scores on achievement tests should not be used as measures of intelligence because they are partly determined by personality.

#### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

None.

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