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Comment on Hogan and Foster: The future is here

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This response to Hogan and Foster's (2016) rethinking of personality refutes their claim that both neuroticism and personality psychology are meaningless. Paradoxically, they also argue that traits are meaningful if they predict outcomes, which in particular the neuroticism personality trait does best of all, as outlined in our comment. Moreover, their defeatist perspective on personality psychology is contrasted with several promising developments, including support for the five factors outside of their lexical roots, and alternative theories to explain personality trait covariance without latent trait factors. In this short literature overview personality psychology is presented as a highly diverse and progressive field, which we believe to have a meaningful future ahead.

Keywords: neuroticism, emotional stability, normality, fitness indicator, network perspective

In their rethinking of personality, Hogan and Foster (2016) cover a wide range of topics, but in this comment we only focus on four of them that are within the scope of our research lines.

Hogan and Foster (2016) conclude that both neuroticism and current personality psychology are meaningless. We would like to encourage them to reconsider their position. In our opinion, neuroticism is the backbone of personality (Jeronimus, 2015), and personality is the nexus of psychology in which all other topics come together (Benet-Martinez et al., 2014; Larsen & Buss., 2013). In this comment we aim to stress that i) neuroticism is meaningful and useful. Moreover, we outline that ii) personality psychology is alive and kicking, iii) Hogan and Foster overlooked support for the Big Five traits (neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness) outside of their lexical roots (John, Robins, & Pervin, 2008), and iv) the literature contains alternative theories to explain personality trait covariance beyond the conventional latent trait perspective.

First, personality theory emerged to help theorists understand mental disorders and abnormal behaviour, because the concept of that what constitutes normal is required to judge what is abnormal (Dumont, 2010; Larsen & Buss, 2013). Personality traits index most consistent between-person differences in the normal ranges of thoughts, feelings, physiology, and actions across time and situations, within a given culture or subpopulation (John et al., 2008). Thus, one's characteristic levels of feelings of anxiety and depression are part of personality as facet traits within the neuroticism domain (Riese, Ormel, Aleman, Servaas, & Jeronimus, 2015). Whereas a sudden significant rise in anxiety or depression without a relevant trig-

gering context (i.e., the death of a partner, or diagnosis of a serious illness) or with a persistent course trajectory may be clinically diagnosed as a mental disorder (DSM-5, APA, 2013).

High neuroticism is the strongest and most commonly used predictor for, among others, the development of all common mental disorders and their symptoms (Jeronimus, Kotov, Riese, & Ormel, 2016), as well as somatic health service use, social, educational, occupational functioning, wealth, well-being, mating success, and longevity (Cuijpers, Smit, Penninx, de Graaf, Ten Have, & Beekman, 2010; Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007; Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). Hogan and Foster (2016) argue that the meaningfulness of traits is defined by the outcomes they can predict (p. 40). Based on the reviewed evidence above, partly mentioned in their paper, one may expect they would embrace neuroticism, rather than evaluate it as meaningless. Paradoxically, and despite all this, Hogan and Foster even postulate that "seeking acceptance, status, and meaning is biologically mandated; being neurotic is not" (p. 39). They thus ignore the known genetic (Nivard, Middeldorp, Dolan, & Boomsma, 2015; Realo et al., 2016) and neurobiological (Panksepp & Biven, 2012; Shackman, Tromp, Stockbridge, Kaplan, Tillman, & Fox, 2016) basis of neuroticism, and they ignore the associations with health and biosocial roles including partnering and parenthood (e.g., Bleidorn et al., 2013), which suggests that neuroticism is not only a central trait from a biological perspective (also see Reale, Reader, Sol, McDougall & Dingemans, 2007; Smith & Blumstein, 2008; Wolf & Weissing, 2012), but may even be a general fitness indicator (Miller, 2001; Buss, 2012).

Second, although we support Hogan and Foster's passionate plea for theories to explain personality taxonomies, we do not share their defeatist perspective on personality psychology at large. Next to the predictive power of per-

sonality traits for lifespan development and outcomes (Caspi et al., 2016) several promising developments in personality psychology can be observed (see Benet-Martinez et al., 2014).

Third, Hogan and Foster (2016) largely overlooked available evidence for the Big Five trait factors outside of their lexical roots, including objective measures in extensive field work (e.g., behavioural residue, see Gosling, 2008), laboratory studies (Wrzus & Mehl, 2015), and especially ecological momentary assessment techniques that enrich our understanding of personality processes at the intra-individual level (Van der Krieke et al., 2015; Wrzus, Wagner, & Riediger, 2015). There is also an increasing understanding of personality based behaviour and differential reactions to situations (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015; Laceulle, Jeronimus, Van Aken, & Ormel, 2015; Ormel, VonKorff, Jeronimus, & Riese, 2017; Shackman et al., 2016) and numerous creative study designs that show how people with specific personality trait profiles tend to select themselves into environments that match these propensities (e.g., Ciani, Capiluppi, Veronese, & Sartori, 2007; Jeronimus et al., 2014; Rentfrow, Gosling, Jokela, Stillwell, Kosinski, & Potter, 2013).

Fourth, their debate about the latent trait perspective would have been enriched by a discussion of several proposed alternative explanations for the high probability of possessing a specific combination of trait characteristics (Ormel et al., 2017). The network perspective (Cramer et al., 2012), for example, holds that the synchronous development of personality components arises from shared external forces (environments) and developmental pressures including genetic influences (cf. Jeronimus, 2015; Kendler, Zachar, & Craver, 2011). In this scenario, latent factors are not required to explain the clustering of co-occurring characteristics in a personality configuration (Kruis & Maris, 2016). Taken together, our short literature overview suggests that personality psychology is a highly diverse and progressive field, which we believe to have a meaningful future ahead.

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