

Alex Swob

Summary

Can the five-factor model be applied to animal personality? If so, does it need any augmentations or omissions to accommodate the difference between human personality and animal personality (e.g. a four-factor model)? Lastly, can the prospective application of the five-factor model towards animal personality highlight or explicate issues within evolutionary biology and psychology?

These are the questions that Gosling and John try to answer in their 1999 article: "Personality Dimensions in Nonhuman animals: A Cross-Species Review." Their review includes 19 factor analytic studies which includes 12 different animal species. Their conclusions would have been astonishing 150 years ago, or even 50 years ago when the behaviorist's held the political high-ground in academia. But, to new readers, it might appear to be common sense.

Their first discovery was that most, if not all, animals showed behaviours corresponding to Neuroticism, Extroversion, and Agreeableness. In other words, even octopuses can be introverts when they go hide in their cave instead of interacting with others; or they could be neurotic by shooting ink at everyone (a paranoid octopus...interesting).

However, the studies were inconclusive about openness. Although some animals are more apt to wander and explore, there is not enough evidence available to make this connection (e.g. there is no art, music, or various societies to be open to). Perhaps agreeableness and extroversion are the best descriptions (instead of openness).

So, 3 of the 5 are found in animals. One of the five is inconclusive. The last one (Conscientiousness) is NOT found in many animals. In fact, the only animal that shows this personality trait is the chimpanzee. As de Waals noted, chimpanzees are good at understanding others' goal-oriented behaviour, and also good at deliberating, planning, etc. As such, it would make sense that conscientious traits, such as restraint and reflection, would be normal for chimpanzees. But, for other less evolved animals, this type of reflection is hard to come by. It makes sense; most animals cannot consciously reflect upon their actions to such a large degree necessary for conscientiousness.

There are two other characteristics that might supplement the five-factor model: Dominance and Activity. Nearly half of the studies showed that Dominance plays a huge role in nonhuman animal personality. They hinted that it might be appropriate to use a 6 factor model; however, they left it up to the reader whether Dominance would be better explained by a combination of low N, high E, and low A. Whatever the categorisation, Dominance plays a larger role in animal personality (or so they say).

The authors agreed that Activity, although relevant for children during play, etc., should not be a stand-alone factor, especially since only 2 of the 19 analyses showed this trait as

important. Lastly, these discoveries make sense from an evolutionary standpoint. Animals lower on the evolutionary tree only share 3 of the personality traits (since two of them require higher rationality, self-reflection, and cultural artifacts). But, this is still pretty enlightening. 3 out of 5 traits are shared with most animals (including octopuses). This makes sense since we descend from common ancestors.

Once we get to chimpanzees, there are 4 out of 5 traits which we share. This also makes sense, since chimpanzees are highly intelligent, and thus can have personalities with conscientiousness involved. Perhaps chimpanzees could have openness as well....we'll just have to wait until they discover art and music.