The value of self-respect for moral and social behaviour: Development of a trait self-respect measure

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Abstract

Objective: Research into self-respect is scarce, possibly because self-respect and self-esteem are often treated as interchangeable in popular culture. However, there is evidence that self-respect is a component of global self-esteem that is attached to moral, principled and honourable behaviour, highlighting its unique role in predicting moral behaviour and well-being. The paper reports on the development of the trait self-respect scale (SRS) to stimulate research into this concept.

Design: Following pilot work to develop the items, cross-sectional survey and lab-based data were collected to validate the SRS.

Methods: Seven convenience adult samples (total N=841) completed the SRS online or in person alongside other validated scales. One sample (N=115) also underwent lab-based tasks measuring moral self-concept and cheating.

Results: Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a one-factor structure. The SRS showed good internal consistency (α>.8 in all samples), convergent and discriminant validity. It correlated significantly with self-esteem (r=.40-.61), and with agreeableness, Machiavellianism, positive norm, moral identity internalisation and symbolisation (N=121), moral-based self-esteem, self-control, number of moral trait adjectives recalled in self-related processing (N=115) and religious status (N=230), adjusting for self-esteem. It did not correlate with amount of social comparison, or with competence and social self-esteem, adjusting for self-regard. Moreover, self-respect significantly predicted forms of pro-relationship behaviour, pro-social behaviour (N=114), cheating (self-reported and observed) and well-being (N=81) over and above self-esteem.

Conclusion: Findings support the need to consider trait self-respect in investigations of well-being and moral and social functioning, and contribute to debates on the value of self-esteem.