Reification of the general psychopathology factor draws attention away from environmental causes of psychopathology

Reification (the act of changing something abstract into something concrete) in psychiatry is often understood in the realm of illness categories, for example when naming and explaining are confused for classifications from the diagnostic and statistical manual for mental disorders. Dimensional models of psychopathology have the promise to prevent reification as they do not necessarily invoke illness categories. However, psychopathology dimensions may get reified too, as I will illustrate in this talk for the increasingly popular *general psychopathology factor* (the *p*-factor). The *p*-factor is the product of a rich body of empirical work that models the covariance of transdiagnostic psychopathology symptoms with factor-analytic approaches. As such, the *p*-factor represents a statistical abstraction (a new dimension in the variable space) which, if the model fits well, *describes* how much symptom load someone experiences. In the literature, however, the *p*-factor is explicitly *concretised* as an underlying person-internal vulnerability causing high symptom load. Such reification of the *p*-factor presents a decontextualized 'one size fits all' explanation for persons with stable and considerable psychological complaints, thereby drawing attention away from environmental causes for these complaints. I will discuss the scientific and clinical implications of reifying the *p*-factor and provide some suggestions for improvement.

Merlijn Olthof
Faculty of behavioural and social sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen.
Philosophy of the social sciences, Radboud University, Nijmegen.
Merlijn.olthof@ru.nl

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