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Resource control strategies and personality traits

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ABSTRACT

Resource control strategies refer to the approaches that individuals adopt in order to acquire material resources and status. The present study examined whether individuals who adopt particular resource control strategies would report different personality traits. This was accomplished by asking 966 Jewish Israeli community participants to complete self-report measures concerning their resource control strategies and their personality traits. The results showed that individuals who adopted particular resource control strategies often reported different personality traits than those who adopted other strategies. For example, those who adopted a bistrategic control strategy reported relatively high levels of the Dark Triad of personality, modest levels of openness, neuroticism, and extraversion, as well as low levels of agreeableness. Discussion focuses on the implications of these results for understanding the connection between resource control strategies and personality traits.

1. Introduction

The attainment of goals is a fundamental aspect of life that often involves the acquisition of material resources and status (see Hawley, 2006 for a review). According to resource control theory (Hawley, 2002), individuals can adopt either coercive or prosocial resource control strategies. Coercive strategies for resource control are derived from traditional models of agonistic social dominance and involve behaviors that are direct, aversive, and immediate (e.g., using physical force or threats of force to take resources from someone else). In contrast, prosocial strategies for resource control involve indirect attempts to gain access to resources through the use of reciprocity, cooperation, unsolicited help, and alliance formation. It is important to note that coercive strategies are generally employed without consideration for the goals or motivations of other individuals in one's social environment, whereas prosocial strategies use a cooperative approach and generally attempt to move away from zero-sum strategies and find ways for both individuals to benefit from interactions to some extent (Hawley, 2011).

Although prosocial and coercive resource control strategies have important differences with regard to their execution, resource control theory argues that they are generally serving the same basic function (i.e., controlling resources) and are actually 'two sides of the same coin' (Hawley, 2002). Resource control theory attempts to capture the complexity of resource control strategies by using the combination of coercive and prosocial strategies to identify more specific resource control strategies (see Hawley, Johnson, Mize, & McNamara, 2007 for an extended discussion). This is typically accomplished by focusing on the relative degree of Resource Control Strategy employment. More specifically, the distributions for coercive and prosocial resource control strategies are divided into tertiles and the placement of a particular individual in each of these distributions is identified. This approach results in five types of resource control strategies: *bistrategic controllers* (those who are in the top tertiles of both coercive and prosocial strategies), *coercive controllers* (those who are in the top tertile for coercive strategies only), *prosocial controllers* (those who are in the top tertile for prosocial strategies only), *noncontrollers* (those who are in the lowest tertile of both coercive and prosocial strategies), and *typical controllers* (those who are in the middle tertile for one or both strategies). These resource control strategies have been identified using self-reports (e.g., Hawley, 2003a) and observer reports (Hawley, 2003b; Hawley, Little, & Card, 2007).

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Coercive controllers use strategies that are direct and aversive (e.g., physical force). It is not surprising that these individuals tend to be less agreeable, less morally mature, and more aggressive than others (Hawley, 2003a,b). Prosocial controllers use strategies that are less direct (e.g., reciprocal helping) but are ultimately self-serving and instrumental (Hawley, Shorey, & Alderman, 2009). Prosocial controllers are perceived as agreeable and generally liked by their peers (e.g., Hawley, 2002, 2003a; Hawley, Little, & Card, 2008). Bistrategic controllers use a blend of coercive and prosocial strategies which leads them to experience both favorable and unfavorable outcomes. However, bistrategic controllers tend to display social and physical aggression (Hawley et al., 2007) which may explain their relatively low levels of peer approval (Hawley et al., 2008). Noncontrollers employ low levels of both coercive and prosocial strategies which may explain their weak connections to their peer groups and their lack of control over outcomes (Hawley, 2003b, 2010). Overall, bistrategic controllers have been shown to be the most successful at controlling resources followed by prosocial and coercive controllers, with the typical controllers and noncontrollers being less successful (see Hawley, 2011 for a review). The existing body of research supports the idea that coercive and prosocial strategies are effective and this is especially true if they are used in combination (i.e., bistrategic control).

The existing evidence clearly suggests that different resource control strategies are associated with a variety of psychological and social outcomes such as aggression (e.g., Hawley, 2011). One particularly interesting difference concerns the personality traits possessed by individuals who employ each Resource Control Strategy. For example, it has been shown that bistrategic controllers exhibit Machiavellian tendencies, prosocial controllers report high levels of agreeableness, and coercive controllers are viewed as being aggressive (see Hawley, 2011 for a review). We believe that it may be beneficial to examine an even broader array of personality traits and their connections with resource control strategies because this may provide additional insight into the reasons that individuals employ particular resource control tactics.

1.1. Overview and predictions

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether individuals who rely on different resource control strategies also differ in terms of their personality traits. This was accomplished by asking participants to complete measures concerning their resource control strategies as well as self-reports of their personality traits. We expected our results to replicate previous results such that individuals who employ bistrategic resource control strategies would report high levels of Machiavellianism and prosocial controllers would report high levels of agreeableness. However, we wanted to extend previous findings concerning the link between resource control strategies and personality traits by examining the Big Five personality dimensions (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness) and the Dark Triad of personality (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). We expected that bistrategic and coercive controllers would report high levels of the Dark Triad personality traits because these traits have been found to be associated with a generally manipulative and malicious interpersonal style (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). We also expected that bistrategic and coercive controllers would report low levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness because it has been suggested that individuals who employ these strategies tend to be interpersonally hostile and lack the ability to delay gratification (Hawley, 1999, 2006). Prosocial controllers were expected to report high levels of agreeableness and low levels of each of the Dark Triad personality traits. Our rationale for this prediction was that prosocial controllers avoid antagonistic encounters which would be consistent with high levels of agreeableness (Hawley, 1999, 2006). However, the Dark Triad traits share an antagonistic interpersonal style so it is unlikely that prosocial controllers would report relatively high levels of these personality traits (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002). We expected typical controllers and noncontrollers to report low levels of the Dark Triad personality traits. The basis for this prediction was that each of the Dark Triad traits shares a willingness to manipulate and exploit others which is inconsistent with the approach that characterizes typical controllers and noncontrollers.

Previous studies concerning resource control strategies have found that men and women report similar strategies (e.g., Hawley et al., 2008). However, sex differences have consistently emerged for the Big Five dimensions of agreeableness and neuroticism such that women consistently score higher than men on these dimensions (e.g., Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001). Sex differences for extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness have been either inconsistent or negligible in size (e.g., Costa et al., 2001). For the Dark Triad, men have consistently been found to report higher levels of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (e.g., Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010). As a result of the sex differences in personality traits that have emerged in previous studies, we included sex as a moderator in the present study. We expected that men who employed bistrategic and coercive resource control strategies would report the lowest levels of agreeableness and neuroticism as well as the highest levels of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Our sample consisted of 966 Jewish Israeli community participants (465 men, 501 women) who responded to requests posted in various public areas (e.g., clubs, hotels, restaurants, shops) that asked for volunteers to take part in a study concerning personality and behaviors. Participants were unmarried young adults in their mid-20s (range 20–35 years; $M = 24.31$, $SD = 2.85$) with an average of 12.78 years of formal education (ranged from 10 to 22 years, $SD = 1.38$). Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were not paid or compensated for their participation. Participants completed measures of the Big Five personality dimensions and the Dark Triad personality traits – along with other measures that are not relevant to the present study (e.g., self-esteem level) – during an individual laboratory session. Participants returned to the laboratory 11 days later for a second laboratory session during which they completed a measure of resource control strategies along with other measures that were not relevant to the present study (e.g., consumerism). All questionnaires were administered in Hebrew with the original English versions being translated using the back-translation method.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Resource control

The Resource Control Strategy Inventory (Hawley, 2006) was used to assess prosocial and coercive resource control strategies. This instrument consists of 12 items concerning prosocial resource control strategies (6 items; e.g., "I access resources [material, social, informational] by promising something in return" [$\alpha = .79$]) and coercive resource control strategies (6 items; e.g., "I access resources [material, social, informational] by dominating others" [$\alpha = .86$]). Respondents rated their level of agreement with each statement using scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Resource control strategies are considered to be a relative differential (e.g., Hawley & Little, 1999) so resource control