

Personality, Attitudinal Correlates and Difference in Sustainable Charitable Behavior

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Abstract

Our study investigated whether the Big-5 personality traits and attitudes such as social dominance and support for science were related to environmentally sustainable choices and behaviors. Most participants did not choose to write a letter supporting an environmental cause, but chose to donate to a sustainable cause. We found that participants who donated had significantly higher scores on Agreeableness and lower scores on Social Dominance Orientation than people who didn't. Participants who chose to donate rated their interest in politics as higher and reported greater support for science than those who did not donate.

Introduction

Agreeableness is a personality construct that is defined as being trusting, generous, sympathetic, cooperative, and not aggressive or cold (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann Jr., 2003). Previous research has found that Agreeableness is correlated with helping behaviors. Graziano, Habashi, Sheese, & Tobin (2007) found that people who scored high on Agreeableness were more willing to help a stranger than low scorers.

Social dominance orientation (SDO) refers to one's degree of preference for group-based hierarchies in which "superior" social groups dominate "inferior" groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, Bertram & Malle, 1994). Research has shown that socially dominant people are more likely to oppose social programs and environmental rights and are more likely to be conservative in their political views (Pratto, et al, 1994). Socially dominant people tend to see the world as a "competitive jungle" (Duckitt, Wagner, Du Plessis, & Birum, 2002), and they tend to be less Agreeable (Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje, & Zakrisson, 2004).

We investigated the relationship between the big-5 personality traits, attitudes (e.g., social dominance, views on science, and political orientation), and two environmentally sustainable behaviors related to protecting water resources. Research on personality in the domain of environmentally sustainable sociopolitical and prosocial behavior is insufficient; our study hopes to clarify some of the characteristics of people who are more likely to engage in sustainable altruism.

Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1:** Participants who score high on the Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO) will be less likely to donate to an environmental cause.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Participants who score high on the SDO will be less likely to write a letter to a government official supporting an environmental cause.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Participants who score high on Agreeableness and Conscientiousness on the Big-Five Personality Inventory will be more likely to write a letter supporting an environmental cause.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Participants with high scores on Agreeableness will be more likely to donate and to donate more money.

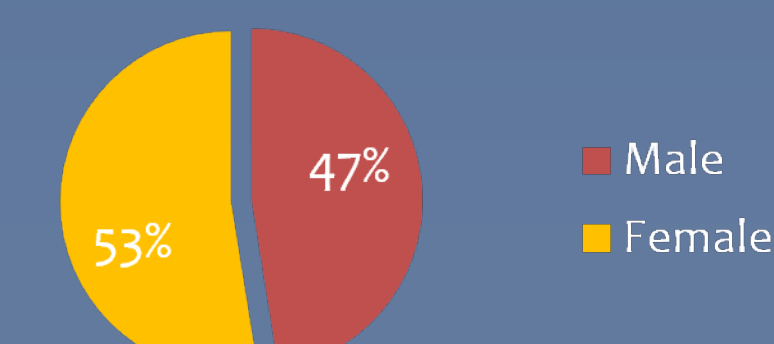
Methods

1. **Big-Five Personality Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentall, 1991)** - A value assessment scale with items adapted from the World Values Survey.
2. **Social Dominance Orientation Scale (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, Bertram & Malle, 1994)**- Predictor of hierarchy-enhancing attitudes and behavior.
3. **Message Framing** - Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two passages related to water resources in New York State. To assess whether message frames affected behaviors related to environmental sustainability.
 - a. Positively-framed message focused on the benefits of protecting water resources .
 - b. Negatively-framed message focused on the consequences of not protecting water resources.
4. **Donation Questionnaire** - Participants were told donations were being collected to print flyers to spread information about the importance of conserving water at their home campus.
 - a. Given choice to donate their allotted printing money and specified what percentage of their printing money they wanted to donate .
5. **Letter Choice** – Participants asked if they would like to write a letter to a local official about the importance of protecting water resources in New York
6. **Demographic Questionnaire** – Collected data on age, gender, ethnicity, class standing, country of origin, and comfort with English as a written, read, and spoken language.

Demographic Information

	Sample	Mean	Standard dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Male	n=53	25.58 yrs	6.56 yrs	21 yrs	53 yrs
Female	n=47	25.79 yrs	4.27 yrs	21 yrs	38 yrs
Total	N=100	25.68 yrs	5.58 yrs	21 yrs	53 yrs

Gender of Participants



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Results

Hypothesis 1: Participants who score high on Social Dominance Orientation Scale will be less likely to donate to an environmental cause.

- Participants who donated (M=40.66, SD=18.68) scored significantly lower on Social Dominance than people who didn't (M=47.8, SD=15.9), $t(97)=-1.99$, $p=.049$.
- We found a negative correlation between Social Dominance and donation amount, $r(59)=-.28$, $p=.03$.

Hypothesis 2: Participants who score high on Social Dominance Orientation Scale will be less likely to write a letter to a government official supporting an environmental cause.

- No significant difference was found between participants who chose to write a letter and those who did not on social dominance orientation.

Hypothesis 3: Participants who score high on Agreeableness and Conscientiousness will be more likely to write a letter supporting an environmental cause.

- No significant difference was found between participants who chose to write a letter and those who did not on any personality variables.

Hypothesis 4: Participants with high scores on Agreeableness will be more likely to donate and to donate more money.

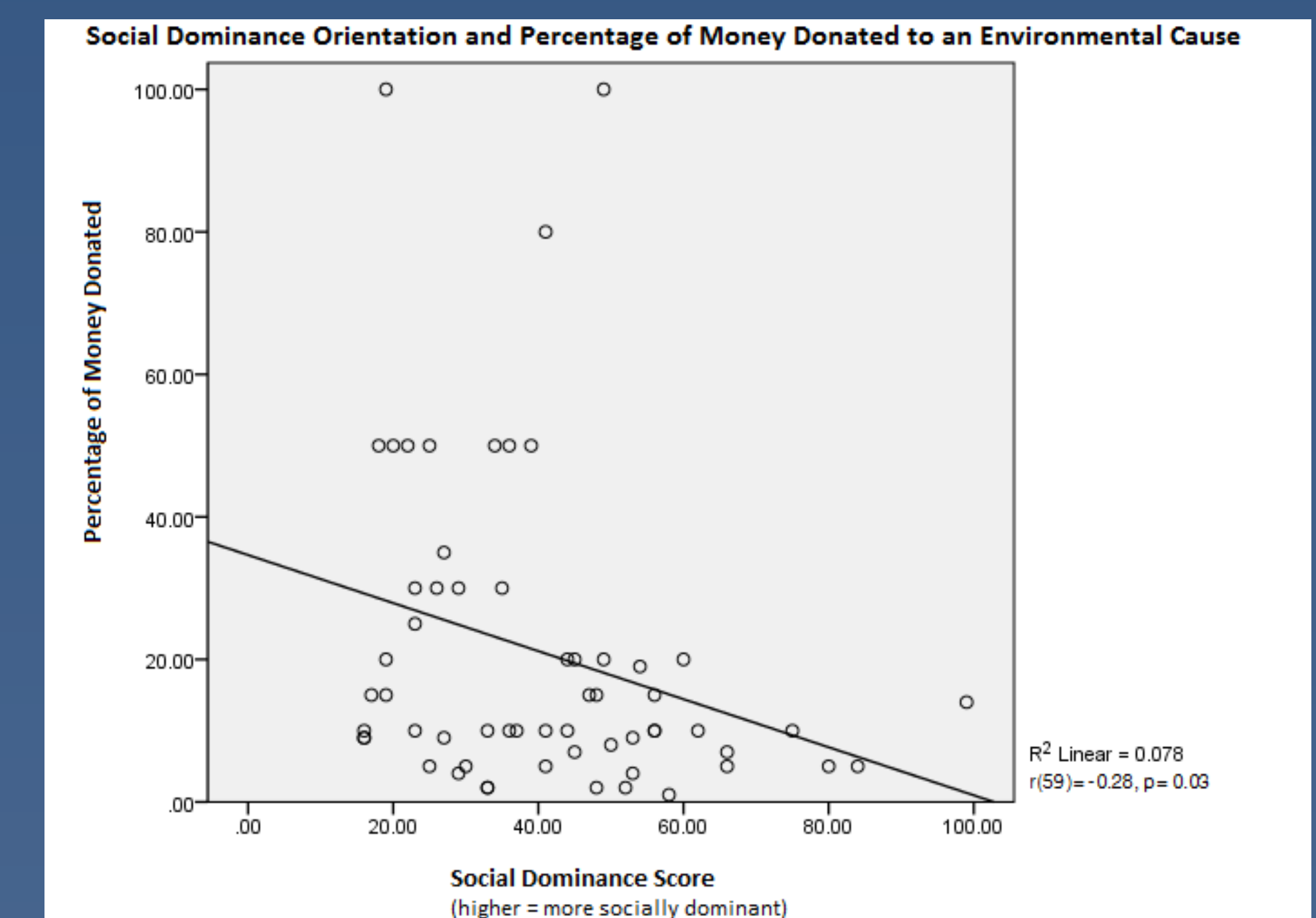
- Participants who donated (M=3.90, SD=.52) had significantly higher scores on Agreeableness than people who didn't (M=3.63, SD=.60), $t(97)=2.14$, $p=.035$.
- No correlation between higher scores on Agreeableness and donation amount.

Other findings:

- A majority of participants (n=58, 88%) offered to donate money from their printing allotment.

- Participants who chose to donate rated their interest in politics as higher (M=2.53, SD=.92) than those who did not (M=2.2, SD=.93), $t(97)=-1.79$, $p=.075$.

- Participants who chose to donate had significantly higher scores (M=45.6, SD=8.2) on a scale measuring support for science than those who didn't (M=41.0, SD=9.01), $t(97)=2.62$, $p=.010$.



Summary and Implications

- People who are more likely to engage in environmentally sustainable charitable behaviors are likely to be interested in science and politics, are Agreeable (empathetic, generous, and cooperative), and favor social equality.
- Certain personality traits may be related to passive pro-social and environmental sustainable behaviors (e.g., donating to an environmental cause), but not active sustainable behaviors (e.g., letter writing).
- People who scored high on Agreeableness were more likely to donate to an environmental cause than low scorers, this is in concordance with prior research.
 - Agreeable people were also more likely to be more extraverted, $r(59) = .281$, $p = .005$; more conscientious, $r(59) = .371$, $p < .00$; less neurotic, $r(59) = -.409$, $p < .00$; and more open, $r(59) = .280$, $p = .005$.
- Social Dominance Orientation was related to the choice to donate to an environmental cause and negatively correlated with the amount donated.
 - Socially dominant participants choosing to donate were less generous compared to their less socially dominant peers.
- Social Dominance found to be negatively correlated with Agreeableness, $r(59) = -.471$, $p < .00$
 - Socially dominant people in our sample were less likely to be generous or empathetic.
- Social Dominance was not found to be correlated with political orientation or interest in politics.
 - Those interested in politics were more likely to choose to donate.
- Those more likely to support science are more likely to donate to an environmental cause.

Limitations

- The sample size of letter writers was too small to see any differences on social dominance, personality variables, or attitudes.
 - We believe that most participants, even high scorers on Agreeableness, did not write a letter because they were worried about writing to an "official".
 - Participants might also have thought that writing a letter would be too time consuming or inconvenient.
- The lack of correlation between political orientation and social dominance was likely due to the sample's proclivity toward a moderate political orientation.

Future Directions

- Future iterations of this study should attempt to have a larger sample size, especially a larger sample of letter writers.
- Future research should address questions such as whether people who are socially dominant and anthropocentric are more likely to respond to environmental messages that are framed in an anthropocentric context.