HOT-BUTTON SOCIAL ISSUES: PERSONALITY PREDICTORS IN A COLLEGE STUDENT SAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Hot-Button Social Issues: Personality Predictors In a College Student Sample

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Although young voters are notorious for not formally taking part in the political process, they nonetheless typically voice strong opinions on a number of societal issues. How do individual personality traits relate to these opinions? Can an individual’s attitudes and opinions be predicted based on personality testing? The aim of the present study was to investigate the role that individual personality traits play in college students’ attitudes and opinions about certain “hot-button social issues.” The study participants were 114 undergraduate college students at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas (41 males; 72 females; one gender unspecified). The participants were first administered two widely utilized, standardized psychological tests: the NEO Big-Five personality inventory (NEO Big-Five) and the Right Wing Authoritarianism scale (RWA) for the purpose of measuring their respective personality traits. Next, the participants were administered a questionnaire (5-point Likert format) which measured their respective attitudes/opinions towards certain popular, controversial societal issues, specifically gun control, abortion, the legalization of marijuana and the death penalty. The psychological test scores/results and expressed attitudes toward these controversial issues (from the questionnaire) were then analyzed to ascertain the correlation, if any, between the personality
traits/variables manifested in the students’ NEO Big-Five and RWA results and their opinions expressed in the questionnaire. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was utilized toward this end. The objective of this research project was to investigate how a college student’s measured personality traits can predict his or her opinions/attitudes about controversial societal issues.

The findings of this study were generally not surprising. High RWA scorers self-reported/endorsed more conservative attitudes and opinions on the significant societal issues included in the study than their lower scoring counterparts (on the RWA).

The NEO Big-Five Openness to Experience scores also proved to be highly indicative of an individual's attitudes and opinions on three of the four hot-button issues: abortion, gun control and marijuana legalization.

Specifically, on the issue of abortion, pro-lifers scored higher than pro-choicers on RWA Aggression, Conventionalism and Submission. Pro-choicers scored higher than pro-lifers on the NEO Big-Five's Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and scored lower on Neuroticism.

On the issue of marijuana legalization, those favoring legalization scored higher on Openness to Experience on the NEO Big-Five and scored lower on Aggression, Conventionalism and Submission on the RWA.

On gun control, those favoring gun control scored higher on Openness on the NEO Big-Five and scored higher on Submission and lower on Aggression on the RWA.

Finally, on the death penalty, supporters predictably scored significantly higher on Aggression on the RWA than their anti-death penalty counterparts.

This research demonstrated that there was indeed a significant interaction between an individual college student's three RWA scales and his or her self-reported attitudes and opinions
on the hot-button social issues included in our study. The same significant interaction was also found between NEO Big Five Openness to Experience and Agreeableness scores and self-reported/endorsed attitudes and opinions on these issues. While these findings were not surprising and were ostensibly intuitive, the conclusions nonetheless shore up and help explain how individual personality traits translate into and predict actual endorsed opinions and attitudes on important social issues.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my two research advisors, Dr. Tony Bourgeois and Dr. Arnold LeUnes, for their guidance and wisdom throughout this process. The two are Professors of Psychology at Texas A&M University with outstanding credentials and accomplishments. It is worth mentioning that Dr. LeUnes came to me and encouraged me to take on this study. With that being said, I am beyond thankful for the opportunity given to me to participate in this research.

I feel extremely privileged to have had this opportunity, which has allowed me to learn under two prestigious professors at my university. It is obvious that the two have gone out of their way, and continue to do so, to ensure not only the success of this research but my own future academic endeavors as well. Once again, I would like to thank Dr. Bourgeois and Dr. LeUnes for the countless hours they have invested in my research and their limitless dedication to me as their student.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Although young voters are notoriously apathetic when it comes to actually voting, they nonetheless are frequently strongly opinionated on a host of societal issues, particularly on those that are either highly provocative or may directly affect them in some manner. The goal of the present study was to investigate the role that individual personality traits (as measured by the NEO Big-Five personality inventory and the Right Wing Authoritarianism scale) play in the formation and shaping, and ultimately the predictability, of college students’ attitudes and opinions about certain “hot-button social issues.”

While a significant amount of research has been conducted over the last half-century regarding the impact that personality traits have on political orientation and/or political choices, less research has been done on the relationship between an individual’s measured personality traits and his or her attitudes and opinions on particular significant societal issues. That was the goal of this research project - to determine the existence of a predictable relationship, if any, between measured personality traits and self-reported attitudes/opinions on meaningful social issues.

Our study consisted of administering the NEO Big-Five Personality Inventory, the Right Wing Authoritarian Scale and a questionnaire to 114 undergraduate students at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas (41 males, 72 females, one gender unspecified). The questionnaire presented definitive, provocative statements about marijuana legalization, gun control and the death penalty and asked the participants to indicate whether they strongly disagreed (1), were neutral (3), strongly agreed (5), or were somewhere in between (i.e. 2 or 4)
(Likert like scale). They were additionally asked whether they were either pro-choice or pro-life on the issue of abortion.

The vast majority of personality psychologists today subscribe to the Five-Factor Model of personality (FFM), in which human personality can be both summarized and reliably measured in terms of five distinct traits (the Big Five): Extraversion (vs. Introversion), Agreeableness (vs. Antagonism), Conscientiousness, Neuroticism (vs. Emotional Stability) and Openness to Experience (vs. Closedness to Experience). The FFM and the accompanying inventory (NEO Big-Five Personality Inventory) are widely accepted in the psychological research community and have demonstrated “substantial theoretical cogency, empirical support and social relevance” over years of use (Piedmont & Widiger, 2000, p. 162). Because of the inventory’s wide acceptance and historic research applicability and utility in the context of identifying and predicting opinions and attitudes, we utilized the inventory as a first step in our study. The inventory measured the participants’ respective Big Five personality traits and provided us with measured, quantified data for analysis.

Likewise for the RWA scale, the other widely utilized test that we administered. The scale, which measures an individual’s level of authoritarianism along three distinct personality/behavioral clusters- Submission, Aggression, and Conventionalism- provided us with highly useful measured, quantified data for analysis. Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is a personality and ideological variable studied in political, social and personality psychology and is measured by the RWA Scale. The scale uses a Likert scale for which participants respond to statements such as “What our country really needs is a strong and determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path.” Although the specific personality theory (RWA) and the accompanying scale was not introduced until 1981 by psychologist Bob Altemeyer, his
work was a reconceptualization/refinement of the psychological study on authoritarianism that arose following the spread of European Fascism (Hitler, Mussolini) which precipitated the Second World War.

Both of these tests (NEO Big-Five Personality Inventory and RWA scale) have been previously proven over a number of research studies to be helpful in both providing insight into the shaping of political and social attitudes and opinions and the ability to predict, with relative accuracy, an individuals’ specific attitudes and opinions on various political and social issues based upon his or her test results. These test results, combined with the questionnaire responses, allowed us to reach conclusions about how an individual’s measured personality traits relate to self-reported opinions and attitudes on the social issues included in our study.

It is a given that personality traits have long been utilized to generally identify political ideologies (and/or leanings). For example, as related to the general predictability of social and political attitudes and opinions, researchers have reached a general consensus, based upon the results of a number of studies, that NEO Big Five personality inventory scores can be used to generate consistent and replicable personality profiles of both conservatives and liberals.

RWA scores have arguably even been more useful (than NEO Big- Five Inventory scores) in identifying and predicting opinions on various social issues such as gay rights, homeless people, drug use, and abortion. Studies of the correlation of high RWA scores and corresponding attitudes/opinions have generally yielded expected results. For example, high RWA scorers endorse greater opposition to abortion and drug use and have more antipathy towards gays and the homeless than low RWA scorers (Duncan, Peterson, & Winter, 1997; Peterson, Doty, & Winter 1993).
But NEO Big-Five inventory scores have also been highly informative. In particular, based on a substantial body of cumulative research, it is now generally accepted that liberals will score significantly higher than conservatives on the Openness to Experience scale and that the comparative gap between liberals and conservatives is greater in the Openness to Experience trait than any other NEO Big Five trait. McCrae’s (1996) contention that “variations in experiential Openness are the major psychological determinant of political polarities” (p. 325) has been consistently proven over the last two decades of research. Less conclusive, but nonetheless important, is that conservatives typically score somewhat higher than liberals on Conscientiousness (NEO Big Five). Interestingly, both of these contrasts between liberals and conservatives (on Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness scores) are more distinct regarding attitudes/opinions pertaining to social as opposed to economic issues (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008).

Based on prior research, we can reasonably expect that people who score high on Openness to Experience will self-report more positive attitudes and views on issues such as gay and transgender rights and the legalization of marijuana. This makes intuitive sense as such high scorers have been found to be more tolerant of diversity, have broader cultural interests, and are more imaginative and curious than low scorers (Schoen & Schumann, 2007). Conversely, low scorers on Openness to Experience are more rigid, close-minded and are more likely to be authoritarian (McCrae, 1996).

Far less evidence has ever been found that any of the other three Big Five personality traits are significantly or consistently related to an individual’s political ideology. Nevertheless, particularly relevant to our present study is the fact that high scorers on RWA Agreeableness are
more likely to hold and endorse traditional values, which may predispose these persons to be more inclined to be authoritarian and conservative (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz & Knafo, 2002).

Researchers have additionally found that high scores on the RWA scale were related to the holding of traditional attitudes regarding gender-role identity, rating political events concerning women as less important, rating feminists and women as having relatively more power and influence in society (than they actually have), and anti-abortion views based on conventional morality, submission to authority and punitiveness towards women seeking abortions (Duncan, Peterson, & Winter, 1997).

Research has additionally indicated that significant ideological (left versus right) differences in individuals may be rooted in the basic Big Five personality dimensions. These have been found to be “relatively stable individual differences in psychological needs, motives, and orientations toward the world” (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008 pg. 807). Remarkably, a longitudinal study by Block and Block (2006) found that many of the personality differences between adult liberals and conservatives were actually already present as far back as the respective individual’s pre-school years, based on perceptions by teachers. The two Big Five personality dimensions that overwhelmingly dominate these left versus right ideological differences are Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008).

**NEO personality inventory (NEO-PI) scale**

Methodical efforts to organize the taxonomy of personality began shortly after William McDougall, the noted twentieth century psychologist, wrote that “[p]ersonality may to advantage be broadly analyzed into five distinguishable but separate factors, namely intellect, character, temperament, disposition, and temper” (Cooper & Pervin, 1998, pg. 15) Raymond Cattell, the
British and American psychologist, subsequently developed a relatively complex taxonomy of individual differences. His work consisted of 16 primary factors and 8 second-order factors. Unfortunately, repeated attempts by researchers to replicate Cattell’s work were unsuccessful and, in each case, researchers found that a 5-factor model categorized and accounted for the data extremely well. Subsequent psychological research on personality confirmed, and reaffirmed, strong support for five factors: Surgency, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Dependability, and Culture. These factors were remarkably similar to those that are generally accepted by personality researchers today (Fehriinger, 2004).

The NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI), created by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae, is a measure of the five major dimensions of normal adult personality traits that has demonstrated its utility for research applications. It embodies a conceptual model that distills decades of factor analytic research on the structure of personality. By a combination of rational and factor analytic methods, the scales themselves have been developed and refined. A series of publications provide evidence of scale reliability, correlation with other inventories and observer ratings, and construct validity in the prediction of theoretically relevant criteria. Although we collected data from college students using this scale in a classroom setting, other data also suggests that it has potential for use in clinical, industrial, and educational settings. The five broad dimensions include Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN). Each of these factors is broad and consists of a range of more specific traits. For example, the broad dimension of Extraversion encompasses more specific traits such as talkative, energetic, and assertive.

The Big Five structure was derived from statistical analyses of which traits tend to co-occur in people’s descriptions of themselves or other people. The underlying correlations are
based on chance and exceptions are possible. For example, you could imagine someone who is assertive yet not very talkative. However, many studies show that people who are talkative are typically assertive and vice versa. This is why they are shown together under the broader Extraversion factor. While the five dimensions do not capture the idiosyncrasies of everyone’s personality, the Big Five still serves as a valid and useful framework. This framework aids in giving us a better understanding of the general components of personality that seem to be the most important in our social and interpersonal interactions with others. Above all, it is important to note the many aspects of personality that are not included within the Big Five. Motivations, emotions, attitudes, abilities, self-concepts, social roles, autobiographical memories, and life stories are just a few of the additional units that personality psychologists consider. While some of these other units may have theoretical or empirical relationships with the Big Five traits, they are conceptually distinct. For this reason, even a very comprehensive profile of an individual’s personality traits can only be seen as a partial description of their overall personality. Since the Big Five taxonomy serves an integrative function, it provides a starting place for vigorous research and theorizing that can eventually lead to an explication and revision of the descriptive taxonomy in causal and dynamic terms.

The NEO-PI measures three broad domains, which include Neuroticism, Extraversion and Openness. In addition, there are significant gaps in the three domain NEO model. In their analyses of the English language, Norman, Goldberg, and other others, showed two clusters of adjectives that describe aspects of personality not related to N, E, or O. Terms such as cooperative, trusting, and sympathetic define a domain they call Agreeableness (A); words such as punctual, responsible, and hardworking suggest a domain they called Conscientiousness (C). Scales to measure these two subdomains were therefore developed, and research has
demonstrated that the new scales correlate highly with adjective factors measuring A and C. Facets for these domains have not yet been clearly identified, and no facet scales are provided in the NEO-PI. It is important to note that these dimensions are not also considered “types” of personalities. A person’s personality is the combination of each of their Big Five personality characteristics. For example, a person may be very sociable (high Extraversion), easily stressed (low Emotional Stability), not very friendly (low Agreeableness), hard working (high Conscientiousness), and extremely creative (high Intellect). Each of the five major dimensions includes global domains and particular aspects. Openness assesses proactive seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake. It also measures toleration for and exploration of the unfamiliar. For example, a person who scores high on Openness would possess characteristics such as curiosity, creativity, and originality and would most likely be extremely imaginative and untraditional. In contrast, a person who scores low on Openness would be more conventional, down-to-earth, unartistic, unanalytical, and would possess narrow interests. Facets of Openness include fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values. Next, having Conscientiousness serve as one of the five major dimensions will assess the individual’s degree of organization, persistence, and motivation in goal-directed behavior and contrasts dependable, fastidious people with those who are lackadaisical and sloppy. It ultimately measures one’s level of organization and work ethic. One who possesses characteristics such as organized, reliable, hard working, self-disciplined, punctual scrupulous, neat, ambitious, and persevering would likely be a high scorer of Conscientiousness. One who possesses characteristics such as aimless, unreliable, lazy, careless, lax, negligent, weak-willed, and hedonistic would likely be a low scorer of Conscientiousness. Extraversion is the dimension, which assesses quantity and intensity of interpersonal interaction as well as activity level, need for stimulation, and capacity for joy. It
measures one’s level of sociability and enthusiasm. While a high scorer of Extraversion may possess characteristics such as sociable, active, talkative, person-oriented, and optimistic, a low scorer will likely possesses characteristics more along the lines of reserved, sober, unexuberant, and quiet. Facets of Extraversion include warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement-seeking, and positive emotions. Agreeableness is the dimension that assesses the quality of one’s interpersonal orientation along a continuum from compassion to antagonism in thoughts, feelings and actions. It measures one’s level of friendliness and kindness. Soft-hearted, good-natured, trusting, helpful, forgiving, gullible and straightforward are all characteristics likely possessed by one who scores high in Agreeableness. In contrast, cynical, rude, suspicious, uncooperative, vengeful, ruthless, irritable, and manipulative would be characteristics possessed by one who scores low in Agreeableness. Lastly, Neuroticism is the dimension that assesses adjustments vs. emotional instability. It also identifies individuals prone to psychological distress, unrealistic ideas, excessive cravings or urges, and maladaptive coping responses. One who scores high in this dimension will most likely show characteristics of being nervous, emotional, insecure, inadequate, and hypochondriacal while one who scores low in this dimension will show characteristics of being calm, relaxed, unemotional, hardy, secure, and self-satisfied. Facets of Neuroticism include anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability. It is suggested by many years of research that personality is stable throughout life and associated with a range of important life outcomes. These outcomes range from academic and occupational success to marital stability and physical health.

Cattell (1946) was the first psychologist to theorize that personality structure should be examined by factor analyzing a subject’s self-reported ratings of descriptive statements. Based on this self-descriptive approach, a five-factor model (FFM) of personality has evolved over the
last half-century into the most widely utilized personality theory within psychology (Widiger & Costa, 2002).

The NEO personality inventories are comprised of descriptive statements such as “I really enjoy talking to people” which the subject rates on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). Based on the subject’s responses, the NEO computes five domain scores for each of the Big Five personality domains. Although the NEO PI and PI-R may also be used to compute an additional thirty (30) facet scores (six subfactors for each of the five domains), the shortened 60-response version of the NEO PI, the NEO Five-Factor Inventory-3 (NEO-FFI-3) was utilized for the present study and computes only the Big Five personality domain scores.

**Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) scale**

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is defined as both a personality and ideology that is studied within the realms of political, social, and personality psychology. A right-wing authoritarian person is described as: having a high degree of willingness to submit to authorities that they perceive as legitimate, adhering to the norms and conventions of society, and holding value in uniformity. It should also be said that right wing authoritarians are often hostile of those who do not adhere to societal norms and conventions (Stenner, 2009). The present RWA was first introduced by the Canadian-American psychologist Bob Altemeyer as a reconceptualization, adaptation and refinement of the authoritarian personality theory that was originally established by researchers Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford in 1950 as they academically, through psychology, tried to explain the unfathomable rise of European facism (Hitler, Mussolini) in the 1930s and 1940s (Altemeyer, 1981). The original authoritarian personality theory was adapted to only include three of the nine scales set forth by
Adorno et al: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism (Altemeyer, 1981). On a psychometric level, the RWA scale is considered an improvement to its predecessor, the F-scale, that was considered the original measure of authoritarianism. In comparison to the F-scale, the RWA scale is equally balanced and contains an equal number of pro-authoritarian and anti-authoritarian statements (Fodor, Wick, Hartsen, Preve, 2008).

Right-wing authoritarians tenaciously adhere to the norms and values of society (conventionalism), are particularly inclined to submit to whatever he or she regards as legitimate established authority (authoritarian submission) and are particularly antagonistic toward those who, by virtue of their race, ethnicity, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or non-normative behavior, are seen as posing a threat to society (authoritarian aggression) (Altemeyer, 1998).

The RWA scale measures three attitudinal and behavioral clusters in a person: Authoritarian submission, aggression and conventionalism. The particular RWA scale utilized in our study was the 14-item version known as the RWA: ACS Scale.

Based on a culmination of previous research and work, RWA is now analyzed at the component level with focus on Altemeyer’s three main components. However, older and longer versions of the RWA scale are still used. A 14-item scale has been developed based off of the components of authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. The 14-item scale is separated into three sections; one for each component. Both the aggression and conventionalism components are attributed with four statements and the submission component correlated with six statements (Mavor, Louis, & Sibley, 2010).

Altemeyer’s RWA scale has been used in a variety of studies concerning the relationship between personality and opinions over controversial social issues (Peterson, Doty, & Winter, 1993). The dimensions of aggression, submission, and conventionalism as identified by
Altemeyer contribute to the robust nature of the scale allowing it to be an applicable construct for understanding people’s opinions upon certain “hot button” societal issues (Duncan, Peterson, & Winter 1997). More specifically, the RWA scale has been applicable when examining the relevance of authoritarianism to contemporary social attitudes, such as attitudes towards abortion, the death penalty, marijuana legalization, gun control, and water conservation. This study will consider how the authoritarianism scale is relevant to predicting and understanding an individual’s opinions on many societal issues.

Abortion

In a 1997 study conducted by Duncan, Peterson, & Winter, the Right Wing Authoritarian Scale was used to investigate the relationship between authoritarianism and attitudes towards abortion. The researchers hypothesized that high scorers on the Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale would express more rigid views against abortion. After administering questionnaires to 251 undergraduate students at the University of Michigan regarding their “overall position on abortion rights,” the study’s findings supported their hypothesis. They found that participants who scored higher on the RWA scores were positively correlated to the expression of anti-abortion views ($r = .45$). Furthermore, their study also showed a negative correlation between pro-choice rallies and authoritarianism. ($r = -.30$).

Marijuana Use

A 1993 study conducted by Peterson et al. used a 30-item balanced Right Wing Authoritarianism scale to examine the relevance of authoritarianism to certain societal issues such as drug use. The data was collected from 278 undergraduate psychology students enrolled in the University of Michigan through the use of a 7-point Likert scale questionnaire (ranging from $1= \text{strongly disagree}$, $4= \text{neutral}$, $7= \text{strongly agree}$). Concerning drugs, the higher scorers
on the RWA appeared to have more “authoritarian” attitudes. The study found that authoritarianism was positively correlated with harsh punitive drug use related opinions (i.e. Rambo-like crusade, comprehensive drug testing, stop marijuana as well as crack) and negatively correlated with “egalitarian” views (i.e. make drugs legal, drug education is the best way, drugs are escape, spend money on treatment). Additionally, in a study conducted by Mirels & Dean (2006), the researchers found that high RWA scores positively correlated to beliefs that marijuana users are addicts and that marijuana is a gateway drug.

Death Penalty

A 2003 study conducted at Wayne State University by Steven Stack examined the relationship between Authoritarianism and support for the death penalty. Through his research, Stack found that high RWA scores were the leading psychological predictor for death penalty support.

Gun Control

Farnen and Meloen (2000) found that high RWA scores were positively correlated with anti-abortion, anti-gun control, and pro-capital punishment views.

RWA & The Big Five

Duckitt & Sibley (2010) labeled the different facets of Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) as Authoritarianism (approving of the use of strict and punitive measures of control), Conservatism (promoting obedience and respect) and Traditionalism (adherence to traditional values and norms). How do these facets of RWA correlate to the Big Five personality dimensions of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism? A research study conducted by Nicol & DeFrance (2016) found that all three RWA facets were negatively related to openness to experience and positively related to
conscientiousness, which is defined as a tendency to be organized and dependable, show self-discipline, act dutifully, aim for achievement and a preference for planned rather than spontaneous behavior. The study also found that the Big Five Factor of agreeableness was a significant predictor of the RWA facet of Traditionalism.

Additionally, Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness have been found to be the most important personality correlates for all RWA facets. Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, and Birum (2002) suggest that social cohesion and collective security are the primary motivational goals of RWA high scorers. These goals are influenced by low Openness to Experience and high Conscientiousness Big-Five personality dimensions. The RWA facets of Authoritarianism, Conservatism, and Traditionalism were each negatively related to Openness to Experience and positively related with Conscientiousness. Agreeableness was positively significantly related to the RWA Traditionalism facet (Nicol & France, 2016).
CHAPTER II

METHODS

Our study consisted of administering the NEO Big-Five Personality Inventory, the Right Wing Authoritarian Scale and a questionnaire to 114 undergraduate students at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas (41 males, 72 females, one gender unspecified). The questionnaire presented definitive, provocative statements about marijuana legalization, gun control and the death penalty and asked the participants, on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, to indicate whether they strongly disagreed (1), were neutral (3), or strongly agreed (5), (or were somewhere in between (ie. 2 or 4). They were additionally asked whether they were pro-choice or pro-life on the issue of abortion. The NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI; McCrae & Costa, 2010) was administered to the students. It contained 60 items measuring openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA-ACS; Mavor, Louis, & Sibley, 2010) was administered to the students. It contained 14 items that measure Aggression, Conventionalism, and Submission. The scale uses a Likert scale for which participants respond to statements such as “What our country really needs is a strong and determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path.”

The NEO Big-Five Personality Inventory that we utilized asked participants to respond to statements by selecting one of the following choices: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree or strongly agree. An example of one of the NEO Inventory statements is “I would rather cooperate with others than compete with them.”
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

SAS procedures were employed in all analyses; Significant MANOVAs (Wilks’ λ) were required prior to analyses of the below results. No differences in gender were observed across all dimensions.

On the issue of abortion, the pro-choice group scored higher relative to the pro-life individuals on the Big Five’s Openness (p<.004), Agreeableness (p<.03), and were less Neurotic (p<.004). The pro-life group was significantly higher on all RWA dimensions of Aggression (p<.001), Conventionalism (p<.00011), and Submission (p<.0001).

On the issue of Marijuana legalization, those favoring legalization were more Open (p<.002) on the Big Five and were less Aggressive (p<.0001), less Conventional (p<.0001), and less Submissive (p<.0001) on the RWA.

On gun control, those favoring gun control were more Open (p<.05) on the Big Five and were more Submissive (p<.05) and less Aggressive (p<.01) on the RWA.

Finally, on the death penalty, supporters were predictably significantly more Aggressive (p<.03) on the RWA than their anti-death penalty counterpart.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study were generally not surprising and yielded anticipated results. High RWA scorers self-report/endorse more conservative attitudes and opinions on the significant societal issues included in the study than their lower scoring counterparts (on the RWA).

The NEO Big-Five Openness to Experience scores also proved to be highly indicative of an individual's attitudes and opinions on three of the four hot-button issues: abortion, gun control and marijuana legalization.

Specifically, on the issue of abortion, pro-lifers scored higher than pro-choicers on RWA Aggression, Conventionalism and Submission. Pro-choicers scored higher than pro-lifers on the NEO Big-Five's Openness to experience, Agreeableness and scored lower on Neuroticism.

On the issue of marijuana legalization, those favoring scored higher on Openness on the NEO Big-Five and were lower on Aggression, Conventionalism and Submission on the RWA.

On gun control, those favoring gun control scored higher on Openness on the NEO Big-Five and were higher on Submission and lower on Aggression on the RWA.

Finally, on the death penalty, supporters predictably scored significantly higher on Aggression on the RWA than their anti-death penalty counterparts.

This research demonstrated that there was indeed a significant interaction between an individual college student's three RWA scales and his or her attitudes and opinions on the hot-button social issues included in our study. The same significant interaction was also found between NEO Big Five Openness to Experience and Agreeableness scores and self-
reported/endorsed attitudes and opinions on these issues. While these findings are not surprising and could be anticipated based on prior research, the conclusions nevertheless shore up and help explain how personality traits translate into, and can accurately predict, actual voiced opinions on important social issues.
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