

Moral Competence and Self-Control: The Moderating Role of Personality Traits

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Using the virtue approach of moral competence and the strength model of self-control, the study aims to discover how effective self-control is linked with moral competence. Additionally, we analyze HEXACO personality traits as a potential moderator of the proposed relationship. Participants ($n = 319$; 76.5% female), with a mean age of 22.75 years ($SD = 3.64$) completed the questionnaires aimed at measuring the HEXACO personality traits – Self-Control and Moral Competence. Results show self-control and moral competence are strongly and positively associated; therefore, self-control significantly predicts moral competence. Moreover, the effect of self-control on moral competence is most apparent when the specific impact of personality traits is considered. Specifically, Conscientiousness and Humility moderate the relationship between self-control and moral competence. Guided by the perspective of positive psychology, the study extends previous empirical research and theoretical conceptualizations of the relationship between two major areas of psychology – morality, and self-control – by placing a special focus on personality traits.

Key words: HEXACO personality traits, trait self-control, moral competence

Introduction

Moral competence is the ability to deliberate, judge, decide and act according to moral principles (Bransen & Smets, 2000; Karamavrou et al., 2016; Lennick & Kiel, 2005; Ma, 2012). As a multifaceted construct, it comprises moral values, feelings, and motivations

and enables us to direct our actions towards ethical goals (Malle & Scheutz, 2014; Rohan, 2000). Moral competence attracts particular interest among psychology scholars as a fundamental motive of social interconnection, which facilitates social living, altruist behavior, and well-being in society (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009; Karamavrou et al., 2016; Park et al., 2006).

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Received August 20, 2021



There are two theoretical approaches related to moral competence. The social cognitive framework emphasizes the leading role of cognitive processes in developing moral competence and asserts that reasoning and judgment engender morally correct decisions (Kohlberg, 1984; Lind et al., 2010). The positive psychology framework argues that moral competence could be approached in terms of personal virtues (Park et al., 2006). Consequently, within the positive psychology framework moral competence is defined and treated as a trait-like construct (Shek & Zhu, 2019). Even though these perspectives are different, both acknowledge that moral competence is a set of instrumental, affective, and cognitive traits and moral values.

There is strong empirical evidence that self-control has the closest association with moral character (Baumeister & Alquist, 2009; Wu et al., 2017). Considering that moral competence is an ability to judge and act according to moral rules, whereas self-control is capable of monitoring our actions, a positive association between the two is very feasible. Undeniably, self-control is necessary for fear judgment and reasonable, defensible ethical decisions. Even though the link between self-control and morality is well documented, studies have failed to find the contextual variables of this relationship. On the other hand, in contemporary moral studies, personality traits have been increasingly investigated to reveal the factors associated with different moral assets.

In the study by Dollinger and LaMartina (1998), the five-factor personality model was used to predict moral reasoning. The results evidenced that principled moral reasoning was related to the Big-Five factor of Openness to experience, but not to the factors of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, or Conscientiousness. Also, a positive relationship has been demonstrated between principled moral

reasoning and openness to experience (Lonky et al., 1984). Next, moral identity was found to be negatively associated with Neuroticism and Extraversion but positively with Openness and Conscientiousness (Abbasi-Asl & Hashemi, 2019). Also, moral sensitivity was positively linked to Agreeableness (Abbasi-Asl & Hashemi, 2019) and a positive correlation was found between moral development and Conscientiousness (Dollinger & LaMartina, 1998). Previous studies also proved associations between moral competence and personality traits. Studies demonstrate that moral competence is associated with Conscientiousness (Karamavrou et al., 2016) and Agreeableness (Abbasi-Asl & Hashemi, 2019).

In sum, these empirical findings show important conceptual connections between moral competence, self-control, and personality traits, but also open up new applied questions. Firstly, considering that self-control could lead a person to successfully accomplish moral as well as immoral intentions, the question is: Under what condition does self-control promote moral functioning? What role could the personality traits have here? Second, although findings suggest that two personality traits – Honesty-Humility and Conscientiousness – capture the elements of moral character, whether or not they positively predict moral competence has not been explored. And lastly, does the presence of morality traits (Honesty-Humility and Conscientiousness) also affect the self-control and moral competence relationship in a positive way?

To answer these questions, we designed a study that uses the virtue approach of moral competence (Park et al., 2006) and the strength model of self-control (Baumeister et al., 2007) and explores the role of personality traits in the context of the self-control and moral competence relationship.

Specifically, we will address three main questions: 1) What are the personality traits

that are associated with moral competence? 2) What is the unique role of a) basic personality traits and b) self-control in predicting moral competence? 3) Do personality traits moderate the self-control and moral competence relationship?

We hypothesize that self-control and moral competence are strongly linked to each other, therefore, together with conscientiousness and humility, they predict a high level of moral competence. Also, we expect to prove the moderation effect of personality traits (Conscientiousness and Humility) on the relationship between self-control and moral competence.

Morality, Self-Control, and Personality Traits

Morality can be categorized into different modalities, such as moral reasoning, moral value system, moral centrality, moral decisions, moral competencies, and traits. One of the most dominant and essential components of morality is self-control, which is even sometimes referred to as a “moral muscle.” Through self-control, people tend to moralize their goals and actions.

Self-control is defined as the way of regulating action in line with high-order standards (Hofmann et al., 2018; Stevens & Hauser, 2004), converting aims into values (Rozin, 1999), exerting control over selfish impulses, and accelerating the tendency to act morally (Wu et al., 2017). High-level self-control enforces and facilitates prosocial behavior, collaborative and integrative actions, and caring and fair attitudes (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Baumeister & Exline, 1999; Hirschi, 2004). In contrast, weak self-control is linked to dishonesty (Chiou et al., 2017), and antisocial and criminal behavior (Hirschi, 2004; Hirtenlehner & Kunz, 2015). Moreover, low self-control is constantly associated with immoral traits, such as cheating, dishonesty, and selfishness

(Chiou et al., 2017; Mead et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2017). Morality and self-control overlap in three different ways. Firstly, self-control is able to monitor, and evaluate feedback from the social environment and correct “wrong” behaviors according to the received feedback (Hofmann et al., 2018). Secondly, self-control is a proactive tool for resisting seductions and avoiding situations that could lead to potentially immoral actions. And lastly, self-control increases the balance between prescriptive and proscriptive morals.

Morality and self-control interaction has been extensively studied empirically. The moral processes are strongly and positively linked with the ability to resist temptation and inhibit impulses (Fujita, 2011). People who exercise good self-control and have the capacity for self-adjustment can achieve better moral behavior (Hidayah, 2021). Different dimensions of self-control are also strongly linked with moral reasoning. Depending on the type of moral scenarios (incidental, instrumental, and filter scenarios), impulsiveness, compulsivity, and inhibitory control (three components of self-control) have different predictive power for the appraisal of moral scenarios: impulsivity and Inhibitory control are linked with the explicit appraisal of incidental and instrumental moral scenarios, but compulsivity with incidental and filtered moral scenarios (Lucifora et al., 2021).

Moral and self-control interaction became especially important in the context of criminal behavior. The Situation Action Theory (SAT) states that interaction between morality and self-control yields a person’s criminal propensity, which has been confirmed empirically (Wikström & Svensson, 2010). The study conducted by Antonaccio and Tittle (2008) evidenced that both, self-control and morality significantly predict crime, however, morality emerged as a more important factor than self-control in their regression models.

The frequent association between morality with self-control eventually brought researchers to discover the process known as “moralization of self-control” (Rozin, 1999). The moralization of self-control is a process of converting self-control preferences into values, and as a result, self-control goals become a matter of moral rightness and wrongness (Rozin, 1999). The moralization of self-control is associated with “binding” moral values (respect for authorities; loyalty to in-group members; standards of purity) rather than “individualizing” moral values (values of harm/care and fairness) (Mooijman et al., 2018).

To sum up, the strong association between morality and self-control has been analyzed theoretically and evidenced empirically: self-control serves as a locomotive for moral personality, directing people’s impulses toward moralized values and ensuring moralized actions (Rozin, 2016).

Self-control has dark sides too. Recent studies discovered some possible negative outcomes of high self-control, such as “ego-depletion,” decreased preconscious monitoring of errors, reduced ability for decision-making, and, most importantly, it has an agency for better outcomes when engaging in bad behaviors (Inzlicht & Gutsell, 2007; Mathes et al., 2017; Vohs et al., 2008). Ironically, strong self-control is beneficial even when the person has an immoral intention, thus increasing the chance to accomplish both moral and immoral goals (Baumeister & Alquist, 2009). These empirical findings evidence the dual effect of self-control and emphasize the need to explore and provide a clearer understanding of the dynamics and consequences of self-control in different settings. Consequently, the current study raises the questions: Under what condition is self-control associated with higher moral competence? What are those factors that predict moral competence under a good self-control condition? We sug-

gest that personality traits might have the ability to influence the relationship between self-control and moral competence.

Morality studies have proved that moral constructs (moral reasoning, moral identity, moral sensitivity, moral competence) demonstrate a strong connection to personality traits. Most studies rely on the Big-Five personality model and have demonstrated that moral components are associated with basic personality traits. Moral reasoning is positively associated with Openness to Experience (Cawley et al., 2000; Lonky et al., 1984); moreover, a study conducted by Mudrack (2006) also evidenced a positive link between moral reasoning and Achievement, Intellectual Efficiency, Tolerance, Responsibility, and Capacity for Status. As for moral identity, research shows that it is positively linked with Openness and Conscientiousness (Abbasi-Asl & Hashemi, 2019), but negatively with Neuroticism and Extraversion. Also, studies demonstrate that moral sensitivity has been positively linked to Agreeableness (Abbasi-Asl & Hashemi, 2019) and the level of moral development correlates positively with Conscientiousness (Dollinger & LaMartina, 1998). Lastly, a study found that there is a positive correlation between moral competence and Conscientiousness, but Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness and Neuroticism are uncorrelated with moral competence (Karamavrou et al., 2016).

In sum, a number of studies reveal that Openness, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness are the core traits that positively contribute to the moral personality. Thus, we assume that self-control and basic personality traits have predictive power for moral competence, and we argue that these personality traits have the capacity to reshape the link between self-control and moral competence. The rationale behind this assumption is that while two personality traits – Honesty-Hu-

mility and Conscientiousness – capture the motivational and willpower aspect of moral character (Helzer et al., 2019), they should contribute positively to moral competence, thus direct self-control into moral choice and actions.

Specifically, we propose that self-control leads to high moral competence when the basic positive personality traits – Humility and Conscientiousness – are presented.

The present study is designed to test these assumptions. Consequently, with this research, we explore the role of trait self-control in moral competence and the moderating capacities of HEXACO personality traits for the relationship between moral competence and self-control.

Research Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 319 psychology students were recruited from the largest state university of Georgia, Tbilisi (76.5% female, $M_{age} = 22.75$, $SD = 3.64$). The convenience sampling method was used to recruit our study participants; the inclusion criteria were being a university student between 18 to 30 years. Subsequently, they were asked to participate in the study and complete the paper and pencil questionnaire at the university. All participants signed the informed consent form and completed three questionnaires (HEXACO Personality Inventory; Self-Control Scale and Moral Competency Inventory) measuring the study variables and demographic data.

Instruments

Moral Competency Inventory

The Moral Competency Inventory (MCI) developed by Lennick and Kiel (2005) was

used to determine the level of moral competence of the study participants. Using the value approach, the MCI consists of 40 items and measures ten competencies that reflect moral principles and ethical behaviors. The response format follows a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 – never, to 5 – in all situations. Sample items include: “I can clearly state the principles, values, and beliefs that guide my actions”; “I own up to my own mistakes and failures”; “I am willing to accept the consequences of my mistakes”. The instrument has been translated by two independent translators and then back-translated. Synthesized translated versions have been reviewed by an expert and the final version of the MCI scale has been created. Then the instrument was pretested, and several confusing and misleading items were identified and modified. The instrument has been used in the previous study thus showing good internal consistency (Mestvirishvili et al., 2020). In the present study, internal consistency (Cronbach’s α) for the Georgian version of MCI was .90.

The Self-Control Scale

The Self-Control Scale (Tangney et al., 2004) included 36 items ($\alpha = .75$) and was used to assess the trait of self-control (Gillebaart, 2018). All items (e.g., “I am good at resisting temptation”; “I’m not easily discouraged”; “I am able to work effectively toward long-term goals) were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (fully agree), with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-control. The instrument has been adapted to the Georgian language and has shown good internal consistency in the previous study (Mestvirishvili & Mestvirishvili, 2021). The Self-Control Scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency for the present study as well (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$).

Personality Traits

Personality traits were measured using the Georgian version of the HEXACO Personality Inventory, which is based on Lee and Ashton's (2004, 2006) personality model. The questionnaire has been adapted to the Georgian language by a group of researchers (Martskvishvili et al., 2022). It includes 24 facet scales and covers six basic dimensions of personality: (H) Honesty-Humility (Having a lot of money is not especially important to me; I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.); (E) Emotionality (When I suffer from a painful experience, I need someone to make me feel comfortable; I sometimes can't help worrying about little things.); (X) Extraversion (I feel reasonably satisfied with myself overall; The first thing that I always do in a new place is to make friends); (A) Agreeableness (Most people tend to get angry more quickly than I do; I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me); (C) Conscientiousness (I often push myself very hard when trying to achieve a goal; People often

call me a perfectionist); and (O) Openness to Experience (I'm interested in learning about the history and politics of other countries; I like people who have unconventional views) (Ashton & Lee, 2001; Ashton et al., 2004). Sixty items (10 for each trait) were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the present study, Cronbach's alphas for each scale demonstrate acceptable internal consistency: Honesty-Humility ($\alpha = .66$) Emotionality ($\alpha = .70$), Extraversion ($\alpha = .76$), Agreeableness ($\alpha = .68$), Conscientiousness ($\alpha = .72$), Openness to Experience ($\alpha = .71$).

Results

All statistical data analyses were performed using SPSS version 21.0 (IBM Corp, 2012). The preliminary analyses (linearity, little multicollinearity, no autocorrelation, and homoskedasticity show no violation of assumptions. Missing values constituted less than 1% of the entire data set. Expectation-maximization (EM) imputation (Lin, 2010) on this very small amount of missing data was conducted to maximize statistical power.

Table 1 Bivariate correlations between and descriptive statistics for all variables of interest ($N = 278$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age										
2. Gender	-.10									
3. Self-control	-.05	.05	(.78)							
4. Moral competency index	.18**	-.18**	.41**	(.90)						
5. Humility	.13*	-.13*	.41**	.29**	(.66)					
6. Emotionality	.40*	-.39**	-.16**	.09	.03	(.70)				
7. Extraversion	.01	-.02	.14**	.32**	-.02	-.07	(.75)			
8. Agreeableness	.02	-.02	.25**	.20**	.18**	-.10	.03	(.68)		
9. Consciousness	.06	-.07	.63**	.46**	.32**	.01	.18**	.02	(.73)	
10. Openness	.20**	-.20**	.09	.21	.18**	.06	.08	.02	.21**	(.71)
<i>M</i>	22.75	.23	112.15	77.56	34.96	32.93	32.18	29.61	33.87	35.78
<i>SD</i>	3.64	.42	14.24	8.83	6.26	6.34	6.73	6.46	6.35	6.25

Note. Figures in parentheses are McDonald's Omega coefficient (ω); *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Man = 0, woman = 1.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

Personality Traits, Moral Competence, and Self-Control

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations of the study variables. Gender showed some associations with personality traits. Specifically, being female has a moderate positive association with Emotionality ($r = .39$; $p < .001$), and weak positive association with Humility ($r = .13$; $p < .01$) and Openness ($r = .17$; $p < .01$). Moral competence is also positively associated with female gender.

Next, as we expected, the results show a positive correlation with moral competence and self-control ($r = .41$; $p < .001$) and also reveal a unique association between moral competence and personality traits. Namely, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Humility and Agreeableness were positively related with moral competence ($r = .46$; $r = .32$; $r = .29$, $r = .20$; all $p < .001$).

Personality Traits and Self-Control as Predictors of Moral Competence

The hierarchical linear regressions were performed to find the predictive values of

self-control and HEXACO personality traits for moral competence. First, demographic variables (age, gender) were entered in Step 1 (Model 1); next, in Step 2 (Model 2), HEXACO personality factors were entered into the equation, and in the final step (Model 3), self-control scores were added to the model. All three steps in regression predicting moral competence were significant (see Table 2). Model 1 indicated that the variance accounting for (R^2) with the first two predictors (age, gender) equaled .03, which was significantly different from zero ($F(2, 275) = 4.30$, $p < .001$). Gender was a significant predictor of moral competence ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .002$) where gender is coded as 0 = female, 1 = male), indicating that being a woman predicts higher scores on moral competence than being a man. The regression equation was significant for Model 2 ($F(8, 269) = 18.66$, $p < .001$) with an R^2 of .36. Moral competence was predicted by Conscientiousness with the highest value ($\beta = .35$, $p = .00$), followed by Extraversion ($\beta = .28$, $p = .00$), Agreeableness ($\beta = .16$, $p = .001$) and Humility ($\beta = .12$, $p < .01$). In the last step in Model 3, self-control scores were entered and in the regression equation ($F(9, 268) = 17.22$,

Table 2 Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting moral competence ($N = 278$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Age	-3.59	1.26	-.17	-2.01	1.14	-.10	-2.17	1.14	-.10
Gender	-.26	.56	-.03*	-.46	.48	-.05	-.48	.48	-.05
Humility				.17	.07	.12**	.13	.08	.09
Emotionality				.10	.07	.07	.12	.07	.09
Extraversion				.36	.06	.28***	.35	.06	.28***
Agreeableness				.21	.07	.16***	.18	.07	.13**
Conscientiousness				.48	.07	.35***	.37	.09	.27***
Openness				.09	.07	.07	.10	.07	.07
Self-control							.08	.04	.14*
R^2		.03			.36			.37	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		4.30**			22.77***			4.95*	

Note. Age and depression were centered at their means.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, male = 1, female = 0.

$p < .001$), self-control positively predicted moral competence ($\beta = .14$, $p = .032$) and the variance accounted for (R^2) with all nine predictors equaling .37.

Personality Traits as Moderators of the Relationship between Moral Competence and Self-Control

Nonparametric bootstrapping analyses were deployed to find the personality factors that moderate the relationship between self-control and moral competence.

We expected that Conscientiousness and Humility would moderate the relationship between self-control and moral competence. The "PROCESS" macro, Model 1, v2.16 (Hayes, 2013) in SPSS ver. 23 with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals ($n = 5000$) was used to test this assumption. Results based on 5000 bootstrapped samples indicate that Humility moderated the relationship between self-control and moral competence ($F(3, 287) = 23.16$, $p \leq .001$, $R^2 = .19$) and the interaction effect was significant ($b = .01$, 95%CI (.0016, .0190), $p = .02$).

Figure 1 shows simple slopes of self-control predicting moral competence for 1 SD below

the mean of Humility, the mean of Humility, and 1 SD above the mean of Humility.

On a low level of Humility, the relationship between self-control and moral competence is slightly positive ($b = .16$; s.e. = 0.044, $p = .00$); on a medium level of Humility, the strength of the relationship increased ($b = .22$; s.e. = 0.0364, $p = .00$); and lastly, on a high level of Humility the relationship shows the strongest value ($b = .29$; s.e. = 0.0473, $p = .00$) (see Figure 1).

In addition, the result also showed that Conscientiousness is a significant moderator of the relationship between self-control and moral competence ($F(3, 285) = 31.15$, $p \leq .00$, $R^2 = .25$) with interaction effect ($b = .08$, 95%CI (.0011, .0159), $p = .02$). Probing the interaction with simple slopes tests of the relationship between self-control and moral competence at -1SD, mean, and +1SD on Conscientiousness is shown in Figure 2.

On a low level of Conscientiousness, the relationship between self-control and moral competence is not significant. On a medium level of Conscientiousness, the relationship becomes positive ($b = .13$; s.e. = 0.0408, $p = .00$), and on a high level of Conscientiousness, the strength of the relationship increases ($b = .19$; s.e. = 0.0498, $p = .00$).

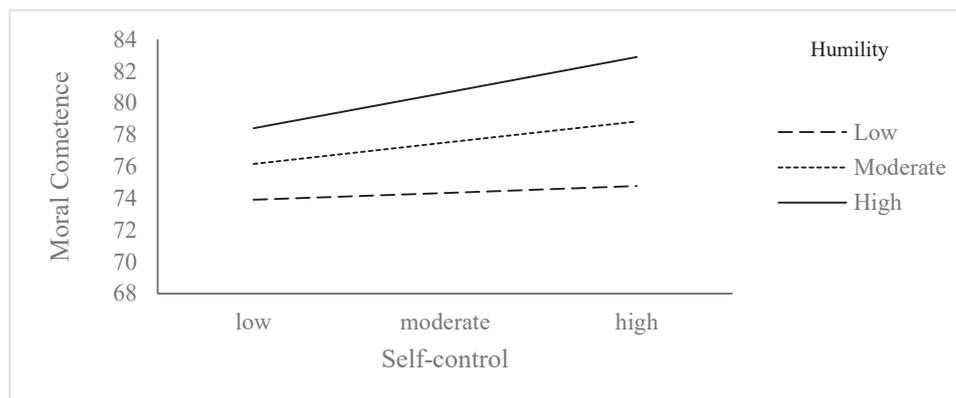


Figure 1 Humility as a moderator of the relationship between moral competence and self-control.

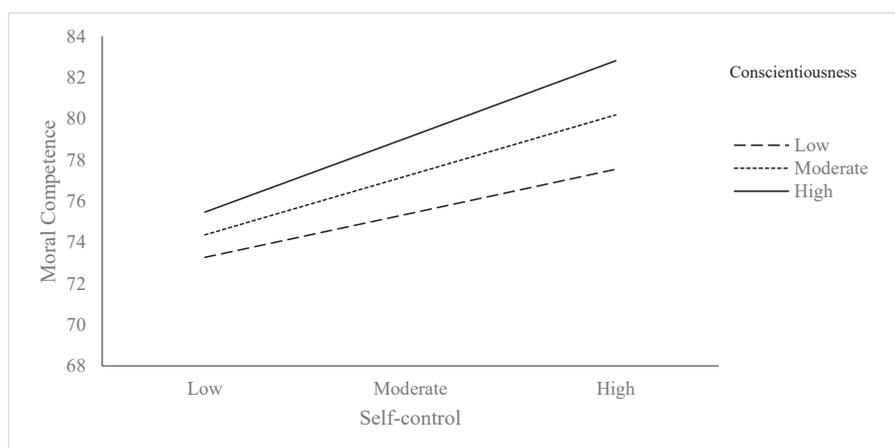


Figure 2 Conscientiousness as a moderator of the relationship between moral competence and self-control.

Discussion

The present study sought to understand the complex and nuanced relationship of moral competence with personality factors and self-control. We aimed to understand the importance of self-control for moral functioning and define the role of personality traits in this relationship.

Firstly, we perform a correlational analysis, to answer our research question of whether or not personality traits are associated with moral competence.

We gained results consistent with past studies, indicating that self-control and moral categories are positively associated (Frimer et al., 2012; Hofmann et al., 2018; Mooijman et al., 2018).

Next, we hypothesize that self-control and moral competence are strongly linked to each other, therefore, together with conscientiousness and humility, they predict a high level of moral competence. The regression analysis evidenced that, before adding self-control in the

final model, four out of six personality factors – Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Humility, and Agreeableness – have predictive values for moral competence. Conscientiousness, which reflects organization, diligence, perfectionism, and prudence, shows the strongest positive link and has higher predictive values for moral competence. Evidently, Conscientiousness is dominant over other personality factors in the context of moral competence. This means that a disciplined, organized person with a hard-working attitude has a higher moral competence than an impulsive person who avoids tasks and challenges. Past studies suggest that Conscientiousness is ultimately related to self-control, industriousness, responsibility, and orderliness that allow individuals to strive towards their goals and to monitor and evaluate their progress (Eisenberg, 2014). Based on the above-mentioned characteristics, we can argue that Conscientiousness is linked to a person's responsiveness and promotes self-regulation. This consideration enables us to clarify the positive association between Conscientiousness,

moral competence, and self-control and suggests that, while responsiveness is a vital part of moral competence and self-regulation is a part of self-control, Conscientiousness, while embracing those two criteria (responsiveness and self-regulation), might be an actual factor that endorses the links between moral competence and self-control.

The second most important correlate and predictor of moral competence is Extraversion, which is related to social self-esteem, social boldness, sociability, and liveliness. High scores on Extraversion indicate that a person is confident in social settings, strives for social interactions, and feels positive about them (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Sociability is the leading facet that could be crucial to explaining the association and predictive value of Extraversion for moral competence. Moral competence is a set of values that allow individuals to pursue communal motives instead of agentic ones (Park & Peterson, 2006). Therefore, being altruistic and sociable is the “must-have” personality trait that helps individuals to develop non-egoistic, altruistic tendencies. In short, without a strong sense of sociability, it is hard to develop a high level of moral competence. This argument might explain why Extraversion – a factor that is associated with the social part of a person’s life – predicts a high level of moral competence.

The next personality factor linked to moral competence is Humility. Humility is a part of the HEXACO personality, which largely reflects personal moral character (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Humility is an exclusive factor for HEXACO and distinguishes HEXACO from the Big-Five personality model (Helzer et al., 2022). Humility encompasses highly moralized traits like sincerity, fairness, greed-avoidance, and modesty. Those traits reflect the motivation part of moral character that allows individuals to behave in a good way and avoid wrongdoing. Consequently, we expected to

get a strong positive correlation between Humility and moral competence. Interestingly, despite the explicated theoretical association, our study evidenced a weak positive correlation between moral competence and Humility, and also, a low predictive ability of Humility for moral competence. We found that Humility was less strongly associated with moral competence than Conscientiousness. Hence, we could argue, that the ability to be responsive (Conscientiousness) is more strongly linked with moral competence than the motivation to behave in a decent way (Humility).

Agreeableness shows a weak but significant positive association with moral competence. Agreeableness is an ability to forgive and show gentleness, flexibility, and patience (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Those are the traits that allow individuals to be other-oriented and engage in prosocial behavior, and clearly, these values are linked to moral character.

Also, we expect to prove the moderation effect of personality traits on the relationship between self-control and moral competence. The hierarchical multiple regressions revealed that after controlling HEXACO personality factors, self-control still remains a significant predictor of moral competence. This result evidences that even when the effects of personality traits – such are Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Humility, and Agreeableness – are considered, self-control remains a unique and independent contributor to moral competence.

In the final step of the data analysis, we performed a moderation analysis to find the indirect effect of personality traits on the relationship between self-control and moral competence. Conscientiousness and Humility emerged as significant moderators of the relationship between self-control and moral competence. We find that people with high self-control are more likely to be morally com-

petent, and when personality factors such as Conscientiousness and Humility increase, this relationship becomes more robust.

The study thus confirms that those who reported higher Conscientiousness and Humility are more likely to act according to moral principles (moral competence). Similarly, previous research has also found that Conscientiousness and Humility are related to different moral features. Moral development and principal moral reasoning are positively linked with Conscientiousness (Dollinger & LaMartina, 1998). Conscientiousness, which reflects diligence and prudence, facilitates the strong link between self-control and moral functioning. Also, past study evidenced that Humility works as good predictor of ethical attitude in leadership suggesting that Sincerity and Modesty, the core sub-traits of Humility, trigger ethical behavior in people who have the ability to inhibit impulsive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Žižar, 2015). In line with those findings, our hypothesis has been confirmed and Conscientiousness and Humility have emerged as unique personality traits that have a capacity to strengthen the self-control and moral competence relationship.

Summary

The study sought to extend previous empirical research and theoretical conceptualization of the relationship between two major concepts of psychology – morality, and self-control. A special emphasis was placed on personality traits as the intervening factor in the relationship between moral competence and self-control.

Using the virtue approach for moral competence (Park et al., 2006) and the strength model of self-control (Baumeister et al., 2007), the present study evidences the direct associations between moral competence and

self-control and therefore proves that personality traits (HEXACO personality model) have a unique role in this relationship.

The study results show that self-control and moral competence are strongly and positively associated, with the former being a significant predictor of the latter. However, the effect of self-control on moral competence is most apparent when the specific impact of personality traits is considered. Specifically, Conscientiousness and Humility moderate the relationship between self-control and moral competence. The study also demonstrates that despite the established view that the HEXACO personality factor Honesty-Humility is exclusively a component of moral character, Conscientiousness followed by Extraversion and Agreeableness are leading personality factors that are positively associated with and strongly predict moral competence.

Practical Implications

Morality studies are highly relevant for the future of society and humanity. The study findings could be beneficial for professionals from different occupations and fields. First, the study findings could be important for organizational managers and leaders. During the last decades, the “soft” skills of leaders have become highly important in order to achieve a “human-oriented ethical” leadership style. Moral competence is one of the core elements of ethical leadership, thus helping leaders and managers to create a constructive and supportive work environment.

Next, the study findings might be beneficial for clinical and counseling psychologists, especially for those who are working with young people, and aim to promote positive youth development and prevent violent, antisocial, and disruptive behavior. The study findings could be taken into consideration when designing a multisystemic therapy for juvenile offenders.

Lastly, the study findings are important for every individual who tries to align their actions to moral behavior, improve moral decision-making and therefore positively contribute to the well-being of society.

Limitations of the Study

This study is not without limitations. First, we should note that the study has a cross-sectional design, therefore causality between the study variables could not be tested. Next, moral competence is measured with a self-report questionnaire and self-reported morality could be influenced by social desirability. Also, all study participants are from the same cohort (students from the faculty of psychology), which limits us in generalizing the results.

Further Directions

Morality studies are critically important for modern societies to combat prejudice and stigma, aggressive behavior, and unfair decisions, and promote acceptance, cooperative behavior, and humbleness, which are the core principles of an ethical and human society. Further studies might consider investigating the role of self-control in moral reasoning, moral identity, and moral behavior. Moreover, it could be interesting for future studies to consider the role of dark-triad personality traits in the context of moral competence.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia under grant DP2016_16.

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