

Abstract

Interest in traits has focused on the Big Five traits in recent decades. Recently, considerable interest has emerged for studying character traits or virtues (e.g., Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Fowers, 2014). Virtues may be valuable for explaining behavior, particularly moral behavior, but there has been very limited empirical study. The studies that exist are almost exclusively conducted with single time-point global surveys that are subject to numerous reporting biases. These common approaches trivialize four central aspects of virtues because virtues are traits (1) that are expressed behaviorally in (2) a properly motivated manner in (3) real-world circumstances, and (4) deeply integrated with the self (Fowers, 2005). In an experience sampling study, we investigated the character trait of fairness in greater depth than attempted in previous studies. To address previous limitations, we assessed the virtue trait of justice (interpersonal fairness) at multiple time points, and examined the degree to which virtues are properly motivated and self-integrated. Our national sample of 71 adult participants were asked to respond to questionnaires about their virtue-related behavior their accompanying motivations, and the self-congruence of their actions four times per day for 14 days through a smartphone application. The study used Fleeson and Gallagher's (2012) density distribution approach to trait measurement. We focused on within subject consistency and variability in the individual's virtue-related activity in his or her natural environment. Based on data from 1,731 occasions, we found that virtue-related behavior, motivation, and self-concordance were consistent over time within individuals and that these components were variable between persons. Social desirability was minimally important. The results suggest that there is good evidence for trait justice with high consistency over time, significant between person differences, and the trait has multiple components.

Hypotheses

1. We expected multi-item scales to be internally consistent indicators of the three components of virtue under study.
2. We expected a high degree of within-person consistency over time in virtue-related: (a) behavior, (b) motivation, and (c) self-integration.
3. We predicted significant variability between persons in virtue-related: (a) behavior, (b) motivation, and (c) self-integration.
4. These results would not be heavily affected by social desirability.

Methods

Measure creation

- We designed new self-report component measures (behavior, motivation, and self-concordance) of justice as a virtue trait suitable for experience sampling research.

Two pilot studies

- Undergraduate pilot sample (N = 12) from a private university in southeastern U.S. and a national pilot sample (N = 20) of individuals 18 to 65.

Study Design

- 71 adults sampled nationally through Qualtrics
- Responded 4 times/day for 14 days
- 4 questionnaire branches

Measures:

- Justice behavior
- Justice motivation
- Justice self-concordance

Results

1731 completed occasions

Scale Internal Reliability

- Justice Behavior: $\omega = 0.97$
- Justice Motivation: $\omega = 0.96$
- Justice Self-concordance: $\omega = 0.96$

Variability

- Justice Behavior (4 items): ICC = 0.47
 - 47% of the variance is due to differences between persons
 - 53% of the variance is due to differences within persons
- Justice Motivation (6 items): ICC = 0.49
 - 49% of the variance is due to differences between persons
 - 51% of the variance is due to differences within persons
- Justice Self-concordance (4 items): ICC = 0.41
 - 41% of the variance is due to differences between persons
 - 59% of the variance is due to differences within persons

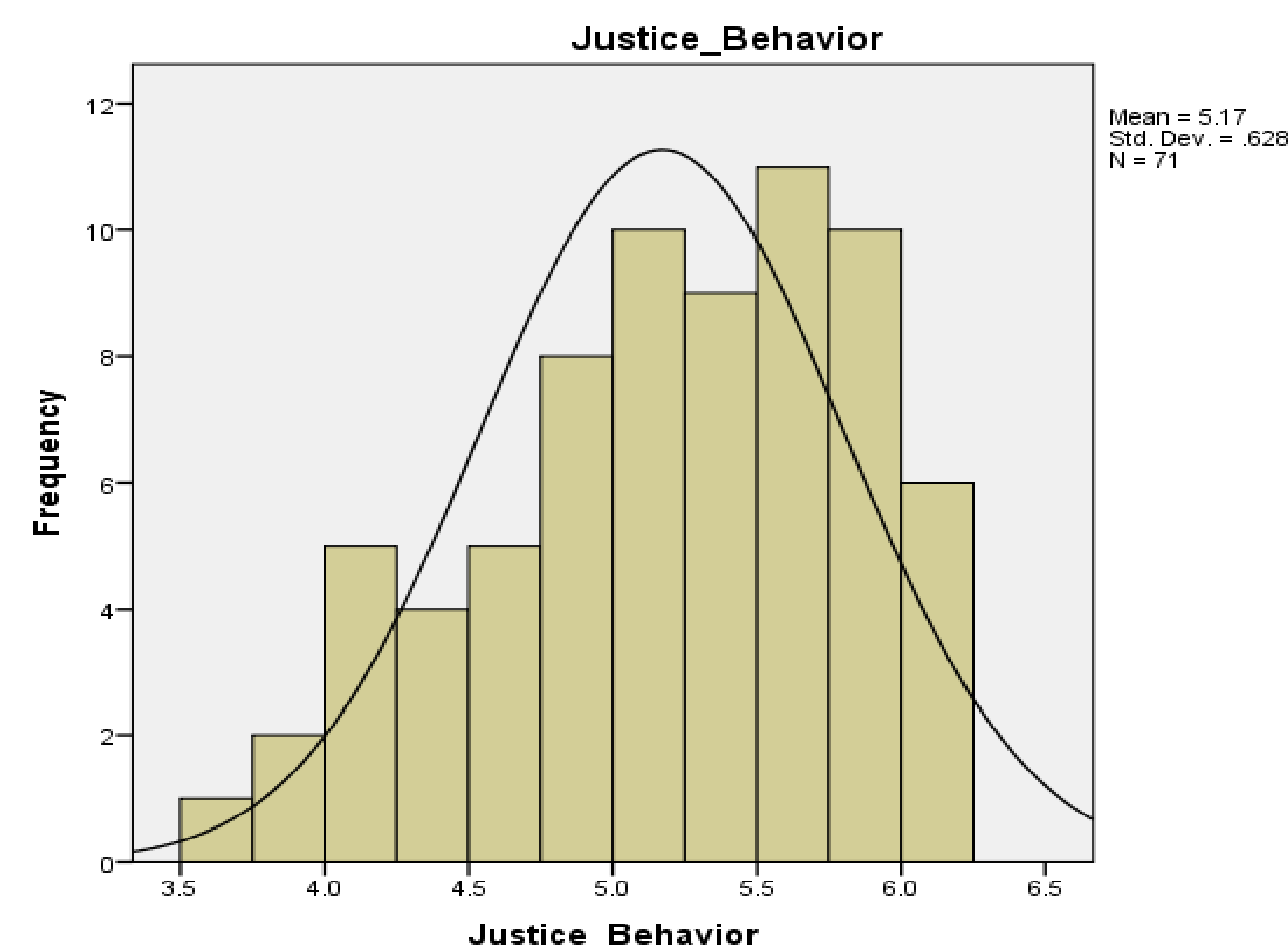
Consistency over Time (Split-half Correlations)

Justice Behavior: $r = .90$
 Justice Motivation: $r = .86$
 Justice Self-concordance: $r = .81$

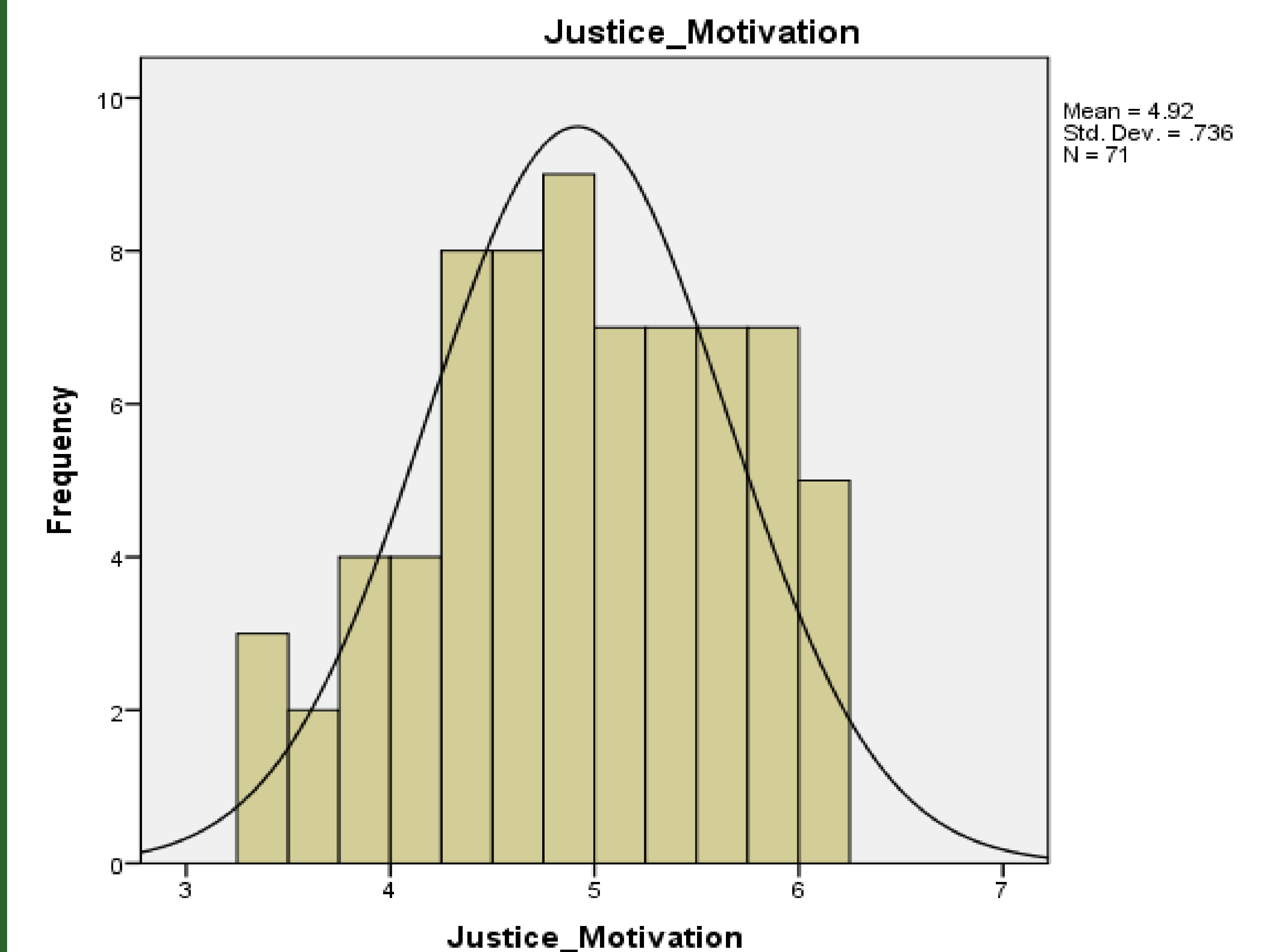
Social Desirability

	Justice Behavior	Justice Motivation	Justice Self-Concordance
Self-Deception	.10	.14	.19
Impression Management	.21	.19	.26*

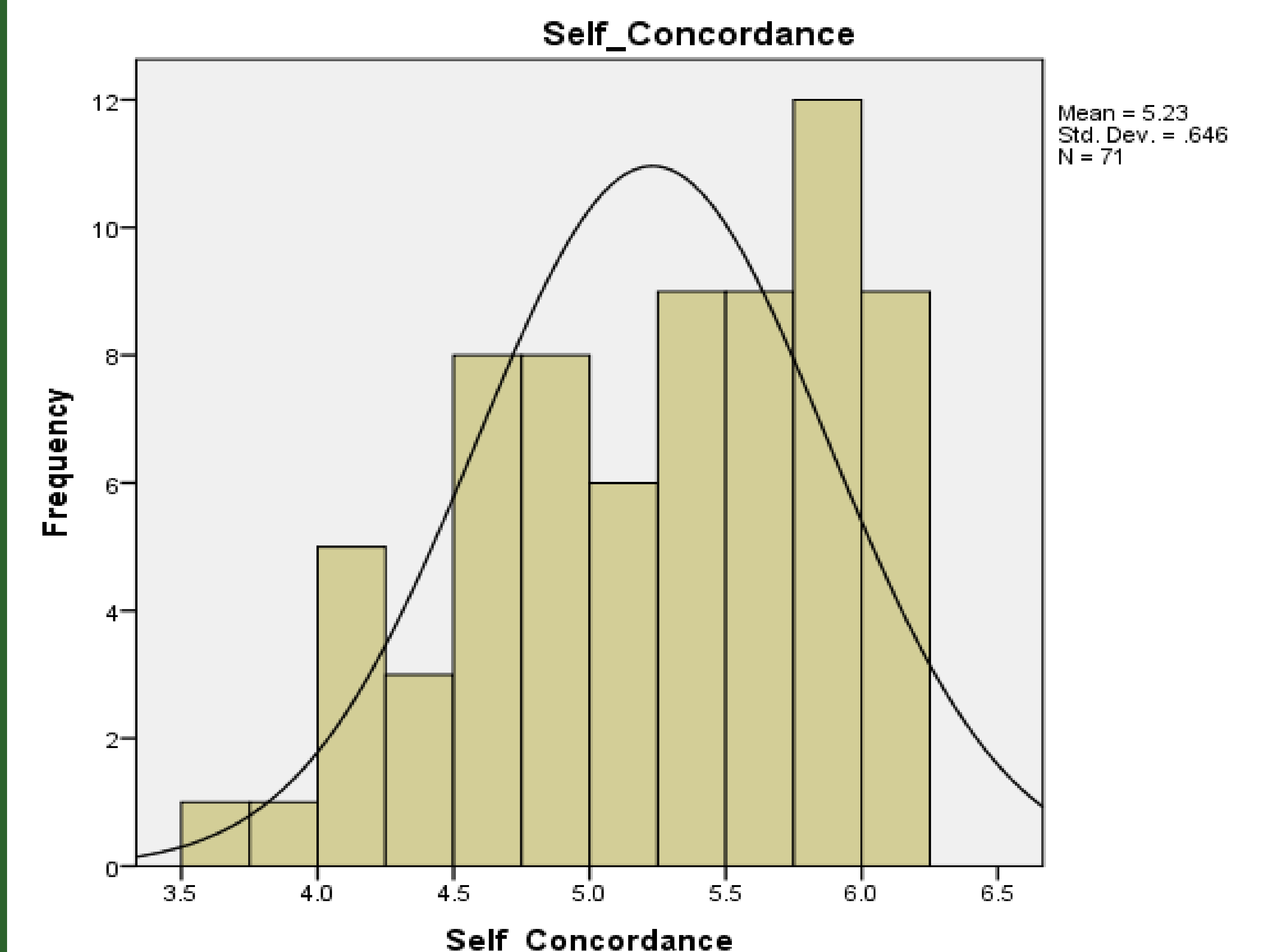
Between Person Variability- Behavior



Between Person Variability-Motivation



Between Person Variability- Self-Concordance



Conclusions

There is good evidence for trait justice as evidenced by:

- Strong internal consistency of the three virtue components scales
- High consistency over time within persons
- Significant between person differences
- Social desirability did not strongly influence participants' responses

This experience sampling study is consistent with and extends the emerging science of virtue.

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