

Abstract

Recent attention to justice as a character trait has been limited to assessments of emotional reactions to injustice, neglecting the other components of character traits such as behavior, attitude, and knowledge. The Justice Sensitivity Inventory (JSI) (Schmitt et al 2010), a reliable and valid measure of emotional reactions to injustice, predicts distributive behavior in economic games such as the dictator game (Lotz et al., 2013) and the solidarity game (Stavrova & Schlösser, 2015). Sensitivity to observing and benefitting from injustice correlates with more cooperative, equal, and other-benefitting decisions, while sensitivity to being a victim of injustice is associated with more selfish behavior (Fetchenhauer & Huang, 2004; Edele et al, 2013). Virtue theory suggests that character traits have four components: emotion, attitudes, behavior, and knowledge. A multicomponent justice measure was created to assess these elements (Cioffi, 2017), with the JSI as the emotion component. Virtue theory predicts that the multicomponent approach will result in stronger predictions of justice behavior.

Hypotheses

1. There will be main effects for the justice trait measures (Justice Sensitivity, Justice Behavior, Justice Attitude), controlling for the Big Five and social desirability, on resource sharing behavior.
2. There will be a main effect for condition on resource sharing behavior.
3. There will be an interaction effect between the justice trait measures and condition.
4. When three components of the justice trait are included, they will better predict sustainability behavior than any single component by itself.

Methods

127 undergraduate students were recruited at a university in the southeastern U.S. This study used a resource sharing game as an observed indicator of justice behavior. The game involves a shared pool of resources that partially replenishes (10%) each turn. Players can choose to use the resource sustainably each turn, or they can take too much and deplete the shared pool. Participants played on a computer against three other players who they were told were other human participants. In fact, they were playing against the computer in one of three randomly assigned conditions. In the first condition, all bogus players behaved sustainably. In the second condition, 1/3 behaved selfishly. In the third condition, 2/3 behaved selfishly. Participants then completed a series of trait measures. 25 participants were excluded from data analyses after guessing that they were not playing against human players.

Measures:

Justice Behavior (Cioffi, 2017)

Justice Attitude (Cioffi, 2017)

Justice Sensitivity Inventory (Schmitt et al., 2010)

Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999)

Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding-16 (Hart, Ritchie, Hepper, & Gebauer, 2015)

Results

Justice Behavior and Justice Attitude were strongly correlated ($r = .83, p < .001$), and were therefore analyzed separately. We used a hierarchical regression procedure to introduce blocks of predictors. After controlling for two forms of social desirability, and Agreeableness (the only relevant Big Five trait) there were main effects for Justice Behavior, Justice Attitude, and Condition on participants' resource sharing behavior. The trait main effect were effaced by the interaction terms. There was no significant effect for Justice Sensitivity on resource sharing behavior. There was a significant interaction effect for the Justice Attitude by Condition and a Justice Behavior by Condition interaction. At high levels of the justice trait, there was no difference in resource sharing behavior, but individuals lower in the justice trait took more of the resource in the two selfish players condition than in the no selfish player condition. Including three components of the justice trait (Sensitivity, Attitude, and Behavior) did not improve the accuracy of predicting fair behavior.

Regression Tables

Total Fish Taken and Justice Attitude

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	3397.23	1439.753	2.360	0.020
Self-Deception	25.41	17.709	1.435	0.155
Impression Management	-13.14	17.218	-0.763	0.447
Agreeableness	-6.93	19.153	-0.362	0.718
Condition 2	3971.58	2082.864	1.907	0.060
Condition 3	7208.24	1961.561	3.675	0.000
Justice Sensitivity	-1.01	13.119	-0.077	0.939
Justice Disposition	-2.88	29.361	-0.098	0.922
Justice Sensitivity x Condition 2	10.28	17.514	0.587	0.559
Justice Sensitivity x Condition 3	14.49	17.875	0.811	0.420
Justice Disposition x Condition 2	-70.49	43.221	-1.631	0.106
Justice Disposition x Condition 3	-130.18	41.556	-3.133	0.002

Total Fish Taken by Justice Behavior

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	2614.338	1405.678	1.860	0.066
Self-Deception	40.141	17.535	2.289	0.024
Impression Management	-19.367	17.351	-1.116	0.267
Agreeableness	-5.146	20.694	-0.249	0.804
Condition 2	3682.632	1787.205	2.061	0.042
Condition 3	6134.193	1729.786	3.546	0.001
Justice Sensitivity	-3.184	12.646	-0.252	0.802
Justice Behavior	21.009	44.883	0.468	0.641
Justice Sensitivity x Condition 2	10.459	16.619	0.629	0.531
Justice Sensitivity x Condition 3	11.117	17.158	0.648	0.519
Justice Behavior x Condition 2	-103.616	52.424	-1.976	0.051
Justice Behavior x Condition 3	-170.453	53.507	-3.186	0.002

Figure 1

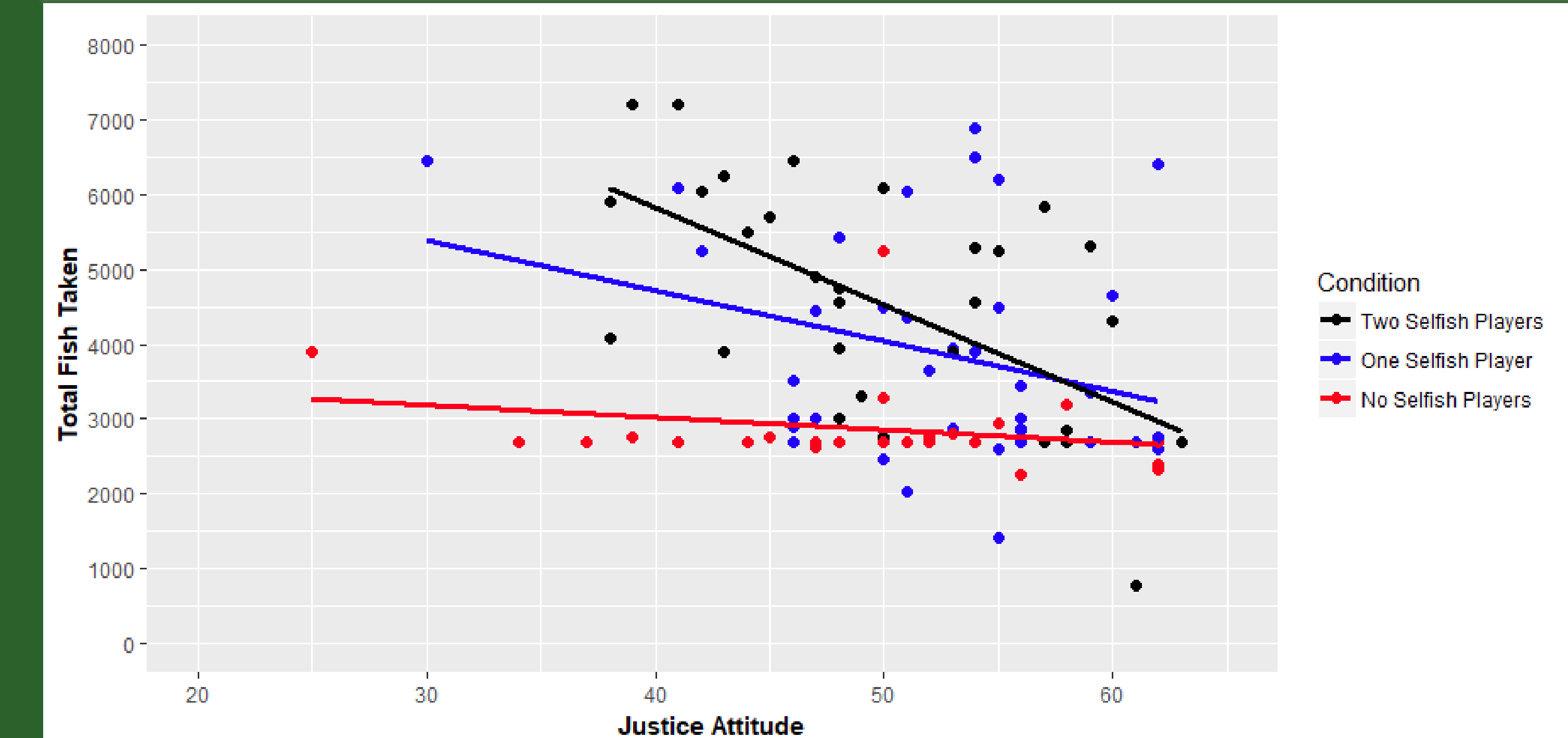
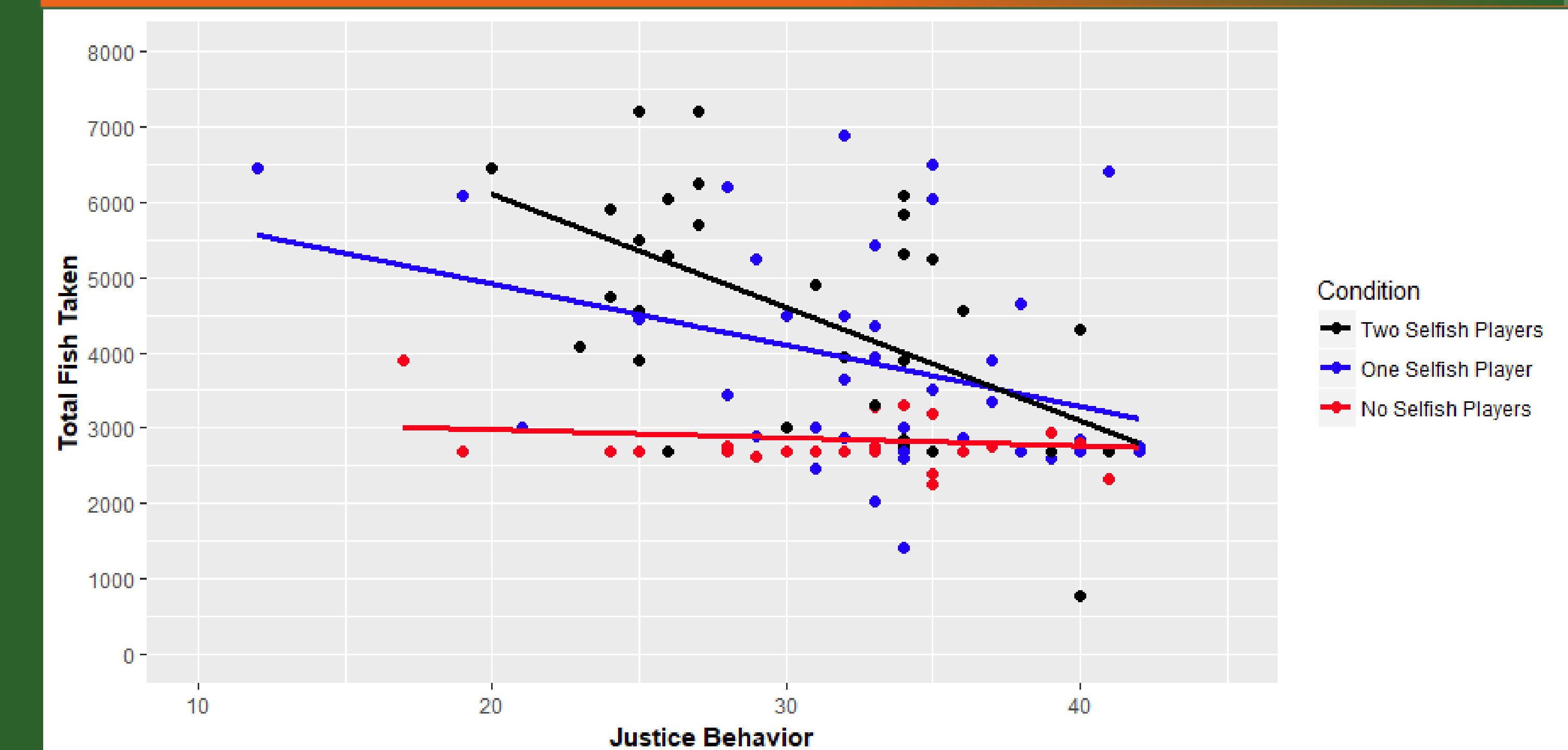


Figure 2



Conclusions

This study provides clear evidence for trait justice, in demonstrating significant between person differences in the trait. After controlling for Agreeableness and two forms of social desirability, we found a strong linkage of the justice trait with observed fairness behavior. The predicted trait-by-situation interaction was also confirmed. Our attempt to create a multi-component trait measure of justice failed because the Justice Behavior and Justice Attitude scales were highly correlated and Justice Sensitivity did not predict resource sharing behavior.

In combination with other recent studies that provide support for character traits such as courage, honesty, kindness, and fairness (Bleidorn & Denissen, 2015; Lang et al., 2017; Lefevor & Fowers, 2016; Meindl, Jayawickreme, Furr, & Fleeson, 2015), the evidence for the existence and importance of virtues is growing. This study differed from most trait focused studies in examining the effects of the trait on observed behavior. The results of this study are consistent with and extend the emerging science of virtue.

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