

How personality traits might interact to affect self-control

August 21 2024



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Neuroticism may moderate the relationship between certain personality traits and self-control, and the interaction effects appear to differ by the type of self-control, according to a study published August 21, 2024 in

the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Fredrik Nilsen from the University of Oslo and the Norwegian Defense University, Norway, and colleagues.

Self-control is important for mental and [physical health](#), and certain personality traits are linked to the trait. Previous studies suggest that conscientiousness and extraversion enhance self-control, whereas [neuroticism](#) hampers it.

However, the link between personality and self-control has mostly been studied using a narrow conceptualization of self-control, and no previous studies examined whether and how personality traits interact with one another to increase, or reduce, self-control.

To fill this [knowledge gap](#), Nilsen and colleagues collected data from 480 military cadets to examine the relationship between the Big Five personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) and self-control dimensions (general, inhibitory, and initiatory self-control).

Inhibitory self-control reflects the ability to resist temptation, whereas initiatory self-control is the ability to initiate proactive actions to achieve long-term goals. The authors also investigated how neuroticism might moderate the relationship between other personality traits and self-control.

Participants scoring highly for neuroticism tended to score lower for general and inhibitory self-control, after controlling for the effect of other variables—a negative correlation.

A positive correlation was seen for extraversion and conscientiousness, with participants scoring highly on these traits being more likely to also score highly on self-control dimensions. Openness and agreeableness

traits did not consistently link with self-control after controlling for other variables.

The researchers found that neuroticism negatively moderated the relationship between extraversion and both general and inhibitory self-control, and the relationship between conscientiousness and both general and initiatory self-control, such that extroverted or conscientious participants scored less highly than otherwise expected for these types of self-control if they were also highly neurotic.

According to the authors, one take-home message from the study is that it is important to differentiate between the types of self-control when studying their relationship with personality traits—in particular, we should distinguish between inhibitory self-control and initiatory self-control.

The study may have practical implications, since self-control can be a valuable resource for good health, success, and proper conduct.

For example, knowledge about strengths and weaknesses of personality profiles and their accompanying self-control qualities might help select individuals for professions that require high self-control. In clinical and personal growth settings, the development and training of self-control may benefit from an increased understanding of the relationship between personality profiles and self-control patterns.

The authors add, "Our research reveals a more complicated relationship between personality traits and self-control than is previously found. First, there are two different types of self-control—the ability to inhibit impulses, and the ability to initiate proactive actions—and personality traits are differently related to these two ways of exhibiting self-control.

"Second, the level of neuroticism can significantly alter the [relationship](#)

between [personality traits](#) like [conscientiousness](#) and [extraversion](#), and self-control. Understanding the nuanced interplay between personality and self-control can help to find more effective ways to select individuals for roles that demand high levels of self-control, and to design interventions for developing [self-control](#)."

More information: *PLoS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0307871](#)

Provided by Public Library of Science

Citation: How personality traits might interact to affect self-control (2024, August 21) retrieved 22 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-personality-traits-interact-affect.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.