

## The Psychology of Hackers: A Comparative Analysis\*

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### Abstract

This study was exploratory and designed to add to the growing body of knowledge in the field of computer deviant behavior analysis. The study examined certain characteristics of individuals engaged in deviant computer activity, better known as hackers. Introductory psychology students took part in the study as part of their course requirements for experimental credits (N = 381). The students filled out a battery of self-report questionnaires that measured their frequency of deviant computer activity (Rogers, 2001), big-five factor traits (Goldberg, 1992), exploitive manipulative behavior (Altemeyer, 1995), and morality (Hladkyj, 2002). Only one out of the three hypotheses were supported. Additional exploratory analyses and the implications for future research are also discussed.

### Hypotheses

Individuals engaging in deviant computer activities will be introverted, antagonistic, undirected, neurotic and be more open to experience than individuals who do not engage in deviant computer activities.

Individuals engaging in deviant activities will be more exploitive and manipulative than individuals who do not engage in deviant computer activity.

Individuals engaging in deviant activities will have a higher rate of hedonistic morality, and lower rates social and internal morality, than individuals who do not engage in deviant computer activity.

### Method

#### Participants

The participants consisted of 381 introductory psychology students. Their participations was voluntary, but did form part of their course requirement for experimental participant credits.

#### Instruments

Computer Crime Index (CCI) (Rogers, 2001) – measures the frequency and prevalence of self-reported deviant computer activity.

Big-Five Factor Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1992) – self-report questionnaire measuring personality traits based on five factors: extraversion (.87), agreeableness (.90), conscientiousness (.84), neuroticism (.79), and openness to experience (.79).

Exploitive Manipulative Amoral Dishonesty Scale (EMAD) (Altemeyer, 1995) – self-report scale that measures the degree of exploitive and manipulative behavior (.88).

Moral Decision Making Scale (MDKS) (Hladkyj, 2002) – adhoc self-report questionnaire that measures participants moral decision making across three subscales: Internal (.73), Social (.59), and Hedonistic (.71).

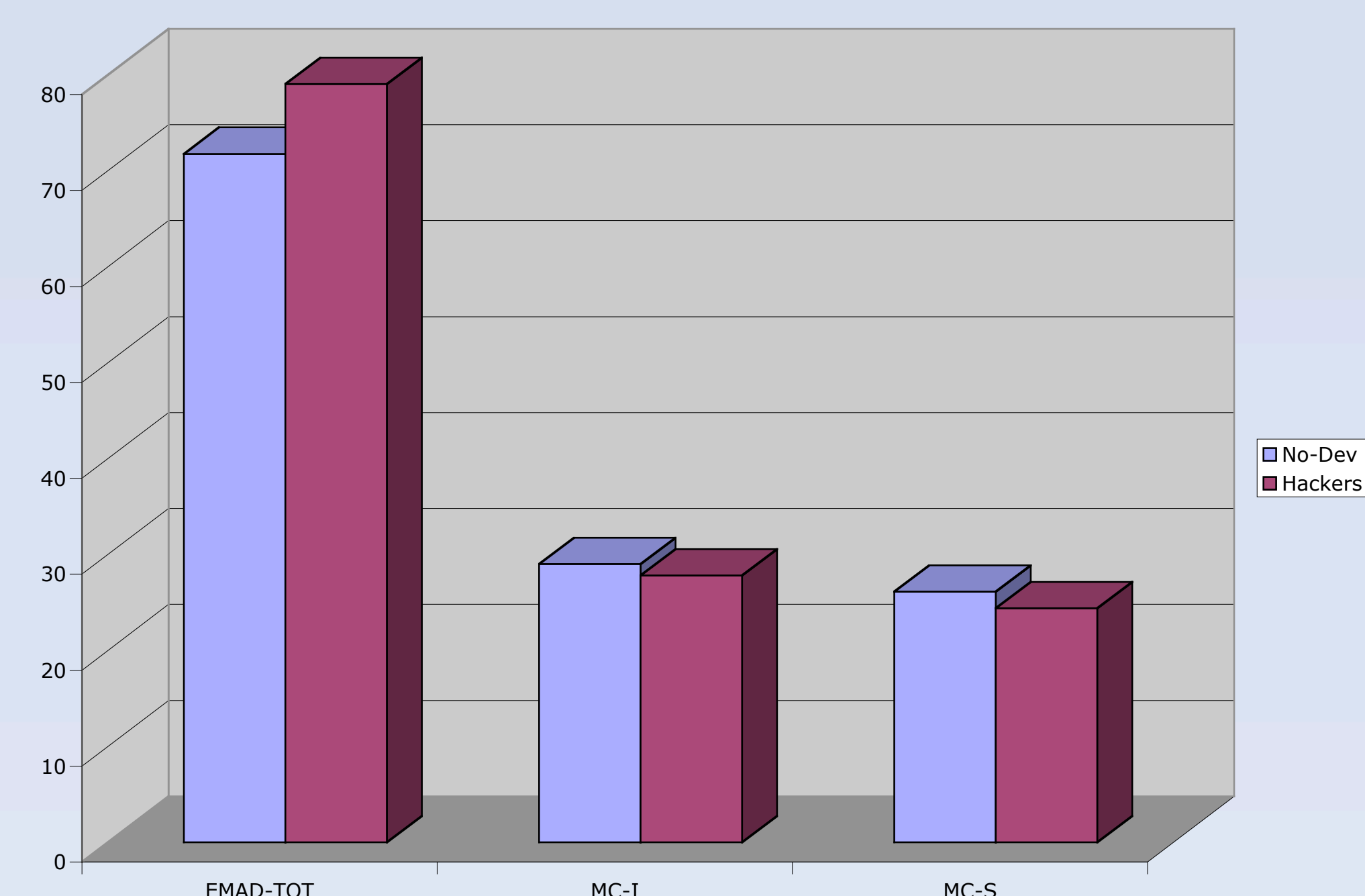
### Results

	Independent Samples T-Test		95% Confidence Interval	
	t	df	Lower	Upper
EMAD	2.84**	341	2.24	12.35
MC-I	-2.65**	378	-2.09	-.31
MC-S	-3.60**	373	-2.68	-.78

Note: EMAD = Exploitive Manipulative Total Score, MC-I = Moral Choice Internal, MC-S = Moral Choice Social.

\*\*p < .001.

#### Mean Comparison



### Discussion

The findings indicated that there was no significant difference on the Big-Five Factor traits between individuals who have engaged in deviant computer behavior and those who have not. This is contrary to what had been hypothesized and more importantly, contrary to the currently held stereotype of hackers (Verton, 2002).

The results indicated that hackers are more exploitive and manipulative. This makes intuitive sense as these characteristics are consistent with deviance in general and are not unique to computer deviance alone.

The findings did not support the hypothesis that hackers would tend to make their moral decisions based more on hedonism than on internal or social morality. Here again, the findings contradict previous research and commonly held stereotypes. Moral decisions based on hedonism is roughly equivalent to being at Kohlberg's pre-conventional morality stage. Previous studies have indicated that hackers tend to aggregate in the pre-conventional morality stage.

### Selected References

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