

# THE EFFECTS OF PERSONALITY TRAITS AND LEISURE TIME BEHAVIOURS ON LIFE SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF TURKISH AND AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS

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**Abstract**—This study focuses on how choice of leisure activity and personal traits affects the students' levels of life satisfaction. How an individual chooses to spend their leisure time reflects that individual's interests, talents and personality and yet although these activities are freely chosen by the individual with the intent of providing of some level of relaxation and enjoyment, all leisure activities do not equally contribute to the perception of life satisfaction. Choice of leisure activity can be broadly categorized according to the big five personality traits which in turn, affect leisure choice and subsequent level of life satisfaction. The study examines how these broad personality types influence an individual's choice of leisure activities and how that choice affects one's sense of accomplishment and the perception of satisfaction with life. This study focuses on students both in the Australia and Turkey and seeks to establish a link between personality type, leisure behaviour and consequent sense of well-being. It is our intention to show that certain types of leisure activity promote increased levels of accomplishment and well-being and since leisure activity is dependent on personality type, some personalities are more predisposed toward higher levels of life satisfaction than others.

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**Keywords**—Personality traits, life satisfaction, leisure

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Diener et al. [1] states that “judgements of life satisfaction are dependent upon a comparison of one's circumstances and what is thought to be an appropriate standard” which leads individuals to establish their own standard of what constitutes happiness and compare and use this to decide how satisfied they are with life. For youth, life satisfaction is believed to be an essential factor in personal development, physical health and healthy behaviours [2], [3]. It has also been found to have “a negative correlation with getting into bad habits” [4]-[6].

Personal well-being is a subjective concept. It is dependent on each individual's personal belief of what defines happiness “If a person reports that his/her life is satisfying, that he/she is experiencing frequent pleasant effects, that he/she is infrequently experiencing unpleasant effects, he/she is said to have a high subjective well-being” [7], [8]. Therefore it is our supposition that personality traits affect one's belief in happiness and life satisfaction and this in turn is influenced by their choice of leisure activities.

## II. PERSONALITY AND PERSONALITY TRAITS

Personality can be defined as the unique interaction between perception, values and attitudes, emotion and behaviour of an individual. It effects the individual interpretation of any given situation at any given time. Personality also affects the myriad of choices we make in the course of our day including at work and at play. This interplay between physical and psychological factors also determines how the individual perceives happiness and views satisfaction with life. It is the

choices we make at play, as a young adult which influence life satisfaction [9]-[11].

Despite the billions of people on earth, human personalities display common sets of characteristics. It is these characteristics which lead individuals to seek out and form relations with those of similar characteristics and interests. Hence, personality affects the choice of activities participated in by a community of personalities as well as their affective experience and social behaviour and this in turn affects their satisfaction with life. The wide ranging similarities or common characteristics between personalities are referred to in psychology as the big five [12]-[16].

The big five is a five factor model which defines five broad personality traits. It is important to emphasize that these categorizations are extremely broad and do not limit personalities into only these five traits. This model was developed by Costa and McCrae and encompasses the majority of personality differences among individuals. These five traits are extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience [17].

Extraversion includes those who exhibit gregariousness, assertiveness, warmth, positiveness and activity. These individuals actively seek out excitement. Those who exhibit this trait approach tasks with a high degree of positiveness and actively seek out interpersonal experiences. Judge, Heller and Mount (2002) stated that extraverts and their positive emotions often equate to a high degree of job satisfaction and satisfaction in their leisure experiences which in turn result in a high satisfaction with life. Watson and Clark (1997) explain that extraverts have more friends, spend more time in social settings and their enjoyment of interpersonal

connections is more rewarding than those who display neuroticism [18], [19].

Neuroticism refers to the degree to which people display anxiety, depression and hostility. These people often feel self-conscious, acting possibly and feel vulnerable when things go wrong. People displaying this trait feel a high degree of vulnerability in their day to day interactions. Their feeling of self-consciousness and anxiety lead these people to limit exposing themselves to situations in which they feel anxious and uncertain. As a result they tend to choose activities which they will enjoy but may not experience the same degree of challenge and competition as extraverts. Since challenge and competition are highly important to achieving a sense of accomplishment and positive outlook, those who display neuroticism tend to view their experiences and lives with less satisfaction than extraverts [20].

Agreeableness refers to those individuals who show trust in others, honest communication, and are cooperative and compliant. These individuals are modest and sympathetic. Those who show the agreeableness trait are easy to get along with and hence find themselves in social situations which allow them to communicate with those from the other big five traits. Due to their honesty and cooperative attitude these people tend to form intimate relationships with others and this in turn, should lead to greater levels of well-being. People who are content in their relationships and choice of leisure activity show a positive degree of life satisfaction. Indeed Organ and Lingl (1995) commented that agreeableness “involves getting along with others in pleasant, satisfying relationships” [21].

Conscientiousness concerns the extent to which individuals are competent, methodical, motivated, disciplined and dutiful. These people apply themselves to any task with a confident, methodical approach. They are motivated to succeed to solve problems in a logical and efficient manner. As opposed to neuroticism where people feel anxious and vulnerable when facing challenges, people who display conscientiousness feel a sense of motivation and confidence which ultimately leads to success and a feeling of accomplishment. This in turn leads to an increased likelihood that they will be viewed with respect and recognition by those around them leads to a high degree of life satisfaction [22].

Openness to experience includes those individuals who are inclined to fantasies, aesthetics, feelings, ideas and values. These individuals are amongst the more creative. People who show openness to experience tendencies are more free thinking and liberal in their approach to work, leisure choices and relationships. These people do not feel the constraints experienced by other personality types. They approach each situation with openness and a willingness to engage in challenge often with a more alternative solution or idea and one or more alternative processes. It would seem logical to expect these people to

experience a high degree of life satisfaction due to their liberal attitudes and their free thinking approach to life. However DeNeve and Cooper [23] stated that “openness to experience is a double-edged sword that predisposes individuals to feel both the good and the bad more deeply”. As a result the effect of openness on effective reactions is unclear.

### III. LIFE SATISFACTION

Life satisfaction is the extent to which an individual perceives themselves to be happy. The choices we make in regard to leisure activities are driven by the human need to communicate and interact with other like-minded individuals. Lu and Hu [24] state that “if leisure were what people truly and freely chose to do, then it would be very odd if they didn’t enjoy it”. However just as there are five broad personality categories, the extent to which individuals enjoy their choices and develop levels of satisfaction, depends on the extent to which the leisure activity generates a feeling of accomplishment, challenge and commitment within the individual [25]. It is this feeling of accomplishment and challenge which generates a high degree of life satisfaction. Hence an individual’s choice of leisure activity has a significant effect on that person’s perception of life satisfaction. Previous research has established there is a positive correlation between extraversion and happiness, indeed Myers and Diener [26] incorporated extraversion in their “happy trait”. Hills and Argyle [27] contend that “emotional stability” was more important to happiness than extraversion hence the absence of neuroticism is important in the feeling of satisfaction one gets from one’s leisure activities.

As previously stated, each of the big five personality traits experiences varying levels of satisfaction from their activities at work and play. Those who are predetermined to seek out challenge and solve problems experience a greater sense of satisfaction with the task themselves and life in general. In contrast people who are predetermined toward vulnerability, anxiety and hostility tend to seek out experiences which exacerbate these feelings in an almost self-fulfilling prophecy. This in turn, leads to these people feeling a lack of satisfaction with their accomplishments and perhaps even experiencing envy of those who are more satisfied.

Previous studies have found strong links between personality traits and life satisfaction, research has even found evidence indicating that one’s level of life satisfaction is almost predetermined by their genetic personality trait. However it is also possible that one’s personality affects life satisfaction according to different life circumstances. Overall, it has been found that people’s personality disposition results in them choosing to engage in activities with like-minded individuals. This results in varying levels of life satisfaction depending on the activity and one’s personality. However it is important to consider that

one's satisfaction with life can go beyond predisposition and be determined by a person's choices and actions in life [38].

The human condition is extremely adaptive. As circumstances change, humans have a natural ability to change and adapt to circumstance. Hence, whilst a person's personality may predispose them toward a negative or anxious outlook on life, how an individual chooses to recognise and deal with this personality trait within themselves can affect their choice of leisure activity and subsequent level of life satisfaction. For example, we all know that there are certain activities we should engage in for our own physical health. Regardless of one's personality, the choice to engage in activities outside one's comfort zone and the discipline to continue in the presence of challenge can override personality trait and result in a greater feeling of life satisfaction and achievement in personalities which otherwise would not naturally seek out such activities.

### **LEISURE ACTIVITIES**

Leisure can be defined as "leisure time, time free from obligations, work (paid/unpaid) and tasks required for existing. Leisure is also defined as a set of activities that people engage in during their free time –activities that are not work oriented or that do not involve life maintenance task such as house cleaning or sleeping. Leisure as a state of mind depends on a participant's perception. Perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, perceived competence and positive affect are critical to the determination of an experience as leisure or not leisure" [29].

In today's modern world technology is providing us with more leisure time than ever before in human history. Leisure time gives individuals a sense of pleasure and an accomplishment which in turn promotes a healthy self-concept. Despite our increased leisure opportunities it is becoming more common for people to fail to find satisfying ways to spend their time [30], [31].

Individual choice of leisure activities is dependent on one's interests. Participation in leisure activities requiring physical exercise has long been proven to have a number of positive effects. Physical conditions, mental illness and depression can all show a decrease in the presence of leisure time physical activity. Leisure time physical activities also show a correlation with increased life expectancy. How an individual chooses to spend their leisure time is directly associated with their perception of happiness and the benefits that brings[32]-[36].

As varied as the population, so choices of leisure activities are wide and varied. An individual interest, comfort, personality and need for social engagement all determine a person's choice of leisure activity. Some people prefer physical, challenging and socially engaging activities such as sport, whilst others prefer to spend their leisure time in more solitary or less

physical activities. A person's choice of leisure activity undoubtedly allows the individual to relax and engage in an activity which brings them some degree of pleasure and so contributes to one's feeling of happiness and life satisfaction. However not all leisure activities promote the same level of satisfaction and achievement hence different leisure activities contribute in different ways to life satisfaction[34],[35].

Whilst we have more leisure time available to us than ever before, increasing numbers of young people fail to find satisfying leisure activities [36], [37]. More young people report increased the levels of boredom and decreased interest in being involved in leisure as they move through their teenage years. Involvement can be defined as "an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product. It is evoked by a particular stimulus or situation and has driven properties. In other words, leisure involvement refers to how we think about our leisure and recreation, and it affects our behaviour [38]. So the leisure activity we choose to engage in affects our levels of achievement, accomplishment and life satisfaction.

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY, LEISURE CHOICE AND LIFE SATISFACTION**

As previously mentioned, humans have more leisure time available than ever before. Since leisure activity is subject to individual choice, it would seem logical that any type of leisure activity would promote happiness and a sense of well-being. However this is not always the case. Despite the leisure time available, many fail to engage in leisure activities which give a sense of satisfaction [36], [37]

Jacobs and Jacobs [39] found that "leisure should result in mastery, motivation, self-efficacy, commitment to the activity and satisfaction" [40].

Choice of leisure activity is dependent on personality [41]. Hills and Argyle [42] found that people who belong to sporting clubs and who enjoy engaging in competition sports show a high degree of the extraversion personality trait whilst Lu and Argyle [25] found that those who exhibit neuroticism tended to prefer hobbies as opposed to sport. As previously stated extraversion has been established as a positive indicator of happiness whilst neuroticism predicts a negative attitude in both western and eastern cultures [41].

The extent to which leisure activities create levels of life satisfaction, depends on the type of activity itself and the attitude of the individual, specifically the time, efforts and skills the participants to bring the activity. It is important to remember that although different personalities chose different types of leisure activities, all types of personalities engage in social activities as an important part of their leisure time. The difference

is in the degree to which the choice of leisure activity derives a sense of life satisfaction. Individuals who are creative and imaginative, low in agreeableness, introverted and low in conscientiousness prefer performing arts activities. Those who engaged in this type of leisure activity are “intrinsically motivated to seek enjoyment but not challenges and were extrinsically motivated to seek rewards while not worrying about the opinions of others” [43].

Barnett [43] states that “openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness are all predictive of specific types of leisure involvement”. The question is, to what degree do the personality types perceive life satisfaction in their choice of leisure activity. According to the related literature the main hypothesis to be tested can be formulated on four different level.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

Data of the research has been collected from business administration master students in one Australian and one Turkish University. 309 (156 Turkish+153 Australian) valid questionnaires have been collected. The profile of the participants was explained by frequency analysis. The participating cohort consisted of predominantly male students with a valid percent of 54.7. The predominant age in the sample was 26-30 years of age with 87.1% falling within that group. The students who participated in the survey, 76.1% identified themselves as single. Within the sample the 21.3% reported 6-10 hours of leisure time per week. 23.7% of respondents identified themselves as not working. Of the participants who work, 41% reported 1-5 years of work experience with 19.3% of respondents working part time. Within the study sample 31.1% reported a GPA of 2.6-3.0 out of a possible GPA of 4.0.

The researchers constructed the demographic properties of the survey. The remainder of the survey utilised scales from prior studies. All items feature 5.0 Likert scales from strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=5. Leisure Behaviour is measured by the Raymore et al. (1999) Leisure Behaviour Scale. The scale is composed of 12 items and one dimension. Life satisfaction is measured by 5 items, one dimension scale of Diener et al. (1985) and the Big Five Personality Traits are measured by John and Srivasta (1999). The scale has 44 items and 5 dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness[44]-[46].

### DEVELOPMENT HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH MODEL

H1: There is a significant relationship between personal traits and life satisfaction.

H1a: There is a significant relationship between extraversion personal trait and life satisfaction

H1b: There is a significant relationship between neuroticism personal trait and life satisfaction

H1c: There is a significant relationship between agreeableness personal trait and life satisfaction

H1d: There is a significant relationship between conscientiousness personal trait and life satisfaction

H1e: There is a significant relationship between openness personal trait and life satisfaction

H2: There is a significant relationship between the personal traits and leisure behaviour.

H2a: There is a significant relationship between the extraversion personal trait and leisure behaviour.

H2b: There is a significant relationship between the neuroticism personal trait and leisure behaviour.

H2c: There is a significant relationship between the agreeableness personal trait and leisure behaviour.

H2d: There is a significant relationship between the conscientiousness personal trait and leisure behaviour.

H2e: There is a significant relationship between the openness personal trait and leisure behaviour.

H3: There is a significant relationship between leisure behaviour and life satisfaction

H4: Leisure behaviour has a mediating role on the relationship between the extraversion personality traits and life satisfaction.

H4a: Leisure behaviour has a mediating role on the relationship between the personality traits and life satisfaction.

H4b: Leisure behaviour has a mediating role on the relationship between the neuroticism personality traits and life satisfaction.

H4c: Leisure behaviour has a mediating role on the relationship between the agreeableness personality traits and life satisfaction.

H4d: Leisure behaviour has a mediating role on the relationship between the conscientiousness personality traits and life satisfaction.

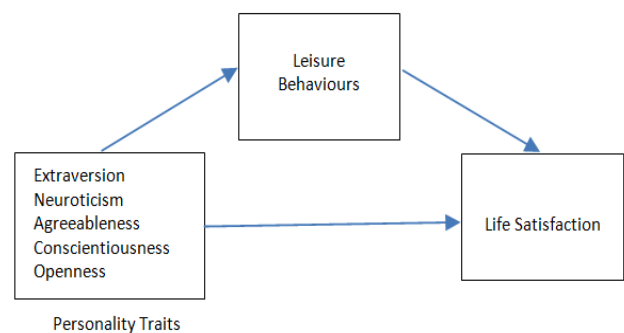
H4e: Leisure behaviour has a mediating role on the relationship between the personality traits and life satisfaction.

H5: There is a significant difference in leisure behaviour between Australian and Turkish students.

H6: There is a significant difference in life satisfaction between Australian and Turkish students.

Due to the main hypotheses of the study, the research model is designed as follows (figure 1)

**Figure 1: Research Model**



## CONCLUSION

The result of this study indicates that personal traits have a significant effect on life satisfaction. Choice of leisure activities have a positive mediating effect on perceived life satisfaction for all personality traits with the exception of the agreeableness personality trait. Our findings suggest that leisure behaviour has a profound influence on life satisfaction with some influence by the personal traits of the individual. We found that extraversion, openness and conscientiousness all impact the degree to which the individual associates positive feeling and accomplishment with their leisure behaviour and hence the level of life satisfaction. Neuroticism has a negative significant effect on life satisfaction however this can be dependent on environmental factors such as upbringing and choice of leisure activity. Our results indicate that choice of leisure activity actually decreases the effect of neuroticism, so promoting a higher level of life satisfaction.

The agreeableness personality trait is the most adaptable of the big five. Individuals who exhibit this trait move freely and fluidly between the other four personality types and the choice of leisure behaviours engaged in. It is our finding that those who exhibit the agreeableness trait walked the middle ground and therefore the more grounded of the big five. This results in a more consistent level of life satisfaction across the broad range of leisure activity choices.

Personality traits of individuals have an impact on their choice of leisure behaviour and the community they seek to associate with. Whilst like personalities tend to connect through common interests, so do personalities seek out like-minded people to interact with in their leisure time. The study has shown that the personality traits and the leisure behaviour engaged in have a profound effect on the individuals' perception of life satisfaction.

The study found significant differences in levels of life satisfaction between the two cohorts. The result show that whilst Turkish students have more leisure time available to them, they are less satisfied with their lives than their Australian counterparts.

Future studies are encouraged to focus on the possible mediating effect of culture and financial means in determining leisure behaviours and the resulting levels of life satisfaction. The effect of employment and the skills learned in the work environment may also influence self-perceptions of the individuals when deciding their level of satisfaction with life.

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