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Personality and Happiness
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Abstract

The connection between personality, emotions, and experience has been of interest to researchers for many years. The present study was designed to assess the specific connection between personality, happiness, and happiness inducing behaviors (HIB) within individuals. This study also extends previous research by assessing whether any or all of these variables were connected to the recommendations an individual would make to improve the mood of a hypothetical other. The data from 424 university students were analyzed to determine the relationship between self-reported extraversion and neuroticism and self-reported affect, engagement in HIB, and the recommendations provided. The results revealed the expected positive correlation between extraversion, happiness, and engagement in HIB along with the expected negative correlation between neuroticism, happiness and engagement in HIB. Contrary to hypothesis, although there were differences in recommendations provided by those high or low in HIB, these differences did not indicate that those high in HIB made the most beneficial recommendations to help improve the mood of another. A discussion of the importance, implications, and limitations of the present study is provided.

Keywords: personality, happiness, happiness inducing behaviors, extraversion, neuroticism

Personality and Happiness:

Many people have heard or made the remark, "You have a great personality!" Of interest to researchers is: what does such a comment mean and, more importantly, what are the implications of one's personality for their psychological well-being. More specifically, is one's personality connected to their experience of happiness? Before such issues can be addressed, it is necessary to determine what 'personality' refers to. There has been some debate about the nature of personality as a construct within the field of psychology. In general terms, Cloninger (2013) has described personality as simply "the underlying causes within the person of individual behavior and experience" (page 2). However, like many definitions of personality, such a conceptualization is plagued by vagueness in the failure to identify what these "underlying causes" truly are.

The Big Five

In an attempt to more explicitly describe personality, McCrae and Costa (1987) developed a theory that describes personality as the combination of five main dimensions, a view commonly known as the Big Five factors model. These five traits include extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. The first dimension, extraversion, relates to the degree to which an individual is sociable, cheerful, and active. An individual high in extraversion would be expected to be talkative, dominant, and gregarious whereas an individual low in this variable would be more quiet, unfeeling, and passive. The second element, agreeableness, measures a person's friendliness and compliance. An individual high in agreeableness will be more good-natured, soft-hearted, and trusting whereas an individual low in this variable would be more irritable, ruthless, and suspicious.

The third aspect, neuroticism, describes an individual's experience of negative emotions. Those high in neuroticism will be more emotional, vulnerable, and anxious whereas those low in this trait would be more calm, self-controlled, and in possession of a greater sense of well-being. The four factor, conscientiousness, describes the extent to which an individual will work hard, have order, and is self-disciplined. Those individuals who score high on conscientiousness are driven, ambitious, and responsible whereas those low in this variable are negligent, lazy, and irresponsible. Finally, openness refers to the extent to which one is artistic, imaginative, and has intellectual interests. Those high in openness are creative, imaginative, and prefer variety whereas those low in this variable are uncreative, down to earth, and prefer routine.

Extensive research has empirically validated the Big Five factor model and further research demonstrates that measurement of the various factors has high predictive validity on many other dimensions, such as emotional experience (Cloninger, 2013). The Big Five factor model has predictive validity on other items such as masculinity/femininity, cynicism, and psychoticism (McCrae & Costa, 1986). There is also research on the connection between the Big Five and a person's experience of happiness, which is of interest here.

Personality and Happiness

Unlike personality, happiness is a relatively easy concept to define. For example, Bradburn (1969) suggests that happiness is merely experiencing more positive than negative experiences. But what experiences constitute positive ones and how are they related to happiness? Furthermore, this definition does not explicitly highlight the fact that perhaps an individual's personal disposition could impact whether or not an event is experienced as positive or negative.

More current research has identified three broad categories that are connected to happiness: life circumstances and demographics, traits and dispositions, and intentional behaviors (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Such a conceptualization suggests that there are many different variables which impact the experience of happiness and highlights that there is likely no single route to creating or increasing one's happiness. In line with this multifactorial conceptualization, Warnecke and colleagues (2014) found that 64% of the variance of subjective happiness was accounted for by life orientation, self-efficacy, depression, and life satisfaction. In contrast to these more global approaches, others have suggested that happiness serves as an indicator of how an individual is doing from moment to moment and that the combination of these momentary experiences can be added together to create a measure of well-being (Wren-Lewis, 2014). Wren-Lewis calls this the Indicator View, where more happiness is seen as an indicator of greater well-being for an individual.

Given that many variables have been shown to connect to one's experience of happiness, it is likely that personality may contribute to happiness as well. For example, researchers have assessed the extent to which factors of the Big Five model might be related to happiness. The two variables that have demonstrated the strongest connection to happiness are neuroticism and extraversion. Specifically, Costa and McCrae (1989) report that those high in extroversion tend to experience more positive emotions. Similarity, Cloninger (2013) found that extraverts are observably happier than those who score lower on this variable. On the other hand, high levels of neuroticism have been associated negatively with happiness, which is unsurprising given that neuroticism describes one's tendency to experience negative emotions like depression and emotional instability (McCrae & Costa, 1989). Cloninger (2013) reports that those scoring low

on neuroticism are not only happier but also report higher life satisfaction compared to those who are high on this variable.

The preceding suggests that the personality traits critical for happiness capture the experience of both positive and negative affect. Consistent with the multifactorial perspective on happiness, the connection between extraversion and neuroticism to emotional experience extends beyond just simple measures of happiness. For example, higher levels of extraversion have been linked to increased positive affect, accounting for feelings of happiness, enthusiasm, and activation (Albuquerque, Lima, Matos, & Figueiredo, 2013). Similarly, higher levels of extraversion are correlated with lower levels of depression (Senf & Liau, 2013). Conversely, neuroticism was found to have a negative relationship with positive affect and a positive link to negative affect, which is comprised of the experience of negative emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt (Albuquerque et al., 2013).

The connection between personality variables and happiness has been demonstrated across age groups and different cultures. For example, Holder and colleagues (2012) looked at children in India and found that children who were social, active, and less shy (all elements of associated with extraversion) were happier. Although the findings were consistent with the research described above for extraversion, this study did not find the same relationship between neuroticism and decreased happiness for their sample. While the reason for this null finding is unclear, it is possible that the same model that applies to adults in the United States regarding personality and happiness may not adequately describe children from other cultures.

This notwithstanding, the connection between neuroticism and extraversion and happiness stands out even when controlling for other variables. For example, Demir and Weitekamp (2007) studied the connection between friendships, personality, and happiness.

While friendship quality was shown to predict happiness over any personality variable, they

estimated that between 20 and 50 percent of the variance in happiness across individuals was due

to personality factors alone. Another study assessed the connection between personality,

happiness, and prayer (Robbins, Francis, & Edwards, 2008). These researchers found a positive

relationship between regularity of prayer and happiness; however, after personality was

controlled for, there was no significant correlation between prayer and happiness. The

researchers concluded that both extraversion and neuroticism were strong forecasters of

happiness. Finally, Demir (2008) assessed relationship quality alongside personality and

happiness. The study concluded that romantic relationship quality was shown to account for only

3% of the variance in happiness across individuals once personality was controlled for. Thus,

overall there is plenty of research evidence demonstrating that extroversion and neuroticism are

meaningful forecasters of happiness.

Happiness and Behavior

As described above, happiness is derived from a multitude of factors and is not solely

determined by personality traits. For example, Lyubomirsky and colleagues (2005) found that an

individual's intentional behavioral strategies can account for as much as 40% of the variance in

happiness. This is important to note, especially for those individuals who might not have the

personality variables that predispose them toward happiness, such as high extraversion or low

neuroticism. Specifically, in lieu of positive personality traits engagement in happiness

enhancing strategies or happiness inducing behaviors (HIB) have been empirically validated as a

means to increase happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Importantly, Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006)

strongly believe genetics do not predetermine happiness and that participating in HIB can

increase happiness. Thus, any individual can increase their happiness by participating in these activities.

Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) have identified eight happiness-enhancing strategies in their research: social affiliation, partying and clubbing, mental control, instrumental goal pursuit, passive leisure, active leisure, religion, and direct attempts. While there are many strategies available, they are not all relied on to the same extent. Researchers exploring engagement in such HIB found that the most frequently used behaviors were maintaining friendships, being optimistic, doing random acts of kindness, and exercising (Warner & Vroman, 2011). The same research also found that the least used HIB were forgiving, avoiding worry, practicing spirituality, and meditation. Others have demonstrated that expressing gratitude is also an effective strategy to increase happiness (Senf & Liau, 2013).

Not all research has demonstrated such a clear connection between happiness and engagement in HIB. For example, which Warner and Vroman (2011) found that, while there were positive associations between HIB and happiness, the connection was only marginally significant. More research, particularly experimental in design, needs to be done in order to determine the relationship between behaviors that are shown to increase happiness and self-reported happiness.

Personality and HIB

Research has also found that personality traits predict not only happiness, but also the use of HIB. For example, Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) found that personality traits were related to engagement in their eight strategies to enhance happiness. Specifically, those individuals with high in extraversion were more involved in happiness inducing behaviors compared to those low

on this variable. In another study, extraversion and agreeableness were positively correlated with HIB, whereas, neuroticism was negatively correlated with such strategies (Warner & Vroman, 2011). In particular, these researchers found a strong negative correlation between neuroticism and the avoidance of worry. Extraversion and agreeableness were positively correlated with cultivating relationships, expressing gratitude, doing random acts of kindness, being optimistic, and maintaining good physical health. This suggests that the connection between personality factors such as increased extraversion or neuroticism and happiness may be partly mediated by one's participation in happiness inducing behaviors.

Gender, Personality, Happiness, and HIB

Researchers have shown that there is a gender difference in personality, specifically in neuroticism. For instance, Albuquerque et al. (2013) discovered that females were significantly more neurotic than males. However, there was no gender difference in personality for extraversion. Their research also extended to gender differences in both positive and negative affect. Albuquerque et al. (2013) found that although there were no gender differences in positive affect, there were marginally significant findings for negative affect where female score higher than males. Researchers have also demonstrated gender differences in the use and choice of happiness inducing behaviors. For example, Warner and Vroman (2011) found that men and women tended to rely on different HIB. Specifically, they found that women reported more engagement in nurturing relationships compared to men and that men reported more experiences of flow compared to women. More research must be conducted on gender differences in happiness and not simply on engagement in particular happiness inducing behaviors.

The Present Research

Although much research has been done on the connection between personality, happiness, and happiness inducing behaviors, virtually all of the research focuses on self-reports of the individual's own personal assessment and outcomes. Lacking too is an assessment of whether or not an individual's personality, happiness, or reliance on HIB might be connected to their ability to help others or offer advice, especially regarding happiness. The current study aims to help fill this gap by assessing an individual's ability to offer sound advice pertaining to mood increasing strategies, whether or not there is a connection between their personality, happiness, and engagement in happiness inducing behaviors, and lastly, whether or not there is a connection between these individual difference variables and recommendations.

The specific aim of the present study is to assess four hypotheses. First, it is predicted that there extraversion will be positively correlated with the experience of positive emotions, increased engagement in HIB, and recommendations for effective mood increasing strategies. Secondly, it is predicted that neuroticism will be negatively correlated with positive emotions, engagement in HIB, and recommendations for effective mood increasing strategies. The third hypothesis predicts a positive relationship between engagement in HIB and adaptive rankings of the mood increasing strategies. Finally, it is predicted that females will report more variance in happiness, with a greater combination of both negative and positive feelings of emotions during the last week.

Method

Participants

The survey was posted online through Qualtrics, provided by the University of San Diego. A total of 486 participants accessed the survey; however, only 424 completed it fully

(86% completion rate). The final sample included 209 students from the University of San

Diego, 205 students from the University of California San Diego, and 10 who chose "other" as

the university they attended. The mean age for the sample was 21 with SD = 3.03. There were

315 females and 109 males. The survey was distributed online to a variety of classes (UCSD:

Psyc 104 - Social Psychology and Psyc 178 - I/O Psychology; USD: Psyc 230 - Research

Methods, 2 sections), organizations (USD: Honors Program, Torero Tour Guides, Outdoor

Adventure guides, and resident assistants), and sororities and fraternities (USD: Alpha Chi

Omega, Beta Theta Pi, and Sigma Phi Epsilon) within both universities. Demographic

information was collected from all participants at the beginning of the survey.

Design and Materials

The survey used a within-subject design to determine the correlations between

participants' personality, happiness, engagement in happiness inducing behaviors (HIB), and

recommendations to reduce stress for friends.

Personality. To measure participants' personality, a brief version of the Big 5 Personality

Inventory (adapted from Rammstedt & John, 2007) was used in order to assess each participant's

score on the five factors. This brief version contains 10 questions, with 2 questions devoted to

measuring each of the five personality factors (Extraversion, Openness to Experience,

Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Conscientiousness). The response format for the inventory was

strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree.

Happiness. The happiness scale was designed to assess the level of happiness (and other

emotions) experienced by the participant during the past week. The happiness assessment was

based on the modified Differential Emotions Scale (mDES; see Fredrickson, 2009 and

Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). The scale consisted of 20 items and asked

participants to indicate the extent to which they experienced a range of positive and negative

emotions during the last week. The response format for this inventory was not at all, a little bit,

moderately, quite a bit, or extremely.

Happiness inducing behaviors. To study happiness inducing behaviors, questions were

derived from Warner and Vroman's (2011) study on "the how of happiness". The questions were

designed to measure how often participant's engaged in activities that were determined by

Warner and Vroman (2011) to increase happiness. A few additional happiness inducing

behaviors not included in Warner and Vroman's study were also assessed.

Happiness recommendations. Lastly, a scenario was designed in which participants were

asked to indicate on a ranking system what behaviors they would recommend to a fictional

person. The scenario explained that John, the fictional character, was not feeling like himself and

was looking to increase his mood. Then, it asked the participant to rank a set list of nine mood-

increasing strategies based on what they would recommend to John. The recommendation

options included some many different options, some happiness-inducing behaviors, others that

are associated with decreased happiness and others that were design to be relatively neutral.

Specifically, participants were asked to put in rank order, from most likely to recommend to least

likely to recommend, the various behaviors that were listed. The purpose of this section was to

determine if people who are themselves happier would also be more likely to recommend

happiness-inducing options to others.

Procedure

As indicated above, a link to the survey was posted on various websites to target several

different individuals. The survey was posted on the experimenters Facebook page, various class

websites (e.g., Blackboard), and distributed via email. Upon accessing the survey, participants

were first presented with brief personality inventory. Next, they completed the happiness items

followed by the happiness-inducing behavior items. Lastly, participants were presented with the

short scenario and asked to make their rankings. All participants completed the survey in the

same order.

Results

The present study aimed to analyze four distinct hypotheses. The first hypothesis predicted a

positive relationship between extraversion and self-reported positive emotions, engagement in

happiness inducing behaviors, and adaptive rankings of mood increasing strategies. The next

hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between neuroticism and the experience of negative

emotions along with a negative correlation between this variable and participation in happiness

inducing behaviors and adaptive rankings for the mood increasing strategies. The third

hypothesis evaluated whether there was a positive relationship between participation in

happiness inducing behaviors and more adaptive rankings of the mood increasing strategies.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis predicted that females would report more variance in emotionality,

with a greater combination of both negative and positive feelings of emotions during the last

week.

Extraversion

It was hypothesized that individuals high in extraversion would report more positive

emotions, engage in more HIB, and provide better strategies compared to those low in this

variable. Consistent with hypothesis, there was a positive correlation between the extraversion

and both happiness ($r = .225$, $n = 424$, $p = .01$; see Figure 1) and commitment to happiness

inducing behaviors ($r = .282$, $n = 424$, $p = .01$; see Figure 2). However, the correlation between

extraversion and strategy rankings was not significant ($r = -.062$, $n = 424$, *ns*).

Neuroticism

The second hypothesis under evaluation was whether those who scored high on neuroticism would report more negative emotions, acknowledge less participation in HIB, and rank less adaptive strategies. Consistent with hypothesis, there was a significant negative correlation between neuroticism and happiness (r = -.324, n = 424, p = .01; see Figure 3) and also engagement in happiness inducing behaviors (r = -.269, n = 424, p = .01; see Figure 4). Contrary to hypothesis, the correlation between neuroticism and rankings was not significant (r = -.001, n =424 , *ns.*).

HIB and Rankings

To evaluate the third hypothesis, that participants who reported more engagement in HIB would also rank mood-enhancing strategies higher than those who engaged in less HIB, Chi-squared tests of independence were conducted on each of the 10 strategies. A quartile split was used to divide the sample into those high or low in HIB. HIB scores were separated into four separate categories. Next, only the lowest score category and the highest score category were used for the low HIB and high HB groups. There were 115 participants in the low HIB and group and 103 participants in the high HIB group. The results revealed significant differences between people with high involvement in happiness inducing behavior and low involvement in happiness inducing behavior on rankings for several of recommendations. Specifically, individuals who reported high participation in HIB were different from those low in HIB on the likelihood to recommend: (1) "have one alcoholic drink" (X^2 (7, N=206) = 31.002, p=.000), (2) "wait it out", X^2 (8, N=206) = 21.283, p=.006, (3) "smoke a joint", X^2 (8, N=206) = 21.773, p=.005, (4) "exercise", X^2 (7, N=206) = 18.024, p=.012, and (5) "go to a religious service" X^2 (8, N=206) = 38.321, p=.000. There was a marginally significant finding regarding the "indulge in his favorite

food", X^2 (8, N=206) = 15.063, p=.058. (See Figure 5 for displayed break-down of

recommendations for high/low HIB groups. These findings were not consistent with the

hypothesis where HIB participants were not better at ranking more positive strategies).

Gender and Emotionality

The final hypothesis predicted greater variability in the emotional experience of females

compared to males, for both positive and negative emotions. Regarding gender revealed that

there was no significant difference between males and females in their overall level of emotions.

This hypothesis was tested using a Pearson's correlation test (.047 where p<.01). This shows that

there was no statistically significant finding between male's and female's variance in happiness

with a greater combination of both negative and positive feelings of emotions during the last

week.

Discussion

The current project was designed to assess the correlation between personality,

happiness, and HIB as well as whether or not these variables would impact the behavioral

recommendations given to another. Consistent with expectations, the results revealed that those

high in extraversion did report more positive affect and engagement in more HIB. Also

consistent with expectations, those high in neuroticism reported more negative emotions and

engagement in less HIB. Contrary to hypothesis, there was no reported difference in the

recommendations that individuals high or low on either personality dimension provided. There

were, however, differences between those high or low in self-reported HIB in their ranking of the

options regarding alcohol, waiting, smoking, exercise, religion and food. Analysis of the

patterns revealed that these differences did not necessarily indicate that those high in HIB give

better (more mood enhancing) rankings. Finally, there were no significant findings associated with gender and emotionality.

The results of the current study are consistent with previous research demonstrating that those high in extraversion acknowledge more positive emotions and also engage in more behaviors that produce happiness. Interestingly, analysis from the rankings did not show that extraverts were significantly better at ranking positive strategies. Conversely, those high in extraversion seemed slightly worse at ranking the happiness inducing strategies that they would recommend to a friend. Although conclusions should be made with caution, the data suggest that while extraverts are able to utilize HIB in their daily lives, they are not necessarily aware of the effect these behaviors have, otherwise they should be more likely to recommend them to others.

The results related to neuroticism were also in line with previous research. Those high in neuroticism were more likely to report negative affect during the past week and engagement in less HIB. Since the research evidence suggests that HIB can lead to increased happiness for any individual, it might be useful for future research to determine ways to cultivate more engagement in these behavioral strategies in order to help improve the emotional experience for those high in neuroticism. As described above, the predictions for the behavioral rankings did not indicate that those high in neuroticism would be worse at recommending mood-enhancing strategies to someone else. In fact, although not significant, the ranking made by these individuals tended to be better than those high in extraversion. Such findings demonstrate that neurotics may be more insightful when it comes to offering sound advice on mood increasing strategies to others, even though they do not participate themselves. An interesting implication of these findings is that perhaps personality is more important in determining what an individual will do, but not necessarily related to his or her knowledge of what will lead to mood enhancement.

The results from the ranking procedure were the only ones inconsistent with hypothesis. The purpose of including this procedure was to determine if an individual's personality or behavioral tendencies would be connected to their advice to another in need of mood increasing strategies. As discussed above, personality did not seem to be related to recommendations at all and further, individuals who themselves engaged in a high level of HIB, while different in their rankings from those low on this variable, did not make noticeably better recommendations. Contrary to expectation, it was often the case that individuals with low engagement in HIB were actually slightly more likely to recommend the mood-enhancing strategies.

This ranking procedure was created specifically for the current study and had not been previously validated. Therefore, it is possible that issues associated with the procedure itself might have led to the inconsistent findings. The results from this procedure should be interpreted with caution as further research needs to be conducted in order to validate this procedure and determine the robustness of these findings.

While the results demonstrated consistency with previous research, it is important to note the potential limitations of this study. As discussed above, the lack of empirical validation for the ranking procedure makes interpretation of the findings regarding the ranking system difficult. For example, it may be that this specific method was low in construct validity and was not able to measure what it was intended to measure. In addition, personality was assessed using the abbreviated inventories. Although unlikely, given that the abbreviated versions have been validated in previous research, it is possible that if the full versions of the Big 5 Personality Inventory were used the results might have been different. One area where a more comprehensive personality assessment may have been useful was specifically with respect to the ranking procedure. Finally, there are potential limitations to the generalizability of these

findings. Specifically, the participants in the survey mainly were college-aged students in the San Diego area. Since previous research has demonstrated variability in personality across age-groups and location, it would be useful to expand the participant pool to increase external validity.

The connection between personality variables, emotional experience, and behavioral recommendations should continue to be explored. Given the novel findings of the ranking procedure, future research is needed to determine whether, or if, individuals with certain personality characteristics or behavioral tendencies actually are better or worse at providing recommendations for mood-enhancing strategies to others. In the present study, the individual who was the target of advice was always a male. It might be of interest to see whether recommendations would be different if the target were a female. In addition, adjusting the wording of the scenario to influence whether participants' goal is to help the individual cope or to actually increase the target's happiness might be an interesting area to explore. It might also be useful to explicitly ask participants which of the strategies provided they believed would lead to an increase or decrease in happiness. Given the new interest in HIB, more exploration of this ranking procedure is warranted. Future research may also explore the potential disconnect between self-reliance on certain behavioral strategies and self-knowledge about the effectiveness that such strategies have for oneself.

In conclusion, the present study replicated the well-established correlation between personality and happiness. Specifically, there was a positive correlation between extraversion and happiness and a negative correlation between neuroticism and happiness. Participation in HIB was also positively and negatively correlated with extraversion and neuroticism, respectively. Finally, a potentially new and interesting area of research in this domain was

explored with the novel component to the present research, the ranking procedure. On the

whole, the findings suggest that the relatively stable aspect of personality and the more dynamic

aspect of behavioral strategies are both related to the experience of positive affect. Thus, while

some individuals may be predisposed toward happiness, it may be possible for most to increase

their experience of positive affect through behavioral change.

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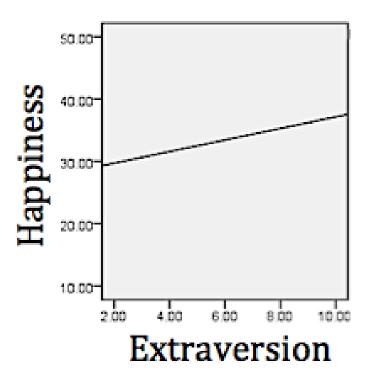
doi:10.1080/02580136.2014.967597

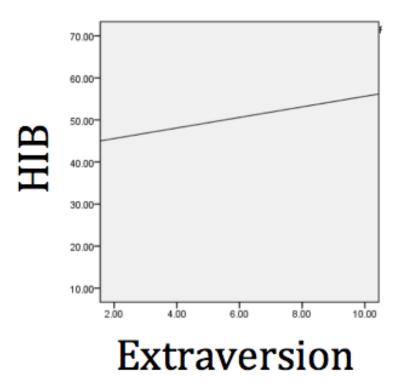*Figure* 1. Levels of increased extraversion compared to levels of increased happiness.

Figure 2. Levels of increased extraversion compared to levels of increased happiness inducing
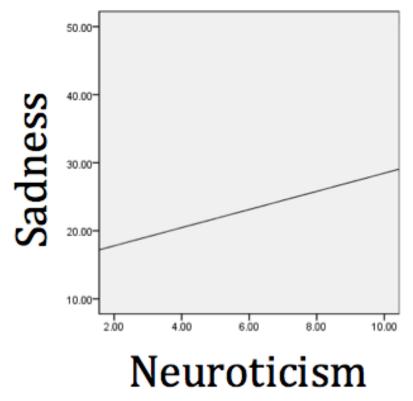
behaviors.

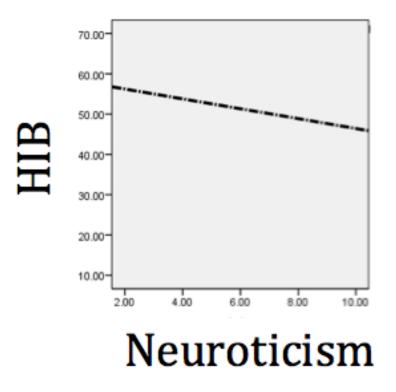*Figure* 3. Levels of increased neuroticism compared to levels of increased sadness.

Figure 4. Levels of increased neuroticism compared to levels of increased happiness inducing
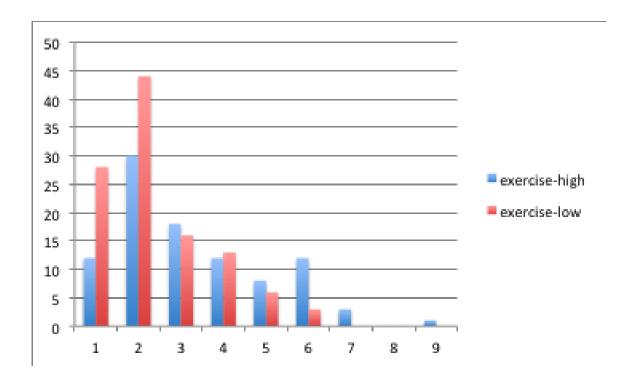
behaviors.

Figure 5. Position of ranking where 1 is most likely to recommend and 9 is least likely to recommend and count of participants. Blue is the high happiness inducing behavior group and red is the low happiness inducing behavior group.