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## Coffee Preferences and Personality

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**Coffee Preferences and Personality**Kristin E. Lantzy<sup>7</sup>

*This study explored the relationship between the personality traits of conscientiousness and openness and coffee habits/preferences. A total of 50 participants were included in the study. All participants took part in a personality survey, and those who were coffee drinkers took part in a secondary survey assessing their coffee drinking habits/preferences. Participants with high openness scores had a weak positive correlation with the average cups of coffee consumed per week. They consumed slightly more cups of coffee/week on average. Participants with high conscientiousness scores had a weak negative correlation with the average cups of coffee consumed per week. These participants consumed slightly less cups of coffee/week on average. George Saucier's (1994) Mini Marker's Survey was used in this study along with a short coffee consumption survey. Implications of this study are that those who score high in the trait of openness may consume more coffee due to social coffee drinking, while those who score high in the trait of conscientiousness may limit their coffee consumption due to knowledge of health risks.*

Interest in the relationship between coffee preferences and personality stems from my years of experience working as a barista, coinciding with undergraduate studies in Psychology. While spending four years working as a barista in several different coffee shops in two different US regions, I began to notice possible relationships between

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customer's personalities and the types of coffee beverages they purchased. I observed that people seemed to be very particular and habitual about their coffee preferences, and became interested in learning if those coffee drinking habits were reflections of personality in any way.

Research findings reveal that there are some correlates between behavior and coffee drinking. A study focusing on the relationship between coffee drinking and suicide found that heavy coffee drinkers, heavy being defined by the researchers as eight or more cups of coffee per day, had a 58% greater risk of suicide than coffee drinkers who drank less than eight cups of coffee per day, (Tanskanen, A., Tuomilehto, J., Viinamaki, H., Vartianinen, E., Lehtonen, J., & Puska, 2001). A study by Leviton and Allred (1994) showed a correlation between consistently choosing decaffeinated coffee and other healthy choices. For women healthy choices correlated with decaffeinated coffee choice included taking vitamins, eating green, leafy vegetables, using seat belts, and exercising, (Leviton & Allred, 1994). For men, the consistent choice of decaffeinated coffee was correlated with a low body fat index, consumption of green, leafy vegetables and eating a diet that is low in fat, (Leviton & Allred, 1994). Leviton and Allred (2004) concluded that people who drank decaffeinated coffee are different from those who do not drink decaffeinated coffee in ways that can provide insight into the risks of illness. Another study researching effects of job stress on consumption of coffee, cigarettes, and alcohol showed that regular coffee drinking was related to consistent and higher perceptions of job stress, (Conway, Vickers, Ward & Ray, 1981).

Review of related literature shows that there is a relationship between behaviors and coffee preferences, (Tanskanen, A. et. al. 2001), (Leviton & Allred 2004). Review of

literature also shows that there is a relationship between coffee drinking and stress perception, (Conway, et al., 1981). Because a relationship can be seen between behaviors and coffee preferences, further study was proposed to see whether or not this relationship occurs at a deeper level—personality. Through review of the above mentioned literature, and personal experience, a hypothesis was developed honing in on conscientiousness and openness and their relationship to coffee drinking habits. The hypothesis developed through personal observation and literature review was that personality traits of conscientiousness and openness predict coffee drink habits.

Conscientiousness can be defined as being painstaking or careful. Openness can be defined as being accommodating and open to new ideas and opinions. These traits were focused in on because I personally observed them in my regular customers and desired to conduct standardized research to test my observations.

The Big Five personality traits were selected for use in this study because of their inclusion of the traits of Conscientiousness and Openness. According to Srivastava (2009), the Big Five traits are broad measures of personality, sometimes called dimensions. The traits include Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism, (Saucier 1994). Openness refers to intellect, having a variety of interests, and being creative, (Srivastava 2009). Conscientiousness refers to being organized and planning ahead, (Srivastava 2009). Extraversion refers to being social and energetic, (Srivastava 2009). Agreeableness refers to being empathetic and nice, (Srivastava 2009). Neuroticism refers to anxiety and moodiness, (Srivastava 2009).

George Saucier's "Mini-Markers Survey" was chosen to assess the Big Five personality traits. The Mini-Markers Survey is a personality measure based on the Big

Five theory of personality. The Mini-Marker Survey was selected for use due to its simplicity and user-friendly design, (Saucier, 1994).

To assess coffee drinking habits and preferences the study was designed with a short coffee survey. The coffee survey consisted of four questions to determine and standardize the participant's coffee drinking preferences for evaluation and comparison with the individual's scores in the traits of Conscientiousness and Openness on the Mini-Markers survey.

Coffee is an important part of the cultural fabric of many communities, and people around the world drink coffee for various reasons including enjoyment, stimulation, and socializing, (The Science Newsletter, 1943). Benefits of this study to society include deeper general knowledge of personality and how it may be reflected in small decisions such as how/if people drink coffee. This general knowledge will serve as a foundation for applied research in the future.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 50 Lindenwood University college students recruited through the Lindenwood University Participant Pool (LPP). There were 20 male and 30 female participants. The average age of the participants was 20 years. All participants took the amended Mini-Markers survey. Out of the 50 students participating in the study, 32 people or 65.3% answered yes to question three, "Do you drink coffee?". The average amount of coffee consumed per week by the coffee drinkers was 3.61 cups (SD=3.32). The group of participants that answered yes to question three took a second

survey assessing their coffee drinking preferences. Participants were rewarded with extra credit in qualified courses (ANT 112, PSY 100, PSY 101, SOC 102 and SOC 214) at Lindenwood University.

### **Materials**

The materials for this study consisted of an amended Mini Markers survey (Appendix A), a coffee preferences survey (Appendix B), two informed consent forms and a feedback letter. Saucier's Mini-Markers survey was amended to include several demographic questions: sex, age and whether or not the participant is a coffee drinker. These questions were included to gather basic demographic information for the study, and also so that non-coffee drinkers would not have to take the second survey. The coffee survey consisted of four multiple part questions asking the participant about their coffee drinking habits and preferences. From this survey information was collected pertaining to how much coffee the participant drinks, what type of coffee they most frequently drink and how they fix their coffee (e.g. black or with sugar and milk).

### **Procedure**

The same researcher was present for each participant of the study. All surveying took place in Young Hall 105B and Butler Library 201 on Lindenwood University's campus. Young Hall 105B consisted of a desk and three chairs. Library 201 consisted of a long table with one chair on either end and three chairs on either side. Participants were tested individually, however some testing overlapped as individuals arrived either later than or earlier than their scheduled times. Surveying took place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from October 26 through November 2. In the evenings surveying took place in the library from 5-8pm, on Monday afternoons surveying took

place in Young Hall 105B from 11am to 3pm. Participants signed up for timeslots on the LPP sign up board located on the fourth floor of Young Hall. Upon arrival at the study, participants were greeted and thanked for coming. Participants were then given two copies of the informed consent form and asked to read, sign and return one copy, keeping the second copy for their own records. Next, participants were given the amended Mini Markers survey. Upon completion of the Mini Markers survey participants who answered yes to the last question on the survey, "Do you drink coffee?" were given the coffee survey. Participants who answered no to the last question on the amended Mini Markers survey were given a feedback letter and extra credit slip, and thanked again by the researcher for their participation. Participants who answered yes to the last question on the amended Mini Markers survey were given a feedback letter and extra credit slip upon completion of the coffee survey, and thanked again for their participation in the study. All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher upon receiving the feedback letter.

### **Results**

To test the hypothesis that the personality traits of conscientiousness and openness are related to coffee drinking behaviors correlational analyses were conducted to see if the mean number of cups of coffee consumed per week was related to any of the personality traits. This test revealed that the trait of Openness had a weak positive correlation of  $r=.165$  and the trait of Conscientiousness had a weak negative correlation of  $r=-.104$  with the variable cups of coffee consumed per week. The traits of Agreeableness, Extraversion and Neuroticism were not correlated with the variable cups of coffee consumed per week.

The most common type of coffee chosen by coffee drinkers on the survey was hot brewed coffee, 36.7%. This was true for the second choice and third choice options. The majority of those who drank brewed coffee drank their coffee with sugar and milk, 72.2%, which was also the same for the second and third choice options.

The mean Openness score out of a possible 54 points was 28.72 (SD=8.29) for those who drank brewed coffee. The mean Conscientiousness score out of a possible 36 points was 9.94 (SD=10.27). The mean Extraversion score out of a possible 36 points was 16.89 (SD=8.31). The mean Agreeableness score out of a possible 36 points was 16.89 (SD=9.33). The mean Neuroticism score out of a possible 54 points was 14.06 (SD=10.13).

### Discussion

The results of the study show support for the hypothesis; there is a correlation between high scores on the traits of conscientiousness and openness and coffee drinking habits. The null hypothesis was rejected. The statistical analyses showed that there is a weak positive correlation of  $r=0.165$  for the trait of openness. The statistical analyses showed that there is a weak negative correlation of  $r=-0.104$  for the trait of conscientiousness. Statistical analyses showed that there was no correlation between the traits of extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism and the amount of coffee participants consumed per week.

One possible reason for the finding that people who scored high in the trait of openness consume slightly more cups of coffee/week could be that in many occurrences is a social activity. It may be that people who participate in coffee drinking as a social activity are more open to new experiences, thoughts and ideas. Coffee shops are in many



cases meeting places for open-minded community focused people. However, the finding that the traits of agreeableness and extraversion were not correlated does not support this idea. Further study needs to be conducted in this area to determine why agreeableness and extraversion are not correlated along with openness.

The more surprising finding is that people who scored high in the trait of conscientiousness consume slightly less cups of coffee/week than average. One might think that those who are very conscientious are also hard workers and probably use caffeine as an energy source. Instead, it might be true that those who are very conscientious are aware of the possible health risks of consuming high amounts of coffee and therefore limit their coffee intake. Further study also needs to be conducted here to determine why this finding is true.

Implications of the results are that personality does indeed influence choices at levels as basic as coffee drinking habits. Limitations in this research prevent us from knowing if the coffee drinking habits formed because of taste of coffee, physiological effects of coffee, or social environment of coffee drinking. Other limitations include running the study with only undergraduate students in a small Midwestern university setting where participants have much in common. Future studies on the topic could include a survey that addresses taste, physiological, and social aspects of drinking coffee more directly. Future studies could also be done including a broader range of participants.

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## **Appendix A**

ID: \_\_\_\_\_

(Assigned by Researcher)

### Part I: Demographic Information

Sex:    Male    Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you drink coffee? :    Yes    No

## Part II: Personality Assessment

Please use this list of common human traits to describe yourself as accurately as possible.

Describe yourself as you see yourself at the present time, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you are generally or typically, as compared with other persons you know of the same sex and of roughly your same age. Before each trait, please write a number indicating how accurately that trait describes you, using the following rating scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Extremely Inaccurate	Very Inaccurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Slightly Inaccurate	Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate	Slightly Accurate	Moderately Accurate	Very Accurate	Extremely Accurate

- |                  |                  |                   |                    |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| ___ Bashful      | ___ Energetic    | ___ Moody         | ___ Systematic     |
| ___ Bold         | ___ Envious      | ___ Organized     | ___ Talkative      |
| ___ Careless     | ___ Extraverted  | ___ Philosophical | ___ Temperamental  |
| ___ Cold         | ___ Fretful      | ___ Practical     | ___ Touchy         |
| ___ Complex      | ___ Harsh        | ___ Quiet         | ___ Uncreative     |
| ___ Cooperative  | ___ Imaginative  | ___ Relaxed       | ___ Unenvious      |
| ___ Creative     | ___ Inefficient  | ___ Rude          | ___ Unintellectual |
| ___ Deep         | ___ Intellectual | ___ Shy           | ___ Unsympathetic  |
| ___ Disorganized | ___ Jealous      | ___ Sloppy        | ___ Warm           |
| ___ Efficient    | ___ Kind         | ___ Sympathetic   | ___ Withdrawn      |

## Appendix B

ID # \_\_\_\_\_

1. How often do you drink coffee beverages, for example ice coffee, hot coffee, latte, etc?

\_\_\_\_\_ 12 oz cups per week\*

\*(12 oz is the average size of a small to go cup of coffee, for example if you drink a medium size coffee put 1.5, for a large put 2)

2a. What type of coffee beverage do you drink **most often**?

\_\_\_\_\_

2b. How often do you drink this beverage? \_\_\_\_\_ /week

2c. How do you usually fix this beverage?\*

\*(For example, two Splendas and skim milk, be as specific as possible)

3a. What type of coffee beverage do you drink **second most often**?

\_\_\_\_\_

3b. How often do you drink this beverage? \_\_\_\_\_ /week

3c. How do you usually fix this beverage? (Be specific)

4. What is your **favorite** coffee beverage?

\_\_\_\_\_

4b. How often do you drink this beverage? \_\_\_\_\_/week

4c. How do you usually fix this beverage? (Be Specific)