Personality, Romantic Attitude, and Happiness in Young Adults

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The present study investigated the relationship between personality traits, romantic attitude, and happiness in young adults. It was hypothesized that a positive relationship exists between extraversion, agreeableness, openness, romantic attitude, and happiness whereas neuroticism is negatively correlated with happiness. Nonprobability convenience sample of 150 students (85 women, 65 men), with age range of 18-25 years (M = 21.76, SD = 1.35) were selected from 3 educational institutions of Lahore. Neo Five-factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992a), Romantic Attitude Scale (Zafar & Amjad, 2012) and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002) were used to assess study variables. Correlation analyses revealed a significant positive relationship of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience with happiness. Romantic attitude had significant positive relationship with neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness. There was a significant negative relationship between neuroticism and happiness. Neuroticism, openness to experience, and extraversion were significant predictors of happiness. Neuroticism was the strongest significant negative predictor of happiness. Findings are discussed in view of theoretical and empirical implications.

Keywords. Personality traits, romantic attitude, happiness, young adults, Pakistani culture

Happiness is one of the most desirable and sought after states among human beings. Although, it is important throughout our life span, happiness of young adults is crucially connected to their emotional health (Anjum & Amjad, 2016). Young adulthood, a time

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of transition is marked by new emerging needs as well as demands. Finding emotional and sexual compatibility is one such need and fulfillment of this need is greatly linked to happiness among young adults. There is also vast amount of literature on link between personality traits and happiness for example, extraversion has significant positive relationship with happiness whereas neuroticism is significantly negatively correlated with happiness (Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby & Ward, 2001; Hills & Argyle, 2002; Lu & Hu, 2005; Pishva, Ghalehban, Moradi, & Hoseini, 2011; White, Herdrick, & Herdrick, 2004; Yousaf, 2007). This background leads us to the complex interplay of personality traits and romantic attitudes and their contribution to happiness among young adults.

Happiness is defined as a state of elation, a subjective experience that entails joy, excitement, and overall pleasant sense of euphoria. Various models of happiness exist, however, a comprehensive model provided by Argyle (1998) is often used in previous studies. Results of several researches have indicated that interpersonal variables are stronger determinants of happiness than contextual factors (see Diener & Ryan, 2009; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Heidi, 1999 for a review). Theoretical as well as empirical literature provides evidence that people who feel connected to others and take joy in life's romance and beauty are more contented and happy (Amjad, Ahmad, & Zaidi, 2013).

Happiness has also been studied in relation to personality traits (see Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008 for a review). The prevalent theory of personality underpinning much of personality research is called Big Five and specifies five domains namely extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. *Neuroticism* is a tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, or vulnerability. *Extraversion* is displayed through a greater degree of friendliness, boldness, and sociability. *Openness to experience* manifests in a strong sense of curiosity, acceptance of novelty, and preference for variety. *Agreeableness* is seen as opposite to aggressiveness – akin to being a humane and amicable person with concern for others. *Conscientiousness* is a tendency for self-discipline, aim for achievement, planned rather than spontaneous behavior.

Much research has addressed relationship of these traits to various phenomena including performance, wellbeing, and happiness (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Roberts & Walton, 2006). Personality studies of unhappy and happy people have shown distinct profiles of personality. Happy people are extroverts, having high self-esteem and they see a positive picture of life events. In contrast to happy people,

unhappy people are neurotics, having low self-esteem and have negative viewpoint about all the happenings. Extroverts respond to positive mood inducing stimuli with greater happiness (Carr, 2004). Openness is seen as a readiness to enjoy new experiences, and a tendency for reaching out to people and situations (Costa & McCrae, 1992b). Romantic attitude also entails a favorable inclination towards people who attract us, attachment and taking pleasure in receiving and giving love. It is also characterized by enjoyment of beauty of nature and activities such as music and poetry. People with more open personality are more prone to romantic attitude and since both constructs involve a dimension of relishing and savoring experiences that connect to people and situations, we hypothesize that openness to experience predicts romantic attitude positively. We expect agreeableness also to be positively related to romantic love and happiness. Agreeable people are also more likely to have a romantic attitude and be happier as opposed to people with neurotic tendency since neuroticism is defined by tendency for worry about consequences and lack of trust in oneself and others. Previous studies show that Neuroticism is negatively related to happiness (for example Argly & Lu, 1990).

Romantic attitude is the tendency of an individual to have a romantic experience or romantic partner in his or her life. Like all attitudes, romantic attitude has standard components: Cognitive, behavioural, and affective; an opinion or belief at thinking level, an emotional element of liking or aversion and a behavioural tendency to approach or be attracted. Attitudes are very important determinants of how people will evaluate a situation. Positive attitudes result in positive emotions and feelings. Romantic attitude is considered a positive attitude and positive attitudes underpin the experience of positive emotions such as happiness. Romantically inclined people are more likely to experience positive emotions (Wages, 2010).Romantic attitude does not mean current romantic love experience or a romantic partner in one's life, it is simply an inclination (Zafar & Amjad, 2012). Individual differences can be observed in romantic attitude which may be linked to personality dimensions. There may be other predictors of romantic attitude such as cultural influences, socialization practices and broader self-concept as well as temperament which are not included in this study.

Individuals with romantic attitude consider love as joyful and a desirable experience (Kokab & Ajmal, 2012) and relationship satisfaction is a predictor of happiness (Demirtas & Tezer, 2012) Meeks, Hendrick, and Hendrick (1998) posit that both love and communication were predictors of relationship satisfaction, which in

long run led to happiness (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). It is also evident from previous research that a love bond between the two partners brings happiness, and joy to them (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Sprecher, 1999). Kokab and Ajmal (2012) explored the perception of love in young adults and report that the first stage in a romantic relation is falling in love and in the second stage there is experience of happiness. However, romantic relationships do not always have a happy ending. Sometimes, they end up in despair. According to Qudsiya (1996) when a person is in a relationship, his beloved is his whole world. Whatever happens beloved cannot be wrong but when relationship ends, attitude changes from the positive acceptance to negative perception and jilted lover starts seeing his beloved as cruel and selfish and may undergo disillusionment with the idea of romance itself.

Acknowledging that romance can add spice and colour to life and generate ecstatic experiences of happiness (Hassan, 2008), it is also personality traits that influence experience of happiness. While studying happiness of young adults, it is meaningful to include romance, a focal concern during this phase of life and a motivation for many activities in their lives (Frank, 1994). Another reason to study romantic attitudes of youth is views among older generation that young are more materialistic and less idealistically romantic. The romantic attitudes condone importance and desirability of romance in life and also underpin many successful adult relationships (Zafar & Amjad, 2012). In view of this rationale, the present study set out to investigate the relationship between personality traits, romantic attitude and happiness among young adults and to find out whether personality and romantic attitude predict happiness.

In view of previous evidence, it was hypothesized that there is a significant positive relationship between extraversion, agreeableness, openness, romantic attitude and happiness. It was also hypothesized that neuroticism has a significant negative relationship with happiness. We expected that these personality traits and romantic attitude may predict happiness in young adults.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 150 students ranging from 18-25 years ($M = 21.76$, $SD = 1.35$). Participants (85 women, 65 men) were recruited from 3 educational institutions in Lahore: University of Punjab, Lahore University of Management Sciences, and National College of Arts. All of these institutions have co-educational system.

Together, these institutions represent diversity of culture and socio economic class of Pakistani society. Monthly family income varied from Rs. 20000 to Rs. 1000000. Thirty-eight (25%) of young persons reported being in a romantic relationship.

Instruments

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ).   This questionnaire was developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) as a comprehensive measure of state of personal happiness. It was derived from original Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI; Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989) as an alternative scale that could be more suitable for nonclinical samples. The OHQ consisted of 29 items that are answered on a 6 point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 6. Twelve items of the scale were reverse scored (1,5,6,10,13,14,19,23,24,27, 28 & 29. The higher score on the scale show the overall happiness of the individual. The authors reported high chronbach's alpha reliability of the scale (.91).

Neo Five-Factor Inventory.   This scale was developed by Costa and McCrae (1985) to measure personality traits conceptualized in Big Five theory of personality. Since then, shorter versions and forms other than self-report have been developed (see John & Srivastava, 2002 for a review & Costa & McCrae, 1992a for a description). The five traits measured in this inventory are Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E) and Openness to Experience (O). Therefore, the scale yields five separate scores which may be correlated but are distinct constructs conceptualized as traits of an individual's personality. In present study, 60 item version of Neo Five Inventory was used (Costa & McCrae, 1992b; McCrae & Costa, 2010). The reliabilities for the five traits scales are: N = .79, E = .79, O = .80, A = .75, and C = .83.

Romantic Attitude Scale.   Romantic Attitude Scale was developed by Zafar and Amjad (2012) and initially tested for psychometric properties. It was developed to understand romantic love in Pakistani context using a sample of young adults. The scale consists of 20 items scored on a Likert type scale with response categories ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*. Six items were reverse scored (item, 3,5,10,15,16,17).   The reliability of the scale reported by authors is .70.

Procedure

Ethical guidelines were followed in conducting and reporting this study. Institutional permission and informed consent was obtained that included approval of research plan from board of studies in psychology and permission from concerned authorities of educational institutions for data collection. Informed consent of the participants was taken after explaining the nature and purpose of the study. Participants were assured that all information would be kept confidential, will be entered anonymously and their data will be used only for research purpose. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Questionnaire booklet was administered to the participants and they were debriefed after data collection and also thanked for their participation.

Results

As a first step, descriptive statistics and reliabilities of scales were computed. All scales showed satisfactory chronbach's alpha values greater than .70 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for all Measures (N=150)

Variables	*k*	*M*	*SD*	*α*
Neo Five Personality	60			
Neuroticism	12	38.31	8.81	.72
Extraversion	12	40.52	5.11	.80
Openness to Experience	12	40.86	5.06	.70
Agreeableness	12	41.06	4.82	.78
Conscientiousness	12	41.69	4.78	.80
Happiness	29	131.71	15.40	.88
Romantic Attitude	20	43.45	10.24	.70

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for all the measures used in the study. Results reveal that all measures have satisfactory reliability.

To test the first hypothesis, and find out relationship between personality traits, romantic attitude, and happiness, Pearson product moment correlation analysis was conducted (Table 2).

Table 2

Relationship Among Personality Traits, Romantic Attitude, and Happiness (N = 150)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Neuroticism	-	$.26^{**}$	$.26^{**}$	$.30^{**}$	$.21^{**}$	-.37	$.24^{**}$
2. Extraversion		-	$.37^{**}$	$.42^{**}$	$.40^{**}$	$.26^{**}$	$.17^{*}$
3.Openness to experience			-	$.41^{**}$	$.43^{**}$	$.20^{*}$	.15
4. Agreeableness				-	$.54^{**}$	$.21^{*}$	$.22^{**}$
5.Conscientiousness					-	$.33^{**}$	.03
6. Happiness						-	.03
7. Romantic attitude							-

$^{*}p < .05. ^{**}p < .01.$

The results show that extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are significantly positively related with happiness. Relationship between neuroticism and happiness is negative and significant. Romantic attitude has a significant positive relationship with neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness whereas there is non significant relationship between romantic attitude and happiness.

To investigate the predictors of happiness, Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was carried out (Table 3).

Table 3

Personality Traits and Romantic Attitude as Predictors of Happiness (N=150)

Predictors	Happiness		
	B	*SE*	*β*
Constant	72.32	13.35	
Neuroticism	-.52	.14	$-.30^{**}$
Extraversion	.53	.26	$.18^{*}$
Openness to experience	.69	.34	$.20^{*}$
Agreeableness	.02	.31	.01
Conscientiousness	.61	.32	.19
Romantic attitude	.08	.12	.05
F	6.16^{**}		
R²	.21		

$^{*}p < .05. ^{**}p < .01.$

The results in Table 3 indicate that neuroticism is significant negative predictor of happiness whereas extraversion, and openness to experience are the significant positive predictors of happiness among young adults.

Discussion

The present research examined the complex relationship between personality traits, romantic attitude and happiness among young adults. It was hypothesized that Happiness is positively associated with extraversion, agreeableness, and openness as well as with romantic attitude and negatively associated with neuroticism. This was confirmed in the findings. Extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness had a significant positive relationship with happiness and neuroticism was significantly and negatively related to happiness. It implies that more neurotic a person is less happy she or he would be. The second assumption that romantic attitude will also positively correlate with happiness was not confirmed. Romantic attitude did not have a significant relationship with happiness and contrary to expectation it had a positive relationship with neuroticism.

This association of romantic attitude and neuroticism is certainly an unexpected finding and contrary to our predictions. Furthermore, the finding that openness was not associated with romantic attitude is inconsistent with what was hypothesized. Among personality traits only extraversion and openness to experience turned out to be significant predictors of happiness. Interestingly results further revealed that neuroticism is also a significant predictor of romantic attitude. The other four domains (extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness & conscientiousness) do not significantly predict romantic attitude. In interpreting and discussing these findings, it must be kept in focus that our sample was young adults who are undergoing a phase in life, making transition from adolescence to adulthood. The pattern of our findings can be specific to this period of life and the demands and challenges it brings.

Personality is an enduring pattern of thoughts, behavior and feelings, seen as relatively consistent and stable across life span. The traits in big five factor model are differentially related to different domains of behaviour in our life. In present research happiness was predicted by the positive traits and was negatively related to neuroticism which replicates findings of previous studies.

Our finding that extraversion is significantly related to happiness and significantly predicts happiness is supported by several studies (for example Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby, & Ward, 1995; Furnham & Brewin, 1990; Lu & Hu, 2005; Pishva et al., 2011). These researchers have found extraversion to be a positive correlate and predictor of

happiness. These studies also show neuroticism to be a significant predictor of happiness.

In Pakistani context, Yousaf (2007) found a positive relationship of two personality dimensions, openness to experience and agreeableness with happiness. Author posits that people with high openness to experience are sensitive, imaginative, and attentive to inner feelings and have intellectual curiosity. They have the tendency to relish new experiences, healthy emotions and beauty of literature and nature. Similarly, highly agreeable people have the tendency to comply with others. They are empathetic, cooperative, and warm. Studies in west have found similar results as Yousaf (2007), for example Brebner et al. (2001) found a positive correlation between happiness, openness and agreeableness. Explanations are found in nature of these traits. People with high openness to experience easily accept novel situations, are more prone to experimenting outside norms and therefore experience heightened pleasure. Agreeable people are humble, believe in harmony and connections. They strive for closeness and harmony. Such individuals care for others, and live happily. They gain happiness by being nice to others. Hence relationship between personality and wellbeing postulated earlier has been verified in our study.

Moving to romantic love and its link to personality, White et al. (2007) found that extraversion and agreeableness are positively associated with relationship satisfaction and also that neurotics do have a romantic attitude and their relationship is mediated by possessive and dependent love. Willi (1997) found that individuals who have a positive attitude towards love and are in a romantic relationship live happily if they manage their differences. Romantic attitude is positively related to and predicted by agreeableness and extraversion which is understandable as both these traits are interpersonal with element of congeniality and social skill in that is necessary for love relationships. Interestingly, romantic attitude is also linked to neuroticism in our findings. This can be explained by the nature of love at young age; challenges and uncertainty of romantic love in young years is well known (Aloni & Bernieri, 2014; Zafar & Amjad, 2012). In conclusion, it can be said that a pattern emerges from this study. On the one hand, there is a strong link between neuroticism and romantic attitude in the sample studied (neuroticism being a significant positive predictor of romantic attitude) which points toward their romantic leanings being clouded by worry, apprehensions and uncertainty. A number of explanations are possible. The link between neuroticism and romance may be attributable to fear of social disapproval or inner conflicts that do not allow them to view

the romantic attitude in an entirely positive light (Hefner, 2011). It also may be the case that neurotic person is characterized by obsessional thinking, unable to switch off and romantic love also contains an element of healthy obsession and persistent thoughts about object of our love. The second finding that needs speculative explanation is the absence of a relationship between happiness and romantic attitude. This paints a largely negative picture of the romantically inclined and one cannot resist thinking of the stereotypical lover in Urdu poetry, hopelessly unstable emotionally and certainly exceedingly unhappy (Amer, 2013). However, it perfectly fits the pattern of neuroticism-romantic attitude- happiness tripartite relationship. Romantic love is surrounded by complex cultural schemas (Galician, 2004; Hefner, 2011) On one hand films, TV dramas, literature and poetry and folk lore in Indo-Pak subcontinent (Farouqi, 2010) and in North America (Straub, 2006) glorifies romance, maintaining love as one of the central themes over centuries. On the other hand, unrequited love and societal taboos stain the romance with fear of failure in attaining fulfillment of love (Marsden, 2007). It is a common view point in our culture that love thrives on sacrifice. It is not all bed of roses. The cruel society ("*zalimsamaj*" as it is called in Urdu) is against the romantic relationships, hence the fear of negative consequences of romantic relationships. Young adults feel that along with excitement of romance, you have to face the resistance by the family and disapproval of the society (Zafar & Amjad, 2012).

Results of the present study also revealed that romantic attitude has a significant positive relationship with extraversion and agreeableness. Through previous researches it is evident that people who feel connected to others and take joy in life's romance and beauty are more contented and happy (Amjad, Ahmad, & Zaidi, 2013). Openness is seen as a readiness to enjoy new experiences, and a tendency for reaching out to people and situations. Romantic attitude also entails a favorable inclination towards attaching to people who attract us, taking pleasure in receiving and giving love and enjoying beauty of nature and activities like music and poetry. People with more openness in their personality should be more prone to romantic attitude since both constructs involve a dimension of relishing and savoring experiences that connect to people and situations.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Suggestions

Findings of the study showed that neuroticism, extraversion and openness to experience are the significant predictors of happiness but romantic attitude is not linked to happiness. Neuroticism is the

strongest significant predictor of happiness as neuroticism increases happiness decreases. Neurotics are considered as people having a tendency for negative thoughts and feelings. They lack trust on others and are angry and anxious. Such individuals experience less happiness in their life. Extraverts enjoy socializing hence experience more positive emotions and less anxiety over negative events. People with openness trait love to explore new ideas and therefore experience state of elation. Romantic attitude was neither related to nor predicted happiness and in present study this has been explained as a characteristic of young age or worry connected to experience of love. Inclination to romantic love brings its share of burden and apprehensions (Kaukab & Ajmal, 2012; Zafar & Amjad, 2012). In terms of limitations, the analyses of gender specific attitudes or happiness was not carried out in this study as the focus was not on gender however it can be interesting to explore. The sample was selected on availability bases which can be a source of confounding; agreeable persons maybe more prone to answer requests for data. Finally, sample was selected from 3 institutions that are quite diverse in cultural and socio-economic sub groups but these were not compared in analyses.

In terms of future suggestions, although link between positive traits and happiness was in expected direction and consistent with theory and empirical studies, there is more to it than simple linear relationship. It must be remembered that five personality traits also work in combinations; high conscientiousness and high neuroticism is a combination which makes people worrisome, obsessed with organization and uncomfortable with novel situations. Similarly, high extraversion, high agreeableness and high openness are a very desirable combination bringing together positive aspects of these traits (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Lee & Ashton, 2012). The analyses in this study did not explore the combinations of traits but this can certainly be an interesting and promising direction to take in further studies. An intriguing question would be how these combinations work in romantic relationships and in one's own well-being. Further investigation of romantic attitudes among older and mature samples will add to this area and will better delineate cultural patterns. On a lighter note it will be helpful for young person to learn about romantic attitudes of their elders.

Implications

Implications of the study are two-fold. This study is one of the few studies that explore romantic attitudes in Pakistani context. Love

is a positive emotion experienced and yearned for, but it seems to be challenging as well especially for young persons whose life choices are tied to control and considerations of an interdependent society. Almost 10 % of young suicides reported in 1999 in Punjab, Pakistan were due to failure in attaining fulfillment of a romantic relationships (Amjad & Khalid, 2000) and sometimes elopements is seen as only answer (Marsde, 2007). Counseling services for young persons can focus on these issues and attitudes to combat despair and increase happiness and flourishing. The other aspect of such studies is to enhance understanding of lives of young persons as well as the personal traits that link to their well being.

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