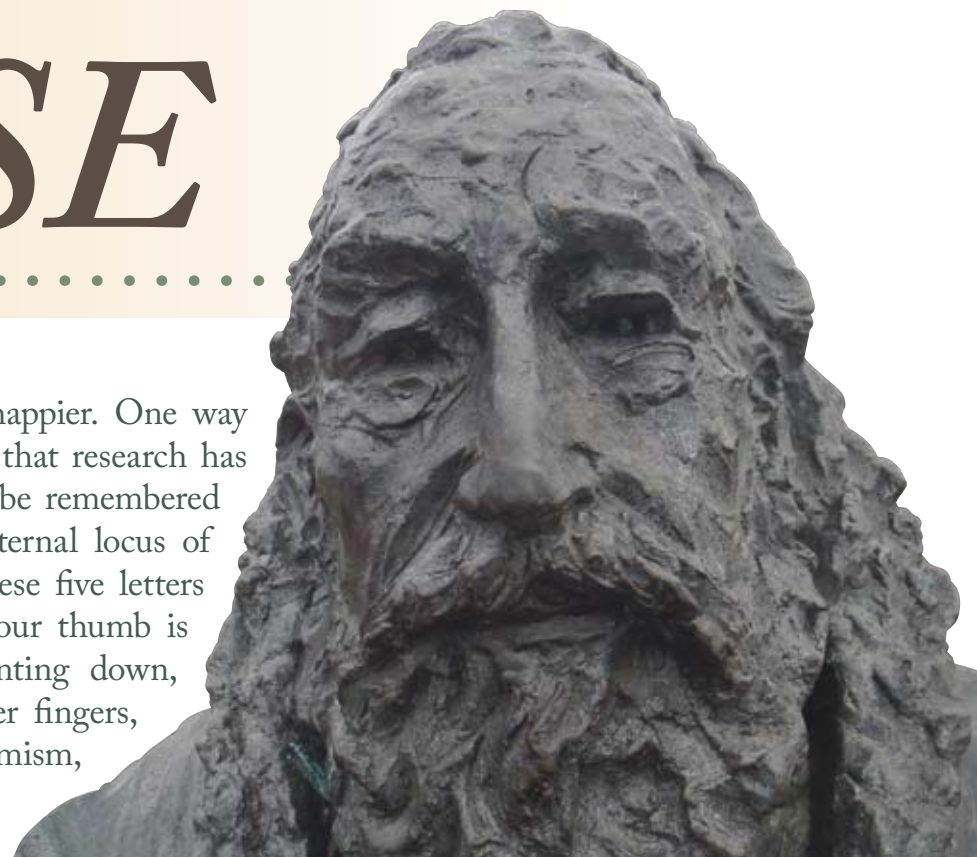


# Happier Horizons | NOISE

## **NOISE:** The 5 psychological factors highly related to happiness

There are many ways to improve your thinking, thrive, and become happier. One way is to ensure that you have optimal levels of five psychological variables that research has consistently shown are highly related to happiness and which can also be remembered easily by the 5-letter acronym (**NOISE**): **N**euroticism, **O**ptimism, **I**nternal locus of control, **S**elf-esteem, and **E**xtroversion. To aid your memory, assign these five letters to each of the tips of your fingers on your right hand. Ensure that your thumb is pointing down and your fingers are pointing up. Your thumb, pointing down, represents **N** for Neuroticism, which you want to minimize. The other fingers, pointing up, represent attributes that you want more of: **O** for Optimism, **I** for Internal locus of control, **S** for Self-esteem, and **E** for Extroversion.



The underlying premise is that to become happier, you should seek to improve your NOISE. As one of my clients suggested anonymously, “I don’t know what every day may bring, but what I do know is that I always have a choice.” Such choices, according to another client, Rene from Brooklyn, New York, are possible for anyone, “If you learn to work with yourself, every day can be bright and sunny.” So imagine if you not only understand the take-home message concerning the research focusing on the five NOISE variables, but you internalize such information and make the choice to work with, not against, yourself to improve your NOISE. In all likelihood you will, “Take action and stop thinking” (Neuroticism; Brandon; Newark, New Jersey), “build bridges instead of walls” (Optimism; Selebogo; Gaborone, Botswana), “accept responsibility and not be dictated by my environment” (Internal locus of control; Mechelle; Barbados, Caribbean), “set small goals and notice our success” (Self-esteem; Theodora; Athens, Greece), and “know how much adrenalin is enough” (Extroversion; Troy; Barbados, Caribbean).

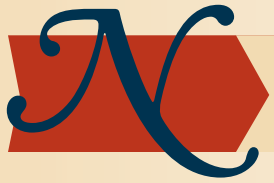
---

*A man’s life is what his thoughts make it.”*

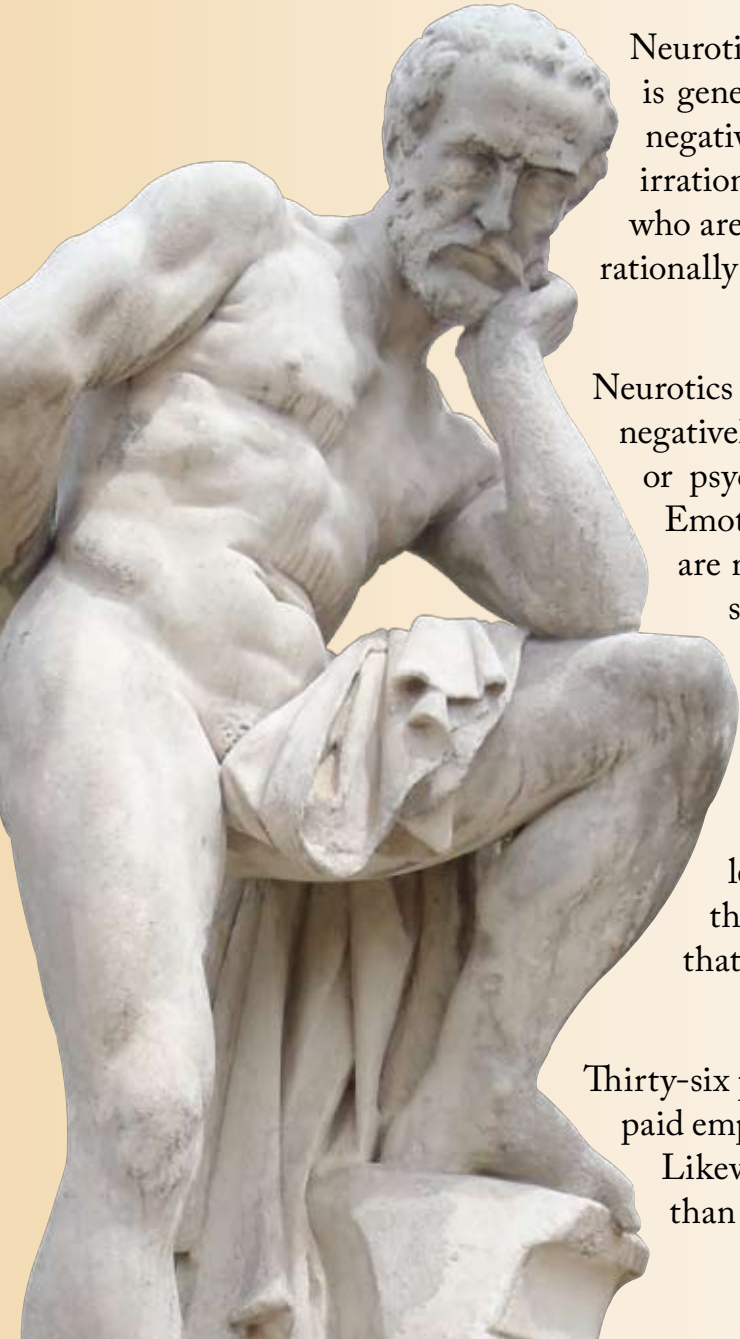
— *Marcus Aurelius*

*(Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher)*

---



# NEUROTICISM

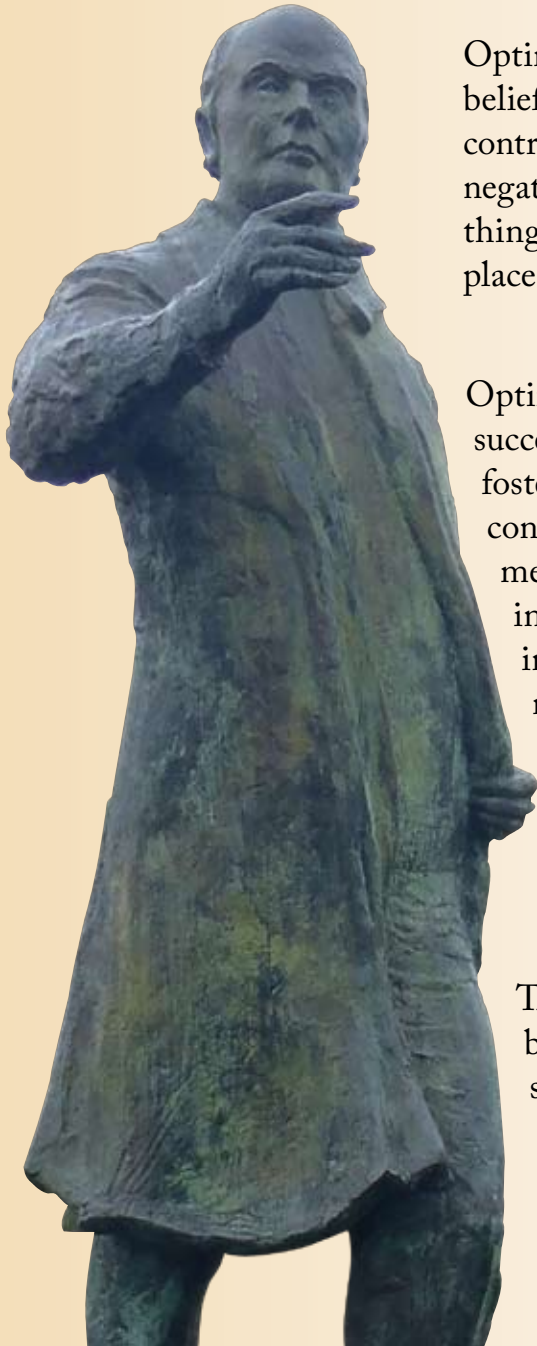


Neuroticism and emotional stability are at opposite ends of a personality continuum. Neuroticism is generally viewed as the degree to which an individual is affected by worry, fear, and other negative emotions such as shame and guilt. Neurotic individuals tend to be anxious, depressed, irrational, moody, nervous, passionate, prone to guilt feelings, sensitive, and tense. Individuals who are emotionally stable tend to be relaxed, in control of their emotions, display poise, and act rationally and confidently.

Neurotics are more likely to be angry, depressed, embarrassed, self-conscious, and respond more negatively to social comparison information. They are more likely to develop an eating disorder or psychosis and have lower quality of life after breast-conserving therapy due to cancer. Emotionally stable individuals, however, have more optimism and life satisfaction. Neurotics are more likely to have asthma, atopic dermatitis, gastro-intestinal disorders, irritable bowel syndrome, metabolic syndrome, migraines, intense pain, peptic ulcer disease, perceived poor health, difficulties waking up in the morning, daytime sleepiness, and feelings of sleep insufficiency. They are more likely to report hypersensitivity to food, be smokers, and have a higher mortality rate. They do not perform as well in jobs involving interpersonal interactions, are less suited for naval aviation duty according to assessment in clinical mental health evaluations, are more frequently absent from work, and have less job satisfaction. A researcher assessed the level of neuroticism of Swedish adults and then asked their partners how satisfied were they with their relationship. Results indicated that the adults less satisfied with their relationship had partners who were neurotic.

Thirty-six percent of the happiness of adults (either working and/or living in New York State and in paid employment) in a study I conducted in 2007 could be explained by their level of neuroticism. Likewise, ten published studies have also reported that emotionally stable subjects were happier than neurotics.

# O OPTIMISM



Optimism is a belief that life is good and will become better. Pessimism is the opposite of optimism - a belief that life is bad and will become worse. Optimistic individuals believe that they have considerable control of their lives. They persist and try harder. Pessimists, on the other hand, tend to believe that negative situations will last a long time, spread this belief to other things they do, and believe that things that go wrong are their own fault. Pessimists give up quickly, or don't even try in the first place.

Optimists think they will succeed. Therefore, they persist longer and as a result are more likely to be successful. This reinforces their optimistic beliefs. Optimists also engage in more proactive behavior, foster supportive social relationships, use adaptive coping strategies, and enjoy healthier habits. As a consequence, optimists are less likely to have coronary heart disease, pain, high blood pressure, or use medical and mental health care services. They have better pulmonary function and cope with illness in a healthier manner. Optimists are less likely to be anxious, depressed, or gain mood disturbances in response to adjusting to both law school and exposure to SCUD missiles. Optimists are also more liked, have fewer negative social interactions, have longer friendships, and have more social support. Not surprisingly, optimists adjust to college demands more effectively, score higher exam marks, and have greater confidence in career decision making. As athletes, they have less pre-competition anxiety and are more mentally tough, while as employees they work harder, are better performers in the manufacturing industry, and are more likely to be hired.

Thirty-eight percent of the happiness of adults in the study I conducted in 2007 could be explained by their level of neuroticism. Likewise, six published studies have also reported that optimistic subjects were happier than pessimists.

**I**

# INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL

Individuals with an internal locus of control see setbacks as a fluke or uncommon, believe reinforcements they receive are under their control, believe they have a firm grip on their situation, place a high value on their skills, and are optimistic and persistent. Internals understand three simple words: action causes reaction. Individuals with an external locus of control, however, believe the reinforcements they receive are due to others, fate, chance, or luck; see less value in exerting effort to improve their situation; place a lower value on their skills; believe they are powerless with respect to outside forces; and are less optimistic and less persistent.

Individuals with an internal locus of control are more proactive. For instance, internals are more likely to clean their teeth frequently, exercise, use more approach-coping and less avoidant-coping strategies, put forward fewer excuses about complying with dietary constraints, and have fewer unplanned pregnancies. They are more reliable contraceptive users, respond to marital difficulties more actively and directly, use more innovative strategies at work, assume the initiative in interviews, pursue more product innovation, and tailor their approaches to the circumstances facing their firms more effectively. Not surprisingly, externals are more likely to be hypertensive, obese, have an eating disorder, a heart attack, pain, and die younger. Internality is significantly associated with increased recovery in schizophrenia, losing weight in a weight reduction program, successfully quitting smoking, and adapting to chronic haemodialysis. Internals are less likely to be anxious, depressed, discontent, maladjusted, neurotic, schizophrenic, suicidal, or have post-traumatic stress disorder. They receive higher performance ratings, are less likely to participate in violence, and have less credit card debt.

Twenty-eight percent of the happiness of adults in the study I conducted in 2007 could be explained by their locus of control. Likewise, seven published studies have also reported that internals were happier than externals.

# S SELF-ESTEEM



Self-esteem assesses the extent to which an individual believes that they are a person of worth. Individuals with high self-esteem have a fundamental sense of competence and worthiness. They may be competitive, strive to become better, and be more successful than most, but they don't feel the need to state that they are better than others. Individuals with low self-esteem, however, feel inadequate, unworthy, wrong as a person, and inappropriate for life.

Although you may argue that self-esteem is both an over-inflated idea and merely a reflection of how well you are doing in life, one can't deny that if you have high self-esteem, you feel good. It is intrinsically pleasant. Likewise, you gain practically by having greater persistence in the face of failure. Furthermore, individuals with high self-esteem feel included by other people, have more social support, and have less friendship jealousy. Hence, they are more likely to anticipate that they will elicit friendly, accepting reactions in others. Women with high self-esteem have more sex, are more likely to have an orgasm when they have sex, initiate sex more often, try new sexual behaviors, and have greater confidence in giving their partner sexual pleasure. Individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to be involved in bullying, criminal behavior, delinquent behavior, drug abuse, and sexually risky behavior. They are more likely to be anorexic, bulimic, and feel victimized and rejected. Not surprisingly, individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to be anxious, depressed, introverted, lonely, neurotic, pessimistic, and suicidal.

Forty-six percent of the happiness of adults in the study I conducted in 2007 could be explained by their level of self-esteem. Although self-esteem is a better predictor of happiness in individualistic cultures than in collectivist cultures, all twelve published studies that assessed the relationship between self-esteem and happiness reported that individuals with high self-esteem were happier than those with low self-esteem.



# EXTROVERSION

Extroversion and introversion are at opposite ends of a personality continuum. Those with high levels of extroversion have a tendency to prefer outward and group activity. They tend to be active, lively, open, oriented towards the external world, oriented towards other people, sociable, socially assertive, and venturesome. In a word, they are sensation-seekers. Those with low levels of extroversion (introverts) have a tendency to focus energy inward and spend time by themselves, resulting in decreased social interaction. They tend to focus on their own thoughts and feelings, while being cautious, reserved, retiring, and withdrawn. In a word, introverts are sensation-avoiders, because they are easily overwhelmed by stimuli.

Extroverts have a larger number of friends and spend more time interacting with them. They have better social functioning, less conflict with peers and are more likely to fall in love, look at their partners more, use longer glances, talk for a greater percentage of the time, hesitate less, and provide more verbal feedback. They are more likely to participate in social activities such as play sport or exercise one month later. They are more likely to have a job they like and have success with, be rated better performers at work, and have more major life goals. Not surprisingly, extroverts are less likely to be anxious, depressed, have had a mental disorder, or seen a health care professional for psychiatric reasons in the past 12 months. They are also less likely to have low self-esteem, have social phobia or cluster C personality disorders, and attempt or commit suicide. Introverts are more likely to have a label of agoraphobia, avoidant personality disorder, dysthymia, or social phobia.

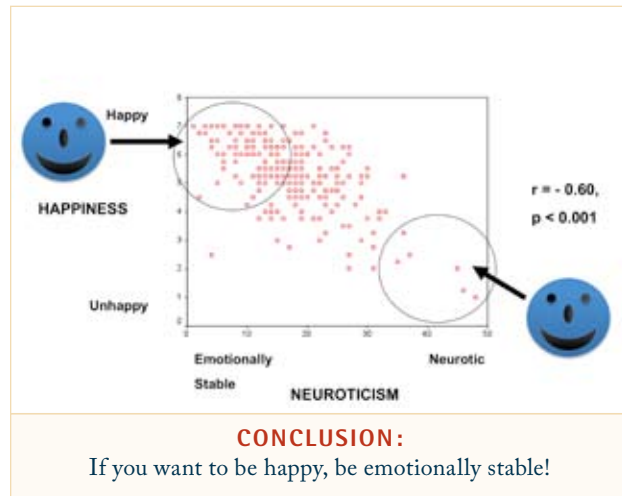
Thirty-five percent of the happiness of adults in the study I conducted in 2007 could be explained by their level of extroversion. Likewise, twelve published studies have also reported that extroverts were happier than introverts.



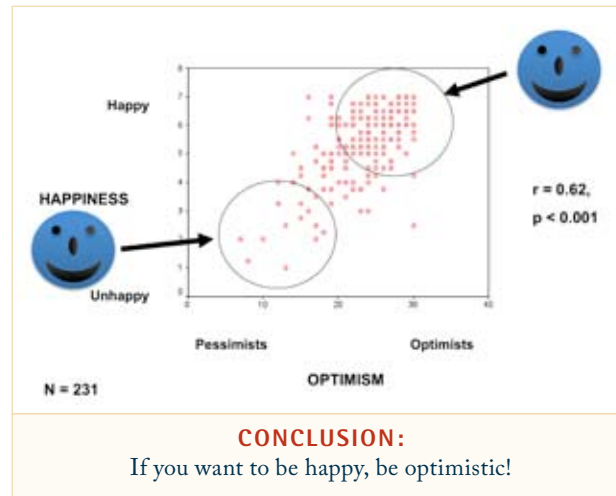
## HAPPINESS-NOISE RESEARCH STUDY

In 2007 I asked 231 adults either working and/or living in New York State and in paid employment, aged 19 to 68 years, to complete the Neuroticism scale of the NEO Five-Factor Inventory, the Life Orientation Test-Revised, the Internal Control Index, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Extroversion scale of the NEO Five-Factor Inventory. All five NOISE variables correlated significantly with happiness. Together, the five NOISE variables predicted a substantial 57.4% of these adults' happiness.

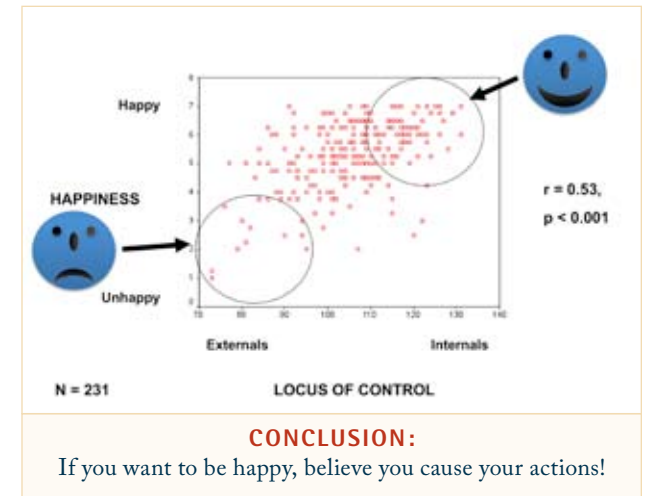
### NEUROTICISM AND HAPPINESS



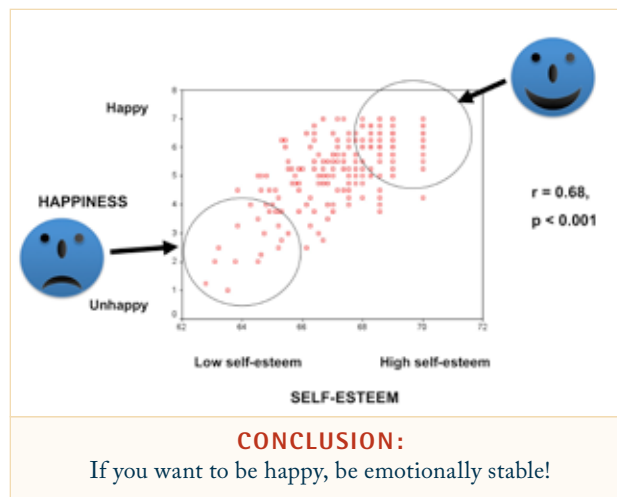
### OPTIMISM AND HAPPINESS



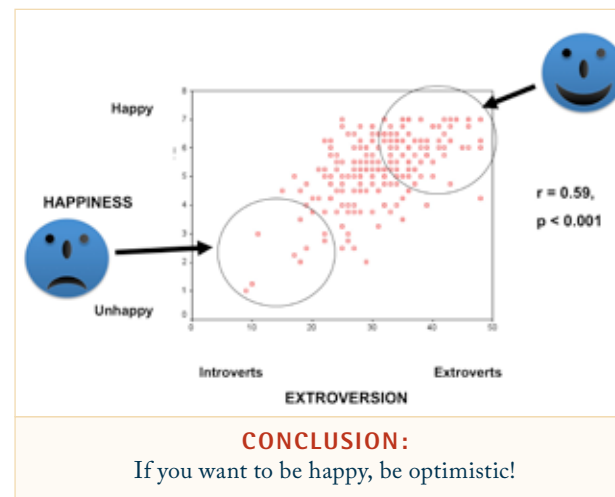
### INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL AND HAPPINESS



### SELF-ESTEEM AND HAPPINESS



### EXTROVERSION AND HAPPINESS



**NEUROTICISM**

- Campbell, J. S., Moore, J. L., Poythress, N. G., & Kennedy, C. H. (2009). Personality traits in clinically referred aviators: Two clusters related to occupational suitability. *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine, 80*(12), 1049-1054.
- Lillestøl, K., Berstad, A., Lind, R., Florvaag, E., Arslan, L. G, & Tangen, T. (2010). Anxiety and depression in patients with self-reported food hypersensitivity. *General Hospital Psychiatry, 32*(1), 42-48.
- Lu, L., & Hu, C.-H. (2005). Personality, leisure experiences and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 6*, 325-342.
- Moller, K. (2004). The longitudinal and concurrent role of neuroticism for partner relationships. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 45*, 79-83.
- Mroczek, D. K., Spiro, A., & Turiano, N. (2009). Do health behaviors explain the effect of neuroticism on mortality? Longitudinal findings from the VA normative aging study. *Journal of Research in Personality, 43*(4), 653-659.
- Phillips, A. C., Batty, G. D., Weiss, A., Deary, I., Galef, C. R., Thomas, G. N., & Carroll, D. (2010). Neuroticism, cognitive ability, and the metabolic syndrome: The Vietnam experience study. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 69*(2), 193-201.
- Sanz, J., García-Vera, M. P., & Magán, I. (2010). Anger and hostility from the perspective of the Big Five personality model. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 51*(3), 262-270.
- Terracciano, A., & Costa, P. T. Jr. (2004). Smoking and the five-factor model of personality. *Addiction, 99*, 472-481.
- van der Steeg, A. F., de Vries J., & Roukema J. A. (2010). Anxious personality and breast cancer: Possible negative impact on quality of life after breast-conserving therapy. *World Journal of Surgery, 34*(7), 1453-1460.
- Wilhelm, K., Wedgwood, L., Parker, G., Geerligs, L., & Hadzi-Pavlovic, D. (2010). Predicting mental health and well-being in adulthood. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 198*(2), 85-90.

**OPTIMISM**

- Brissette, I., Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (2002). The role of optimism in social network development, coping, and psychological adjustment during a life transition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*(1), 102-111.
- Creed, P. A., Patton, W., & Bartrum, D. (2002). Multidimensional properties of the Lot-R: Effects of optimism and pessimism on career and well-being related variables in adolescents. *Journal of Career Assessment, 10*, 42-61.
- Green, K. W. Jr., Medlin, B., & Whitten, D. (2004). Developing optimism to improve performance: An approach for the manufacturing sector. *Industrial Management and Data Systems, 104*(2), 106-114.
- Ironson, G., Balbin, E., Stuetzle, R., Fletcher, M. A., O'Cleirigh, C., Laurenceau, J. P., Schneiderman, N., & Solomon, G. (2005). Dispositional optimism and the mechanisms by which it prevents slower disease progression in HIV: Proactive behaviour, avoidant coping, and depression. *International Journal of Behavioural Medicine, 12*(2), 86-97.
- Mohanty, M. S. (2010). Effects of positive attitude and optimism on employment: Evidence from the US data. *Journal of Socio-Economics, 39*(2), 258-270.
- Nicholls, A. R., Polman, R. C. J., Levy, A. R., & Backhouse, S. H. (2008). Mental toughness, optimism, pessimism, and coping among athletes. *Personality and Individual Differences, 44*(5), 1182-1192.
- Puri, M., & Robinson, D. T. (2007). Optimism and economic choice. *Journal of Financial Economics, 86*(1), 71-99.
- Siddique, H. I., LaSalle-Ricci, V. H., Glass, C. R., Arnkoff, D. B., & Diaz, R. J. (2006). Worry, optimism, and expectations as predictors of anxiety and performance in the first year of law school. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 30*(5), 667-676.
- Wilson, G. S., Raglin, J. S., & Pritchard, M. E. (2002). Optimism, pessimism, and precompetition anxiety in college athletes. *Personality and Individual Differences, 32*(5), 893-902.
- Zanni, G. R. (2008). Optimism and health. *The Consultant Pharmacist, 23*(2), 112-126.



## INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL

---

- Adolfsson, B., Andersson, I., Elofsson, S., Rossner, S., & Uden, A.-L. (2005). Locus of control and weight reduction. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 56, 55-61.
- Al-Turkait, F. A., & Ohaeri, J. U. (2008). Prevalence and correlates of post-traumatic stress disorder among Kuwaiti military men according to level of involvement in the first Gulf war. *Depression and Anxiety*, 25(11), 932-941.
- Argyle, M. (2001). *The psychology of happiness (2nd ed.)*. London: Routledge.
- Clarke, D. (2004). Neuroticism: Moderator or mediator in the relation between locus of control and depression? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37(2), 245-258.
- Consoli, S. M., & Buckeri, E. (2004). Health locus of control and cholesterol representations. Results of the FRACTION survey [Article in French]. *Encephale*, 30, 331-341.
- Dalgard, O. S., & Haheim, L. L. (1998). Psychosocial risk factors and mortality: A prospective study with special focus on social support, social participation, and locus of control in Norway. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 52, 476-481.
- Fouts, G., & Vaughan, K. (2002). Locus of control, television viewing, and eating disorder symptomatology in young females. *Journal of Adolescence*, 25, 307-311.
- Harrow, M., Hansford, B. G., & Astrachan-Fletcher, E. B. (2009). Locus of control: Relation to schizophrenia, to recovery, and to depression and psychosis - A 15-year longitudinal study. *Psychiatry Research*, 168(3), 186-192.
- Mueller, S. L., & Thomas, A. S. (2001). Culture and entrepreneurial potential: A nine country study of locus of control and innovativeness. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 16, 51-75.
- Sturmer, T., Hasselbach, P., & Amelang, M. (2006). Personality, lifestyle, and risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer: Follow-up of population based cohort. *British Medical Journal*, 332, 1359-1362.

## SELF-ESTEEM

---

- Ackard, D. M., Kearney-Cooke, A., & Peterson, C. B. (2000). Effect of body image and self-image on women's sexual behaviors. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 28, 422-429.
- Diener, E., & Diener, M. (1995). Cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction and self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 653-663.
- Martin, G., Richardson, A. S., Bergen, H. A., Roeger, L., & Allison, S. (2005). Perceived academic performance, self-esteem and locus of control as indicators of need for assessment of adolescent suicide risk: Implications for teachers. *Journal of Adolescence*, 28, 75-87.
- O'Moore, M., & Kirkham, C. (2001). Self-esteem and its relationship to bullying behaviour. *Aggressive Behavior*, 27, 269-283.
- Parker, J. G., Low, C. M., Walker, A. R., & Gamm, B. K. (2005). Friendship jealousy in young adolescents: Individual differences and links to sex, self-esteem, aggression, and social adjustment. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(1), 235-250.
- Salmivalli, C., & Isaacs, J. (2005). Prospective relations among victimization, rejection, friendlessness, and children's self- and peer-perceptions. *Child Development*, 76, 1161-1171.
- Simple, S. J., Grant, I., & Patterson, T. L. (2005). Negative self-perceptions and sexual risk behavior among heterosexual methamphetamine users. *Substance Use and Misuse*, 40, 1797-1810.
- Stein, J. A., Rotheram-Borus, M.-J., Swendeman, D., & Milburn, N. G. (2005). Predictors of sexual transmission risk behaviors among HIV-positive young men. *AIDS Care*, 17, 433-442.
- Trzesniewski, K. H., Donnellan, M. B., Moffitt, T. E., Robins, R. W., Poulton, R., & Caspi, A. (2006). Low self-esteem during adolescence predicts poor health, criminal behavior, and limited economic prospects during adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 381-390.
- Wilksch, S., & Wade, T. D. (2004). Differences between women with anorexia nervosa and restrained eaters on shape and weight concerns, self-esteem, and depression. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 35, 571-578.

## EXTROVERSION

- Chico Libran, E. (2006). Personality dimensions and subjective well-being. *Spanish Journal Psychology*, 9, 38-44.
- de Bruijn, G.-J., Kremers, S. P. J., van Mechelen, W., & Brug, J. (2005). Is personality related to fruit and vegetable intake and physical activity in adolescents? *Health Education Research*, 20, 635-644.
- Jonsson, G. K. (2006). Personality and self-esteem in social interaction. In G. Riva, M. T. Anguera, B. K. Wiederhold and F. Mantovani (Eds.), *From communication to presence: Cognition, emotions and culture towards the ultimate communicative experience*. Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Jylhä, P., Melartin, T., & Isometsä, E. (2009). Relationships of neuroticism and extraversion with axis I and II comorbidity among patients with DSM-IV major depressive disorder. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 114(1), 110-121.
- Ranjith, G., Farmer, A., McGuffin, P., & Cleare, A. J. (2005). Personality as a determinant of social functioning in depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 84(1), 73-76.
- Rhodes, R. E., Courneya, K. S., & Jones, L. W. (2002). Personality, the theory of planned behaviour and exercise: A unique role for extroversion's activity facet. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32, 1721-1736.
- Roberts, B. W., & Robins, R. W. (2000). Broad dispositions, broad aspirations: The intersection of personality traits and major life goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(10), 1284-1296.
- Stankovic, Z., Saula-Marojevic, B., & Potrebic, A. (2006). Personality profile of depressive patients with a history of suicide attempts. *Psychiatric Danub*, 18, 159-168.
- Watson, D., Suls, J., & Haig, J. (2002). Global self-esteem in relation to structural models of personality and affectivity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 185-197.
- Wu, P.-C., Foo, M.-D., & Turban, D. B. (2008). The role of personality closeness, developer assistance, and career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73, 440-448.

---

*There are many ways to improve your thinking, thrive, and become happier. One way is to ensure that you have optimal levels of five psychological variables that research has consistently shown are highly related to happiness and which can also be remembered easily by the 5-letter acronym (NOISE): Neuroticism, Optimism, Internal locus of control, Self-esteem, and Extroversion.*

---