

Examining the Correlation Between Personality and Sport Choice Among High School

Student-Athletes

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Abstract

After Dr. James Gavin published his theory on the various factors that contribute to people choosing a sport to play, many researchers flocked to test the validity of his theory [1]. One such factor is tested in this study: personality. This study aims to eliminate the other factors of his theory and focus on how personality affects sport choice. This study also tests if Gavin's theory is true and, if so, what patterns can be associated with various types of sports. A survey containing the Big Five personality test was given to student-athletes at Thousand Oaks High School to self assess their respective personalities. The data collected from this survey was used to draw conclusions on the personality traits associated with each sport type.

Literature Review

This study utilizes the Big Five Personality test. It narrows the human personality into five traits: extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. Extraversion measures how talkative, assertive, outgoing and sociable one is [2]. Neuroticism measures an individual's emotional stability. The agreeableness aspect is someone's emotional support or hostility, sensitivity, politeness, care, and nurturing or lack thereof. Conscientiousness is defined as an individual's ability to achieve goals and his or her dependability. Openness to experience is described as someone's creativity and divergent thinking as well as one's openness to new ideas and feelings. Serdar Tok found athletes who participate in high risk sports tend to be less neurotic than those who do not participate in risky sports [3]. The more neurotic participants prefer to participate in activities with lower levels of arousal, explaining why they opt for the lower risk sports as opposed to higher risk activities. Athletes in team sports are found to be more neurotic than the emotionally stable athletes in an individual sport. Conscientiousness also plays an important role in sport choice. Those who are conscientious are more reserved, think actions through, and take into account potential consequences. Unsurprisingly, risky sport participants have low levels of conscientiousness.

Purpose

This study aimed to find a correlation between athletes' sport choice and their personality. This information would be used to help future potential athletes find the best sport/physical activity method to stay physically fit and lead a healthy lifestyle.

Question

Do patterns exist between personality and sport choice and, if so, what are they?

Methods

Participants

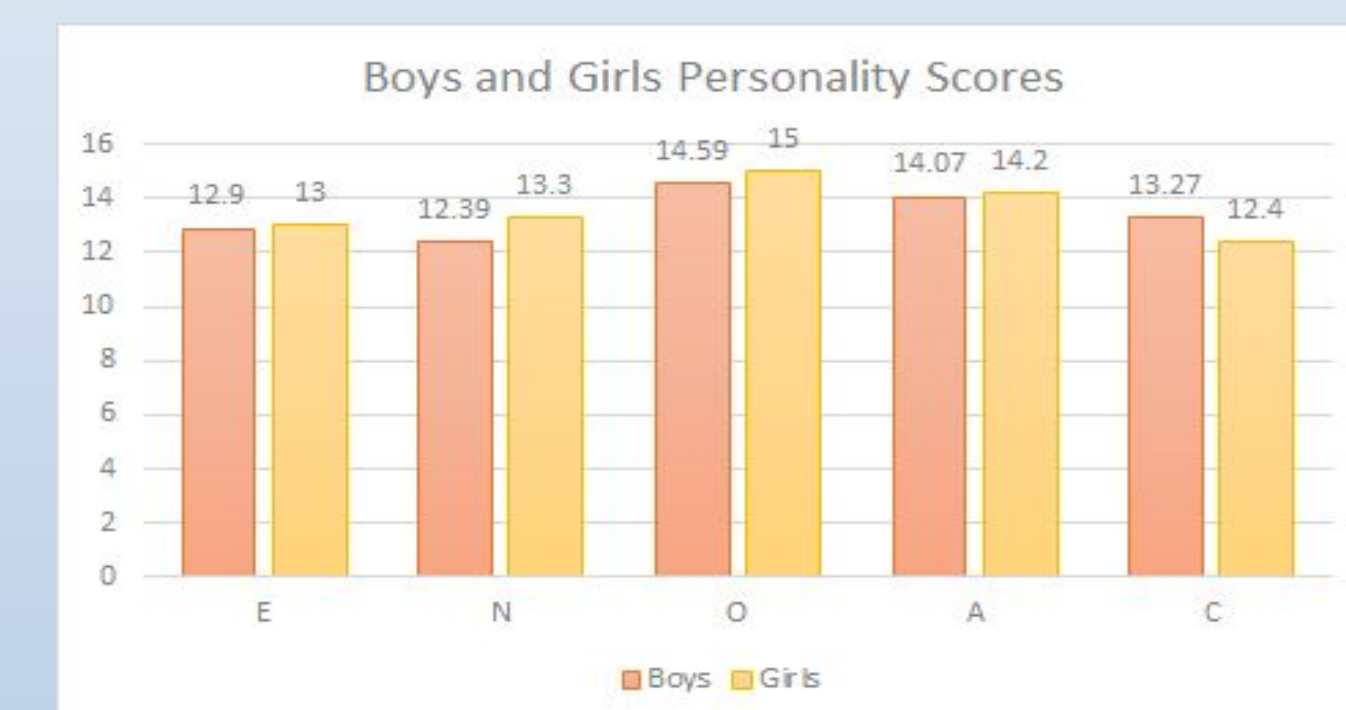
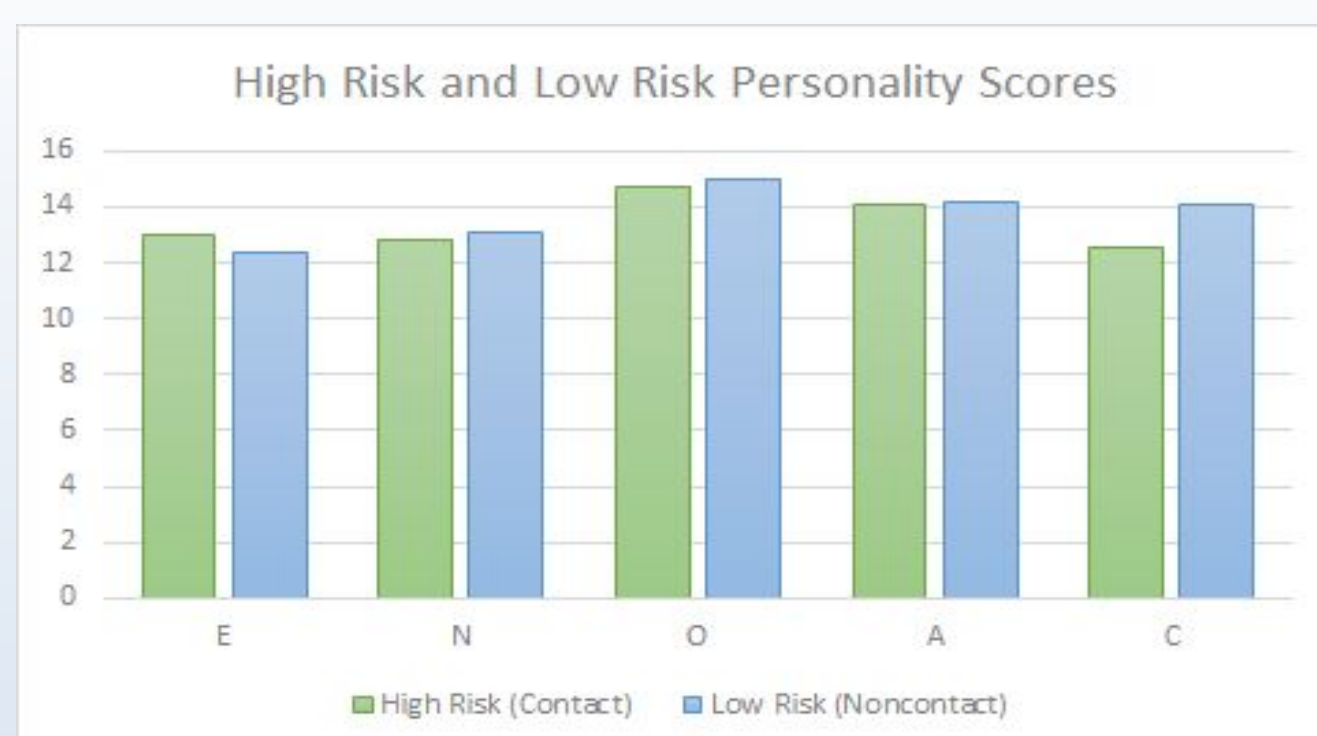
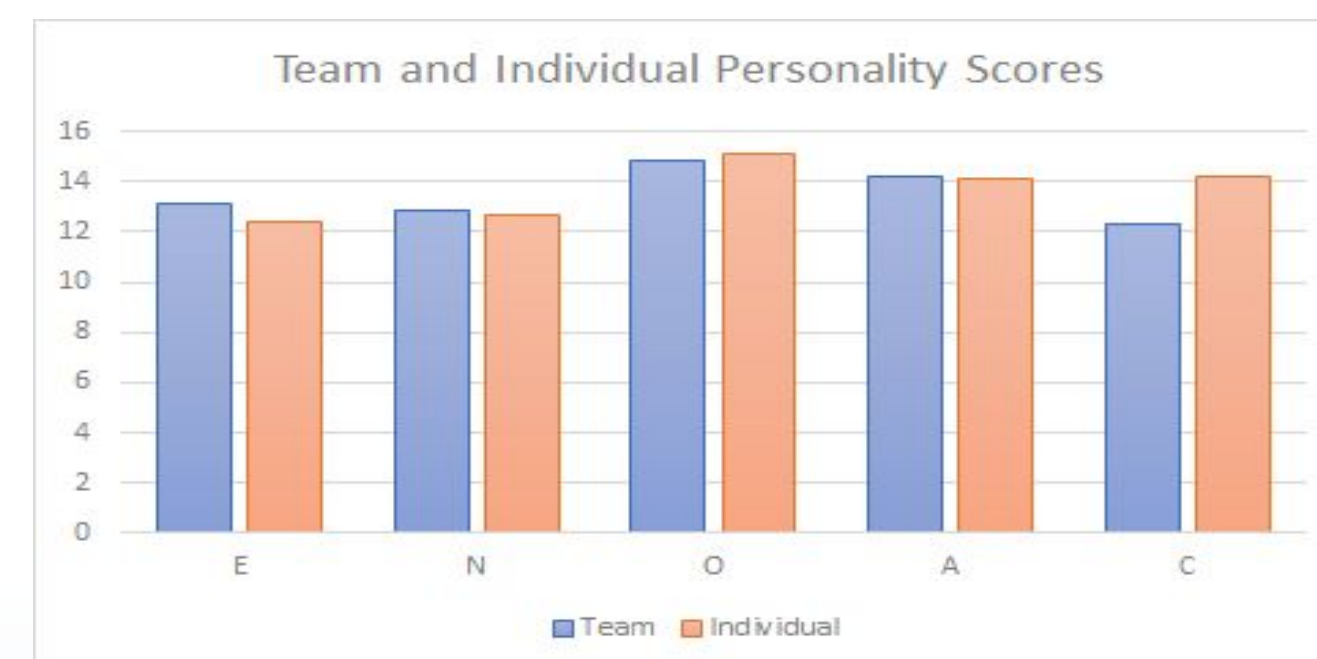
An anonymous survey asked what grade the student was in and the sport they played. It included a twenty question Big Five personality test as well. The Big Five Personality test gauges individuals' personalities based on five traits. The Big Five Personality test gives statements and has the participants rate how much they would agree with the statement for themselves on a scale from 1-5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The results were then compared among sports to find a possible connection between sports. Higher and lower risk sports were compared as well as individual and team sports. The contact sports were considered high risk and non contact sports are considered low risk.

Methods (cont.)

Survey Parameters

This study conducted research on students attending Thousand Oaks High School. 158 high school student athletes participated in the study. Students must attend the high school and play a sport that is run through the school. This excludes sports participation outside of the school. Sports that did not have five or more participants were excluded from the study. Students who do not play a sport but opt to participate in physical education will not be included in this study. This study focused on high school varsity athletics made up of juniors and seniors. The lower level athletics will be utilized, including the freshman, soph-frosh, and junior varsity levels, depending how many levels there are in each respective sport.

Results



Discussion

Individual and Team Sports

There is a notable difference between the team and individual sports. As expected, the team sports averaged a higher score than the individual sports did with respect to extraversion. Team sports require communication and good relationships among teammates in order to be successful. These communication and social skills correlate with a higher level of extraversion. However, individual sports do not require these social skills, as success depends solely on the performance of the individual and no one else. Individual sports also scored higher than team sports in conscientiousness.

High and Low Risk Sports

The high risk sports had a higher extraversion score than low risk sports. This difference is not surprising as those with higher extraversion scores tend to be more aggressive, a necessary trait for success in contact sports. Those that are more extraverted also seek to raise their arousal level, which is what high risk sports provide, so it can be concluded that extraverts are more attracted to high risk sports [3]. The low risk sports scored higher in conscientiousness. The similarities in scores between high risk and team sports as well as low risk and individual sports can be attributed to the similarities in the subject groups.

Boys' and Girls' Sports

Boys' and girls' sports also had some interesting differences. Student-athletes who participate in boys' sports tended to have lower neuroticism scores than student-athletes who participate in girls' sports. This was expected for a multitude of reasons. Men are also less likely to admit fear or anxiety than women [4]. As the Big Five Personality Test is a self-assessed personality test, this may have contributed to the boys' having a lower neuroticism score than the girls. In addition, men generally have higher self-esteems than women [5]. Because self-esteem is a subcategory of the Big Five neuroticism, this is logical that boys would have lower neuroticism scores than girls. Additionally, the boys' sports averaged higher conscientiousness scores than the girls' sports. Furthermore, the girls' sports averaged higher openness to experience scores than the boys'. This is surprising as various studies, including Tok's 2011 study, found that besides neuroticism and conscientiousness, all other Big Five personality factors were of similar scores. The openness to experience traits are creativity and divergent thinking.

Conclusion

There are various factors that contribute to a person's sports choice. By eliminating the other factors as much as possible, this study aimed to find trends in personality among each sport as well as among various categorizations of the sports. These categorizations were team and individual sports, high risk and low risk sports, and boys' and girls' sports. It was found that those who play team and high risk sports tend to be more extroverted than individual and low risk sports. However, those that play individual and low risk sports tend to be more conscientious than those that play team and high risk sports. The similarities in openness to experience and neuroticism were initially unexpected, but once the different sport subject groups were accounted for, it was logical that the scores were like so. Finally, it was also found that those student-athletes that participate in boys' sports tend to be more conscientiousness than those that participate in girls' sports, while student-athletes that participate in girls' sports tended to be more neurotic and open to experience than boys' sports participants.

Conclusion (cont.)

Limitations

One limitation was the fact that not every athlete from every sport could be surveyed, which would provide exact personality scores for each sport. Another limiting factor in the survey were the multisport athletes. Although not necessarily detrimental to the study, these athletes' scores were recorded for all sports in which the individuals participate and need to be taken into account. Various personality traits may be displayed by these athletes and may be outliers of one or more sports in which they participate. Furthermore, not every factor that contributes to the ultimate decision to play one or more sports was eliminated. The social network factor could not be eliminated as these networks are established by each individual participant at a young age, long before they took the survey associated with this study. Availability was only partially eliminated as it can only be considered eliminated to freshmen and sophomores as they have yet to fulfill the two years of physical education required by the school.

Further Research

This survey could also be given to younger subject groups. This would provide a larger subject base, however some problems would arise with this. These problems include that the cost and availability factors are not eliminated as well as the fact that some children are more or less forced to play sports at a young age when their parents sign them up for recreational sports, usually for the purpose of physical activity and to develop social skills.

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