Investigating the relationship between personality traits and risky sexual behaviour

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Abstract

Research into the relationship between personality traits and sexual behaviour have indicated that the traits Extraversion and Openness have some correlation with increased risky sexual behaviour. Drawing from ecological holes in existing research, this study aimed to expand on the current literature to determine whether personality traits predicted risky sexual behaviour in third level students living in Ireland. The research question for this study was, do personality traits predict risky sexual behaviour? The traits being openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Participants were recruited through social media using a snowball sampling technique (N = 37) and completed an online survey containing demographic questions, the big five personality trait questionnaire, and the safe sex behaviour questionnaire. Results of standard multiple regression analysis found that personality traits did not significantly predict levels of risky sexual behaviour.

Keywords: conscientiousness, openness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, sexual behaviour.

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Introduction

The relationship between personality and sexual behaviours has long been an area of much interest in psychology (Eysenck, 1976). The growing fear of AIDS/HIV in the 1980's resulted in psychologists researching which personality traits were associated with behaviours that would increase one's likelihood of contracting HIV (Hoyle, Fejfar, & Miller, 2000; Mashegoane, Moalusi, Ngoepe, & Peltzer, 2002; McCown, 1992). Research in this area has more recently found it to be more relevant to examine the relationship between the big five personality traits and risky sexual behaviours (Miller, Lyman, Zimmerman, Logan, Leukefeld, & Clayton, 2004). A dominant, trusted method of measuring personality is the Big Five dimensions (John & Srivastava, 1999). Of the five traits, four have been identified as possibly being linked to risk sexual behaviours. These are, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (Pinkerton & Abramsom, 1996; Trobst, Herbst, Masters, & Costa, 2002).

The problems surrounding risky sexual behaviours can be categorised as both individual to those who partake in these activities and for society as a whole. These behaviours include things like unprotected sexual intercourse, sexual intercourse with multiple partners, engaging in sexual acts under the influence of alcohol or drugs and nondiscriminating selection of sexual partners (Zeitsch, Verweij, Bailey, Wright, & Martin, 2012). A major negative outcome that may occur as a result of these behaviours is unwanted pregnancy. This in turn may lead to an abortion or unplanned birth, which can negatively affect the academic success and employment for the mother (Miller et al., 2004). Risky sexual behaviour can also lead to sexually transmitted diseases (STD's). According to sexualwellbeing.ie, there are around 6000 people in Ireland living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), while the Center for Disease Control (CDC)

states there are over 1 million people living with HIV in the United States, with more people

contracting the disease every year (Wright & Randall, 2012)

Extraversion and risky sexual behaviour

Some of the first research on the correlation between personality traits and attitudes

towards risky sexual behaviour was done by Eysenck (1976). Eysenck found that those high in

extraversion tended to be more open to having multiple sexual partners and exploring different

positions during sexual interactions than those low in extraversion (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975).

These findings were supported by similar results in other studies (Barnes, Malamuth & Cheek,

1984; Costa, Fagan, Piedmont, Ponticas, & Wise, 1992; Snyder, Simpson, & Gangestad, 1986).

Links between the trait extraversion and promiscuous sexual behaviour have been found in

studies done by Pinkerton & Abramson (1995), Schenk & Pfrang, (1986), Schmitt & Buss (2000)

and Wright (1999). While McCown (1992) found a link between extraversion and unsafe sexual

practices. It is important to note that despite these findings extraverts are only marginally more

likely than introverts to cheat in a relationship (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Schmitt & Buss,

2001). Eysenck theorized that this connection between extraversion and risky sexual behaviours

may be due to those higher in extraversion having a higher libido than their introverted

counterparts. He stated it may also be due to a need for those high in extraversion to raise their

low levels of cortical arousal to a more comfortable level through the engagement of risk sexual

behaviours. In a recent study done by Zeitsch et al. (2012) the relationship between personality

and risky sexual behaviours was examined. Results showed that above all other traits,

extraversion held the strongest positive correlation to engagement in risky sexual behaviours.

Another study by Moyano & Sieera (2013) the year after supported this finding by also showing

a strong positive correlation between extraversion and engagement in sexual activities. Miller et

al. (2004) conducted a study that too supports the correlation between extraversion and engagement in risky sexual behaviours, to a degree. Miller et al., (2004) study also showed some relationship between traits openness and agreeableness and risky sexual behaviours; however, not to the level of the correlation between extraversion and risky sexual behaviours. The current study expects to find that individuals high in trait extraversion will have higher scores on the Safe Sex Behaviour Questionnaire (SSBQ) based on this research.

Neuroticism and risk sexual behaviour

Trait neuroticism can be most easily explained as an individual's sensitivity to negative emotions such as anxiety, depression and anger (Costa & Widiger, 1994). Bradbury & Fincham (1988) and Gottman (1994) found links between neuroticism and different facets of problematic sexuality. For example, sexual dissatisfaction and marital distress. A relationship between trait neuroticism and higher degrees of permissive sexual attitudes has been found by several studies (Lameiras Fernandez & Rodriguez Castro, 2003). While Eysenck (1971) and Naff Johnson (1997), found those high in neuroticism tend to engage in more sexual risk taking, McCown (1992) also supported these claims as he found those high in neuroticism would engage in unsafe sexual practices. Ball & Schottenfeld (1997) found that among groups of pregnant and post-partum cocaine users, the trait neuroticism was the strongest personality trait to predict risky sexual behaviour. It is not yet precisely known why neuroticism may lead to risky sexual behaviour. Cooper, Agocha & Sheldon (2000) stated that it may be that those who experience greater levels of emotional distress engage in risky sexual behaviours as a coping mechanism. While Trobst et al (2002) argued that perhaps those high in trait neuroticism are less capable of controlling their desires and needs which leads to higher rates of engagement in risky sexual behaviours. A study done by Miri et al., (2011) found that the relationship between neuroticism

and sexual desire was negative. This stands in relative contrast to previous findings that tended to show a slight positive relationship between neuroticism and risky sexual behaviour. This may be due to the slight difference in measuring the relationship between neuroticism and sexual desire, rather than risky sexual behaviour. It is expected that this study will show a correlation between higher levels of trait neuroticism and higher levels of risky sexual behaviour.

Agreeableness, conscientiousness, and risk sexual behaviour

The seemingly strongest personality characteristic correlated with risky sexual behaviour is impulsive sensation seeking (Hoyle et al., 2000; Zuckerman, 1994; Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 2000). Impulsive sensation seeking is not itself one of the big five personality traits, however it is most closely associated with low agreeableness and low conscientiousness (Zuckerman, 1993; Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Joireman, Teta & Kraft, 1994). There have been a plethora of studies linking sensation seeking to risk sexual behaviour (Hoyle et al., 2000; Mshegoane et al., 2002; Ripa, Hansen, Mortensen, Sanders & Reinisch, 2001). Mating success can be defined as having more sexual partners and children. Linton and Wiener (2001) discovered an association between high sensation seekers and higher levels of mating success, when compared to those at the opposite end of the spectrum. Franzini & Sideman (1994) found that males who are high in sensation seeking are less likely to employ the use of condoms. While Wilson, Manual & Lavelle (1992) found that high sensation seeking men are more likely to use the services of sex workers.

Other than sensation seeking, three other characteristics associated with low conscientiousness and low agreeableness have been shown to repeatedly be associated with risky sexual behaviour. The characteristic Machiavellianism, so named after the famous Italian politician and philosopher Nicolo Machiavelli (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Mchosky (2001) found that, especially males, who have this Machiavellian personality 'type' are likely to engage

in promiscuous sexual behaviour and to have permissive sexual attitudes. It has been observed that, like those with high sensation seeking, those who can be considered Machiavellian seem to have more mating success (Linton & Wiener, 2001).

The second of the three characteristics is psychoticism (Eysenck, 1976). The link between psychoticism and permissive sexual behaviour and attitudes has been observed in several studies (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975; Pinkerton & Abramson, 1996). McCown also found psychoticism was correlated with unsafe sexual practices.

The final characteristic is anti-sociality or otherwise known as psychopathy, again also associated with low agreeableness and low conscientiousness like the two previously stated characteristics (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Psychopathy is often linked to sexual risk taking (Aromaeki, Lindman, & Eriksson, 2002; Malamuth, 1998; McMahon, Malo, & Penedo, 1998). There has been a significant amount of literature tying together risky sexual behaviour and the personality traits agreeableness and conscientiousness (Hoyle et al., 2000; Lameiras Fernandez & Rodriguez Castro, 2003; Markey, Markey & Tinsley, 2003; Trobst, Wiggins, Costa, Herbst, McCrae & Masters, 2000; Wright & Reise, 1997; Buss & Shackelford, 1997). In this study it is expected that low levels of trait agreeableness and conscientiousness will be associated with higher SSBQ scores.

Aims/Hypotheses

The aim of this study is to determine whether any of the big five personality traits are associated with risky sexual behaviour measured using the big five trait scale and the safe sex behaviour questionnaire. The study aims to identify possible correlations and therefore create suggestions for future implementation of education strategies to equip younger people with the knowledge of risks associated with risky sexual conduct in a manner that would better target

those who are more potentially at risk of experiencing a negative outcome as a result of such an encounter (e.g., STI or STD).

Methodology

Participants

Participants were recruited using an opportunistic snowball sampling technique. A brief description of the study and a link to the online survey was distributed through the following social media sites, Instagram and Twitter. Participants were also invited to inform their friends about the study and share the link with any other suitable participants. As a standard multiple regression was used in this study, G*Power: Statistical Power analysis (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) was used to determine the sample size required for a statistically powerful analysis. As such, there was a 95% chance that the R-squared value would significantly differ from zero with a sample size of 50 or over, reducing the likelihood of a type 1 error. There were no incentives used to collect participants. The sample consisted of 37 participants. There were no participants excluded post participation. The final sample consisted of 21 females and 16 males, with a mean age of 22.6 years. Ranging from 19 to 31. Participants were asked to provide which third level educational institution they are attending to allow for exclusion of participants not currently enrolled in a 3rd level degree. 67.6% are attending NCI (N = 25), 8.1% are attending NUIG (N = 3), 5.4% TCD (N = 2), 5.4% TUD (N = 2), 2.7% DCU (N = 1), 2.7% DIT (N = 1), ICFE (N = 1).

Materials

Demographics. Participants were required to state their gender (male, female, other) and to give their age. The participants were also required to state which educational institute they are attending.

Personality Measure. The Big Five Personality Model, a 50-item self-report measure was used to determine participants levels in each of the five core traits that make up the scale. These traits are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. The users read 50 statements and rated how these statements described the participant on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate).

Openness is associated with high levels of creativity, a willingness to consider new and abstract ideas, and an eagerness to experience the unknown and explore. Conscientiousness is associated with being highly organised and task oriented. Those scoring high in this trait will possess good impulse control and the tendency to plan ahead and make goals for their future. Extraversion is easily identified as someone high in extraversion becomes energised by social events. These individuals are talkative, assertive, outgoing and love to be the centre of attention. Individuals high in agreeableness will be trusting, empathetic, caring and warm. These individuals engage in pro social behaviours and like to help others. Neuroticism is one's sensitivity to negative emotion. Those high in this trait are more prone to feeling sad, depressed, irritable and can experience mood swings and anxiety. The test measures individuals across these five traits and gives scores based on a percentile within the population. For example, an individual could score in the 90th percentile for Extraversion, meaning they scored higher than 90% of the population in that trait. A high or low score in each given trait is not necessarily positive or negative, it simply gives a description of an individual's location on the spectrum of

each trait, relative to the population. These five scales were developed to measure the Big-Five

factor markers reported in the following article Goldberg, L. R. (1992). The big 5 personality test

has shown internal reliability of .7 for all factors.

Items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14,16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 39, 44, 46,

and 49 were worded negatively and therefore had to be reverse scored when totaling the results

in SPSS.

Sexual Behaviour Measure..The safe sex behaviour questionnaire (SSBQ) was

originally developed to allow for the user to measure the participants on how often they

employed safe sex practices. The scale was assessed for its construct validity, its reliability, and

its content validity as it was subjected to a number of tests. The initial content validity for the

SSBQ showed an impressive computation of 98%. A population of 89 college freshmen were

used to compute the reliability of the items in the scale and this gave a figure of .82. After this

another test was run using a sample of 531 participants. The scale was factor-analysed separately

between genders to distinguish between males and females. This produced five factors with high

similarity for males and females. The salient items in the model had reliability coefficients

ranging from .52 to .85. A final sample of 174 participants was used to assess the construct

validity of the scale. This was done by correlating measures of participants general assertiveness

and their general level of risk-taking and correlating these results with the model. These

correlations were in the previously expected directions and were appreciable. This therefore

supported the construct validity of the model.

Questions 2,7,13,14,15,20,22,23 and 24 were negatively scored and therefore had to be

reverse scored when totalling the scores using SPSS. Questions 6,7, and 16 were not removed by

the researcher even though they had been removed by the original paper as removal was optional

and had not doing so had no negative effect on the results. Measurement of Safe Sex Behaviour in Adolescents and Young Adults (Dorio, Collen, Parsons, Margaret, Lehr Sally, Adame, Daniel, Carlone, Joyce, 1992)

Design

The independent variables are personality traits, measured with the Big Five Personality model. These are Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Participants self-reported scores between 1 and 5 on Likert scale. The dependent variable is the total score on the Safe Sex Behaviour Questionnaire. The individual's level for risky sexual behaviour is measured using this 27-item questionnaire. The participant self-reports a score of 1-4 on a Likert scale and the final score can then be looked at to see if the participant scored low, average or high. By measuring personality and risky sexual behaviour we can then run a statistical analysis (standard multiple regression) and see if any level in these personality traits predicts risk sexual behaviour

Procedure

Data was collected through Google Forms. The researcher first ran through the study three times to ensure no issues and to determine the length of time needed to complete the survey. The researcher took on average 16 minutes to complete the survey, this included fully reading the participant information sheet. The researcher exited the survey before total completion so as to not add any data that would later need to be excluded. The participant information sheet was then updated to include that participants would need approximately 20 minutes (rounded up for convenience) to complete. The survey was then launched online. The

survey was posted on the researchers Instagram story, bio, and timeline. A link and short explanation were also posted on the researchers Twitter page and bio. The first page presented to the participants was the participant information sheet. This page detailed the nature and purpose of the study, the researcher conducting the study, the organization in which the researcher is pursuing their degree, and the researcher's supervisor. The participants were also informed that they may contact the researcher or the supervisor with any queries prior to commencement of the study. The eligibility criteria were also included in this page (see Appendix A). Participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any point up until they have completed the survey. This was because of the anonymous nature of the data collection, once collected it could not then be identified and excluded.

The next page of the study contained the informed consent form. This form once again detailed the anonymous nature of the study (see Appendix B). To proceed past this page the participants were required to confirm that the voluntarily consent to participate. The next page consisted of demographic questions. These included age, gender, and educational institute (see Appendix C). The Safe Sex Behaviour Questionnaire followed this (see Appendix D) which was then followed by the Big Five Personality Scale (see Appendix E). The final page of the survey contained a debrief sheet (see Appendix F), this form again briefly detailed the nature of the story and showed appreciation for the participants partaking in the study. The page contained various helplines, emails and websites for participants if they wish to seek help for their mental health, or issues they may have confronted during the study, or for further education on topics relating to the study.

Ethical Considerations the National College of Ireland's Ethics Committee approved this research study to be carried out and the study is in line with the Psychological Society of Ireland's Code of Professional Ethics (2010) and the NCI Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research Involving Human Participants. The debrief form contained various helplines, emails, and websites even in the absence of any obvious risks of harm to the participants wellbeing.

Data Analysis

Data was collected using Google Forms and then analyzed through SPSS. Descriptive statistics were run to determine the average mean score for demographic questions. Inferential statistics were used to determine in any of the independent variables predicted the dependent variable. This was done using a standard multiple regression. The output of the standard multiple regression was then analyzed to determine whether any of the five independent variables (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) predicted the dependent variable (total SSBQ score).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the demographic variables. These are present in Table 1. The majority of participants attend the National College of Ireland (NCI) (67.6%). DCU, DIT, and ICFE all took 2.7% of the population each. Maynooth, TCD, and TUD all took 5.4% of the population. While 8.1% attended NUIG. 56.8% of the population was female (N = 21) and 43.2% of the population were male (N = 16).

Table 1

Frequencies for the current sample on each demographic variable.

Variable	N	Valid %
Sex		
Male	16	43.2
Female	21	56.8
College		
NCI	25	67.6
NUIG	3	8.1
TCD	2	5.4
TUD	2	5.4
Maynooth	2	5.4
DCU	1	2.7
DIT	1	2.7
ICFE	1	2.7

The mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD) for all continuous variables are shown in Table 2. Participants had a mean age of 22.27 years (SD = 2.60), ranging from 19 to 31 years. An inspection of histograms show that the data are normally distributed for males and females scores on the SSBQ.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for all continuous variables

	Mean (95% Confidence intervals)	Std. Error Mean	Median	SD	Range
Age	22.27 (21.40 – 23.14)	.43	21	2.60	12 (19 – 31)
Openness	36.76 (34.81 – 38.70)	.96	37	5.84	23
Conscientiousness	33.19 (31.25 – 35.13)	.96	33	5.83	25
Extraversion	29.46 (26.78 – 32.14)	1.32	29	8.04	33
Agreeableness	41.38 (39.66 – 43.10)	.85	42	5.16	18
Neuroticism	26.16 (24.13 – 28.20)	1.00	25	6.10	26
Total SSBQ Score	62.95 (61.30 – 64.59)	.81	63	4.94	22

Inferential Statistics

A multiple regression was used to investigate how much of the variance of the dependent variable (Total SSBQ score) was explained by our independent variables (Big Five Personality Trait scores). The standard multiple regression allowed the researcher to determine the statistical significance of the results, in terms of the five individual independent variables and the model itself.

A standard multiple regression analysis was used to determine if risky sexual behaviour could be explained by the five predictor variables, which include openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. As no a priori hypotheses were made to create a need for a specific order of entry of these predictor variables, a standard multiple regression was used as it is a direct method of analysis. The results from table 3 show that the big five personality traits explained 31.7% of the variance in risky sexual behaviour ($R = .317$, $p < .001$).

However due to the small sample size, the adjusted R square value was used and that determined

that the big five model explained 4.5% of the variance in risky sexual behaviour (R = -.045, p

> .001). Of the five predictor variables none made a significant unique contribution to the

prediction of the dependent variable. (See table 3).

Table 3

Table showing results of standard multiple regression.

	R	R^2	β	B	SE	P
SSBQ	.317	-.045				
Extraversion			.171	.105	.119	.385
Agreeableness			-.045	-.141	.185	.452
Conscientiousness			-.024	-.020	.161	.900
Neuroticism			-.086	-.070	.170	.683
Openness			.227	.192	.155	.223

Note: R^2 = Adjusted R-squared; β = standardized beta value; B = unstandardized beta value; SE

= Standard errors of B; N = 37; Statistical significance = p > .05

The tolerance and VIF were also examined, and it was found that the multicollinearity

was not violated. The normal P-P plot was also examined, and the points were in a relatively

straight line indicating no major deviations from normality. The scatter plot also suggests no

violation of assumptions as the points forms a rectangular shape with the majority being towards

the center of said shape.

Discussion

The aim of this current study was to investigate if there was a relationship between any of

the big five personality traits and risky sexual behaviour. Previous studies found that there was at

least some degree of correlation between conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness

openness, neuroticism, and risky sexual behaviour (Pinkerton and Abramsom, 1996; Trobst,

Herbst, Masters & Costa, 2002). Of these four, agreeableness, extraversion and

conscientiousness seemed to show the highest correlation with risky sexual behaviour (Hoyle et

al., 2000; Lameiras Fernandez & Rodriguez Castro, 2003; Markey, Markey & Tinsley, 2003;

Trobst, Wiggins, Costa, Herbst, McCrae & Masters, 2000; Wright & Reise, 1997; Buss &

Shackelford, 1997).

It was hypothesised that low levels of traits agreeableness and conscientiousness would

predict higher scores on the safe sex behaviour questionnaire, in turn showing that these traits

predict higher levels of risky sexual behaviour. This was explored using a correlation analysis

known as a standard multiple regression, this analysis is used when wanting to determine if one

variable predicts the outcome of another (personality traits prediction SSBQ scores). From this

analysis there was no significant findings. Unlike previous studies the data did not show a

correlation between any of the five personality traits and total SSBQ scores. These findings may

suggest a weakness in the present study as the results are inconsistent with many previous

studies. This may be due to methodological differences between the current study and previous,

such as, target population, and models used to determine risky sexual behaviour and personality.

(Hoyle et al., 2000; Lameiras Fernandez & Rodriguez Castro, 2003; Markey, Markey & Tinsley,

2003; Trobst, Wiggins, Costa, Herbst, McCrae & Masters, 2000; Wright & Reise, 1997; Buss &

Shackelford, 1997). It is then possible, based on these findings to reject the hypothesis.

It may be of some concern that these findings showed no correlation between any of the

five personality traits measured and the level of risky sexual behaviour as a plethora of previous

research has found that personality traits do correlate with risky sexual behaviour. Especially in

regard to conscientiousness which showed almost not relation at all ($p > .900$). It may also be of

note to address that modern forms of media have become very openly sexualized in regard to

consumable content and also attitudes towards casual or even risky sexual behaviour (APA,

2007; Rush & La Nauze, 2006a, 2006b; Bailey, 2011). This increase in the consumption of such

material may also be influencing the populations willingness to engage in risky sexual acts that would have previously been viewed in a less casual light. Therefore, it may be prudent to consider the possible social influences on risky sexual behaviour as well as the biological influences.

This study identified several different limitations. The scale used to measure the participants propensity to engage in risky sexual behaviour. It may have been pertinent to use more than a single scale to measure the participants levels of risky sexual behaviour as this would give a better understanding of their true levels rather than that based on a single, reliable, yet limited scale. The scale also contains many questions that may put off participants as they are somewhat graphic in nature. This can lead to participants choosing to back out of completing the study, or to skew their answers knowingly or unknowingly to ones that would not place their self-image in a negative light. This avoidance of a negative image would be due to individuals not wanting to feel judged negatively, either by themselves or society for their sexual behaviours. When looking at the limitations of the big five personality scale, the questions can be confusing in how they are worded for the average person. Therefore, some participants may not fully understand what a question is asking or may not take the time to attempt to understand if they are not sure, they instead may simply go with what they first thought the question was asking and move on. It may in future studies be necessary to reword certain questions in the scale to make them clearer and more concise to the lay person while also ensuring not to affect the original validity of the question and its ability to measure what it is designed to measure.

The population for the study was also severely limited. This no doubt impacted the findings of the research as the low number of participants made it very unlikely for an accurate finding. This could have been caused by several different things. Firstly, the researcher used

social media as their primary method of sourcing participants. The researcher however did not initially have a large enough following to facilitate the finding of enough participants through this method. Future researchers should ensure the participant collection methods used are the most appropriate for the study, rather than the most convenient for themselves. This method was also flawed as the nature of the study being somewhat "taboo" may have led to others being less willing to share the study on their own social media platforms as they did not want to be incur negative social judgement. In future studies it may be a viable option to allow for an incentive for participation as this may increase the chances of participants completing the study and doing so in a careful manner. This is also a flaw of the self-report style of both the questionnaires used. This may have caused a self-selecting bias; this means that the participants feelings at the time the completed the study could have affected their answers. To mitigate this, future studies may consider a more experimental research design in a lab setting, and perhaps a longitudinal research design, where participants scores can be looked at over a given period of time to increase the reliability of said scores. The participants for this study were also all located in the Dublin region, this too limited the generalisability, therefore future studies should seek to expand the participant collection nationally. While the majority where also from the same college, with 67.6% of participants attending NCI. This heavy bias towards a single college may have incurred a skew in results as college environments may differ in their levels of promoting safe sexual behaviour among students. As NCI does indeed promote safe sexual behaviour, through methods such as the allocation of free contraceptive measures to any student who wishes to avail of this offer, this may impact the NCI student populations SSBQ scores.

There was also a significant time restraint upon this study as it was part of the coursework for a final year Bachelor Honours degree in Psychology. This meant there was a very

limited time frame to collect participants before the researcher had to close off the study and begin analysing the data and writing up the current project. For future research in this area in would be beneficial to allow for a far greater time period to collect participants, this would then lead to more accurate and ecologically valid findings.

This study did present several strengths. One of which was the age range. Findings have shown that the age is a significant risk factor in relation to sexually transmitted infection diagnosis. The most at-risk group being 15–24-year-olds (Tao et al, 2020). The mean age for this study was 22. Therefore, this study population was in the most at-risk group. Meaning the findings may have contributed to the education of young people on their sexual behaviour, leading to safer future practices.

The split between male and female participants for this study was also relatively even. With 56.8% of participants identifying as female and 42.3% identifying as male. This somewhat even distribution allows for a positive level of ecological validity. However future studies may seek to also promote the inclusion of those who identify as other non-standard genders (e.g., non-binary). This in turn would also allow for the targeting of more LGBTQ+ community members in the promotion of safe sex behaviour.

Conclusion

Overall, there has been enough consistent research to conclude that personality traits are associated with risky sexual behaviour. Specifically, traits openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Although different levels of each trait are understood to predict risky sexual behaviours. Such as high levels of extraversion, openness, and agreeableness, and low levels on conscientiousness (Lameiras Fernandez & Rodriguez Castro, 2003; Eysenck, 1971; Naff & Johnson, 1997; McCown, 1992; Zeitsch et al, 2012; Pinkerton &

Abramson, 1996; Trobst, Herbst, Masters & Costa, 20020. Further research in this area may show greater promise by implementing several models to measure both personality and risky sexual behaviour. This would allow for a deeper understanding of each participants personality and sexual behaviours. As well as this it would be prudent for the research design to be more heavily considered. The implementation of a more longitudinal and experimental research design may yield more accurate results as the data would be far more accurate due to less likelihood of a bias in self-reported answers on the measurement scales and scores taken at different time points to mitigate the chance of mood fluctuations affecting the scores. The danger of unsafe and risky sexual behaviour is an ever present one in our society. It is a constantly changing and growing danger to navigate with the development of drugs to treat what would have previously been fatal sexually transmitted diseases, a vital and amazing step forward for science, but perhaps one that has led to societies becoming more lackadaisical in the implementation of proper education on sexual behaviour and health. It is therefore of vital importance that we maintain an understanding of what measures and policies should be put in place to ensure the appropriate level of sexual education is provided to everyone. These broader implications may impact the policies the government has in place. These results may also cause thought for the HSE to develop a new and appropriate guideline regarding safe sexual behaviour that is more so targeted towards those that have been shown to be more susceptible to partaking in such behaviours due to their predisposed personality.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Informed Consent Form

In agreeing to participate in this research I understand the following:

This research is being conducted by Gareth Connolly_____, an undergraduate student at the School of Business, National College of Ireland.

The method proposed for this research project has been approved in principle by the Departmental Ethics Committee, which means that the Committee does not have concerns about the procedure itself as detailed by the student. It is, however, the above-named student's responsibility to adhere to ethical guidelines in their dealings with participants and the collection and handling of data.

If I have any concerns about participation, I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage.

I have been informed as to the general nature of the study and agree voluntarily to participate.

There are no known expected discomforts or risks associated with participation.

All data from the study will be treated confidentially. The data from all participants will be compiled, analysed, and submitted in a report to the Psychology Department in the School of Business. No participant's data will be identified by name at any stage of the data analysis or in the final report.

At the conclusion of my participation, any questions or concerns I have will be fully addressed.

I may withdraw from this study at any time, however it may not be possible to withdraw my data at the conclusion of this study due to the data being unidentifiable as mine.

Signed: Gareth Connolly

Participant _____

Researcher: Gareth Connolly Date: _____

Appendix 2

Participant Information Sheet

DO PERSONALITY TRAITS PREDICT SEXUAL RISK BEHAVIOURS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS LIVING IN IRELAND?
INVITATION
You are being asked to take part in a research study on whether personality traits predict risky sexual behaviour. I, Gareth Connolly am conducting this research as part of my Undergraduate Psychology degree in the National College of Ireland. The research is being supervised by Dr. Michelle Kelly. The project has been approved by the National College of Ireland Research Ethics Committee.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN
In this study, you will be asked to take a personality test that will measure your personality on five different traits. You will be asked a total of 44 questions on this test. You tick the most appropriate box based on how much you feel the statement describes you.

After this you will be given a questionnaire on safe sexual behaviour. You will be shown 27 sex related activities. Each of which you will answer on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being you never partake in this behaviour, and 4 being you always partake in this behaviour.

After both of these tests have been taken the study will end.

TIME COMMITMENT
The study typically takes 20 minutes. This is an estimate, and it may take more or less time. It is advised that you take enough time to ensure you give as accurate answers as possible.

After this there will be no follow up study and no more of your time needed.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS
You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/destroyed.

You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you without penalty

You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome). If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

This study carries no physical or social risks to the participants. If the answering of questions of a sexual nature causes the participant emotional distress, the debrief page will provide several helplines and information websites.

COST, REIMBURSEMENT AND COMPENSATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY
The data we collect do not contain any personal information about you except your age, gender and which 3rd level institute you attend. All data obtained will be completely anonymous and will be impossible to trace back to you.

The data will be presented as part of the researcher's undergraduate degree, as per the module curriculum. It may also in future be presented at conferences or published in journals. In these circumstances it will still be impossible to trace data back to any of the participants.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
Dr April Hargreaves or the researcher Gareth Connolly will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact the researcher at garthc98@gmail.com or 0873664231. You may contact the researchers Supervisor, Dr April Hargreaves at April.hargreaves@ncirl.ie

If you want to find out about the final results of this study, you should contact Gareth Connolly

Appendix 3

Safe Sex Behaviour Survey

SAFE SEX BEHAVIOR QUESTIONNAIRE (SSBQ) (DiIorio, et al., 1993)

Directions: Below is a list of sexual practices. Please read each statement and respond by indicating **your degree of use of these practices.**

1 = Never   2 = Sometimes   3 = Most of the Time   4 = Always

1. I insist on condom use when I have sexual intercourse.
        1   2   3   4

2. I use cocaine or other drugs prior to or during sexual intercourse.
        1   2   3   4

3. I stop foreplay long enough to put on a condom (or for my partner to put on a condom).

        1   2   3   4

4. I ask potential sexual partners about their sexual histories.
        1   2   3   4

5. I avoid direct contact with my sexual partner's semen or vaginal secretions.
        1   2   3   4

6. My partner and I use spermicide as well as a condom with each act of sexual intercourse.
        1   2   3   4

7. I have sexual intercourse with someone who injects drugs (IV drugs) into his/her veins.
        1   2   3   4

8. I ask my potential sexual partners about a history of bisexual/homosexual practices.
        1   2   3   4

9. I engage in sexual intercourse on a first date.
        1   2   3   4

10. I abstain from sexual intercourse when I do not know my partner's sexual history.
        1   2   3   4

11. I avoid sexual intercourse when I have sores or irritation in my genital area.
        1   2   3   4

12. If I know an encounter may lead to sexual intercourse, I carry a condom with me.
        1   2   3   4

13. I insist on examining my sexual partner for sores, cuts, or abrasions in the genital area.   1   2
3   4

14. If I disagree with information that my partner presents on safer sex practices, I state my point of view.
     1   2   3   4
1 = Never   2 = Sometimes   3 = Most of the Time   4 = Always

15. I engage in oral sex without using protective barriers such as a condom or rubber dam.
     1   2   3   4

16. I use rubber gloves for sexual foreplay when I have cuts or abrasions on my hands.
     1   2   3   4

17. If swept away in the passion of the moment, I have sexual intercourse without using a condom.
     1   2   3   4

18. I engage in anal intercourse.
     1   2   3   4

19. I ask my potential sexual partners about a history of IV drug use.
     1   2   3   4

20. If I know an encounter may lead to sexual intercourse, I have a mental plan to practice safer sex.
     1   2   3   4

21. If my partner insists on sexual intercourse without a condom, I refuse to have sexual intercourse.
     1   2   3   4

22. I avoid direct contact with my sexual partner's blood.
     1   2   3   4

23. It is difficult for me to discuss sexual issues with my sexual partners.
     1   2   3   4

24. I initiate the topic of safer sex with my potential sexual partner.
     1   2   3   4

25. I have sexual intercourse with someone who I know is a bisexual or gay.
     1   2   3   4

26. I engage in anal intercourse without using a condom.
     1   2   3   4

27. 1 drink alcoholic beverages prior to or during sexual intercourse.
     1   2   3   4

Appendix 4

Big Five Personality Traits Questionnaire

How Accurately Can You Describe Yourself?

Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself, in relation to other people you know of the same sex as you are, and roughly your same age. So that you can describe yourself in an honest manner, your responses will be kept in absolute confidence. Indicate for each statement whether it is 1. Very Inaccurate, 2. Moderately Inaccurate, 3. Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate, 4. Moderately Accurate, or 5. Very Accurate as a description of you.

		Very Inaccurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Neither Accurate Nor Inaccurate	Moderately Accurate	Very Accurate	
1.	Am the life of the party.	O	O	O	O	O	(1+)
2.	Feel little concern for others.	O	O	O	O	O	(2-)
3.	Am always prepared.	O	O	O	O	O	(3+)
4.	Get stressed out easily.	O	O	O	O	O	(4-)
5.	Have a rich vocabulary.	O	O	O	O	O	(5+)
6.	Don't talk a lot.	O	O	O	O	O	(1-)
7.	Am interested in people.	O	O	O	O	O	(2+)
8.	Leave my belongings around.	O	O	O	O	O	(3-)
9.	Am relaxed most of the time.	O	O	O	O	O	(4+)
10.	Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas.	O	O	O	O	O	(5-)
11.	Feel comfortable around people.	O	O	O	O	O	(1+)
12.	Insult people.	O	O	O	O	O	(2-)
13.	Pay attention to details.	O	O	O	O	O	(3+)
14.	Worry about things.	O	O	O	O	O	(4-)
15.	Have a vivid imagination.	O	O	O	O	O	(5+)

16. Keep in the background.	O	O	O	O	O	(1-)
17. Sympathize with others' feelings.	O	O	O	O	O	(2+)
18. Make a mess of things.	O	O	O	O	O	(3-)
19. Seldom feel blue.	O	O	O	O	O	(4+)
20. Am not interested in abstract ideas.	O	O	O	O	O	(5-)
21. Start conversations.	O	O	O	O	O	(1+)
22. Am not interested in other people's problems.	O	O	O	O	O	(2-)
23. Get chores done right away.	O	O	O	O	O	(3+)
24. Am easily disturbed.	O	O	O	O	O	(4-)
25. Have excellent ideas.	O	O	O	O	O	(5+)
26. Have little to say.	O	O	O	O	O	(1-)
27. Have a soft heart.	O	O	O	O	O	(2+)
28. Often forget to put things back in their proper place.	O	O	O	O	O	(3-)
29. Get upset easily.	O	O	O	O	O	(4-)
30. Do not have a good imagination.	O	O	O	O	O	(5-)
31. Talk to a lot of different people at parties.	O	O	O	O	O	(1+)
32. Am not really interested in others.	O	O	O	O	O	(2-)
33. Like order.	O	O	O	O	O	(3+)
34. Change my mood a lot.	O	O	O	O	O	(4-)
35. Am quick to understand things.	O	O	O	O	O	(5+)
36. Don't like to draw attention to myself.	O	O	O	O	O	(1-)
37. Take time out for others.	O	O	O	O	O	(2+)
38. Shirk my duties.	O	O	O	O	O	(3-)

39.	Have frequent mood swings.	O	O	O	O	O	(4-)
40.	Use difficult words.	O	O	O	O	O	(5+)
41.	Don't mind being the center of attention.	O	O	O	O	O	(1+)
42.	Feel others' emotions.	O	O	O	O	O	(2+)
43.	Follow a schedule.	O	O	O	O	O	(3+)
44.	Get irritated easily.	O	O	O	O	O	(4-)
45.	Spend time reflecting on things.	O	O	O	O	O	(5+)
46.	Am quiet around strangers.	O	O	O	O	O	(1-)
47.	Make people feel at ease.	O	O	O	O	O	(2+)
48.	Am exacting in my work.	O	O	O	O	O	(3+)
49.	Often feel blue.	O	O	O	O	O	(4-)
50.	Am full of ideas.	O	O	O	O	O	(5+)

Appendix 5

Debrief Sheet

Thank you for participating as a research participant in this present study concerning if personality traits predict risk sexual behaviour. This studies aim is to determine if scoring high or low in any of the five factor traits can predict if someone is more or less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour. Again, I greatly appreciate your participation in this study, your contribution is of vital importance. Please, if you know of anyone, friends or family, who like you fit the criteria to partake in this study, then feel free to pass along the link to them. If you have any queries regarding this study, please contact myself, the researcher at x19340651@student.ncirl.ie

In the event that partaking in this study has caused you any form of psychological distress then please, we encourage you to contact any of the following helplines:

Samaritans: 116 123

HSE Live: 1800 700 700

Gay Men's Health Service: 01 9212730 / or email gmhclinic@hse.ie

Or if you wish to find out more about sexual health and safe sex practices, the please visit:

https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/