

Psychology AP
Summer Assignment
Due Date: August 10, 2021

Read The Personality of the Simpsons by David A. Kenny and Deirdre T. Kenny.

Choose a character from a movie, novel, or TV show (none of the Simpsons characters may be used) and write a paper analyzing their personality.

The following topics should be included.

1. Describe the character using each of the Big Five factors.
2. Describe whether or not the character would agree with your assessment, using the concepts of social desirability and self-presentation.
3. Choose another person from the same movie or show. Using the concept of peer assessment, describe how their analysis of your character's personality would be similar and how would it be different.
4. Describe whether or not this character seems to be well-liked by viewers. What personality characteristics attribute to how much the character is liked? Describe how this agrees or disagrees with the reading on what characteristics are correlated with liking.

A well done paper should address all of the above topics and be supported with evidence from the character's actions. Use specific examples. Your assignment should be typed and written in prose format (not a list of answers to the four topics listed). See the attached rubric for scoring guidelines.

The paper can be mailed to Covington Catholic High School c/o Mrs. Osterhaus, can be submitted on Canvas, or it can be e-mailed to Mrs. Osterhaus at mosterhaus@covcath.org

Psychology AP
Summer Assignment Rubric/Scoring Sheet

Correctly describing personality traits:

Extroversion (2 points)

Agreeableness (2 points)

Conscientiousness (2 points)

Neuroticism (2 points)

Openness (2 points)

Character agreement/disagreement

social desirability (2 points)

self-presentation (2 points)

Peer assessment

similarity (2 points)

difference (2 points)

Liking

Is the character liked? (2 points)

What trait contributes to that ? (2 points)

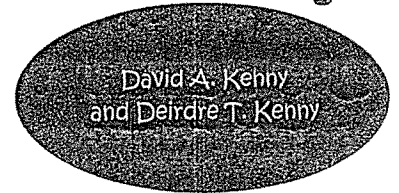
Agreement with reading (2 points)

Total (24 possible)

University where she is also an Associate Master of Morse College. In 2004, she received the Elm-Ivy Award from the City of New Haven and Yale University for important work fostering relations between the city and the university.



Simpsons' Big Five



"'cause you got personality!"
—Lloyd Price song from the 50s

PEOPLE ARE CLEARLY DIFFERENT from one another. Unmistakably they differ in their looks; they also differ in their personalities.

Psychologists have investigated these differences for over a century. Among some of the most examined aspects of personality are self-esteem, intelligence, depression, sensation seeking, optimism-pessimism and internal-external control. However, in the last decade or so, research in personality has focused on the Big Five. Although there are several different versions of the Big Five, we refer to the most researched version, that by Costa and McCrae (1997). The Big Five factors, with several indicators, are as follows:

Extroversion: outgoing, energetic, humorous

Agreeableness: warm, accepting, trusting

Conscientiousness: conventional, careful, organized

Neuroticism: stable, well adjusted, calm (indicators of low neuroticism)

Openness: independent, creative, adventurous

One way to remember the Big Five is the acronym OCEAN. There is a debate among personality psychologists whether there is a Big Five or a Big Six or even a Big Seven. Moreover, there is even some evidence that the Big Five factors are different in different cultures (Yang & Bond, 1990). Whether the personality pie is sliced into five or seven pieces, the Big Five provides a convenient framework for summarizing personality differences.

How does the field of psychology measure these differences in people's personality, using the Big Five? Historically, the standard approach to the measurement of a person's personality is for a person to take a personality test. The person is asked a series of questions, and based on his or her answers, a measurement is made as to whether the person has the Big Five factor. These tests are used in a wide variety of settings, among which are: employment, vocational counseling, diagnosis of psychopathology and mate selection. Several books and websites offer personality tests; while some personality tests are subtle, most are very transparent. That is, the test taker can quite easily figure out what personality dimension is being assessed by the question. For instance, if you were asked, "Do you like to go to parties?" it would not surprise you that by choosing "yes" you indicate that you are extroverted. "No" would indicate that you are introverted.

Because of the transparency of self-report personality inventories, many psychologists have questioned their validity. That is, there are concerns that a personality test may not accurately measure what it purportedly claims to measure. What are the bases of these concerns? One concern is social desirability. People may be unwilling to describe negative features about themselves, especially in certain situations. For instance, if you were filling out a personality questionnaire for a job application, you may not be willing to admit that you cheated on tests and used illegal substances. Another concern is self-presentation. People have a self-image of who they are, and that self-image may have little or nothing to do with what they are really like. For example, you may fancy yourself as quite the athlete and competitor, despite the fact that you never played sports in high school and you are seventy-five pounds overweight.

Psychologists are aware that personality tests are biased, in part. However, it is not correct to say that personality tests are totally invalid. Any measure, even a very good one, has sources of error. No measure is perfect. Even physical measurement has errors. If you are five feet six, you are likely not *exactly* five feet six. Also, your height will vary by time of

day, posture and measuring instrument. It should then come as no surprise that psychological measurement has error and bias. The current view is that personality tests do provide information about a person, but they do have biases.

You might wonder how we would ever know whether a personality test was valid or not. Psychologists have asked themselves this question too. Most accept that some measures of personality are more valid than others. In particular, the best way to determine whether a personality measure is valid is to see whether it predicts a person's behavior. Thus, although we can never ascertain with 100 percent certainty what someone's personality is, we can pretty closely approximate it.

Peer Assessment

In the last twenty or so years, an alternative approach to the assessment of personality has been developing. Instead of asking people about their own personality, others who know the person are asked about that person's personality. The personality psychologist who pioneered this effort is David Funder, author of the *Personality Puzzle* (Funder, 2004), who is currently at the University of California at Riverside. The rationale for this method is that others are, presumably, less biased than the persons themselves. This is not to say that peers are unbiased, but rather biases are not as strong in the ratings of others as they are in self-ratings. Recall that all measurement contains some error, and even good measures have sources of bias and error.

How well do informant ratings work? Actually quite well. There is some evidence that they are more valid than self-reports. For instance, in a study conducted by Kolar, Funder & Colvin (1996), people were placed in a group and interacted with each other. After the interaction, each person was asked to rate him or herself on several traits, e.g. dominance, and the person was also rated on these traits by others. Kolar et al. concluded that the ratings of others were better, that is more accurate (i.e., related more strongly to behavior), than the self-ratings.

An additional advantage of observer ratings is aggregation. When we add up the judgments of several informants, some of their biases will be cancelled out. Therefore, by getting several judges to rate a person, we can obtain more reliable and valid ratings than from a self-rating.

A final advantage, and one particularly useful for the research that we later describe, is that knowledgeable informants can be used when a self-report is not a possibility. For example, Gosling, Kwan and John (2003)

were interested in the personalities of dogs. Obviously, they could not ask the dogs to complete self-ratings of personality, so they used people to judge the dogs' personalities.

How well do informants need to know the person they are rating? Ideally, they would be knowledgeable informants. We would seek to ask the person's close friends, their romantic partner or family members. However, a very surprising finding is that virtual strangers are surprisingly accurate at knowing other people's personality. They are not as accurate as knowledgeable informants, but they are remarkably close. Albright, Malloy and Kenny (1988) developed the zero acquaintance paradigm. They had groups of strangers judge one another on the Big Five. These might be students who simply view each other on the first day of class. Surprisingly, many studies have found astonishing validity in these first-impression judgments. Total strangers can quite accurately read your personality.

Ambady and colleagues in several studies have shown that thin slices or little bits of behavior can also lead to valid judgments. For instance, Ambady and Rosenthal (1993) showed students a thirty-second clip of a professor giving a lecture. Surprisingly, the observers of this thin behavioral slice agreed very closely in their assessment of the professor's teaching ability with students who completed a semester-long course with the professor.

Finally, Gosling and colleagues (Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli & Morris, 2002); Vazire & Gosling, 2004) have shown that you do not even need to observe a person to know that person's personality. Just by viewing the person's bedroom, office or website, you can fairly accurately know the person's personality.

In sum, judgments by others are a good way to assess a person's personality. Ideally, these others should know the person well, but even strangers are surprisingly accurate.

The Study

How do *The Simpsons* shake out when it comes to the Big Five? Of course, we cannot ask Marge and Homer to complete a Big Five questionnaire. However, we can ask viewers to evaluate the personalities of the cast. We recruited thirteen "Simpsonites," people who are heavy viewers of the show. While thirteen might seem like a small number of judges, we shall see that they provided sufficiently reliable data for the type of conclusions that we wish to draw. The sample consisted of eight

men and five women; the age range was from twenty to fifty-four years old. They were heavy viewers of *The Simpsons*, and had watched the program, on average, for twelve years.

We presented the judges with a standard measure of a shortened Big Five (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) called the Ten-Item Personality Inventory or TIPI, and we asked them to rate twenty characters from *The Simpsons* on ten traits on a seven-point scale. We did not include the baby Maggie, because she does not talk (although she did once say "Homer"), nor did we include Marge's twin sisters Selma and Patty, because they are a pair, and thus, may not have two distinct personalities. Our list of twenty characters are Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, Ned Flanders, Milhouse, Nelson, Barney, Moe, Groundskeeper Willie, Principal Skinner, Edna Krabappel, Otto Mann, Krusty, Apu, Abe Simpson, Ralph Wiggum, Reverend Lovejoy, Smithers and Mr. Burns. Because of time limitations, we limited the questionnaire to these twenty characters, and thus did not obtain judgments of some minor regular characters (e.g., Lenny and Chief Wiggum).

Our focus was on agreement in the perception of personality. Would our judges agree in their perception of the personalities of these characters; would they agree as much as others tend to agree in the judgments of real people? We might think that there would be more agreement on fictional characters. The very term "cartoon character" would seem to imply that the character is distinct and facets of their personality would be sharply drawn. Alternatively, it might be thought that cartoon characters can be made to do just about anything, and they are not necessarily consistent with any personality. For instance, in one episode Homer is a cheating college student and in another he is a charismatic prophet predicting the end of the world. If cartoon characters are inconsistent, then people will judge them quite differently. Thus, we are unlikely to find more-or-less agreement in the judgment of *Simpsons* characters.

Our volunteers stated they knew the characters very well, the mean on a 1 (do not know well) to 7 (know well) scale being 6.03. Homer is the best-known character (Mean equal to 6.77) and Reverend Lovejoy was least well known (5.54). We also measured how much they disagreed on each character (i.e., the standard deviation), and this measure did not correlate across the Big Five factors, the average correlation being essentially zero. This tells us that the judges either agreed or disagreed with each other equally in judging the characters. Thus, the judges know the characters equally well, even the characters that were not featured regularly, like Lovejoy and Groundskeeper Willie.

We performed detailed statistical analyses of the data, which can be found on <http://davidakenny.net/doc/simpsons.htm>. We present here the key results from those analyses (without including the statistical details.) The website also contains the questionnaire that we used, and you can compare your answers to those of our thirteen judges.

Results

In Table 1, we have the ratings of the characters on the Big Five averaged across the thirteen judges. You can look for your favorite character and see how it is judged. For instance, we see that Abe Simpson is pretty low on all of the measures, except Neuroticism.

The central question of this research is whether judges agree with one another in their assessment of the characters' personalities. For example, do they agree that Homer is extroverted and open to experience? We used a measure of consensus (Kenny, 1994), which is equal to zero if agreement was only at chance level, and would be one if there was perfect agreement between all the perceivers. Based on past research (Kenny, 1994), we, and others, have found that the level of consensus using this measure is .275.

What did we find for the characters that we studied? As shown in Table 2, judgments of the characters' personality are quite reliable. Normally, with judgment data, we would hope for a minimum reliability of .7, and anything above .8 is quite good. Using these standards, we see that the judgments of the characters are very good, and that thirteen judges are sufficient, the average reliability being an impressive .924. When we look at the consensus results, we see three particularly interesting features.

First, we find much more agreement in the judgment of the characters than we do for real people. Judges agreed to an exceptional extent about the personalities of the characters. Perhaps the characters "behave" much more consistently than do real people because the writers of the show have clear conceptions of their characters' personalities.

Second, we find the weakest level of agreement for extroversion, which is surprising, because it is the one Big Five factor for which we usually find the greatest level of agreement. We think the reason for this is that virtually all the *Simpsons* characters are extroverted, and thus, they do not vary a great deal in their extroversion. Note that the mean on extroversion is 4.59 on a scale that ranges from 1 (not extroverted) to 7 (extroverted), which is the largest mean of the Big Five factors. In

TABLE 1
Big Five Ratings Made by 13 Judges of 20 Simpsons Characters

Character	Extroversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
Abe Simpson	3.73	2.96	3.12	5.46	2.58
Apu	5.31	4.85	6.12	3.27	4.19
Barney	5.19	5.08	1.35	4.35	3.92
Bart	6.73	2.73	2.54	3.31	5.54
Edna Krabappel	4.00	2.81	4.58	4.77	3.23
Homer	6.15	3.54	1.69	5.19	5.35
Krusty	6.19	2.77	2.38	5.42	5.12
Lisa	4.27	4.62	6.69	4.08	5.35
Marge	3.81	5.46	6.54	3.92	4.04
Milhouse	2.96	4.42	4.08	5.92	3.12
Moe	3.15	2.96	3.62	5.15	3.08
Mr. Burns	4.50	1.35	4.85	3.92	3.35
Ned Flanders	5.15	6.27	6.42	3.12	2.38
Nelson	5.46	1.85	2.15	4.96	3.96
Otto Mann	5.27	5.27	1.96	3.08	5.19
Principal Skinner	3.69	3.27	5.69	4.81	2.15
Ralph Wiggum	4.58	4.92	2.23	4.62	3.65
Rev. Lovejoy	4.00	4.04	5.54	2.65	2.27
Smithers	2.92	5.15	5.92	4.27	3.42
Grounds-keeper Willie	4.73	2.50	4.31	5.73	3.54

Scores can range from 1 to 7.

contrast, the thirteen judges saw themselves as scoring lowest on extroversion, relative to the other Big Five factors. Cartoon characters cannot be too introverted or they would not be very interesting. Jung (1999) obtained a similar finding when he studied celebrities (e.g., Jerry Seinfeld and Madonna), the least agreement for Extroversion. Again, celebrities are all generally extroverted and so the differences between them on Extroversion are weaker.

Third, and what we find most interesting, is that the level of agreement for conscientiousness is incredibly large, a value of .773. This val-

Big Five Factor	Reliability	Consensus*
Extroversion	.887	.354
Agreeableness	.952	.574
Conscientiousness	.980	.773
Neuroticism	.892	.389
Openness	.910	.419

*Prior research normally finds consensus at about .275.

ue is almost three times larger than what we typically find. We suspect that much of what makes *The Simpsons* a very interesting television program is about the contrast in the conscientiousness of the different characters. The most conscientious characters are Lisa, Marge, Ned Flanders and Apu—the least conscientious are Barney, Homer, Otto and Nelson. Perhaps surprisingly, Bart is only the seventh least conscientious character of the twenty we measured. We do note, perhaps unsurprisingly, that our thirteen judges, all serious *Simpsons* fans, viewed themselves higher on Conscientiousness than on any of the other Big Five.

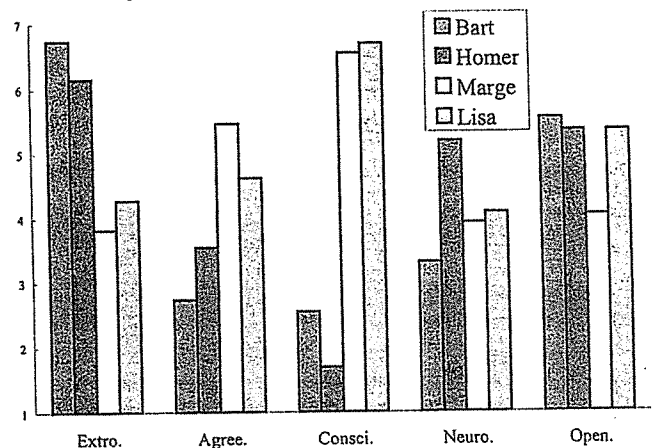
How are the different characters seen on the Big Five? In Table 3, we list the two characters who are the highest and lowest for each of the Big Five using the results from Table 1. For instance, Milhouse and Groundskeeper Willie are seen as the most Neurotic, and Otto Mann and Ned Flanders as the least. It is clear that the characters are seen differently on the Big Five. Note that fourteen of the twenty characters are either among the two highest or the two lowest. Thus, the cartoon characters are not seen as entirely good or bad and have, in fact, complex and multidimensional personalities.

Big Five Factor	Most	Least
Extroversion	Bart, Krusty	Smithers, Milhouse
Agreeableness	Ned, Marge	Mr. Burns, Nelson
Conscientiousness	Lisa, Marge	Barney, Homer
Neuroticism	Milhouse, Groundskeeper Willie	Otto Mann, Ned
Openness	Bart, Homer	Skinner, Ned

In Figure 1, we present the ratings, averaged across the thirteen judges, of the four major characters—Bart, Homer, Marge and Lisa—on the Big Five. Looking first at extroversion, Bart and Homer are seen as very extroverted, whereas Marge and Lisa are seen as average. The pattern is just the opposite for the next two factors, but most clearly for conscientiousness. It is the two females who are conscientious and agreeable and the two males who score low on both these factors. The characters are about average in neuroticism, but Homer scores higher than the other three. Interestingly, Bart is the least neurotic. Finally, the characters are all scored relatively high on openness, but Marge scored least. In fact, Marge is the most "normal" family member in that her scores are closer to the scale midpoint of 4 than they are for any other character. It is interesting to note the one gender difference we find in our studies of college students is in conscientiousness, with women being perceived as more conscientious than men. At least in this case, the Simpson family mirrors real life.

Do we find agreement for liking? That is, do judges tend to particularly like some characters and dislike others? It may surprise you to learn that, in general, people agree less about whom they like than about that person's personality (Kenny, 1994). What do we find about the *Simpsons*

FIGURE 1
Ratings of the Four Major Characters on the Big Five



characters? The level of consensus in liking is .200, a value comparable to the .16 value that Kenny (1994) found for people who were well-acquainted with each other. Homer and Bart are the most liked, whereas Lovejoy and Skinner were the least liked.

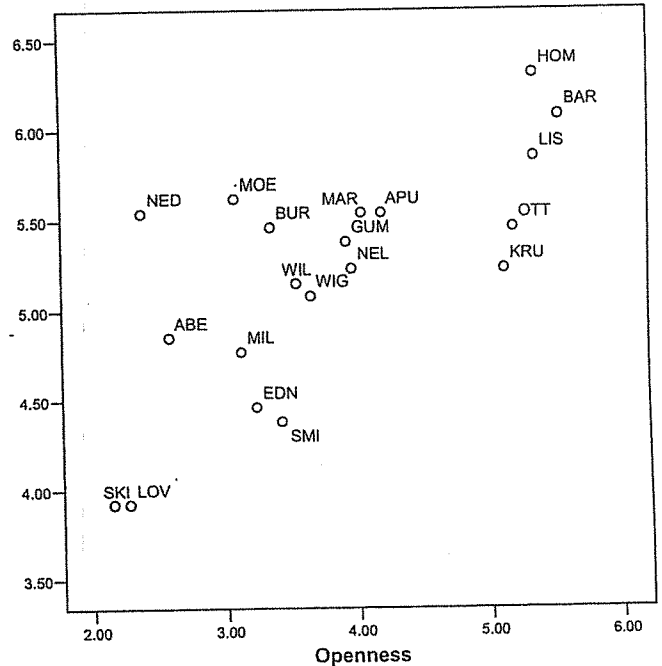
Does liking correlate with the Big Five? Normally with real people, liking is most highly related to agreeableness, but instead, in this study we find that liking is most strongly related to openness to experience, $r = .721$. (A correlation of .5 is considered strong, and a .7 correlation is very strong.) To see the relationship between liking and openness, we have presented the results in a diagram, called a scatterplot, that is presented in Figure 2. The X axis has the measure of how much the character is viewed as being open to experience, and the Y axis is how much the character is liked by the perceivers. A data point in the scatterplot is denoted by the first three letters of the character's name. We see in the upper right of the figure that Homer is very open to experience and liked a lot. Whereas, in the bottom right, we see that Skinner and Lovejoy are disliked and seen not as open to experience. The graph clearly shows a relationship such that increased openness is very strongly correlated to liking.

The relationship of liking to agreeableness is complex, but very interesting. Unlike past studies, there is little or no relationship between how agreeable a *Simpsons* character is overall with how much that character is liked. However, we can relate agreeableness with liking for each character and that correlation is .263, the largest of any of the Big Five. For instance, for Ned Flanders, judges who see him as more agreeable like him more. There is an additional complication. This positive relationship holds for the least popular characters (e.g., Lovejoy and Skinner), but it does not hold for some of the most popular characters (e.g., Homer and Bart), and in fact, for these characters the more disagreeable they are the more they are liked. The results suggest that we are willing to accept and even appreciate disagreeableness among those we like. It would be interesting to see if this pattern holds for real people.

Summary

Perhaps, some readers know more about Homer Simpson than they know about some of their friends. Moreover, they may spend more time observing Homer than they do observing their less close friends. Possibly, at least in part, Homer and the other *Simpsons* characters are as real to some people as are their real-life friends.

FIGURE 2
Scatterplot of Openness with Like



In general, the cartoon characters' personalities are much more extreme, and consistent, than those of real people.

Another result that differs for the *Simpsons* versus real people is that openness relates much more strongly to liking for the cartoon characters than it does for real people. However, agreeableness correlates with liking much more in studies of real people. Although it may be fun and entertaining to view cartoon characters trying out new things and entering unusual circumstances (i.e., being open), these same characteristics may not be as amusing or entertaining in a family member, close friend, or coworker. Similarly, agreeableness is a very important trait in

real-life interactions with people, but viewing Homer being disagreeable to Flanders may be quite entertaining.

There are, however, several results of the *Simpsons*' study that are very consistent with judgments of real people. The judgments of the *Simpsons* characters were complex, as are those of real people. That is, characters were not perceived as entirely good or entirely bad, but rather, as possessing a mixture of good and bad traits. Both in this study and in those of real people, we also find limited consensus in judgments. There is indeed "no accounting for taste." Interestingly, both studies of real people and of cartoon characters have tended to show that males are perceived to be less conscientious than females.

We need to realize that our study, like any research, has limitations. We only asked ten questions about each character's personality, and we have only thirteen perceivers. We chose to look at twenty of the most well known, rather than all of the possible characters. We have also ignored the fact that some of the personalities of the *Simpsons* may have changed over time. Nonetheless, we have gained some interesting insights into the perception of the personalities of the *Simpsons* characters, and possibly gained some comprehension of the perception of real people.

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Acknowledgments

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David A. Kenny is a Distinguished Board of Trustees professor at the University of Connecticut, where he has taught since 1978. He has also taught at Arizona State University and Northwestern University. He is the author of six books, the most recent being *Dyadic Data Analysis*, and over 100 journal articles and book chapters. Besides his work in person perception, he is known for his contributions in the area of methodology. He is the proud father of three children, one of whom co-authored this chapter.

Deirdre T. Kenny is a graduate of the University of Connecticut, and she is currently a center coordinator for Planned Parenthood of Connecticut. She has been a *Simpsons* enthusiast since 1989 and is responsible for her father's interest in *The Simpsons*. In some ways, Deirdre is the Lisa of her family, as she has a strong social conscience and is a vegetarian. She even views her father as Homer, but she is quick to state that, unlike Homer, he is not that much of an irresponsible, insensitive, fun-loving drunk.