



Gender-Based Analysis of Homesickness and Personality Traits among International Students

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Abstract

The global expansion of education has facilitated greater connectivity and advancement opportunities for individuals and societies across the centuries. At its core, the global expansion of education has enabled individuals to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, forging connections with others from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Importantly, the link between personality traits and homesickness underscores the significance of individual differences in

adapting to new environments, with specific traits predisposing individuals to heightened susceptibility or resilience to homesickness. The present study aimed at investigating the prevalence of homesickness among genders, while also assessing the personality traits exhibited by foreign students, both males and females. A sample of 110 students, equally divided between 55 males and 55 females, representing diverse cultural backgrounds spanning Asia, Africa, and the Middle East was recruited. To test the hypotheses, independent sample t-test was computed. The results showed no significant gender differences in homesickness levels. However, females exhibited higher levels of neuroticism compared to males, whereas males demonstrated greater openness to experience. Understanding how gender influences these dynamics sheds light on nuanced variations in adjustment experiences among males and females in unfamiliar settings. Additionally, recommendations have been provided to support students in navigating the transition process smoothly.

Keywords: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Homesickness, Gender

Introduction

Homesickness is defined as the “distress or impairment resulting from being away from home, as well as concern with thoughts of home and attachment objects” (Verschuur et al., 2004). Symptoms include a mix of depressive and anxious feelings, withdrawn behavior, and difficulty concentrating on non-home-related matters. While, mild homesickness can foster coping skills and healthy attachment behaviors, severe cases can be debilitating. However, estimates of the

prevalence of homesickness differ significantly depending on testing techniques, demographic, separation circumstances, and criteria.

Departing from home marks a significant milestone commonly experienced by students (Egondi et al., 2013). Certainly, embarking on a course overseas represents a pivotal stage of the college journey, often accompanied by various challenges in adaptation (Aderi et al., 2013) and anxiety issues (Lowe & Cook, 2003). Additionally, residing in unfamiliar institutional settings divergent from home environments may exacerbate these difficulties (Larivière-Bastien et al., 2022), ultimately contributing to feelings of homesickness (English et al., 2016).

Model of Homesickness

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

A framework for managing homesickness during changes, such as starting college, is provided by Schlossberg's transition theory (1984) and its “Four S’s” method. Schlossberg's transition theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals deal with change and transition throughout their life. It considers external factors (Situation), internal strengths (Self), coping strategies (Support), and the meaning of the transition. Robust self-esteem and support systems enhance individuals’ ability to navigate change effectively, while effective coping skills contribute to better stress management. Ideally, by identifying the crucial components that influence how individuals perceive and manage transition, the theory can help researchers better understand the complexity and diversity of the transition process.

Gender Differences in Homesickness

Gender differences are a significant consideration in the study of homesickness, particularly among student populations (Sun et al., 2016). While, common belief may suggest that females experience more homesickness, the literature presents mixed findings. Some studies (e.g., Fisher & Hood, 1987; Brewin et al., 1989; Thurber et al., 2007) show similar prevalence rates among males and females, including children (e.g., Archer et al., 1998; Stroebe et al., 2002). Others, show higher levels of homesickness among female students. Gender differences also exist in coping mechanisms for homesickness; women tend to seek out more social support (Brewin et al., 1989) and have more intrusive thoughts about homesickness (Archer et al., 1998). It is interesting to note that males experienced homesickness at higher rates than females in a study of Indian students studying in the US (Tochkov et al., 2010), which may indicate cultural differences. However, while some studies support the notion of females experiencing more homesickness (Archer et al., 1998), other researchers find no significant gender differences (Kazantzis & Flet, 1998).

Differences in estimates of homesickness prevalence also stem from various assessment methods. For instance, Thurber (2005) discovered that during a two-week summer camp, up to 94% of boys reported experiencing some level of homesickness on at least one day. Interestingly, Bhaskar et al. (2014) noted that boys tend to experience higher levels of stress compared to girls, with significant gender differences observed in social and home adjustments. Both boys and girls displayed unsatisfactory and average levels of adjustments, with notable gender disparities particularly in home and social adjustment areas. Moreover, between 30 and 60% of male and female university students in Great Britain found that they experienced homesickness in their first year of study (Fisher, 1989). Fisher and Hood (1988) reported that 30–35% of their student sample felt slightly

homesick, and 65–70% did not report feeling homesick. In addition, Brewin et al. (1989) observed that 40% of their student sample reported feeling homesick.

While the authors of the homesickness scale identified gender differences in degree of attachment to home (Archer et al., 1998), these findings have been inconsistent in other studies, with some indicated greater susceptibility to homesickness among women (Bernier et al., 2004), while others found no such distinctions (Beck et al., 2003). In research involving British university students, Fisher and colleagues reported that 60 to 70% of those transitioning to university residency experienced homesickness (Fisher et al., 1985; Fisher & Hood, 1987). Similarly, Burt (1933) found that all Australian first-year students experienced some level of homesickness, a finding supported by Lu (1990) in Chinese students studying at universities in the United Kingdom. Cultural differences may also influence the duration of homesickness effects, as evidenced by Tochkov et al. (2010), who found that Indian students remaining in the United States for longer durations experienced greater homesickness. In addition to that, Brewin et al. (1989) reported similar prevalence rates of homesickness among male and female students. Gender-specific coping strategies did, however, differ, with women typically seeking out greater social support than males. Gruijters (1992), however, discovered that women were more prone than men to experience homesickness.

However, there is still debate in the literature over whether gender influences in homesickness is experienced (Van Tilburg, 1996). Research on social interactions, stress, adjustment, and homesickness among 279 university students was conducted by Kumar et al. (2016). The researchers found no statistically significant differences in these categories based on gender. This finding was supported by Ashwini et al. (2014), who also found no notable gender differences

among science and arts students. Similarly, Fisher (1989) did not observe gender differences in homesickness among school children, university students, and student nurses. These findings suggest that contemporary trends indicate similar levels of stress, adjustment, and homesickness across genders.

Personality

Personality, as defined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2023), pertains to individual distinctions in consistent patterns of thought, emotion, and action. According to Allport (1961), personality is further described as the “dynamically organized psychophysical processes that shape a person's characteristics, actions, and thoughts.” On the other hand, McAdams (2001) viewed personality as a dynamic and organized combination of traits that uniquely shape an individual's thoughts, motivations, and actions across various contexts. Many individual differences in human personality, according to McCrae and the Big-Five paradigm, can be divided into five key domains; Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. McCrae and John (1992) defined “openness to experience” as a person's propensity for creativity, intellectual curiosity, and receptivity to new ideas and experiences. Conscientiousness includes qualities such as organization, dependability, self-discipline, and a strong sense of obligation. Extraversion is the term used to describe a person's gregariousness, assertiveness, and social interaction preference. Agreeableness includes traits like compassion, cooperation, and a tendency to be considerate and trusting. Lastly, neuroticism relates to emotional stability and volatility. High levels of neuroticism are associated with heightened emotional sensitivity, anxiety, and a propensity for negative emotions (Eysenck, 1975).

Gender Differences in Personality

It is widely acknowledged that biological variations and social experiences specific to a person's gender influence how personality traits develop in both men and women (Srivastava et al., 2003). Various studies have identified personality traits like extroversion, openness to experience, and neuroticism as predictors of students' psychosocial adjustment (Lin et al., 2011; Lippa & Richard, 2010; Lee et al., 2011). In the Five Factor Model (Costa et al., 2001), women typically score higher on qualities like agreeableness and neuroticism, which represent dispositions toward discomfort proneness and positive interpersonal attributes. According to Vecchione (2012), men often score better on tests of emotional stability, whereas women typically score higher on measures of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness. While studies with large sample sizes have shown mixed or negligible results regarding gender differences in extraversion and openness to experience (Feingold, 1994). In-depth analyses conducted by Costa et al. (2001) showed that men and women have different profiles in certain aspects of these traits. Men tend to score higher on traits like being open to new ideas and wanting excitement, for example, while women score higher on traits like warmth and being open to aesthetics. Like this, research have shown that women typically display higher degrees of anxiousness and tender mindedness, while men are typically more assertive and risk-taking (Kring & Gordon, 1998; Byrnes et al., 1999; Brody & Hall, 2000). Additionally, Feingold (1994) found that on tests measuring neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, women tended to score higher than males in several nations, including Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Poland, and Russia. In contrast, men generally performed better in all cultures when it came to assertiveness, a quality linked to extraversion.

Cultural disparities in sex differences in openness to experience differed greatly. According to the BFI scale, men were more open to experience than women in 37 cultures (with statistically

significant differences noted in 8 cultures). Nonetheless, women reported being more receptive to new experiences than men did in 18 cultures (with statistically significant differences in 4 cultures). These contradictory results were partially predicted, since other studies (Costa et al., 2001; McCrae et al., 2005) have demonstrated that women are generally more receptive to new ideas, while males tend to be more open to feelings. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the BFI Openness to Experience measure was not accurate enough to differentiate these aspects of the more general characteristic of openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Men are more likely to show an external locus of control and a need for affiliation, whereas women are more likely to show an internal locus of control and a desire for challenge, according to research by Anastasia and Susan (2006). Mueller (2004), on the other hand, could not discover any statistically significant difference in locus of control between men and women after analyzing survey data from university students in seventeen different nations.

Gender Differences in Homesickness and Personality

It appears that broad personality traits indeed hold predictive value and can serve as valuable tools in identifying specific aspects of homesickness. Research on the correlation between these personality traits and homesickness has revealed that while positive traits like extraversion and openness to new experiences may help college students adjust to university life, negative traits like neuroticism increase the likelihood of experiencing homesickness (Halamandaris & Power, 1999; Tilburg et al., 1999; Khademi & Aghdam, 2013).

It is also crucial to keep in mind that personality traits may have an impact on how homesickness develops. Strong relationships between personality qualities and homesickness have been observed by several researchers (Eurelings-Bontekoe et al., 1994). Compared to those who are not

homesick, homesick people typically have low degrees of extraversion, dominance, and assertiveness along with high levels of rigidity and reliance. It is unclear, nevertheless, if these personality traits have an impact on how long homesickness lasts. Also, people who score higher on neuroticism are more likely to experience increased anxiety and emotional instability when they are taken out of their comfort zone. At the same time, lower extraversion ratings can indicate a slower rate of forming new social networks and support systems, which could exacerbate feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Students' experiences at university can differ greatly from one another; for some, it can be an exciting academic and social journey, while for others, it can be a burdensome and upsetting one. The chronicity of homesickness, especially in females, has been found to be predicted by neuroticism as a personality characteristic and mental escapism as a coping mechanism, according to logistic regression studies (Tilburg et al., 1999).

Purpose of the Present Study

While extensive research has explored homesickness and its psychological effects, there is a pressing need to examine how gender disparities and personality traits intersect to shape the experience and management of homesickness. The purpose of the present study is to examine the gender differences in homesickness and personality factors in international students. Prior research has shed light on the emotional and psychological dimensions of homesickness, yet there remains an untapped area concerning the influence of gender on its prevalence, manifestation, and coping strategies. This gap in knowledge holds both academic significance and practical implications for individuals, families, and professionals dealing with homesickness. Specifically, this study seeks to explore how homesickness manifests differently across genders and how personality traits such

as Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism interact with gender to affect homesickness experiences and coping mechanisms.

Hypotheses

H1: It is expected that there is a significant gender difference regarding levels of homesickness with females exhibiting higher levels of homesickness.

H2: There will be a significant gender difference in terms of personality traits.

H2a: There will be a significant gender difference in Openness to experience with males being high on Openness to experience.

H2b: There will be a significant gender difference in Conscientiousness with females being high on the latter.

H2c: There will be a significant gender difference in Extraversion with females being more extroverted as compared to males.

H2d: There will be a significant gender difference in Agreeableness with females being high on agreeableness.

H2e: There will be a significant gender difference in Neuroticism with females being high on neuroticism.

Methodology

The aim of the present research is to investigate the prevalence of homesickness among individuals of varying genders, with the intention of discerning significant distinctions in the collective experiences of students living away from their home environment. Subsequently, it aims to evaluate the personality traits exhibited by male and female international students.

Sample

A total of 110 individuals, aged between 18 and 25 participated for the study using purposive sampling techniques through online channels such as email and messages. The sample consisted of an equal distribution of 55 females and 55 males, representing 50% each, and they hailed from diverse backgrounds including Asian, African, and Middle Eastern origins. Among the participants, 60 were pursuing undergraduate studies, while 50 were enrolled in postgraduate programs. Moreover, the participants were drawn from various countries across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Since the study focuses on homesickness among students, it was a prerequisite for participants to be residing and studying away from their home location.

Measures

- **Demographic variables:** In section A, demographic data was collected, including the respondents' age, gender, level of education, and country of origin. They were all close-ended questions except where they had to specify their country of origin and country where they are currently pursuing their education. However, numbers were assigned to gender using a nominal scale, where (0) represents male and (1) represents female.
- **Big Five Personality Inventory:** The personality of the students was assessed using the Big Five Inventory (BFI). The 44-item scale was created by Srisvastava and John (1999). This brief scale is used to evaluate each of the five aspects of personality: Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Respondents rated their answers on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree." The scale also included questions

with both positive and negative wording. The scale's Cronbach alpha reliability is .83, and after three months, test-retest reliability falls between 0.80 and 0.90.

- **Homesickness and Contentment Scale-** The Homesickness and Contentment Scale (HCS), developed by Shin (1992), consists of 20 questions designed to measure two distinct emotional states: homesickness and contentment. Derived from a larger Homesickness, Loneliness, and Depression scale, these questions assess the intensity and frequency of feelings associated with being away from one's familiar environment. Respondents typically rate each question based on their personal experiences and feelings using a rating scale, often ranging from (1) for "Very Often" to (5) for "Never."

Procedure

To gather the necessary data, participants were directed to an online mode link where they completed a series of self-report questionnaires. These questionnaires included sections to collect demographic details, as well as the BFI and HCS. Prior to their participation, participants were presented with an informed consent form, which outlined the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants. It explicitly stated that their responses would be treated with strict confidentiality and assured them of anonymity whereby their responses would be used solely for research and academic purposes. Moreover, they were guaranteed that there were no dangers linked to the study and that their participation was voluntary. They were also informed that they had the right to discontinue any time. Once participants completed the survey, they were fully debriefed, and the data obtained was subjected to analyses.

Data Analysis

To analyse data for the current study, the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences was utilized and the information gathered from the respondents was inputted into the SPSS program, coded and analysed. Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test were utilized to test the hypotheses generated.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic factors. There were 110 participants in the sample overall, 55 of whom were male and 55 of whom were female, belonging to Asian, African, and Middle Eastern origins (N=110) ranging from ages 18 to 25. Data Analysis was done by calculating descriptive and independent sample t-tests.

The table below showed the frequency and percentage of the demographic variables.

Table1

Demographic Characteristics of the sample

Gender	n	%
Male	55	50
Female	55	50

N= 110

Inferential Statistics

The above indicated hypotheses were tested using an independent sample t-test. The results are shown in table 2 below.

Table 2*Independent sample t-test for personality traits and homesickness*

Variables	Females (N=55)		Males (N=55)		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Openness	28.96	3.897	30.24	5.457	1.408*
Conscientiousness	30.24	4.745	28.87	4.985	-1.469
Extraversion	23.49	5.614	26.95	6.859	2.890
Agreeableness	33.85	4.716	32.42	3.775	-1.764
Neuroticism	25.64	5.064	21.96	6.423	-3.330*
Homesickness	57.24	12.037	66.02	13.925	3.538

*Note: *p<.05***Discussion Of Results**

The analyses showed significant gender differences in Openness to experience [$t(108) = 1.408$, $p = .005$] at $p < .05$, with males ($\bar{x} = 30.24$, $\sigma = 5.457$) being more curious and open-minded than females ($\bar{x} = 28.96$, $\sigma = 3.897$). In the same line, significant gender differences were found in level of Neuroticism [$t(108) = -3.330$, $p = .018$] at $p < .05$, with females ($\bar{x} = 25.64$, $\sigma = 5.064$) reporting as being more emotionally unstable and anxious as compared to males ($\bar{x} = 21.96$, $\sigma = 6.423$).

However, no significant gender differences were found in Conscientiousness [$t(108) = -1.469$, $p = .727$] at $p < .05$, for males ($\bar{x} = 28.87$, $\sigma = 4.985$) and females ($\bar{x} = 30.24$, $\sigma = 4.745$). Also, there were no significant gender differences in Extraversion [$t(108) = 2.890$, $p = .099$] at $p < .05$, for males ($\bar{x} = 26.95$, $\sigma = 6.859$) and females ($\bar{x} = 23.49$, $\sigma = 5.614$) as well as in Agreeableness [$t(108) = -1.764$, $p = .112$] at $p < .05$, for males ($\bar{x} = 32.42$, $\sigma = 3.775$) and females ($\bar{x} = 33.85$, $\sigma = 4.716$).

Moreover, results showed no significant gender differences in level of homesickness also [$t(108) = 3.538, p=.167$] at $p < .05$, for males ($\bar{x} = 66.02, \sigma = 13.925$) and females ($\bar{x} = 57.24, \sigma = 12.037$).

This study aimed to evaluate the degree of homesickness experienced by male and female students enrolled in international programs. This study found no evidence of significant gender differences in homesickness levels favoring women, in contrast to previous research findings (Fisher et al., 1985; Fisher & Hood, 1987; Archer et al., 1998; Stroebe et al., 2002; Gregory & Jungmeen, 2013; Cariello et al., 2020; Menon & Harter, 2012; Maldonado et al., 2018; Temircan, 2022). This result is consistent with that of Beck et al. (2003), who likewise did not identify any gender differences in the degrees of homesickness. Male and female students experienced homesickness at similar rates, according to Brewin et al. (1989). Fisher's research across a variety of populations (e.g., Fisher et al., 1985; Fisher & Hood, 1987, 1988) supports this finding. The results of this study are corroborated by research conducted by Pardeep Kumar et al. (2016) and Ashwini et al. (2014), who likewise reported no gender differences in social ties, stress, adjustment, and homesickness among university students. Similarly, Fisher (1989) found no variations in the degree of homesickness between school-age children, college students, and student nurses based on sex. This implies that stress, adjustment, and homesickness are currently plaguing both genders at comparable rates, pointing to a growing trend in gender similarities in recent years.

Similarly, Kazantzis and Flet (1998) found no significant difference between men and women, further corroborating the present research findings. When male and female students have access to comparable levels of social support and effectively utilize these resources, they may experience similar levels of homesickness. Additionally, if they come from cultural backgrounds with shared

values, beliefs, and family structures, they may experience homesickness similarly, despite gender differences in roles and expectations.

Furthermore, the study indicates a notable gender contrast in Openness to Experience, with males exhibiting higher levels of this trait. This suggests that heightened openness may translate into a greater readiness to explore novel environments and embrace unfamiliar circumstances. Consequently, males might be more predisposed to adapting to the challenges encountered while studying abroad, potentially experiencing less homesickness compared to females. Moreover, their openness to new experiences could prompt them to actively pursue opportunities for social integration and cultural immersion, thereby alleviating feelings of homesickness. This observation is consistent with Ward and Kennedy's (1993) proposition that openness to experience correlates with a heightened inclination for exploration and adjustment to new cultural milieus, where males may exhibit a greater inclination to acclimate to new surroundings and engage in novel experiences, contributing to their elevated openness to experience. It's worth noting that discrepancies in openness to experience between sexes varied across different cultural contexts (Costa et al., 2001). These contradictory results were partially expected, since research has indicated that women are more sensitive to emotional experiences than men are, and that males are more receptive to novel concepts (Costa et al., 2001; McCrae et al., 2005). In earlier studies (Feingold, 1994; Costa et al., 2001; Costa et al., 2001), neuroticism ratings were found to be greater in females than in males. Firstly, the heightened neuroticism observed in females may reflect disparities in emotional regulation and susceptibility to stressors. Studies by Schmitt et al. (2008) and Costa et al. (2001) suggest that females tend to report increased levels of neuroticism, characterized by greater emotional volatility and susceptibility to negative emotions, potentially contributing to their experiences of distress and homesickness while studying abroad.

Secondly, females' elevated neuroticism may be linked to less adaptive coping mechanisms and greater challenges in adjusting to the demands of living in a foreign country. Research by Watson et al. (1999) suggested that individuals with high neuroticism levels are more prone to engaging in maladaptive coping strategies such as rumination, avoidance, and negative thought patterns, which could worsen their adjustment difficulties while studying abroad (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Thirdly, heightened neuroticism in females may affect their social support networks and peer relationships during their studies abroad. This was proposed by Hu et al. (2017) and Yoon and Lau (2008), who suggested that neuroticism is inversely correlated with forming and maintaining social bonds, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation among females in unfamiliar settings. This finding may also be explained by the fact that women score higher than men on comparable measures that were not created expressly to evaluate the Big Five, such as anxiety indices (Feingold, 1994) and poor self-esteem (Kling et al., 1999).

In line with earlier investigations (Costa et al., 2001), no notable gender disparity in Conscientiousness at the Big Five domain level was observed. This could be attributed to the likelihood that both male and female students demonstrate comparable levels of organization, accountability, and self-discipline in navigating the complexities of studying abroad. This suggests that conscientiousness may be a trait universally associated with successful adaptation and academic achievement across genders in international educational settings. This, however, is contrary to other research findings (Feingold, 1994; Costa et al., 2001), which showed that women tended to score somewhat higher than men in terms of self-discipline, orderliness, and dutifulness—all aspects of conscientiousness.

Similarly, no apparent gender distinctions were noted in extraversion. The absence of gender differences in extraversion suggests that both male and female students may display comparable

levels of comfort and involvement in social interactions while pursuing studies abroad. This implies that the process of social adaptation and integration into the host culture may not vary significantly between genders. Another possibility is that both boys and girls share a similar inclination to engage in cross-cultural interactions, participate in social events, and establish connections with peers from diverse backgrounds. This result, however, is at odds with previous research by Feingold (1994) and Costa et al. (2001), which found that men generally tended to score higher in assertiveness, a feature related to extraversion, across cultural contexts.

Furthermore, our results did not align with prior research findings, as no significant gender differences were detected in levels of agreeableness. This could be attributed to the notion that both male and female students may exhibit comparable levels of empathy and interpersonal warmth while pursuing studies abroad. This suggests that both genders may engage in cooperative behaviors, cultivate positive relationships with others, and contribute to fostering a harmonious social environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes to the comprehension of gender disparities in homesickness and personality traits among international students. Despite initial expectations, no significant gender differences were detected in homesickness levels. However, in alignment with existing literature, females displayed higher neuroticism levels than males, while males exhibited greater openness to experience. These findings underscore the intricate relationship between gender, personality traits, and homesickness, suggesting that factors beyond gender alone may influence homesickness experiences among international students. Nonetheless, irrespective of gender, international students may encounter similar adjustment challenges while studying abroad, including cultural adaptation, language barriers, academic pressures, and social isolation, which

may precipitate comparable levels of homesickness. Furthermore, while gender can impact certain facets of the homesickness experience, such as coping strategies and social support networks, individual variances within genders can also be influential. Factors like personality traits, previous travel experiences, attachment styles, and resilience levels may diverge widely among individuals and contribute to similar levels of homesickness across genders. The availability and utilization of social support systems, both within the host country and from one's home country, can influence the extent of homesickness experienced by international students.

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