

PERSONALITY, PRESSURE, AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT:
AN EXAMINATION OF HOW PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT
INFLUENCE ACADEMIC BURNOUT

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Abstract

Academic burnout is a prolonged exposure to academic stress experienced by students. This is a prevalent issue among university students, leading to increased feelings of exhaustion and cynicism towards their studies as well as reduced academic efficacy. Furthermore, academic burnout is associated with a variety of negative outcomes, including poor academic performance, reduced psychological well-being, and negative mood. Certain personality traits, including conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, have been linked to higher levels of academic burnout. Additionally, social support has been found to be negatively associated with academic burnout. This suggests that social support could play an important moderating role in the relationship between some aspects of personality and academic burnout. However, limited research has been done in this area. The current study aimed to address this gap by examining the relationships between personality, social support, and academic burnout, with a specific focus on the moderating role that social support plays in the relationship between extraversion and neuroticism and academic burnout. A total of 172 undergraduate students from Cape Breton University (ages 18-41, M = 20.7) completed an online survey assessing the Big Five Personality traits (IPIP-NEO- 120 item), academic burnout (MBI-SS), and interpersonal social support (ISEL). Results show that three personality traits can be predictive of academic burnout: conscientiousness (-), openness to experience (-), and neuroticism (+). Social support was not found to moderate the relationship between extraversion/neuroticism and academic burnout. Findings suggest that while social

support is important, academic burnout may be more strongly influenced by individual differences, and interventions may benefit from a more individualized approach

Chapter 1: Introduction

Academic Burnout, a negative psychological phenomenon associated with declines in academic engagement and performance, is prevalent among university students (Huang et al., 2025). It has been found to be associated with numerous negative outcomes, including low academic achievement, low self-esteem, low psychological well-being, as well as depressive symptoms (Önder et al., 2025). Due to the negative nature of this phenomenon, it is crucial to understand the underlying factors that can predict burnout. Past research has shown personality traits to be one of these factors, indicating that certain traits (namely, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) are predictors of burnout (Armon et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2006). However, results are mixed in this area, and little research has been conducted on the association between personality and *academic* burnout specifically. Another important predictor of burnout is perceived social support, as research shows that perceived social support and coping mechanisms are essential when dealing with stress (Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). Furthermore, it has been proven that increased levels of support from family and peers can act as a buffer towards the negative effects of burnout (Huang et al., 2025; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). The current study aims to explore both personality and perceived social support as predictors of academic burnout, examining how perceived social support influences the relationship between personality and academic burnout in university students.

1.1 Academic Burnout

Burnout is an individual response to prolonged stress, typically in the workplace, identified by chronic emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion (Einav et al., 2024;

Maslach et al., 1997). As explained by Hudek-Knežević et al. (2006), burnout has three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism), and reduced professional efficacy. The first dimension, emotional exhaustion, is the loss of energy and fatigue resulting from feelings of emotional overload, while depersonalization refers to negative feelings about the work or the workplace. The last dimension, reduced professional efficacy, is the lack of confidence or belief that work can be completed successfully (Maslach et al., 1997). Burnout develops gradually over time, eventually leading to adverse effects in cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal well-being, and often resulting in negative behaviours in the workplace (Armon et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2006; Huang et al., 2025). This differs from typical workplace stress, as it is a long-term chronic state, compared to temporary mental and physical symptoms (Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). As such, burnout syndrome (chronic exposure to high stress levels) can lead to many psychological symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Köslich-Strumann et al., 2023; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Research shows that people who tend to experience high levels of burnout tend to also experience feelings of low self-esteem, negative thought processes, and a lack of stamina to endure stressful situations (Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019; Einav et al., 2024; Köslich-Strumann et al., 2023).

Academic burnout, an extension of workplace burnout, is burnout faced by students concerning their studies (e.g., Huang et al., 2025; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006).

Academic burnout shares the same three dimensions explained above, referring to feelings of exhaustion due to study demand, having a cynical or detached attitude towards academics, and feelings of incompetence as a student (Kong et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2002). While students are not “workers”, there are a lot of structured

events (course attendance, assignments, examinations) that could induce stress, leading to burnout (Lee et al., 2017; Ye et al., 2021). The high demands of studying and university pressure can lead to feelings of emotional exhaustion from students which in turn leads them to adopt a cynical attitude towards their studies and academic goals (Köslich-Strumann et al., 2023). These feelings can consequently lead to feelings of being unable to achieve academic goals along with decreased academic performance, thus increasing stress levels and resulting in burnout (Köslich-Strumann et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Ye et al., 2021).

Prior research consistently shows that academic burnout has a negative impact on psychological well-being, overall mood, and academic performance (E.g., Huang et al., 2025; Kong et al., 2021). Compared to peers with lower levels of burnout, students experiencing academic burnout are more likely to experience feelings of depression, anxiety, aggression, or anger, as well as a lack of optimism and motivation (Lee et al., 2017; Molina Moreno et al., 2025). Furthermore, academic burnout is associated with lower attendance rates, higher percentage of dropout, and less in engagement overall in learning activities (Huang et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2021). This indicates that academic burnout is a significant risk factor for mental health issues in students (Molina Moreno et al., 2025). Interestingly, while many people experience academic burnout, others show resilience to it under the same circumstances (Kong et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2017). This demonstrates that other variables, such as an individual's personality, could be predictive of academic burnout (Bakker et al., 2006; Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006; Kong et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2017).

1.2 Burnout & Personality

Personality is a collection of traits that are enduring patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours (Johnson, 2014; Kaoropthai & Dryver, 2025; Wu et al., 2024). There are many different ways of classifying or categorizing personality traits with the most common being the Five-Factor Model, also referred to as the Big Five personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This model used factor analysis to narrow down a wide variety of personality traits into a smaller set of traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Johnson, 2014; Ollfors & Andersson, 2022). These personality traits can be a predictor of certain life outcomes, predisposing individuals to choose and expose themselves to a wide variety of situations (Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). Specifically, it could predispose individuals to expose themselves to situations that could either increase or decrease feelings of stress and therefore the likelihood of burnout (Armon et al., 2012; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006).

Furthermore, personality traits may influence people to either experience stressors more intensely or to develop coping strategies to deal with stressful situations (Armon et al., 2012; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). Due to this predictive nature, many have examined the relationship between personality and burnout (E.g. Alarcon et al., 2009; Armon et al., 2012). Each of the Big Five personality traits, with the exception of openness to experience, have been found to have an association with burnout:

Openness to experience. Openness refers to desires of uniqueness, change, and variety; those who are high in openness are imaginative, independent thinkers, who are open to and enjoy new experiences and ideas (Alarcon et al., 2009; De La Fuente et al., 2021). Openness has been found to have a significant positive relationship with academic performance, with higher levels of openness being associated with higher academic

performance (De La Fuente et al., 2021; Kaoropthai & Dryver, 2025). However, in past research, openness to experience has not been found to be related to burnout. (Alarcon et al., 2009; Armon et al., 2012; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006).

Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is the tendency to be achievement-oriented, dependable, organized, and responsible (Alarcon et al., 2009; Armon et al., 2012; De La Fuente et al., 2021). Individuals high in this trait have been linked to higher academic performance (Kaoropthai & Dryver, 2025; Wu et al., 2024). People high in conscientiousness are persistent, careful, reliable, hardworking, and well-organized with efficient time management skills (Armon et al., 2012; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). As such, conscientious individuals are more likely to develop proactive coping strategies and skills to help reduce stressful situations which can help prevent or act as a buffer against burnout (Armon et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2006; Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019). Prior research supports this, finding a significant negative relationship between conscientiousness and all three burnout dimensions (Armon et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2006; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006).

Extraversion. Extraversion is described as trait that evokes cheerfulness, gregariousness, sociability, friendliness, and excitement-seeking (Alarcon et al., 2009; De La Fuente et al., 2021). A person high in extraversion is known to show positive emotions, have a higher frequency of social interactions, and a higher need for stimulation (Bakker et al., 2006). These traits may predispose a person to have a more adaptive response to stressful situations, thus reducing the risk of burnout (Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019). Past research found that extraversion was one of the most consistent predictors of burnout (Bakker et al., 2006; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). Extraversion

had a significant negative relationship with burnout as a whole, with higher scores predicting less burnout (Bakker et al., 2006). Furthermore, extraversion was negatively related to emotional exhaustion, fatigue symptoms, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). It is hypothesized in the literature that increased interpersonal interactions, optimism, and self-confidence (traits of extraversion) may counteract feelings of depersonalization and increase feelings of accomplishment (Bakker et al., 2006).

Agreeableness. Agreeableness can be explained as the extent to which a person is cooperative, caring, trusting, and sympathetic towards others (Alarcon et al., 2009; De La Fuente et al., 2021). Some research shows a negative relationship between agreeableness and burnout, however results are mixed (Bakker et al., 2006; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). The negative relationship aligns with the idea that individuals high in agreeableness tend to evoke kind, optimal responses from their environments, acting as a buffer against psychological distress or burnout (Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019). Notably, a significant negative relationship was found between agreeableness and burnout in research done by Hudek-Knežević et al. (2006), where agreeableness negatively predicted all three burnout dimensions.

Neuroticism. Neuroticism is described as the tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, anger, and vulnerability (Armon et al., 2012; De La Fuente et al., 2021; Johnson, 2014). People high in neuroticism tend to interpret events more negatively than those lower in neuroticism (Armon et al., 2012; Barańczuk, 2019; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). As such, these individuals are more likely to develop poor coping strategies to stressful situations and therefore experience higher levels of burnout

(Armon et al., 2012; Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006).

Neuroticism has been repeatedly found to be the most significant trait in predicting burnout, with positive correlations with the different dimensions of burnout (Alarcon et al., 2009; Bakker et al., 2006; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). Individuals who scored higher in neuroticism were consistently shown to be higher in emotional exhaustion, leading to other dimensions of burnout such as cynicism and reduced personal efficacy (Bakker et al., 2006; Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019).

1.3 Burnout, Personality, & Social Support

One of the most prominent factors in reducing the negative effects of stress is social support: the assistance, care and comfort you receive from those around you (Einav et al., 2024). This includes being able to obtain assistance from others when needed, feeling cared for, and being a part of a supportive network (Agbaria & Mokh, 2022; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006; Ye et al., 2021). This support can come from various sources, including family, friends, coworkers, classmates, and different community groups (Einav et al., 2024). While there are many different sources, the quality and satisfaction from the support received is much more important than the quantity of supporters (Schwarz Terra et al., 2024). Research shows that higher levels of social support are associated with a multitude of benefits, including reduced feelings of isolation, loneliness and depression, improved ability to deal with traumatic events and life changes, as well as better decision-making and problem-solving skills (Agbaria & Mokh, 2022; Einav et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2024). On the contrary, weaker social support is associated with feelings of anxiety and depression, as well as overall life dissatisfaction (Schwarz Terra et al., 2024).

Many researchers believe that because the presence of social support provides so many benefits, social support can act as a buffer or protective factor against the negative impacts of stress on an individual's well-being (Agbaria & Mokh, 2022; Einav et al., 2024; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). The stress-buffering model, which explains that by providing emotional resources (affection, love, and appreciation), instrumental resources (practical/ financial support), or informational resources (receiving information, help with decision making), social support helps individuals cope with stress (Einav et al., 2024; Schwarz Terra et al., 2024). High levels of social support make it easier for an individual to establish higher levels of self-esteem, which helps minimize the effects of stressors (Agbaria & Mokh, 2022).

This model is prominent in burnout research, where numerous studies identify a link between burnout and perceived social support (Einav et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2025; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006; Schwarz Terra et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2021). Huang et al. (2025) explain that social support offers people pleasant social interactions, which helps relieve stress and therefore reduce burnout. This is consistent with research from (Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006) which states that there is consistent evidence that burnout is related to a lack of social support. Social support is essential for decreasing levels of academic burnout in that students with various social supports can easily seek help to address issues that arise from burnout (Ye et al., 2021). In academic contexts, social support enables students to connect with others who share similar experiences and helps them to effectively cope with the challenges they encounter (Huang et al., 2025). However, when individuals have a perceived lack of support, they are more likely to engage in

maladaptive coping strategies, and have a harder time dealing with stressful situations (Agbaria & Mokh, 2022; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006)

On the other hand, past research shows an association between personality traits and perceived social support (Barańczuk, 2019; Hill et al., 2024; Pierce et al., 1997; Yu et al., 2024). Specifically, research shows that high levels of agreeableness and extraversion, and low levels of neuroticism, are linked to better levels of social functioning and increased social support (Barańczuk, 2019; Hill et al., 2024). Individuals high in extraversion and agreeableness tend to have increased social interactions, less conflict, and stronger relationships, leading them to have greater social support systems (Barańczuk, 2019). Conversely, individuals high in neuroticism tend to feel more negative emotions, have increased conflict, and avoid social activities, which are associated with lower levels of social support (Hill et al., 2024). Research by Yu et al. (2024) expands on this, arguing that social support mediates the relationship between extraversion & neuroticism and well-being. This research suggests that extraversion leads to seeking out social activities, which in turn leads to increased social support and greater well-being (Yu et al., 2024). In contrast, neuroticism leads to conflict or social isolation, which in turn leads to decreased social support and decreased well-being (Yu et al., 2024). This suggests that personality is related to social support by evoking supportive or unsupportive reactions from others, or by influencing the social environment an individual surrounds themselves with (Pierce et al., 1997).

Past research shows that personality plays an important role in the likelihood of an individual developing academic burnout. However, results on which traits specifically predict burnout are mixed. Some research suggests that only neuroticism and

conscientiousness are predictive of burnout (e.g., Alarcon et al., 2009; Armon et al., 2012), while other research highlights that extraversion and agreeableness also play a role (e.g., Bakker et al., 2006; Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019). Additionally, little research has been conducted on the effects of academic burnout specifically on personality. Further research is required to determine the predictive power of personality traits on academic burnout. Furthermore, past research shows that there is a significant negative relationship between perceived social support and burnout, where high levels of social support can help buffer the effects of burnout (Einav et al., 2024; Schwarz Terra et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2021). While research has been conducted on the association between social support and academic burnout, little research has tied this association to personality.

1.4 The Current Study

The current study aims to address these gaps by examining the relationship between personality and academic burnout, while also investigating the role that social support plays within this relationship. Consistent with past research, it is hypothesized that conscientiousness will have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout (H1a), as will extraversion (H1b) and agreeableness (H1c). It is predicted that traits common in individuals high in conscientiousness (such as increased organization skills and self-discipline) will help the individual to gain better coping skills when dealing with academic stress, thus reducing the likelihood of developing burnout. Similarly, it is predicted that traits that are common in individuals high in extraversion (such as desire for social interaction and activity seeking) will help the individual establish a healthy work-life balance and therefore reduce academic stress and the

likelihood of developing academic burnout. Individuals high in agreeableness tend to prioritize social harmony and cooperation and, therefore, may develop strategies to stay on top of their schoolwork as a way to please those around them. Having these strategies may lower academic stress levels, leading to a lower likelihood of developing burnout. Moreover, it is predicted that neuroticism will have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout, as prominent in the literature (H1d). Given that individuals high in neuroticism have the tendency to experience big, negative emotions, it is fair to assume that these feelings can lead to increased levels of burnout. As openness to experience has consistently produced non-significant results in past literature, there are no specific hypotheses connecting it to academic burnout. Furthermore, it is predicted that, consistent with past literature, social support will have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout (H2). Social support is associated with wide variety of positive outcomes, so it is therefore logical to assume that high levels of social support would act as a buffer against the symptoms of burnout.

Given that social support and personality traits seemingly play critical roles in the likelihood of an individual developing burnout, it is reasonable to assume that social support could influence the relationship between certain personality traits and academic burnout. As such it is hypothesized that social support will moderate the relationship between both extraversion (H3a) and neuroticism (H3b) and academic burnout. It is assumed that when individuals high in extraversion do not receive the social interaction or peer support that they crave, they will become more likely to develop academic burnout. In contrast, it is assumed that when individuals high in neuroticism have strong

levels of social support, they will have people to turn to who help share the load and help to reduce feelings of academic stress.

Chapter 2: Methods

2.1 Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 172 undergraduate students at Cape Breton University, recruited online through both virtual posters directing participants to the study (posted on social media and the CBU Psychology Society's Microsoft Teams pages, as well as shared by course instructors) and through the Sona Study Management System. Participants recruited through Sona were eligible to receive a 0.5% bonus point in a psychology course that knowingly offered such an incentive. Those recruited otherwise participated voluntarily and did not receive an incentive.

In total, 210 participants were recruited; however, 34 were discarded as they did not meet the study requirements or had incomplete survey data. Participants ranged in age from 17-41 ($M = 20.7$). Overall, the sample primarily identified as White ($n = 117$, 68.02%), and as women ($n = 132$, 76.74%). There was a range of degree types and program years, and over half of the participants reported having average grades of over 80% (55.23%). Additional demographic information can be found in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics for Participants*

Demographic Characteristic	n	%
Gender Identity		
Male	36	20.93
Female	132	76.74
Not Listed/ Prefer to self-describe	4	2.33
Race/Ethnicity		
White	117	68.02
Black	15	8.72
Indigenous	6	3.48
Asian (Eastern)	8	4.65
Asian (Indian)	13	7.56
Latin/Hispanic	3	1.74
Not Listed/ prefer to self-describe	8	4.47
Prefer not to answer	2	1.16
Country of Residence		
Canada	170	98.84
India	1	0.581
Not Listed/ prefer to self-describe	1	0.581
Relationship Status		
Single	79	45.93
In a Relationship	80	46.51
Engaged	2	1.16
Married	9	5.23
Not Listed/ prefer to self-describe	2	1.16
Degree Type		
BSc	63	36.63
BA	49	28.48
BACS	22	12.79
BScN	20	11.63
Other	18	10.37
Program Year		
First year	69	40.11
Second year	38	22.09
Third year	43	25.14
Fourth year	20	11.63
Fifth+ year	2	1.16
Average Grades (self-reported)		
90-100%	29	16.86
80-90%	66	38.37
70-80%	46	26.74
60-70%	28	16.27

60% or less	3	1.74
Enrollment Status		
Full-time student	164	95.35
Part-time student	7	4.07
Not listed/ prefer to self-describe	1	0.581

2.2 Measures

Demographic Information. Prior to the survey, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. They reported their age, gender identity, country of residence, and race/ethnicity. Given that the current study focuses on academic burnout and social support, participants were also asked about their relationship status, degree type (program), academic major, current year of degree, current enrollment status, and average grades. These demographics were used to gain more information about the sample and were voluntary.

International Personality Item Pool Representation of the NEO Personality Inventory – Revised (IPIP-NEO; Johnson, 2014). To measure personality, this study used the IPIP-NEO 120-item scale. This is a shortened version of the widely recognized IPIP-NEO 300-item scale, which measures an individual's personality across the Big Five Personality Traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. There are 24 items associated with each trait, which are calculated to create a total score on that trait. In this scale, participants are asked to self-report how accurately each of the 120 statements describes them. Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Inaccurate" to "Accurate". Each response is associated with one of the Big Five traits and helps to calculate where the individual falls on each trait. Example questions include "I often forget to put things back in their proper place" or "I enjoy wild parties". Previous research supports the reliability and validity of the IPIP-NEO (120-item) and its five-factor structure reflecting the Big Five personality traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Johnson, 2014).

Maslach Burnout Inventory – Student Survey (Maslach et al., 1997; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Academic burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Student Survey (MBI-SS). An extension of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, this questionnaire was created specifically to measure academic burnout in university students. The MBI-SS is a 15-item scale consisting of three subscales: Exhaustion (5 items), describing the extent to which the student is emotionally drained in regard to their studies; Cynicism (4 items), describing the amount of interest or enthusiasm the student has regarding their studies; and Academic Efficacy (6 items), describing the students' belief that they can succeed in their academic tasks. All academic efficacy scores were reverse scored. Participants were asked to rate each of the fifteen questions on a 7-item Likert scale ranging from 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores in Exhaustion, Cynicism and Academic Efficacy (after reversing) are indicators of academic burnout. These scores can be added up to create a total score for academic burnout, which were used for the present study. Example items include “I feel used up at the end of a day at university”, “I feel stimulated when I achieve my study goals”, or “I doubt the significance of my studies”. Previous research has supported the reliability and validity of the MBI-SS and its three-factor structure reflecting exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced academic efficacy (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983). The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List is a 40-item scale measuring an individual's levels of perceived social support. The list is composed of four different subscales, each measuring a different type of interpersonal support. These subscales include tangible support (providing practical, such as money or services; 10 items), Belonging Support

(providing a sense of group belonging or acceptance; 10 items), Self-Esteem Support (providing feelings of joy or reassurance; 10 items), and Appraisal support (providing advice or guidance; 10 items). Participants rate each statement based on how true or false they believe it to be for themselves. All answers are given on a four-point Likert scale ranging from “Definitely True (0)” to “Definitely False (4)”. Twenty items are reverse-scored, and higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived social support. These scores can be added up to create a total score for perceived social support, which was used for the present study. Example items include “I often meet or talk with family or friends” or “If I needed help fixing an appliance or repairing my car, there is someone who would help me”. Previous research has supported the reliability of the ISEL and its multidimensional structure reflecting perceived social support, including appraisal, belonging, tangible, and self-esteem support (Cohen et al., 1985)

2.3 Procedure

This research was conducted through an anonymous online survey on the Qualtrics survey website. Prior to recruitment, the study protocol was approved by the Cape Breton University Research Ethics Board (REB # 2025-095). Upon recruitment, participants were provided with either a link or a QR code which takes them directly to the survey. After clicking on the link, participants were immediately directed to an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the research and the role of the participant. This form clearly stated the potential harms and benefits of the study and reminded participants that participation is voluntary, and they may choose to stop the study at any time. At the bottom of the informed consent page, there were two questions

for the participant to answer, one to agree that they were informed about the purpose of the research and choose to participate, and one confirming that they are an undergraduate student at CBU. Answering “NO” to either of these questions sent the participant to the end of the study. If the participant clicked “YES” to both of those questions, they moved on to answer some demographic questions including questions about their age, relationship status, gender identity, ethnicity, academic program, and average grades. Following demographic information, participants completed the IPIP-NEO questionnaire, followed by the MBI-SS, and finished with the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List. At the end of the survey, participants were thanked for their participation and presented with a list of mental health resources available to them.

Chapter 3: Results

The current study used a linear regression using model terms to explore the relationship between the Big Five personality traits, social support, and academic burnout. Descriptive statistics for the variables are seen in Table 2, and correlations between the variables are seen in Table 3.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Openness	169	3	79.86	12.10	44.00	114.00
Conscientiousness	170	2	87.34	15.27	47.00	115.00
Extraversion	169	3	77.79	13.74	45.00	108.00
Agreeableness	171	1	91.59	12.26	63.00	118.00
Neuroticism	168	4	78.70	16.68	39.00	112.00
Burnout	171	1	55.24	15.85	20.00	98.00
Social Support	169	3	124.55	20.69	52.00	158.00

Table 3*Pearson's Correlations*

Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Openness	R-value	-						
	P-value	-						
2.Conscientiousness	R-value	-0.01	-					
	P-value	0.93	-					
3.Extraversion	R-value	0.14	0.23	-				
	P-value	0.07	0.002	-				
4. Agreeableness	R-value	0.27	0.26	0.05	-			
	P-value	<.001	<.001	0.48	-			
5.Neuroticism	R-value	-0.08	-0.59	-0.43	-0.27	-		
	P-value	0.28	<.001	<.001	<.001	-		
6.Burnout	R-value	-0.22	-0.51	-0.35	-0.21	0.66	-	
	P-value	.005	<.001	<.001	.005	<.001	-	
7.Social Support	R-value	0.05	0.42	0.25	0.25	-0.38	-0.39	-
	P-value	0.52	<.001	.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	-

To test H1 and H2, the Big Five personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, & neuroticism) and social support were entered as predictors in the first model, with academic burnout as the outcome variable. This model was used to determine the role that personality traits and social support play in predicting academic burnout. Consistent with H1a, conscientiousness was found to have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout ($\beta = -.19, p = .009$; see Table 3). Contrary to H1b and H1c, extraversion was not found to be a significant predictor of academic burnout ($\beta = -.006, p = 0.93$), nor was agreeableness ($\beta = .06, p = .29$). Consistent with H1d, neuroticism was found to have a significant positive relationship with academic burnout ($\beta = .49, p < .001$). Notably, openness to experience was shown to be a negative predictor of academic burnout ($\beta = -.19, p = .002$), contrary to past research. Finally, social support was found to have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout ($\beta = -.14, p = .04$), consistent with H2.

The second model, used to test H3, includes the same variables above as predictors, with academic burnout as the outcome variable, and adds interaction terms between extraversion and social support, and neuroticism and social support. This model was used to determine if social support moderates the relationship between extraversion/neuroticism and academic burnout. Results show that the interaction between extraversion and social support was not a statistically significant predictor of academic burnout ($\beta = .03, p = .96$). Similarly, social support was not shown to moderate the relationship between neuroticism and academic burnout ($\beta = -.18, p = .69$). A summary of the linear regression, including both models, can be found in Table 3.

Table 4*Linear Regression Using Model Terms*

Model		Unstandard- ized	Standard Error	Standard- ized	t	p
M₀	(intercept)	55.04	1.26		43.75	<.001
M₁	(intercept)	60.23	15.73		3.83	<.001
	Openness	-0.25	0.08	-0.19	-3.23	.002
	Conscientiousness	-0.20	0.08	-0.19	-2.64	.009
	Extraversion	.007	0.08	.006	0.09	0.93
	Agreeableness	0.08	0.08	0.07	1.06	0.29
	Neuroticism	0.48	0.07	0.49	6.59	<.001
	Social support	-0.11	0.05	-0.14	-2.07	0.04
M₂	(intercept)	47.22	63.08		0.75	0.45
	Openness	-0.24	0.08	-0.19	-3.04	.003
	Conscientiousness	-0.19	0.08	-0.18	-2.47	0.01
	Extraversion	-0.01	0.45	-0.01	-0.03	0.97
	Agreeableness	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.91	0.37
	Neuroticism	0.64	0.43	0.67	1.49	0.14
	Social Support	-0.02	0.47	-0.02	-0.03	0.97
	Social Support*	1.83x 10 ⁻⁴	.003	0.03	0.05	0.96
	Extraversion					
	Social Support *	-.001	.003	-0.18	-0.39	0.69
	Neuroticism					

Chapter 4: Discussion

The current study sought to investigate the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and academic burnout in university students, investigating the role that social support plays in this relationship. Specifically, the current study explored what traits were predictive of academic burnout, and if social support moderates the relationship between two traits, extraversion and neuroticism, and academic burnout. Based on past research, it was hypothesized that conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness would have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout, and that neuroticism would have a significant positive relationship with academic burnout. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that social support would have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout and would also moderate the relationship between both extraversion and neuroticism and academic burnout. Results show that openness to experience, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and social support were all significantly related to academic burnout, and social support did not provide evidence of playing a role in this relationship.

4.1 Personality and Academic Burnout

Openness to experience. The results indicate a significant negative relationship between openness to experience and academic burnout, indicating that higher levels of openness to experience were associated with lower levels of burnout and vice versa. This finding contradicts past research, where it is widely found that openness to experience is not significantly related to burnout (Alarcon et al., 2009; Armon et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2006; Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). While there has not

been evidence to support a relationship between openness to experience and academic burnout in the past, examining the definition of openness to experience may provide an explanation for this finding. Openness to experience is related to adventurousness, artistic interests, and intellect, with intellect being one of the most important aspects of the trait (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As such, individuals high in openness tend to enjoy things such as debating intellectual issues, completing puzzles or brain teasers, and are open-minded to new and unusual ideas (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As such, individuals high in this trait may find university life more enjoyable rather than stress-inducing, as it allows them to continuously engage in intellectual activities. This could lead to reduced levels of academic burnout, as the tasks of university are viewed as intellectual challenges as opposed to grueling tasks. Furthermore, people who are higher in openness to experience are more likely to take risks, seek new experiences, and come up with innovative solutions to problems (Costa & McCrae, 1992). These individuals may be able to create new strategies to reduce their workload and may be able to create a greater work-life balance, thus reducing academic stress and the likelihood of developing academic burnout.

Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness was also found to have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout, indicating that high scores in conscientiousness are associated with lower academic burnout scores and vice versa. This finding supports previous research that found strong relationships between conscientiousness and burnout (e.g., Bakker et al., 2006; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). Given that conscientiousness is characterized by both industriousness (the tendency to be achievement-striving or hard-working) and orderliness (the tendency to be organized, rule-following, and cautious) it is

logical to assume that this trait reduces the impact of burnout (Jackson et al., 2009). Individuals high in this trait likely strive for academic success, and work hard to achieve it, leading to higher levels of motivation to complete academic tasks (Jackson et al., 2009). This higher level of motivation could help increase feelings of academic efficacy and reduce feelings of cynicism, resulting in a decreased likelihood of developing academic burnout. Furthermore, individuals high in conscientiousness are typically well organized and may be able to plan ahead, complete tasks on time, and schedule time to get things done (Armon et al., 2012). These traits may help reduce the academic workload and make academic burnout less likely to occur. Individuals who score low on this trait may lack that same motivation and orderliness, leading to increased academic stress, and a stronger likelihood of developing academic burnout.

Agreeableness. Similarly, agreeableness was not found to be a significant predictor of academic burnout, contrary to the hypotheses. Alongside extraversion, this somewhat aligns with past research, where some studies found a significant relationship between agreeableness and academic burnout (e.g., Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006), while others did not (Bakker et al., 2006; Kong et al., 2021). Individuals high in agreeableness tend to value cooperation, social harmony, and trust (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As such, it was assumed that individuals high in agreeableness may feel more pressure to make a good impression on their classmates and their professors, and therefore they may have better strategies for prioritizing classwork and keeping up to date in their schoolwork. These strategies could lead to decreased levels of academic burnout. However, individuals low in agreeableness tend to be competitive and prioritize personal needs over social harmony (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As such, these

individuals may develop stronger academic skills that focus on self-improvement and success rather than making a good impression. It is possible that these two things contradict each other, leading to agreeableness not being a significant predictor of academic burnout.

It is important to note that while extraversion and agreeableness were significant in some studies but not in others, the populations being studied within those studies differed widely. In research examining burnout within highly social, people-oriented occupations (healthcare fields, volunteering, etc), extraversion and agreeableness were found to be significantly negatively related to burnout (Agbaria & Mokh, 2022; Bakker et al., 2006; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). However, in fields such as academics or teaching, where stress comes from within, these traits were not found to be significantly related to burnout (Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019; Kong et al., 2021; Schaufeli et al., 2002). It may be that extraversion and agreeableness are only significant predictors of burnout in situations where there is a lot of external stress and a lot of social interactions. Therefore, these traits may not be predictive of *academic* burnout, as the majority of academic stress and feelings related to burnout come from within.

Neuroticism. The finding that neuroticism has a significant positive relationship with academic burnout suggests that higher levels of neuroticism are associated with higher levels of academic burnout. This supports previous research, where neuroticism was consistently found to be a strong predictor of academic burnout (e.g., De La Fuente et al., ; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Individuals high in neuroticism have the tendency to experience negative emotions, including feelings of anxiety, anger, and depression (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As such, these individuals are more likely to have an adverse reaction

to increased levels of stress. The academic workload can be very stress-inducing for students, and for those high in neuroticism, such stress can cause an increased number of negative emotions. This can lead to decreased motivation to continue to pursue study goals, resulting in higher levels of academic burnout. For those low in neuroticism, these negative emotions are less likely to occur, reducing the likelihood of developing academic burnout.

Extraversion. Contrary to the hypotheses, extraversion was not found to be a significant predictor of academic burnout. This somewhat aligns with past research; while extraversion was found to be related in some research (Alarcon et al., 2009; Armon et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2006), other research found that the two were not statistically related (Castillo-Gualda et al., 2019; Hudek-Knežević et al., 2006). Individuals high in extraversion crave social experiences and spending time with others, therefore it was assumed that higher levels of extraversion would increase the number of social opportunities an individual has (Costa & McCrae, 1992; De La Fuente et al., 2021). Increased social opportunities allow students to take breaks from their studies, discuss their workload with their peers, and spend time with like-minded people which could help reduce academic stress and the likelihood of developing burnout (De La Fuente et al., 2021). However, it may be that individuals high in extraversion are so focused on seeking social experiences that their academics suffer as a result. Perhaps the craving for social interaction and spending time with others is so strong that it distracts the individual from completing their academic tasks. In this case, extraversion may actually lead to increased levels of academic stress, and a higher likelihood of developing academic burnout. It is possible that both of these explanations are true at the same time, and that

while the craving for social experiences may be beneficial for reducing academic stress, it may also be harmful if it acts as a distraction. This could help explain why extraversion did not provide evidence as being predictive of academic burnout. Future research should explore how social support influences those with high levels of extraversion when dealing with academic stress. Specifically, future research should examine what behaviours (e.g. hours spent with others; motivations for spending time with others) make social support helpful or harmful in this scenario. It is also possible that this phenomenon is better explained by social support, rather than extraversion. Perhaps extraversion plays a role in how often a person seeks social experiences, but social support is a stronger predictor of how this can influence the likelihood of becoming burnt out.

4.2 Social Support and Academic Burnout

Social support was found to have a significant negative relationship with academic burnout, suggesting that having increased levels of social support can help reduce academic burnout (Huang et al., 2025). Individuals who have increased levels of social support have people to turn to when their workload becomes heavy and can receive emotional support when needed. Having a strong support system can encourage healthy coping strategies when stress levels increase and can help reduce the mental load (Huang et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2024). For those who do not have a strong social support system, burnout may be more likely as they are dealing with that stress alone, without the support of family and friends. It is this concept that inspired the idea that social support may moderate the relationship between certain personality traits and academic burnout.

As individuals high in extraversion crave social experiences and being in the presence of others, it was predicted that they would benefit from having a strong support

system when dealing with academic stress. However, for those high in extraversion but lacking social experiences and a strong support system, it was predicted that they would experience increased stress levels, resulting in academic burnout. Ultimately, however, the results did not support this hypothesis.

Similarly, it was hypothesized that social support would moderate the relationship between neuroticism and academic burnout. For those who scored high in neuroticism, it was predicted that increased levels of social support would help alleviate some of those negative emotions, thus reducing the risk of burnout. Having people to turn to when you are experiencing an influx of negative emotions may help the individual to reduce stress levels and obtain a clear mind before returning to their studies. However, results show this hypothesis to be not statistically significant, indicating that social support does not moderate the relationship between neuroticism and academic burnout. A possible explanation for this is that because neuroticism is such a strong predictor of burnout, it may be more influential than the moderator (Alarcon et al., 2009; Armon et al., 2012). Future research should explore how a different moderator, such as therapy or cognitive training, may help reduce the likelihood of neuroticism influencing academic burnout.

Overall, this suggests that while social support is important for everyone, the likelihood of developing academic burnout may be more influenced by personal factors rather than simply social factors. Perhaps it is personality traits, and other differences at the individual level that predict the likelihood of developing academic burnout. As such, interventions created to help reduce academic burnout in university students may require a more head-on approach, helping people at the individual level rather than just increasing social supports. Perhaps individuals who are at-risk for developing academic

burnout due to their high levels of neuroticism would benefit from interventions aimed at reducing negative emotions and thought processes, whereas those who are at-risk due to lower scores in openness/ conscientiousness would benefit from an intervention that promotes organizational skills and viewing academics as intellectual activities. This knowledge could be beneficial for universities or mental health professionals who aim to help reduce the impact of academic burnout on university students. Future research could look into the benefits of individualized interventions for academic burnout, investigating whether personality-based interventions can help reduce the impact of burnout.

4.3 Limitations

One possible limitation to the current study is that individuals on average reported having a higher level of social support. This created higher mean levels of social support within the sample, and a lack of participants reporting lower levels of social support. This lack of information could have impacted the results of the current study, as there is not a comprehensive view of those who report lower levels of social support. One possible explanation for this is that the sample of the current study consisted of students from Cape Breton University, where many students at this university continue to reside at home and commute to campus, as opposed to living on campus. These students typically live with their families, who are a main source of social support. Furthermore, as many of these students continue to reside at home, they tend to run in the same social circles as they did prior to university. These factors indicate that students at Cape Breton University may have higher levels of social support than students at other universities, as the majority are surrounded by their primary support systems. Students who live on campus,

away from their families and familiar social circles, may have lower levels of social support. As such, the current study cannot be generalized to the general population. Future research could examine how social support differs at universities where the majority of students live on campus, away from their primary support systems, and how this may play a role in their likelihood of developing burnout.

Another possible explanation for high levels of social support is that the measure of social support used does not specify who the individual receives support from (e.g., parental support, peer support, support from professors and other students) and encompasses all kinds of social support. This could have led to reports of higher levels of social support, as the individual is responding based on all of their support systems. It may be that in the context of academic burnout, support from certain people (such as classmates who are going through the same things) is more important for reducing the influence of personality on burnout. Future research should explore the influence that social support from different interpersonal relationships has on the relationship between personality and burnout.

Another limitation to the current study is that over half of the sample reported having average grades above 80%, and almost the entire sample reported having average grades of 60% and higher. This indicates that the sample vastly underrepresents students who are not performing well academically. This is especially important when researching academic burnout, because while students who are performing well are susceptible to developing academic burnout, those who aren't performing as well have the same risk. Perhaps the students who are not receiving high grades are working hard to succeed, yet their effort is not being reflected in their grades. This could lead to the individual

questioning the potential usefulness of their degree, questioning their ability to succeed in university life, and becoming exhausted with their studies. Future research should examine the relationship between personality, social support, and academic burnout within a sample of students who reflect all levels of average grades. This will help to provide a more comprehensive view of how academic burnout is developed. However, as with all studies that use self-reports, the current study is subject to self-report bias. The sample of high-achieving students may be due to the fact that students self-reported their grades and may have inflated their grades to be perceived as better students.

4.5 Strengths

This research is one of the first to examine the moderating role of social support in the relationship between personality and academic burnout. This is useful to help future researchers better understand the relationship between personality, social support, and academic burnout. Moreover, this study is one of the first studies to find a significant relationship between openness to experience and academic burnout. This contributes to the research on the topic, providing important information on the relationship between openness to experience and academic burnout, highlighting the need for more research on this topic.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The current study contributes to our understanding of how personality and social support influence academic burnout. Findings show that openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism are all predictive of academic burnout, and that social support doesn't appear to moderate the relationship between extraversion/neuroticism and academic burnout. These findings highlight the importance of supporting individualized interventions for preventing and treating academic burnout. By understanding the factors that influence academic burnout and what puts an individual at risk, we can begin to create interventions and strategies to help reduce academic burnout in university students.

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