

Psychology: Playful people are at an advantage

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Adults can positively utilise their inclination towards playfulness in many situations. They are good at observing, can easily see things from new perspectives, and can turn monotonous tasks into something interesting. At the same time, playfulness should not be equated with humour. Instead we need a new vocabulary to describe it, write psychologists from Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (MLU) in the current issue of the international journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Unlike research on playfulness in children, little research has been conducted on playfulness in [adults](#). "Models of childhood playfulness have often been transferred to adults. This results in the loss of many aspects including those related to [romantic relationships](#) or intellectual performance," explains Dr René Proyer from the Institute of Psychology at MLU. Playful people are able to reinterpret situations in their lives so that they experience them as entertaining or are able to reduce stress levels.

Proyer investigated this phenomenon in adults in many studies and surveys of around 3,000 people. He found that playfulness has an overlap, but no redundancy with the big five personality traits frequently used to describe personality. These include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience and emotional stability. "Playfulness is an independent personality trait that shares certain aspects with these five global dimensions but which cannot be interchanged," explains Proyer. The study also shows that people who describe themselves as playful are also viewed by others as such.

Furthermore, playful people act out their propensity in many day-to-day situations.

The psychologist has identified four basic types of playful adults: "There are people who like to fool around with friends and acquaintances. We describe this as other-directed playfulness. By contrast, light-heartedly playful people regard their whole life as a type of game," says Proyer. Another category includes people who like to play with thoughts and ideas - this describes intellectual playfulness. These people are able to turn monotonous tasks into something interesting. The psychologist describes the final group as being whimsically playful. "These people tend to be interested in strange and unusual things and are amused by small day-to-day observations."

The studies reveal that playfulness in adults is expressed in very different ways and should be regarded as a positive trait. However, it has more negative connotations in the German-speaking world; playful people are sometimes not taken seriously or are seen as unreliable. Unjustly so, as Proyer relates: "When looking for solutions to complex problems, they can easily change perspectives. This allows them to find unusual and novel solutions."

The current study also provides incentives for other areas of research, such as evolutionary psychology. Even though playfulness has no direct advantage for survival, it could play an important role when choosing partners and in romantic relationships. The psychologists from Halle will be devoting their energies to this topic in the coming months.

More information: René T. Proyer, A new structural model for the study of adult playfulness: Assessment and exploration of an understudied individual differences variable, *Personality and Individual Differences* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2016.12.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.12.011)

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