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HOW DOES PERSONALITY INFLUENCE MARITAL SATISFACTION?



Do opposites really attract?

You have probably heard the saying that “opposites attract”. This complementarity hypothesis states that the greater the personality differences between spouses, the more satisfied they are in their marriage (Odilavadze, 2019). While research findings have been directed more in support of this hypothesis, there are certain personality traits that contribute to the **good** or the **bad** in one’s marriage.

THE “GOOD” TRAITS

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

There is a positive correlation between conscientiousness and marital satisfaction.

Results from eighteen Iranian correlational studies on personality traits and marital satisfaction revealed that couples high in conscientiousness are most satisfied with their marriage (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). A potential explanation for such finding stems from the fact that conscientious individuals are better at handling marital issues. According to questionnaire results from eighty-seven married couples, husbands who are more conscientious have more satisfied wives (Odilavadze et al., 2019).

EXTRAVERSION Extraversion of one partner appears to positively impact marital satisfaction.

Odilavadze et al. (2019) discovered that wives that are on the high end on the continuum for extraversion have more satisfied husbands. Evidence from Weidmann et al. (2017) and the longitudinal data from one hundred forty-one couples supports an opposite effect in which the increased satisfaction of one partner leads to increased extraversion in the other.

AGREEABLENESS

Agreeableness increases self-esteem, which further increases marital satisfaction.

Agreeableness is a good predictor of satisfaction as it increases self-esteem (Weidmann et al., 2017).

Someone with high self-esteem is more likely to experience happiness in their marriage.



The Big Five

The Big Five personality traits are a set of five major traits that are universally accepted to be shared by all people (Goldberg, 1993). Each factor has its own scale in which you are either high, low, or somewhere in between. Below you will find the Big Five along with some of their characteristics. As you read along, think about where you fit on the spectrum for each, as these traits have been used in most studies of the correlation between personality and marital satisfaction.

- 1 Extraversion** - sociable, outspoken, upbeat
- 2 Neuroticism** - unhappy, anxious, emotionally unstable
- 3 Conscientiousness** - careful, dutiful, self-disciplined
- 4 Agreeableness** - friendly, caring, empathetic
- 5 Openness to Experience** - imaginative, curious, creative

THE “BAD” TRAIT NEUROTICISM

Several articles point to high neuroticism as being negatively correlated with marital satisfaction.

Couples high in neuroticism experience the least satisfying marriages. This finding remained true between several populations, regions, and languages of study participants from the Iranian studies analyzed by Sayehmiri et al. (2020). In longitudinal studies, where the same participants were studied over time, neuroticism contributed to low marital satisfaction. Those high in neuroticism tend to exhibit negative behaviours towards their spouses, reducing satisfaction of both parties within a marriage.

HEXACO Personality

Inventory

In addition to the Big Five inventory, HEXACO incorporates honesty/humility (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Honesty/humility is significant in collectivist cultures, thus expanding the generalizability of the Big Five personality traits to better suit a cross-cultural audience.



More about self-esteem

Using the widely accepted methods of the Big Five Inventory and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Weidmann et al. (2017) investigated how self-esteem mediated the connection between the Big Five and relationship satisfaction. Self-esteem is how one feels about themselves, their worth, and well-being (MacKenzie, 2023). As previously mentioned, high self-esteem is tied to positive feelings about one's relationship. However, low self-esteem causes one to see themselves from their partner's perspective in a negative light. This decreases relationship satisfaction. The Big Five traits can influence self-esteem, further influencing satisfaction. For instance, neuroticism predicts dissatisfaction because it can have negative long-term effects on an individual's self-esteem.

A cross-cultural approach

HONESTY/HUMILITY

Incorporating the HEXACO Personality Inventory

Odilavadze et al. (2019) have identified a positive correlation between husbands' honesty/humility and wives' satisfaction. Additionally, discrepancy in this trait only affects satisfaction of the wives. When both partners are high in honesty/humility, marital satisfaction is greatest because humble people have been found to form better relationships with other humble people.



It is important to consider that these results come from a cross-sectional study, where information was gathered from multiple participants at the same time. A longitudinal study would have been better to examine potential changes in the findings over time. The data was also obtained through self-reports, where participants answered questions about themselves in questionnaires. The limitations of self-judgements are that they are prone to bias and questionnaires do not allow for much of an in-depth analysis.



It is evident that personality plays a significant role in marital satisfaction. The studies examined bear implications for marital success and the risk of divorce since one's personality traits affect not only their own satisfaction and self-esteem, but also the self-esteem of their partner and therefore the satisfaction of the couple.



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