



# Personality Traits as Predictors of Romantic Relationship Satisfaction among Dating University Students

Solomon A. Agu

Department of Psychology

Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu

E-mail: solomon.agu@esut.edu.ng

## Abstract

*Close, personal relationships are ubiquitous and a pervasive part of our everyday life. They are characterized by a “strong, frequent and diverse interdependence” that endures over time. The study tested if personality trait will significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students. A total of 298 participants comprising 158 female and 140 male, within the age range of 19 to 26 years, mean age of 23.54 and a standard deviation of 1.56. They were selected making use of simple random sampling techniques, from the population of Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and Faculty of Applied Natural Sciences, Enugu state University of Science and Technology, Agbani Campus, Enugu, Enugu State. Big five Inventory and General Relationship Satisfaction Scale were used in the study. Cross-sectional design was adopted while Hierarchical Multiple Regression was used to analyse the data. Results revealed that big five personality traits (extraversion)  $\beta = .03$ ,  $t = .35$ , at  $P > .05$  did not significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction; while agreeableness,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $t = -2.21$ , at  $P < .05$ ; conscientiousness,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $t = 2.68$ , at  $P < .01$ ; neuroticism,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -2.15$ , at  $P < .05$  and openness,  $\beta = .44$ ,  $t = 6.76$ , at  $P < .01$ , significantly predicted romantic relationship satisfaction. The findings were discussed in view of literature reviewed and recommendations were made.*

**Keywords:** *dyadic relationship, romantic relationship, personality traits, love, students*

## Introduction

Humans are characterized by a fundamental need to belong (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). This need is thought to have evolved because it facilitates reproduction and survival, motivating individuals to maintain different types of close relationships throughout their lives, such as relationships with friends, kin, and offspring. Among these close relationships, relationships with romantic partners are of pronounced importance. For most individuals, finding a mate to love and be loved are central goals (Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, & Overall, 2015), with a close satisfying relationship even being the most important goal for many (Berscheid, 1999). A large amount of time and energy is spent on finding a romantic partner (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012), and once a romantic satisfying relationship is built, it seems to contribute to better physical and mental health (Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014). Apart from being the most researched aspect in relationship science, satisfaction with one's current relationship is also one of the strongest predictors of couple stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). But what makes for a satisfying relationship in the first place? Besides relationship characteristics such as commitment, investment, love, or communication (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988), inter individual differences in personality traits have been shown to be linked to relationship satisfaction

(Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2010; Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2010).

Interpersonal relationship satisfaction in the context of intimate relationships has often been conceptualized as adjustment, which has traditionally been measured by assessing relationship behaviours such as conflict (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Cramer, 2000). The perspective of other theorists and researchers has been more individualistic, encompassing attitudes and subjective feelings expressed about a particular relationship context or feelings towards one's partner (Fricker & Moore, 2002; Martin, Blair, Nevels, & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Morrow, Clark, & Brock, 1995). Research suggests that an individual's cognitions in the context of and about a particular relationship are associated with the way an individual feels about the relationship, as well as reciprocal behaviours between partners (Fletcher, Overall, & Friesen, 2006; Vangelisti, 2019). On this basis, researchers have used both subjective feelings and objective behaviours as ways to operationalize relationship satisfaction and have established methods of assessment to capture these constructs. However, Hendrick and Hendrick (1997) argued that adjustment and satisfaction are not always synonymous; although couples might be considered "well adjusted" in terms of an apparent well-functioning relationship on behavioural terms (e.g., via their utilization of similar parenting strategies, enacting similar values with respect to finances and spending, using appropriate conflict resolution skills with one another), the same partners may still experience subjective feelings of dissatisfaction if they lack intimacy in their relationship (e.g., strong physical attraction, emotional closeness).

Essential to human existence, dyadic relationships are the most important of all close relationships (Hazan et al., 2000; Kelley et al., 1983). Within this category, romantic dyads are particularly critical to consider, given their universal relevance and impact on a wide range of outcomes (Bartels & Zeki, 2004; Fisher, 1994b). Characterised by voluntary attachment, reciprocal attraction, expressed affection and intensity, romantic relationships are distinct from but often associated with broader romantic activity such as flirting, fantasising or casual sex (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). Romantic relationships are driven by the shared pursuit of mutually beneficial goals (Finkel & Simpson, 2015). These relationships involve the unique combination of two people's individual characteristics, development of a single psychological entity and dynamic change over time (Finkel et al., 2017).

Sternberg's Triangular Theory (1986) of Love holds that love can best be understood in terms of its three basic components: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment (1986, 1988, 1997). Each of these components is represented as a side of a triangle. The triangle itself represents love. The type of love in a relationship, as determined by the relative ratios of intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment, is reflected by the shape of the triangle. The amount of love, regardless of the shape, is reflected by the size of the triangle. According to Sternberg (1986, 1997), multiple triangles can exist within a relationship. A triangle could be used to represent the current state of love in the actual relationship, while a different triangle could represent the desired or idealized state of love for the relationship. According to Sternberg (1986), intimacy refers to "feelings of

closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships”. Intimacy can also be conceptualized as sharing one’s true self with another person (Pickering, 1993).

Passion refers to sexual, romantic, and physical components of a relationship (Sternberg, 1986). Sexuality typically, but not always, dominates the construct of passion. Passion may include “self-esteem, succorance, nurturance, affiliation, dominance, submission, and self-actualization” (Sternberg, 1997). Passion, by and large, refers to the motivation for being in a romantic relationship (Sternberg, 1986). Decision/Commitment refers “in the short-term, to the decision that one loves a certain other, and in the long-term, to one’s commitment to maintain that love” (Sternberg, 1997). It is possible for a person to experience only part of this component. A person could commit to the relationship without loving the other person. It is possible that someone could complete the decision to love their partner without ever committing to the relationship. Decision/Commitment, by and large, refers to the cognitive choice to be in the relationship and to stay with the relationship (Sternberg, 1986).

While these three components of love are presented as discrete categories for the sake of increasing understanding, Sternberg (1997) himself acknowledges that these components of love are intricately connected to each other and that they interact with each other. For example, an increase in passion could lead to an increase in intimacy. There is evidence that increases in passion could be linked to increases in intimacy and commitment (Gulledge et al., 2007). This interconnection provides opportunities for the practice of love (e.g. initiating physical affection (passion) in order to increase intimacy and commitment), but it also provides difficulties for researching love as the components are not clearly separated from each other.

Personality traits refer to relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that distinguish individuals from one another (McCrae & John, 1992). Personality refers to the long-standing traits and patterns that propel individuals to consistently think, feel, and behave in specific ways. Our personality is what makes us unique individuals. Each person has an idiosyncratic pattern of enduring, long-term characteristics and a manner in which he or she interacts with other individuals and the world around them. Our personalities are thought to be long term, stable, and not easily changed. According to Freud the two most important roles in adult life are work and love. And so, a number of tests of development have focused on these two major roles with evidence suggesting that happy work and close relationships may lead to long-term improvement in psychological well-being. (Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003). Personality characteristics of partners affect their intimate relationships. Higher satisfaction in intimate relationship means less relationship instability and lower dissolution (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Satisfied individuals in long term romantic relationships have been found to be happier, healthier, and have longer lives (Diamond, Fagundes & Butterworth, 2010). The associations between the personality characteristics of an individual and the relationship satisfaction do not vary significantly from men to women or from married to unmarried individuals (Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar & Rooke, 2010). Trait theories of personality have long attempted

to pin down exactly how many personality traits exist. Earlier theories have suggested a various number of possible traits, including Gordon Allport's list of 4,000 personality traits, Raymond Cattell's 16 personality factors, and Hans Eysenck's three-factor theory. However, many researchers felt that Cattell's theory was too complicated and Eysenck's was too limited in scope. As a result, the five-factor theory emerged to describe the essential traits that serve as the building blocks of personality.

Many contemporary personality psychologists believe that there are five basic dimensions of personality, often referred to as the "Big 5" personality traits (Costa, & McCrae, 1992). . The five broad personality traits described by the theory are extraversion (outgoing, talkative, energetic). They take pleasure in activities that involve large social gatherings, such as parties, community activities, public demonstrations, and business or political groups; agreeableness, (kind, sympathetic, cooperative, warm, and considerate); openness, (active imagination (fantasy), aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety (adventurousness), intellectual curiosity, and challenging authority) conscientiousness, ( a desire to do a task well, and to take obligations to others seriously. Conscientious people tend to be efficient and organized as opposed to easy-going and disorderly. They exhibit a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement; they display planned rather than spontaneous behaviour; and they are generally dependable). and neuroticism (anxious, worry, fear, anger, frustration, envy, jealousy, guilt, depressed mood, and , loneliness). Studying predictors of relationship satisfaction is important because ultimately this construct has strong implications for relationship commitment and longevity (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988) which, in turn, has implications for overall health and well-being (Dush & Amato, 2015).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Most previous research has assessed satisfaction in intimate relationship (Actitelli, Rogers, & Knee, 1999; Glenn, 2019; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). A substantial proportion of these researches have focused on marital relationships in an attempt to determine how couples stay satisfied in long-term committed relationship (Antill, 2019; Kalin & Lloyed, 2017; Langis, Sabourin, Lussier & Mathieu, 2014). However, very few studies focused on satisfaction in dating relationships, because dating relationship lay the foundation for how couples interact with each other and whether this interaction is positive or negative. The importance of research on satisfaction in dating relationships has been espoused (Rouse, Breen & Howell, 2015). Thus, no single question in relationship research has captured more attention than why one relationship endures and another dissolves (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). Yet for the multitude of research which has been conducted in order to better understand relationship satisfaction, a comprehensive understanding of what factors lead to relationship satisfaction and stability especially among youths still eludes researchers (Berscheid, 1999). One area of focus for satisfaction in intimate relationships is to assess the traits of each individual in a romantic relationship. Hence, the study

is aimed to investigate how personality traits of university students in a dating relationship predict their experience of satisfaction in a romantic relationship..

### **Big Five Personality Traits and Relationship Satisfaction**

Personality is not only linked to important life outcomes such as work performance, health, or longevity (Ozer & Benet-Martinez 2006; Robertsetal, 2007) but also to the quality of social and romantic relationships. It is important to note that intimate relationships should be conceived as dyadic processes, with each partner contributing toward the functioning of the relationship (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Kenny et al., 2006). In consequence, researchers have sought to investigate two sorts of effects: associations of individuals' personality with their own relationship satisfaction (actor effects) and associations of individuals' personality with their partners' relationship satisfaction (partner effects).

A study was done by studied individual differences in change in extraversion, neuroticism, and work and relationship satisfaction. 1,130 individuals aged between 16 to 70 from Victorian Quality of Life Panel Study were studied. Respondents were assessed every 2 years from 1981 to 1989. It was found out that relationship satisfaction was associated with decreases in neuroticism and increases in extraversion over time (Scollon & Diener, 2006).

Another study was done by Jason and Hendrick (2004) explored the associations between the personality variables of the five-factor model and close relationship variables (love styles, relationship satisfaction, and intimacy). 196 participants were studied. They used the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised, the Love Attitudes Scale-Short Form, the Relationship Assessment Scale, the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships, and a demographic questionnaire. It was concluded that Extraversion and agreeableness were positively associated with relationship satisfaction and intimacy, especially for males.

Schaffhuser, Allemand and Martin (2004) studied three different perspectives on the Big Five personality traits to examine their association with relationship satisfaction of intimate couples. They used self-perception, partner perception, and meta perception of personality on 216 couples. It was found out substantial associations existed between extraversion and relationship satisfaction in terms of the partner perception and meta perception.

The five-factor model of personality (FFM, frequently also called Big Five, although there are slight differences, (see De Fruyt et al., 2004) is the most established taxonomy of personality. It consists of the five dimensions neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness to experience (McCrae & Costa Jr 1997). A well-established finding is the negative associations of neuroticism with relationship satisfaction. Starting in 1930, a longitudinal study followed 300 couples over a time span of 50 years and examined associations between couples' marital satisfaction and personality. Its main result was that higher levels of neuroticism were associated with lower relationship quality and also higher divorce rates (Kelly & Conley 1987). Numerous studies have since replicated neuroticism's negative association with romantic

satisfaction (e.g., Donnellan et al., 2004; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Ináncsi et al., 2016; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Orth, 2013). Besides the association of one's own neuroticism with own relationship satisfaction, high levels of neuroticism have also been found to go along with reduced relationship satisfaction in one's partner (Barelds 2005; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Malouff et al., 2010; Orth, 2013).

Agreeableness contrasts a prosocial and communal orientation toward others with antagonism. As a personality dimension, it includes attributes such as being altruistic, trustful, tender-minded, and modest (John & Srivastava, 1999). Positive effects of agreeableness on own relationship satisfaction have been shown in two large samples (Dyrenforth et al., 2010). Additionally, in a study on 214 newlywed couples, Shackelford and Buss (2000) reported a positive association of agreeableness with spouses' relationship satisfaction. This was replicated by two other studies, including 237 (Furler et al., 2014) and 186 (Orth, 2013) couples, although only Orth (2013) found agreeableness to also be related to one's partner's relationship satisfaction. Whereas some other studies only found a positive association of men's agreeableness with own relationship satisfaction (Watson et al. 2000), a meta-analysis focusing on partner's satisfaction also supports a positive partner effect of agreeableness for both sexes (Malouff et al., 2010). In sum, there is evidence that agreeableness is positively related to relationship satisfaction in the self and the partner.

Conscientiousness is characterized by being diligent, self-disciplined, and well-organized and having good impulse control. As a personality trait, it facilitates task- and goal-directed behaviour such as delaying gratifications and planning and prioritizing tasks (John & Srivastava 1999). Positive associations between conscientiousness and own (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Heller et al., 2004; Schaffhuser et al., 2014) and partner's relationship satisfaction (Dyrenforth et al., 2010) have been reported in large Australian, British, and Swiss samples. In a study by Watson et al. (2000), conscientiousness was positively associated with own and partner's relationship satisfaction in dating couples; however, findings on the role of conscientiousness in married couples were inconsistent. Other studies found that conscientiousness is positively linked with individual's satisfaction, but not partner's relationship satisfaction (Furler et al., 2014; Orth 2013). A meta analysis by Malouff et al., (2010) corroborated the positive association between conscientiousness and partner's relationship satisfaction. In sum, conscientiousness also seems to be positively associated with relationship satisfaction in the self and the partner, albeit not consistently so.

Extraversion is characterized by an energetic approach to the social and material world. As a personality dimension, it includes being sociable, talkative, assertive, active, adventurous, and high on positive emotionality (John & Srivastava, 1999). Barelds (2005) reported a positive correlation between extraversion and marital quality in a sample of 282 Dutch couples. (Their analyses do not allow to differentiate between extraversion's effects on own and one's partner's marital quality). In Kelly and Conley's (1987) longitudinal study, however, extraversion did not show any associations with relationship satisfaction in women and was correlated with men's

relationship satisfaction only once at the very end of the study period. Dyrenforth et al., (2010) found evidence for positive associations of own extraversion with own relationship satisfaction in large Australian and British samples. A partner effect of extraversion, however, was only apparent among the 2639 Australian couples. In their meta-analysis, Malouff et al., (2010) attained a small positive effect of own extraversion on one's partner's relationship satisfaction. In sum, extraversion may be associated with own relationship satisfaction as well as with partner's satisfaction, yet all of these effects seem to be rather small and not very consistent.

In general, openness has been shown to be a weak predictor of relationship outcomes. Donnellan et al., (2004) found a positive relationship between wives' openness and her sexual satisfaction among 400 couples yet no association with global relationship satisfaction. Dyrenforth et al., (2010) found inconsistent results for openness, with negative effects on own and partner's satisfaction in the Australian sample yet positive effects on own relationship satisfaction only in the British sample. Other studies did neither find actor nor partner effects for openness (Furler et al., 2014; Orth, 2013), and Malouff et al., (2010) did not find any evidence for partner effects in their meta-analysis. In sum, openness seems to be unrelated to relationship satisfaction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study will examine if personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism) will predict romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students.

### **Hypothesis**

This hypothesis was tested in the study:

1. Personality trait (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism) will significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

A total of 298 participants comprising 158 female and 140 male, within the age range of 19 to 26 years, mean age of 23.54 and a standard deviation of 1.56. They were selected making use of simple random sampling techniques, from the population of Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (N-158) and Faculty of Applied Natural Sciences (N-140), Enugu state University of Science and Technology, Agbani Campus, Enugu, Enugu State.

#### **Instrument**

Two sets of instrument were used in the study: The Big Five Inventory (BFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992) and General Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Hendrick, 1988).



### **Big Five Inventory (BFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992)**

Big five inventory is a 44-items inventory designed by Costa and McCrae (1992) to assess personality from a five dimensional perspectives which are distinct from one another. The five subscales are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. It is administered individually or in group after establishing adequate rapport with the clients. The young and the semi illiterates' clients are helped to carry out the instructions. There are no right or wrong answer and no time limit for completing BFI. Direct scoring is used for all the items. The value of the number shaded in each item is added to obtain the clients score in each of the subscales. Items 1-8 measures extraversion; items 9-17 measures agreeableness; items 18-26 measures conscientiousness, items 27-34 measures neuroticism while items 35-44 measures openness. Costa and McCrae (1992) obtained convergent validity coefficient of .75 while Umeh (2004) obtained divergent validity coefficient of .05 = extraversion; .13 = agreeableness; .11 = conscientiousness; .39 = neuroticism and .24 = openness with University Maladjustment Scale (UMS) Also, Umeh (2004) provided norm for Nigeria samples using 60 participants (Extraversion, Male = 28.45, Female = 27.10; Agreeableness, Male = 29.75, Female = 24.74; Conscientiousness, Male = 29.10, Female = 27.60; Neuroticism, Male = 23.43, Female = 24.48 and Openness, Male = 38.07, Female = 35.18). Cranbach Alpha coefficient of .73 = Agreeableness, .83 = Conscientiousness, .85 = Extraversion, .87 = Neuroticism and .86 = Openness, was obtained in a pilot test by the researcher using 52 participants from the population of students of Law Faculty, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Enugu State.

### **General Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Hendrick, 1988)**

This is a 7-item scale developed by (Hendrick, 1988) to measure the level of contentment a person has for the romantic relationship in which they are involved. Thus, the items of the scale were worded positively and negatively. Positively worded items ( 1,2,3,5,6) were scored between 5 points for most satisfied to 1 point for least satisfied while on the other hand negatively worded items (4, 7) were reversely scored between 5 points for lest satisfied to 1 point for most satisfied. Examples of items in General Relationship Satisfaction Scale are: How well does your partner meet your needs? How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship? To what extent has your relationship met your original expectation? A highest possible score of 35 and a least possible score of 7 is expected from a given respondent. An established alpha coefficient of .85 was obtained by the researcher using 52 participants from the population of students of Law Faculty, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Enugu State.

### **Procedure**

A total of 350 copies of the research instruments were administered by the researcher within a period of 5weeks to the target population. The administration of the instrument took the form of individual testing in their respective class rooms. The Researcher introduced herself to the participants and informed them that the study is for her Bachelor Degree project. However, out of the number distributed 321 copies were collected while 298 copies correctly filled were scored and analysed whereby 23 copies were discarded.

## Design and Statistic

The design for the study is correlational design. Therefore, the statistics for the study was Hierarchical Multiple Regression to help the researcher account for the contribution of each of the dimensions of personality trait on romantic relationship satisfaction.

## Result

**Table 1: Zero order correlation coefficient matrix showing Personality Traits as Predictors of Romantic Relationship Satisfaction among Dating Undergraduate Students**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Age	23.54	1.56	1							
Gender	.45	.50	.02	1						
Extraversion	32.80	5.97	-.02	-.20**	1					
Agreeableness	33.53	6.11	-.14*	.085	.77**	1				
Conscientiousness	34.72	6.17	-.06	.03	.82**	.91**	1			
Neuroticism	17.40	5.84	-.14*	.23**	-.37**	-.26**	-.33**	1		
Openness	38.12	7.20	.09	-.31**	.48**	.34**	.41**	-.65**	1	
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	29.33	4.19	.21**	-.17**	<b>.36**</b>	<b>.23**</b>	<b>.34**</b>	<b>-.48**</b>	<b>.59**</b>	1
Coefficient of Determinants ( $r^2$ )					<b>.13</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.12</b>	<b>.23</b>	<b>.35</b>	

*Note* \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$  Bold are relevant coefficient for research hypothesis

The result shows that big five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness) correlated significantly with romantic relationship satisfaction (see Table 1). Table 1 shows that correlation coefficients were as follows; extraversion and romantic relationship satisfaction  $r = .36$ ,  $r^2 = .13$ ,  $P < .01$ ; agreeableness and romantic relationship satisfaction,  $r = .23$ ,  $r^2 = .05$ ,  $P < .01$ ; conscientiousness and romantic relationship satisfaction,  $r = .34$ ,  $r^2 = .12$ ,  $P < .01$ ; neuroticism and romantic relationship satisfaction,  $r = -.48$ ,  $r^2 = .23$ ,  $P < .01$ ; openness and romantic relationship satisfaction,  $r = .59$ ,  $r^2 = .35$ ,  $P < .01$ .

**Table 2: Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Romantic Relationship Satisfaction (N=298)**

	Step 1		Step 2	
	B	T	B	T
Age	.21	3.73**		
Gender	-.17	-3.07		
Extraversion			.03	.35
Agreeableness			-.25	-2.21*
Conscientiousness			.33	2.68**
Neuroticism			-.13	-2.15*
Openness			.44	6.76**
<i>R</i>	.27		.64	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.07		.41	
$\Delta R^2$	.07		.33	
<i>F</i>	11.40(2,295)		32.60(5,290)	

Note \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Results of the hierarchical multiple regression for the test of the first factors of romantic relationship satisfaction index is shown in the Table 1 above. The variables were entered in stepwise models. The demographic variable (age) in the Step 1 of the regression analysis and it had a significant relationship with romantic relationship satisfaction. Age,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $t = 3.73$ ,  $p > .01$ . On the other hand the demographic variable (gender) gender also had a significant relationship with romantic relationship satisfaction. Gender,  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $t = -3.07$ ,  $p > .01$ . Hence, the demographic variable (age and gender) serves as control variables in the study and that is why they are keyed in step 1.

In step 2, big five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness) were entered. Only extraversion,  $\beta = .03$ ,  $t = .35$ , at  $P > .05$  did not significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction; while agreeableness,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $t = -2.21$ , at  $P < .05$ ; conscientiousness,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $t = 2.68$ , at  $P < .01$ ; neuroticism,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -2.15$ , at  $P < .05$  and openness,  $\beta = .44$ ,  $t = 6.76$ , at  $P < .01$ , significantly predicted romantic relationship satisfaction. On the other and. The contribution of big five personality traits in explaining the variance in romantic relationship satisfaction was 33% ( $\Delta R^2 = .33$ ). Therefore, a big five personality trait is a significant predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students.

## Discussion

The finding of this study revealed that the hypothesis tested which stated that “Big Five Personality Traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness) will significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students”, was accepted. This means that big five personality traits significantly predicted romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students. In relation to the outcome of the study big five personality traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness) was confirmed to be significantly and positively predicted romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students. Hence, university students that scored high on Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness were observed to experience low romantic relationship satisfaction. On the other hand university students that experience high romantic relationship satisfaction tend to score low on Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness. On the other hand dating university students that scored high on neuroticism experiences low in romantic relationship satisfaction and vice versa.

Positive effects of agreeableness on own relationship satisfaction have been shown in two large samples (Dyrenforth et al., 2010). Additionally, in a study on 214 newlywed couples, Shackelford and Buss (2000) reported a positive association of agreeableness with spouses’ relationship satisfaction. This was replicated by two other studies, including 237 (Furler et al., 2014) and 186 (Orth, 2013) couples, although only Orth (2013) found agreeableness to also be related to one’s partner’s relationship satisfaction. Whereas some other studies only found a positive association of men’s agreeableness with own relationship satisfaction (Watson et al. 2000), a meta-analysis focusing on partner’s satisfaction also supports a positive partner effect of agreeableness for both sexes (Malouff et al., 2010). In sum, there is evidence that agreeableness is positively related to relationship satisfaction in the self and the partner.

Conscientiousness is characterized by being diligent, self-disciplined, and well-organized and having good impulse control. As a personality trait, it facilitates task- and goal-directed behaviour such as delaying gratifications and planning and prioritizing tasks (John & Srivastava 1999). Positive associations between conscientiousness and own (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Heller et al., 2004; Schaffhuser et al., 2014) and partner’s relationship satisfaction (Dyrenforth et al., 2010) have been reported in large Australian, British, and Swiss samples. In a study by Watson et al. (2000), conscientiousness was positively associated with own and partner’s relationship satisfaction in dating couples; however, findings on the role of conscientiousness in married couples were inconsistent. Other studies found that conscientiousness is positively linked with individual’s satisfaction, but not partner’s relationship satisfaction (Furler et al., 2014; Orth 2013). A meta analysis by Malouff et al., (2010) corroborated the positive association between conscientiousness and partner’s relationship satisfaction. In sum, conscientiousness also seems to be positively associated with relationship satisfaction in the self and the partner.

Neuroticism describes how easily and strongly one experiences negative affect. As a personality dimension, it contrasts being emotionally stable and even-tempered with tendencies toward negative emotionality such as feeling anxious, nervous, angry, sad, and tense (John & Srivastava, 1999). A well-established finding is the negative associations of neuroticism with relationship satisfaction. Starting in 1930, a longitudinal study followed 300 couples over a time span of 50 years and examined associations between couples' marital satisfaction and personality. Its main result was that higher levels of neuroticism were associated with lower relationship quality and also higher divorce rates (Kelly & Conley 1987). Numerous studies have since replicated neuroticism's negative association with romantic satisfaction (e.g., Donnellan et al., 2004; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Ináncsi et al., 2016; Karney & Bradbury 1995; Orth 2013). Besides the association of one's own neuroticism with own relationship satisfaction, high levels of neuroticism have also been found to go along with reduced relationship satisfaction in one's partner (Barelds 2005; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Malouff et al., 2010; Orth, 2013).

Result of openness in relation to romantic relationship satisfaction is inconsistent with the finding of John and Srivastava (1999). They observed that people high in openness to experience are characterized by being intellectually curious, imaginative, attentive to inner feelings, creative, and unconventional. In a nutshell, openness to experience (vs. closed-mindedness) taps into the originality and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life (John & Srivastava 1999). In general, openness has been shown to be a weak predictor of relationship outcomes. Donnellan et al., (2004) found apposite relationship between wives' openness and her sexual satisfaction among 400 couples yet no association with global relationship satisfaction. Dyrenforth et al., (2010) found inconsistent results for openness, with negative effects on own and partner's satisfaction in the Australian sample yet positive effects on own relationship satisfaction only in the British sample. Other studies did neither find actor nor partner effects for openness (Furler et al., 2014; Orth, 2013), and Malouff et al., (2010) did not find any evidence for partner effects in their meta-analysis.

Also, result of the study on extraversion which indicated that extraversion did not predict romantic relationship satisfaction is not in consonance with other findings. Extraversion is characterized by an energetic approach to the social and material world. As a personality dimension, it includes being sociable, talkative, assertive, active, adventurous, and high on positive emotionality (John & Srivastava, 1999). Barelds (2005) reported a positive correlation between extraversion and marital quality in a sample of 282 Dutch couples. (Their analyses do not allow to differentiate between extraversion's effects on own and one's partner's marital quality). In Kelly and Conley's (1987) longitudinal study, however, extraversion did not show any associations with relationship satisfaction in women and was correlated with men's relationship satisfaction only once at the very end of the study period. Dyrenforth et al., (2010) found evidence for positive associations of own extraversion with own relationship satisfaction in large Australian and British samples. A partner effect of extraversion, however, was only apparent among the 2639 Australian couples. In their meta-analysis, Malouff et al., (2010) attained a small positive effect of own

extraversion on one's partner's relationship satisfaction. In sum, extraversion may be associated with own relationship satisfaction as well as with partner's satisfaction, yet all of these effects seem to be rather small and not very consistent.

### **Implications of the Finding**

The result of the study revealed a significant positive prediction between big five personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness) and romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students, apart from extraversion that revealed no significant prediction. University students with high personality traits are said to experience high degree of satisfaction in their romantic relationships.

Also, university students with high scores for neuroticism are more likely than average to be moody and to experience such feelings as anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, envy, jealousy, guilt, depressed mood, and loneliness. Such university students are thought to respond worse to stressors and are more likely to interpret ordinary situations, such as minor frustrations, as appearing hopelessly difficult. They are described as often being self-conscious and shy, and tending to have trouble controlling urges and delaying gratification. Hence, it is helpful for the counselors to assist the university students' deal with the relationship problem as many intervention techniques can also be provided like:

Counselor can help them to strengthen their relationship. The individuals with short-lived relationships can be provided with intervention techniques can be provided as the strong and the weak points of a relationship will be known.

Making them aware of the characteristics of their relationship will help them change their view of the relationship

### **Limitations of the Study**

First, because of the nature of the models used, each personality trait was analyzed separately. Thus, while some traits did emerge having stronger path coefficients and predicting greater proportions of the variance in romantic relationship satisfaction, caution should be taken in generalizing this to the relative importance of these traits because each was analyzed without controlling of the effects of the others. Another limitation is that this study used cross-sectional, self-report data. This does not allow for the examination of causation or the prediction of changes in levels of romantic satisfaction over time. Relying exclusively on self-report data can also produce biases, because some of the variance in scores may be due to the idiosyncratic way in which individuals answer questions in the survey. Also, the most common and prevalent issue, like most other researches, is the issue of the sample size. It is somewhat difficult to generalize the finding as sample included only 298 university students out of myriad of undergraduates in Enugu State.

## Summary and Conclusions

The finding of this study concludes that five personality trait was observed to significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students. In conclusion, the findings elucidated that big five personality trait (agreeableness, conscientiousness neuroticism, openness) significantly predicted romantic relationship satisfaction among dating university students while extraversion did not yield a significant prediction with romantic relationship satisfaction.

## References

- Actitelli, L. K., Rogers, S., & Knee, C. R. (1999). The role of identity in the link between relationship thinking and relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationship, 16*(5), 591-618.
- Antill, J. K. (2018). Sex role complementarily versus similarity in married couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*(1), 145-155.
- Bajoghli, H., Keshavarzi, Z., Mohammadi, M., Schmidt, N. B., Norton, P. J., Holsboer-Trachsler, E., & Brand, S. (2014). "I love you more than I can stand!" – Romantic love, symptoms of depression and anxiety, and sleep complaints are related among young adults. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Clinical Practice, 18*(3), 169–174.
- Bamford, J. M. S., & Davidson, J. W. (2017). "Trait Empathy associated with Agreeableness and rhythmic entrainment in a spontaneous movement to music task: Preliminary exploratory investigations". *Musicae Scientiae. 23* (1): 5–24.
- Barelds, D. P. (2005). Self and partner personality in intimate relationships. *European Journal of Personality, 19*, 501–518. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.549>.
- Berscheid, E. (1999). The greening of relationship science. *American Psychologist, 54*, 260–266.
- Bartels, A., & Zeki, S. (2004). The neural correlates of maternal and romantic love. *NeuroImage, 21*(3), 1155–1166.
- Berscheid, E. (1999). The greening of relationship science. *American Psychologist, 54*(4), 260-266.
- Berscheid, E., & Reis, H.T. (1998). Attraction and close relationships. In D.T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology: Vol. 2* (4th Ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hil.
- Cramer, D. (2000). Relationship satisfaction and conflict style in romantic relationships. *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied, 134*(3), 337-341.
- Christensen, A., & Heavey, C. L. (1990). Gender and social structure in the demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*(1), 73-81.

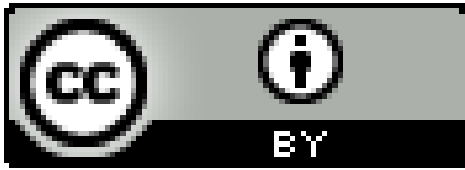
- Collins, W. A., Welsh, D. P., & Furman, W. (2009). Adolescent romantic relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology, 60*(1), 631–652.
- Costa, P. T. & McCrae, R. R. (1992). *NEO personality Inventory professional manual*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- DeFruyt, F., McCrae, R. R., Szirmák, Z., & Nagy, J. (2004). The five factor personality inventory as a measure of the five-factor model: Belgian, American, and Hungarian comparisons with the NEO-PI-R. *Assessment, 11*, 207–215
- Diamond, L. M., Fagundes, C. P., & Butterworth, M. R. (2010). Intimate relationships across the life span. The handbook of life-span development. McCrae, R. R., & John, O. P. (1992). An introduction to the fivefactor model and its applications. *Journal of Personality, 60*, 175–215.
- Donnellan, M. B., Conger, R. D., & Bryant, C. M. (2004). The big five and enduring marriages. *Journal of Research in Personality, 38*, 481–504.
- Dush, C. M. K., & Amato, P. R. (2005). Consequences of relationship status and quality for subjective well-being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 22*(5), 607–627.
- Dyrenforth, P. S., Kashy, D. A., Donnellan, M. B., & Lucas, R. E. (2010). Predicting relationship and life satisfaction from personality in nationally representative samples from three countries: The relative importance of factor, partner, and similarity effects. *Journal of*
- Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P. W., Karney, B. R., Reis, H. T., & Sprecher, S. (2012). Online dating: A critical analysis from the perspective of psychological science. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 13*, 1–64.
- Finkel, E. J., Simpson, J. A., & Eastwick, P. W. (2017). The psychology of close 380 relationships: Fourteen core principles. *Annual Review of Psychology, 68*(1), 383–411.
- Fisher, H. E. (1994b). The nature of romantic love. *The Journal of NIH Research, 6*(4), 56–64.
- Fletcher, G. J. O., Overall, N. C. and Friesen, M. D. (2006). *Social cognition in intimate relationships*. In A.L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 353-368). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Fletcher, G. J., Simpson, J. A., Campbell, L., & Overall, N. C. (2015). Pair-bonding, romantic love, and evolution the curious case of homo sapiens. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 10*, 20–36.
- Fricker, J., & Moore, S. (2002). Relationship satisfaction: The role of love styles and attachment styles. *Current Research in Social Psychology, 7*, 182-204.
- Furler, K., Gomez, V., & Grob, A. (2014). Personality perceptions and relationship satisfaction in couples. *Journal of Research in Personality, 50*, 33–41.
- Glenn, N. D. (2019). Quantitative research on marital quality in the 1980's: A critical review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 52*, 818-831



- Gottman, J. M., & Levenson, R. W. (1992). Marital processes predictive of later dissolution: Behaviour, physiology and health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 221–233.
- Gulledge, A., Hill, M., Lister, Z., & Sallion, C. (2007). *Non-erotic physical affection: It's good for you*. In L. L'Abate, D. E. Embry, & M. S. Baggett (Eds.), *Low-cost approaches to promote physical and mental health: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Springer-Verlag
- Hazan, C., Diamond, L. M., Allen, E., Ellens, J., Goldman, S., & Guzman, S. (2000). The place of attachment in human mating. *Review of General Psychology*, 4(2), 186–204.
- Hendrick, S. S., Dicke, A., & Hendrick, C. (1988). The relationship assessment scale. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15(1), 137-142.
- Hendrick, S. S., Hendrick, C., & Adler, N. L. (1988). Romantic relationships: Love, satisfaction, and staying together. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 980–988.
- Ináncsi, T., Láng, A., & Bereczkei, T. (2016). A darker shade of love: Machiavellianism and positive assortative mating based on romantic ideals. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 12(1), 137–152.
- Kalin, R., & Lloyed, C. A. (2017). Sex role identity, Sex role ideology and marital adjustment. *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 8, 32-39.
- Karney & Bradbury. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability. A Review of theory, method and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 3-34.
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, methods, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 3–34.
- Kelley, H. H., Berscheid, E., Christensen, A., Harvey, J. H., Huston, T. L., & Levinger, G., ... Peterson, D. R. (1983). *Analyzing close relationships*. In H. Kelley, Harold (Ed.), *Close relationships* (pp. 20–67). New York, NY: Freeman.
- Kelly, E. L., & Conley, J. J. (1987). Personality and compatibility: A prospective analysis of marital stability and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52,
- Kenny, D. A., Kashy, D. A., & Cook, W. L. (2006). *Dyadic data analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Leary, M. R., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). The nature and function of self-esteem: Sociometer theory. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 32, 1–62.
- Langis, J., Sabourin, S., Lussier, Y., & Mathieu, M. (2014). Masculinity, femininity and marital satisfaction. An examination of theoretical models. *Journal of Personality*, 63(3), 394-414.
- Malouff, J. M., Thorsteinsson, E. B., Schutte, N. S., Bhullar, N., & Rooke, S. E. (2010). The Five-Factor Model of personality and relationship satisfaction of intimate partners: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 44(1), 124–127.
- McCrae R. R., & John, O. P. (1992). "An introduction to the Five-Factor Model and its applications". *Journal of Personality*. 60 (2): 175–215.

- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1997). Personality trait structure as a human universal. *American Psychologist* 52, 509–516.
- Morrow, G. D., Clark, E. M., & Brock, K. F. (1995). Individual and partner love styles: Implications for the quality of romantic involvements. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 12, 363-387.
- Orth, U. (2013). How large are actor and partner effects of personality on relationship satisfaction? The importance of controlling for shared method variance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39, 1359–1372.
- Ozer, D. J., & Benet-Martinez, V. (2006). Personality and the prediction of consequential outcomes. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57, 401–421.
- Pickering, G. (1993). *Being a gentleman: A resource for men*. Minneapolis, MN: Helping Ourselves, Inc.
- Roberts, B. W., Kuncel, N. R., Shiner, R., Caspi, A., & Goldberg, L. R. (2003). The power of personality: The comparative validity of personality traits, socioeconomic status, and cognitive ability for predicting important life outcomes. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2, 313–345.
- Robles, T. F., Slatcher, R. B., Trombello, J. M., & McGinn, M. M. (2014). Marital quality and health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140, 140–187.
- Rouse, L. P., Breen, R., & Howell, M. (2015). Abuse in intimate relationship. A comparison of married and dating college students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 3(4), 414-421.
- Schaffhuser, K., Allemand, M., & Martin, M. (2014). Personality Traits and Relationship Satisfaction in Intimate Couples: Three Perspectives on Personality. *European Journal of Personality*, 28(2), 120–133.
- Sprecher, S., & Metts, S. (1999). Romantic beliefs: Their influence on relationships and patterns of change over time. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 16(6), 834–851.
- Sternberg, R. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Bulletin*, 93, 119-138.
- Sternberg, R. (1988). *Triangulating love*. In R.J. Sternberg, & M. L. Barnes (Eds.), *The psychology of love* (pp. 119-138). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sternberg, R. (1997). Construct validation of a triangular love scale. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 27, 313-335.
- Vangelisti, A. L. (2019). Interpersonal processes in romantic relationships. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of interpersonal communication* (4th ed., pp. 597- 631). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Watson, D., Hubbard, B., & Wiese, D. (2000). General traits of personality and affectivity as predictors of satisfaction in intimate relationships: Evidence from self-and partner-ratings. *Journal of Personality*, 68, 413–449.

**Open Access:** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## INDEXED

