



The Big Five and Marital Behavior Predicting Life Satisfaction Among White and African Americans

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; BF) have been associated with a wide range of psychological outcomes in cross-cultural samples. For example:
 - Conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion significantly predicted life satisfaction among adolescents in rural and urban India (Singh & Lal, 2012).
 - Neuroticism and extraversion directly predicted life satisfaction in German adults (Heidemeier & Goritz, 2016).
 - Life satisfaction being related to neuroticism and extraversion among Australian adults (Anglim & Grand, 2014).
- ❖ While the relationship between BF and life satisfaction has been well documented, research on BF, healthy marital behaviors, and life satisfaction remains limited.
 - One such study demonstrated that one's own neuroticism predicted lower marital satisfaction (Fisher & McNulty, 2008) while another study found that women experience greater life satisfaction after leaving a poor-quality marriage (Bourassa, Sbarra, & Whisman, 2015).

THE PRESENT STUDY

- ❖ A review of the literature reveals no published study linking BF, healthy marital behaviors, and life satisfaction with an ethnically diverse sample in the U.S. As such, we investigated these variables in the present study and focused on three hypotheses:
 1. Emotional stability, extraversion, and agreeableness would significantly predict life satisfaction at a higher rate than conscientiousness and openness.
 2. Healthy marital behaviors would mediate the relationship between the BF and life satisfaction.
 3. Marital behaviors would mediate the relationship between BF and life satisfaction differently between White and African Americans.
- ❖ A path analysis was employed to analyze data and test the hypotheses.

METHOD

- ❖ **Participants**
 - Data were drawn from the U.S. Department of Labor's National Longitudinal Study of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79). Data were from the 2014 session of data collection ($N = 1,523$).
 - All participants were female. Criteria for inclusion were: 1) they had recorded data for each variable of interest and 2) they had self-reported as being either White or African American. Participant demographics are as follows:
 - ❑ White Americans ($n = 1,141$, $M_{age} = 53.53$, $SD_{age} = 2.19$, 93% married)
 - ❑ African Americans ($n = 355$, $M_{age} = 53.18$, $SD_{age} = 2.15$, 89.3% married)
- ❖ **Procedures**
 - Data were extracted from 2014 NLSY79 dataset.
 - IBM SPSS and IBM SPSS Amos were used to analyze data and run nine path analyses.
- ❖ **Measures**
 - Items examining the Big Five (Ten Item Personality Inventory; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003), marital satisfaction, and life satisfaction were used (see Table 1).

RESULTS

- ❖ **Unmediated Models:**
 - ❖ Emotional stability ($\beta = .237$, $p < .001$) was the strongest personality trait predictor of life satisfaction in the full sample.

RESULTS CONTINUED

Table 1.
Information for items used.

Variable	Item	Higher Scores indicate
Agreeableness (TIPI)	"Sympathetic, warm."	Higher levels of agreeableness
Extraversion (TIPI)	"Extraverted, enthusiastic."	Higher levels of extraversion
Emotional Stability (TIPI)	"Calm, emotionally stable."	Higher levels of emotional stability
Openness (TIPI)	"Open to new experiences, complex."	Higher levels of openness
Conscientiousness (TIPI)	"Dependable, self-disciplined."	Higher levels of conscientiousness
Marital Behaviors	3 items ($\alpha = .78$). Item example: "How often do you and [Spouse/partner's name]... tell each other about your day...almost every day, once or twice a week, once or twice a month, or less than once a month?"	Higher frequency of positive marital behaviors
Life Satisfaction	"How dissatisfied or satisfied are you with your life overall?"	More life satisfaction

- ❖ Furthermore, agreeableness ($\beta = -.146$, $p < .01$) and emotional stability ($\beta = .269$, $p < .001$) were the strongest predictors of life satisfaction in the African American and White American samples, respectively.

Figure 1. Example path diagram for agreeableness.

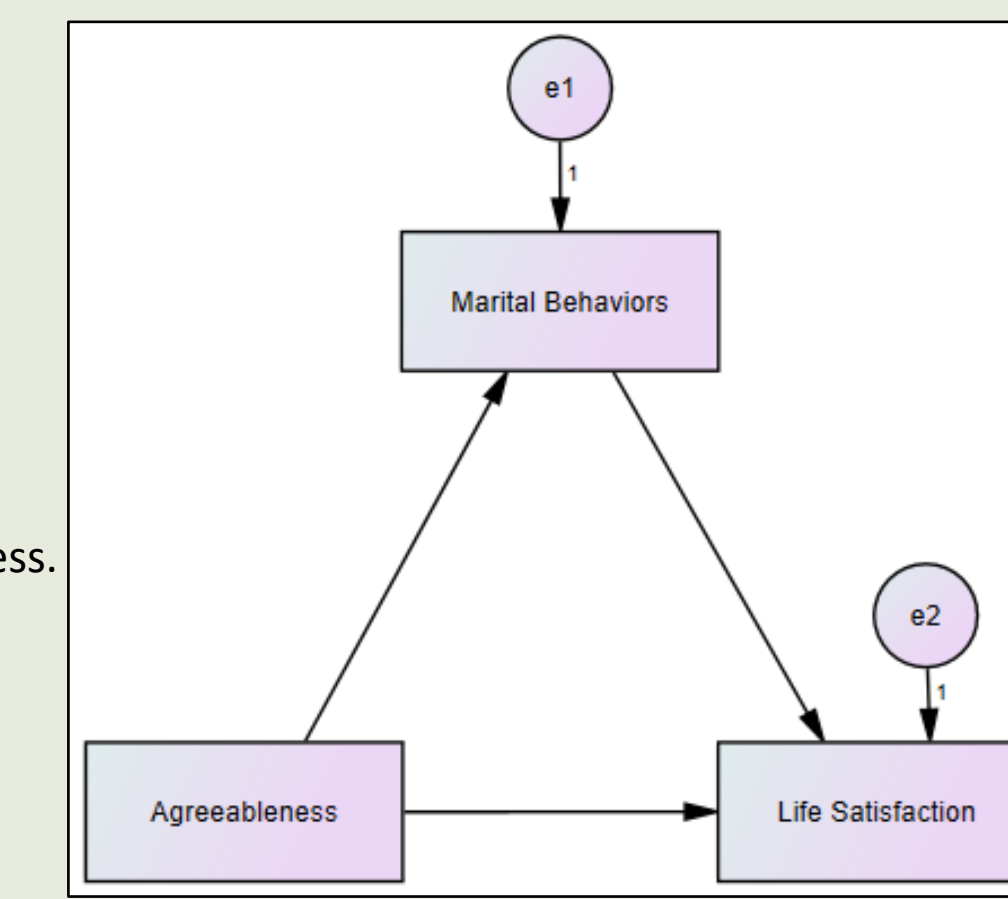


Table 2.
Standardized regression weight and mediation results for each path analysis.

Ethnicity	IV (n)	Full Model IV → DV	Full Model IV → M	Full Model M → DV	Un-mediated IV → DV	Freedman-Schatzkin (df)	Aroian	% Mediated
Full Sample	Agreeableness (1,476)	-0.017	0.049	.180***	-0.008	6.80 (1474)***	1.65	-
	Extraversion (1478)	.123***	.089***	.129***	.134***	4.49 (1476)***	2.64**	8.57%
	Emotional Stability (1478)	.232***	0.033	.144***	.237***	2.63 (1476)**	1.28	-
	Openness (1479)	.112***	0.036	.163***	.118***	6.53 (1477)***	1.44	-
	Conscientiousness (1465)	.168***	0.03	.150***	.172***	4.76 (1463)***	1.09	-
African American Sample	Agreeableness (328)	-.146**	0.001	.047	-.146**	0 (326)	0	-
	Extraversion (332)	0.006	0.078	0.021	0.007	0.46 (330)	0.31	-
	Emotional Stability (331)	0.094	.031	0.041	0.096	0 (329)	0.31	-
	Openness (332)	0.015	0.051	0.033	0.017	0 (330)	0.37	-
	Conscientiousness (324)	.111*	0.001	0.012	.111*	0 (322)	0.01	-
White American Sample	Agreeableness (1,122)	0.017	.073**	.236***	.034	6.98 (1120)***	2.47**	50.67%
	Extraversion (1120)	.157***	.095***	.182***	.174***	5.67 (1118)***	2.92**	9.94%
	Emotional Stability (1121)	.258***	.058*	.191***	.269***	6.35 (1119)***	1.77	-
	Openness (1121)	.129***	0.046	.227***	.140***	0.5 (1119)	0.54	-
	Conscientiousness (1115)	.168***	.062*	.214***	.181***	7.39 (1113)***	2.03*	7.33%

Note. * $p > .05$; ** $p > .01$; *** $p > .001$

RESULTS CONTINUED

- ❖ **Overall Sample**
 - In the unmediated models, each personality trait, except agreeableness, significantly predicted life satisfaction.
 - According to Freedman-Schatzkin and Aroian tests, marital behaviors significantly mediated (8.57%) the relationship between extraversion and life satisfaction.
- ❖ **African American Sample**
 - Marital behaviors did not mediate the relationship between personality traits and life satisfaction.
 - However, agreeableness ($\beta = -.146$, $p < .01$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = .111$, $p < .05$) significantly predicted life satisfaction.
- ❖ **White American Sample**
 - A Freedman-Schatzkin and Aroian tests indicate that marital behaviors significantly mediated the relationship between extraversion (9.94%) and conscientiousness (7.33%).
 - Furthermore, emotional stability ($\beta = .269$, $p < .001$) and openness ($\beta = .140$, $p < .001$) predicted life satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

- ❖ The current study examined the relationship between the Big Five (BF) personality traits and life satisfaction as well as the mediating role of marital behaviors.
- ❖ Hypothesis 1 stating that agreeableness, extraversion, and emotional stability would be stronger predictors of life satisfaction compared to openness and conscientiousness was partially supported. Emotional stability was the strongest predictor in the full and White American samples while agreeableness was the strongest predictor in the African American sample.
 - This is further supported by prior research (Anglim & Grand, 2014; Heidemeier & Goritz, 2016) suggesting emotional stability to be a strong predictor of life satisfaction.
- ❖ Hypothesis 2 was also partially supported as healthy marital behaviors was only a significant predictor in three of the 15 models.
 - Marital behaviors significantly mediated the relationship between extraversion and life satisfaction in two of the three samples. This could be related to extraverts' desire to be around people. Therefore, a healthy relationship with loved ones could increase life satisfaction.
- ❖ Hypothesis 3 was supported as marital behaviors did not significantly mediate the relationship between BF and life satisfaction in the African American sample but did so in the White American sample.
 - ❖ One possible explanation for this is that marital behaviors plays a more significant role in the relationship between BF and life satisfaction for White Americans compared to African Americans.
 - ❖ Another possible explanation is that the BF measure is flawed and could disproportionately affect one group over another (see, for example, Schult, Schneider, & Sparfeldt, 2016).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- ❖ Low reliability of the TIPI Scale required the researchers to use single observed variables for the BF instead of latent variables. This caused a deviation from the original analysis plan and a possible input of bias. However, little published research indicates the TIPI is unreliable and therefore should be expressed in the literature.
- ❖ Researchers should conduct a similar study with a different personality inventory, more ethnic diversity, and the inclusion of male participants.

Contact Information

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