

Personality Types and Marital Satisfaction

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Abstract

Many studies show that the basic personality factors of neuroticism, extroversion, and conscientiousness are important predictors of marital satisfaction. However, little is known about their combined effects. The configurations of the basic personality factors form eight personality types: spectating, insecure, sceptical, brooding, hedonistic, impulsive, entrepreneurial, and complicated (Torgersen, 1995). In this article, we examine the role of personality types in estimating the level of marital satisfaction. One hundred sixty-four married couples completed questionnaires on the NEO (Neuroticism-Extroversion-Openness) Personality Inventory-Revised to determine their personality types and ENRICH (ENriching Relationships Issues, Communication and Happiness). The two-way ANOVA test showed that the entrepreneurial and hedonistic personality types, both men and women, which are characterized by a combination of low neuroticism and high extroversion, presented higher scores on marital satisfaction. Among males, the sceptical type gained the same level of marital satisfaction as the hedonistic type. Conversely, sceptical women reported the least marital satisfaction scores. Moreover, among men, the insecure type, which is a combination of high neuroticism and low extroversion, reported the lowest marital satisfaction; among women, the insecure type reported a level of marital satisfaction just above that of the skeptical type. This research could open a new window for premarital studies.

Keywords: Conscientiousness; Extroversion; Marital Satisfaction; Neuroticism; Personality

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1. Introduction

Although numerous studies have been done on the concept of marital satisfaction, no single definition of this construction has yet to be presented. For example, Snyder (1979, 1983; in Sousou, 2004) defined marital satisfaction as a construction including a variety of dimensions that included quality of communication, leisure interactions, cohesiveness on matters relevant to the relationship (e.g., child rearing and finances), and family history of distress. Marital satisfaction is one of the most often studied constructs in marital research. Some researchers have perceived marital satisfaction as a multidimensional construction comprised of various components (Sousou, 2004). However, some others have treated marital satisfaction as a one-dimensional construction. Although research efforts have failed to provide comparative examinations of the various dimensions of marital satisfaction, examinations of specific aspects of marital satisfaction can provide a clearer understanding as to what areas in the relationships are problematic to couples. Some of these studies aimed to understand the sources of marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Because various variables have been used to predict marital satisfaction, researchers have investigated the individual elements involved in the way people interact during their relationships. They have paid particular attention to the influence of personality traits on satisfaction. Research on personality traits has a long history in the study of premarital predictors because marriage is a relationship that endures across situations and conditions and because marital compatibility is affected by the personality characteristics that the two people bring to their marriage (Zoby, 2005).

Personality includes stable and enduring traits that reveal themselves in various situations. Global assessments of personality have shown that the personality characteristics found among satisfied couples are different from those found among dissatisfied couples. Although research has shown how personality is generally associated with marital satisfaction (e.g., Amiri et al., 2011; Decuyper et al., 2012), the main part of this study addresses the impact of certain personality characteristics on marital satisfaction. The behaviors associated with specific personality characteristics can contribute to tranquility or conflict in the relationship (Craig & Olson, 1995).

In comparison to other models of personality, the five-factor model (FFM) encompasses the most basic dimensions of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to McCrae (1991), the FFM consists of five aspects of personality (called the Big Five): neuroticism, extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness. Previous research has demonstrated robust relationships between romantic relationship quality, functioning, and outcomes and broad personality traits such as the Big Five (Goldberg, 1993; in Letzring & Nofle, 2010).

Scholars have used a variety of paradigms to investigate the relationship between the Big Five dimensions and satisfaction in an intimate relationship. The strongest and most consistent finding to emerge from these studies is that high neuroticism or frequent experience of negative emotion in either or both partners is toxic in a marriage (Barelds, 2005; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Shiota & Levenson, 2007). In a meta-analysis of FFM characteristics and self-rated marital satisfaction conducted by Heller et al. (2004), neuroticism was found to have the strongest relationship, higher neuroticism being associated with self-rated marital satisfaction at $r = -0.26$. The longitudinal approach to predicting marital satisfaction has also found low neuroticism to be an important predictor. In a review of longitudinal studies (Karney and Bradbury, 1995), neuroticism was reported to be a substantial predictor of marital satisfaction and stability and to be associated with higher rates of divorce. Karney and Bradbury proposed that personality dispositions such as emotional instability or neuroticism created 'enduring vulnerabilities' that affected how couples adapted to stressful experiences and that this adaptation impacted general satisfaction in the

relationship. Also, they estimated that each person's neuroticism accounted for roughly 10% of variability in marital satisfaction at later times. Totally, numerous studies have suggested that the highest levels of neuroticism have been associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction (Botwin et al., 1997; Caughlin et al., 2000; Davila et al., 2003; Gattis et al., 2004; Hayes & Joseph, 2003; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Robinson et al., 2000, in Stroud et al., 2010).

Extroversion is a measure of sociability and has a positive effect. Research on extroversion and marital satisfaction has shown inconsistent results. Some researchers reported that extroversion was associated with marital satisfaction (Watson et al., 2000; Hayes & Joseph, 2003; Karney & Bradbury, 1995) while others found non-significant or negative correlations between variables (Botwin et al., 1997; Gattis et al., 2004; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Lester et al., 1989, in Aluja et al., 2007). Also, research suggested that high conscientiousness was associated with greater marital satisfaction (Botwin et al., 1997; Hayes & Joseph, 2003; Heller et al., 2004; Watson et al., 2000). The research results on personality and marital relationship show that the two of the five factors in the FFM, openness to experience and agreeableness, are less strong. Thus, the three remaining personality factors, neuroticism, extroversion, and conscientiousness, appear to be the most important in determining how couples experience and adjust to situations and conditions in marital relationships.

In the present study, a typology approach is adopted to examine unique configurations of personality factors in regard to marital satisfaction. The typology was developed by Torgersen (1995, in Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000) and was built on three fundamental personality factors from the core of several basic systems (Eysenck, 1994), those factors being neuroticism or negative affectivity, extroversion or positive affectivity, and conscientiousness. In constructing the typology, Torgersen (1995, in Vollrath & Torgersen, 2002) aimed at representing every possible combination of these three basic personality factors. To this end, he combined high and low scores of each of these factors, which resulted in the eight unique types shown in Table 1.

As Table 1 shows the spectating type (low N, low E, low C) is only slightly responsive to other people or to social cues, has low vulnerability to stress, is emotionally flat, is not very interested in social norms, has low ambition in his or her work, and is passive in coping. The insecure type (high N, low E, low C) is shy and self-conscious, is highly vulnerable to stress, depends on other people's opinions, is overly sensitive to his or her own mental and physical experience, resorts to avoidance, is poorly organized, and is ineffective in coping. The sceptical types (low N, low E, high C) are relatively closed in their relations to others, self-secure, emotionally stable, and effective in managing their lives, but are sometimes somewhat rigid. The brooding type (high N, low E, high C) is shy and withdrawn, ambivalent, vulnerable to stress, prone to negative emotions, insecure, and scrupulous, brooding over every decision and tending to give up easily when meeting difficulty. The hedonistic type (low N, high E, low C) is socially skilled, pleasure-oriented, emotionally and physically robust, and stress resistant. The impulsive type (high N, high E, low C) is attention-seeking and pleasure-oriented, is very vulnerable to stress, is emotionally unstable, being in need of social confirmation, is passive in coping, and appears to be chaotic and changing. The entrepreneurial type (low N, high E, high C) is socially secure, thinks independently, is cool-headed, is domineering, shows talent for leadership, is goal-oriented, is stress-resistant, and is effective in coping. The complicated type (high N, high E, high C) is outgoing and socially dependent, emotionally intense with occasional emotional outbursts and subsequent guilt-feelings, sensitive, dependent on others, conscientious and orderly, and somewhat vulnerable to stress, but also flexible and effective in coping (Lau et al., 2006; Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000; Vollrath & Torgersen, 2002).

Since in many related personality studies, the five factor model is used, we thought that a typology based on this approach would help to achieve our goals and that the results of this study might help people to better select their spouses before marriage. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to compare the eight personality types in regard to the level of marital satisfaction. We predicted that the highest level of marital satisfaction scores would belong to the hedonistic and the entrepreneurial types. We assumed that a combination of low N and high E in Iranian society would be the best predictor of high marital satisfaction. Conversely, lowest marital satisfaction would belong to the insecure- and the impulsive-type personalities because these two types of personalities, due to a combination of high N and low C, could predispose couples to experience the lowest degree of marital satisfaction.

2. Methods and Procedures

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 164 married peoples. They were selected in a simple random fashion by one of the researchers from the local area. One hundred women and 100 men received questionnaires. Among the 170 questionnaire that were returned, 6 questionnaires were excluded due to their being incomplete. For the 164 questionnaires considered in this research, the average participant was 43 years of age ($SD = 11.10$; range: 25-59 years), and the mean duration of marriage was 14 years ($SD = 9.8$, range: 1 to 30 years). About 12.5 % of the individuals who completed the questionnaires had no children; the others had one to five children.

2.2 Measures – personality type

As Vollrath & Torgersen (2000) noted, to build the eight-group personality typology, we also used the neuroticism, extroversion, and conscientiousness scales of the Persian version of the NEO-FFI (Keyamehr, 2002; in Karimzadeh, 2007), which is designed to assess the FFM. Each of those three scales is composed of 12 items that are rated on a five-point answer format (strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)). Descriptive statistics for the scales are as follows: N: mean=33.02, $SD=6.86$, median=32.5; E: mean=40.34, $SD=6.26$, median=41; C: mean=48.06, $SD=6.82$, median=49. The inter-correlation between N and E was $r=-.45$, that between N and C was $r=-.35$, and that between E and C was $r = .43$.

Each participant was assigned to one of Torgersen's (1995) eight personality types by splitting the scales at the median and combining high and low scores. This resulted in the frequency distribution of personality types presented in Table 2. The unequal frequencies of the types are due to the negative correlation between N and E and to the high frequency of participants with scores just at the median. Gender differences among the types were significant ($X^2=38.82$; $df=7$; $P=0.000$).

2.3 Measures - marital satisfaction

The ENRICH questionnaire was provided by Fowers and Olson (1986) as a self-report measure of marital satisfaction. We used the Persian version, a 47-item form of this scale (Solymanian, 1994). In Iran, many studies have confirmed the reliability and validity of the scale (Solymanian, 1994; Mahdaveian, 1997; Ahmadzade, 2005). Cronbach's coefficients of 0.62 to 0.94 and test-retest reliabilities at a one-week interval of 0.94 for men and 0.94 for women were demonstrated.

2.4 Analytical Procedure

This study first investigated whether gender and personality type interacted in regard to marital satisfaction. For this purpose, a two-way analysis was applied as a general linear model univariate procedure in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), where marital satisfaction was used as the dependent variable and personality type and gender were used as the fixed factors. The findings showed independent effects for both gender and personality type, and their interactions were significant. In addition, a series of partial correlations (controlled for gender) were conducted to find the correlations between marital satisfaction and each of the personality traits.

3. Results

As shown in Table 3, the three personality dimensions correlated somewhat with each other. The highest correlation was between neuroticism and extroversion (-.46). Also, personality dimensions correlated with marital satisfaction as dependent variables. The highest correlations between personality dimension and marital satisfaction was that between neuroticism and marital satisfaction, namely $r = -.56$. Extroversion and conscientiousness correlated positively with marital satisfaction.

The ANOVA test (Table 4) showed that the eight personality types differed significantly with regard to marital satisfaction. The univariate F-tests were significant on the $P < 0.000$ level. The highest number of elevated mean scores for marital satisfaction was in the entrepreneurial type (mean=187.44, SD=19.58, n=41). This type identifies with low N and high E & C. Also, the least number of elevated mean scores for marital satisfaction belonged to the insecure type, which identifies with high N and low E & C. The results of the two-way analysis in Table 4 indicate that the main effects of personality type and gender are significant. Namely, satisfaction scores for various personality types and for both genders are different ($F=11.63$, $p<0.000$, and $\text{Eta squared}=.35$ & $F=11.64$, $p<0.001$, $\text{Eta squared}=.07$, respectively). Also, the interactions between of personality types and gender (Types*Gender) were significant. On the other hand, marital satisfaction differed with the personality types of men/women ($F= 2.46$, $p<0.02$, $\text{Eta squared}=.10$).

Levene's test showed that the error variances of the dependent variable were equal among the groups (with $F=.83$ & $p=.64$). Pair-wise comparisons indicated that most of the differences belonged to entrepreneurial and insecure types (mean difference=-45.28, SD=5.55, & $p=0.0000$. On the contrary, the least mean differences were observed between the insecure and the brooding types (mean difference=-14.14, SD=6.30, & $p = .026$). As predictable, individuals with entrepreneurial-type personalities showed the highest marital satisfaction (mean= 187.43, SD= 19.58), and individuals with insecure-type personalities showed the lowest marital satisfaction (mean= 144.90, SD= 25.62).

4. Discussion

The present study examined a personality typology built on high vs. low neuroticism, extroversion, and conscientiousness with regard to marital satisfaction. We assumed that the entrepreneurial- and the hedonistic-type personalities would show the highest level of marital satisfaction, which hypothesis was confirmed. Conversely, we assumed that the insecure- and the impulsive-type personalities would show the lowest level of marital satisfaction. The results suggested that the insecure type had the least marital satisfaction. On the other hand, findings showed that the eight types on the personality typology exhibited unique patterns regarding marital satisfaction. Some types experienced higher or lower satisfaction with regard to their marital relationships. The mean satisfaction scores for both men and women indicated that the highest mean, the best predictor of marital satisfaction, belonged to the

entrepreneurial type with a combination of low N, high E, and high C. As shown in the literature, high neuroticism, which has characteristics such as negative emotion, general nervousness, and pervasive experiences of negative affectivity such as fear, guilt, and irritation, has the strongest relation, negatively, with marital satisfaction (Aluja et al., 2004; Barelds, 2005; Bouchard et al., 1999; Caughlin et al., 2000; Davila et al., 2003; Donnellan et al., 2004; Eysenck & Wakefield, 1981; Geist & Glibent, 1996; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004; Malouff et al., 2010; Moller, 2004; Robins et al., 2000; Watson et al., 2000).

In addition to low neuroticism, the entrepreneurial type exhibits high extroversion and high conscientiousness. Conscientiousness with reflective feelings of competence and responsibility, with a need for achievement, and with organizational skills, preparation, and self-direction is the second best variable for predicting increased marital satisfaction. Previous research, also, reported a correlation of high conscientiousness with a high level of marital satisfaction (Botwin et al., 1997; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Kosek, 1996; Kwan et al., 1997; Malouff et al., 2010; Robins et al., 2000; Rogers, 1999).

The final variable in the entrepreneurial type is high extroversion. Extroverted individuals are characterized by liveliness, high activity levels, sociability, dominance, energy, and cheerfulness. Several studies have shown positive correlations between extroversion and marital satisfaction (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Gattis et al., 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Malouff et al., 2010; Nemechek & Olson, 1996; Robins et al., 2000; Russell & Wells, 1994; Watson et al., 2000; White et al., 2004,) while other studies have shown non-significant correlations between these variables (Botwin et al., 1997; Cramer, 1993, Lester et al., 1989, and Wang et al., 2005, in Schmitt et al., 2007). Thus, research on extroversion and marital satisfaction has produced inconsistent results.

After entrepreneurs, the highest satisfaction for both men and women belonged to hedonistic-type personality. The hedonistic type combines low N, high E, and low C. Some researchers have found and explained a relation between low N plus high E and increased marital satisfaction (Aluja et al., 2004; McFatter, 1994), which is associated with reported links between extroversion and marital satisfaction (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Gattis et al., 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Malouff et al., 2010; Nemechek & Olson, 1996; Robins et al., 2000; Russell & Wells, 1994; Watson et al., 2000; White et al., 2004).

Moreover, sceptical-type males, who feature low N, low E, and high C, showed marital-satisfaction scores similar to those of hedonistic-type males. In this study, the combination of low neuroticism and high conscientiousness, as observed in the entrepreneurial and the sceptical types, is a possible factor, at least for men, that increases the experience of satisfaction. This result is in line with the literature regarding the negative relation between marital satisfaction and neuroticism, negatively and the positive relation between marital satisfaction and conscientiousness.

Surprisingly, in women of the sceptical type, the least marital satisfaction was observed. In other words, while sceptical-type men showed the second highest marital satisfaction, following entrepreneurial-type men, sceptical-type women showed the lowest satisfaction. Our interpretation is that the characteristics of sceptical types, such as being reserved in relationships, self-secure, resilient to stress, and emotionally stable, as well as the difference in needs and qualities between men and women in expression and emotional expressiveness, are entirely responsible for sceptical men feeling higher satisfaction than sceptical women.

For men, the insecure type showed the least marital satisfaction. The insecure type features a combination of high N, low E, and low C, and is characterized as being highly vulnerable to stress, experiencing frequent negative emotions, and resorting to avoidance and ineffective coping, which might pre-dispose couples to increase marital dissatisfaction. Insecure-type women have a lower marital satisfaction than sceptical-type women. In men, lower satisfaction was observed in the impulsive-type personality than in the insecure-type personality. An impulsive-type personality with a combination of high N, high E, and low C, as well as a very high vulnerability to stress and emotional instability, tends to lead to decreased marital satisfaction.

The highest levels of satisfaction after those of the entrepreneur, the hedonist, and the sceptic for men belonged to the brooders, the complicated, and the spectator in that order from higher to lower. Among women, the highest degrees of marital satisfaction in order from high to low, after the entrepreneur and the hedonist, were found in the complicated, the spectator, and the Impulsive types.

In summary, our findings showed that a combination of low N and high E, which were observed in hedonistic and entrepreneurial types, is the best indicator for both men and women of marital satisfaction. These groups experience fewer feelings of anxiety, hostility, depression, and worry, and have characteristics such as warmth, gregariousness and excitement seeking, which was what we expected. Because our society values characteristics such as competence, dutifulness, achievement and self-discipline, especially for men, high C, as observed in sceptical type, could be a predictor of high marital satisfaction, at least for men.

This study has some limitations. First, this typological approach splits a trait, reducing the positions of individuals to simply two states, high or low; consequently, a number of individuals might be misclassified. Second, our sample size was rather small, so this study should be repeated with a larger sample size. Finally, this study was conducted in an eastern culture while extracting personality traits based on western culture, which could have an influence on the deductions made.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study with a typological approach based on combinations of the personality factors of neuroticism, extroversion, and conscientiousness provided new insights into the relation between personality and marital satisfaction whereas previous studies found opposite results when investigating spouses' personality similarities or non-similarities for predicting marital satisfaction, with some suggesting an association between personality similarity and marital satisfaction (Gattis et al., 2004; Gonzaga et al., 2007; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; McGlade, 2008; Robins et al., 2000) and others observing no such association (Barelds, 2005; Glicksohn & Golan, 2001; Neyer & Voigt, 2004; Russell & Wells, 1991; Shoita & Levenson, 2007; Watson et al., 2004). Therefore, we conclude that research ought to be directed towards indicating the most suitable combinations of personality types for couples to achieve the highest level of marital satisfaction, which would open a new window for premarital studies. Furthermore, we found that this typology constituted a source of inspiration for research.

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Annexure

Table 1. The eight personality types (adopted from Vollrath & Torgersen, 2002)

Type	N Neuroticism	E Extroversion	C Conscientiousness
Spectating	Low	Low	Low
Insecure	High	Low	Low
Sceptical	Low	Low	High
Brooding	High	Low	High
Hedonistic	Low	High	Low
Impulsive	High	High	Low
Entrepreneurial	Low	High	High
Complicated	High	High	High

Table 2. Frequency distribution of personality types

Type	sex		Total
	Female	male	
Spectating	7	10	17
Insecure	10	20	30
Sceptical	2	5	7
Brooding	14	9	23
Hedonistic	8	9	17
Impulsive	6	9	15
Entrepreneurial	27	14	41
Complicated	8	6	14

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation and partial correlations (controlled for gender) between marital satisfaction and each of the three personality dimensions addressed in this research

	M	SD	Neuroticism	Extroversion	Conscientious
Neuroticism	33.02	6.86	-	-.46	-.37
Extroversion	40.34	6.26	-.46	-	.41
Conscientiousness	48.06	6.82	-.37	.41	-
Marital satisfaction	167.14	27.57	-.56	.55	.43

p < .001

Table 4. Summary of the two-way analysis of the variance for the variables of personality type and gender and their interactions

	<i>df</i>	<i>mean square</i>	<i>F-test</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Partial Eta squared</i>
Personality types	7	5554.19	11.63	0.000	.35
Gender	1	5558.58	11.64	0.001	.07
Types * Gender	7	1176.81	2.46	0.020	.10