

## Personality Traits, the Risk of Divorce and Marital Satisfaction: An Intrapersonal Model

Bahareh Zare, Rohany Nasir, Khariul Anwar Mastor and W.S. Wan Shahrazad  
School of Psychology and Human Development,  
National University of Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Malaysia

**Abstract:** The theory of intrapersonal model maintains that an individual's personality traits can directly affect marital satisfaction. Although, an intrapersonal model in its extreme version may suggest that the negative relationship between characteristic anxieties and marital satisfaction is mediated by marital communication, the interpersonal and intrapersonal models do not share the same limitations. Any intrapersonal persuasion is most likely accompanied with interpersonal procedures. This study tested the relationship between the five factor model of personality (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness), marital satisfaction and the risk of divorce. The participants completed NEO-FFI and ENRICH and they were interviewed according to the OHI (Oral History Interview) method. The results demonstrate that neuroticism is as a significant predictor of marital satisfaction and the risk of divorce. In addition, such traits as conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion and openness to experience can help predict satisfaction in married couples.

**Key words:** Five factors personality, marital satisfaction, the risk of divorce, satisfaction, married couples

---

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage establishes a pleasant and sacred environment and as described by the Holy Quran, it is a sanctuary of peace and tranquillity (Quran, Surah Rome, verse 21). In the light of evidence that marital satisfaction is one of the most revealing predictors of success in a marriage. This evaluation can reflect how happy couples are with their marriage in general or a mix of satisfaction and several thorough aspects of marital relationship. There has been significant interest in recognizing the variables that can help predict marital breaking down (Kurdek, 2002). Marriage, marital satisfaction and personality are among the rigorously studied variables in numerous researches. The reason for the fascination with marital satisfaction is that researchers as a result of a wide range of studies have come to believe that marital satisfaction can be related to factors establishing marital stability (Caughlin *et al.*, 2000; Rosen-Grandon *et al.*, 2004; Shackelford and Buss, 2000; Spotts *et al.*, 2005).

Personality characteristics, over the past 60 years have been the crucial centre of interest in studies dedicated to couples' relationships to describe and predict relationship stability and quality (Schneewind and Gerhard, 2002). Neuroticism is a personality characteristic

often classified as an essential cause of marital termination (Duggan *et al.*, 2001; Duncan *et al.*, 2003; Robins *et al.*, 2000; White *et al.*, 2004). Used in pre-marriage personality questionnaires, emotional stability is a personality trait found to be useful for predicting marital satisfaction in couples before marriage. (Barelds, 2005; Friedman, 2000).

Another predictive personality factor can be the conscientiousness. Divorced couples show extra spontaneous behavior than those with high marital stability (White *et al.*, 2004). As a result, one of the possible personality predictors of negative marital consequences seem to involve low impulse control and high neuroticism in couples (Neyer and Voigt, 2004; O'Rourke *et al.*, 2011).

Low agreeableness in wives is the strongest predictor of irritation and distress in their husbands. Botwin *et al.* (1997) contend that being married to an agreeable spouse is an especially well-constructed predictor of marital satisfaction. They also explain that emotional stability, intellect-openness and conscientiousness are associated with satisfaction. According to the findings of related studies, being married to an agreeable spouse can most strongly help predict satisfaction in a marriage viewed from the BFF perspective (Shackelford and Buss, 2000). Also, a husband's low emotional stability and low

agreeableness, according to Shackelford *et al.* (2000) can consistently help predict his partner's marital dissatisfaction. Furthermore, individuals with constantly disagreeable partners and bitterly untrustworthy spouses are not satisfied with their marriage (Shackelford *et al.*, 2008).

The studies also report that there is a relationship between openness/intellect and marital satisfaction. Amiri *et al.* (2011) in a study explored the effects of big-five personality traits and communication styles on the marital satisfaction of married students studying in Tehran State Universities. The participants in the study filled NEO, communication styles and enrich marital satisfaction questionnaires. Their findings indicated that openness to experience had a significant and positive relationship with marital satisfaction.

Divorce too is a multifaceted phenomenon happening to a marriage while it can be analysed from numerous perspectives. For instance, the various features of marital interaction can be described as including such factors as personality characteristics, antisocial behaviour or constant pessimistic effect (Testa and Leonard, 2001). Divorce procedures can often disrupt the emotional, physiological and psychological health of divorced couples. Also to understand the reason couples resort to divorce, one should consider the link between some variables, such as personality, marital satisfaction, infidelity and divorce.

The relation between personality and the risk of divorce is also one of the thought-provoking areas in psychological studies and particularly for family therapists because it can prove to be helpful in pre-marriage consultations to prevent divorce. Wives who divorced untimely in life obtained a higher score on neuroticism had more unsteady and more stressed families were less strict in their manners and had more sexual and romantic experiences before their marriage compared to the steadily married women (Gattis *et al.*, 2004).

The purpose of the present research is to address two major questions:

- Do individuals with especial personalities (i.e., those low on agreeableness) tend to be more or less satisfied with their marriage and experience a high risk of divorce?
- Do people with especial personalities (i.e., those high on neuroticism) tend to get divorce?

The current study is concerned with the personality factors that possibly affect an individual's marital satisfaction and the risk of divorce. It was hypothesized that the higher the level of individuals'

agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness the more satisfied they are with their marriage. It was also hypothesized that the higher the level of individuals' neuroticism and extraversion, the higher the risk of divorce.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Participants:** The sample consisted of 134 males (40% response rate) and 183 females (60% response rate) aged between 20-55 years all of whom had been married for at least for 2 years. A convenient sampling procedure was used in this study with a total of 600 questionnaires distributed among couples and 307 questionnaires returned (40 and 60% completion rates for males and females, respectively). The participants were chosen randomly from among the approximately 2000 people, members of couples who referred to a consulting centre in Shiraz-Iran for consulting with a therapist. The participants came from different demographic backgrounds and the only controlling demographic variable was the length of marriage that the samples should get married at least for 2 years.

**Personality traits:** Personality traits were assessed through the NEO-PI-R (NEO-FFI Persian Revised) personality test which is a shortened version of the NEO personality test for measuring personality. A NEO personality test examines the five aspects of personality and their related specifications.

The NEO-FFI involves 60 items of the NEO-PI-R which can be used for making short and fast evaluation of the five major factors; namely Extraversion (E), Neuroticism (N), Openness to experience (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C) with internal consistency coefficients varies from 0.86-0.95 for domain scales and from 0.56-0.90 for facade scales. The responses to each of the items are ranked on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 5 (I strongly agree).

**Marital satisfaction:** Marital satisfaction was measured by ENRICH marital inventory that consists of 47 items classified within an 11-category scale. Fournier *et al.* (1983) enumerated the findings of ten studies carried on marital dissolution and conflict. These researches highlight the significance of intrapersonal matters, such as personality, personal habits, ideals, values, expectations and so on. Interpersonal issues include communication, roles, commitment, sex and conflict resolution. Yet, external matters involve such themes as friends, relatives, parenting and money and children.

**Risk of divorce:** Risk of divorce was measured using the semi-structured Oral History Interview (OHI) during the OHI spouses are requested to tell the story of their relationship from the time they met until the present day. Couples are also requested to talk about the hard and good times in their marriage as well as their philosophy about marriage, as well as their evaluation of their parents' marriages compared to their own marriage. Buehlman *et al.* (1992) used the oral history interview (Krokoff, 1984) to measure spouses' universal insights about their marriage and their mutual relationship. They were able to forecast divorce with 94% accuracy. They explained the variables that describe how the couple thinks of their past relationship predict the future of the marriage. Couples who eventually divorced were low in fondness for their partners, high in negativity, low in we-ness, high in chaos, low in glorifying the struggle and high in disappointment of the marriage. Therefore, the way that couples told the story of their relationship could forecast their probability of divorce or marital stability.

### Procedures

**Distribution and completion of self-report measures:** The participants' information sheet and questionnaire packets were given to the couples who were referred to the consulting centre. Both the introduction and questionnaire were in a Microsoft word format on a CD. The participants were asked to download and complete the questionnaires and then return them back to the researcher in a Microsoft word attachment via e-mail. The participants were permitted to change their answers any time during the process of completing the questionnaire, however answers were treat as final once the questionnaire was returned to the researcher. The completed questionnaire could be returned to the researcher at any given time during the 2 months period after its distribution after which participants received a reminder e-mail and phone call every week from the researcher. The participants who returned completed questionnaire were invited for interview to collect the data for OHI.

## RESULTS

This study considered two important questions. Do people with particular personality tend to less satisfied in their marriage and have high risk of divorce? Do people with specific personality tend to get divorce? To explore these questions, a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) strategy was employed. This strategy allows for a stimulative evaluation of two hypothesized effects while evaluating faults in the dependent and independent

variables (Hoyle and Smith, 1994). Figure 1 depicts the structural model of the NEO-FFI, ENRICH and OHI (with estimated standardized parameters). All mentioned variables were scaled to have unit variance via standardizing.

Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square Error Approximation Index (RMSEA) were employed as fit indexes. CMIN (minimum discrepancy) or Chi-square, CMIN/DF <5.0 according to Marsh and Hocevar (1985) and Bentler (1990) index examined the difference between the sample covariance matrix and the confined covariance matrix with the presupposition that the residual difference between them is zero (Table 1). In this index,  $p > 0.05$  shows a good fit.

Considering the overall fit of the model to the observed data, revealed that chi-square with 608 df is 1031.897 a value remarkably distinguished from zero that suggests good model fit. Also, considering the Chi-square/df with ratio 1.70 suggested a good fit of the model to the data. The Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) as well as the unadjusted model of this index approached 0.90. An additional measure of overall model fit was the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) that was measure of the average fitted residuals. The RMR for the hypothesized model was 0.048, representing a good fit of the estimated model to the observed data (Table 2). Byrne (2001) observed that RMSEA values <0.05 show good fit (Bentler and Yuan, 1999) suggested <0.06 as good fit, between 0.05 and 0.08 represent reasonable fit between 0.08 and 0.10 indicate medium fit and if the values are >0.10 show poor fit. Another indication of the good fit of this model to the data is the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.93. The value of CFI ranges from 0-1.00. However, the proposed value for CFI, representative of good fit was between 0.95 and 1.00. Totally, the value of CFI represented consistency with the values of NFI (Normed Fit Index) and IFI (Incremental Fit Index) (Byrne, 2001). Moreover, TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) is 0.93, proposing a sensible fit of the suggested model to the observed data. This goodness of fit indices will obviously reject insufficient or poorly specified models while the hypothesized model of the present research meet real-world criteria for sensible fit for the presentation of the data.

**Composition of main variables:** For each of the five latent exogenous variables derived from the self-reported NEO-FFI personality domains with  $\alpha$  set to 0.001, all paths were remarkably distinguished from zero and paths (loadings-the lowest of which for each domain given in parentheses) satisfactory: Neuroticism (0.72), extraversion (0.44), openness to experience (0.61), agreeableness (0.73)

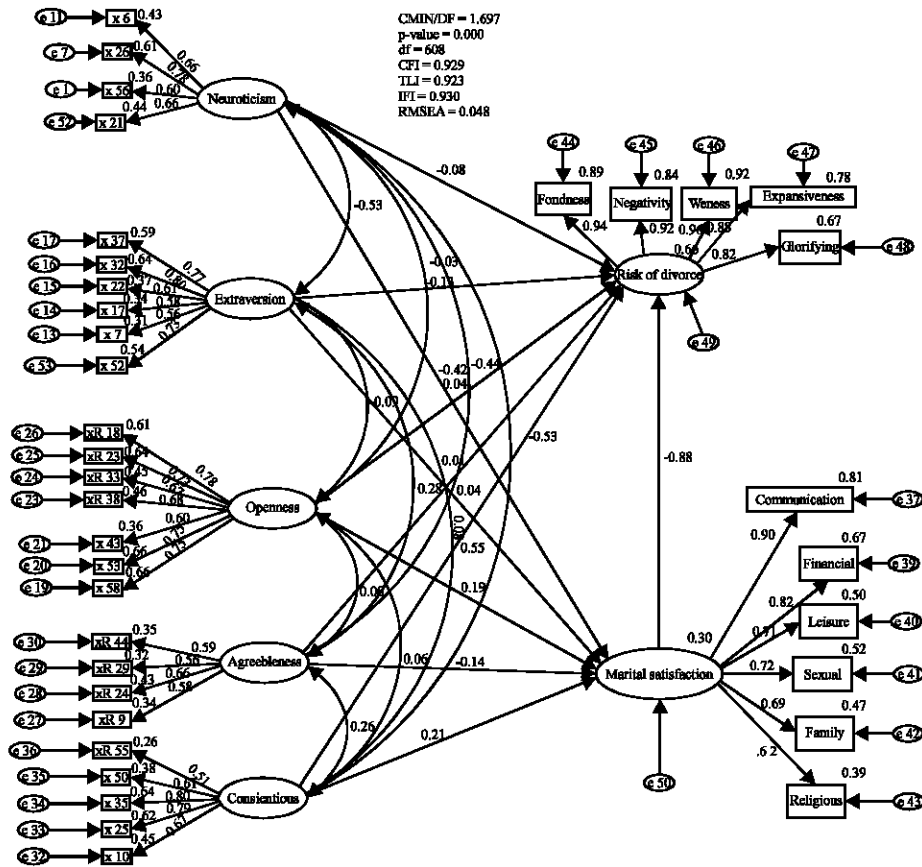


Fig. 1: Structure model of sample

Table 1: CMIN

Models	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default	95	1031.897	608	0.00	1.697
Saturated	703	0.000	0	-	-
Independence	37	6675.716	666	0.00	10.024

Table 2: RMR, GFI

Models	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default	0.304	0.848	0.824	0.733
Saturated	0.000	1.000	-	-
Independence	3.982	0.283	0.243	0.268

and conscientiousness (0.51). Possible correlations between the NEO-FFI domains were examined and are included in Fig. 1. Positive linear relationships were identified between extraversion and each of the following: openness ( $r = 0.10$ ), agreeableness ( $r = 0.28$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r = 0.55$ ). Agreeableness was also found to be positively correlated with openness ( $r = 0.19$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r = 0.26$ ).

The endogenous latent variable marital satisfaction measured satisfaction in a marriage through the six factors: Communication, financial, leisure activities, sexual, family and parenting and religious. To scale marital satisfaction, it was set the path from marital satisfaction to

religious that is 1.0. The standardized path for every indicator (loading) exceeding 0.62, reveals that all six measures are good indicators of the latent factor marital satisfaction. The second endogenous latent variable measured the probability of divorce through the five OHI derived indicators we-ness, expansiveness, fondness/affection, negative and glorifying a struggle. To scale the risk of divorce, it was set the path from the risk of divorce to glorifying equal to 1.0. The standardized path to each indicator (loading) exceeding 0.82, reveals that all five measures are good indicators of the latent factor risk of divorce.

**Prediction of marital satisfaction and divorce:**

According to the model high scores on the neuroticism trait are associated with less marital satisfaction (estimated path = -0.42 with  $\alpha$  set to 0.001). Conversely, neuroticism and extraversion are not significantly associated with the risk of divorce. The conscientiousness and openness traits are similarly positively correlated with marital satisfaction (estimated paths = 0.21 , 0.19). Finally, the estimated path from marital

satisfaction to risk of divorce is significant with  $\alpha$  set to 0.001 (-0.88) suggesting that marital satisfaction might predict risk of getting divorced.

### DISCUSSION

The current study investigated the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction and the risk of divorce. High self-reported scores on neuroticism predicted higher marital satisfaction while neuroticism and extraversion can not predict the risk of divorce. This study managed to support the hypothesis that neuroticism as a personality trait is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction consistent with the findings of Lazarides *et al.* (2010), Fisher and McNulty (2008), Dehle and Landers (2005), Karney and Bradbury, Shackelford and Buss (2000) and Caughlin *et al.* (2000) that showed the relationship between marital satisfaction and anxiety is fairly multifaceted and Gattis *et al.* (2004) who identified this correlation across cultures. Neuroticism is the propensity to experience negative emotions and people who are high on it get irritated and upset easily, often change their mood and worry frequently. People who score high on neuroticism are less satisfied with romance and relationships (DeLongis and Holtzman, 2005). Thus, neurotic individuals are usually less satisfied with their marriage than those who are emotionally stable.

The finding that high openness scores are also predictive of marital satisfaction is consistent with previous studies (Amiri *et al.*, 2011; O'Rourke *et al.*, 2011; Shiota and Levenson, 2007, Watson and Humrichouse, 2006; Luo and Klohnen, 2005; Shackelford and Buss, 2000). Openness to experiences demands visual sympathy, active imagination, consideration of inner experience, appreciation of intellectual aspects and curiosity for diversity.

Additionally, it was found that conscientiousness can predict marital satisfaction in couples. The results of the previous studies consistently confirmed the finding (Shiota and Levenson, 2007; Bekkers *et al.*, 2006; Dehle and Landers, 2005; Boertien *et al.*, 2012; Kalmijn, 2005; Kinnunen and Pulkkinen, 2003; Tucker *et al.*, 1998). According to the NEO-FFI manual, conscientious individuals are usually reliable and hardworking. In extreme cases, they may also be as idealistic as perfectionists as exceedingly hardworking as workaholics or may have obsessive-compulsive tendencies.

People who are low on conscientiousness may be more laid back, less goal-oriented and less driven (Rosowsky *et al.*, 2012).

### CONCLUSION

In this study, results showed that from among the five factors of personality (extraversion, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness), neuroticism could determine marital satisfaction more illuminating than other traits. Also, it was demonstrated that there is an obvious negative relationship between marital satisfaction and the risk of divorce. As Rogers and DeBoer (2001) states when couples are not satisfied with their marriage they are more likely to terminate their marriage.

### REFERENCES

- Amiri, M., F. Farhoodi, N. Abdolvand and A.R. Bidakhavidi, 2011. A study of the relationship between Big-five personality traits and communication styles with marital satisfaction of married students studying in state universities of Tehran. *Procedia-Social Behav. Sci.*, 30: 685-689.
- Barelds, D.P.H., 2005. Self and partner personality in intimate relationships. *Eur. J. Pers.*, 19: 501-518.
- Bekkers, R., M.A.G. van Aken and J. Denissen, 2006. Social structure and personality assortment among married couples. *Proceedings of the Dag van de Sociologie Conference*, June 8, 2006, Tilburg University, The Netherlands, pp: 1-12.
- Bentler, P.M. and K.H. Yuan, 1999. Structural equation modeling with small samples: Test statistics. *Multivariate Behav. Res.*, 34: 181-197.
- Bentler, P.M., 1990. Comparative fit indexes in structural models. *Psychol. Bull.*, 107: 238-246.
- Boertien, D., C. von Scheve and M. Park, 2012. Education, personality and separation: The distribution of relationship skills across society. *SOEPpaper No. 487*.
- Botwin, M.D., D.M. Buss and T.K. Shackelford, 1997. Personality and mate preferences: Five factors in mate selection and marital satisfaction. *J. Pers.*, 65: 107-136.
- Buehlman, K.T., J.M. Gottman and L.F. Katz, 1992. How a couple views their past predicts their future: Predicting divorce from an oral history interview. *J. Family Psychol.*, 5: 295-318.
- Byrne, B.M., 2001. Structural equation modeling with AMOS, EQS and LISREL: Comparative approaches to testing for factory validity of a measuring instrument. *Int. J. Test.*, 1: 55-86.
- Caughlin, J.P., T.L. Huston and R.M. Houts, 2000. How does personality matter in marriage? An examination of trait anxiety, interpersonal negativity and marital satisfaction. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, 78: 326-336.

- DeLongis, A. and S. Holtzman, 2005. Coping in context: The role of stress, social support and personality in coping. *J. Pers.*, 73: 1633-1656.
- Dehle, C. and J.E. Landers, 2005. You can't always get what you want, but can you get what you need? Personality traits and social support in marriage. *J. Soc. Clin. Psychol.*, 24: 1051-1076.
- Duggan, S., M. O'Brien and J.K. Kennedy, 2001. Young adults' immediate and delayed reactions to simulated marital conflicts: Implications for intergenerational patterns of violence in intimate relationships. *J. Consult. Clin. Psychol.*, 69: 13-24.
- Duncan, L.E., B.E. Peterson and E.E. Ax, 2003. Authoritarianism as an agent of status quo maintenance: Implications for women's careers and family lives. *Sex Roles*, 49: 619-630.
- Fisher, T.D. and J.K. McNulty, 2008. Neuroticism and marital satisfaction: The mediating role played by the sexual relationship. *J. Family Psychol.*, 22: 112-122.
- Fournier, D.G., D.H. Olson and J.M. Druckman, 1983. Assessing Marital and Premarital Relationships: The PREPARE-ENRICH Inventories. In: *Marriage and Family Assessment: A Sourcebook for Family Therapy*, Felsing, E.E. (Ed.). Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, USA., pp: 229-250.
- Friedman, H.S., 2000. Long-term relations of personality and health: Dynamisms, mechanisms, tropisms. *J. Pers.*, 68: 1089-1107.
- Gattis, K.S., S. Berns, L.E. Simpson and A. Christensen, 2004. Birds of a feather or strange birds? Ties among personality dimensions, similarity and marital quality. *J. Family Psychol.*, 18: 564-574.
- Hoyle, R. and G.T. Smith, 1994. Formulating clinical research hypotheses as structural equation models: A conceptual overview. *J. Consulting Clin. Psychol.*, 62: 429-440.
- Kalmijn, M., 2005. The effects of divorce on men's employment and social security histories. *Eur. J. Popul.*, 21: 347-366.
- Kinnunen, U. and L. Pulkkinen, 2003. Childhood socio-emotional characteristics as antecedents of marital stability and quality. *Eur. Psychologist*, 8: 223-237.
- Krokoff, L.J., 1984. The anatomy of blue-collar marriages. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA.
- Kurdek, L.A., 2002. Predicting the timing of separation and marital satisfaction: An eight-year prospective longitudinal study. *J. Marriage Family*, 64: 163-179.
- Lazarides, A., C. Belanger and S. Sabourin, 2010. Personality as moderator of the relationship between communication and couple stability. *Eur. J. Psychol.*, 6: 11-31.
- Luo, S. and E.C. Klohnen, 2005. Assortative mating and marital quality in newlyweds: A couple-centered approach. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, 88: 304-326.
- Marsh, H.W. and D. Hocevar, 1985. Application of confirmatory factor analysis to the study of self-concept: First-and higher order factor models and their invariance across groups. *Psychol. Bull.*, 97: 562-582.
- Neyer, F.J. and D. Voigt, 2004. Personality and social network effects on romantic relationships: A dyadic approach. *Eur. J. Pers.*, 18: 279-299.
- O'Rourke, N., A. Claxton, P.H.B. Chou, J.Z. Smith and T. Hadjistavropoulos, 2011. Personality trait levels within older couples and between-spouse trait differences as predictors of marital satisfaction. *Aging Mental Health*, 15: 344-353.
- Robins, R.W., A. Caspi and T.E. Moffitt, 2000. Two personalities, one relationship: Both partners' personality traits shape the quality of their relationship. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, 79: 251-259.
- Rogers, S.J. and D.D. DeBoer, 2001. Changes in wives income: Effects on marital happiness, psychological Wella?™ Being and the risk of divorce. *J. Marriage. Family*, 63: 458-472.
- Rosen-Grandon, J.R., J.E. Myers and J.A. Hattie, 2004. The relationship between marital characteristics, marital interaction processes and marital satisfaction. *J. Counsel. Develop.*, 82: 58-68.
- Rosowsky, E., K.D. King, F.L. Coolidge, C.S. Rhoades and D.L. Segal, 2012. Marital satisfaction and personality traits in long-term marriages: An exploratory study. *Clin. Gerontologist*, 35: 77-87.
- Schneewind, K.A. and A.K. Gerhard, 2002. Relationship personality, conflict resolution and marital satisfaction in the first 5 years of marriage. *Fam. Relations*, 51: 63-71.
- Shackelford, T.K., G.J. LeBlanc and E. Drass, 2000. Emotional reactions to infidelity. *Cognition Emotion*, 14: 643-659.
- Shackelford, T.K. and D.M. Buss, 2000. Marital satisfaction and spousal cost-infliction. *Person. Individual Differences*, 28: 917-928.
- Shackelford, T.K., A. Besser and A.T. Goetz, 2008. Personality, marital satisfaction and probability of marital infidelity. *Indiv. Diff. Res.*, 6: 13-25.
- Shiota, M.N. and R.W. Levenson, 2007. Birds of a feather don't always fly farthest: Similarity in big five personality predicts more negative marital satisfaction trajectories in long-term marriages. *Psychol. Aging*, 22: 666-675.
- Spotts, E.L., P. Lichtenstein, N. Pedersen, J.M. Neiderhiser, K. Hansson, M. Cederblad and D. Reiss, 2005. Personality and marital satisfaction: A behavioural genetic analysis. *Eur. J. Personality*, 19: 205-227.

- Testa, M. and K.E. Leonard, 2001. The impact of marital aggression on women's psychological and marital functioning in a newlywed sample. *J. Family Viol.*, 16: 115-130.
- Tucker, J.S., N.R. Kressin, A. Spiro III and J. Ruscio, 1998. Intrapersonal characteristics and the timing of divorce: A prospective investigation. *J. Soc. Personal Relat.*, 15: 211-225.
- Watson, D. and J. Humrichouse, 2006. Personality development in emerging adulthood: Integrating evidence from self-ratings and spouse ratings. *J. Personal. Soc. Psycho.*, 91: 959-974.
- White, J.K., S.S. Hendrick and C. Hendrick, 2004. Big five personality variables and relationship constructs. *Personal. Individ. Diff.*, 37: 1519-1530.