

Agreeableness and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction: A Meta-Analytic Review

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Abstract. Romantic relationships are central to human well-being, and personality traits have been identified as key predictors of relationship outcomes. This meta-analysis focused on agreeableness, a core dimension of the Five-Factor Model characterized by kindness and cooperation, to evaluate its association with romantic relationship satisfaction. A systematic search of PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Scopus identified 15 articles, providing 24 independent effect sizes from a total of 15,965 participants. Using a random-effects model, a sensitivity analysis produced a robust pooled estimate of $r = .18$ (95% CI [.15, .21], $p < .001$), confirming agreeableness as a consistent, small-to-moderate predictor that explains approximately 3% of the variance in satisfaction. While conflict management is a key mechanism, these findings have direct practical implications. They provide an evidence-based rationale for relationship counseling and educational programs to target agreeableness-related behaviors, such as empathy, constructive communication, and cooperative problem-solving. For applied psychology, this study underscores that prosocial traits are a foundational component of relational well-being, affirming the value of cultivating kindness to sustain satisfying partnerships.

Keywords: agreeableness, relationship satisfaction, Big Five, personality, romantic relationship

1. Introduction

Romantic relationships are a central component of human life, profoundly influencing emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and psychological health. Given their importance, a primary objective within relationship science has been to identify the key predictors of successful and satisfying partnerships. While situational and dyadic processes play an undeniable role, researchers have increasingly turned to more stable, dispositional factors, such as personality traits, to understand why some individuals consistently foster healthier relationships than others [1]¹. The Five-Factor Model of personality, which includes Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism, has become the most important way to study this area.

¹ Note. References marked with an asterisk (*) indicate studies that were included in the meta-analysis.

Numerous studies have demonstrated unambiguous connections between these personality qualities and different relational outcomes. Low Neuroticism (or high Emotional Stability) and high Conscientiousness, for instance, are consistently linked with higher relationship satisfaction [2]. However, one of the most important qualities for negotiating the difficulties of intimacy is agreeableness, which represents a person's propensity to be cooperative, kind, considerate, and compassionate [3]. Individuals high in agreeableness are expected to engage in more prosocial behaviors, handle disagreements constructively, and be more motivated to maintain positive interpersonal bonds, all of which are foundational to a satisfying partnership.

Indeed, prior research provides strong support for this hypothesis. A landmark meta-analysis by Malouff et al. [2] synthesized 19 studies and found a significant positive correlation between an individual's agreeableness and their partner's relationship satisfaction. More recent work has extended these findings, demonstrating not just a concurrent link but also a long-term one. According to a longitudinal study by O'Meara and South [4], which tracked couples over time, higher agreeableness predicted more stable and positive marital satisfaction trajectories, indicating that its advantages last. The mechanism underlying this relationship may be behaviour during conflict; for instance, a meta-analysis conducted by Tehrani and Yamini [5] revealed a positive correlation between agreeableness and constructive conflict resolution strategies including cooperating and compromise.

Despite this robust body of evidence, the precise magnitude of the association remains subject to variability across studies. This heterogeneity suggests that the effect, while consistently present, may not be uniform. The present study aims to build upon this literature by conducting an updated and comprehensive meta-analysis focused specifically on the link between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction. By synthesizing a larger and more current body of studies, this research seeks to provide the most accurate and reliable estimate of the overall strength of this association. This contribution is important as it will not only confirm the role of agreeableness in relational well-being but also quantify the level of unexplained variance, thereby highlighting the need to explore potential moderators that may influence this foundational effect.

Based on the consistent direction of previous findings, the primary hypothesis of this meta-analysis is that there will be a significant positive correlation between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction. The null hypothesis (H_0) is that the correlation will be zero, while the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is that the correlation will be greater than zero.

2. Method

2.1. Strategy for literature review

A comprehensive literature review was performed to identify all published research in order to examining the relationships between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction level. This search was performed in three major electronic databases: PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Scopus, with no date restrictions, and concluded in September 2025. A comprehensive research string was developed using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators related to the primary constructs: (agreeableness OR the big five OR five-factor model) AND (relationship satisfaction OR marital satisfaction OR dyadic adjustment OR couple satisfaction OR romantic relationship).

2.2. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion

This meta-analysis only included studies that satisfied the following requirements: (a) empirical studies that quantitatively measured both agreeableness and a global measure of romantic relationship satisfaction; (b) reported a Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) between the two constructs, or provided sufficient data from which a correlation could be calculated; and (c) sampled participants currently in a romantic relationship (e.g., dating, cohabiting, or married).

Studies were excluded if they were: (a) qualitative, theoretical, or review articles without original data; (b) focused on non-romantic relationships (e.g., friendships, familial relationships); or (c) the study did not provide the statistics required to calculate the effect size and the authors did not respond to data requests.

The author examined the initial search results by title and abstract, subsequently retrieving and evaluating the full texts of possibly suitable publications for final inclusion.

2.3. Data extraction and coding

A coding database was developed to extract key information from each included study. The following data were extracted: author(s), publishing year, sample size (N), the correlation coefficient (r) between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction, and the country where the study was conducted. When a single study reported multiple independent correlations (e.g., for separate male and female subsamples), each was treated as a separate effect size. For studies reporting on couples, the total number of individuals was used since the sample size to reflect the quantity of independent data points for the personality-satisfaction link.

2.4. Statistical analysis

This meta-analysis was conducted through the R programming language (version 4.3.2) with the metafor package [6]. The Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used for the effect size metric. As is standard practice in meta-analyses of correlations, each r value was converted to Fisher's z using the formula $z = 0.5 * \ln((1+r)/(1-r))$. This transformation stabilizes the variance of the correlation coefficient, making it more suitable for statistical analysis [7]. After analysis, the pooled Fisher's z values were back-transformed to the more intuitive correlation metric for interpretation.

The primary analysis used an a priori random-effects model. This model suggests that the actual effect size might be different between studies, which is a reasonable assumption given the expected variability in samples, methodologies, and cultural contexts across psychological research [7]. The I^2 statistic and Cochran's Q test were used to formally evaluate the existence of heterogeneity. The I^2 statistic is particularly useful as it quantifies the proportion of overall variation among studies attributable to genuine heterogeneity rather than random chance [8].

Potential publication bias was evaluated via visual examination of a funnel plot and by performing Egger's regression test for funnel plot asymmetry. A sensitivity analysis was designed to examine the impact of potential outliers on the overall pooled effect size.

3. Results

3.1. Study selection

The systematic literature search yielded an initial pool of 1,247 unique articles. After screening titles and abstracts, 89 articles were identified for full-text review. Of these, 74 were excluded for not

meeting the inclusion criteria (e.g., not reporting a relevant correlation, using a non-romantic sample). The final sample for the meta-analysis consisted of 15 articles, comprising 24 independent studies with a total of 15,965 participants.

3.2. Main analysis and heterogeneity

The initial random-effects model, including all 24 studies, which showed a significant and positive relationship between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction level. The initial pooled correlation was $r = .23$, 95% CI [.13, .32], $p < .001$. However, the heterogeneity test was significant, $Q(23) = 3985.84$, $p < .001$, and the I^2 statistic was 98.0%. This result indicates that almost all the observed diversity in effect sizes was due to genuine differences between studies rather than sampling error. While formal moderator analyses were beyond the scope of this review, this substantial heterogeneity suggests the association may vary based on substantive factors. For example, potential moderators could include cultural context, as norms around agreeableness may differ, or relationship characteristics such as gender composition and relationship duration. The wide prediction interval ($PI = [-.25, .62]$) further suggested that true effects could vary considerably across different populations and contexts.

3.3. Publication bias and sensitivity analysis

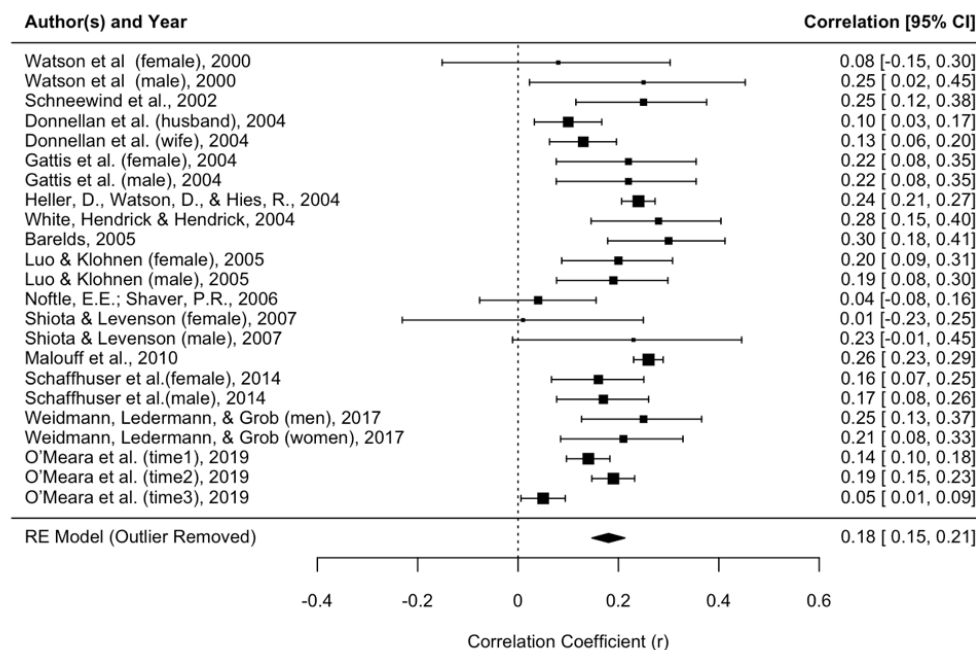


Figure 1. Forest plot of correlations between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction across 24 independent studies (outlier removed) [10] *[11] *[12] *[13] *[14] *[15] *[1] *[16] *[17] *[18] * [2] *[19] *[20] * [4] *

The visual examination of the funnel plot did not indicate significant asymmetry. Egger's regression test was non-significant ($z = -1.22$, $p = .223$), indicating little evidence for publication bias. Closer examination of the data identified the study by Sayehmiri et al. [9], which reported an effect size of $r = .86$, as a highly influential statistical outlier. To assess its impact, a sensitivity analysis was conducted by removing this study and re-running the model with the remaining 23

studies. The revised model continued to show a significant positive association, with a pooled correlation of $r = .18$, 95% CI [.15, .21], $p < .001$. The removal of the outlier resulted in a substantial reduction in heterogeneity, though the level remained significant, $Q(22) = 102.02$, $p < .001$, $I^2 = 73.3\%$. The prediction interval was narrower and strictly positive (PI = [.06, .30]). Given the strong influence of the outlier and the marked reduction in unexplained variance, the result from the sensitivity analysis ($r = .18$) is regarded as a more reliable and stable estimate of the actual effect size. A forest plot summarizing the results of this final model is presented in Figure 1, and the funnel plot is shown in Figure 2.

Each square represents the correlation coefficient (r) for an individual study, with the size of the square proportional to the study's weight in the meta-analysis. Horizontal lines indicate 95% confidence intervals (CI). The vertical dotted line represents the null effect ($r = 0$). The diamond at the bottom represents the pooled random effects estimate after outlier removal ($r = .18$, 95% CI [.15, .21]). Studies generally indicate a small-to-moderate positive association between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction, with variability in effect sizes across samples.

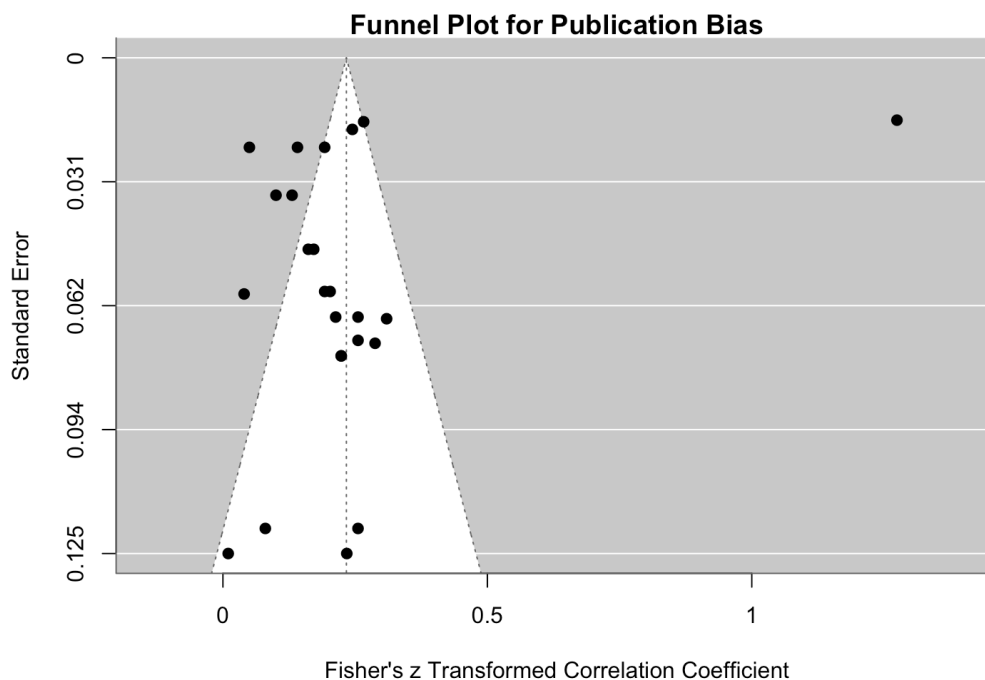


Figure 2. Funnel plot for assessing publication bias in studies of agreeableness and relationship satisfaction

Each dot represents an individual study's effect size (Fisher's z -transformed correlation coefficient) plotted against its standard error. The vertical dashed line marks the pooled effect size estimate, and the triangular region represents the expected 95% confidence limits in the absence of bias. The distribution of points is relatively symmetrical around the pooled effect size, and Egger's regression test was non-significant, suggesting little evidence of publication bias in the meta-analysis.

4. Discussion

This meta-analysis offers a reliable, current estimate of the relationship between agreeableness as a personality attribute and the pleasure of romantic relationships. With an overall correlation of around

$r = 0.18$, the results of the synthesis of 24 independent samples supported the main hypothesis: agreeableness is a trustworthy positive predictor of relationship satisfaction. This effect size is statistically significant and can be characterized as small-to-moderate in magnitude. Notably, this finding converges with prior literature; for example, earlier meta-analyses have documented that higher agreeableness is linked with greater marital satisfaction levels (correlations on the order of $r \approx 0.24$) [2]*. Likewise, narrative reviews of personality in relationships have emphasized the central role of agreeableness (alongside low neuroticism) in supporting the health of intimate bonds [4]*. Overall, the evidence supports the idea that prosocial dispositional qualities, even if they only explain a small percentage of the variance, are significantly associated with relationship well-being.

5. Interpretation and mechanisms

The magnitude of the observed correlation suggests that agreeableness, while important, is but one of many factors contributing to relationship satisfaction. A correlation of $r = 0.18$ indicates that agreeableness explains roughly 3.2% of the variance in satisfaction outcomes, implying that other traits and external circumstances also play substantial roles. Nevertheless, this consistent association invites consideration of the mechanisms by which agreeableness may foster a happier relationship. One primary pathway likely involves the management of interpersonal conflict. Individuals high in agreeableness are predisposed to adopt constructive, cooperative approaches to resolving disagreements [5]. Meta-analytic evidence on conflict resolution styles shows that agreeableness correlates positively with tendencies toward compromise, accommodation, and integration – in other words, agreeable people strive for mutually beneficial solutions and tend to maintain a pleasant, peaceful interaction climate [5]. By contrast, those low in agreeableness are more prone to antagonistic or competitive conflict tactics [5]. Low agreeableness has in fact been identified as a significant risk factor for exhibiting aggressive or hostile behavior toward one's partner [21]. For instance, longitudinal studies find that among the Big Five traits, low agreeableness (along with high neuroticism) is one of the strongest dispositional predictors of intimate partner aggression and violence [21].

Taken together, these patterns suggest that agreeableness promotes relationship satisfaction through two complementary functions: by encouraging positive, prosocial interactions and by inhibiting destructive behaviors. High-agreeability partners are generally trusting, altruistic, and cooperative in their orientation, which likely creates a climate of support and empathy in the relationship. Indeed, people who score higher on agreeableness are motivated to maintain harmonious, kind interactions with others [5]. This means they may be more forgiving, better at perspective-taking, and more willing to engage in collaborative problem-solving during relationship challenges. Such behaviors directly enhance mutual understanding and trust between partners, thereby nurturing satisfaction. Conversely, a disagreeable disposition (characterized by traits like hostility, stubbornness, and lack of empathy) can erode relationship quality by escalating conflicts and undermining emotional security. By fostering cooperation, warmth, and tactful communication, agreeableness appears to bolster the positive processes that make intimate bonds rewarding while also protecting against the corrosive effects of hostility. In short, agreeable personality traits help set the stage for a more positive emotional environment in a couple, which in turn is conducive to higher relationship satisfaction.

6. Limitations and alternative interpretations

Despite the clarity of the main finding, several limitations of this meta-analysis must be acknowledged. First, the analysis revealed a moderate degree of heterogeneity in effect sizes across the included studies ($Q(22) = 102.02$, $p < .001$, $I^2 \approx 73.3\%$ even after removing an outlier). This indicates that the true strength of the agreeableness–satisfaction association likely varies systematically between studies. We did not conduct subgroup or moderator analyses to explain this variance, which is a key limitation of the current synthesis. The heterogeneity could stem from methodological differences – for example, studies used different measures of personality and relationship satisfaction, with varying reliability and scale definitions. It could also reflect substantive sample characteristics. The link between agreeableness and satisfaction might differ by context: for instance, cultural norms could influence how strongly agreeableness affects relationship dynamics, or the effect might depend on whether couples are dating, cohabiting, or married, or on the age of the sample. Without formally examining moderators, we must be cautious in generalizing the exact effect size to all populations; the association may be stronger or weaker under certain conditions that future research should uncover.

Second, although funnel plot inspection did not reveal strong asymmetry, the possibility of publication bias cannot be entirely ruled out. Egger's test was non-significant ($z = -1.22$, $p = .223$), suggesting no systematic evidence of small-study effects in the present dataset. Nonetheless, unpublished or null findings may remain underrepresented in the literature, which could lead to a slight overestimation of the true effect size. In practical terms, agreeableness would still be a meaningful positive predictor of relationship satisfaction, but the exact magnitude of the association may vary somewhat depending on the completeness of the evidence base. Future meta-analytic updates might address this limitation by incorporating unpublished theses, preprints, or open datasets to minimize bias.

A final important limitation is the correlational nature of the evidence base, which constrains the conclusions we can draw about causality. All studies in the meta-analysis relied on observational designs (mostly cross-sectional correlations, with a few longitudinal associations) rather than experimental manipulations. Thus, while it is plausible that higher dispositional agreeableness leads to behaviors that increase relationship satisfaction, one must consider alternative directions of influence. It is also possible that being in a satisfying, supportive relationship can, over time, encourage individuals to behave more agreeably toward their partner. In other words, the causality may be reciprocal or bidirectional: agreeable people make relationships better, and good relationships may in turn reinforce agreeable tendencies or allow those traits to flourish [4]*. Longitudinal studies support this idea to some extent – for example, improvements in relationship quality have been linked to positive personality changes (such as reductions in neuroticism, a trait inversely related to agreeableness) in long-term marriages [4]*. Furthermore, it is possible that a third factor (such as overall mental health or secure attachment style) could independently foster both agreeableness and relationship satisfaction, creating a spurious association between them. Given these possibilities, one should be careful not to overinterpret the findings as proof that "agreeableness causes satisfaction." Rather, we can say that the two go together in many studies. Establishing the direction (or reciprocity) of influence would require longitudinal cross-lagged analyses or experimental interventions that increase agreeableness to see if satisfaction improves as a result. Until such evidence is available, the link should be viewed as a robust association but not necessarily a unidirectional effect.

7. Future directions

The meta-analysis's conclusions offer up a number of research directions. Investigating modifiers that could account for the notable variation in effect sizes is the first priority. One promising line of inquiry concerns the distinction between actor effects and partner effects of personality. Actor effects capture how an individual's own agreeableness predicts their own relationship satisfaction, whereas partner effects assess how one's agreeableness predicts their partner's satisfaction [22]. Our meta-analysis was restricted to actor-style correlations; partner effects were not coded and thus could not be examined. Prior evidence suggests that both types of effects are important, but their magnitudes differ. For example, Malouff et al. [2] reported that actor effects of agreeableness on satisfaction tend to be somewhat stronger ($r \approx .22-.24$) than partner effects ($r \approx .15$). Future syntheses should explicitly code and analyze both actor and partner effects to determine whether it is more beneficial to be an agreeable person or to have an agreeable partner.

Beyond actor–partner distinctions, other moderators may shed light on the observed heterogeneity. Cultural context may alter the strength of the agreeableness–satisfaction link, given cross-cultural differences in the value placed on harmony, collectivism, and conflict avoidance. Gender is another plausible moderator. Some evidence indicates that women may benefit more from having agreeable partners than men do, though findings are mixed and warrant replication [22, 23]. Similarly, relationship duration or stage could moderate effects: agreeableness may be especially influential in the early phases of bonding or conversely may become increasingly important in long-term partnerships for weathering stressors. Zhou et al. [22] found that personality effects on perceived relationship quality varied depending on both gender and relationship length, highlighting the need for more nuanced analyses.

Lastly, samples from Western, educated, industrialised, wealthy, and democratic (WEIRD) societies make up the majority of the literature now in publication. This might limit the generalizability of our findings. A critical priority for future research is to conduct cross-cultural studies to examine whether the importance of agreeableness for relationship satisfaction is a universal phenomenon or if its role is shaped by cultural values regarding harmony, assertiveness, and emotional expression. Similarly, research must extend to more diverse relationship structures, including LGBTQ+ and non-monogamous partnerships, to build a more inclusive relationship science. The methodical application of dyadic actor–partner interdependence models (APIM), which may evaluate how an individual's agreeableness influences both their partner's and their own pleasure (partner effect and actor effect), would be a particularly potent strategy for future research.

8. Practical implications

The results of this meta-analysis have substantial practical significance for applied contexts focused on enhancing relationship quality.

For Couples Therapy and Counseling: The results provide an evidence-based rationale for interventions that foster behaviors reflective of agreeableness. Clinicians can use techniques from frameworks like Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) or Gottman Method Couples Therapy to explicitly train skills such as active listening, expressing empathy, validating a partner's perspective, and engaging in collaborative problem-solving. Our findings suggest that these skills are not just "nice-to-have" communication tools but are behavioral manifestations of a personality trait robustly linked to satisfaction.

For Relationship Education and Training: The strong link between agreeableness and constructive conflict resolution suggests that educational programs should prioritize conflict resolution training.

Workshops can teach couples how to navigate disagreements without resorting to criticism or hostility, thereby building the behavioral patterns characteristic of highly agreeable individuals.

For the General Public: On a broader level, this research validates the common intuition that kindness, generosity, and cooperation are vital for lasting love. It highlights the value of both selecting partners who exhibit these prosocial traits and striving to cultivate these behaviors in oneself.

9. Conclusion

In sum, this meta-analysis confirms that agreeableness is a modest but highly consistent positive predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction. While accounting for a small portion of the variance, its role in fostering constructive interaction and preventing antagonism establishes it as a foundational trait for relational well-being. By connecting dispositional personality with dyadic outcomes, these findings give significant insights for researchers and establish a clear, evidence-based directive for clinical interventions that foster kindness, empathy, and collaboration in intimate relationships.

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