



Research Paper: Personality and Relationship Satisfaction Across Cultures: A Comparative Review of Collectivist and Individualist Contexts



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Abstract

Objective: This review examines how personality traits, particularly those outlined in the Five-Factor Model (FFM), impact relationship satisfaction across diverse cultural contexts. The study highlights the cultural dimensions of collectivism and individualism in shaping how traits such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism affect relational outcomes.

Methods: A comparative analysis of Persian and Western literature was carried out to evaluate how personality traits predict satisfaction in romantic, familial, and parent-child relationships. The review integrates meta-analytical findings, theoretical frameworks such as self-construal theory, and cross-cultural assessments using tools such as the NEO-FFI and EPQ, while addressing methodological challenges in cross-cultural measurement.

Finding: Neuroticism was found to have a universally negative effect on relationship satisfaction across cultures. In a collectivist context such as Iran, conscientiousness and agreeableness emerged as the strongest predictors of relational harmony, while in individualist cultures, extraversion and personal autonomy played more significant roles. The study also revealed measurement biases and the underrepresentation of non-romantic relationships in prior research.

Conclusion: Cultural values profoundly moderate the impact of personality on relationships. This review underscores the importance of culturally sensitive assessment tools and intervention strategies. It calls for future research involving direct cross-cultural comparisons, mixed-methods approaches, and broader relational contexts to build more inclusive psychological models and effective clinical practices.

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1. Introduction

Personality traits, defined as enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, significantly shaping interpersonal relationships and their outcomes across diverse cultural contexts (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). The Five-Factor Model (FFM), encompassing neuroticism (emotional instability), extraversion (sociability and energy), openness (intellectual curiosity and creativity), agreeableness (empathy and cooperation), and conscientiousness (organization and responsibility), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these traits and their impact on satisfaction in romantic partnerships, familial bonds, and parent-child dynamics (Karimi & Mohammadi, 2019; Uhlich et al., 2022). Cultural values, such as collectivism and individualism, further modulate how these traits influence relationship satisfaction, highlighting the need for cross-cultural perspectives (Rezvani Shakib, 2024).

The FFM is widely recognized as a universal tool for personality assessment, applicable across diverse cultural settings (Sayehmiri et al., 2020; Uhlich et al., 2022). However, cultural values, such as collectivism and individualism, profoundly influence how these traits manifest and contribute to relationship satisfaction. In collectivist cultures similar to Iran, where social harmony and familial obligations are prioritized, conscientiousness and agreeableness are strongly associated with higher relationship satisfaction. For instance, a meta-analysis of Iranian studies found conscientiousness to be a robust predictor of marital satisfaction, reflecting cultural values

of duty and responsibility (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Conversely, in individualist Western cultures, which emphasize personal fulfillment and self-expression, extraversion emerges as a key driver of relationship satisfaction, as outgoing individuals are valued for their engaging nature (Uhlich et al., 2022).

Recent research has deepened our understanding of these cultural dynamics. Rezvani Shakib (2024) explores personality traits and relationship satisfaction across cultural contexts; he finds that conscientiousness is a significantly stronger predictor in collectivist Iran compared to individualist Western samples, while extraversion's role is culturally contingent. Similarly, Karimi and Mohammadi (2019) demonstrated that conscientiousness enhances family functioning in Iranian households, underscoring its relational importance in collectivist settings. In contrast, Western studies highlight extraversion's role in fostering romantic satisfaction, aligning with individualist norms (Uhlich et al., 2022).

These findings build on cross-cultural psychology frameworks, such as Hofstede's collectivism-individualism dimension, which explain variations in personality's relational impact (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). This review synthesizes Persian and English literature to examine how personality traits interact with cultural factors to shape relationship satisfaction across romantic, familial, and parent-child contexts. By comparing findings from Iranian and Western studies, the present review aims to identify universal patterns and

culture-specific dynamics, offering insights into the complex interplay of personality, culture, and relationships.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Influences on Personality

Traits

Personality traits, as outlined by the Five-Factor Model (FFM)—neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness—offer a widely recognized framework for exploring individual differences across cultures (McCrae et al., 2015; Terracciano & McCrae, 2017). These traits shape behaviors, emotions, and cognitions, yet their expression and significance are heavily influenced by cultural contexts such as collectivism and individualism, which in turn affect interpersonal outcomes such as relationship satisfaction.

In collectivist societies like Iran, where group harmony and familial duties are paramount, traits such as conscientiousness and agreeableness are highly prized. Recent research on Iranian university students revealed that conscientiousness positively predicts eudaimonic well-being, while neuroticism has a negative correlation (Smith & Johnson, 2022). This echoes findings from a meta-analysis in Iran, which identified a strong link between conscientiousness and marital satisfaction ($r = 0.90$, 95% CI: 0.84–0.95), underscoring the cultural value placed on responsibility and dependability (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Marked by empathy and cooperation, agreeableness is also critical in Persian culture, aligning with norms that emphasize maintaining harmonious relationships (Rezaei et al., 2020).

In contrast, in individualist cultures, the United States and Western Europe, autonomy and self-expression, as well as elevating traits such as extraversion and openness, are prioritized. Studies show that extraversion, tied to sociability and assertiveness, is more prominent in individualist societies that value personal achievement (Oishi et al., 2018). For instance, extraverted individuals in the U.S. are often seen as ideal partners due to their outgoing nature (Malouff et al., 2019). Openness, associated with creativity and curiosity, thrives in settings that encourage innovation and exploration (Schmitt et al., 2016). A global study by Rocha (2024) across 22 nations further highlights how cultural values systematically influence personality trait expression.

Self-construal theory provides additional insight into these differences. In collectivist settings, an interdependent self-construal ties identity to relationships and group roles, as evidenced in Iranian studies where personality is often assessed within family dynamics (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). In individualist contexts, an independent self-construal emphasizes personal traits and achievements. Kwan et al. (2017) found that European Americans derive happiness from accurate perceptions of their personal selves, whereas Asian Americans prioritize perceptions of their collective selves, reflecting divergent cultural priorities.

2.2. Measurement of Personality Traits Across Cultures

Accurate measurement of personality traits across cultures is essential for valid comparisons but is fraught with challenges stemming from linguistic, cultural, and methodological variations. The FFM is commonly evaluated using tools like the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), adapted for diverse populations, including Persian samples (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). However, ensuring measurement equivalence requires addressing cultural nuances in trait expression.

In Iran, the NEO-FFI has been tailored to reflect collectivist values, with conscientiousness and agreeableness items emphasizing the family-oriented behaviors (Karimi & Mohammadi, 2019). For example, conscientiousness might focus on fulfilling familial roles, aligned with cultural norms. Yet, translating traits like openness—linked to exploration and less valued in tradition-focused contexts—poses difficulties. Garcia et al. (2019) demonstrated the cross-cultural reliability of the Big Five Personality Trait Short Questionnaire (BFPTSQ) across Spanish-speaking nations, with minor intercept variations, affirming its adaptability.

In Western individualist settings, the NEO-FFI is calibrated to highlight personal achievement and self-expression (McCrae & Costa, 2015). This can create measurement discrepancies when applied cross-culturally, as extraversion's assertiveness in individualist contexts may contrast with its social harmony focus in collectivist ones. Lee

and Ashton (2022) confirmed the FFM's general equivalence across cultures but noted that extraversion and agreeableness are particularly sensitive to cultural interpretation.

Methodological challenges, such as social desirability bias, further complicate the assessment. In collectivist cultures, respondents may inflate agreeableness to align with social expectations (Sayehmiri et al., 2020), while in individualist cultures, self-enhancement may boost extraversion scores (Kwan et al., 2017). To mitigate these issues, mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative tools with qualitative insights have been proposed to capture culturally specific trait expressions better (Cheung et al., 2018).

2.3. Personality Traits and Relationship Satisfaction Within Cultures

The influence of personality traits on relationship satisfaction is well-documented, but their strength and nature vary across cultural contexts (Mund et al., 2016). FFM traits shape satisfaction in romantic and familial relationships, modulated by cultural norms regarding collectivism in Iran and individualism in the West. This section examines these dynamics within specific cultural contexts, drawing on Persian and English literature.

In collectivist cultures such as Iran, traits that foster relational harmony are paramount. A meta-analysis of 18 Iranian studies (N = 4,049) found conscientiousness as the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction ($r = 0.90$, 95% CI: 0.84–0.95), reflecting collectivist values of duty and responsibility

(Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Similarly, Rezvani Shakib (2024) examined the relationship between personality traits, such as conscientiousness, and relationship satisfaction in her research, demonstrating how these traits function in different cultural contexts. Agreeableness, characterized by empathy, also strongly correlates ($r = 0.855$, 95% CI: 0.80–0.90), supporting harmonious relationships. Neuroticism, linked to emotional instability, negatively correlates ($r = -0.439$, 95% CI: 0.27–0.60), disrupting family cohesion. Derived from the NEO-FFI and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Inventory, these findings highlight traits aligning with Iranian norms. A study among Iranian nurses reinforced that conscientiousness and agreeableness predict marital satisfaction (Rezaei et al., 2020). Karimi and Mohammadi (2019) found that conscientiousness enhances family functioning, suggesting its broader relational impact. Additionally, findings from Iranian school contexts highlight how parental conscientiousness and parenting styles predict emotional outcomes such as anxiety, further reinforcing the relational importance (Okati et al., 2019).

Eysenck et al. (1994) investigated personality traits in Iranian children, revealing lower extraversion and higher neuroticism compared to their English counterparts. These early traits likely shape family dynamics, as elevated neuroticism in children may strain parental satisfaction, while reduced extraversion aligns with Iran's collectivist cultural emphasis on stability over sociability (Shahidi et al., 2015). This extends to familial relationships, where

conscientious parents, through authoritative parenting styles, foster cohesive family environments (Alidosti et al., 2016). High neuroticism may also contribute to parent-teen conflicts, challenging family cohesion in collectivist settings (Valizadeh et al., 2018).

In individualist cultures, traits promoting personal fulfillment are emphasized. A meta-analysis of 29 Western studies found extraversion moderately correlates with relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), as extraverted individuals are seen as engaging partners (Malouff et al., 2010). Agreeableness also correlates positively ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting mutual respect. Neuroticism shows a stronger negative correlation ($r = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$), undermining fulfillment.

These findings suggest that extraversion's influence on relationship satisfaction may vary across cultural contexts, whereas neuroticism's negative impact appears to be consistent globally. For instance, Schmitt et al. (2008) found that while extraversion levels differed significantly across cultures, neuroticism consistently predicted lower relationship satisfaction across diverse populations. Similarly, Kim et al. (2017) observed that the association between extraversion and life satisfaction was stronger in North American samples compared to other cultural contexts, indicating cultural contingency. In contrast, neuroticism's negative correlation with life satisfaction remained stable across cultures.

Self-construal explains these patterns. In collectivist cultures, interdependent self-construal emphasizes relational roles,

amplifying conscientiousness and agreeableness (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). In individualistic cultures, independent self-construal emphasizes autonomy and personal achievement, which are closely associated with higher levels of extraversion. This cultural orientation encourages individuals to express themselves openly and engage in social interactions, fostering extraverted behaviors (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Conversely, in collectivist cultures like Iran, conscientiousness plays a more significant role in familial satisfaction, as it aligns with cultural values of duty, harmony, and familial responsibility (Atari et al., 2017). In Western contexts, extraversion is more strongly linked to romantic satisfaction, reflecting the cultural emphasis on personal fulfillment and expressive communication in intimate relationships (Kim et al., 2017).

2.4. Personality and Non-Romantic Relationships

While much research focuses on romantic relationships, personality traits also influence non-romantic relationships, such as parent-child and extended family dynamics, particularly in collectivist cultures. In Iran, where family structures are central, conscientiousness and agreeableness enhance satisfaction in these contexts. Rahimi et al. (2022) found that parental conscientiousness predicts parent-child relationship satisfaction, as responsible parents foster trust and stability. Agreeableness facilitates empathetic communication, reducing conflicts in extended family settings (Karimi & Mohammadi, 2019).

In Western cultures, extraversion is more relevant in parent-child relationships, as outgoing parents engage children in shared activities, enhancing satisfaction (Malouff et al., 2010). Neuroticism negatively affects these relationships universally, with emotionally unstable parents creating tension (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Eysenck et al. (1994) suggested that high neuroticism in Iranian children may strain parent-child interactions, highlighting the bidirectional influence of personality.

This broader relational scope addresses a limitation of prior research, which often overlooks non-romantic contexts. Including these dynamics enriches cross-cultural understanding, as family structures vary significantly between collectivist and individualist societies.

2.5. Cross-Cultural Comparisons

The relationship between personality traits and relationship satisfaction is shaped by cultural contexts, with collectivist and individualist cultures exhibiting both shared and distinct patterns. This section compares findings from Iran and Western nations to identify universal and culture-specific differences.

Neuroticism universally negatively affects relationship satisfaction. In Iran, a meta-analysis found a negative correlation with marital satisfaction ($r = -0.439$, 95% CI: 0.27–0.60) (Sayehmiri et al., 2020), attributed to disrupted stability. In Western studies, the correlation is stronger ($r = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting an emphasis on the fulfillment of individual needs and personal goals (Malouff et al., 2010). Eysenck et al.

(1994) noted higher neuroticism in Iranian children, suggesting early traits influence later dynamics.

Conscientiousness and agreeableness are culture-specific. In Iran, conscientiousness strongly predicts marital satisfaction ($r = 0.90$, 95% CI: 0.84–0.95), reflecting duty (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Agreeableness follows ($r = 0.855$, 95% CI: 0.80–0.90), supporting harmony (Rezaei et al., 2020). In the West, conscientiousness has a modest correlation ($r = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$), while agreeableness is secondary to extraversion ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$) (Malouff et al., 2010).

Extraversion's role varies. In the West, it predicts satisfaction ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), aligning with sociability (Malouff et al., 2010). In Iran, the correlation is weaker ($r = 0.833$, 95% CI: 0.77–0.88), as stability is prioritized (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). Eysenck et al. (1994) found lower extraversion in Iranian children, supporting cultural differences.

Self-construal explains these patterns: interdependent self-construal in collectivist cultures enhances conscientiousness, while independent self-construal boosts extraversion (Kwan et al., 2007). Limited direct comparisons involving Iran highlight a research gap (Uhlich, 2022). However, recent research, such as Rezvani Shakib's (2024) study, has helped fill this gap by examining the relationship between personality traits and relationship satisfaction across cultural contexts and provided us with useful data on how culture influences these relationships.

3. Methods

This study was conducted using a qualitative narrative review methodology. The purpose was to synthesize and critically analyze existing research on the relationship between personality traits and relationship satisfaction across different cultural contexts. To this end, relevant Persian and international scholarly sources were systematically identified and reviewed.

The literature search prioritized peer-reviewed journal articles, meta-analyses, and theoretical studies focusing on the Five-Factor Model (FFM) and its association with romantic, familial, and parent-child relationship satisfaction. Special attention was given to integrating findings from collectivist societies, particularly Iranian studies, alongside research from individualist cultures to provide a comparative cross-cultural perspective.

In conducting the review, methodological considerations such as measurement equivalence, cultural validity, and potential biases were critically assessed. This approach enabled a comprehensive synthesis of the existing body of knowledge and facilitated the identification of both universal and culturally specific patterns influencing the relationship between personality traits and relationship satisfaction.

4. Finding

The findings of this study suggested that neuroticism universally undermines relationship satisfaction, with correlations of -0.439 in Iran (Sayehmiri et al., 2020) and -0.39 in the West (Malouff et al., 2010). Its stronger effect in individualist cultures reflects emotional expression norms. In Iran,

conscientiousness ($r = 0.90$) and agreeableness ($r = 0.855$) dominate, aligning with collectivist values (Sayehmiri et al., 2020; Rezaei et al., 2020). Eysenck et al. (1994) suggested that early personality traits in Iranian children influence family

dynamics. In the West, extraversion ($r = 0.21$) and agreeableness ($r = 0.23$) are key (Malouff et al., 2010). Table 1 synthesizes major findings from Persian and Western research on personality traits and relationship satisfaction.

Table 1

Comparison of Personality Traits Predicting Relationship Satisfaction in Persian and Western Contexts

Aspect	Persian Studies	Western Studies	Key Difference
Key Traits	Conscientiousness ($r = 0.90$), Agreeableness ($r = 0.855$) (Sayehmiri et al., 2020)	Extraversion ($r = 0.21$), Agreeableness ($r = 0.23$) (Malouff et al., 2010)	Collectivists focus on duty, vs. individualists focus on sociability
Neuroticism	$r = -0.439$ (Sayehmiri et al., 2020)	$r = -0.39$ (Malouff et al., 2010)	Stronger in individualist cultures
Cultural Values	Harmony, duty (Eysenck et al., 1994; Karimi & Mohammadi, 2019)	Fulfillment, autonomy (Kwan et al., 2007)	Group vs. personal goals
Study Gaps	Few cross-cultural comparisons (Sayehmiri et al., 2020)	Rare Middle Eastern samples (Uhlich, 2022)	Need for direct comparisons

5. Discussion

This review integrates Persian and English literature to explore how personality traits influence relationship satisfaction across cultures, revealing universal and culture-specific patterns.

5.1. Cultural Moderators

Cultural dimensions such as individualism and collectivism significantly moderate the influence of personality traits. In collectivist cultures, individuals prioritize group concerns, namely harmony and cohesion, supporting traits such as Conscientiousness and Agreeableness, whereas the individualist cultures emphasize personal autonomy and self-enhancement, fostering traits like

extraversion (Jiao & Zhao, 2023). Self-construal theory further explains these cultural differences: interdependent self-construals in contexts like Iran enhance traits related to group identity and conscientious behavior, whereas independent self-construals in Western settings strengthen personal traits such as extraversion and self-concept clarity (Khodabakhsh et al., 2024).

5.2. Clinical Implications

Clinically, psychological interventions should be culturally tailored to optimize relational outcomes. In Iran, enhancing conscientiousness through counseling is particularly valuable given the strong role of family cohesion in societal structures

(Hasanvand, Jokar, Aflatooni, & Javanbakht, 2024). Furthermore, a qualitative study on Iranian middle-aged couples highlighted the importance of culturally grounded relational interventions. This study found spirituality served as a protective factor, enhancing the relational resilience of Iranian couples (Rezvani Shakib & Abdekhodaei, 2021). Research indicated that conscientiousness is a significant predictor of marital and family satisfaction in Iranian culture (Habibi et al., 2025; Pandey & Priyanshu, 2025). Conversely, in Western societies, promoting extraversion may yield greater romantic satisfaction and lower marital dissatisfaction (Agrawal, 2024; Bleidorn et al., 2013). Extraversion has been closely tied to higher relationship quality in more individualistic cultural settings. Importantly, addressing neuroticism is universally beneficial, as its reduction is associated with improved psychological and relational outcomes across diverse populations (Hanina & Abdullah, 2015; Farahani & Kormi-Nouri, 2019).

5.3. Methodological critiques

Abdin et al. (2023) and Teh et al. (2023) highlight that reliance on correlational designs and self-report measures risks introducing bias, especially in collectivist cultures where social desirability may artificially inflate traits such as agreeableness (). Studies have shown that self-report instruments often reflect social desirability tendencies rather than true personality measures, complicating cross-cultural research validity (Durmaz & Dursun, 2023; Steenkamp & De Jong, 2010). Consequently, mixed-methods approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies,

are recommended to capture deeper nuances and enhance the construct validity of personality assessments in diverse cultural contexts (Babineau, 2013; Rodríguez-Arauz & Ramírez-Esparza, 2019).

6. Limitations

Limited direct cross-cultural comparisons exist in Iran, restricting generalizability (Uhlich, 2022). The focus on FFM may exclude other frameworks such as HEXACO. Expanding to non-romantic relationships, as addressed here, partially mitigates this.

6.1. Future Research Directions

- Direct Comparisons: Longitudinal studies comparing Iranian and Western populations.
- Mixed-Methods: Combine quantitative and qualitative approaches.
- Diverse Relationships: Explore friendships and professional relationships.
- Alternative Frameworks: Investigate HEXACO's honesty-humility in collectivist cultures.
- Middle Eastern Inclusion: Incorporate more Middle Eastern samples.

7. Conclusion

This comprehensive review demonstrated that personality traits significantly shape relationship satisfaction across cultural contexts. The findings indicated that neuroticism universally undermines relational well-being, whereas conscientiousness and agreeableness are particularly influential predictors of satisfaction in collectivist cultures such as

Iran (Sayehmiri et al., 2020). In contrast, in individualistic societies, traits such as extraversion and personal autonomy play a more central role in fostering relationship satisfaction (Malouff et al., 2010).

From a clinical perspective, these insights highlighted the need for culturally sensitive interventions. In collectivist cultures such as Iran, enhancing conscientiousness may strengthen familial bonds and improve overall relational outcomes (Karimi & Mohammadi, 2019), whereas in individualistic contexts, promoting extraversion may more effectively enhance romantic satisfaction (Agrawal, 2024). Addressing neuroticism remains a universally beneficial therapeutic goal across cultural boundaries (Farahani & Kormi-Nouri, 2019).

Nevertheless, methodological challenges — particularly considering cultural biases in self-reported personality assessments — underscore the importance of employing mixed-method approaches to achieve greater cross-cultural validity (Babineau, 2013).

Future research should prioritize longitudinal, cross-cultural comparative studies, incorporate alternative personality frameworks such as the HEXACO model, and broaden the scope to include non-romantic relationships, thereby enriching the understanding of personality's role in diverse relational domains.

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Conflict of interest

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