

## Personality: Effects on Marriage and Romantic Relationships

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- What is personality?
- At the root, the idea is that personality is the combination of the characteristics of an individual that are relatively stable across situations.
- Caution: The Fundamental Attribution Error

### A little self-reflection

- Take a moment to think (jot down some ideas):
  - What are the major characteristics of your personality?
  - What are the good things that those characteristics lead to in your most important relationships?
  - What are the not so good things those characteristics lead to in your most important relationships?

### A Little History

- In the modern era, the study of the effects of personality on relationships goes back to the 1930s.
- There are nearly 500 published studies on this topic (Zentner, 2005).
- Some findings are consistent and many are not.

### Five Factor Personality Trait Model Costa & McCrae

- The most empirically validated model
- Five dimensions
  - Openness
  - Conscientiousness
  - Extraversion
  - Agreeableness
  - Neuroticism

### *The Most Consistent Finding*

- Neuroticism is associated with marital difficulties.
  - Think of neuroticism as generalized, negative emotional reactivity.
  - A disposition to experience negative emotional states
- Sample studies:
  - Kelly & Conley, 1987
  - Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000
  - Karney & Bradbury, 1997

## Other Consistent Findings

- Agreeableness, Openness, and Conscientiousness are often found to relate to marital and relationship quality.
- Neuroticism is the most consistent predictor of how a marriage will go among major personality constructs.

## Similarity and Complementarity: What Makes for Best Fit?

- Similarity hypothesis: sharing personality characteristics is good for relationships
- Complementarity hypothesis: differences are good for relationships

## Mixed Mess

- Many studies, inconclusive findings
- Neither similarity nor complementarity are consistently associated with marital success.
- Why?

## Zentner (2005) Finds:

- People have Ideal Mate Personality Concepts (IMPCs).
- How one perceives similarity of partner to IMPC is more important than actual similarity of personality.
- In other words, what may matter most is how close you got to what you wanted to have in a partner, not how close partner is to actually matching you.

## Zentner (2005)

- Actual similarity on Agreeableness and Openness are related to relationship quality.
- People also prefer similarity most highly on Agreeableness and Openness.

## Teaching Tolerance and Acceptance in Marriage:

## Using Personality Tests

### Primary Goals for Using Personality Testing in ME/RE

- Individuals: Help them think about who they are and who they are looking for.
- Couples: Help them think clearly about their differences in order to promote acceptance.

### Working with Couples: How we use this tool

- Share basic results with partner
- Results as one window into basic differences
- Pushing the importance of acceptance and appreciation
- Communication task about effects of their differences in their relationship

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