

The Influence of Personality and Military Membership on Relationship Satisfaction

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Abstract

Purpose: Previous research has shown that men in the military have less relationship satisfaction than civilian men, regardless of being married or not (McLeland & Sutton, 2005). Other research has shown that military training does change service members' personality (Thoemmes, Jonkmann, Lütke, & Trautwein, 2012). The purpose of this study was to see how United States military service members' relationship satisfaction changes between the time before they enter into service and during their time in service, as well as to examine the relationship between personality and relationship satisfaction in the military population. **Method:** Sixty-nine participants took an online survey through Qualtrics that assessed their personalities and relationship satisfaction using the OCEAN.20 Inventory and ENRICH Assessment. **Results:** Results showed no significant correlations between personality characteristics and relationship satisfaction or between the two different time points.

Keywords: relationship satisfaction, military, personality, veterans

The Influence of Personality and Military Membership on Relationship Satisfaction

Marriage satisfaction in the military is a very well researched area and so is military personality, but intimate relationship satisfaction, regarding all types of relationships, not just marriage, does not have a lot of research (McLeland & Sutton, 2005; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006; Schaffhuser, Wagner, Ludtke, Allemann & Luedtke, 2014; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Claxton, O'Rourke, Smith & Delongis, 2012). The combination of intimate relationship satisfaction and personality in the military is another topic without much research. The purpose of this study is to bridge the research gap between all different types of intimate relationship satisfaction and service member's personalities. This study will also look at how the personalities of service members change between the time before they enter into service and during their time in service.

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This change may affect how they view their satisfaction in their intimate relationships. The knowledge of how personality changes and how this change affects relationship satisfaction could be applied to future military marriage courses, which could include the pre-marriage courses required to be taken for military members to get married, as well as marriage counseling.

Military and Relationship Satisfaction

Many studies have been conducted looking into relationship satisfaction; some of which have even been done for military marriages (McLeland & Sutton, 2005; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). Most of the studies on military marriages have been from the spouses' (usually women) point of view about the relationship. Not very many have been from the service members' viewpoint of the relationship. A survey study conducted by McLeland and Sutton (2005), was trying to find a relationship between military status, marital status and relationship satisfaction in men. The results indicated that men in the military (married and non-married) had less relationship satisfaction than civilian men. Relationship satisfaction was the same regardless of being married or not. Deployment also had a significant impact on relationship satisfaction with the military participants, in which those who were notified about deployment had lower relationship satisfaction (McLeland & Sutton, 2005).

Other factors that can affect military relationships are ones that are part of military life, which normally do not apply to civilians (Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006). These factors include deployment, changing bases, living away from family, living in a different country, getting married at a younger age, and long separations (Burrell et al., 2006). Since these factors are so different from civilian life, Burrell et al. (2006) conducted a study to find how much the four factors impact military families (Burrell et al., 2006). The results found that fear of spouse's safety negatively affected three factors, mental and physical health and military satisfaction. Moving also had a negative relation to military satisfaction, but was positively related to physical and mental health. While mental and physical health, marriage satisfaction, and military satisfaction were negatively related to separation and living in a foreign country (Burrell et al., 2006).

Another unique aspect of military lifestyle is the training service members receive. Military training is either basic training or boot camp, depending on the military branch. During training, individuals are put through three months of physical and mental tests, to develop the skills for military life. One study conducted by Jackson, Thoemmes, Jonkmann, Lütke, and Trautwein (2012) looked into the relationship between military

training and personality over time. Researchers found that participants who joined the military scored lower on agreeableness, openness, and neuroticism than the civilian participants.

Vickers, Hervig, Paxton, Kanfer, & Ackerman (1996) also found neuroticism was significantly lower after training and consciousness was significantly higher, while the other three Big Five personality scales were not affected (Schult & Sparfeldt, 2015). Bradley & Nicol (2003) also found a change that may be consistent with military situational factors with officer cadets in the Canadian military. The personality scores that they found were lower after four years in the military were sense of surgency, achievement, consciousness, internal control, adjustment, agreeableness, and dependability (Bradley & Nicol, 2003; Schult & Sparfeldt, 2015).

Personality and Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction and personality influence one another in different ways. Each factor of personality has a certain amount of predictability towards the satisfaction in a relationship, being higher on one factor can benefit the relationship and make it stronger or it could make the relationship weak. An example would be with the factor neuroticism, when an individual's score is high on this factor, the relationship satisfaction declines, and vice versa (Schaffhuser, Wagner, Ludtke, Allemann & Luedtke, 2014; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Claxton, O'Rourke, Smith & DeLongis, 2012). In addition to neuroticism, lower self-esteem is also an indicator for lower relationship satisfaction. Schaffhuser and colleagues (2014) conducted a study using 141 heterosexual couples in Switzerland to see if there was a correlation between personality traits and relationship satisfaction and if the relationship would change because of personality changes. Their results show that higher neuroticism and lower self-esteem creates lower relationship satisfaction.

Personality factors that predict high relationship satisfaction include high extraversion, high agreeableness, and high conscientiousness (Claxton et al., 2012; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). A study by Claxton et al. (2012), was conducted to find whether there would be a difference between personality reports from self (intra-couple) and from the spouse. The study was also trying to see if long lasting marriages could predict marriage satisfaction. It was found that, marital satisfaction for the husband was negatively related to neuroticism with intra-couple traits, but not for the wives. This finding means that depending on the participant's gender it could decrease the relationship satisfaction. Another finding that was different between the couples was with extraversion. When the participants and their respective

partners thought they themselves were extraverted, marital satisfaction increased. Agreeableness and conscientiousness predicted marital satisfaction for the husbands and wives, while openness to experience only did for the wives. These findings are relevant to the current study, because depending on the gender of the participant their view of the relationship satisfaction and personality could change the relationship satisfaction. An example would be if a participant was male, his view of the relationship could decrease the satisfaction then if they were female. Another example is if that same male participant viewed himself as extraverted, he would have a higher view of his relationship satisfaction.

The lack of previous research including non-marital romantic relationships and their relationship satisfaction along with personality has led to the current study. The current study adds to the existing body of knowledge by including how veterans' relationship satisfaction changes over time as well as how personality affects relationship satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to use survey methodology to examine how the personalities of service members change between the time before they enter into service and during their time in service. Two hypotheses guided this study: (1) in military relationships, veteran personality affects their relationship satisfaction, either in a positive or negative way; (2) there will be a significant change in relationship satisfaction between the two points in time. These hypotheses were expected because of results found in previous research.

Method

This section describes the participants, the survey instrument used, as well as the procedure for data collection.

Participants

There were 69 participants, whose ages varied between 19 and 74, with the average age of participants being 41.22. Most of the participants were male (76.7%). The ethnicity of the participants consisted of Caucasian (81.2%), African American (1.4%), Hispanic (1.4%), and both Caucasian and Hispanic (1.4%). Out of the 69 participants, the majority were from Wisconsin (89.8%), while the others were from Minnesota (5.1%), Virginia (1.7%), Idaho (1.7%), and Arizona (1.7%). The relationships of participants included 70% that were married, 13.3% were in a relationship, 10% were single, 5% were living with another person and 1.7% were divorced.

The military demographics showed that 25.4% of participants were currently in the military, while the other 74.6% were not. The majority of participants were in the Army branch (50%), while the Air Force branch

comprised 18.3% of the sample and Marine Corps had 18.3% and the Navy branch consisted of 13.3% of participants. Over half of the veterans had been deployed (65%), and of those, many were deployed only once (71.8%), while some had been deployed six or more times (5.1%). The average time that the participants were deployed for was 19.89 months.

The sample of veterans was a convenience sample chosen primarily through a university veteran services office and a local county veterans' services office. Other data was also collected using a social media platform, Facebook, as well as through word of mouth, including relatives and friends of the researcher. To participate in the study, participants must have been in the military, and have been in an intimate relationship before and during their service.

Materials

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS), has 12 elements, which include idealistic distortion, marital satisfaction, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, equalitarian roles, and religious orientation. These 12 elements are broken down between two subscales, idealistic distortion and marital satisfaction. Examples of the 15 items include, "My partner and I understand each other perfectly," for the subscale idealistic distortion and "I am not pleased with the personality characteristics and personal habits of my partner" for the subscale personality issues. The items are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Six of the items (two, five, eight, nine, twelve and fourteen) are reverse scored. Previous research that utilized the EMS showed the internal reliability of the measurement was 0.86 (Fowers & Olson, 1993).

OCEAN.20 Inventory. The OCEAN.20 Inventory has five scales, which are openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and extraversion. Each of these five scales are measured based on 20 items, four for each scale. Examples of these items include, "I like to keep all my belongings neat and organized," for the subscale conscientiousness and "Kind" for the subscale agreeableness. Examples of the subscale neuroticism includes, "Sometimes I get so upset, I feel sick to my stomach" and the subscale extraversion is, "Most of my friends would describe me as a talker." The 20 items are scored on a Likert scale, from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic*) to 7 (*extremely characteristic*). Research conducted on the OCEAN.20 to validate the measure found an internal reliability ranging between 0.71 and 0.88 for the five scales (O'Keefe & Kelloway, 2012).

Demographics and qualitative items. The demographic questions gathered information about age, ethnicity, education, location, sex, relationship status, branch of service, pay grade, and deployment experience.

Procedure

A link to the Qualtrics survey was sent via email or the link was provided after a prompt provided on social media. Participants were informed that research was being conducted regarding intimate military relationship satisfaction and personality, and that participants were being recruited to take a ten to 15 minute survey. Participants were able to take the survey at their own convenience, and could take it anywhere they felt comfortable doing so. Participants were first asked three questions, (1) "if they were ever or are still in the military"; (2) "are they currently in the military"; (3) "if they were in a romantic relationship before entering the military". Then they were prompted with questions from both the OCEAN.20 Inventory and the EMS, which was completed in a continuous period, one right after the other. After completing the first three questions, the participants who met the criteria were prompted with the directions to complete the following statements about themselves, and they were given the OCEAN.20 Inventory. After completing the OCEAN.20 Inventory, the participants were given the EMS twice. First, to measure the relationship satisfaction before they entered in the military, then right after the participants completed the EMS a second time to measure the relationship satisfaction during their time in the military. At the end of the survey, participants provided their demographic information. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to earn an incentive through a raffle, in which they could earn one of two e-gift cards to Walmart for 20 dollars. If participants wanted to enter into the raffle, they were taken to a separate survey to provide their contact information. After participants completed the survey, they were thanked for their time.

Results

In order to determine the participants' personality, their average score for the OCEAN.20 Inventory score was computed (see Table 1). To find each participant's relationship satisfaction score, the percentile score was calculated based on the mathematical guidelines presented by Flowers and Olson (1993). The relationship satisfaction was calculated for both the responses regarding the time before entering the military and the time during military service.

<i>Scale</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Openness	68	4.10	1.36
Conscientiousness	67	5.06	1.21
Extroversion	65	3.62	1.34
Agreeableness	65	5.49	.95
Neuroticism	68	3.04	1.37
Enrich Before Entering the Military	29	68.99	44.45
Enrich During the Military	28	41.56	19.77

Table 1: Average Scores for Scales

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis, which states that in military relationships, the veteran's personality will affect their relationship satisfaction, either in a positive or negative way. To answer this question, a series of Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted. When comparing personality characteristics to relationship satisfaction before entering the military, no significant results were found for any of the correlations (see Table 2). Similarly, when comparing relationship satisfaction during the time in the military to personality, there were again no significant correlations (see Table 3). However, the personality factor with the strongest correlation to relationship satisfaction during the time in the military was agreeableness, which was approaching significance ($r(23) = .39, p = .055$). This result shows that there was a trending positive correlation between agreeableness and relationship satisfaction while in the military. Agreeableness was not statistically significant, but it was approaching significance.

<i>Scale</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Openness	27	-.03	.887
Conscientiousness	27	-.04	.830
Extroversion	25	-.21	.289
Agreeableness	26	-.03	.896
Neuroticism	27	-.30	.110

Table 2: Personality as it Relates to Marital Satisfaction Prior to Entering the Military

Scale	df	r	p-value
Openness	26	-.03	.887
Conscientiousness	24	-.03	.872
Extroversion	23	-.23	.279
Agreeableness	23	.39	.055
Neuroticism	26	-.01	.975

Table 3: Personality as it Relates to Marital Satisfaction During Time in the Military

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis stated that there would be a significant change in relationship satisfaction between the two points in time. The results of a dependent *t*-test showed that there was not a significant difference between relationship satisfaction before entering the military (*M* = 43.98, *SD* = 16.28) and relationship satisfaction during the time in the military (*M* = 40.36, *SD* = 20.31) (*t* (18) = .92, *p* = .368).

Discussion

Through the two research questions in this study, a number of findings were explored. The results of the first hypothesis showed that there were no significant correlations between any of the OCEAN.20 personality traits and relationship satisfaction both before entering the military and during the military. When the personality traits were compared to relationship satisfaction during time in the military, there were still no significant correlations. The only trait that came close to being significant was agreeableness, which had a positive correlation. This means that when agreeableness is high, relationship satisfaction is also high. This result was also found in research conducted by Claxton et al. (2012) and Karney & Bradbury (1997). The results of these studies both found that high extraversion, high agreeableness, and high conscientiousness all predicted high relationship satisfaction (Claxton et al., 2012) and Karney & Bradbury, 1997). Though this result was not significant, a sample size increase may have provided a stronger result.

The results of the second hypothesis showed that there was not a significant difference between the relationship satisfaction before and during the time in the military. Although there was not a significant difference

between the two time points, there was a very small decrease in relationship satisfaction, with a decrease in relationship satisfaction during the time in the military. This could mean that there is some relationship between participation in the military and relationship satisfaction. Again, more participants would be needed in order to explore this further.

Limitations

The largest limitation of the current study was the small sample size, which was around 19 participants. Secondly, there were complications regarding participants not answering all the statements in the ENRICH assessment. Participants were provided with a "Not Applicable" option for the statements, as some participants may not have had children with their significant other, and so on. Calculating relationship satisfaction required participants to have answered all of the statements in the assessment, so a small number of participants was utilized in the analyses of the ENRICH scores.

Participants were also chosen via convenience sample, and were primarily residing in the Midwest. This one area does not generalize to every service member in the country. Random sampling of participants from many different areas of the United States would have produced more sound results.

It is also important to note the timeframe that participants were responding to in this study. Participants were first asked to assess their relationship satisfaction before entering the military. This is a retrospective pre-test and post-test, and some participants may have had a strong and recent recollection of their relationship satisfaction before the military, while for others this could be a recollection of 20 years ago or more. Another factor would be if their current relationship were influencing their perception about their past relationship. This could have skewed participants' perceptions to be more positive or negative than they actually were. Secondly, participants were then asked to assess their relationship satisfaction during their time in the military. Again, a large portion of participants were not currently in the military, therefore they had to retrospectively think of their relationship satisfaction, as opposed to actively experiencing the relationship they were in.

Implications and Future Directions

Although this study did not produce any statistically significant findings, there is something to gain from this exploration of military members' opinions and perspectives regarding personality and relationship satisfaction. One implication is finding that agreeableness may be

significantly related to relationship satisfaction (Claxton et al., 2012; Karney & Bradbury, 1997).

Future research should look into what these findings are with a larger, more generalizable sample size of veterans. Using a larger and more generalizable sample size may reveal whether agreeableness is significantly related to relationship satisfaction.

Additionally, future research should focus on seeing what the third variables are when it comes to the changes in relationship satisfaction for military veterans. These third variables could include PTSD, the personality of the significant other who is at home while the service member is away, whether or not and how long they were deployed, and how long they have been in the military (Burrell et al., 2006). Burrell et al. (2006) conducted a study, which found that many of these third variables, such as fear of spouse's safety, mental and physical health, military satisfaction, moving, separation and living in a foreign country, effect military couples relationship satisfaction. Other studies conducted by Schaffhuser et al (2014), Karney & Bradbury (1997) and Claxton et al. (2012) have all found that personality effects relationship satisfaction as well. These factors could be researched using a number of different tactics. Another focus could be on finding out if agreeableness is a predictive factor in relationship satisfaction in this population.

Another direction for future research would be to see if the length of time in the military has an effect on personality or relationship satisfaction, by using a prospective longitudinal study following service members from before they enter boot camp until they leave the military. In addition to the effect of deployments, have on participant's relationship satisfaction or personality, such as location of the deployment, length, and number of deployments. Finally, future studies may include the effects of relationship health training on service members' relationship satisfaction over time.

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