

Personality type can help predict who's single or in a relationship, and how happy they are, says study

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The phrase "single life" may conjure images of a busy "Sex and the City"-like social calendar, packed with dates and drama. But researchers at the University of Toronto say that most singles are actually introverts—a far cry from the extroverted stereotypes we often see depicted in movies and on TV.

In a study published recently in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, the researchers reveal how certain personality traits—particularly how extroverted, conscientious and neurotic someone is—predict who is likelier to be single or in a relationship.

It's one of several links among personality, well-being and relationship status described in the research.

"As marriage rates decline and more people live alone, our study contributes to a more complex picture of single lives that goes beyond the misleading stereotype of the miserable single person," says lead author Elaine Hoan, a Ph.D. candidate in the lab of Geoff MacDonald, a professor in the department of psychology in the Faculty of Arts & Science.

"While on average people in relationships are more satisfied with their lives than single people, there are many happy singles—relationships don't play as big of a role in one's overall life satisfaction as you may think. We found that personality, more than relationship status, determines who is happy with their life and who isn't."

For the study, researchers recruited over 1,800 participants between the ages of 20 and 59 who had either been single for at least six months or in a relationship for at least six months. Participants completed a set of questionnaires that measured personality, satisfaction with relationship status, sexual satisfaction and life satisfaction to shed light on how [personality traits](#) affect well-being in the context of [relationship status](#).

For the personality measurement, Hoan used the "Big Five" model of personality, which focuses on the following traits: extroversion (outgoing and high-energy), agreeableness (compassionate and respectful), conscientiousness (productive and dependable), neuroticism (anxious and depressed) and openness (curious and creative).

Where someone fell on the introversion and extraversion scale was more strongly related to whether they would be single or in a relationship.

"In a world that caters to extroverts, introverts are misrepresented as antisocial," says Hoan. "The reality is, introverts enjoy their alone time and independence, and can emotionally regulate—meaning, they can manage their reactions to their feelings on their own. So, an [introvert](#) may prefer being single more than being in a relationship.

"On the other hand, extroverts are happier than introverts in general—regardless of whether they were single or not—and introversion makes it a bit tougher to get into a relationship in the first place because introverts may not find themselves in social situations as often. Other existing research also suggests that being in a relationship may make someone more extroverted, by increasing confidence and widening their social circle."

The researchers also found notable--though weaker--connections to the traits of conscientiousness and neuroticism. Single people were less likely to identify with descriptors like "keeps things neat and tidy" and

"gets things done" and agreed more strongly with phrases like "can be tense," "often feels sad" and "is temperamental."

"Conscientious people are more likely to be goal-oriented, especially towards traditional goals like getting a job and getting married, as well as exhibit a strong work ethic, so that may feed into their desire and ability to start and commit to a romantic relationship," says Hoan. "Depressive symptoms like sadness and low energy may make it more difficult to pursue and maintain a relationship—while the [emotional support](#) you get in a [romantic relationship](#) could reduce these symptoms."

Next, Hoan will be researching happiness in married versus unmarried people. She hopes her work continues to challenge societal misconceptions about who people are and how they choose to live their lives, whether in a relationship or not.

"There is stigma associated with being single—you know, people saying, 'You'd be happier if you were in a relationship, so why aren't you?'—when that's not necessarily true for everyone," she says. "I hope what people take from our research is the idea that you don't have to be someone you're not—just be yourself."

More information: Elaine Hoan et al, Personality and Well-Being Across and Within Relationship Status, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/01461672231225571](https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231225571)

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