

Agreeableness Research: A Narrative Review

Tiffany Field

University of Miami/Miller School of Medicine and Fielding Graduate University, USA

Corresponding author

Tiffany Field, University of Miami/Miller School of Medicine and Fielding Graduate University, USA

Received: March 10, 2026; Accepted: March 23, 2026; Published: March 30, 2026

ABSTRACT

Agreeableness is one of the four positive Big Five personality traits. Agreeableness is characterized by trusting, helpful, kind and compassionate behavior that fosters social harmony as opposed to conflict. Positive effects of agreeableness on feelings include trust and agreeableness characteristics including transcendence, contentment, social integration and emotional reactivity. Positive effects of agreeableness on behaviors include responsiveness, proactive behavior and volunteer service. A decrease in negative behaviors has also been noted including decreased discrimination and conflict. Predictors of agreeableness in this current literature include openness, social skills, empathy and trust. Only two studies have been conducted on inducing the state of agreeableness including being asked to behave in an agreeable way and targeting agreeableness. At least four potential underlying biological mechanisms have appeared in this literature on agreeableness. They include functional connectivity, ventromedial cortical activity, default mode network activation, and cortical microstructural brain network activation.

Agreeableness is one of the four positive Big Five personality traits. It is characterized by trusting, helpful, kind and compassionate behavior that fosters social harmony and decreases conflict. Individuals who are high on agreeableness are thought to be cooperative, empathetic and nurturing. The agreeableness personality trait is widely prevalent and is thought to increase with age. Agreeable individuals reportedly have a positive impact on 93% of work and life variables and often foster better relationships. These qualities and effects highlight the importance of research and reviews of research on agreeableness.

The current narrative review includes research not only on positive effects of agreeableness on feelings and behaviors but also on predictors, potential underlying biological mechanisms and experimental manipulations. The papers were found on PubMed and PsycINFO by entering the term agreeableness and the years 2022-2026. Exclusion criteria were protocols, case studies and non-English language papers.

The 21 papers in this current literature review can be categorized as positive effects of agreeableness on feelings and behaviors (8 papers), reduction of negative effects (5 papers), predictors (2 papers), manipulations (2 papers), and potential underlying biological mechanisms (4 papers). These sections are followed by a discussion on methodological limitations of this current literature.

Positive Effects of Agreeableness on Feelings

The positive effects of agreeableness are divided into sections on

the positive effects on feelings and positive effects on behaviors (see table 1). Positive effects of agreeableness on feelings include trust, emotional reactivity and agreeableness characteristics including transcendence, contentment and social integration.

Table 1: Positive effects of agreeableness on feelings (and first authors)

Effects	First Authors
Trust	Stavrova
Emotional reactivity	Robinson
Transcendence, contentment, relational investment	Wilmot

Trust was a positive effect of agreeableness in a study that involved social dilemma situations that required trust of its participants [1]. Greater trust was shown for agreeable partners and for agreeable group members in contrast to less trust being noted for extroverted partners/members. This study was limited by its being an unnatural social dilemma situation that required trust. In addition, the reporting partner/member was not matched for being agreeable or extroverted and only one partner reported. A simpler and more natural study could have been a survey of real couples/partners and groups for their reporting of agreeableness and trust.

In a paper entitled "Feelings as a currency of care: a role for agreeableness in emotional reactivity", agreeableness predicted emotional reactivity to pleasant stimuli (N=517 adults) [2]. In

this sample, agreeableness was also noted towards unpleasant stimuli. The agreeableness to unpleasant stimuli was surprising. Openness of agreeable individuals may have contributed to their agreeableness towards unpleasant stimuli.

Several agreeableness characteristics were reported in a quantitative review of 142 meta – analyses on 275 variables and 1.9 million participants in which agreeableness had desirable directions for 93% of the variables [3]. The agreeableness characteristics included transcendence, contentment, relational investment, teamwork, work investment, lower results emphasis, social norm orientation, and social integration. It’s not surprising that this meta-analysis of so many meta-analyses (142), so many variables (275) and so many participants (1.9 million) yielded so many agreeableness characteristics (8).

Positive Effects of Agreeableness on Behaviors

Positive effects of agreeableness on behaviors include responsiveness, proactive behavior, learning and volunteer service (see table 2). Responsiveness has resulted from agreeableness in two samples in the same study (N= 176 and 228) [4]. In these samples, agreeableness led to responsiveness, but the responsiveness was recognized by the partner independent of the agreeableness. This result was not surprising given that the responsiveness was the more recent and probably more salient or noticeable behavior.

Table 2: Positive effects of agreeableness on behaviors (and first authors)

Effects	First Authors
Responsiveness	Dilian
Warm quality	Robinson
Proactive behavior	Yang
Learning	Meddab
Volunteer service	Chen

Agreeableness was also rated as an interpersonally warm quality by peers in a daily diary study (N= 901 daily diaries) [5]. That agreeableness is thought to be a warm quality is not surprising given its related helpful, kind and compassionate qualities.

Agreeableness in mentors has led to proactive behavior in mentees (N=417 Chinese new employees) [6]. Agreeable behavior, not surprisingly, has been a good role model and reinforcer for proactive behavior. In another sample, agreeableness in mentors led to a reduction in narcissism in mentees and an increase in their learning [7]. It’s not surprising that reduced narcissism was a mediator for agreeableness leading to greater learning as narcissism, like self-centeredness, would likely block learning from a mentor. It’s surprising that openness was not assessed in this study as agreeableness would likely increase openness that would then be a positive mediator in the relationship between agreeableness and learning.

Volunteer service has also resulted from agreeableness in a sample of Chinese college students (N=408) [8]. In this sample, agreeableness led to volunteer motivation and, in turn, to volunteer service. The mediators and moderators selected by researchers need to be based on theory. Volunteer motivation

would clearly be a moderator that positively influenced the relationship between agreeableness and volunteer service.

Agreeableness Effects on Negative Feelings and Behaviors

Agreeableness has also decreased negative feelings and behaviors, and less agreeableness has increased negative behaviors (see table 3). The decrease in negative behaviors has included decreased discrimination and conflict.

Table 3: Agreeableness Effects on Negative Feelings and Behaviors (and first authors)

Effects	First Authors
Decreased discrimination	Wu
Reduced conflict	Blackman

In a study on ethnic/racial minority freshmen (N= 209), daily agreeableness decreased discrimination and facilitated the freshmen’s acculturation process as they entered college [9]. Agreeableness by faculty, staff and students led to mainstream cultural orientation of these freshmen, likely again related to variables like openness, responsiveness and other positive characteristics of agreeableness.

Conflict has also been reduced by agreeableness in a study on middle adolescents (N= 571) [10]. While neuroticism increased conflict with peers and parents, agreeableness decreased conflict in those relationships. Neuroticism and agreeableness are extreme behaviors on the continuum of the Big Five Personality Traits and would be respectively expected to increase and decrease conflict.

Low Agreeableness Effects

Low agreeableness has contributed to negative behaviors in studies in the current literature on agreeableness (see table 4). The negative behaviors include trolling, cyberbullying and alcohol use. Trolling behavior (posting inflammatory/offensive content online) was reported in a study on low agreeableness [11]. In this sample of “healthy adults” (N=787), a low degree of agreeableness “led to” callous, unemotional, manipulative, and self-centered behaviors which, in turn, led to trolling. Although the authors attributed trolling to a low degree of agreeableness by saying that agreeableness led to trolling via several mediators, the direction of effects could not be determined in this cross-sectional study. As in most studies in this current literature on agreeableness, directionality or causality cannot be determined because of the cross-sectional design of the studies. However, the agreeableness effects are likely reciprocal with agreeableness and would reinforce the agreeableness personality trait.

Table 4: Low Agreeableness Effects (and first authors)

Effects	First Authors
Trolling	Ubaradka
Cyberbullying	Gao
Alcohol use	Franken

Cyberbullying was noted in another study on low agreeableness [12]. In this sample of Chinese adolescents (N=2407), low agreeableness “led to” moral disengagement and low empathy which, in turn, led to cyberbullying. Again, these are associated

behaviors that have been selected a priori by the researchers based on theories about their mediation/moderation models. As already mentioned, directionality and causality cannot be determined because the studies are cross-sectional, not longitudinal.

Non-agreeableness has also “led to” alcohol use in a 22-year prospective study [13]. In this sample (N=329), 6-9-year-old children were seen again in adolescence and again at 27–30 years. Both extroversion and non-agreeableness “led” to alcohol use. Directionality can be implied here as this was a longitudinal study. However, these personality qualities and alcohol use were likely also concurrent during adolescence, suggesting that the non-agreeableness and extraversion during adolescence may have “led” to alcohol use. The combined risk factors of extraversion and non-agreeableness were not surprising given their comorbidity in several studies. Interestingly, these negative factors have been assessed in the same studies while positive correlates of agreeableness have been less frequently researched together in the same studies.

Predictors of Agreeableness

Only two papers on predictors of agreeableness have appeared in this current literature (see table 5). The predictors include openness, social skills, empathy and trust. Openness (one of the other positive Big Five personality traits) has, not surprisingly, been a predictor of agreeableness. In a paper already mentioned called “Open- hearted: Preferences for openness in the agreeableness domain”, daily diaries (N=901) suggested that openness led to agreeableness [2].

Table 5: Predictors of Agreeableness (and first authors)

Predictors	First Authors
Openness	Robinson
Social skills, empathy and trust	Sneed

Correlates of agreeableness in children (N= 76) including social skills, empathy and trust have predicted agreeableness [14]. These predictors of agreeableness were only noted for female children, not males. These findings on gender differences were surprising given that the predictors of agreeableness that were measured were those that have been defined as agreeableness and would be expected to be characteristic of both genders.

Manipulations of Agreeableness

Only two studies have induced the state of agreeableness (see table 6). They include being asked to behave in an agreeable way and targeting agreeableness. Both manipulations effectively increased the amount of agreeableness in people.

Table 6: Manipulations of Agreeableness (and first authors)

Manipulations	First Authors
Instructions to behave in an agreeable way	Leikas
Intervention targeting agreeableness	Hudson

In one study entitled “Trait agreeableness moderates the relationship between induced state agreeableness and feeling states”, the participants were asked to behave in an agreeable way and a conscientious way for four days each [15]. The greater the agreeableness trait, the less stressed the participants

felt after behaving agreeably. Conscientiousness did not reduce stress, possibly because conscientious behavior may have been less obvious to others such that conscientious behavior was less reinforced by others and therefore less frequently occurred.

In another study entitled “Lighten the darkness: Personality interventions targeting agreeableness”, the results are in the title. This sample (N = 467) engaged in a 16-week weekly intervention targeting agreeableness [16]. This intervention decreased Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy (the dark triad) based on daily diaries. Given the rarity of these traits in healthy adults, it’s not surprising that these traits were rarely mentioned in daily diaries. The participants may have also been “faking good” because of the social desirability of positive responses following interventions.

Potential Underlying Biological Mechanisms for Agreeableness
At least four potential underlying biological mechanisms have appeared in this literature on agreeableness (see table 7). They include functional connectivity, ventromedial cortical activity, default mode network activation, and cortical microstructural brain network activation.

Table 7: Potential Underlying Biological Mechanisms (and first authors)

Mechanisms	First Authors
Resting state functional connectivity	Yoon
Activity in the ventral medial prefrontal cortex	Pisano
Activation of the default network	Udochi
Activation of a cortical microstructural brain network	Wu

In research on resting-state functional connectivity that has been associated with agreeableness, adolescents (N=70 adolescents 12 to 15 years old) were the participants [17]. Agreeableness was positively associated with amygdala connectivity with the middle occipital cortex and superior parietal cortex in the same direction for girls and boys. These connections within the limbic network were, surprisingly, positively associated with agreeableness in boys and negatively associated with agreeableness for girls. This gender difference is difficult to interpret but may be related to the greater agreeableness noted in girls than boys.

In a study entitled “Agreeableness modulates mental state decoding: Electrophysiological evidence”, a “reading the mind and the eyes task” (decoding of mental states from eye expressions) was given to the participants (N= 62) [18]. Event-related potentials suggested that agreeableness was associated with activity in the ventral medial prefrontal cortex. That association was not surprising given that emotion regulation and social cognition are associated with that brain region which is part of the reward and default mode network (a set of brain regions-primarily the medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, and angular gyrus-that are most active when the mind is at rest, engaged in daydreaming or retrieving memories).

In a study on the default mode network, several animations were presented to the participants during a “theory of mind

task" (N=1,050) and fMRIs were recorded [19]. The results suggested that the activation of the default network during that task predicted individual differences in agreeableness as well as social cognition activity. The rationale for the selection of a theory of mind task to assess agreeableness and the default mode network was not clear.

Activation of a cortical microstructural brain network has also been related to the agreeableness personality trait based on fMRIs of healthy adults (N = 1043) [20]. This network included the superior parietal lobule, inferior parietal lobule and temporoparietal junction. This cortical microstructural brain network mediated the association between the personality trait of agreeableness and life satisfaction. The brain regions activated in this study were different than those activated in the previously described research, although activation of these several different brain regions was associated with agreeableness.

Methodological Limitations of this Literature

Several methodological limitations can be noted for this current literature on agreeableness. They include diversity of definitions, biased sampling, limited data analyses and questionable interpretations. One of the primary problems is the different definitions of agreeableness with some using the Big Five definition and others using broader definitions. This might be one reason why prevalence data have not appeared in this literature.

Sampling has been primarily convenience sampling of university students. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other samples. Some of the gender differences in outcomes have been difficult to interpret. These may relate to the greater degree of agreeableness noted in females.

The absence of comparisons between agreeableness and other positive Big Five variables like openness and conscientiousness is surprising. It is also surprising that these have not been considered confounding variables as they likely cooccur with agreeableness.

Agreeableness is also likely reciprocally related to many of the effects that have been reported for agreeableness such as responsiveness and proactive behavior. Those effects would, in turn, lead to more agreeableness, as in reciprocal variables. Several potentially positive effects, including a reduction in depressed and anxious affect and better relationships have not appeared in this literature.

Data analyses have been primarily mediation/moderation models. While these are increasingly popular types of data analyses, they are based on researchers' theoretical models and their selection of variables that might be biased. The multiple variables considered mediators or moderators are typically significant. However, their relative importance in contributing to the variance of outcomes cannot be determined by this type of analysis as it could be by regression or structural equation models.

The results of the physiological studies can be considered more robust as they are more objective variables. However, many of those studies are lacking behavioral or self-report measures so the linkages between behavior and physiology have not been made.

Only two manipulation/ intervention studies have appeared in this literature. The targeting of agreeableness and the intervention requesting that individuals behave more agreeably have been effective, suggesting that agreeableness can be increased. Despite these methodological limitations, this current literature is informative for future research on agreeableness as a personality trait.

References

1. Stavrova O, Evans AM, van Beest I. The effects of partner extraversion and agreeableness on trust. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull.* 2023. 49: 1028-1042.
2. Robinson MD, Irvin RL, Fereidouni H, Klein RJ. Feelings as a currency of care: a role for agreeableness in emotional reactivity. *J Pers.* 2025. 93: 553-566.
3. Wilmot MP, Ones DS. Agreeableness and its consequences: a quantitative review of meta-analytic findings. *Pers Soc Psychol Rev.* 2022. 26: 242-280.
4. Kilian JL, Gere J, LaBuda J. Influence of agreeableness on responsiveness: effort versus skill. *J Pers.* 2025.
5. Robinson MD, Lindquist JA, Irvin RL. Open-hearted: preferences for openness in the agreeableness domain. *J Pers.* 2024. 92: 378-392.
6. Yang W, Wang Y, Choi M, Li Y. Influence of mentoring on the proactive behavior of new employees: moderated mediation effect of agreeableness. *Front Psychol.* 2024. 15: 1370815.
7. Meddeb S, St-Jean É, Rauch A. The interaction of narcissism, agreeableness and conscientiousness in entrepreneurial mentoring: implications for learning outcomes. *Int Small Bus J.* 2024. 42: 726-750.
8. Chen C, Su W. The impact of agreeableness trait on volunteer service motivation and behavior: a moderated mediation study of Chinese college students. *Behav Sci (Basel).* 2025. 15: 1308.
9. Wu Y, Xu J, Shen Y, Wang Y, Zheng Y. Daily agreeableness and acculturation processes in ethnic/racial minority freshmen: the role of inter-ethnic contact and perceived discrimination. *J Pers.* 2024. 92: 1299-1314.
10. Bleckmann E, Wiczorek LL, Wagner J. The role of agreeableness, neuroticism, and relationship-specific features in self- and other-perceptions of conflict frequency in adolescent relationships with parents and peers. *J Youth Adolesc.* 2024. 53: 1630-1645.
11. Ubaradka A, Khangnba SP. The differential effect of psychopathy on active and bystander trolling behaviors: the role of dark tetrad traits and lower agreeableness. *Sci Rep.* 2024. 14: 9905.
12. Gao L, Li X, Wang X. Agreeableness and adolescents' cyberbullying perpetration: a longitudinal moderated mediation model of moral disengagement and empathy. *J Pers.* 2023. 91: 1461-1477.
13. Franken IHA, Prinzie P. Adolescent extraversion and agreeableness predict adult alcohol use: a 22-year prospective study. *Addict Behav.* 2025. 165: 108303.
14. Sneed CD. Correlates and implications for agreeableness in children. *J Psychol.* 2002. 136: 59-67.
15. Leikas S. Trait agreeableness moderates the relationship between induced state agreeableness and feeling states. *Front Psychol.* 2026. 16: 1646442.

16. Hudson NW. Lighten the darkness: personality interventions targeting agreeableness also reduce participants' levels of the dark triad. *J Pers.* 2023. 91: 901-916.
17. Yoon L, Carranza AF, Swartz JR. Resting-state functional connectivity associated with extraversion and agreeableness in adolescence. *Front Behav Neurosci.* 2022. 15: 644790.
18. Pisanu E, Arbula S, Rumiati RI. Agreeableness modulates mental state decoding: electrophysiological evidence. *Hum Brain Mapp.* 2024. 45: 26593.
19. Udochi AL, Blain SD, Sassenberg TA, Burton PC, Medrano L, et al. Activation of the default network during a theory of mind task predicts individual differences in agreeableness and social cognitive ability. *Cogn Affect Behav Neurosci.* 2022. 22: 383-402.
20. Wu H, Fan S, Yan C, Wang H. Cortical microstructural brain network mediates the association between personality trait of agreeableness and life satisfaction. *Cereb Cortex.* 2024. 34: bhad410.