When personal becomes relational

Investigating the role of personality traits in affective student-teacher relationships

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Chapter 2

When Personal Becomes Relational

A Meta-Analysis and Narrative Review on Personality Traits and Children's Affective Relationships with Adults

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Abstract

In this meta-analysis and narrative review, we investigated whether personality traits of children and adults (i.e., parents and teachers), as well as personality similarity, were associated with the affective quality of dyadic adult–child relationships. We conducted a systematic literature search following PRISMA guidelines. By performing a quantitative meta-analysis (k = 39), we examined the associations of children's and parents' personality traits with parent–child relationship quality. Due to a limited number of available studies, associations between personality traits and teacher–child relationships (k = 8) and between personality similarity and adult–child relationships (k = 4) were explored through a narrative review. The meta-analytic findings indicated that children's agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness were positively associated with *positive* parent–child relationships (e.g., warmth) and negatively associated with *negative* parent–child relationships (e.g., conflict). In contrast, children's neuroticism was negatively associated with *positive* parent–child relationships and positively associated with *negative* parent–child relationships. Comparable patterns were found for parents' personality traits; however, parents' openness was not significantly associated with either positive or negative parent–child relationships. Furthermore, the narrative review suggested that personality traits of both children and teachers may be associated with teacher–child relationships, especially for relational positivity. Finally, preliminary evidence indicated that personality similarity appeared to be positively associated with positive adult–child relationships. Although the results we found were small to medium in magnitude, these findings suggested that focusing on personality may be a promising way to better understand children's affective relationships with adults in various contexts (e.g., family, school).

Keywords: personality traits, personality similarity, parent–child relationships, teacher–child relationships, adult–child relationships

Introduction

The affective quality of children's dyadic relationships (or emotional bonds) with adults such as parents and teachers may be a salient developmental context for children. From an attachment point of view, positive dimensions of affective relationships (e.g., warmth) may satisfy children's emotional needs and serve as a safe space for children to explore and take on challenges, whereas negative dimensions (e.g., rejection) may discourage children's exploration and development (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969; Pianta et al., 2003). Empirical studies also suggest that successfully navigating affective relationships with these important adults may benefit children's behavioral development, social–emotional competence, and school adjustment (see Cooke et al., 2019; Mammadov & Avci, 2024; Roorda et al., 2017; ten Bokkel et al., 2023 for meta-analyses). There may be individual differences, however, in the quality of the affective relationships that children develop with important adults. Whereas some children tend to experience more conflict in their interpersonal relationships, other children are more likely to perceive warmth in their relationships with others (e.g., Ayoub et al., 2019; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Conceivably, such interpersonal differences may be caused by individual attributes such as personality traits (Ayoub et al., 2019; de Haan et al., 2012). In this study, we aimed to enhance the understanding of how individual variations in personality traits are linked to the affective quality of adult–child relationships by synthesizing the existing empirical research.

Personality traits are defined as the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are relatively consistent across time and contexts (Shiner & Caspi, 2003). Previous studies have shown that both children's and relationship partners' personality traits may hamper or enhance affective relationship quality (e.g., Prinzie et al., 2009; Van Den Akker et al., 2014; Zee et al., 2013). However, the current state of knowledge on the associations between personality traits and dyadic, affective relationships seems to be falling short in four different ways. First, it remains disputed which personality traits are actually relevant for the affective quality of the relationships that children develop with significant adults. For some traits (e.g., agreeableness), positive associations with warmth in dyadic relationships have consistently been found (de Haan et al., 2012; Denissen et al., 2009; Van Den Akker et al., 2014), whereas for other traits (e.g., conscientiousness and openness) findings tend to be rather inconsistent (Asendorpf & Van Aken, 2003; Denissen et al., 2009; Egberts et al., 2015). So far, no systematic review has been conducted to elucidate whether personality traits are differentially associated with the affective quality of dyadic relationships between children and adults.

Second, most studies thus far have either focused on personality traits of children or adults, without taking both simultaneously into consideration. This is unfortunate, as empirical evidence has highlighted the importance of both children's and adults' personality traits for the quality of their mutual relationships (Denissen et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2018; Prinzie et al., 2009).

Third, some evidence has been found that the interplay between children's and adults' personality traits (i.e., personality similarity) may play a role in relationship quality (Harris & Vazire, 2016; Pancorbo et al., 2022). More specifically, studies have suggested that personality similarity may benefit the quality of interpersonal relationships (Belsky, 1984; Denissen et al., 2009; Pancorbo et al., 2022). As such, it seems relevant to explore whether personality similarity contributes to children's affective relationships with adults as well.

Lastly, compared to positive relationship dimensions (e.g., warmth, closeness), negative relationship dimensions (e.g., rejection, conflict) tend to be neglected when investigating the associations between personality traits and affective relationships. Yet, it is very well likely that personality traits are differently associated with positive and negative dimensions of affective relationships (Nurmi, 2012; Roorda et al., 2011). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the associations of personality traits with both positive and negative relationship dimensions is needed.

Considering the research gaps addressed above, we conducted a meta-analysis and narrative review to summarize the knowledge on the associations between personality traits and the affective quality of children's dyadic relationships with adults. We included studies concerning children's and adults' personality traits, as well as personality similarity. Additionally, both positive and negative relationship dimensions were investigated in this review. In terms of relationship domains, we included dyadic relationships with adults that are deemed most important for children's development, namely, relationships with parents and teachers.

Importance of Adult–Child Relationships Across Domains

Most empirical work on affective relationships between children and adults is based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Originally, attachment theory was developed to understand the impact of affective parent–child relationships on children's development. According to this theory, sensitive parenting provides children with a sense of emotional security and self-worth, which allows them to explore the environment and develop in an optimal way (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969). More specifically, parents can serve as a secure base from which their children feel safe to explore the environment, and they can function as a safe haven to whom children can turn for comfort in times of stress (Ainsworth, 1989).

Since the 1990s, attachment theory has also been applied to teacher–child relationships (e.g., Pianta, 1999). According to this extended attachment perspective (Pianta, 1999; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012), teacher–child relationships differ from parent–child relationships in that they may not be as durable or exclusive—teachers build relationships with multiple children and children interact with multiple teachers throughout school years. Nevertheless, teacher–child relationships seem to share similar functions with parent–child relationships. Specifically, in schools, teachers can serve as a secure base that support children's autonomy exploration in the school environment and a safe haven for children to restore their sense of security when they encounter difficulties in school (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Thus far, the extended attachment theory has elicited researchers' interest in exploring the dyadic, affective teacher–child relationships, that is, the emotional bond between teachers and individual children (see Spilt & Koomen, 2022 for a review). Empirical studies have provided ample evidence for the importance of dyadic teacher–child relationships for diverse aspects of children's development, such as school engagement, academic achievement, and bullying behaviors (see Roorda et al., 2011; ten Bokkel et al., 2023 for meta-analyses).

It is important to investigate the affective relationship quality across relationship domains. As suggested by attachment theory, children develop mental representations of their relationships with different relationship partners. Mental representations are generally believed to reflect the thoughts, emotions, and feelings about the self, the relationship partner, and their mutual relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1990). They have been conceptualized as a hierarchical structure with a global mental representation on the top level and domain-specific mental representations at a lower level (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). A global mental representation indicates an attachment blueprint that shapes children's general view of the interpersonal world. These global representations subsequently guide their domain-specific mental representations about specific categories of relationship partners, such as parents and teachers (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Spilt & Koomen, 2022). Conceivably, such domain-specific representations (e.g., parents versus teachers) may vary in content, intent, and quality, and may also be influenced by different sources (Spilt & Koomen, 2022). Therefore, differences in the affective quality of relationships within the same relationship domain (e.g., mother–child relationship vs. father–child relationships) may be smaller than those across domains (e.g., mother–child relationship vs. teacher–child relationship). Considering such potential cross-domain differences, it seems relevant to investigate whether associations between personality traits and affective relationship quality may vary across relationship domains. In this study, we therefore investigated two relationship domains that are important for children and adolescents, namely, their affective relationships with parents and teachers.

Conceptualization of Dyadic Relationship Quality Across Domains

In previous research, affective relationships (i.e., emotional bonds with important relationship partners) have been conceptualized differently across relationship domains. In research about parent–child relationships, a variety of concepts have been used, such as warmth, support, rejection, and conflict (e.g., Baumrind, 1991; Rohner & Ali, 2016). These concepts could be classified into two broad categories, namely positive relationships (e.g., warmth, care) and negative relationships (e.g., conflict, rejection). Positive relationships refer to how supportive, sensitive, and caring parents are toward their children, whereas negative relationships describe the degree of negligent, indifferent, and rejecting experiences in parent–child relationships (Laursen & Collins, 2009). Affective teacher–child relationships are commonly operationalized in terms of closeness and conflict. Closeness refers to the degree of warmth, open communication, and support in teacher–child relationships, whereas conflict indicates the degree of fights, coercion, and disharmony in relationships with teachers (Pianta et al., 2003; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012).

Despite these differences, there seems to be consensus that conceptualizations across the two relationship domains all tap dimensions that are relevant for secure versus insecure attachment. To explore how affective relationships across domains are shaped by personality, we therefore consistently defined these relationships as the emotional bond between children and adults, which satisfies or hampers children's need for emotional support and security. Positive dimensions of affective relationships are considered to create a secure environment for children and promote their adjustment and wellbeing, whereas negative dimensions would increase insecurity in children and, consequently, lead to maladjustment (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012).

Conceptualization of Personality

In personality research, it is generally assumed that people behave or react in a relatively predictable way in daily life (McCrae & Costa, 2008). The patterns of individuals' behaviors, feelings, and attitudes across time and contexts tend to be described in terms of personality traits (Shiner & Caspi, 2003). Over time, personality researchers have proposed several models to describe the content of such personality traits (see Table 1 for an overview of the main models). One of the earliest frameworks attempting to describe the dimensions of personality is the 16 Personality Factor (16PF) model proposed by Cattell (Cattell & Cattell, 1995; Cattell & Mead, 2008). This framework was built based on a long list of words that people used to describe personality in daily life, which were subsequently clustered into 16 factors (Cattell & Cattell, 1995; Cattell & Mead, 2008). The higher-order factors of these 16 factors appear to overlap with the dimensions that are captured in other, more recent models (Cattell & Mead, 2008; John, 2021).

Eysenck (1991) took a different approach and adopted ratings of actual behaviors to organize the myriad individual differences between people (Revelle, 2016). Eysenck's model (the PEN model) includes three major dimensions: psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism. Although this model has been replicated across different samples (Eysenck, 1991; Furnham et al., 2008), there has been a dispute that it captures important, albeit limited dimensions of personality (Goldberg & Rosolack, 1994; John, 2021).

Table 1

Overview of Main Models of Personality

	Trait I Extraversion	Trait II Neuroticism	Trait III Agreeableness	Trait IV Conscientiousness	Trait V Openness
16 PF (Primary factors)	Self-reliance (R) Warmth Liveliness Privateness (R) Social boldness	Tension Emotional stability (R) Apprehension Vigilance	Dominance (R) Openness to change (R) Social boldness (R) Vigilance (R)	Perfectionism Rule-conscientiousness Abstractedness (R) Liveliness (R)	Sensitivity Openness to change Abstractedness Warmth
16PF (Higher-order factors)	Extraversion	Anxiety Neuroticism	Independence (R)	Self-control	Tough-mindedness (R)
PEN Model	Extraversion	Neuroticism	Psychoticism (R)		——
Big Five model	Surgency	Emotional stability (R)	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Intellect
Five-factor model	Extraversion	Neuroticism	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Openness

Note. R = reversed.

Recently, the field has reached a broad consensus that personality is best described by a five-trait structure. One model is the Big Five model, an empirically based model developed through lexical analyses of everyday expressions of personality traits used by researchers such as Cattell (Cattell & Cattell, 1995; Goldberg, 1993; John, 2021). Another model is the five-factor model, which takes a theory-driven approach and has been validated with questionnaire research (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Despite differences between origins and analytical approach, both the Big Five model and the five-factor model converge on a framework comprising five core traits, namely, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness (John, 2021). In this review study, agreeableness describes individuals' prosocial orientation, demonstrated by their kindness, cooperation, and consideration. Conscientiousness refers to how responsible, organized, thoughtful, and rule-abiding individuals are. Extraversion describes whether individuals prefer engaging in highly stimulating environments and enjoy social interactions. Neuroticism indicates the likelihood that an individual becomes emotionally unstable and experiences negative feelings such as anxiety and stress. Lastly, openness describes the extent to which individuals are interested in novel experiences and able to think creatively (John, 2021).

To comprehensively investigate the personality-relationship link, we included studies that used the models mentioned above. As can be seen in Table 1(based on Boyle, 1989; Cattell & Mead, 2008; Cattell & Cattell, 1995; Goldberg, 1993; John, 2021; Krug, 1978; McCrae & Costa, 2008; Noller et al., 1987; Saggino, 2000), there is a lot of overlap among these different models. More specifically, the sixteen factors proposed by Cattell could be further clustered into higher-order factors that substantially overlap with the model of five traits. Likewise, the three factors of the PEN model all seem to be fully described by the five core traits. Because of the overlap among these models and considering the widespread use of the model with five traits in recent research, the model with five traits was thus used as an overarching framework in this study to cluster findings using different models (John, 2021; McCrae & Costa, 2008).

Personality Traits and Personality Similarity in Affective Relationship Quality

According to developmental systems theory (Pianta et al., 2003), children's and adults' characteristics are expected to influence the formation of interpersonal relationships. These characteristics can be either biological (e.g., gender, age) or more developed features, such as the personality traits (Pianta et al., 2003). Following the idea of Buss (1987), personality traits may influence the quality of affective relationships both in a (re)active and evocative way. First, individuals may influence their relationships with others in a more reactive way, suggesting that they interpret aspects of their social environment in a way that resonates with their own personality traits. For instance, individuals who report a high level of neuroticism may interpret ambiguous behaviors in relationships more negatively than those who have lower levels of neuroticism (Finn et al., 2013). Such a tendency may increase the chance that relational negativity is perceived.

Second, individuals may actively shape their relationships with others in a way that aligns relatively well with their personality traits (Buss, 1987). For instance, highly agreeable individuals, thanks to their prosocial nature, are more motivated to maintain harmonious relationships (Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002). Thus, these individuals may initiate more support-seeking behaviors toward others, which may contribute to a closer and more supportive relationship than those who are low in agreeableness (Gleason et al., 2004; Graziano et al., 1996). Additionally, people who display a high level of conscientiousness may find it easier to regulate their behaviors and may therefore be more able to avoid conflicts in relationships (Jensen-Campbell & Malcolm, 2007). Also, individuals with a high level of openness may be good at creating new experiences with relationship partners, which may render these relationships more favorable (Prinzie et al., 2009).

Third, in social interactions, personality traits may evoke certain reactions (e.g., affection, hostility) from their relationship partners (Buss, 1987). In the long run, these reactions may accumulate and become more or less fixed interaction patterns within relationships. For instance, people who report a high level of extraversion tend to frequently engage in social activities and seek attention, which may either elicit positive feelings or conflict feelings from the relationship partner (Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002; Zee et al., 2013).

As suggested by developmental systems theory (Pianta et al., 2003), the interplay between the characteristics of both partners may significantly influence relationship quality as well. In relationship domains where personality interplay has been extensively studied (e.g., romantic relationships), two primary conceptualizations have emerged: personality similarity and personality dissimilarity. According to the personality similarity approach, individuals who share similar personality traits are more likely to develop positive relationships with each other (Lampis et al., 2018;

Montoya et al., 2008). The personality dissimilarity approach, however, suggests that opposite personalities (e.g., one person high in extraversion and the other low in extraversion) may be beneficial for developing high-quality relationships, as relationship partners can complement each other (Lampis et al., 2018). Although both perspectives may be theoretically relevant, research on adult–child relationships has largely focused on personality similarity; therefore, this review specifically focused on personality similarity.

Theoretically, research on personality similarity suggests that individuals generally favor people who are more similar to themselves in terms of personality traits, as they tend to use their own personality traits as an anchor to evaluate others (Buss, 1987; Kaplan & Anderson, 1973). Conceivably, when individuals evaluate their own attributes positively, similar others are evaluated in a comparable way (Montoya & Horton, 2013). Therefore, the level of attraction may be higher in relationships between two individuals with higher personality similarity. Notably, personality similarity can be operationalized in two ways: Perceptual similarity measures the level of similarity between individuals' reports about their own personality and their relationship partner's personality, and actual similarity is measured by the degree of similarity between the self-reports of both relationship partners about their own personality (Pancorbo et al., 2022). Based on previous studies, perceptual similarity in personality seems to be more strongly associated with relationship quality than actual similarity (Montoya et al., 2008). To comprehensively investigate the similarity-relationship link, we included both perceptual personality similarity and actual personality similarity in this review.

Potential Moderating Factors in the Personality-Relationship Link

Several factors may play a role in the associations between personality traits and affective relationships. Among personal variables, the age of children may be one relevant factor, considering that children's need of emotional support from others may change as they grow up (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Indeed, previous research has found that as children got older, the links of agreeableness and neuroticism with warmth became weaker (Prinzie et al., 2009). Next to age, gender may play a role in the personality-relationship link. For example, the association between openness and warmth appeared to be stronger for girls than boys (Denissen et al., 2009). With regard to adult gender, some studies found that adult gender played a role in the association between personality traits and adult–child relationships (e.g., Denissen et al., 2009), however, such an association was not found in other studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2018).

Furthermore, other demographic factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and culture may also be worth investigating. This aligns with the premise that relationship development may be an outcome of ongoing interactions between personality traits and the contexts they are in (Pianta et al., 2003). Specifically, SES and ethnic background may moderate the associations between personality traits and relationship quality by predisposing individuals to distinct resources and stressors (Conger et al., 2010; Lavner et al., 2018; Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). For instance, the link between neuroticism and negative relationships was found to be amplified by the financial instability (i.e., low SES) or stressors related to systemic discrimination (i.e., minority background; Lavner et al., 2018; Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). In addition to SES and ethnicity, culture may shape individuals' interpersonal expectation and motivation in social interactions, potentially moderating how personality traits relate to relationship quality (Matsumoto et al., 2008). For instance, in Eastern collectivistic cultures, which emphasize harmony and interdependence, agreeableness may disproportionately enhance relationship quality by aligning with communal norms. Conversely, in individualistic Western cultures, traits like extraversion may matter more, as they fulfill expectations for autonomy and self-expression (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hence, it seems relevant to consider these factors to comprehensively understand the personality-relationship link.

Additionally, methodological characteristics, such as research design and informant, may be of influence, as previous meta-analyses found that studies with a longitudinal design usually reported smaller effect sizes than studies with a cross-sectional design (e.g., Roorda et al., 2011). Furthermore, studies using a same-informant approach are prone to same-informant bias, often resulting in larger effect sizes for these studies than for studies with a multi-informant approach (e.g., Roorda et al., 2011). Therefore, we also explored whether these methodological factors would play a role in the personality–relationship link.

Present Study

The past decades have witnessed an accumulation of studies on the associations between personality traits and the affective quality of dyadic relationships. The current study extended prior research (e.g., Mammadov & Avci, 2024; Prinzie et al., 2009) in three ways. First, this study focused on relationships at the dyad level and included both parent–child relationships and teacher–child relationships. Second, we explored the roles of both children's personality traits, adults' personality traits, as well as personality similarity in affective relationships. Third, we differentiated between positive and negative relationship dimensions and explored how personality traits may be differently associated with these affective relationship dimensions.

A comprehensive understanding of the link between personality traits and affective relationship quality can provide important insights for practice. First, although personality traits are generally considered relatively stable over time, there is evidence that personality traits may be susceptible to change in childhood and adolescence (Bleidorn et al., 2022). This suggests that childhood and adolescence may be key periods for interventions aimed at fostering positive adult–child relationships by targeting personality traits. Second, with an understanding of personality traits, parents and teachers may become more aware of how their personality traits may shape their relationships with children. They may also gain a better understanding of individual children's relational needs and unique strengths, enabling them to tailor relationship-building strategies to meet the specific needs of individual children.

In this study, we aimed to answer three research questions. First, we investigated to what extent children's and adults' personality traits are associated with the affective quality of their mutual relationships. Second, we explored to what extent demographic characteristics (including both personal and contextual factors) and methodological characteristics may play a role in the associations between personality traits and adult–child relationship quality. Third, we investigated to what extent personality similarity (i.e., the degree of similarity in children's and adults' personality traits) is associated with affective relationship quality.

Table 2 provides an overview of the predictions in this study. As can be seen from Table 2, based on theory and empirical evidence (Harris & Vazire, 2016; Pianta et al., 2003; Prinzie et al., 2009), we hypothesized that children's and adults' agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness would be positively associated with positive affective relationships, whereas would be negatively associated with negative affective relationships. In contrast, children's and adults' neuroticism would be negatively associated with positive affective relationships and positively associated with negative affective relationships. Furthermore, we expected that interpersonal personality traits (i.e., agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism) would be more strongly associated with relationship quality than cognitive traits (i.e., openness and conscientiousness; Graziano et al., 1996; Zee et al., 2013). For our second research question, we hypothesized that stronger associations between personality traits and adult–child relationships would be found in studies with younger children and a higher percentage of girls (Denissen et al., 2009; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). With regard to methodological characteristics, we expected that studies using a cross-sectional and same-informant design would report stronger associations than those employing a longitudinal and different-informant design (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Roorda et al., 2011). Due to the scarcity or inconsistency of empirical evidence, we left the investigation of parent gender, SES, ethnicity, and culture as moderators exploratory. Regarding the third research question about personality similarity, we hypothesized that personality similarity would be positively associated with positive adult–child relationships, whereas it would be negatively associated with negative relationships (Montoya & Horton, 2013; Pancorbo et al., 2022).

Table 2

An Overview of Predictions

Predictor	Predictions	Reference
RQ1: Personality traits → adult–child relationship quality		
Agreeableness	(+) Positive relationships; (–) Negative relationships	Gleason et al., 2004; Mammadov & Avci, 2024
Conscientiousness	(+) Positive relationships; (–) Negative relationships	Denissen et al., 2009; Jensen-Campbell & Malcolm, 2007
Extraversion	(+) Positive relationships; (–) Negative relationships	Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002; Prinzie et al., 2009
Neuroticism	(–) Positive relationships; (+) Negative relationships	Bradley & Corwyn, 2023; Finn et al., 2013
Openness	(+) Positive relationships; (–) Negative relationships	Mammadov & Avci, 2024; Prinzie et al., 2009
Cognitive vs interpersonal	Stronger associations for interpersonal traits	Graziano et al., 1996; Zee et al., 2013
RQ2: Moderators in the personality-relationship link		
Child age	Stronger associations for younger children	Prinzie et al., 2009; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012
Child gender	Stronger associations for girls	Prinzie et al., 2009
Parent gender	Exploratory due to mixed findings	Denissen et al., 2009; Prinzie et al., 2009
SES	Exploratory due to scarce findings	Bradley & Corwyn, 2023; Lavner et al., 2018
Ethnicity	Exploratory due to scarce findings	Conger et al., 2010; Randall & Bodenmann, 2017
Culture	Stronger associations for Eastern culture	Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Matsumoto et al., 2008
Informant	Stronger associations for same-informant studies	Podsakoff et al., 2003; Roorda et al., 2011
Research design	Stronger associations for cross-sectional studies	Prinzie et al., 2009; Roorda et al., 2011
RQ3: Personality similarity → relationship quality		
Similar personalities	(+) Positive relationships (–) Negative relationships	Montoya & Horton, 2013; Pancorbo et al., 2022

Note. (+) = positive association; (–) = negative association

Method

Literature Search and Screening

We used three databases, PsycInfo, Web of Science, and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), to conduct the literature search. We chose these databases as they encompass the fields that are relevant for the variables under investigation. To identify relevant articles, we created three categories of keywords describing 1) personality traits (e.g., "personality", "Cattell", "Eysenck", "five-factor model", "agreeableness", "neuroticism", "emotional stability", "openness", "extraversion", "conscientiousness"); 2) relationship quality (e.g., warmth, support, closeness, conflict, hostility); and 3) age group (e.g., children, adolescence, elementary student, secondary school student). For each of the variables of interest, we entered various synonyms and ensured high searching productivity by replacing word endings with an asterisk to include all possible terms with the same root. Moreover, we added the Boolean operator AND to find empirical studies that simultaneously comprised dimensions of personality, relationship quality, and age groups. A full syntax can be found in Appendix A. The literature search was completed in May 2024[1].

Data screening was conducted in two phases: The abstract/title screening phase and the full-text screening phase. First, we screened the retrieved results based on the titles and abstracts by using the Rayyan Software (Ouzzani et al., 2016). We checked these results against the inclusion and exclusion criteria that we formulated (see below) and excluded obviously irrelevant results, such as studies that were not about humans. After the abstract/title screening, 629 articles were maintained. In the second phase, we retrieved the full texts of the remaining articles and checked these against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. By the end of the full text screening, we included 48 articles in our study (see Table 3 for a detailed list of the included studies). The PRISMA flow diagram (see Figure 1) illustrates our screening process in more detail (Page et al., 2021). The screening process was conducted by the first author. Possible uncertainties about whether to include an article or not were discussed with the co-authors.

[1] It should be noted that our literature search originally encompassed four relationship domains, namely relationships with parents, teachers, peers, and siblings. As we only found in total five studies for peer relationships and sibling relationships, we excluded these studies and decided to only focus on relationships with parents and teachers in this review.

Table 3

Included Studies in the Literature Review: Study and Sample Characteristics

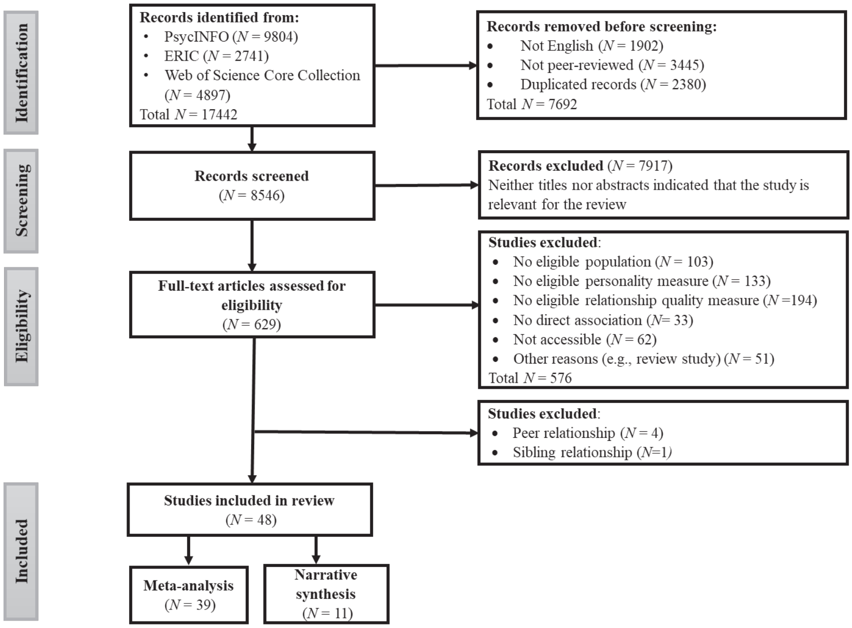
Reference	*N*	Country	Culture	SES	Ethnicity	Research design	Personality measurement	Personality trait/similarity	Rel domain	Rel dimensions	Informant
Asendorpf & Van Aken (2003)	336	Germany	W	––	––	C	BFQ	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P	same
Ayoub et al. (2019)	1313	US	W	––	75	C	BFI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P	different
Baardstu et al. (2017)	529	Norway	W	23.6	––	L	BFI	A	PCR	P, N	same & different
Batky et al. (2024)	1232	US	W	––	51	C	ICID	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	same
Boele et al. (2023)	582	Germany	W	12	87.3	C	HiPIC	N	PCR	P	same
Bradley & Corwyn (2023)	845	US	W	10	76	C	NEO-PI	N	PCR	P, N	different
Branje et al. (2004)	288	Netherlands	W	0	––	C	BFQ	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P	different
Branje et al. (2010)	1313	Netherlands	W	––	85	C	BFM	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	same
Castellani et al. (2014)	385	Italy	W	5	––	C/L	BFQ	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	N	same
Charalampous & Kokkinos (2014)	317	Cyprus	W	––	––	C	JEPQ	E, N	TCR	P	same
Cohrdes & Göbel (2022)	4258	Germany	W	11.6	––	C	BFI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	same
Cundiff et al. (2021)	335	US	W	16.9	40.6	L	CCQ	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	same & different
Ene et al. (2020)	158	Romania	W	––	––	C	––	PS	PCR	P	same
Fadda et al. (2015)	1193	Italy	W	––	100	C	BFQ	E, N	PCR	P, N	same
Ferguson (2024)	6309	Ireland	W	––	5.2	L	TIPI	N	PCR	N	same
Finkelstein & Grebelsky-Lichtman (2022)	230	Israel	W	12.9	76.55	C	EPQ-R	N	PCR	P	same
Gurba et al. (2021)	405	Poland	W	8	100	C	BFM	A, N	PCR	P	same
Heijkoop et al. (2009)	61	Netherlands	W	––	––	C	––	PS	PCR	P	different
Hong et al. (2015)	268	Singapore	E	––	70	L	BFI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	N	same
Keresteš et al. (2023)	968	Croatia	W	––	––	C	BFI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P	same
Kim et al. (2018)	2082	Australia	W	––	––	C	BFI	A, C, E, N, O	TCR	P	same & different
Lianos (2015)	230	Greece	W	––	88	C	DPCA	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	different
Lynn et al. (2016)	174	US	W	0	68	C	BFI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P	different
Ma et al. (2022)	492	China	E	39.3	––	C	BFI	O	PCR, TCR	P	same
Mastrotheodoros et al. (2020)	497	Netherlands	W	12.3	94.8	C	BFQ	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	N	same & different
Moreira et al. (2021)	399	Portugal	W	––	––	C	NEO-FFI	N	PCR	P, N	same
O'Connor & Dvorak (2001)	402	––	––	––	––	C	BFM	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	same
Oliver et al. (2009)	95	US	W	––	90	L	NEO-FFI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P	same

Reference	*N*	Country	Culture	SES	Ethnicity	Research design	Personality measurement	Personality trait/similarity	Rel domain	Rel dimensions	Informant
Pancorbo et al. (2022)	634	Brazil	W	––	––	C	BFPF	A, C, E, N, PS	TCR	P	same & different
Peng et al. (2022)	882	China	E	––	––	C	BFI	N	PCR	N	same
Prinzie et al. (2012)	353	Belgium	W	––	100	L	HiPIC	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	different
Qu et al. (2022)	4213	China	E	32	100	C	BFM	N	PCR	P	same
Rimehaug et al. (2011)	406	Norway	W	––	––	C	NEO-PI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	same
Röder et al. (2015)	72	Germany	W	100	12.5	C	BFI	E, N	PCR	P, N	same
Saritas-Atalar & Altan-Atalay (2017)	267	Turkey	E	24.7	100	C	BPTI	E, N	PCR	P	same
Schofield et al. (2012)	451	US	W	1	100	C	NEO-FFI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	different
Truhan et al. (2022)	257	Ireland	W	––	5.7	C	BFI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	same
van der Linden et al. (2012)	428	Netherlands	W	––	––	C	QBF	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P	same & different
Van Heel et al. (2020)	993	Belgium	W	––	––	C	QBF	A	PCR	P	different
Van Leeuwen et al. (2007)	582	Belgium	W	4.54	––	C	HiPIC	A, C, E, N, O	PCR	P, N	different
Van Tuijl et al. (2005)	288	Netherlands	W	––	96	C	––	PS	PCR	P	different
Wan et al. (2023)	352	China	E	––	––	C	BFI	O	TCR	P	same
Wettstein et al. (2021)	1290	Switzerland	W	––	––	C	––	N	TCR	P	different
Wilkinson & Walford (2001)	404	––	––	0	90	C	EPQ	E, N	PCR	P	same
Zanon et al. (2014)	344	Brazil	W	––	––	C	FPB	A, C, E, N	PCR	P	same
Zee et al. (2013)	8545	Netherlands	W	32.9	9.8	C	FFPI	A, C, E, N, O	TCR	P, N	same & different
Zhang et al. (2022a)	1844	China	E	––	––	C	TIPI	A, C, E, N, O	PCR, TCR	P, N	same
Zhang et al. (2022b)	3345	China	E	––	––	C	EPI	E, N	PCR	P, N	same

Note. *N* = child sample size; Culture: W = Western; E = Eastern; SES = % of low SES; Ethnicity = % of majority; Study design: C = cross-sectional study; L = longitudinal study; Personality Measurement: BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire; BFI = Big Five Inventory; ICID = Inventory of Children's Individual Differences; BFM = Big-Five Markers; JEPQ = Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire; CCQ = California Child Q-set; DPCA = Dimensions of Personality for Children and Adolescents; NEO-FFI = NEO-Five-Factor-Inventory; BFPF = Big Five Personality Factors; HiPIC = Hierarchical Personality Inventory for Children; NEO-PI = NEO-Personality-Inventory; BPTI = Basic Personality Traits Inventory; QBF = Quick Big Five; EPQ = Eysenck Personality Questionnaire; FPB = Factorial Personality Battery; FFPI = Five Factor Personality Inventory; EPI = Eysenck Personality Inventory; TIPI = Ten Item Personality Inventory; Personality traits: A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; E = Extraversion; N = Neuroticism; O = Openness to experience; PS = personality similarity; Rel domain = Relationship domains; PCR = parent–child relationship; TCR = teacher–child relationship; Rel dimensions = Relationship dimensions; P = positive dimensions; N = negative dimensions.

Figure 1

Flowchart of Study Selection and Screening



Note. Among the 48 included studies, 2 studies were both included in the meta-analysis as well as the narrative synthesis. In terms of relationship domains, 40 studies were about parent–child relationships, and 6 studies were about teacher–child relationships, and 2 studies included both relationship domains.

We formulated the following five inclusion and exclusion criteria. First, studies were considered eligible if they included children aged 6 to 18 years old. Second, studies were included if they were about the affective quality of children's relationships with either parents or teachers or both. More specifically, studies that measured positive dimensions (e.g., closeness, support, warmth) and/or negative dimensions (e.g., conflict, hostility, rejection) of children's emotional bonds with adults were included. Third, we investigated the quality of affective relationships at the dyadic level. Studies that measured relationship quality at the group level were excluded. For example, parent–child relationships that did not differentiate between mothers and fathers (e.g., Zhang et al., 2019) and teacher–child relationships that were measured solely at the classroom level or as a general relationship without specifying individual teachers (e.g., Chen et al., 2021) were excluded. Fourth, in case multiple studies used the same database, we only included the study with the largest sample size and excluded the other articles from the analyses to avoid overlapping samples (e.g., de Haan et al., 2012). Fifth, we only included empirical studies that provided statistics for the association between either children's or relationship partners' personality traits or both and at least one of the investigated affective relationships. Lastly, we restricted the studies to English peer-reviewed articles. Book reviews, commentary articles, and dissertations were excluded (Roorda et al., 2017).

Coding of Included Studies

After the screening phase, we coded all included articles on the basis of sample, demographic, design, and measurement characteristics. Sample and demographic characteristics included overall sample size, children's mean age, child gender (percentage of girls), parent gender (percentage of mothers/female teachers), SES (percentage of the sample with low SES background), ethnicity (percentage of the sample from majority groups), and cultural context (Western or Eastern culture). Design and measurement characteristics were the country where the study was conducted, research design (cross-sectional or longitudinal design), type of informant (same or different informants for personality traits and affective relationship quality), type of personality trait(s) measured (i.e., agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and/or openness), type of relationship dimension(s) (i.e., positive dimensions and/or negative dimensions), and relationship domain(s) (i.e., parent–child relationships and teacher–child relationships) measured. Regarding effect sizes, we coded the used statistics (e.g., Pearson correlation coefficient) that quantified the associations of interest.

Each article was double coded by the first author and a PhD researcher who received training before coding. The mean kappa value for the categorical variables was .96 (range .91-1.00), and the mean intra-class correlation for the numerical variables was .99 (range .98-1.00). These indicators suggest a high reliability between the coders (Cicchetti et al., 2006). Discordances among coding were mostly due to mistakes made when entering the data into the software program.

After coding, we found that in terms of relationship domains, among the 48 studies, more studies were about parent–child relationships (k = 42) than about teacher–child relationships (k = 8). Interestingly, two studies were about both parent–child relationships and teacher–child relationships. Considering the high number of studies on parent–child relationships, we further categorized these particular studies to explore whether they provided sufficient information for a meta-analysis. Among the studies about parent–child relationships, 35 studies were about the association between personality traits and positive parent–child relationships (e.g., warmth, support, closeness, open communication) and 25 studies investigated negative relationship dimensions (e.g., rejection, hostility, conflict). In this study, we therefore used a meta-analytic approach to analyze the associations of personality traits with both positive and negative parent–child relationships (k = 39). The associations between personality traits and teacher–child relationships and the associations between personality similarity and the relationships with both parents and teachers were examined with a narrative approach, given the limited number of available studies (k =11).

Meta-Analysis of the Association Between Personality Traits and Parent–Child Relationships

To investigate the associations of personality traits with positive and negative parent–child relationships, we took a meta-analytic approach and adopted Pearson correlation coefficients (r) as the effect size estimate. If r was not reported in the studies, we contacted the first authors to ask for this information. When authors did not provide us with the required information, studies had to be excluded from the meta-analysis. In this review, we considered r lower and around .10 as small, around .25 as medium, and higher and around .40 as large (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001, p. 147).

We investigated the associations between personality traits and parent–child relationships in two ways. First, we used three-level meta-analysis to investigate the associations of children's personality traits and parents' personality traits with parent–child relationships in isolation. Some studies included more than one effect size, that is, effect sizes from different informants, or different measurement points in longitudinal studies. By using three-level meta-analysis, we were able to include all relevant effect sizes from primary studies, as this technique accounts for the interdependency of effect sizes (Assink & Wibbelink, 2016; Konstantopoulos, 2011; Van den Noortgate et al., 2013).

We built separate models for each personality trait and for different dimensions of parent–child relationships (i.e., positive and negative), respectively. We conducted log-likelihood-ratio tests and calculated the percentage of variance at each level to investigate whether the effect sizes were heterogeneous within studies (i.e., variance at level 2) or/and between studies (i.e., variance at level 3, Assink & Wibbelink, 2016). To explore whether the variance at these levels could be explained by particular demographic or methodological characteristics, we continued to conduct moderator analyses. The moderators tested were child age, child gender, parent gender, ethnicity, SES, cultural context, research design, and type of informant. To ease the interpretability of the results of moderator analyses, we centered the continuous moderators (e.g., age) around their means (Hayes, 2022). When the moderators were centered, the regression intercepts represented the estimated effect sizes at the means of the moderators, and the regression coefficients indicated how much the effect sizes would change if the moderators were one unit away from the means. If the tests of the regression coefficients were significant, the tested factors were then proven to be significant moderators.

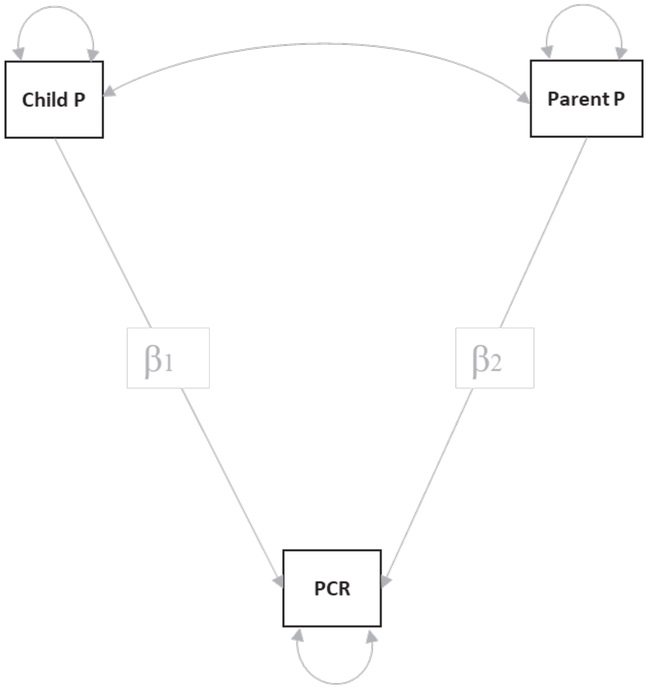
To assess publication bias, we adopted the modified regression-based test, or Egger Multilevel Meta-Analysis test (Egger MLMA), as suggested by Rodgers and Pustejovsky, (2021), concerning the interdependency of the effect sizes. We included the standard error of the effect sizes as a covariate in the meta-regression formulas. In addition, we plotted the study mean effects against their meta-analytic standard errors in study-funnel plots (Fernández-Castilla et al., 2020). These analyses were performed in R (version 4.3.2) using the metafor package (Viechtbauer, 2010).

Second, we used meta-analytic structural equation modeling (MASEM) to investigate what the associations between personality traits and parent–child relationships would be like when having the other relationship partners' personality traits being controlled for (see Figure 2). We fitted the model in Figure 2 and conducted MASEMs for each personality trait separately. As MASEM does not account for the interdependency of the effect sizes within one primary study, we calculated the mean effect sizes within studies by taking sample size as weight (Bilici & Jak, 2022). Because our proposed model was saturated, model fit could not be tested.

To test whether children's and parents' personality traits were associated with parent–child relationships differently at a statistically significant level, we conducted chi-square difference tests to compare the model in which the two associations were constrained to be equal with the model in which these associations were not constrained to be equal. If the chi-square difference test is not significant, it suggests that the magnitude of the association between children's personality trait and relationship quality is not significantly different from the association between parents' personality trait and relationship quality. We applied one-stage MASEM (Jak & Cheung, 2020) as implemented in webMASEM (Jak et al., 2021). All meta-analytic data, codes, and research materials (including our coding scheme and online supplementary materials) are available at https://osf.io/4dprw.

Figure 2

MASEM of Personality Traits' Effect on Parent–Child Relationships



Note. Child P = children's personality traits; Parent P = parents' personality traits; PCR= parent–child relationships; β_1 = the unique effect of children's personality traits on parent–child relationships; β_2 = the unique effect of parents' personality traits on parent–child relationships.

Results: Meta-Analyses

Three-Level Meta-Analyses

Children's Personality Traits and Parent–Child Relationships

In the multilevel meta-analyses for children's personality traits and parent–child relationships, 30 studies were included, involving 30,364 parent–child dyads (see Online Supplementary Materials for forest plots). These studies included children of both elementary and secondary school age (mean age = 13.36, age range = 7 to 17 years). Regarding the geographic locations of these studies, 16 studies were conducted in Europe, 7 in Asia, 4 in North America, and 1 in South America. Two studies did not provide geographic information.

Table 4 provides the results for the associations of children's personality traits with positive parent–child relationships and negative parent–child relationships. Regarding children's personality traits and *positive* parent–child relationships, the results indicated statistically significant, small to medium effect sizes for all five traits. Children's agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness were positively associated with positive parent–child relationships (rs range from .11 to .21, ps < .001), whereas Neuroticism was negatively associated with positive parent–child relationships (r = -.14, p < .001).

Regarding the associations between children's personality traits and *negative* parent–child relationships, all five traits were found to be associated with negative parent–child relationships, with statistically significant, small to medium effect sizes (see Table 4). Specifically, children's agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness were negatively associated with negative parent–child relationships (r = -.13, -.14, -.07, and -.06, respectively, ps < .01). In contrast, neuroticism was positively associated with negative parent–child relationships (r = .17, p < .001).

Table 4

The Meta-Analytic Associations and Associated Statistics Between Children's Personality Traits and Parent–Child Relationships

	k	j	$\bar{r}$	95%CI	Var at level 2	% Var level 2	Var at level 3	% Var level 3
Positive parent–child relationships								
Agreeableness	19	48	.21***	[.16, .27]	0.003***	21.52	0.010***	70.24
Conscientiousness	16	37	.21***	[.16, .25]	0.001	14.10	0.006**	68.07
Extraversion	20	43	.14***	[.11, .17]	0.000	9.45	0.003***	65.42
Neuroticism	25	51	-.14***	[-.18, -.11]	0.002***	19.68	0.007***	67.95
Openness	15	35	.11***	[.06, .16]	0.002**	19.88	0.006**	64.68
Negative parent–child relationships								
Agreeableness	14	53	-.13***	[-.17, -.10]	0.004***	56.40	0.002	20.12
Conscientiousness	13	52	-.14***	[-.17, -.11]	0.003***	49.00	0.001	19.46
Extraversion	15	58	-.07**	[-.11, -.02]	0.001***	18.27	0.005***	65.73
Neuroticism	18	64	.17***	[.13, .21]	0.004***	36.07	0.005***	53.45
Openness	12	48	-.06**	[-.10, -.02]	0.000**	0.00	0.005***	71.54

Note. We fitted separate models for each personality trait. k = number of studies; j = number of effect sizes; Var = variance. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

In Table 5, the findings for the moderator analyses can be found. Regarding personal factors, *child age* was a significant moderator of the association between children's agreeableness and positive parent–child relationships, with stronger associations observed in studies with older children compared to those with younger children. With regard to contextual factors, ethnicity was found to moderate the association between children's conscientiousness and positive parent–child relationship quality, such that the association was weaker in samples with a higher percentage of children from majority groups. Regarding methodological factors, *type of informant* appeared to be a significant moderator for four out of the five associations between children's personality traits and positive parent–child relationships, namely for the associations with agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism. Type of informant was also a significant moderator for three out of five associations between children's personality traits and negative parent–child relationships, namely for extraversion, neuroticism, and openness. In all these cases, associations were significantly stronger if personality traits and parent–child relationships were reported by the same informant than by different informants. Child gender, parent gender, culture, SES, and research design did not act as statistically significant moderators in any of the associations (see Table 5).

Parents' Personality Traits and Parent–Child Relationships

Regarding the analyses of the associations between parents' personality traits and parent–child relationships, 14 studies were included, involving 9,660 parent–child dyads (see Supplementary Material for forest plots). These studies included both elementary and secondary school-aged children (mean age =12.95 years, age range = 7 to 15 years). Among these studies, 9 studies were conducted in Europe, 4 studies in North America, and 1 study in Asia.

Table 6 presents the results of the associations of parents' personality traits with positive and negative parent–child relationships. As shown in Table 6, four out of five traits were significantly associated with *positive* parent–child relationships, with small to medium effect sizes being reported. Specifically, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion were positively associated with positive parent–child relationships (r =.24, .15 and .13, ps < .05, respectively). Neuroticism was the only trait that was found to be negatively associated with positive parent–child relationships (r = -.14, p < .010). Openness was not significantly associated with positive parent–child relationships.

Table 5

Regression Coefficients of Categorical and Continuous Moderator Analyses on the Association Between Children's Personality Traits and Parent–Child Relationships

Moderator variables	Agreeableness			Conscientiousness			Extraversion			Neuroticism			Openness		
	k	*j*	β	*k*	*j*	β	*k*	*j*	β	*k*	*j*	β	*k*	*j*	β
Positive parent–child relationships															
Child age	19	48	.02*	16	37	.01	20	43	-.00	25	51	-.01	15	35	-.01
Child gender (% of girls)	19	48	-.00	16	37	-.00	20	43	-.00	25	51	-.00	15	35	-.00
Parent gender (% of mothers)	19	48	.00	16	37	-.00	20	43	-.00	25	51	.00	15	35	-.00
Research design (0=cross-sectional,1=longitudinal)	19	48	-.10	16	37	-.06	20	43	-.01	25	51	.03	15	35	-.04
Informant (0=different, 1=same informant)	19	48	.12*	16	37	.11**	20	43	.07 *	25	51	-.12***	15	35	-.03
Culture (0=Eastern, 1=Western)	17	44	.08	14	33	.03	17	38	-.02	21	45	.04	13	31	-.07
SES (% of low SES)	6	12	-.01	4	9	-.00	6	11	.00	10	18	-.00	4	9	.00
Ethnicity (% of majority)	8	20	-.00	7	18	-.00*	10	22	-.00	14	29	.00	6	16	.00
Negative parent–child relationships															
Child age	14	53	-.01	13	52	.03	15	58	-.00	18	64	.01	12	48	.01
Child gender (% of girls)	14	53	.00	13	52	-.00	15	58	.00	18	64	.00	12	48	-.00
Parent gender (% of mothers)	14	53	-.00	13	52	-.00	15	58	-.00	18	64	.00	12	48	-.00
Research design (0=cross sectional,1=longitudinal)	14	53	.03	13	52	.03	15	58	-.04	18	64	-.01	12	48	-.02
Informant (0=different, 1=same informant)	14	53	-.02	13	52	.03	15	58	-.07**	18	64	.07**	12	48	.04*
Culture (0=Eastern, 1=Western)	11	44	.01	11	44	-.04	13	50	-.08	16	56	-.09	10	40	-.03
SES (% of low SES)	5	31	.01	5	31	.00	5	29	-.00	6	33	-.00	4	27	.01
Ethnicity (% of majority)	7	37	.00	7	37	-.00	8	37	.00	10	42	-.00	6	33	.00

Note. k = number of studies; j = number of effect sizes; β = standardized beta coefficient. ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05.

In Table 6, the associations between parents' personality traits and *negative* parent–child relationships can be found. Only three out of five personality traits were found to be significantly associated with negative parent–child relationships. Specifically, agreeableness and conscientiousness (*r*s = -.06 and -.10, *p*s < .050) were negatively associated with negative parent–child relationships. In contrast, neuroticism was positively associated with negative parent–child relationships ($r = .15$, $p < .001$). Extraversion and openness were not significantly associated with negative parent–child relationships (see Table 6).

Table 6

Meta-Analytic Associations and Associated Statistics Between Parents' Personality Traits and Parent–Child Relationships

	k	j	$\bar{r}$	95%CI	var at level 2	% var level 2	var at level 3	% var level 3
Positive parent–child relationships								
Agreeableness	12	22	.24***	[.14, .35]	0.000	0.00	0.029***	93.42
Conscientiousness	11	21	.15***	[.09, .22]	0.000	0.00	0.008***	78.47
Extraversion	10	19	.13*	[.02, .25]	0.000	0.00	0.030***	92.89
Neuroticism	13	26	-.14**	[-.22, -.06]	0.000	2.01	0.017***	87.58
Openness	10	19	.10	[-.00, .21]	0.002	6.29	0.022**	84.79
Negative parent–child relationships								
Agreeableness	9	36	-.10**	[-.18, -.03]	0.001**	4.88	0.011***	82.73
Conscientiousness	8	35	-.03*	[-.06, -.00]	0.005***	76.75	0.000	0.00
Extraversion	7	31	-.01	[-.06, .04]	0.004***	53.07	0.002	23.76
Neuroticism	10	37	.15***	[.10, .20]	0.018***	92.33	0.000	0.00
Openness	7	31	-.06	[-.12, .01]	0.001***	10.15	0.006**	71.82

Note. We fitted separate models for each personality trait. k = number of studies; j = number of effect sizes; Var = variance. ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

Table 7 displays the findings for the moderator analyses. As can be seen in this table, most of the moderator analyses were insignificant, except for some exceptions. With regard to personal factors, *child gender* significantly moderated the association between parents' neuroticism and positive parent–child relationships, with stronger associations found in samples with a larger proportion of boys. Regarding contextual factors, *SES* was found to moderate the association between parents' openness and positive parent–child relationships, such that the association was weaker in samples containing a larger proportion of families from low SES backgrounds. *Ethnicity* significantly moderated the association between parents' agreeableness and negative parent–child relationships, with stronger associations observed among parents from majority groups as compared to minority groups. *Culture* moderated the association between parents' conscientiousness and positive parent–child relationships with a stronger association found in Eastern culture compared to Western culture. In terms of methodological factors, *type of informant* was a significant moderator of the association between parents' conscientiousness and positive parent–child relationships. Specifically, associations were stronger when parents' conscientiousness and positive parent–child relationships were reported by the same informant than by different informants. Child age, parent gender, and research design did not act as significant moderators for the associations between parents' personality traits and parent–child relationships (see Table 7).

Publication Bias

Egger MLMA tests and funnel plots (see Online Supplementary Materials) provided mixed evidence for publication bias in the current study. The funnel plots indicated a potential publication bias for the association between children's openness and positive parent–child relationships, and for the associations of children's conscientiousness and neuroticism with negative parent–child relationships. In terms of Egger MLMA tests, only three out of twenty tests were statistically significant. That is, the associations between children's agreeableness and positive parent–child relationships, and associations of conscientiousness and neuroticism with negative parent–child relationships indicated significant results, suggesting potential publication bias for children's personality traits. For parents' personality traits, none of the effects were statistically significant (*p*s > .050). Taken together, this suggests that results of children's personality traits, in particular the associations of conscientiousness and neuroticism with negative relationships, should be interpreted with caution, as potential publication bias may have led to an overestimation of the true effects.

Table 7

Regression Coefficients of Categorical and Continuous Moderator Analyses on the Association Between Parents' Personality Traits and Parent–Child Relationships

Moderator variables	Agreeableness			Conscientiousness			Extraversion			Neuroticism			Openness		
	k	*j*	β	*k*	*j*	β	*k*	*j*	β	*k*	*j*	β	*k*	*j*	β
Positive parent–child relationships															
Child age	12	22	.07	11	21	-.01	10	19	.01	13	26	.01	8	18	-.02
Child gender (% of girls)	12	22	.00	11	21	.00	10	19	-.00	13	26	-.00*	8	18	.00
Parent gender (% of mothers)	12	22	-.00	11	21	.00	10	19	.00	13	26	-.00	8	18	-.00
Research design (0=cross sectional,1=longitudinal)	12	22	-.03	11	21	.05	10	19	.04	13	26	-.00	8	18	.01
Informant (0=different, 1=same informant)	12	22	.05	11	21	.12*	10	19	.05	13	26	-.14	8	18	.02
Culture (0=Eastern, 1=Western)	12	22	-.03	11	21	-.20**	10	19	-.14	13	26	.13	10	19	-.28
SES (% of low SES)	5	9	-.01	4	8	.00	3	6	-.01	5	10	-.01	3	6	-.03*
Ethnicity (% of majority)	6	13	-.00	6	13	-.00	5	11	.00	7	15	.00	5	11	.00
Negative parent–child relationships															
Child age	9	36	-.01	8	35	.00	7	31	-.01	10	37	.00	7	31	-.01
Child gender (% of girls)	9	36	.00	8	35	.00	7	31	-.00	10	37	-.01	6	29	-.01
Parent gender (% of mothers)	9	36	.00	8	35	-.00	7	31	-.00	10	37	-.00	7	31	.00
Research design (0=cross sectional,1=longitudinal)	9	36	-.06	8	35	-.01	7	31	-.05	10	37	-.06	7	31	-.00
Informant (0=different, 1=same informant)	9	36	-.01	8	35	-.05	7	31	-.05	10	37	.07	7	31	-.02
Culture (0=Eastern, 1=Western)	8	35	.03	8	35	.01	7	31	-.04	10	37	.04	7	31	-.08
SES (% of low SES)	3	26	.02	3	26	.00	2	22	-.07	4	27	.01	2	22	-.09
Ethnicity (% of majority)	6	31	.00*	6	31	.00	5	27	-.00	7	32	-.00	5	27	.00

Note. k = number of studies; j = number of effect sizes; β = standardized beta coefficient. ***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05.

Meta-Analytic Structural Equation Modeling

Table 8 provides the results of the MASEM analyses that were conducted to explore the associations of personality traits with parent–child relationships when another relationship partner's personality was controlled for. Regarding *positive* parent–child relationships, both children's and parents' agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism were significantly associated with positive parent–child relationships, after controlling for the relationship partners' personality traits (i.e., parents' or children's personality traits, respectively; $|\beta|$s range from .11 to .20, *p*s <.01). As such, the reported associations seem to be rather robust. However, for extraversion and openness, only children's personality traits remained statistically significant when controlling for parents' personality traits, but not vice versa. Notably, for all five personality traits, the chi-square tests comparing the models with and without constrained associations were not statistically significant. This means that the magnitude of the associations between children's personality traits and positive parent–child relationships was not significantly different from the associations between parents' traits and positive parent–child relationships. The non-significance effect of parents' extraversion and openness may be caused by a relatively smaller sample size of parents compared with children and thus less power to detect significant effect.

Regarding *negative* parent–child relationships, both children's and parents' agreeableness and neuroticism remained statistically significantly associated with negative parent–child relationships when the others' corresponding personality traits were controlled for (i.e., parents' or children's personality traits, respectively; $|\beta|$s range from .08 to .15, *p*s <.01). The chi-square difference tests suggest that no statistical difference was found between the effect sizes of children's and parents' agreeableness and neuroticism on negative parent–child relationships. For openness, when having children's and parents' openness in the same model, only children's openness was significantly associated with negative parent–child relationships (β = -.05, p < .05) but not parents' openness (β = -.04, *ns*). However, the chi-square difference test was not significant, suggesting that the effect sizes of children's and parents' openness on negative parent–child relationships were not statistically different. For conscientiousness and extraversion, when having both relationship partners' personality traits in one model, only children's traits remained statistically significant (βs = -.13 and -.06, *p*s < .01). The significant chi-square difference tests indicated that the associations of children's conscientiousness and extraversion with negative parent–child relationships were significantly larger than the associations for parents' conscientiousness and extraversion.

Table 8

Estimated Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors of MASEM of the Associations Between Personality Traits and Parent–Child Relationships

	Child β_1 (*SE*)	Parent β_2 (*SE*)	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta\ df)$	*p* value
Positive parent–child relationships				
Agreeableness	.16 (.03) ***	.20 (.05) ***	χ^2 (1) = 0.36	.550
Conscientiousness	.18 (.02) ***	.11 (.03) ***	χ^2 (1) = 2.68	.102
Extraversion	.12 (.02) ***	.11 (.06)	χ^2 (1) = 0.03	.861
Neuroticism	-.12 (.02) ***	-.12 (.04) **	χ^2 (1) = 0.01	.919
Openness	.09(.03) **	.07 (.05)	χ^2 (1) = 0.07	.794
Negative parent–child relationships				
Agreeableness	-.11 (.02) ***	-.08 (.04) *	χ^2 (1) = 0.51	.474
Conscientiousness	-.13 (.01) **	-.00 (.01)	χ^2 (1) = 17.73	.000
Extraversion	-.06 (.02) **	.00 (.01)	χ^2 (1) = 4.76	.029
Neuroticism	.15 (.02) ***	.13 (.03) ***	χ^2 (1) = 0.23	.634
Openness	-.05 (.02) *	-.04 (.03)	χ^2 (1) = 0.04	.848

Note. We fitted separate models for each personality trait. β_1 = the unique effect of children's personality traits on parent–child relationships; β_2 = the unique effect of parents' personality traits on parent–child relationships; $\Delta\chi^2(\Delta\ df)$ = chi-square difference with a model with constrained direct effects ($\beta_1 == \beta_2$); *p* value = *p*-value of chi-square difference test. ****p* < .001; ***p* < .01; **p* < .05.

Results: Narrative Review

In the following sections, associations between personality traits and teacher–child relationships, as well as the associations of personality similarity with parent–child relationships and teacher–child relationships are summarized.

Personality Traits and Teacher–Child Relationships

Table 9 gives an overview of the included studies about teacher–child relationships. In total, eight studies investigated associations between personality traits and teacher–child relationships. Studies were conducted in Europe (3), Asia (3), South America (1), and Australia (1). Sample sizes ranged from 317 children (Charalampous & Kokkinos, 2014) to 8,545 children (Zee et al., 2013). Four studies were performed in secondary schools, three studies were conducted in upper elementary schools, and one study was conducted in both elementary and secondary schools. All studies were cross-sectional in design. Four studies employed the same-informant approach, and the other four studies employed a multiple-informant approach.

Children's Personality Traits and Teacher–Child Relationships

Regarding *positive* teacher–child relationships, four studies reported the associations of children's agreeableness and conscientiousness with positive teacher–child relationships, with three studies reporting positive associations (Kim et al., 2018; Zee et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2022a). The effect sizes ranged from small to medium for both agreeableness and conscientiousness. One study did not find any significant associations of children's agreeableness and conscientiousness with positive teacher–child relationships (Pancorbo et al., 2022). One possible explanation can be that the first three studies had much larger sample sizes (i.e., N ranged from 902 to 8545) than the study of Pancorbo et al. (2022; i.e., N = 634) and, hence, had more statistical power to detect significant results. Another explanation is that the first three studies focused on relatively specific aspects of teacher–child relationships, such as closeness and support, whereas the study by Pancorbo et al. (2022) investigated a more general construct, namely liking.

Five studies investigated children's extraversion and neuroticism in relation to positive teacher–child relationships. Four studies reported a positive association for extraversion and a negative association for neuroticism, with effect sizes ranging from small to medium (Charalampous & Kokkinos, 2014; Kim et al., 2018; Zee et al., 2013; Q. Zhang et al., 2022a). In one study, however, children's extraversion or neuroticism was not associated with positive teacher–child relationships (Pancorbo et al., 2022). This again could be due to the broad conceptualization of teacher–child relationships used by Pancorbo et al. (2022).

Five studies examined the association between children's openness and positive teacher–child relationships. Four studies found a positive association between children's openness and positive teacher–child relationships, with effect sizes ranging from small to medium (Kim et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2022; Wan et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022a). Another study did not find such an association (Zee et al., 2013). This may be due to differences in how the fifth trait was conceptualized. The first four studies measured openness as conceptualized in the five-factor model, whereas the last study used a narrower conceptualization of openness (i.e., autonomy).

Table 9

An Overview of Included Studies on Personality Traits and Student-Teacher Relationships

Reference	Country	Age	*N*	PER	STR	Informant	Teacher Type	A	C	E	N	O
Charalampous & Kokkinos (2014)	Cyprus	elementary	317	child	POS	same	–	–	–	.39*	-.14*	–
Kim et al. (2018)	Australia	secondary	2082	child	POS	same	sub (MT)	.20**	.24**	.08**	-.11**	.14**
							sub (EN)	.18**	.22**	.12**	-.11**	.22**
				teacher	POS	same	sub (MT)	.66**	.54**	.48**	-.51**	.58**
							sub (EN)	.62**	.51**	.47**	-.49**	.56**
				teacher	POS	different	sub (MT)	.29	.16	.19	-.18	.22
							sub (EN)	.31	.18	.09	-.28	.19
Ma et al. (2022)	China	secondary	738	child	POS	same	class	–	–	–	–	.19***
Pancorbo et al. (2022)	Brazil	secondary	634	child	POS	same	class	.04	.05	.08	-.05	–
				teacher	POS	same	class	.52**	.39**	.31**	-.37**	
				teacher	POS	different	class	.05	.03	-.10*	-.01	–
Wan et al., (2023)	China	elementary &secondary	352	child	POS	same	class	–	–	–	–	.38**
Wettstein et al. (2021)	Switzerland	elementary	1290	teacher	POS	different	class	–	–	–	-. 04	–
							sub	–	–	–	-. 23**	–
Zee et al., (2013)	Netherlands	elementary	8545	child	POS	same	class	.31*	.29*	.16*	-.20*	-.02
					POS	different	class	.17*	.07*	.11*	-.02	.01
				sample1	NEG	same	class	-.23*	-.12*	.05*	.10*	-.13*
					POS	same	class	.30*	.28*	.14*	-.20*	.01
				sample2	POS	different	class	.17*	.07*	.09*	-.02	.00
					NEG	same	class	-.21*	-.10*	.05*	.10*	-.13*
Zhang et al. (2022a)	China	secondary	902	Sample 1	POS	same	class	.09*	.16*	.14*	-.13*	.18*
			942	Sample 2	POS	same	class	.16*	.17*	.14*	-.15*	.14*

Note. Age: elementary = children of elementary school age; secondary = children of secondary school age; child *N* = child sample size; PER= whose personality traits were reported; STR= aspects of teacher–child relationships; POS= positive teacher–child relationships; NEG= negative teacher–child relationships; Informant= whether same-informant or different-informant approach was used; Teacher Type= whether teachers were class teachers or subject teachers; sub = subject teacher; EN = English; MT = Math; class = class teacher; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; E = Extraversion; N = Neuroticism; O = Openness to experience.

With regard to *negative* teacher–child relationships, only one study investigated associations between children's personality traits and negative teacher–child relationship quality (Zee et al., 2013). This study found negative associations of children's agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness with negative teacher–child relationships. A negative association was found between neuroticism and negative teacher–child relationships. Unexpectedly, this study reported positive associations between children's extraversion and negative teacher–child relationships.

In summary, the small number of studies suggests that children who scored high on agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness, and low on neuroticism, were likely to experience a high degree of positivity with teachers. Evidence regarding the association between children's personality traits and negative teacher–child relationships was scarce, and therefore, we could not draw definitive conclusions for this association. In general, the strength of associations did not seem to differ based on any of the investigated moderating variables.

Teachers' Personality Traits and Teacher–Child Relationships

Two studies investigated the associations of teachers' agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness with *positive* teacher–child relationships, with both studies providing information about both same informant and different informant associations. When the same informant reported about both personality traits and relationship quality, teachers' agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion appeared to be significantly and positively associated with positive teacher–child relationships, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large (Kim et al., 2018; Pancorbo et al., 2022). However, when teachers' personality traits and teacher–child relationships were reported by different informants, the associations of teachers' agreeableness and conscientiousness and positive teacher–child relationships were not significant (Kim et al., 2018; Pancorbo et al., 2022). For teachers' extraversion, one study (Pancorbo et al., 2022) even found a negative association with positive teacher–child relationships, with a small to medium effect size. In Kim et al. (2018), this association was not significant.

Three studies examined the association between teachers' neuroticism and positive teacher–child relationships. Two studies reported both same-informant and different-informant associations, whereas one study only reported different informant associations. With respect to same-informant associations, teachers' neuroticism appeared to be negatively associated with positive teacher–child relationships in both studies, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large (Kim et al., 2018; Pancorbo et al., 2022). With regard to different-informant associations, only one study found a positive association between teachers' neuroticism and positive teacher–child relationships, with a medium effect size (Wettstein et al., 2021). The two other studies, however, did not find significant associations between teachers' neuroticism and positive teacher–child relationships at all (Kim et al., 2018; Pancorbo et al., 2022). A possible explanation for this mixed finding could be that the first study was conducted in elementary schools, whereas the other two studies were performed in secondary schools.

Only one study investigated the association between teachers' openness and positive teacher–child relationships. This study found that when adopting the same-informant approach, teachers' openness was positively associated with positive teacher–child relationships, with large effect sizes (Kim et al., 2018). However, this link was not found when different informants reported about teachers' openness and teacher–child relationships.

To summarize, teachers who rated themselves high on agreeableness, conscientiousness, and low on neuroticism tended to experience more positive relationships with children. The evidence regarding the association between extraversion and positive teacher–child relationships was mixed and evidence for openness was scarce, warranting further study. Additionally, no studies have yet examined the associations between teachers' personality traits and negative teacher–child relationships. Therefore, we cannot make any conclusive remarks about this. Regarding potential factors that may play a role in the personality-relationship link, studies using the same-informant approach tended to report a stronger association than those using a different-informant approach.

Personality Similarity and Affective Adult–Child Relationships

Regarding personality similarity and *parent–child relationships*, three studies were included. All three studies were conducted in Europe. The sample sizes ranged from 61 children (Heijkoop et al., 2009) to 288 children (Ene et al., 2020). One study was conducted in upper elementary school and two studies were performed in secondary school. These studies were all cross-sectional in design, with one study utilizing a single-informant approach and two studies using a different-informant approach. When looking at personality similarity, these three studies did not distinguish between personality traits, but rather used a general measure of personality similarity. Furthermore, one study (Van Tuijl et al., 2005) looked at actual personality similarity and two studies (Ene et al., 2020; Heijkoop et al., 2009) focused on perceptual personality similarity.

When measuring *perceptual personality similarity*, one study (Heijkoop et al., 2009) revealed a positive association between perceptual personality similarity and positive mother–child relationships, with a medium effect size. In contrast, the association between perceptual personality similarity and father–child relationships was not significant (Heijkoop et al., 2009). Another study (Ene et al., 2020) revealed a positive association between perceptual personality similarity and positive father–child relationships, with a medium effect size. These authors did not examine mother–child relationships (Ene et al., 2020). When *actual personality similarity* was measured, the one available study (Van Tuijl et al., 2005) did not find significant associations of actual personality similarity with positive mother–child and father–child relationships (Van Tuijl et al., 2005).

For *teacher–child relationships*, only one study examined the associations of perceptual and actual personality similarity with positive teacher–child relationships (Pancorbo et al., 2022). This study was conducted in South America and included 634 children and 31 teachers from secondary schools. The study was cross-sectional and used a multiple-informant approach. This study showed that both actual and perceptual personality similarity were positively associated with positive teacher–child relationships (Pancorbo et al., 2022). The association between perceptual personality similarity and positive teacher–child relationships was stronger than that for actual personality similarity.

In summary, we found preliminary evidence supporting the idea that greater personality similarity between children and their relationship partners is associated with more positive adult–child relationships, especially for perceptual similarity. We were not able to draw any conclusions about the association between personality similarity and negative adult–child relationships, as this association has not yet been examined.

Discussion

In the present study, we examined whether personality traits and personality similarity were linked to dyadic, affective adult–child relationships (i.e., children's relationships with parents and teachers). For parent–child relationships, there were sufficient studies to perform a meta-analysis. For the associations between personality traits and positive teacher–child relationships and between personality similarity and relationships with parents and teachers, we conducted a narrative review due to the limited number of studies available. Therefore, these results should be interpreted with somewhat more caution than those from the meta-analytic part. No studies were available about the associations between teachers' personality traits and negative teacher–child relationships, or between personality similarity and negative adult–child relationships, precluding conclusions about these associations. To better understand influential factors in the personality-relationship link, we investigated personal, contextual, and methodological characteristics as moderators. Although more research is needed, our review provides valuable insights into the personality-relationship link.

First, at a general level, both the meta-analysis and narrative review provided evidence that personality traits in both children and adults were associated with the affective quality of adult–child relationships. These associations were observed across relationship domains (parent–child and teacher–child) and both positive and negative dimensions (e.g., warmth vs. conflict). As such, these findings support developmental systems theory which emphasizes that the characteristics of both relationship partners—adult and child—are crucial for the formation of dyadic relationships (Pianta et al., 2003). Although effect sizes were small to medium in magnitude, they aligned with meta-analyses showing associations of similar magnitude between personality traits and various outcomes in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (e.g., Kim et al., 2019; Mammadov, 2022; Prinzie et al., 2009). Furthermore, the personality-relationship link held for parent–child and teacher–child relationships, which are pivotal to children's development in different contexts (see Boele et al., 2019; Roorda et al., 2011 for meta-analyses). This cross-domain consistency highlights the practical relevance of personality traits in fostering favorable relationships with various important others. Additionally, attention to personality traits may benefit not only relationship quality but also spill over into other aspects of children's adjustment, such as improving academic achievement and reducing bullying (Mammadov, 2022; Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015). Therefore, our findings on the personality–relationship link have both scientific and practical implications.

Second, as expected (Denissen et al., 2009; Harris & Vazire, 2016; Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002), higher levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, openness, and lower levels of neuroticism were associated with more positivity (e.g., closeness, warmth) and less negativity (e.g., conflict, rejection) in adult–child relationships. This applied to both children's and adults' personality traits. In contrast to our hypothesis (Graziano et al., 1996; Zee et al., 2013), we did not find that interpersonal traits (agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism) were more strongly associated with affective relationships than cognitive traits (conscientiousness, openness). Specifically, our meta-analytic findings revealed that the effect sizes for the associations between all five traits and parent–child relationships were of similar magnitude. The narrative review further supported this idea by showing that both cognitive and interpersonal personality traits were associated with teacher–child relationships. One possible explanation is that cognitive traits are important for adult–child relationships as well, as they encourage socially appropriate behaviors, which in turn may foster positive emotional bonds and reduce the likelihood of developing negative relationships (Jensen-Campbell & Malcolm, 2007; Tehrani & Yamini, 2020). Therefore, we advise future studies to include both interpersonal and cognitive personality traits to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of personality traits in the affective relationship quality.

Third, most findings were consistent across relationship domains, including the relevance of all five personality traits of children and the importance of both cognitive and interpersonal traits for affective relationship quality (as discussed above). However, some cross-domain differences seem to exist. Specifically, certain parents' personality traits (e.g., extraversion, neuroticism) demonstrated more consistent links to affective relationships than those of teachers. This discrepancy may reflect differences in relationship nature and role expectations. For instance, unlike parents, teachers often divide attention among many children, which may limit individualized interactions and potentially reduces the salience of their personality traits in dyadic relationships. Furthermore, guided by professional norms, teachers are inclined to regulate their behaviors to foster warm and supportive relationships with children, even when their innate traits may predispose them to behave otherwise (Burić & Mornar, 2023; Diefendorff et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2018). Future research is suggested to explore whether and how teachers' personality traits manifest differently across personal and professional contexts, and how these differences may shape teacher–child relationships .

Fourth, our analyses indicated that the personality–relationship link is not consistently moderated by personal factors, contextual factors, or research design.

Specifically, contrary to our hypothesis (e.g., Denissen et al., 2009; Prinzie et al., 2009; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012), we found little evidence that the association between personality traits and relationship quality consistently varied across child age, child gender, or parent gender. This suggests that personality traits may predispose basic tendencies in how individuals form emotional bonds with the others, which may be less susceptible to age and gender (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Furthermore, although four moderation analyses were significant, the overall pattern did not reveal consistent moderating effects of contextual factors (i.e., socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and culture). One plausible explanation is that the variability in the operationalization of SES and ethnicity across studies, as well as the underrepresentation of the studies from Eastern cultures (17%), may constrain the statistical power to detect moderation effect. It is also possible that certain contextual factors play a role in shaping affective relationships for specific personality traits (e.g., Prinzie et al., 2009). In addition, methodological factors yielded mixed results. Although effect magnitudes did not differ between cross-sectional and longitudinal designs, the choice of informant seemed to play a significant role. This finding aligns with prior research (Roorda et al., 2011) and may be attributed to the shared method variance when the same informant provides ratings for both personality traits and relationship quality (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Overall, our findings underscore the robustness of the personality–relationship link and advocate for future research to replicate these results using refined, consistent measures and multi-informant designs.

Fifth, even though only a few studies were available, our narrative review suggested adult–child relationships tended to be more positive when a higher degree of personality similarity between adults and children was reported. This aligns with previous research that personality similarity may contribute to favorable relationships (Montoya & Horton, 2013). Consistent with previous research (Montoya et al., 2008), we also found preliminary evidence that perceptual similarity may have a stronger association with relationship quality than actual similarity. Thus, future studies are suggested to distinguish between perceptual and actual similarity when investigating affective relationship quality (Montoya et al., 2008). Furthermore, our conclusion about the similarity-relationship link is limited to cases where similarity was measured as an aggregated index across all five traits. Some researchers, however, have argued that the role of personality similarity in interpersonal relationships may differ across specific traits (Harris & Vazire, 2016). It therefore would be interesting for future research to distinguish between similarity on the different personality traits when examining the association between personality similarity and adult–child relationships.

Limitations and Future Directions

The results reported in this study should be interpreted in light of the following limitations. First, most of the included studies for parent–child relationships and all studies for teacher–child relationships were cross-sectional in design, and thus, conclusions about the causal relations between personality traits and affective relationships could not be drawn. Although several theories (Buss, 1987; Pianta et al., 2003) have suggested that personality traits influence affective relationship quality, there is also research suggesting bidirectional associations between personality traits and relationship quality (e.g., Asendorpf & Van Aken, 2003). More longitudinal studies are needed to investigate the causality of influences in the link between personality traits and affective relationships.

Second, more studies were available about parent–child relationships than teacher–child relationships, and more studies investigated positive relationship dimensions than negative relationship dimensions, which constrains the generalizability of our findings. As such, more research is needed to understand the role of personality traits in teacher–child relationships and for negative relationship dimensions. Furthermore, more studies are needed to draw firm conclusions about personality similarity and adult–child relationships. Until that time, we should be careful in drawing conclusions about these under-investigated issues.

Third, as most studies tended to investigate personality traits in isolation, we were not able to examine the unique associations between specific personality traits and adult–child relationships (i.e., controlling for the influence of other traits; (van der Linden et al., 2010). In addition, we could not control for personality traits when examining the role of personality similarity in affective relationship quality, or vice versa, as few studies have concurrently included both variables (see Pancorbo et al., 2022, for an exception). Some research in romantic relationships has shown that the effect of personality similarity on couple satisfaction appeared to be negligible after accounting for the main effects of individual personality traits (Weidmann et al., 2016, 2023). Therefore, to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the personality-relationship link, it seems important for future research to include all five personality traits as well as both personality traits and personality similarity in the same study.

Fourth, to ensure the quality of the included studies, we only used peer-reviewed articles in this review. However, this could have resulted in potential publication bias in our findings. Future studies are recommended to replicate our findings by including unpublished studies as well (e.g., dissertations, conference contributions).

Practical Implications

Our findings regarding the personality-relationship link may contribute to practice. First, increasing parents', teachers', and psychologists' understanding of the role that both adults' and children's personality traits play in relationship quality may help improve adult–child relationships. Specifically, children with distinct personality traits may have different relational needs. By being aware of individual differences in personality traits, parents and teachers can tailor their communication strategies to meet children's specific needs, making them feel understood and, as a result, improving mutual relationships. Furthermore, it may provide teachers and parents with insights into why they respond to children in certain ways, stimulating their reflection upon how they can foster positive relationships.

Second, interventions targeting personality traits may help foster positive relationships. As personality traits appear to be less stable in childhood and adolescence (Bleidorn et al., 2022), this period offers an opportune time for interventions. Existing interventions have shown that by consistently enacting trait-level behaviors over time, individuals can align their behaviors with their desired personality traits (Hudson, 2021; Hudson et al., 2019). This approach can also be tailored to foster positive relationships. For instance, children with lower agreeableness could engage in weekly challenges to display agreeable behaviors, such as giving someone (e.g., friend, family member) a compliment at least twice a week (Hudson et al., 2019). Implementing these challenges over time may help foster positive relationship quality.

Third, although much more research is needed on personality similarity, we can draw a preliminary conclusion about its implications for practice. In practice, it would not be possible to match parents and children, or teachers and children, based on their respective personalities to create more positive adult–child relationships. However, research has shown that after receiving feedback about the similarities they shared, both teachers and children felt more similar to each other, and teachers also perceived their relationships with children as more positive (Gehlbach et al., 2016). Therefore, it is possible to change children's and adults' perceptual similarity, which can, in turn, improve their affective adult–child relationships.

Conclusion

To conclude, this review synthesized the findings from existing empirical research on the link between personality traits and adult–child relationships, indicating that the personality traits of both children and adults are relevant for children's affective relationships with parents and teachers. This underscores the potential of focusing on personality traits as a promising approach to enhancing the quality of adult–child relationships. However, more research is necessary to replicate our findings, particularly regarding the associations between personality traits and negative teacher–child relationships, as well as the association between personality similarity and adult–child relationships.