

**‘When Reality is Questioned’ – Gaslighting Acceptance in Intimate Relationships: The  
Role of Big Five Personality Traits and Dependent Personality Type**

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### Abstract

Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse that is increasingly recognized as a manipulative tactic within intimate relationships. Despite its growing societal relevance, research on gaslighting remains limited and inconsistent, especially regarding the psychological traits that may be linked to its acceptance. This study examined whether the Big Five personality traits, as well as a dependent personality profile, are associated with individuals' acceptance of gaslighting behaviours. The study employed a cross-sectional design. A sample of 176 participants ( $M = 27.45$ , 70.5% female) completed the Gaslighting Acceptance Questionnaire and the Big Five Inventory–2 Extra-Short Form (BFI-2-XS). The dependent personality profile was developed based on a trait combination identified in earlier research, which found that high agreeableness, high neuroticism, and low openness are characteristic of dependent tendencies. The results showed that higher agreeableness ( $\beta = -0.238, p = .001$ ) and openness ( $\beta = -0.202, p = .007$ ) were significantly associated with lower acceptance of gaslighting. No significant results were found for neuroticism ( $\beta = 0.025, p = .746$ ), extraversion ( $\beta = 0.003, p = .973$ ), conscientiousness ( $\beta = -0.025, p = .740$ ), or the dependent personality profile ( $\beta = -0.008, p = .927$ ). These findings suggest that higher levels of openness and agreeableness are associated with lower acceptance of gaslighting behaviours. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, experience sampling, or mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative measures with qualitative interviews. These methods would allow for a more nuanced and valid understanding of how personality traits shape individuals' acceptance of gaslighting tactics. By examining these dynamics in everyday relational contexts, researchers can gain deeper insight into how such attitudes develop and take shape in intimate relationships.

## **Introduction**

Despite its long-standing presence in society, intimate partner violence (IPV) remains a widespread yet often underrecognized issue. It includes various forms of abuse that can occur in romantic relationships, such as physical, psychological, sexual, and emotional abuse (Dicola & Spaar, 2016). Psychological abuse, in particular, is often overlooked, partly because it is less visible than physical violence and harder to operationalize (Heise et al., 2019). According to Henning and Klesges (2003), up to 80% of women have experienced psychological abuse. The increasing prevalence over the years in several countries makes psychological abuse an essential problem to focus on (Ma et al., 2023).

The terms emotional and psychological abuse are often used interchangeably in psychological literature because of their overlapping definitions. In fact, psychological abuse refers to verbal or non-verbal communication intended to mentally or emotionally harm or control another person (Breiding et al., 2015), whereas emotional abuse includes tactics such as coercive control and humiliation (Francis & Pearson, 2021). Since gaslighting incorporates aspects of both emotional and psychological abuse, this thesis will therefore use the term psychological abuse to encompass such non-physical forms of IPV, with a specific focus on gaslighting.

Within psychological abuse, gaslighting has gained increasing recognition as a particularly harmful form of manipulation because of its insidious nature. In fact, typical manipulation tactics involve causing the victim to question their perception of reality, which leads to confusion, self-doubt, and emotional dependence on the partner (Sweet, 2019). It is especially common in abusive relationships, where behavioural patterns such as denial, blame-shifting, and emotional invalidation are used to undermine the partner's sense of reality and emotional stability. Also, literature often distinguishes between a "gaslighter", referring to the perpetrator, and a "gaslightee", being the victim (March et al., 2025).

Gaslighting in intimate relationships arises from an imbalance of power, wherein one partner manipulates the other to maintain control and dominance.

Gaslighting operates on a more indirect level compared to physical abuse, which makes it more difficult to detect. As perpetrators seek to increase their partner's emotional dependence, victims often struggle to escape the abusive relationship, particularly when it comes to seeking external help from support institutions (Sweet, 2019). Given that gaslighting has only recently gained recognition within the field of IPV, research on this topic is limited. One major challenge lies in the difficulty of directly measuring individuals' experiences with gaslighting or their use of gaslighting tactics (Ferrer-Perez et al., 2020). Since gaslighting relies on deception and psychological control, victims may not fully recognize or accurately report their experiences, which makes it challenging to capture gaslighting explicitly. Additionally, studying "gaslighters" directly can be another challenge, as individuals who use gaslighting tactics may deliberately downplay their behaviours when asked. This social desirability bias can lead to inaccurate self-reports, complicating the identification and measurement of gaslighting perpetration (Grimm, 2010). Therefore, it is suggested that IPV and related constructs should be measured more implicitly (Ferrer-Perez et al., 2020).

One approach is to assess gaslighting acceptance, which captures the extent to which individuals justify or tolerate gaslighting tactics rather than directly measuring whether they have experienced gaslighting (March et al., 2025). To this end, March et al. (2025) developed a 10-item self-report questionnaire that measures individuals' acceptance of various gaslighting tactics. This instrument serves as a valuable indirect method for understanding gaslighting and has demonstrated acceptable validity in capturing attitudes toward manipulative behaviours in relationships, as reported in their study.

Personality traits might play a significant role in how individuals perceive and tolerate manipulative behaviours in relationships. The Big Five Personality Model provides a useful framework for understanding personality dimensions and their impact on social behaviour (Costa et al., 1991).

The five major traits include agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Literature has shown that certain personality traits are linked to manipulative and controlling behaviours in relationships, such as those observed in gaslighting (Mento et al., 2023). While psychological abuse is often examined in relation to specific pathological personality constructs, such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy in the Dark Triad (Fontanesi, 2024), this study focuses on how broader personality dimensions, specifically the Big Five, relate to the acceptance of gaslighting. In fact, Ulloa et al. (2016) analysed data from 7,187 young adults in the U.S. as part of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. IPV was measured through self-reports of physical, sexual, and psychological aggression, both as perpetrator and victim. Results showed positive associations between openness, extraversion, and neuroticism and both IPV perpetration and victimization. Similar results are shown in another study, stating that neuroticism can be linked with IPV perpetration (Dorling et al., 2024).

Personality traits may also shape the extent to which individuals accept or justify gaslighting behaviours. In fact, agreeableness, associated with cooperation and conflict avoidance (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997), may increase susceptibility to gaslighting due to a desire to maintain harmony in relationships. Individuals high in agreeableness may prioritize relational peace, making them more likely to tolerate manipulative behaviour rather than risk confrontation or disruption.

Neuroticism, characterized by emotional instability and high stress sensitivity, has been linked to IPV (Dorling et al., 2024). Individuals high in neuroticism may be more prone

to accept gaslighting due to difficulties with emotional regulation and ineffective coping strategies. These challenges can impair their ability to recognize manipulation, set boundaries, or respond assertively.

Findings on openness to experience are mixed. While some studies associate high openness with IPV (Ulloa et al., 2016), others suggest that lower openness may be linked to reduced critical thinking and greater passivity (Furnham, 2018). These factors may make individuals less likely to question manipulative behaviours or challenge controlling relationship dynamics, potentially increasing their acceptance of gaslighting tactics.

Similar to openness, research on extraversion also shows inconsistent results. However, higher extraversion is often associated with assertiveness, confidence in social interactions, and active communication (Dorling et al., 2024). These traits may help individuals detect inconsistencies in communication and express their concerns openly, making them less likely to tolerate manipulative behaviours such as gaslighting.

Lastly, conscientiousness, reflecting self-discipline, responsibility, and impulse control, has been negatively associated with IPV (Dorling et al., 2024). Individuals low in conscientiousness may be more tolerant of gaslighting tactics due to a tendency toward impulsivity, disorganization, and less goal-oriented behaviour, which can reduce their likelihood of resisting or critically evaluating manipulative dynamics in relationships.

Beyond general personality traits, it is also essential to consider overall personality types. A dependent personality type might be particularly relevant in the context of IPV (Kane & Bornstein, 2016). People with a dependent personality have a strong need for support and reassurance from others (Furnham, 2018). They struggle to make decisions on their own and often let others take responsibility for their lives. People with a dependent personality fear disagreement because they worry about losing approval. Other symptoms include feeling helpless when being alone and seeking a new relationship after one ends, as

well as their biggest fear of being abandoned. The studies from Kane and Bornstein (2016) and Collison and Lynam (2021) indicate a positive relationship between a dependent personality and IPV perpetration. Dependency has also been associated with a specific personality profile, which is characterized by high agreeableness, high neuroticism, and low openness (Furnham, 2018).

Despite growing recognition of gaslighting as a serious form of psychological abuse, research on the psychological factors that influence its acceptance is still in its early stages. While IPV has been studied extensively, most research has focused on physical or general psychological abuse, with little attention given specifically to gaslighting. More specifically, insight is still lacking on whether individuals who exhibit this combination of traits, reflecting a dependent personality type, are more likely to accept gaslighting behaviours. This study addresses that gap by examining how general personality traits and characteristics of a dependent personality type relate to the acceptance of gaslighting behaviours.

Specifically, the aim of the current study is two-fold: (1) investigating how the Big Five personality traits are associated with the acceptance of gaslighting behaviours, and (2) examining whether individuals with personality characteristics reflective of a dependent personality type show a greater tendency to accept gaslighting. This study contributes to a better understanding of psychological risk factors that may increase susceptibility to gaslighting, thereby supporting future prevention and intervention efforts.

Based on existing research, the current study proposes five hypotheses related to the Big Five personality traits: it is hypothesized that i) higher agreeableness and ii) higher neuroticism will each be associated with greater acceptance of gaslighting behaviours. In contrast, iii) higher levels of conscientiousness, (iv) extraversion and (v) openness are expected to be associated with lower acceptance of gaslighting. In addition, vi) it is also hypothesized that individuals who display a combination of high agreeableness, high

neuroticism and low openness, characteristics linked to a dependent personality type, will show a higher acceptance of gaslighting compared to those who do not share this profile.

## **Methods**

### **Design**

This study used a cross-sectional, correlational design to explore the relationship between personality traits and the acceptance of gaslighting behaviours. The data was collected through an anonymous online survey in April 2025. The ethical review of the study was carried out by the ethics committee of the University of Twente, which also issued the ethical approval (250463) for the study.

### **Participants**

The intended sample size for this study was determined using the pwr package in R (version 4.2.3; Champely, 2020). A power analysis for a linear regression with one independent variable indicated that a minimum of 54 participants would be required to detect a medium association ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ) with 80% power at a two-sided alpha level of .05. The final sample ( $N = 176$ ) exceeded this requirement, ensuring sufficient statistical power for the primary analyses. Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old and have sufficient proficiency in English to understand and complete the survey. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and participated voluntarily.

### **Procedure**

Data collection took place from the 24<sup>th</sup> of March until the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2025 through an online survey. The survey was created using Qualtrics and distributed via the SONA system of the University of Twente, where students could participate for research credits, as well as through social media to reach a broader participant pool. Before starting, participants were presented with an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, risks and ethical safeguards. They were informed that participation was voluntary,



anonymous and that they could withdraw at any time without providing a reason. The consent form also included a warning about potentially sensitive content. To continue, participants had to confirm their understanding and agreement, including consent for their data to be stored until May 2027. The survey took approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete and was structured in randomized blocks. After finishing the questionnaires, participants were shown a debriefing page explaining the study's focus on gaslighting. The page also offered support resources. At the end, participants were asked once more whether they consented to their data being used. If they declined, their responses were deleted automatically.

## **Materials**

The survey included several validated questionnaires measuring experiences with childhood adversity, attachment style, narcissistic traits, borderline symptoms and personality characteristics, of which only two were used for the present study.

The Gaslighting Questionnaire (March et al., 2025) is a 10-item self-report instrument designed to measure individuals' acceptance of gaslighting behaviours within romantic relationships. The items present different manipulative scenarios that reflect common gaslighting tactics, such as denying reality, shifting blame, or questioning the victim's perception. Participants respond using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher total scores reflect a greater tendency to justify or tolerate gaslighting behaviours. The scale has demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .97, and strong construct validity, showing significant correlations with other measures of intimate partner violence control. In the present study, the scale also showed good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .77.

To assess personality traits, the study employed the Big Five Inventory–2 Extra-Short Form (BFI-2-XS), a 15-item measure that captures the five major personality domains: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism

(Soto & John, 2017). Each domain is assessed using three items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). The BFI-2-XS is designed to measure broad personality traits efficiently and is suitable for research contexts with limited time. Although it is not intended to assess facet-level traits, it retains a clear Big Five structure and shows adequate psychometric properties in previous research, with internal consistency estimates ranging from  $\alpha = .59$  to  $.63$  and retest reliabilities between  $.70$  and  $.76$  (Soto & John, 2017).

In the present study, internal consistency values (Cronbach's alpha) were  $\alpha = .64$  for extraversion,  $\alpha = .33$  for agreeableness,  $\alpha = .51$  for conscientiousness,  $\alpha = .75$  for neuroticism, and  $\alpha = .44$  for openness.

### **Data Analysis**

The study targeted a diverse sample and collected demographic information, including age, gender, education level, and nationality. All data analyses were conducted using R (version 4.3.0). Prior to inferential analyses, data were screened for missing values and outliers. Missing responses were imputed based on patterns in the available data. Outliers were defined as standardized z-scores exceeding  $\pm 3$ . No extreme outliers were identified, and all cases were retained for analyses. To test the main hypotheses regarding the association between personality traits and gaslighting acceptance, five separate simple linear regression analyses were conducted, each including one of the Big Five traits as an independent variable. All variables were z-standardized before the analyses. Regression assumptions (normality of residuals, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence) were checked before interpreting the models.

In addition, a continuous dependent personality profile score was created to reflect the extent to which a person's trait levels matched the hypothesized dependent personality pattern, specifically, high agreeableness, high neuroticism, and low openness. This score was

computed by first standardizing each participant's agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness values separately. Since the hypothesized dependent personality profile included low openness, the standardized openness scores were multiplied by -1 to reverse their direction. This transformation ensured that higher reversed openness scores represent lower openness, aligning with the expected profile. The reversed openness score was then averaged with the standardized agreeableness and neuroticism scores to create a single continuous score. Higher scores indicate a greater resemblance to the dependent personality trait profile. This continuous score was then entered as an independent variable in a simple linear regression model to examine whether dependent personality tendencies were associated with gaslighting acceptance. To further explore the role of openness, a separate version of the composite score was calculated using non-reversed openness. This additional step was taken to investigate whether openness itself, rather than low openness as originally hypothesized, might be associated with gaslighting acceptance combined with agreeableness and neuroticism. Especially given the mixed findings regarding openness in previous literature, this step aimed to give more insight into the relationship. Effect sizes were interpreted using Cohen's (2013) guidelines, where values of  $\beta = .10$  are considered small,  $\beta = .30$  moderate, and  $\beta = .50$  large.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The final sample consisted of 176 participants. The average age was 27.45 years ( $SD = 12.94$ ), ranging from 18 to 78 years. Regarding gender, 124 participants (70.5%) identified as female, and 52 participants (29.5%) as male. In terms of nationality, 105 participants (59.7%) reported being German, 36 (20.5%) identified as Dutch, and 35 (19.9%) reported another nationality.

### **Big Five Score Distribution**

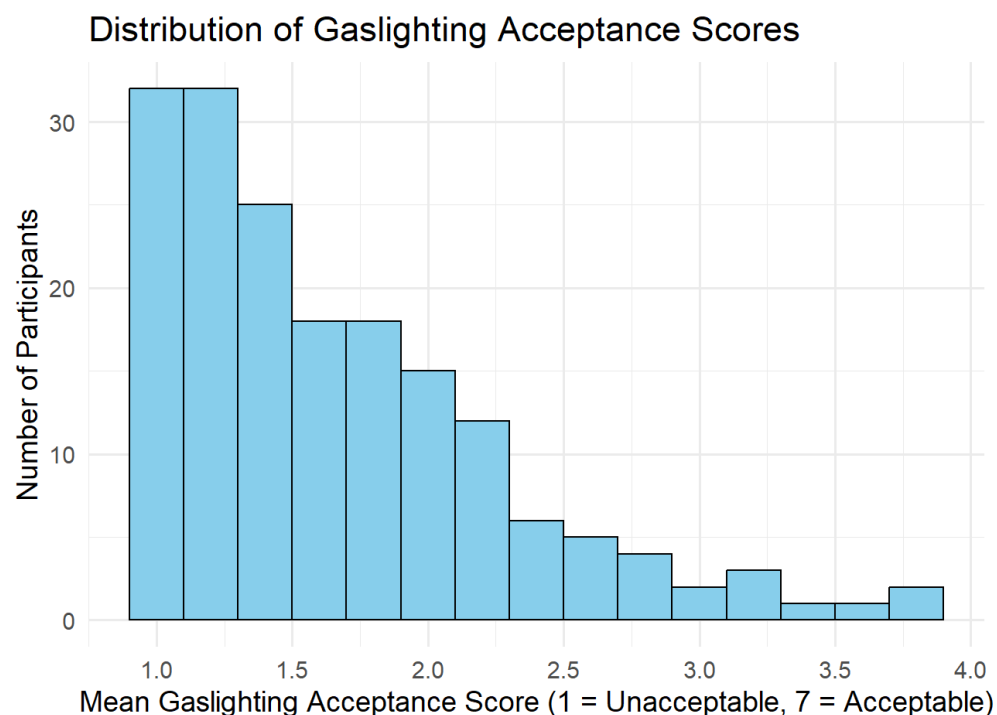
On average, participants who completed the BFI-2-XS scored highest on openness ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) and agreeableness ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ), and lowest on neuroticism ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). The mean scores for extraversion and conscientiousness were  $M = 3.13$  ( $SD = 0.86$ ) and  $M = 3.27$  ( $SD = 0.85$ ). Distributions for each trait are presented in Appendix B (Figures 1–5).

### Gaslighting Acceptance

The average acceptance score of the Gaslighting questionnaire was  $M = 2.45$  ( $SD = 0.62$ ), indicating generally low acceptance. The score distribution was right-skewed, with most participants scoring low and fewer reporting higher levels of acceptance (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*Histogram of Distribution of Gaslighting Acceptance Mean Scores*



### Assumption Checks

Before conducting the regression analyses, all relevant assumptions of linear regression were evaluated. Linearity and homoscedasticity were examined using residuals-

versus-fitted plots (see Appendix C). Visual inspection revealed no evidence of curvature or funnel-like patterns, indicating that the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were reasonably met. Normality was assessed using Q–Q plots and the Shapiro–Wilk test. Although the Shapiro–Wilk test indicated significant deviations from normality in all models (all  $p < .001$ ), the Q–Q plots showed only mild deviations in the tails, suggesting that normality violations were not severe. The independence of residuals was assumed based on the cross-sectional survey design with one-time individual responses. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as each model included only a single independent variable.

### Linear Regression Analyses

To examine the relationship between personality traits and gaslighting acceptance, five separate simple linear regression analyses were conducted using standardized variables. Results are presented in Table 1. Among the Big Five traits, only openness and agreeableness could be significantly associated with gaslighting acceptance. However, higher openness was associated with lower acceptance of gaslighting ( $\beta = -.202, p = .007$ ). Similarly, higher agreeableness was also negatively related to gaslighting acceptance ( $\beta = -.238, p < .001$ ). No significant associations were found for neuroticism, extraversion, or conscientiousness.

**Table 1**

*Results of Simple Linear Regressions Examining Associations between Gaslighting Acceptance and Big Five Traits.*

	$\beta$	SE	$p$	95% CI	df
Agreeableness	-0.238	0.074	.001	[-0.238, -0.058]	174
Openness	-0.202	0.074	.007	[-0.216, -0.034]	174
Neuroticism	0.025	0.076	.746	[-0.078, 0.108]	174

	$\beta$	SE	$p$	95% CI	df
Extraversion	0.003	0.076	.973	[-0.107, 0.110]	174
Conscientiousness	-0.025	0.076	.740	[-0.128, 0.091]	174

*Note.*  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error;  $p$  = p-value; 95% CI = 95% Confidence interval; df = degrees of freedom.

### Continuous Dependent Personality Profile and Gaslighting Acceptance

To examine the association between dependent personality traits and gaslighting acceptance, a linear regression was conducted using the continuous dependent personality profile score as a predictor. The analysis revealed no significant result ( $\beta = -0.008$ ,  $SE = 0.082$ ,  $p = .927$ ), with the model explaining virtually no variance in gaslighting acceptance ( $R^2 < .001$ ). As a follow-up, a second model was tested using a version of the dependent personality profile score that included non-reversed openness. This model showed a significant negative association between the trait combination and gaslighting acceptance, with  $\beta = -0.293$  and  $p = .001$ . This result indicates that individuals who scored high in agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness were less likely to accept gaslighting.

### Discussion

The present study aimed to examine whether the Big Five personality traits and a dependent personality profile were associated with the acceptance of gaslighting behaviours in intimate relationships. Gaslighting, as a form of psychological abuse, is often difficult to detect and underexplored in psychological research (Sweet, 2019). By focusing on personality traits, the purpose of this study was to identify traits and patterns that might contribute to gaslighting victimisation and perpetration. The results showed that higher levels of openness and agreeableness were significantly associated with lower gaslighting acceptance. In contrast, neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, and the initially tested

dependent personality profile (defined by high agreeableness, high neuroticism, and low openness) showed no significant associations. However, a version of the profile that included high instead of low openness, testing the trait in its original non-reversed form, was significantly associated with lower gaslighting acceptance.

## **Main Findings**

Three of the Big Five traits, namely neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion, were not significantly associated with gaslighting acceptance. This lack of significance may be partly explained by restricted variability within the sample. Participants reported relatively low levels of gaslighting acceptance overall and only low to moderate levels of these three traits, which reduces the potential to detect meaningful trait-related associations. Evidence from previous research further highlights the importance of sample characteristics. Visser and Bedard (2025), for instance, found that high neuroticism in men, specifically, is strongly associated with IPV. Similar findings were reported for conscientiousness and extraversion, where negative associations with IPV were observed in a large, predominantly male sample (Dorling et al., 2024). Given the female-skewed sample in the present study, this gender imbalance may have further weakened the observed relationships, as these might be more pronounced in men and thus diluted in the overall analysis. Another explanation for the non-significant findings across traits may lie in differences between the constructs being measured. While many previous studies have focused on IPV perpetration, the present study examined gaslighting acceptance, which represents a related but conceptually distinct outcome. While IPV perpetration reflects behavioural aggression and encompasses a broad spectrum of abusive behaviours (Stewart et al., 2013), gaslighting acceptance is attitudinal, focusing specifically on perceived acceptability of manipulation (March et al., 2025).

The only Big Five trait that aligned with expectations was openness to experience, which was negatively associated with the acceptance of gaslighting techniques. In the study

by Ekehammar and Akrami (2007), openness was found to be related to nonconformity and low levels of authoritarianism. These aspects may influence how people respond to gaslighting, as individuals who are less conforming and less accepting of rigid authority structures may be more likely to question manipulative behaviour rather than comply with it. As a result, they are also less inclined to accept one-sided or controlling dynamics in relationships.

Contrary to the original hypothesis, agreeableness was negatively associated with gaslighting acceptance. While it was expected that highly agreeable individuals would be more susceptible to manipulation due to their trustworthiness and conflict avoidance (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997), the results showed that those low in agreeableness were more likely to accept gaslighting tactics. One explanation is that low agreeableness corresponds to higher antagonism, which is associated with hostility, a lack of empathy, and a greater tendency to manipulate others to achieve personal goals (Crowe et al., 2018; Lynam & Miller, 2019). People with this interpersonal style may be more inclined to view controlling behaviours as acceptable within relationships because they are generally less concerned with the well-being of others and more tolerant of dominance-oriented interactions. In fact, they may be more accepting of manipulative tactics as a means of maintaining power and control, given their lower concern for others and greater tolerance of dominance-oriented interactions (Crowe et al., 2018).

Further insight comes from examining agreeableness at the facet level. Straightforwardness and compliance, which are two facets of agreeableness, appear especially relevant (Crowe et al, 2018). Straightforwardness reflects sincerity and an unwillingness to manipulate others, while compliance captures the ability to inhibit aggression and forgive others. These characteristics may directly counter the core features of gaslighting, which rely on manipulation, dominance, and psychological pressure (March et



al., 2025). Individuals high in these facets of agreeableness may be more attuned to harmful relational dynamics because they place strong value on honesty, cooperation, and emotional restraint in conflict situations. As a result, they may be more sensitive to manipulative behaviour that violates these interpersonal norms, making them less likely to tolerate or justify gaslighting tactics.

In addition to the Big Five traits, the study also examined a composite dependent personality profile, based on a combination of traits associated with dependent tendencies (Furnham, 2018). The original profile, defined by high agreeableness, high neuroticism, and low openness, was hypothesized to be positively associated with gaslighting acceptance, under the assumption that individuals with this combination may be more prone to emotional dependency and therefore more susceptible to manipulation. However, this profile was not significantly related to gaslighting acceptance. Given existing contradictions in the literature regarding openness, an alternative version of the profile was tested, this time combining high agreeableness, high neuroticism, and high openness. Surprisingly, this revised combination was negatively associated with gaslighting acceptance, suggesting that individuals with this trait pattern may, in fact, be more resistant to manipulation tactics.

A likely explanation is that agreeableness and openness may have reinforced each other, amplifying their role in reducing the acceptability of manipulative behaviours. This interpretation is supported by the current study's findings, which showed that both traits were independently associated with lower gaslighting acceptance. When combined, this relationship may have appeared even stronger, contributing to the significant outcome observed in the composite profile. These results may suggest that certain combinations of traits, such as openness and agreeableness, influence how individuals respond to manipulative relational dynamics. Although there is evidence that dependent personality types may be linked to intimate partner violence (Kane & Bornstein, 2016; Collison &

Lynam, 2021), the trait-based approach used in this study may have been too indirect to fully capture the mechanisms involved. The findings may be better understood as reflecting interactions between specific personality traits, rather than treating the profile as an indicator of gaslighting acceptance.

### **Future Research**

To better understand the associations identified in this study, future research could benefit from the use of more comprehensive personality instruments, such as the full BFI-2. Unlike the short form, the full version captures facet-level information, allowing researchers to examine the distinct subcomponents of each trait (Soto & John, 2017). With regard to the case of agreeableness, this approach appears to be beneficial, since previous research has shown that analysing traits only at the domain level may provide limited insight, as associations with outcomes can vary across lower-order facets (Crowe et al., 2018). Employing the full-length version would allow more precision in identifying which specific facets are most relevant to gaslighting acceptance.

In addition, future research might consider assessing dependent personality directly rather than inferring it from trait combinations. While the current study explored dependency through a profile of Big Five traits, instruments such as the Dependent Personality Questionnaire (Tyrer et al., 2004) are designed to capture dependency as an integrated and clinically validated construct. This would provide a more direct and psychometrically reliable assessment of dependency traits than indirect approximations based on Big Five scores.

Beyond traditional cross-sectional self-report designs, future research could make use of different measures to capture a more holistic view of gaslighting acceptance. For instance, experience sampling methodology (EMA) captures real-time reactions to interpersonal interactions (Myin-Germeys et al., 2018). While EMA primarily tracks momentary fluctuations, combining it with personality assessments could help clarify how stable traits

influence individuals' real-world recognition or rationalization of manipulative behaviour. In parallel, longitudinal designs could help reveal how attitudes toward gaslighting develop or shift over time, and whether certain traits can be associated with increased tolerance as relationships evolve (Farrington, 1991). Moreover, incorporating mixed-method approaches, such as combining quantitative trait measures with qualitative interviews or scenario-based tasks, may provide a richer understanding of the subjective reasoning behind gaslighting acceptance (Wenger, 1999). Particularly, this could be valuable in clarifying why individuals with similar personality profiles respond differently to manipulation. Altogether, these alternative methods would allow for a more nuanced and context-sensitive exploration of psychological abuse dynamics.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

One of the strengths of this study is the use of a reliable instrument for assessing attitudes toward manipulative behaviours in relationships. The Gaslighting Acceptance Questionnaire (March et al., 2025) showed strong internal consistency. Moreover, the sample size was also sufficient for detecting medium-sized effects and allowed for the inclusion of both trait-level and profile-based analyses.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. To start, a key limitation of this study is the low internal consistency observed for several of the Big Five scales. These low reliability values may have compromised the precision of trait measurement, making it more difficult to draw firm conclusions about the relationships between personality traits and gaslighting acceptance. To move on, the sample lacked demographic diversity, as it primarily consisted of young, female participants, most of whom identified as German or Dutch, limiting the generalizability of the results to broader populations. Furthermore, while the BFI-2-XS allowed for efficient personality assessment, its brevity restricted the ability to analyse specific trait facets that may be more relevant in the context of psychological abuse. The full

version of the BFI-2 would have provided deeper insight into lower-order facets, which could help identify which specific aspects of a trait are most strongly linked to gaslighting acceptance. Adding on that, the approach used to create a continuous interaction score to represent a dependent personality profile may have been too implicit to accurately reflect the construct. Using combinations of Big Five traits likely captured only general tendencies, rather than the nuanced features measured by dedicated tools like the Dependent Personality Questionnaire (Tyrer et al., 2004). This may have limited the clarity and interpretability of findings related to dependency.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, gaslighting remains a relatively new and underexplored topic in psychological research, particularly in relation to individual personality traits. While openness and agreeableness emerged as traits negatively associated with gaslighting acceptance, other hypothesized relationships, such as those involving neuroticism, conscientiousness, and the dependent personality profile, were not supported. These mixed results highlight the complexity of how personality traits relate to the tolerance of manipulative behaviours. They also point to the need for further investigation of the traits on a deeper facet level, as well as a more holistic approach to studying this complex relationship. A deeper understanding of these dynamics could help clarify who may be more vulnerable or resilient to gaslighting acceptance techniques and guide the development of more targeted interventions in the future.

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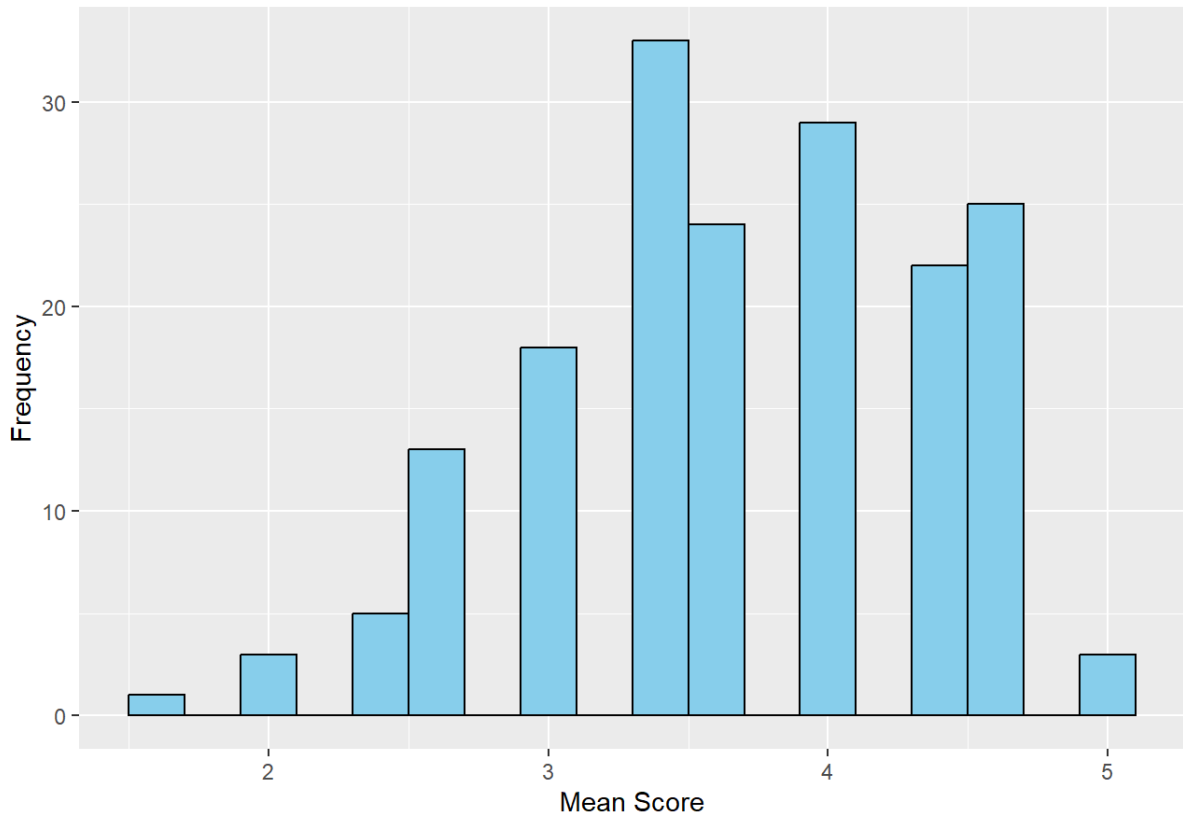
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### **Appendix A: AI Statement**

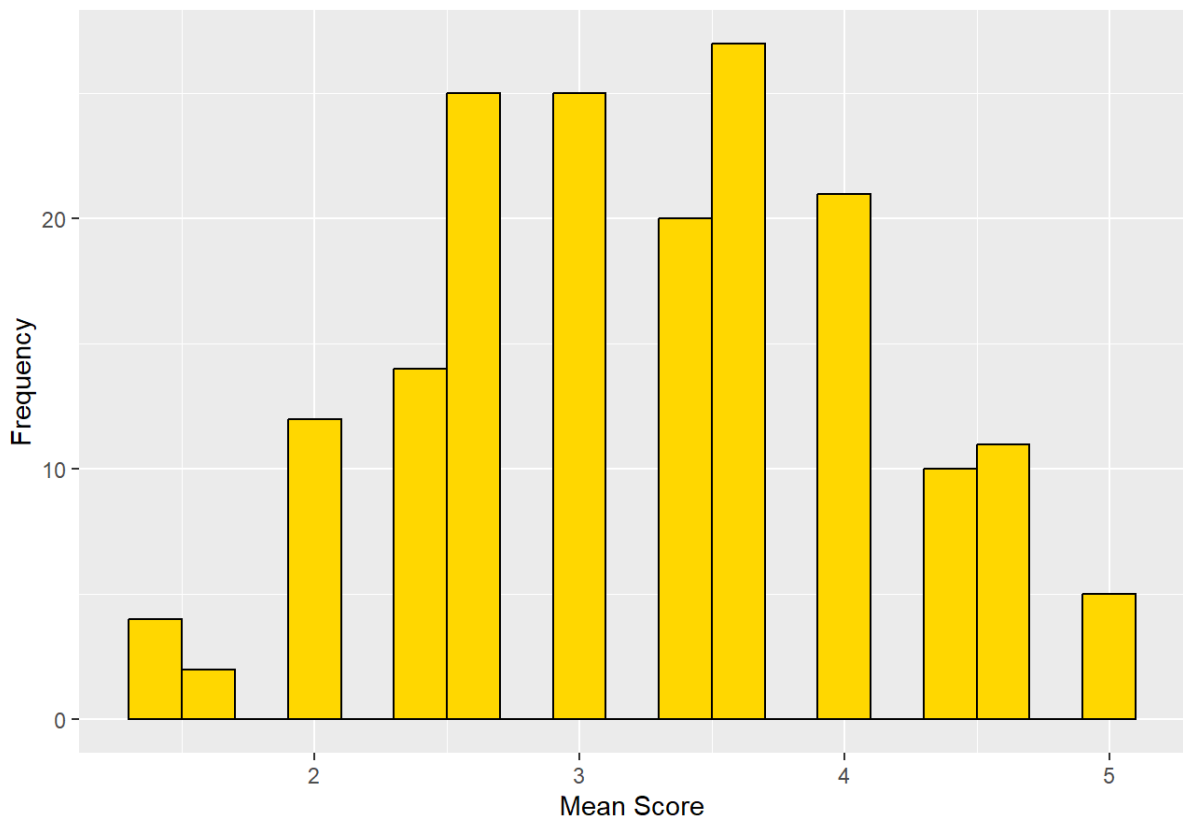
During the preparation of this thesis, the author, Merve Bekir, used ChatGPT and Grammarly to enhance the grammar, wording, and structure of the text. Additionally, ChatGPT was used to generate R codes for statistical analysis. All outputs were reviewed and revised by the author, who takes full responsibility for the final content of the work.

## Appendix B: Big Five Score Distribution

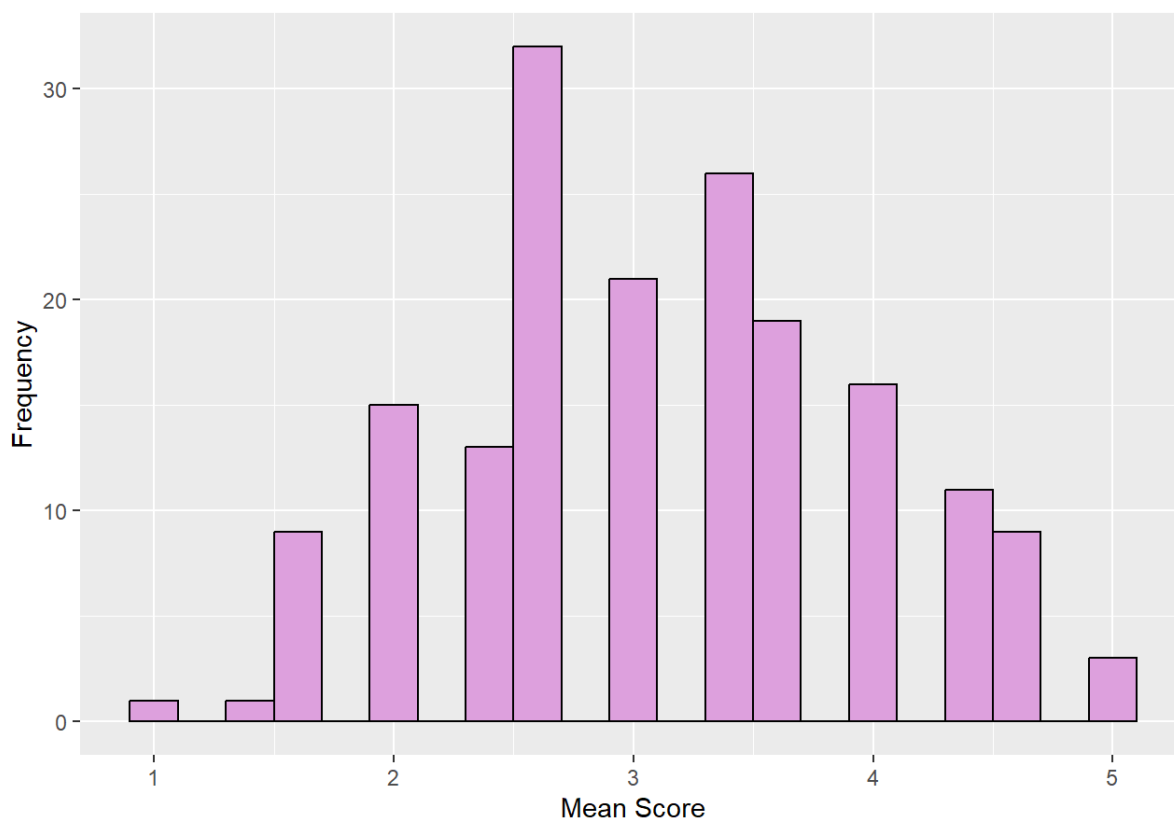
### Distribution of Agreeableness Scores



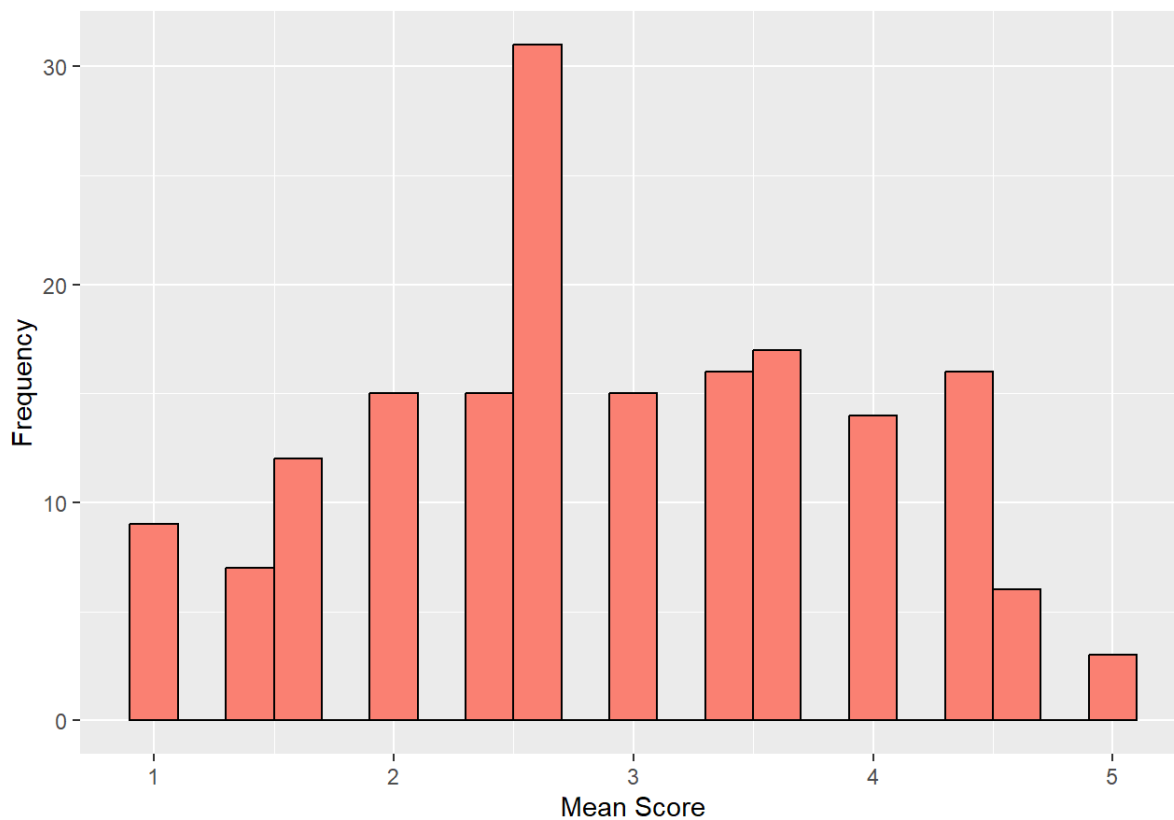
### Distribution of Conscientiousness Scores

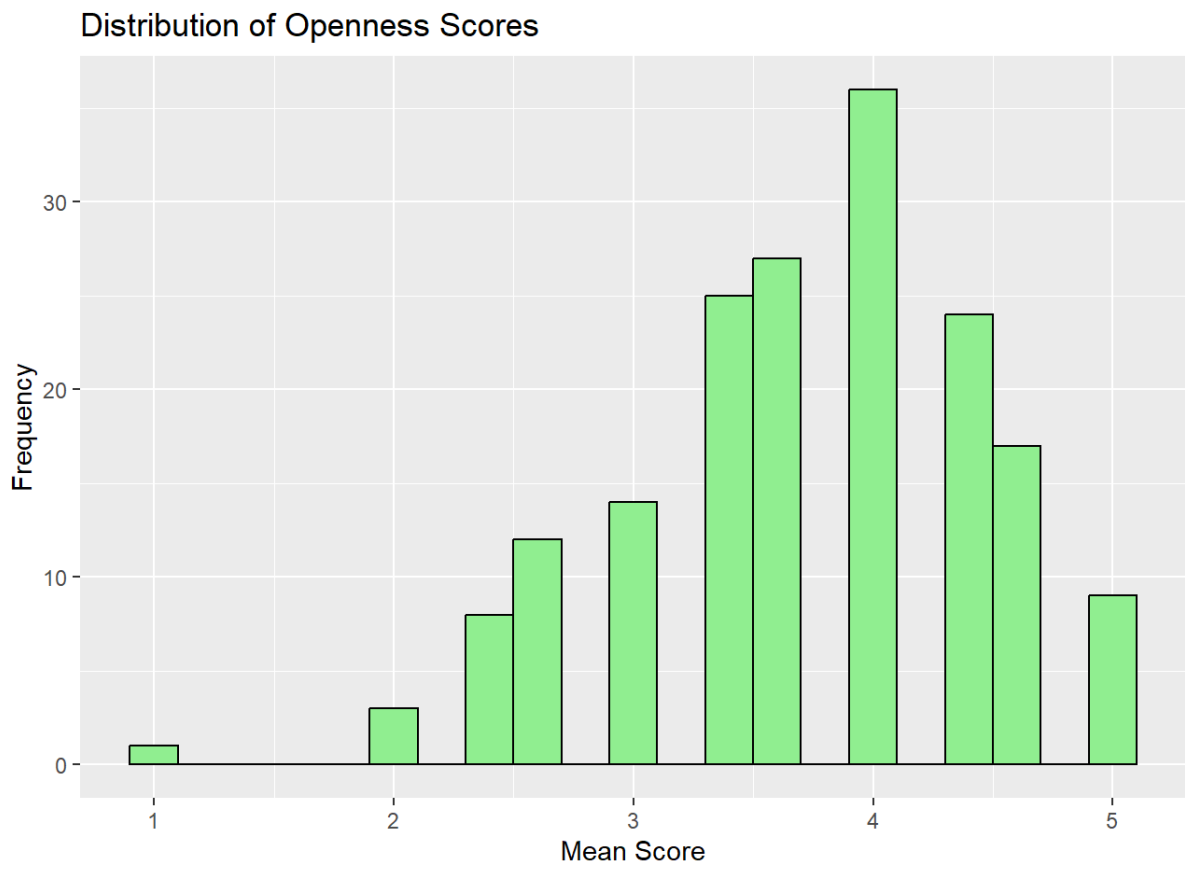


Distribution of Extraversion Scores



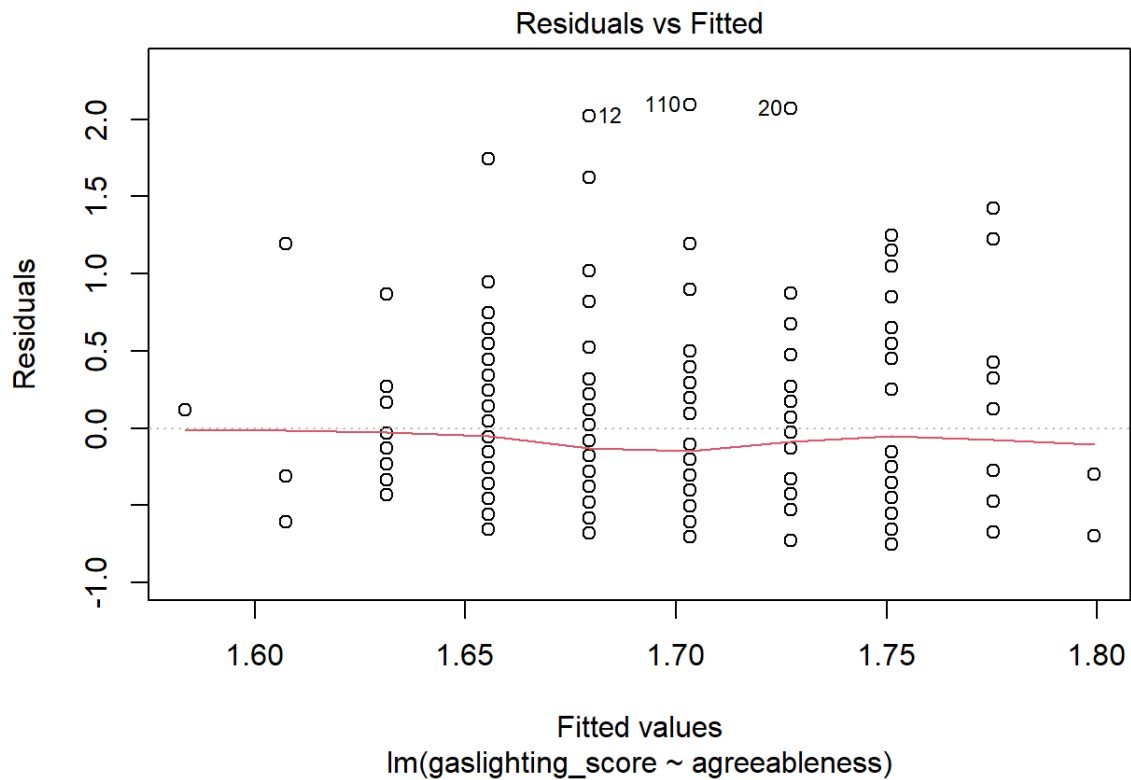
Distribution of Neuroticism Scores





### Appendix C: Assumption Check- Linearity and Homoscedasticity

#### Residuals vs Fitted - Agreeableness



#### Residuals vs Fitted - Conscientiousness

