Personality Styles and its Effect on the Satisfaction of Romantic Relationship

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ABSTRACT

This pilot study was designed to determine the nature of the relation between personality styles and relationship satisfaction. Ten participants, 8 females and 2 males, were asked to complete two questionnaires, the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) and the Hendrick’s Relationship Satisfaction Assessment Scale (RAS). We hypothesized that the personality characteristics of openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness would be positively correlated with high levels of relationship satisfaction. We also hypothesized that neuroticism would be a powerful predictor of relationship dissatisfaction. Lastly, we hypothesized that extroversion would have no correlation with relationship satisfaction.

Introduction

Relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships has been associated with many factors including self-concept, optimism, and self-disclosure. Finding the factors related to unsatisfactory relationships has social importance. Lack of relationship satisfaction can affect school performance, lead to long term depression, drug and alcohol use, and even suicide (Blanchard, 2004). The damage potential in a poor relationship is far reaching at all ages, especially adolescence. Adolescence is a time to seek acceptance and discover the self. Romantic relationships are central in most adolescents' lives (Galliher & Rostosky, 1999). Because relationship formation is central to the lives of adolescents, it is important to examine the relation between relationship satisfaction and how emergent adolescent personality dimensions impact relationship satisfaction.

A romantic relationship consists of two partners who both bring their individual personalities to their relationship. This notion sounds trivial, but its conceptual implications are profound. Previous research has examined many aspects of personality that impact relationship satisfaction including self-esteem, self-concept, positive illusion projection, negative conflict style, introversion and extroversion, self-monitoring and depression. Previous research suggests that different personality styles may ultimately predict the type of relationship an individual is likely to have or even not have, as in the case of Wilbert and Rupert's (1986) study on lonely college students. These researchers found that, in general, lonely college students were more upset over not being in a romantic relationship than anything else. These students were overly cautious in social atmospheres and exhibited fear of embarrassing themselves in front of strangers. These dysfunctional attitudes influenced the college students' self-esteem, thereby decreasing it and decreasing the chances that they would enter into a romantic relationship. Freshman year in college can be a tough time because most students have to build new friendships. This may be a time of increased loneliness and therefore fewer romantic relationships (Wilbert & Rupert, 1986).

Cramer and Donachie (1999) also evaluated college students' self-esteem in the context of romantic relationships. These researchers found that lower self-esteem and decreased mental health was a predictor of decreased closeness within romantic relationships of college students. Conversely, it was noted that increased closeness between two people was not a predictor of good mental health. Possibly, the support due to this closeness invalidated any signs of poor mental health (Cramer & Donachie, 1999).

Blanchard found that poor relationship satisfaction and low self-concept are highly correlated in romantic relationships. His results suggest a positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and trust in relationships as well as between relationship satisfaction and emotional stability (Blanchard, 2004).

Murray, Holmes, and Griffin found that a person's ability to project positive illusions in relationships predict greater satisfaction and less conflict in both dating and marital relationships. (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1997). They also recognized that a sense of security requires the absence of significant doubts or uncertainties. Those who possess positive illusions have few doubts about their own
relationships and believe that dangers affecting most others relationships (such as meeting a more attractive partner or personality) pose little threat to their own relationships (Murray and Homes, 1997). Negative conflict style (e.g. becoming irritated or avoiding discussion) is also significantly associated with relationship satisfaction. The findings suggests that it is not the frequency of opinion differences that is associated with relationship satisfaction but the manner in which they are handled and the extent to which they are satisfactorily resolved (Cramer, 1999).

Another factor of personality may include a person's tendency to be introverted or shy. Johnson, Aikman, Danner, and Elling (1995) found a link between shyness and attributions of relationship quality in college-aged students. The researchers found that shy individuals tend to attribute relationship failure to internal and global factors. This means that the individual perceives their negative relationships to be a cause of their own personality and that this cannot be changed over time. Such stable internal attributions may be harmful to a person's well-being and therefore the quality of their romantic relationships because they internalize the belief that the failure is their fault and their fault alone (Johnson et al., 1995). In addition, Remen and Chambless (2001) have argued that depression may also be a factor in predicting relationship adjustment of college students. Increased levels of depression did in fact later predict the quality of these romantic relationships. In general, couples who contained at least one person with depression were less satisfied with their relationship. This may be due to a decrease in mental functioning of depressed people that then leads to a decrease in functioning of the relationship. For casual dating dyads, however, relationships were less likely to succeed if one member of the dyad perceived a decrease in the rewards of the relationship. These dyads also declined in their relationship quality if a dyad member perceived an increase in the availability of other possible mates and experienced decreased satisfaction with the current relationship (Remen & Chambless, 2001).

Not only can personality and mental health be factors for relationship quality, but self-monitoring, whether a person acts differently in different contexts (high self-monitoring) or a person who acts the same no matter what context (low self-monitoring) can predict the type of people who pair up in a relationship (Norris & Zweigenhaft, 1999). Research shows that individuals who match up with similar self-monitoring scores have a tendency to become partners romantically, although the quality of the relationship does depend on which type of self-monitor the individuals are. Less involvement and less commitment is seen with dyads of high self-monitors, whereas characteristically low self-monitors appear more committed (Norris & Zweigenhaft, 1999). Therefore, college students who are consistent with their personality across all situations may end up in more long-lasting relationships than those whose personality is constantly changing (Norris & Zweigenhaft, 1999).

It is apparent that ones personality plays a part in one's relationship. Many factors have been found to influence a person's relationship including self-esteem, self-concept, and introversion/extroversion. Studying the correlation between personality characteristics and relationship satisfaction is important in coming to understand how some individuals come to form lasting, satisfying romantic relationships while others repeatedly fail to do so. Understanding how personality characteristics impact late adolescents and young adults is especially important as it is the time when most individuals seek intimacy in their romantic relationships.

**Relationship Satisfaction**

A relationship exists when two people believe a relationship exists and both feel some sort of commitment or emotional bond toward the other. The study of the success or failure of romantic relationships can look back on a long tradition in personality psychology. Hendrick, Dicke, and Hendrick (1998) defined relationship satisfaction as a subjective evaluation of relational meanings. Relational satisfaction, then, can be conceptualized as the fulfillment of positive expectations across an array of relational domains. This definition encompasses conversational management skills, as well as facets of intimate relationships such as love, the meeting of needs, and comparison level for the current relationship.

There has been much debate among scholars about how to define and measure relationship satisfaction. Much of the disagreement stems from two sources: how to define the construct of interest
and whether to use a global or specific measure. Susan Hendrick developed the Relationship Assessment Scale (1988) that specifically tests the level of satisfaction in relationships. Hendrick found that her scale was highly correlated (0.80) with a well known relationship scale, the Spanier (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Vaughn and Baier also validated the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) by again comparing Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) scores to RAS scores in a clinical population of 55 men and 63 women. Findings of zero-order and partial correlations and multiple regression suggest a high degree of convergence between the two instruments, with the highest correlations being between the RAS total score and DAS total score, and the RAS total score and DAS Satisfaction subscale score (Vaughn and Baier, 1999).

In sum, relationship satisfaction can be described as a subjective evaluation of relationship meaning between two people who both experience emotional intimacy and a sense of commitment. The Hendrick's RAS measures a single construct, mainly one's subjective evaluation of a close relationship. This measure is not limited to marriage relationships and has shown strong predictive validity with dating couples. For these reasons, we have decided to use the RAS as our own means of measurement for measuring the satisfaction of romantic relationships.

**Dimensions of Personality**

According to Cattell, personality is “what permits a prediction of what a person will do in a given situation” (Hergenhan and Olson, pg. 263). There are several definitions of personality that exist. Definitions of personality can vary from the popular notion that personality allows a person to be socially effective (a person may be viewed as having a wonderful personality, a terrible personality, or no personality at all), to highly technical definitions involving mathematical formulations. Personality theorists attempt to describe what all humans have in common, what some have in common, and the uniqueness of each individual (Hergenhan and Olson, pg. 1) The definition of personality, however, tends to vary with the assumptions and beliefs of those studying it.

One particular approach to personality is Costa and McRae's Big Five Theory. The Big Five theory is often called the five-factor model of personality which provides an understanding of the structure of personality. The NEO PI-R was developed to perform the five factor model. The NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) is a shortened version of the NEO PI-R, designed to give quick, reliable and valid measures of the five domains of adult personality. The five domains are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

Neuroticism is the general tendency to experience negative affects such as fear, sadness, embarrassment, anger, guilt, and disgust. Men and Women who are high in neuroticism are prone to have irrational ideas, to be less able to control their impulses, and to cope more poorly than others with stress. Individuals with lower scores are more emotionally stable. They are usually calm, serene, relaxed and they are able to face stressful situations without becoming upset or flustered.

Extraverts are sociable. In addition to liking people and large groups and gatherings, extraverts are talkative, active, and assertive. They like excitement and tend to be cheerful in character. They are upbeat, energetic, and optimistic. An introverted person is reserved, independent and even paced. They may say they're shy when they mean they prefer to be alone. Introverts are not unhappy or pessimistic.

Open individuals are open to new experiences. They are curious about both their inner and outer worlds. They are willing to entertain ideas and unconventional values. They experience both positive and negative emotions more intensely than do closed individuals. Openness consists of having an active mind, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety, intellectual curiosity, and independent of judgment. People who score low on openness tend to be conventional and conservative. Closeness does not imply unfriendly intolerance or authoritarian aggression.

The agreeable person is essentially altruistic. He or she is sympathetic to others. They are eager to help others and believes that others will be equally helpful in return. In contrast, the disagreeable person is egocentric, skeptical of others' intentions, and competitive.
Conscientious individuals are purposeful, strong-willed, and determined. Individuals scoring high on this trait are associated with academic and occupational achievement. They are scrupulous, punctual, and reliable. Low scorers are not necessarily lacking in these traits but are less thorough in applying them.

In sum, the five factors represent biological tendencies to act and feel in certain ways; they are a fundamental motivation to personality. According to Costa and McRae, these traits are largely inherited and unfold over a lifetime. The five factors are thought to be influenced very little by experience and they are proposed to influence the development of the rest of personality (e.g., self-concept).

**Hypothesis**

The purpose of the present study was to examine the links between personality type and romantic relationships. After researching the dimensions of personality, we hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness with high relationship satisfaction. We are hypothesizing this because each one of these traits, we believe will have a positive influence to the relationship. For example, open individuals are attentive to their inner feelings, an agreeable person is fundamentally altruistic, and a conscientious individual is purposeful and reliable.

We also hypothesized that neuroticism will be a powerful predictor of relationship dissatisfaction since men and women high in neuroticism are prone to have irrational ideas, less able to control their impulses, and cope more poorly than others with stress. Lastly, we hypothesized that extroversion will have no correlation with relationship satisfaction. Extraverts are sociable and like being in large groups and gathering. We believe this won’t have much of a significant impact on the relationship satisfaction scale.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited from classes at the University of MN Duluth using the online sign-up system. Participation was voluntary and students who participated received extra credit for their participation. The expected number of participants will be 100 students, 50 males and 50 females.

**Materials:**

Personality was be measured by the NEO PI-R. The NEO PI-R is a self-administered instrument. It is a sixty item assessment designed to provide a brief comprehensive measure of five personality factors: emotional adjustment, extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Scoring is based on tabulated T-scores provided in the administration manual. The approximate time for administration is 30 minutes. (See appendix A)

Relationship satisfaction was measured by Hendrick's Relationship Satisfaction Assessment Scale. This is also a self-administered questionnaire. It is composed of ten questions such as “How does your partner meet your needs?” to “How many problems are there in your relationship?” This questionnaire took, roughly 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Each question had a rating of 1 to 7, 1 being the lowest and 7 the highest. All but 2 questions were added together for a final score. The 2 questions that weren’t added with the rest had a reverse scoring which was then added later.

Participants also completed a Demographic survey by indicating their age, gender, and major. The demographics survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

**Procedure**

Participants completed two questionnaires. The total amount of time to complete all measures was approximately 40 minutes. Participants first completed the RAS than took the NEO-FFI.

**Results**

The intention of the current study was to examine the links between personality type and romantic relationships. We hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness with high relationship satisfaction. We also hypothesized that neuroticism will be a powerful predictor of relationship dissatisfaction. Lastly, we hypothesized that extroversion will have no correlation with relationship satisfaction.
Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between relationship satisfaction and the five dimensions of personality and are presented in Table 1. Our analysis revealed that there was only one significant correlation at the .05 level. The only significant correlation meaningful is the correlation between relationship satisfaction and agreeableness at -.673. This correlation shows us that there is an increase in relationship satisfaction if at least one of the parties in the relationship is agreeable. These results suggest that the agreeable person is fundamentally altruistic. They are eager to help others and trust that others will be equally helpful in return. He or she is compassionate to others. In contrast, the disagreeable person is egocentric, doubtful of others' intentions, and competitive. This measure supports the supposition that an agreeable person will have a more satisfying relationship.

We hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness with high relationship satisfaction. As Table 1 indicates there were no significant correlations found between relationship satisfaction and conscientiousness and openness. We also hypothesized that neuroticism would be a powerful predictor of relationship dissatisfaction. There was no significant correlation found between relationship satisfaction and neuroticism.

Lastly, we hypothesized that extroversion would not be related to relationship satisfaction. Extraverts are sociable. She or he likes people and large groups and gatherings. Extraverts are loquacious, lively, and assertive. Although this trait sounds like a good facilitator to a relationship, earlier research also found no link between relationship satisfaction and extroversion. We believed that there would not be a strong relationship between these two variables because this trait may go either way within a relationship depending on the personality of both persons. For example, an extrovert and agreeable person may have a very satisfying relationship but if the second partner isn't an agreeable person and is disagreeable, the disagreeable partner may feel as though they have to compete with the extrovert socially therefore having a less satisfying relationship. Our preliminary results, therefore, parallel earlier research findings.

Table 1: Pearson correlation of relationship satisfaction and NEO PI-R

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>RAS</th>
<th>Neuroticism</th>
<th>Extravert</th>
<th>Openness</th>
<th>Agreeableness</th>
<th>Conscientious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>.619</td>
<td>-.389</td>
<td>-.389*</td>
<td>-.673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAS</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.367</td>
<td>.660</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>.619</td>
<td>-.367</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.851</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>-.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extravert</td>
<td>-.389</td>
<td>.660</td>
<td>-.851</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>-.321</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.673</td>
<td>.463</td>
<td>-.797</td>
<td>.764</td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientious</td>
<td>.225</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td>-.337</td>
<td>.339</td>
<td>-.388</td>
<td>.388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

The results of this pilot study provide some empirical support that relationship satisfaction is related to agreeableness. Although these results are tentative because of the small number of participants, the pattern of correlation coefficients indicated that high traits of agreeableness are related to high relationship satisfaction. We're assuming that agreeableness is related to relationship satisfaction due to the fact that an agreeable person is good natured in general. Consequently they tend to see the good things within a relationship. As a result, they're much more satisfied with their relationship.

Our study was limited due to the number of participants. Our outcomes may be skewed because of this problem. There may have been more meaningful effects if we had more participants. Future research could focus on the length of the relationship as well. The present study was designed to examine only the relationship between the five dimensions of personality and relationship satisfaction. Future
research could also incorporate other components into this study such as self-esteem or relationship attachment styles to see whether there is a moderating or mediating effect. These measures are important in future research because there may be other variables affecting the relationship other than just the personality of a person.
References


