The Relationship between Gender & Perceived Life-Satisfaction in Intimate Romantic Relationships

Olivia Boyd & Ashley Osteen, Advised by Susan Wolfgram, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin-Stout

Hypothesis:
- Intimacy achievement would positively affect life-satisfaction for males and females in college.
- Although we speculated that both genders would be positively affected, we anticipated that females would be more greatly affected than males.

Purpose:
1. Examine the relationship between intimate romantic relationships and perceived life-satisfaction and compare this relationship between males and females in emerging adulthood.
2. Develop a reliable survey instrument to measure male and female attitudes towards intimacy and life-satisfaction.
3. Increase awareness on the issue of intimacy achievement in connection with life-satisfaction so that college students and researchers are aware of the importance of the formations of these critical relationships during this stage of life development.

Theoretical Framework:
- Erik Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development divides the human lifespan into eight developmental stages each defined by a psychological crisis that the individual must resolve before moving into the next stage of development (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968, as cited in Gurney, Moore & Rosenthal, 1981).
- As applied to our study, this theory would predict that Emerging Adults who have successful intimate romantic relationships will have an increased sense of life-satisfaction because they will have resolved the conflict of this stage in their life, Intimacy versus Isolation.

Literature Review:
- Ratelle et al. (2013) determined that romantic relationships play a very important role in an individual’s well-being in their college years, especially during times of difficulty and stress.
- Mackinnon et al. (2011) showed that romantic intimacy was positively correlated with psychological adjustment and subjective well-being.
- Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick et al. (2006) examined the associations between relationship satisfaction, intimacy dating goals, and identity among romantic relationships.
- Vandervoort (2000) found that high numbers of social contacts did not prevent loneliness; only when relationships involved disclosure and emotional intimacy could you be freed from loneliness, regardless of gender.

Research Question:
“What are the attitudes of college students towards how intimate romantic relationships affect their perceived life-satisfaction?”

Demographic Variables:
- **AGE** (Age)
- **GEN** (Gender)
- **STS** (Intimate Relationship Status)

Independent Variable:
- **GEN** (Gender)

Dependent Variables:
- **SAT** (Overall, I am satisfied with my life)
- **IDL** (Currently, my life in most ways seems close to my ideal)
- **HPY** (In general, my partner makes me a happier person)
- **SEL** (My partner makes me a better person)
- **DIS** (I share my most intimate thoughts and feelings with my partner)
- **BLD** (My partner and I work together to strengthen and improve our relationship)
- **TRT** (My partner and I share a strong sense of trust)
- **INF** (My current relationship with my partner positively influences my life-satisfaction)

**Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIS</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>-2.16</td>
<td>91.84</td>
<td>*0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.84)</td>
<td>(1.49)</td>
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*Significance at p<.05

Method:
- **Participants**: 113 male and female college students from a university in northwestern Wisconsin
- **Research Design**: Non-random pilot study, Cross sectional, Purposive sampling design
- **Data collection Instrument**: IRB approved, informed by literature & theory, implied consent. Self administered surveys with one independent variable, three demographic variables, nine closed ended statements based on a 1-6 Likert Scale, and two open ended statements.
- **Procedure**: Administered questionnaires to male and female college students in general education courses, explained implied consent and confidentiality.
- **Data Analysis Plan**: Cleaned & coded surveys, analyzed data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).
- **Cross-tabulations, mean-comparisons, independent t-tests, and a reliability analysis: Cronbach’s Alpha.**

Results:
- We found a significant mean difference in DIS “I share my most intimate thoughts and feelings with my partner”; females responded more strongly to this statement (See Table).
- The significant mean differences we found are: Females (4.85), Males (4.11) @ p<.05.
- Both males and females responded similarly with the balance of our variables as shown in our Cross-Tabulations.
- **Reliability Analysis**: Cronbach’s Alpha measures reliability and our survey items measured 0.946

Implications:
- **Practitioners**: Educators, advisors, school counselors, residential life staff and others who work with emerging adults must be sensitive to the importance of this developmental stage and be aware of the socially structured gender stereotypes they may have about intimate relationships and not reinforce these stereotypes.
- Professionals should support males in expressing their feelings regarding intimacy and loneliness.
- **Future Research**: Large, random, longitudinal study supplemented with qualitative questionnaires, sample should include more diversity, questions should include more about loneliness/isolation.

Conclusion:
- The intimate romantic relationship becomes the primary relationship throughout adulthood, and relationships formed during emerging adulthood can have lasting effects on the individual for the duration of their life. Therefore, it is important for emerging adults to form stable and healthy intimate relationships during this period in order to progress to the next stages of adult development. It is hoped that with continued research there will be increased awareness on this topic to provide education and support for young adults in how to form healthy and intimate relationships.