
An Inquiry of Young Adults' Perceived Efficacy and Success of Intimate Relationships: Gender and Personality Differences

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The purpose of this study was to explore gender and traits of introversion and extraversion in relationship to intimacy self-efficacy and success in intimate relationships of young adults. Intimacy self-efficacy ratings were obtained from 74 adults who participated in a Marriage and Intimacy course at a Western university. The two personality types (introversion and extraversion) differed significantly on intimacy self-efficacy, with extraverts reporting greater intimacy self-efficacy (M=3.33) than introverts (M=3.14). Males (M=3.32) and females (M=3.37) were not found to differ significantly, nor was there a significant interaction between gender and personality type. Also, there were no significant differences in beliefs about overall success in intimate relationships. Although it appears that personality traits of introversion and extraversion influence intimacy self-efficacy, the question remains as to why this is so.

Keywords: young adults, relationships, gender



fficacy scales are widely used in education to help assess students' and teachers' perceptions of various skills (Bandura, 1997), but research regarding student's sense of self-efficacy

regarding their ability to manage intimate relationships remains thin. Developing the skills needed to explore and maintain intimacy is a developmental task of most young adults, but little is known regarding their perceived self-efficacy of that ability.

Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, and Pastorelli (2003) found that the ability to exercise personal efficacy can greatly influence the course of life paths. This research study addresses the intimate relationship efficacy that young adults have and how those perceptions compare based on gender and personality characteristics of introversion and extraversion.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

LOOKING FOR LOVE

Most American young adults from ages 18 to 25 are single. The current average age of the first marriage for American men is 27 years and for women 25.5 years. The American college scene offers an academic melting pot of available, potential partners. Although the percentage of married American men and women has declined

from a high of 68% of the population in 1970 to 52% in 2000, the most common status of American individuals is still 'married' (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Yet marriage is not the only indicator of the desire to be in an intimate relationship. Marriage census data does not reflect committed gay and lesbian couples. In addition, the number of unmarried, implied heterosexual couples living together increased from 500,000 in 1970 to 5.5 million couples in 2000. Of the 5.5 million cohabitating couples in 2000, 54% had never been married, 37% had been divorced, and the rest were widowed (Olson & Defrain, 2003). Regardless if a couple marries or not, Myers and Diener (1995) have shown that satisfying intimate relationships are associated with greater levels of life satisfaction and general well-being. Indeed, using Bandura's language of psychosocial functioning, there is a similar theme of the desire to be connected with other people. Bandura (2002) stated that "People do not live their lives autonomously. Many of the things they seek are achievable only through socially interdependent effort" (p. 270). It is through this interdependent effort that the foundation for satisfying, committed relationships are made. How is this accomplished? Healthy relationships are developed and maintained by attending to interpersonal (Gottman, 1994) and intrapersonal processes (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), which will be described here.

VARIABLES ASSOCIATED WITH SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS. Gottman (1994) conducted extensive studies on the interpersonal aspects of relationships. He described how divorce was predicted with 90% accuracy

by watching a 5-minute videotaped conversation of the couple working through a conflict. Identified behaviors seen in couples who would eventually divorce included a harsh start-up, criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Gottman and Silver (1999) identified several behaviors that led to satisfying relationships, including the ability to maintain a five to one ratio of positive interactions to negative ones, and to readily accept one's partners efforts to reconcile after an argument.

Intrapersonal variables were drawn from the work of Karney and Bradbury (1997), Watson et al. (2000), and Digman (1990) with a five-factor model called the Big Five. Although researchers debated the language of the five attributes, they generally agreed about the essence of the traits (Digman, 1990). For a history of the Big Five, see John and Srivastava (1999).

Extraversion, a trait that is included in this study, is the first of the five traits included in The Big Five (Digman, 1990). "The five traits are: 1) Extraversion/introversion; 2) friendliness/hostility; 3) Conscientiousness (agreeableness); 4) Neuroticism (negative emotionality) /emotional stability; and 5) inquiring intellect (openness)" (Digman, p. 423).

Karney and Bradbury (1997) studied the trait of neuroticism and how it influenced marital interaction and the trajectory of marital satisfaction. Not surprisingly, the trait of neuroticism (or negative affectivity) negatively influenced marital quality. Watson et al. (2000) conducted a correlational study of all of the Big Five factors with 74 married and 136 dating couples. The purpose was to examine the ability of general personality traits to



predict the level of satisfaction in intimate relationships, based on the five-factor or Big Five model, and to see how dating couples compared to married couples. The dating couples had known each other, on average, for 3 years and had dated, on average, for 18.2 months. At least one member of each dating couple was a college student. This is in contrast to the married couples who had been married, on average, just over 16 years.

Watson et al. (2000) also studied the way couples rated their relationship satisfaction and the personality traits of themselves and their partners. An interesting aspect of this research was that although the couples were very similar in how they rated the level of satisfaction of their relationship, the personality trait scores were quite different from each other. Yet, the self score and partner score for the same person were generally similar. This is consistent with a previous study by Watson (1989), in which strangers' ratings of the five factors were similar to self-reports of the subjects, based on minimal interaction in small groups. Regarding the trait of extraversion, Watson (1989) stated that "The implications of these findings are remarkable: In judging targets' standing on extraversion, a single, minimally acquainted peer can achieve a significant level of convergent validity" (p. 126).

In developing the methodology, Watson et al. (2000) found that previous research had recognized that neuroticism was strongly linked to negative affectivity and extraversion was strongly associated with positive affect. Watson hypothesized that measures of positive emotionality would contribute significantly to the prediction of relationship satisfaction, even after

controlling for individual differences in neuroticism and negative emotionality. Watson's hypothesis was confirmed. The results indicated that the strongest predictors of relationship satisfaction were the two affectivity scales, with significant correlations for both married and dating men and women. Watson et al. also looked at the relationship between personality and relationship satisfaction. Using the Personality Trait Scale, they found correlations among traits included in The Big Five: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Their findings regarding extraversion were of particular interest. Watson found a moderate correlation between extraversion and marital satisfaction in both wives ($r=.41$) and husbands ($r=.38$) but extraversion was only a weak predictor of relationship satisfaction in the dating couples ($r =.13$ and $.17$ respectively). Considering that positive affect was related to marital satisfaction, and extraversion was positively correlated with positive affect, it could be deduced that the trait of extraversion would also be a factor in satisfying relationships.

How does this relate to self-efficacy? The self-efficacy literature demonstrates that if people believe in their ability to achieve something, their likelihood to achieve it is enhanced (Bandura, 1997; Bandura & Wood, 1989). This is also seen in regard to relationships.

RELATIONAL SELF-EFFICACY

Central to the concept of self-efficacy is the power of one's beliefs to enact change. Bandura (2002) stated that "Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the



power to produce desired effects by one's actions, otherwise one has little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties" (p. 270). Bandura et al. (2003) conducted a rather complicated study with 464 older adolescents (14-19 years old at time 1; 16-21 years at time 2) to test the structural paths of influence in areas of self-efficacy of academic achievement, empathy, and resistive self-regulation of positive and negative affect. The authors' concluded that perceived empathic self-efficacy contributed to psychosocial functioning. In addition, self-efficacy of one's ability to regulate positive and negative affect was associated with high efficacy in areas of academic development, ability to resist social pressures, and to engage empathetically with others. These results have similar conclusions as Watson et al. (2000), who reported significant relationships between positive and negative affect in satisfying relationships and the Big Five. The question arises whether differences in intimacy self-efficacy are seen in regard to personality traits of introversion and extraversion and gender.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this study was to explore gender and traits of introversion and extraversion in relationship to intimacy self-efficacy of young adults. The following research questions were explored: Are there gender and personality differences (introverts and extraverts) on intimacy self-efficacy in young adults? Also, are there differences in beliefs regarding overall success in intimate relationships? If there are differences on either intimacy self-efficacy or beliefs about overall success, what are they?

Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that no differences would be found in perceived intimacy self-efficacy between men and women, but differences would be seen between introverts and extraverts, with extraverts reporting slightly greater intimacy self-efficacy. It was also hypothesized that there would be no significant interaction of gender and personality type on intimacy self-efficacy.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS & PROCEDURE

A survey was developed and piloted with a small group of 10 graduate students. Several questions were revised based on the pilot. The survey was then administered to a convenience sample of 76 upper-class students who were enrolled in a Marriage and Intimacy class in a Western university. Completion of the survey was voluntary and responses were kept anonymous. The response rate was 97%, with 74 of the 76 students responding. The two students who were not included in this study did not indicate on their survey if they were introverted or extraverted, thus their surveys were not used.

Compatibility and personality traits were studied in this course to help students discern potential conflict areas (Myers & Myers, 1995). Within this unit students studied the traits of introversion and extraversion. Information gathered from writings of Myers and Myers (1995) and Keirsey and Bates (1998) helped students distinguish between the two traits and identify their own. It was during this classroom discussion that questions surfaced concerning the role of self-efficacy



regarding intimate relationships and personality traits.

INSTRUMENTATION

The instrument used to collect data in this study was a paper and pencil survey that focused on students' self-efficacy regarding their abilities to manage intimate relationships. The survey consisted of one efficacy scale, one overall item about success, one scale to measure social desirability, a set of demographic items, and an open-ended response item. The efficacy scale was developed to measure intimacy self-efficacy. It consisted of ten Likert-type items that used a four-point response scale ranging from *not like me* to *like me*. In addition, one overall item based on a five-point scale (never successful to always successful) addressed the overall success with intimate relationships that an individual perceived. A ten-item version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (M-C SDS) was used to assess the degree to which students might be responding in socially desirable ways to the other items on the survey (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972). Demographic information included gender, age, marital status, if the respondent was involved in a current intimate relationship, and how many intimate relationships the responder had through his or her life. The final question allowed for additional comments.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The efficacy scale on the survey was developed so that it would reflect content validity. Efficacy items emerged from the literature (Bandura, 1997; Digman, 1990;

Watson et al., 2000) and were reviewed by an expert in the area of research and survey design and a panel of experts in the field of counseling. Also, the correlation of the efficacy scale, using the average score for the 10 items with the overall success item was .78, indicating some evidence of construct validity. In other words, students who reported strong levels of efficacy in intimate relationships also reported that they believed they were successful in intimate relationships. In addition, the correlation of the efficacy scale and the success item with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale was -.08 and .12 respectively, indicating that the students were likely not responding to the efficacy items and the success item in socially desirable ways. In addition, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the scale was .72.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 74 surveys returned, 31 (42%) were from males and 43 (58%) from females. The average age of the respondents was 21.9 years of age, with 95% of the respondents falling between 20-24 years of age.

Three demographic items addressed relationship issues, including marital status, number of intimate relationships the respondent had throughout his or her life, and whether or not the respondent was involved in a current intimate relationship. Males reported an average of 2.93 lifetime intimate relationships; females reported 2.23 relationship. The average number of relationships for the entire sample was 2.52. The number of males and females who



reported being in current relationships, married or single, and who were introverts and extraverts are included in Table 1.

DATA ANALYSIS

Two research questions were asked in this study, including:

1. Are there gender differences and personality differences (introverts and extraverts) on intimacy self-efficacy in young adults? If so, how do they differ?

2. Are there gender and personality differences in beliefs regarding overall success in intimate relationships? If so, in what ways do they differ?

In order to address the first question, data were analyzed using a two-way ANOVA with gender and personality type as independent variables and intimacy self-efficacy as the dependent variable. The dependent variable was an average of the ten self-efficacy items and was measured on a scale from 1, *not like me*, to 4, *like me*. Table 2 summarizes the ANOVA results.

Table 1. Frequencies for Gender, Current Relationship, Marital Status and Personality Type

	Current Relationship		Marital Status		Personality Type		Total N
	Y	N	M	S	I	E	
Males	13	18	4	27	9	22	31
Females	33	10	10	33	21	22	43
Total	46	27	14	60	30	44	74

Note. Note: Y=yes, N=no, M=married, S=single, I=introvert, and E=extravert.

Table 2. ANOVA Summary Table for Influence of Gender and Personality Type on Intimacy Self-Efficacy

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Gender	1	.11	.12	1.04	.31
Personality type	1	1.82	1.82	16.23	<.001
Gender X Personality type	1	.36	.36	3.18	.08
Error	70	7.84	.11		

The two personality types (introversion and extraversion) differed significantly on intimacy self-efficacy ($F=16.23, p<.001$), with extraverts ($M=3.33$) reporting greater intimacy self-efficacy than introverts ($M=3.14$). Males ($M=3.32$) and females ($M=3.37$) were not found to differ significantly ($F=1.04, p=.31$), nor was there a

significant interaction between gender and personality type ($F=3.18, p=.08$).

The second research question was also analyzed using a two-way ANOVA, using gender and personality type as the independent variables. The dependent variable was beliefs about success in intimate relationships, with scores ranging from one, *never successful*, to five, *always*



successful. No significant differences were found for gender ($F=2.90$, $p=.09$), personality type ($F=2.23$, $p=.14$), or their interaction ($F=.36$, $p=.55$). In addition, it is possible that a Type II error was made; a single ordinal item that reflects beliefs may not be sufficiently reliable to yield significant results. Results of the ANOVA are shown in Table 3.

Eight of the seventy-four students wrote comments. Of those eight, six were introverted and two extraverted, and seven

of the eight were female. One male student commented that "marriage takes work to be successful (his intimacy self-efficacy score of 3.9 was the highest in the class). A lower scoring student (2.5) said "I have only had one romantic relationship in my life, and we were never intimate on an emotional level or sexual level, so much of this is speculation." Another female student said "Although I do not control my anger very well, it is something I am working on." Her intimacy self-efficacy score was 2.9.

Table 3. ANOVA Summary Table for Influence of Gender and Personality Type on Beliefs about Success in Intimate Relationships

Source	df	SS	MS	F	<i>p</i>
Gender	1	2.39	2.39	2.90	.09
Personality type	1	1.83	1.83	2.23	.14
Gender X Personality type	1	.30	.30	.36	.55
Error	69	56.84	.82		

DISCUSSION

Introverts and extraverts differed significantly on intimacy self-efficacy, with extraverts having a higher level of intimacy self-efficacy compared to introverts. Males and females did not differ, nor was there an interaction of gender and personality. Also, there were no significant differences in beliefs about overall success in intimate relationships. It is interesting to note that extraverts reported higher levels of intimacy self-efficacy and beliefs about success in intimate relationships than their introverted peers; however, the difference was significant only for intimacy self-efficacy. The characteristic of extraversion and increased intimacy self-efficacy compares with previous findings that extraverted people report greater happiness

than their introverted counterparts (Myers & Myers, 1995) and that extraversion and marital satisfaction were positively correlated (Watson et al., 2000).

In addition, it was notable that females reported higher level on both measures compared to males, even though neither comparison yielded a significant difference. This raises questions regarding the reasons why extraverts might have stronger beliefs compared to introverts in their abilities to achieve intimate relationships; in addition, it may be that females have stronger beliefs about intimacy self-efficacy and success than males. This is consistent with Powers and Reisers (2005) findings that more women see emotional intimacy as providing social power than men.

Those who are married report greater happiness and life satisfaction than those



who are not (Myers, 2000). Considering that, what are the implications of this study for educators and counselors working with young adults who are developing relational skills? The results of this research may illuminate differences between students regarding intimacy self-efficacy, offer insights into areas that may assist students in building intimacy self-efficacy, and finally to aid in Marriage and Intimacy course development. It may be that introverted women and men struggle more than their extraverted counterparts in their confidence to foster intimate relationships, which may impact other presenting issues, such as social isolation, depression and anxiety.

In developing curriculums that strive to enhance relationship skills, it is important to recognize and be sensitive to the greater level of low intimacy self-efficacy that both introverted men and women may experience.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In conclusion, this study highlights the need to be sensitive to the possibility of introverted college student's greater struggle for intimacy. Programs and initiatives that assist in developing a sense of self-efficacy in the area of intimacy and relationships may benefit college students. It may be especially useful to embed skill development into courses such as general psychology or personal growth/interpersonal effectiveness training. This would address the challenge of motivating college students to commit to an additional group experience. Collaboration between the college counseling center and academic courses

may be an efficient mechanism to address these kinds of college student needs.

Three significant limitations are noted in this study. The first is the use of the convenience sample of young adults who were enrolled in Marriage and Intimate Relationships college course. Although the findings of this study were consistent with the literature, they may not generalize to the majority of young adults in the United States, or even the Western U.S. The second is the small sample size, which yields low statistical power. It is possible that there is an interaction of gender and personality type in regard to intimacy self-efficacy that is not detected in this data. And finally, although it appears that personality traits of introversion and extraversion influence intimacy self-efficacy, the question remains as to why this is so.

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